

Keynote Address

Apocryphal Canons: The (Post)Modernist Turn of the Spanish Golden Age

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Abstract: Ever since Aristotle established the superiority of literature over history, the debate on the relationship between the two forms of accessing the past has not abated and in our times, this controversy probably is more intense than ever. Poststructuralism and postmodernism have demonstrated the tenuous borderline between the two discourses, since both share many common elements. In this paper I revise briefly the notions of Grand Narrative and Master Narrative, as defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard and others, and propose the notions of Apocrypha and apocryphal as the inevitable contestation to any canonical, authoritative imposition on the part of the State. While master or grand narratives (or even meta-narratives) refer to stories that seem to assimilate different cultures into a single course of history dominated by the West, apocryphal stories / histories subvert the very attempt to encompass the discourse of peoples “without history” into the totalizing speech of eurocentrism. Apocryphal, in this respect, is synonymous with subversive and anti-hegemonic. The counterpart of the apocryphal, the canonical, is the materialization, or better, verbalization, of power, but as long as it is sustained by language, it becomes an aporia. If language is fluid and ambiguous, the canon cannot be fixed and immutable. I base my argumentation on two classic texts from the Spanish Golden Age (16th-17th centuries): *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*, the first picaresque novel, published anonymously by Diego Antonio de Mendoza (1554), and Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), the work that paves the road for the modern novel.

Keywords: Apocrypha, Aristotle, Don Quixote, Ecclesiastical censorship, Golden age, Eurocentrism, grand narrative, history vs. literature, intertextuality, Lazarillo, master narrative, novel of chivalry, picaresque, (Post) Modernism, Spanish literature, subversion, translation.

Ever since Aristotle established the superiority of literature over history, the debate on the relationship between the two forms of accessing the past has not abated, and in our times, this controversy probably is more intense than ever. Post-structuralism and postmodernism have

demonstrated the tenuous borderline between the two discourses, since both share many common elements. In my paper, I will propose the notions of “Apocrypha” and “apocryphal” as the inevitable contestation to any canonical, authoritative imposition on the part of the State. While master or grand narratives (or even meta-narratives) refer to stories that seem to assimilate different cultures into a single course of history dominated by the West, apocryphal stories / histories subvert the very attempt to encompass the discourse of peoples “without history” (I borrow the term from anthropologist Eric Wolf), into the totalizing speech of eurocentrism. Apocryphal, in this respect, is synonymous with subversive and anti-hegemonic. The counterpart of the apocryphal, the canonical, is the materialization, or better, verbalization, of power, but as long as it is sustained by language, it becomes an aporia. If language is fluid and ambiguous, the canon cannot be fixed and immutable. I will illustrate my argument with Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, first part, 1615, second), and the first Spanish picaresque novel, *The Life and Adventures of Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), attributed to Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.

In chapter IX of the first volume of *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes addresses, in a highly paradoxical key, the interplay between literature and history, as well as the ways in which events from the past can be rendered and endowed with meaning in literary and historical discourse. Likewise, Cervantes discusses the role that translators and translations play in the transmission of those discourses. While the passage is not long, it provides the reader with some valuable meta-textual clues to understand the subversive, or apocryphal, drive of the novel. As is well known, the narrator of the first eight episodes finds himself at a loss when his unidentified source (a manuscript by an anonymous author) comes to an abrupt end while Don Quixote and the valiant Biscayan are in the midst of a frightful battle. Intrigued by the outcome of the episode, and of the life and deeds of the wondrous knight-errant, the narrator undertakes extensive but fruitless research. One day, however, “chance and good fortune” guide him to the market in the city of Toledo, where he runs into a boy with a load of pamphlets and old papers the boy is trying to sell to a merchant. Picking up one of those pamphlets, the narrator immediately realizes that it is written in Arabic, a language that he does not speak. He immediately looks around for a translator, a bilingual “Morisco” (that is, a Christianized Arab) who can help him understand the tenor of the Arabic text. As a side note, the narrator explains how easy it was for him to find one, for even if he were in need of a translator for an “older and more respectable” language, they

were to be found in abundance. Obviously, Cervantes is quite explicitly invoking the importance that Toledo had had during the middle ages as a multilingual and multiethnic city with a flourishing school of translators who engaged in the recovery of classical texts in Greek and Syrian from the Arabic into which they had been translated. Without the patient labor of compilation carried out by Arab scholars and translators in the city Baghdad during the high middle ages, and the later expansion of the Islam through the conquest of Spain and Italy, Western Europe would probably never have recovered some of the most crucial texts in philosophy, science and history from antiquity.

Once a symbol of tolerance and inclusion, in Cervantes' time the city of Toledo, like the rest of Spain, was languishing under the racial and religious intolerance imposed upon the country by Ferdinand and Isabella and the subsequent Counterreformation that would sweep Southern Europe as a response to the Lutheran schism. Meanwhile, Spain was engaged in the construction of one of the mightiest empires ever seen on earth and was actively defending Christendom from the Ottoman threat. Cervantes was nicknamed the "one-armed hero of Lepanto" because he participated in the most decisive naval confrontation between the Spanish and Turk navies and lost an arm in battle (October 7, 1571). When Cervantes decides to attribute his novel to an Arab historian, Cide Hamete Benengeli, he is obviously parodying the convention of the chivalric romance, the most popular literary genre in medieval and renaissance Europe. The sources for those whimsical and incongruous romances were systematically attributed to a manuscript found by chance and authored by a reputed historian or "sage," thus claiming historical validity to the story, or rather "history," that is being presented to the reader. There are innumerable examples of such convention, which in the case of Cervantes also suggests the need felt by literary authors to legitimate their narratives by claiming their historical truthfulness, not being the product of fantasy and fictional whim but of rigorous and accurate research into the annals of the past. Cervantes makes the point clear: "no history can be bad so long as it is true," and by so stating he places center stage the time-old debate on the borderline between history and literature. The fact that the life and adventures of Don Quixote had been written by an Arab historian is double-edged. On the one hand, it guarantees the reliability of the events related, but on the other, since Arabs were enemies and lying was a "very common propensity with those of that nation," Cervantes suspects that Cide Hamete Benengeli had followed a strategy of omitting and

silencing some important facts about the most fascinating knight-errant ever to walk the earth. As a historian, however, Benengeli would never distort or manipulate the facts, since, as Cervantes states:

It is the business and duty of historians to be exact, truthful, and wholly free from passion, and neither interest nor fear, hatred nor love, should make them swerve from the path of truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, storehouse of deeds, witness for the past, example and counsel for the present, and warning for the future. (Part I, chapter 8)

Having established the truthfulness of the narrative, Cervantes feels legitimized to undertake his narrative, or better, his “history” of Don Quixote and his demented exploits. In so doing, Cervantes gives voice to that “other” Spain, the Spain of the dispossessed, the oppressed and the persecuted because of religion and race. There is increasing agreement among scholars that Cervantes was in fact a “judío converso” or “converted Jew” (or “marrano” [pig], as they were pejoratively called), and his life a constant struggle to overcome such condition. Despite his heroism in the battle of Lepanto, the writer never rose in the military ranks; his repeated attempts to get authorization to travel to America were systematically turned down; despite his growing literary fame, he was never granted a public office beyond that of a “tax collector,” a job traditionally carried out by Jews. The State had imposed the “limpieza de sangre” or “purity of blood” as the iron rule that differentiated those who had full citizen rights, the so-called “Old Christians,” and those whose rights were strictly limited because of their religion, even if they or their ancestors had embraced the Catholic faith, the so-called “New Christians.” Such a distinction, by the way, also traveled to the American colonies and became the basis for the racial categories implemented in the New World. The term “Jew” appears only once in *Don Quixote*, when Sancho vindicates his historical worthiness (and his literary value) because of his loyalty to Spain’s imperial project:

If I had no other merit save that I believe, as I always do, firmly and truly in God, and all the holy Roman Catholic Church holds and believes, and that I am a mortal enemy of the Jews, the historians ought to have mercy on me and treat me well in their writings” (vol. II, chapter 8).

And yet, the novel abounds in veiled allusions to the orthodoxy dictated by the State and executed by the Holy Inquisition, the implacable tribunal that persecuted through torture any vestige of religious or political dissent since its implementation in the late 15th century.

In *Don Quixote* and other works, Miguel de Cervantes articulates an alternative history of Spain that subverts and contests the grand narrative told by the State since the imposition of an absolutist regime by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1478. Such a grand narrative speaks of a country with a “manifest destiny” to become the champion of Christendom and the carrier of civilization to the New World. Not in vain in 1494 Pope Alexander VI bestowed upon the monarchs the title of Catholic Queen and King for their unparalleled efforts in defense of the Catholic Church and the expulsion of all those Jews who rejected baptism, as well as the defeat of the last Muslim kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula. In that sense, the history of Spain was seen as “exceptional” and unique, as later the history of the United States would also be. Such narrative is obviously monolithic or, in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, a good example of the “monoglossia,” proper of the epic mode, which never allows the interference of voices other than the bard’s, and the ideology that the bard conveys (Bakhtin 13). In this respect, we can read the demented knight-errant as the grotesque personification of the divine mission to eradicate dissention and heterodoxy, and spread / impose the only true faith and the only ideology sanctioned by the State.

In Francois Lyotard’s terminology, the grand narrative or metanarrative of imperial Spain was univocal and monolingual, and did not allow for any “little narrative” that could undermine the hegemonic discourse. In fact, during the long dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1936-1975), this imperialist and intolerant discourse was recovered and imposed anew on Spain, which was split once again between those who had supported Franco and the fascist cause, and those who had fought in defense of the legitimate government of the Republic, who were dispossessed of most civil rights. What Lyotard labels as grand or metanarrative directly relates to the notion of canonical and canon, and its counterpart, “petit recite” or little narrative, is a synonym for “apocryphal.” The hegemonic discourse of the West has pivoted on *logo-centrism*, which, in my usage of the term, refers to the possession of the written (and spoken) word as the measure for “civilization,” in opposition to “barbarism” and “savagery.” As is well known, in its origin, the term barbarian referred to those individuals who did not speak Greek and whose speech resulted

thus unintelligible for the inhabitants of the polis, the city, hence its primordial meaning as “foreigner.” The word is an onomatopoeia reproducing what the Greeks actually heard when a foreigner spoke. The dichotomy between civilized and barbarian is therefore based on the possession of the “logos,” both in a linguistic and a religious sense.

For centuries, Western hegemony has imposed a canon perpetuating the official discourse of the State. History, religion and politics are totalitarian or monolithic discourses that admit neither dissenting interpretations nor counter-narratives. While master or grand narratives are stories that seem to assimilate different cultures into a single course of history dominated by the West, apocryphal stories / histories subvert the very attempt to encompass the discourse of peoples “without history” (that is, without civilization) into the totalizing speech of eurocentrism, as I stated at the beginning. Apocryphal, in this respect, is synonymous with subversive and anti-hegemonic. The counterpart of the apocryphal, the canonical, is the materialization, or better, verbalization, of power, but as long as it is sustained by language, it becomes an impossibility. If language is fluid and ambiguous, the canon cannot be fixed and immutable, despite the efforts on the part of State and Church to perpetuate meaning. The history of the Bible, literally a collection of “little books,” illustrates the strategy of exclusion of those writings that did not conform to the orthodoxy dictated by the ecclesiastical authorities. The Gelasian Decree, a sixth-century list of canonical and “heretical” books, included dozens of works and authors that were deemed apocryphal, and therefore heretic, even if many of them had been admitted earlier as part of the biblical canon:

These and those similar ones, which Simon Magus, Nicolaus, Cerinthus, Marcion, Basilides, Ebion, Paul of Samosata, Photinus and Bonosus, who suffered from similar error, also Montanus with his obscene followers, Apollinaris, Valentinus the Manichaean, Faustus the African, Sabellius, Arius, Macedonius, Eunomius, Novatus, Sabbatius, Calistus, Donatus, Eustasius, Jovianus, Pelagius, Julian of Eclanum, Caelestius, Maximian, Priscillian from Spain, Nestorius of Constantinople, Maximus the Cynic, Lampetius, Dioscorus, Eutyches, Peter and the other Peter, of whom one disgraced Alexandria and the other Antioch, Acacius of Constantinople with his associates, and what also all disciples of heresy and of the heretics and schismatics, whose names we have scarcely preserved, have taught or compiled, we acknowledge is to be not merely

rejected but eliminated from the whole Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church and with their authors and the followers of its authors to be damned in the inextricable shackles of anathema forever. (Dobschütz)

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes uses the term “apocryphal” at least five times, which suggests the word was quite common in everyday parlance. Even though the etymology of apocryphal reveals that its meaning is “hidden” or “obscure” (from the Greek “apó,” outside or distant, and “krýpto,” to hide or conceal), the term has come to mean both in English and Spanish “fabulous,” “false,” or “spurious,” but the term also refers to works that offer alternative, oftentimes subversive, versions of the official narratives. For the State, apocryphal refers to all those writings that question or negate the grand narratives imposed by power. In one of the most famous passages of the novel, Cervantes parodies the ecclesiastical purgation of books considered subversive or unhealthy. In this case, all those popular romances of chivalry that had intoxicated don Quixote’s feeble mind with outlandish deeds and impossible ideals of universal justice. And like the knight errant of old, Cervantes’ protagonist finds his platonic love in Dulcinea, a rather homely peasant—Aldonza Lorenzo—who becomes in Don Quixote’s fanciful imagination the most beautiful lady of La Mancha. Cervantes adopts through the priest the role of a literary critic, or rather “censor,” who vindicates realism and verisimilitude as the standard for literary value, and in so doing establishes a canon of texts as the true representatives of Spanish and universal literature, throwing the rest into the bonfire to be consumed by the merciless flames. This metafictional chapter fulfills a double function: on the one hand, it provides standards of artistic value in literature. On the other hand, the chapter satirizes the common practice of the Inquisition, and of the Church at large, of expurgating any writing that did not conform to the orthodoxy in religion and in politics. This early chapter in the novel paves the way for the metafictional realm in which the modern-day knight-errant will perform his wondrous and impossible deeds. Furthermore, Miguel de Cervantes inserts himself among the authors and works that the priest is assessing, and the clergy, a time-long friend of Cervantes, obviously praises the author and his writing, vindicating the recognition that the reading public has denied to the writer:

“But what book is that next it?” “The ‘Galatea’ of Miguel de Cervantes,” said the barber.

“That Cervantes has been for many years a great friend of mine, and to my knowledge he

has had more experience in reverses than in verses. His book has some good invention in it, it presents us with something but brings nothing to a conclusion: we must wait for the Second Part it promises: perhaps with amendment it may succeed in winning the full measure of grace that is now denied it.”

The ten-year gap between the publication of the First and the Second parts of *Don Quixote* suggests for some scholars that Cervantes might have considered the novel completed with the first part. It would have been the publication of the so-called “apocryphal Quixote”—a continuation of the novel signed by Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda, the pseudonym of an unidentified author—that led an irritated Cervantes to compose the second part. While approaching the city of Barcelona, Don Quixote and Sancho are met by a party of riders in livery who extend a glad hand to the knight and his esquire:

“Welcome to our city, mirror, beacon, star and cynosure of all knight-errantry in its widest extent! Welcome, I say, valiant Don Quixote of La Mancha; not the false, the fictitious, the *apocryphal*, that these latter days have offered us in lying histories, but the true, the legitimate, the real one that Cide Hamete Benengeli, flower of historians, has described to us!” (Vol. II, chapter 41, my emphasis).

By this time, both Don Quixote and Sancho are aware of their role as literary (anti)heroes, and of the fame that precedes them everywhere they go, and are well satisfied for being the matter of history, like the knights-errant and esquires of old. These words of welcome to the city of Barcelona, furthermore, reinforce their authenticity as the only true protagonists of Benengeli’s historical account.

In his dismissal of Avellaneda’s sequel as “false,” “fictitious,” and “apocryphal,” Cervantes—in the guise of an unidentified bourgeois—plays the same role as the priest in the first part, that of the censor who opens or closes the gates of the canon. By this time, knight-errant and esquire are fully aware of their textual nature, being creatures who inhabit a universe of words, characters in a narrative discourse rather than individuals dwelling in a tangible, “real” world. While Cervantes’ novel is a pristine example of “history,” inasmuch as it relays, almost verbatim, Benengeli’s chronicle, Avellaneda’s un-authorized fabulation stands as a prime representation of

apocryphal writing deserving expurgation from the roster of “authorized” books. Once again, Cervantes dictates the whats and whatnots of the literary canon, never giving up, however, the satiric diction that questions and subverts that very role. In the end, it all becomes a labyrinth of confronting mirrors forever differing signification and, in so doing, Cervantes undermines the edifice of linguistic and literary meaning as fixed and immutable, in a strategy that anticipates postmodernist aesthetics by several centuries.

Don Quixote is a “hidalgo,” a member of the lower ranks of Spanish nobility. The hidalgos were, literally, “hijos de algo” or “inheritors of some fortune,” and conformed a class that had lived for centuries off the rents collected from their properties. They were direct descendants of those soldiers who had participated in the warfare against the Muslims and, in exchange, received lands and perpetual exemption from taxes. Hidalgos were old Christians who looked down on any kind of manual labor as too menial for their rank and lineage, even if their income had dwindled dramatically by the time of the novel, as it was the case of Cervantes’ protagonist. Don Quixote’s income allows him to lead a life of relative ease, with enough money to provide for his household and his meager sustenance. He spends most of his income, however, on romances and poetry chapbooks, quite an expensive commodity at the time. Such costly hobby forces him to sell his land acre by acre, in order to afford those novels of chivalry that infect his mind with such nonsensical absurdities as “the reason of the unreason with which my reason is afflicted so weakens my reason that with reason I murmur at your beauty” (part I, chapter 1). Spanish nobility was an institution in open decline, being taken over by a pragmatic plutocracy that was finding its way to power through wealth, rather than ancestry. In this respect, Don Quixote stands as a representative of a class that seeks in vain to restore its social and political role, oftentimes by invoking a past that no longer exists, if it ever truly did. This new society has no room for grand ideals and principles, which this emerging moneyed class scoffs at as a product of whimsical and feeble minds. This is, in my opinion, where the true greatness of Cervantes’ novel lies: Cervantes confronts the world as it should be--even if represented by a maddened knight--and the world as is, prosaic, unjust, greedy, discriminatory and cruel. Even those who find succor in their distress, scorn and even beat the gallant knight in exchange for his help. Such clash of the ideal and the real is no doubt the central drive of the novel. Thus, for example, the episode in which Don Quixote liberates a chain of galley slaves he and Sancho run across on the road,

convinced that they are innocent victims of royal injustice, only to find himself and his esquire stoned and robbed by the very convicts he has just freed. Despite the burlesque tone of the whole chapter, as of the book at large, the reader is confronted with the most excruciating evidence of the unviability of man's loftiest ideals of universal justice:

[Don Quixote] addressed them as follows: "To be grateful for benefits received is the part of persons of good birth, and one of the sins most offensive to God is ingratitude; I say so because, sirs, ye have already seen by manifest proof the benefit ye have received of me; in return for which I desire, and it is my good pleasure that, laden with that chain which I have taken off your necks, ye at once set out and proceed to the city of El Toboso, and there present yourselves before the lady Dulcinea del Toboso, and say to her that her knight, he of the Rueful Countenance, sends to commend himself to her; and that ye recount to her in full detail all the particulars of this notable adventure, up to the recovery of your longed-for liberty; and this done ye may go where ye will, and good fortune attend you." [. . .] The ass and Rocinante, Sancho and Don Quixote, were all that were left upon the spot; the ass with drooping head, serious, shaking his ears from time to time as if he thought the storm of stones that assailed them was not yet over; Rocinante stretched beside his master, for he too had been brought to the ground by a stone; Sancho stripped [. . .] and Don Quixote fuming to find himself so served by the very persons for whom he had done so much. (Part I, chapter 22)

The episode of Don Quixote and the galley slaves provides a good transition to the second novel I will discuss in this paper. The punishment of forced service in the army and the navy in expiation for crimes committed was an extended practice, since the Emperor Charles V and later Phillip II had ever-increasing needs of manpower to assist soldiers and to maneuver the galleys in the various wars Spain was fighting in the Old and the New Worlds. Thus, in the first picaresque novel, *The Life and Adventures of Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), Lazaro—narrator and protagonist—reveals the reason why his natural father, a miller of questionable habits at a watermill by the river Tormes, just outside the Spanish city of Salamanca, was conscripted:

“When I was a child of eight years old, they accused my father of certain misdeeds done to the sacks of those who came to have their corn ground. He was taken into custody, and confessed and denied not, suffering persecution for justice's sake. So I trust in God that he

is in glory, for the Evangelist tells us that such are blessed. At that time there was a certain expedition against the Moors and among the adventurers was my father, who was banished for the affair already mentioned. He went in the position of attendant on a knight who also went, and, with his master, like a loyal servant, he ended his life. (Kindle Location 45-45)

Lazarillo de Tormes is the direct precursor of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, to the extent that the Spanish classic would be in its present form without the inspiration provided by this foundational picaresque. *Lazarillo* portrays one of the earliest antiheroes in Western literature. Lázaro de Tormes is a young *pícaro* (rascal or rogue) that parodies the classic hero and its medieval inheritor the knight-errant. By means of this subverted heroic figure, the writer undertakes a bitter portrayal of a country in which pervasive corruption and ecclesiastical hypocrisy contest and subvert the gran narrative of the Spanish Empire. In fact, Cervantes pays homage to the book in a very explicit exercise of intertextuality by invoking the title of the novel and praising its truthfulness, even if with an ironic twist:

"I am Gines de Pasamonte, whose life is written by these fingers."

"He says true," said the commissary, "for he has himself written his story as grand as you please, and has left the book in the prison in pawn for two hundred reals." . . . "Is it so good?" said Don Quixote. "So good is it," replied Gines, "that a fig for 'Lazarillo de Tormes,' and all of that kind that have been written, or shall be written compared with it: all I will say about it is that it deals with facts, and facts so neat and diverting that no lies could match them." (Kindle Edition 85)

For centuries, the real identity of the author of *Lazarillo* remained unknown, and only recently scholars have agreed that the author was Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, a Spanish poet and a diplomat, who would have carefully hidden his authorship because of fear of the civil and ecclesiastical tribunals. This short novel is the first Spanish, and most probably European, narrative to expose nakedly the incongruence and cruelty of a society in profound crisis. In the conclusion to his autobiographical account, Lazaro explains: "All this happened the same year that our victorious Emperor Charles made his entry into this celebrated city of Toledo, and there held his court, bringing with him a season of feast and jubilee, of which all must have heard."

The year Lazaro finishes his narrative is thus 1524, and the choice is not mere coincidence. At 21, Lazaro has achieved the success his lineage would have denied him in earlier times, and obtains a royal appointment as town crier and dealer of wine, a coveted position that comes, however, at a cost, as we shall see. Like the books expurgated from the Bible by the Gelasian Decree as heretical or apocryphal, *Lazarillo* was prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition as early as 1559, and yet not soon enough to prevent its immense popularity in Spain and Europe, which led to a number of editions published in different countries. The book was first received as an autobiographical account and not as a work of fiction. Tired of the novels of chivalry and their whimsical fantasies, the Spanish readership welcomed the freshness and the realism of a story portraying the many contradictions of a country torn between an imperial agenda based on religious orthodoxy and territorial expansion and a society leaving behind the immobility of medieval hierarchies.

In the *Lazarillo* we find, at least to my knowledge, the first European statement of fear to the “racial Other” in modern literature. Thus, after the death of Lazaro’s father, his widowed mother becomes the concubine of a Black slave named Zayde, who provides the humble household with food and firewood and other items that he steals from his master. At first, Lazaro did not like him, because of “his colour and his ugly face,” but the boy soon took to him, because his visits were “signs of better living.” Racial fear is thus replaced by filial love in a boy whose life will be determined by hunger and need, in a world that he sees but does not understand, even if he suffers in full, for very rarely does he find help and succor along the road. Eventually Lazaro’s mother bears a son, a mulatto who is unaware of his skin color and therefore bears the same prejudices about blackness as Lazaro earlier:

One day my mother gave me a pretty little brown brother, whom I played with and helped to keep warm. I remember once that when my stepfather was fondling the child, it noticed that my mother and I were white, and that he was not. It frightened the child, who ran to my mother, pointing with its finger and saying, “Mother, he is ugly!” To this he replied laughing; but I noticed the words of my little brother, and, though so young, I said to myself, “How many there are in the world who run from others because they do not see themselves in them.” (Kindle Locations 53-57)

Even though the passage about Zayde, the black slave, has received scant critical attention, it certainly fulfills a central role in Lazaro's universe, for he is a fatherless child who is forced to seek on the road a surrogate progenitor. His father Tomás is killed in battle—perhaps the most honorable deed in his life—while his step father Zayde is flogged and tarred as punishment for his petty thieveries. While at first Lazaro did not like his mother's "friend" because he was scared of his color and his sinister looks, he gradually takes to him, since Zayde brings supplies that are badly needed at home, and eventually gets to love him well. Lazaro's early acceptance of the racial other may not be fully altruistic, but it represents a step forward in a world in which color and blood, along with religion (obviously Zayde is a Muslim) are the markers for social exclusion. Lazaro will probably never make this acceptance extensive to all non-whites but he at least concedes that Zayde is good, like Huck Finn in Mark Twain's 19th century novel gets to accept that Jim, the runaway slave, is "white inside."

Once those fathers, the real and the putative, are gone, Lazaro sets out on a journey of self-discovery that will turn him into a servant of different masters, all of them surrogate fathers who abuse him but also instruct him on the ways of the world. In this respect, *Lazarillo* is a travelogue, like Don Quixote, like the Odyssey, like the medieval allegorical play *Everyman* or the more modern *Pilgrim's Progress*, and like the romance of chivalry and its wondering knights—errant. The *Lazarillo* anticipates the genre of the bildungsroman by several centuries, since it traces the coming of age of a wretched lad who climbs the social ladder by means of his wit and endurance. Lazaro is both protagonist and narrator of his story, the archetypal story of a young man who rises "from rags to riches," as Horatio Alger's "Ragged Dick" would in 19th century America. His mother, out of necessity after Zayde is out of the picture, hands over Lazaro to a blind man. The blind man promises the mother to adopt the child as his own son rather than his "servant," and will instruct him in the ways of the world. Lazaro begins his education in the school of life in the most painful way, since upon arrival at the bridge that leads out of Salamanca, the blind man and the pupil come across a stone figure remindful of a bull that presides over the bridge. In his kindest of tones, the blind man invites Lazaro to approach his ear to the bull because he will hear the sea:

"I did so, like a simpleton, believing it to be as he said. When he felt that my head was against the stone, he raised his hand and gave me a tremendous blow against the devil of

a bull, so that I felt the pain for more than three days. Then he said to me, ‘This will teach you that a blind man's boy ought to be one point more knowing than the devil himself’; and he laughed heartily at his joke.”

And Lazaro does indeed learn the lesson, feeling as if he had awoken abruptly from the dream of his infancy into the reality of a world in which he is completely alone, and alone will have to fend for himself. This early epiphany will guide his feet in the long journey ahead of him and will lead in due time to exact revenge in the cruel blind beggar, after a myriad other tricks the child plays on him. As in the biblical “an eye for an eye,” Lazaro replays the episode of the stone bull, but this time it is a stone pillar and the victim the blind man. Lazaro tricks his master into believing that he needs to ford a creek with a good jump: “The poor old man, balancing himself like a goat, gave one step backwards, and then sprang with all his force. His head came with such a noise against the pillar that it sounded like a great calabash. He fell down half dead.” Despite his greed and his meanness, Lazaro’s master provides the kid, however, with an education quite similar to the schooling that Herman Melville received aboard a whale-ship, his only “Yale College” and “Harvard” in the school of life and of letters, as Ishmael says in *Moby Dick*.

The different masters Lazarillo serves compose a gallery of archetypes representing Spanish society, much in the line of *Don Quixote*, and in so doing, the novel gives voice to individuals silenced by the State’s grand narrative through a collection of “little narratives” (or episodes) that counteract and subvert the very pillars of the State. After the blind sage, Lazaro spends several months in the service of a village priest, a greedy miser who starves the boy almost to death: “I had escaped from the thunder to fall under the lightning. For compared with this priest, the blind man was an Alexander the Great. I will say no more than that all the avarice in the world was combined in this man, but I know not whether it was naturally born in him or whether it was put on with the priestly habit” (Kindle Location 647). The satire on the clergy at large was in the first edition of the novel so acerbic that not only did the ecclesiastical censors prohibit the book for decades, but also demanded a thorough expurgation of all references to the corrupted practices of the Church before approving the work for reprint.

One of the most pathetic—in the etymological sense of “arousing pity”—masters Lazarillo serves is an esquire that he finds upon arrival in Toledo. In fact, this anonymous esquire belongs in the same rank of lower nobility (*hidalgos*) as Don Quixote, and I suspect Cervantes may have found in him inspiration for his mad knight-errant. The esquire leads a life of appearances, since for him honor is the only principle worth living for: “For a gentleman owes nothing to anyone but God and the king; nor is it right for a man of honour to forego his self- respect” (Kindle Location 1005). The esquire’s material possessions are but a cloak of fine fabric and an old sword. Without money or food, he spends his days walking about the streets with an aristocratic air, attending mass daily or strolling by the riverbanks, where ladies in search of wealthy husbands gather whenever the weather allows. A stranger in the city, the esquire has moved to Toledo, and rented a house he cannot pay for, in order to seek some royal appointment that will fit his rank. Instead, he discovers that such coveted positions are assigned to clergymen. Fully dispossessed, the esquire claims to have a large estate back in his hometown, as befits an *hidalgo*:

"Above all, I am not so poor but that I possess, in my own country, an estate of houses which are well-built, sixteen leagues from where I was born, in the vicinity of Valladolid. They would be worth two hundred times a thousand maravedis if they were in good repair; and I also have a pigeon-cote which, if it was not demolished, would give out two hundred pigeons every year, as well as other things about which I am silent, as it might touch my honour. (Kindle Locations 1017-1018)

Even if such claims were true, the present condition of his possessions is so ruinous as to be worthless, since restoring those buildings to their former glory would require an impossible investment. The esquire thus stands as the representative of a class that is gradually waning away, *hidalgos* frozen in a glorious past that will never return, as the world that Don Quixote inhabits in his feverish imagination never will. And it will become Lazarillo’s task to feed the esquire through begging, therefore becoming his master’s master, in an ironic twist that reveals the real drive of the novel, since his master proves to be as much of a *picaro* as Lazarillo by vanishing into thin air when the landlord finally requests payment of his rent. The young boy, despite the deprivations suffered with the esquire, does not feel anger but pity and sympathy for

a man who equals him in poverty but lacks the ingenuity to cope with it. The whole episode is as much a satire as an elegy that leaves the reader with bittersweet feelings.

Lazaro's last masters are all representatives of the Church, which explains why the author of the novel never accepted his paternity of such subversive text. After the esquire's disappearance, he briefly serves a friar of the Order of Mercy, who Lazaro describes in passig in a very cryptic language, clear enough however to reveal the friar to be a womanizer and a glutton who spends his days walking about the city. The short passage finishes with a hint at even worse things about the friar that he is ashamed to tell. His next master is beyond doubt the most corrupted member of the Church invoked in the novel, and is remindful of Chaucer's Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales*, for he is also a seller of Catholic indulgences. No wonder religious authorities ordered expurgating the whole chapter from the text as a condition for authorizing its reprint. Lazaro opens the episode with a very explicit condemnation of his new master: "He was the most shameless and impudent distributor of them that ever [indulgences] I saw or hope to see, nor do I believe that anyone else ever saw one like him. For he had and sought out his own modes and methods, and very cunning inventions." In truth, the seller proves to be the most corrupted representative of the ecclesiastical business and does manage to swindle the whole city with his cunning alliance with the city constable, as roguish as himself, to the extent that even Lazaro is greatly shocked: "How many more tricks will the rogues play on these innocent people!" (Kindle Location 1167).

After two short stints with other masters, Lazaro finally receives reward for all his suffering and starvation and achieves what the esquire, and the likes of him, had longed for. Thus, Lazaro reaches social respectability—even if somewhat questionable—and economic success, becoming a true member of the rising bourgeoisie, the social class that was displacing the old social ranks dependent on lineage and inheritance: "This was a Government appointment such as enabled no one to thrive except those who occupied it. In it I live and reside to this day, in the service of God and your Honour," explains Lazaro to his unidentified narrate, beyond the opening address to "Your Honour." Lazaro becomes the official crier of the city and a successful intermediary in transactions of wine, to the extent that all merchants make use of his advice. Thus, the prophecy that the blind man made years earlier: "If there is a man in the world who ought to be lucky with

wine . . . it is you," is fulfilled. Seeing Lazaro's success as a merchantman, the Archpriest of St. Saviour secures his services and proposes the young man to marry one of his servant girls, which Lazaro gladly accepts. His rise from rags to riches and fame is hence accomplished. "Evil tongues," however, try to make Lazaro doubt his newly wed wife, claiming that she may be more intimate with the Archpriest than Lazaro may suspect. Well aware of his concerns, the Archpriest plainly tells him: "'Lazaro de Tormes . . . he who listens to evil tongues will never prosper. I say this because your wife may be seen entering my house and leaving it. She comes with honour to herself and to you, and this I promise you. Do not attend to what they say, and be assured that what I tell you is for your good.'" For Lazaro those words suffice to extinguish his concerns and thus he threatens any evil tongue with his wrath. The reader will decide how to interpret this final twist.

The general title of the conference that gathers us here today is "Facts, Distortions and Erasures: Literature as History; History in Literature." The two texts I have chosen for my paper clearly illustrate some of the ways in which literature can challenge the grand narrative of an empire based on orthodoxy and exclusion. The *Lazarillo* is, furthermore, an outstanding materialization of the subaltern's resistance to suppression and silencing by the State. The young protagonist is the perfect embodiment of subalternity, since Lazaro serves different masters who use and abuse him in multiple ways. Paradoxically, however, Lazaro arrogates to himself the role of the State. Not only does he affirm his white supremacy over his mulatto half-brother, but he also offers example as living proof that the State accepts in its lap those individuals traditionally relegated to the margins, providing the individual willingly accepts servitude and even shame as the toll for economic success.

Blackness is also present in *Don Quixote*, revealing the pervasive presence of slavery and racial discrimination in Spain, which official historiography has to a great extent deleted from the national narrative. Thus, in his simplicity, Sancho Panza gives voice to the prejudices against the racial and the religious other, as we already saw in the passage in which he affirms his orthodoxy through his hatred towards the Jews and his blind obedience to the Church ordinances. In another passage, he daydreams of future wealth through slave trade:

“The only thing that troubled him was the reflection that this kingdom was in the land of the blacks, and that the people they would give him for vassals would be all black; but for this he soon found a remedy in his fancy, and said he to himself, "What is it to me if my vassals are blacks? What more have I to do than make a cargo of them and carry them to Spain, where I can sell them and get ready money for them, and with it buy some title or some office in which to live at ease all the days of my life? (p. 117)

While Don Quixote, in his madness, fights to protect the weak and the dispossessed, Sancho, in his sound pragmatism, plans to thrive in life through the exploitation of them. That is how Cervantes substantiates the two Spains in the knight-errant—embodiment of the apocryphal—and his esquire-embodiment of the imperial grand narrative, in a reading that no scholarship has ever addressed. Both novels, paramount representatives of the Spanish Golden Age, anticipate by several centuries both modernism and postmodernism and their literary practices, from the questioning of visible reality to the conviction that literature, as well as history, find their referents not in the world itself as much as in other texts. But that goes beyond the scope of the present article.

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