The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANONYMOUS

Nothing is known about the author who penned this short novel. He or she likely chose to remain anonymous as a self-protective measure, given that the book makes pointed critiques of the Catholic Church, an offense that at the time of the book's publication would have been punishable by death.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lazarillo de Tormes was written during the Spanish Inquisition, a time when the rulers of Spain took extreme measures to enforce the sovereignty of the Catholic Church. This initiative resulted in several centuries of violent and systematic suppression of religious minorities (such as Jews, Muslims, and Protestants) who had established sizeable populations throughout Spain. Under the Spanish Inquisition, non-Catholics were forced to convert or were expelled from the country, though often those who refused to convert were killed or burned at the stake. Many of those who converted did so to save their lives but continued to practice their faith in secrecy. Within the church there was an atmosphere of fear, intolerance, and cynicism that gave rise to the forms of hypocrisy that *Lazarillo de Tormes* satires so sharply. The book was banned by the Office of the Inquisition when it was published.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The success of *Lazarillo de Tormes* gave rise to an entire literary genre known as the picaresque novel. The distinguishing mark of this genre is that the story follows a *pícaro*—a "rogue" or a "rascal," always someone of low class—instead of a nobleman or a more traditional hero. Other notable picaresque novels include Cervantes' novel *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. *Lazarillo de Tormes* is also notable because it was one of the first works of its kind to experiment with innovations in form, such as structuring the narrative as though it were a letter written in the first person. Novels written as letters are referred to as epistolary novels. Other noteworthy epistolary novels are *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities
- **When Written:** Unknown
- **Where Written:** Spain
- **When Published:** 1554
- **Literary Period:** Spanish Literature of the Golden Age
- **Genre:** Picaresque novel
- **Setting:** 16th century Spain
- **Antagonist:** The blind man and the priest
- **Point of View:** First-person narrator (Lazaro)

EXTRA CREDIT

Converso. Some scholars have suggested that the author may have been a *converso*—a Jew forced to convert to Catholicism under the Inquisition—whose experiences of persecution under the Catholic Church gave him a disaffected view of Christian society.

Success Despite Censorship. *Lazarillo de Tormes* was added to the Office of the Inquisition's official Index of Forbidden Books when it was published, but illegal copies of the book were widely circulated throughout Europe and the text was translated into English and French shortly after it was published. By 1573 the Church responded to the book's popularity by allowing edited versions of the text to circulate, but these versions were heavily censored.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel is written from the perspective of Lazaro de Tormes, a town crier in the city of Toledo, telling his life story to an unknown superior in the form of a letter. In the novel's short prologue Lazaro mentions that he is telling the story to better explain a certain matter into which his addressee has inquired, though the specifics of the matter are unclear.

Lazaro was born to a poor mother and father outside of Salamanca in Spain. His father was exiled when he was caught stealing from the mill where he worked, and he died at war shortly after that. Lazaro and his widowed mother move to Salamanca, where she finds work and settles down with a slave named Zaide who works in the stables. Lazaro's mother has another child by Zaide, but then Zaide is caught stealing to provide for Lazaro and his family. The court forbids Lazaro's mother from seeing Zaide again and she moves with her two sons into an inn where she finds work.

While at the inn, Lazaro's mother meets a blind man who offers to take Lazaro as a servant, so Lazaro leaves his family to travel with the blind man, who makes a living by saying prayers in

exchange for alms. Lazaro soon discovers that the blind man is a stingy and dishonest master. Lazaro endures many abuses and often goes hungry while in the blind man's service, though he learns many lessons about how to survive. Eventually Lazaro musters the courage to leave the blind man's service, but before he does he gets his vengeance; Lazaro stands the blind man in front of a stone pillar and tricks him into bashing his head against it by telling him he is standing on one side of a gulley that he needs to jump across.

Lazaro travels alone to a town where he meets a priest who agrees to take him on as a servant, but Lazaro soon discovers that this master is even more cruel than the last. The priest starves Lazaro, but soon Lazaro gets hold of a key to the locked chest where the priest keeps a store of bread and Lazaro helps himself. When the priest notices that one of his loaves has gone missing, Lazaro is forced to become more clever. He begins eating the bread so that it looks like mice have gotten into the chest. Eventually the priest catches on to this trick as well, and Lazaro is sent on his way.

Lazaro's third master is a squire who has lost all his wealth but is obsessed with maintaining his status and the appearance of nobility. Lazaro takes pity on the squire, sharing the food he earns through begging in the town. When the squire is no longer able to pay his rent he abandons the house along with Lazaro. The landlords, upon discovering the house is empty inside, assume that Lazaro has stolen everything and threaten to punish him, but Lazaro's neighbors defend him.

Lazaro works briefly for a friar before he moves on to another town where he meets a seller of indulgences who makes a living by convincing people to buy articles that he claims will pardon their sins. The seller of indulgences agrees to take Lazaro as his servant, and Lazaro participates in a scheme that results in all the people of one town purchasing indulgences.

Then Lazaro serves a tambourine painter briefly, followed by a chaplain for whom he leads a mule around town selling water. Lazaro keeps this job for several years and says little about it, but he is happy because it enables him to save money and provide for himself for the first time in his life. After this he works briefly for a constable before finally finding a job as a town crier in Toledo, advertising **wine** to earn his money.

While working as a town crier, the archbishop takes an interest in Lazaro and offers him one of his maids as a wife. Lazaro takes the archbishop's offer despite widespread rumors that the maid is the archbishop's mistress. Lazaro later confirms these rumors are true but he is happy to ignore them, as he and his wife receive some money from the Archbishop. In exchange Lazaro is willing for his sham marriage to protect the Archbishop's reputation. At this point in the narrative it becomes clear that Lazaro's arrangement with the archbishop is the matter Lazaro refers to in the prologue.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lazaro de Tormes – Lazaro is the story's narrator and protagonist. Born to a poor family in Spain and given away by his mother at a young age, Lazaro spends his childhood serving many different masters who treat him cruelly. At first, he describes his experiences with the innocence of a young child and even a sense of humor, but as Lazaro grows older, his outlook becomes increasingly cynical and unfeeling. By the end of the book Lazaro has found a stable job advertising wines as a town crier and he seems to be known locally as a cuckold (someone whose wife is unfaithful), but he is too jaded for this to bother him much. Over the course of this short novel, Lazaro transforms from a sympathetic character into a hardened, amoral man. This transformation is symbolic of the book's general message that only those willing to trade honor for profit can succeed in a corrupt society.

The blind man – The blind man is Lazaro's first master, about whom Lazaro writes the most. A miserly and streetwise old beggar, the blind man earns a living by travelling from town to town saying prayers and blessings for whoever will pay him. He beats Lazaro and doesn't feed him well, but he teaches Lazaro valuable lessons about how to protect and provide for himself. Like other blind men in literature, he seems to have a gift for prophecy, predicting the two most notable developments of the book's conclusion: that Lazaro's livelihood will depend on wine, and that he will become a cuckold.

The priest – The priest of Maqueda is Lazaro's second master, more selfish and stingy than even the blind man. He agrees to take Lazaro on as a servant, but he deprives Lazaro of food while he indulges in excessive eating and drinking himself. The priest takes the bread that is donated to the church and eats it, and he also stuffs himself on the feasts of the funerals he administers. Through his selfishness, dishonesty, gluttonousness, and cruelty toward Lazaro, the priest epitomizes the hypocrisy of the church.

The squire – The squire, Lazaro's third master, is a figure of minor nobility who is obsessed with maintaining an appearance of wealth that he does not have. He dresses in fine clothes and carries a nice sword, but his home is empty of furniture save for a tattered old mattress, and he never has anything to eat. Lazaro, while in the squire's service, takes pity on him and helps him by sharing the food he is able to collect by begging. The squire symbolizes the foolishness of a superficial notion of honor that is based more on appearances and the opinions of others than actual virtue.

The seller of indulgences – The seller of indulgences is Lazaro's fifth master. He makes a living by selling articles that are believed to pardon the sins of those who purchase them. He is a conman, in short—a cunning master of deception. He devises

elaborate theatrical productions to convince otherwise rightfully skeptical townspeople to buy his indulgences. His job is one of the most morally suspect positions in the clergy, since it represents a near complete conflation of wealth with moral purity and transforms currency into a vehicle for redemption.

Zaide – A black man and a slave who works in the stables of the Comendador of La Magdalena, Zaide becomes the lover of Antona Pérez after Lazaro's father is exiled. Zaide is also the father of Antona Perez's second child, Lazaro's half-brother. Though Lazaro is afraid of Zaide at first, Lazaro soon learns that Zaide provides for his family, and this secures Lazaro's trust. Zaide is then caught stealing and is separated from Lazaro and his mother as part of his punishment.

The archpriest – The archpriest of San Salvador, a high-ranking clergyman, takes a liking to Lazaro and offers Lazaro one of his maids to marry. Lazaro soon discovers that his new wife is the archpriest's mistress, but he turns a blind eye because the archpriest showers him and his wife with gifts. The person that the story is addressed to seems to be a friend or acquaintance of the archpriest's who has asked Lazaro to explain this matter further. Given that members of the clergy were supposed to be celibate, it would be an especially significant offense if a figure of such high office were found out to be an adulterer.

The friar –The friar is Lazaro's fourth master, whom Lazaro serves for only a brief time. Because he is a monk, the friar is presumed to have recused himself from worldly matters, but he seems to spend all his time running about on errands of a sexual nature. Lazaro quickly tires of following him around and decides to find another master.

Tomé González – Lazaro's father, a miller who is caught stealing from the mill and is exiled as punishment. He then dies while fighting in a military campaign against the Moors (a northwestern African Muslim people who had settled throughout Spain), another example of the violent expulsion of religious minorities from Spain under the Inquisition.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Antona Pérez – Lazaro's mother and the widow of Tomé González, Antona Pérez struggles to provide for her children before finally giving Lazaro away to his first master, the blind man.

The chaplain – The chaplain is Lazaro's seventh master, about whom little is said. He employs Lazaro by putting him in charge of a donkey and several jars of water, and for several years Lazaro makes a decent living selling water in his service.

The neighbors – Lazaro's neighbors while he is living with the squire are poor but generous women who make their living spinning cotton. They give Lazaro food when he needs it and defend him against the townspeople who falsely accuse him of stealing from the squire.

The first constable – The constable is a corrupt officer of the law who accuses the seller of indulgences of fraud but then later helps him deceive the townspeople into buying indulgences.

The second constable – Lazaro's eighth master, whom he serves only very briefly because the job seems dangerous. Lazaro abandons the constable as the constable is getting beaten-up by a band of fugitives.

The tambourine painter – Lazaro's sixth master. Lazaro helps him mix his paints, and claims to have suffered a thousand indignities in his service, though no more detail is given.

Lazaro's wife – The archpriest's maid and, as Lazaro later finds out after marrying her, mistress.

Comendador of La Magdalena – The master of Lazaro's mother.

The creditors – The man and woman who come to the squire's house to collect rent.

The tinker – The man who gives Lazaro a spare key to the priest's chest

The innkeeper's wife – Nurses Lazaro back to health after the episode with the sausage

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TRUTH, DECEPTION, AND LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Through telling his life story, Lazaro portrays the society he lives in as one in which deception is the essence of every interaction. Born to one thief and then adopted by another, it is clear from the outset that young Lazaro belongs to the class of people who depend on lying and cheating to survive. Leaving his family at a young age to fend for himself, Lazaro goes on to serve many masters who exploit the ignorance of others to make their living. Lazaro quickly learns the art of deception himself through a series of insufferable jobs in which survival and loss of innocence are revealed to be two deeply entangled processes.

Although Lazaro sets up his story with the stated purpose of bringing the truth to light, the process of growing up makes him willfully ignorant of or complicit in various acts of deception. After suffering months of abuse as the blind man's servant, and taking revenge whenever the opportunity arose, Lazaro's final betrayal of the blind man represents a moment of the student

surpassing the master in the art of deception. Later on, during his time spent serving the priest, Lazaro's survival depends upon his ability to maintain the illusion that the bread he steals is being eaten by mice. Years later, Lazaro marries the archpriest's maid and discovers, after some time, that she and the archpriest have carried on a secret sexual relationship under his nose. Lazaro is angry at first but then makes an arrangement with the archpriest allowing this infidelity to go on as long as both he and the archpriest continue to benefit from it. Lazaro is content that this arrangement works to his financial benefit and seems flatly unconcerned with the moral questions it poses.

Against the backdrop of the Inquisition, even the credibility of Lazaro's account is, in the end, made somewhat uncertain, as it becomes clear that the impetus for telling the entire story had been to supply an explanation — and perhaps also a defense — of the arrangement he has made with the archpriest concerning his wife. Lazaro seems to suggest that the only truth that can be known with any certainty is that of the absolute rule of deception. The book's anonymous author, by contrast, is perhaps more optimistic about what can be achieved by striving to expose the truth and illuminate hypocrisy, since the book itself stands as a sharp piece of social criticism which he risked his life to have published.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

At the time in which *Lazarillo de Tormes* was written, the supremely powerful Catholic Church had begun the Spanish Inquisition, a violent campaign to purge religious diversity from Spain. The novel critiques the moral authority of the Catholic Church to embark on such a project by exposing the gap between the professed values and the actual behavior of Spanish Catholics.

The author uses the form of the picaresque novel—a genre characterized by plots composed of distinct episodes that are each their own story—to enumerate the types of religious hypocrisy afflicting Spain. *Lazarillo de Tormes* is divided into sections devoted to Lazaro's time with different masters, each of whom embodies a different kind of hypocrisy. The blind man Lazaro serves at the start of the book is outwardly pious, but his cruelty and stinginess toward Lazaro stand in stark contrast to the religious values he pretends to embody. The priest is by far Lazaro's cruelest master; as the figurehead of the church, he is supposed to be a paragon of charity, selflessness, and love, but he starves Lazaro, which shows his selfishness, opportunism, and greed. The friar is presumed, as a monk, to have recused himself from worldly matters, but he seems to spend all his time running about on errands of a sexual nature. The seller of papal indulgences—an already morally suspect position to hold in the clergy—lies, cheats, and burns the faces of several other clergymen in order to sell people articles that are meant to pardon them for their sins. Finally, by the end of the book, Lazaro has entered into a tacit agreement with the archpriest (a high religious office, and presumed to be celibate) to keep the archpriest's mistress as Lazaro's wife for a small fee, implicating all parties not only in adultery but in some form of prostitution. Each of these examples shows that Catholic clergy and outwardly-pious members of the lay public were not acting in accordance with their professed values—values that they were also hypocritically demanding of others. The fact that *Lazarillo de Tormes* was published anonymously can be explained by these frank depictions of religious hypocrisy—the author's perspective was regarded as heretical and it resulted in the book being banned throughout Spain.

While *Lazarillo de Tormes* focuses on religious hypocrisy, there are other forms of social hypocrisy that come to light in the course of the novel. This includes class hypocrisy—it's the poor that tend to be generous, rather than the wealthy and powerful who preach generosity—and racial hypocrisy. The novel hints at violence done to racial minorities, from the Church-backed war against the Moors to Lazaro's initial mistrust of his mother's black lover Zaide, and it's a moment of confusion about race that most powerfully brings to light the underlying dynamic of the social hypocrisy that pervades the book. Early in the novel, Lazaro recalls his dark-skinned half-brother (son of Zaide and Lazaro's mother) crying out in fear of his own dark-skinned father, not yet understanding that he himself is not white. In response, Lazaro wonders to himself how many people in the world run away from others because they can't see themselves. In this light, *Lazarillo de Tormes* can be seen as a text that seeks to bring the Spanish public to an understanding that their cruelties towards others stem from their own internal contradictions and confusions—perhaps, by more clearly understanding themselves, the Spanish can create a more just society.

POVERTY, CRIME, AND VIOLENCE

Lazarillo de Tormes was a unique book at the time of its publication because it portrayed the world realistically through the eyes of a poor boy rather than a nobleman or a more conventional hero. The book's frank depiction of how crime and violence are interwoven into the fabric of the lives of poor people was shocking to the Spanish readership of the 16th century. Ultimately, the author represents the crimes committed by the poor as victimless crimes, committed out of necessity, while the conditions in which poor people live and the punishments they are served for their crimes are treated by the author as the more reprehensible violence, inflicted by those in power against those without.

All around Lazaro, the poor and low-born are subject to violence, either by being forced into danger in service of the rich, or by the rich punishing them directly. Lazaro himself is frequently subjected to brutal violence at the hands of the

masters he serves, often with no real recourse but to continue serving them until an opportunity for escape presents itself. He moves from one master to the next, hoping that the pain he has to endure will be less. Despite all this, extreme hunger is perhaps the greatest source of suffering for Lazaro. The pain of hunger seems to be deliberately inflicted on Lazaro by his masters, making it the violence that characterizes his life story more than any other.

In many instances Lazaro retaliates with violence or theft against the masters that abuse him, but these acts of violence are presented as justified. For example, Lazaro steals systematically from the blind man because the blind man deprives Lazaro of a fair share of the spoils that Lazaro helps to bring in. Lazaro injures the blind man on several occasions—finally perhaps mortally—but he feels no remorse. Lazaro also steals from the priest's chest of bread, feeling he has no choice if he hopes to survive, since the priest starves him.

Over the course of the text, distinctions become blurred between cruel and arbitrary violence against the weak, violence as punishment for crime, and retaliatory violence. But by regularly treating the crimes of the powerless against those in power as justified, the author portrays poverty itself as a violence inflicted by those in power against those without. As a vivid depiction of class inequality, the book seems to encourage—sometimes explicitly—a total upheaval of the social order by means of violent rebellion.

MERCY AND COMPASSION

Though instances of mercy and compassion in the text are few and far between, these moments serve as important guideposts for the reader. Characters acting with mercy and compassion help the reader to understand the richness of the social critique being leveled throughout the text because they provide a rare example of virtue in a world otherwise rife with cruelty and vice. Virtually the only figures that are portrayed as compassionate in Lazaro's story are the neighbors he had while living with the squire. The neighbors, cotton-spinners who are quite poor themselves, give Lazaro food, shelter, and safe harbor when he is afraid, and they defend him against townspeople who falsely accuse him of stealing from the squire. The neighbors' generosity is also particularly noteworthy because, while they are the most giving figures in the text, they are also the only characters in the text who are identified as poor.

The moral highpoint for Lazaro's character comes during his time with the squire. Lazaro shows compassion for the pitiful squire by sharing with him what little Lazaro is able to earn by begging. This kindness is remarkable not just because it is an inversion of the typical hierarchy of master and servant, but because this is also a time at which Lazaro has almost nothing to give. The compassion Lazaro shows in his dealings with the poor squire is demonstrative of the central virtues of Christianity, in stark contrast to the example set by Lazaro's prior masters (many of whom were themselves religious figures).

In keeping with the overarching social commentary of the text, these rare instances of compassion and mercy are meant to signify a truer spirit of Christianity than is practiced or preached by the hypocritical Catholic clergymen of the text. Tellingly, it is only the poor who seem able to embody the Christlike virtues of mercy and compassion. The implication here is that even small amounts of wealth and power inevitably lead to moral corruption.

GROWING UP

Lazaro's story, marked by milestones of learning and loss of innocence, is a story of a boy growing older. But Lazaro's process of coming of age is unlike many other examples in literature, distinguished above all by the character's development of a deeply cynical worldview and his loss of a sense of morality. His mother's parting words—a prayer that Lazaro should "learn his worth"—loom over the entire story. If it is true that Lazaro has, in fact, realized his worth at the end of the book by settling down as a lowly town crier and a cuckold, then perhaps his mother's words are an omen that the essential worth of a human is very little indeed.

Lazaro himself foreshadows his own loss of innocence early on in the text when he remarks that he has much to learn from the cruel and conniving blind man if he hopes to survive. Lazaro's time serving the chaplain years later marks a major pivot point in the text, as Lazaro begins to find financial security for the first time. However, his decision to spend his first savings on nicer clothes and a fine sword is reminiscent of the figure of the squire, who was concerned above all with appearances. This also marks the end of the streak of compassion Lazaro showed for the squire, and it foreshadows a shift in his values, from merely striving for survival and helping others when he can to having an interest in self-betterment.

In the final chapter, the narrator changes his name from Lazarillo (*-illo* being a diminutive ending in Spanish) to Lazaro. This change of name reflects a shift in identity, cementing a loss of innocence and signaling the moral transformation that has occurred. This shift is evidenced, for example, in the deal Lazaro strikes with the archpriest to turn a blind eye to his own wife's infidelity. Here, again, coming of age and finding one's place in the world are synonymous with moral corruption. Ultimately *Lazarillo de Tormes* is the life story of a poor boy who is subject to one brutal violence after another until he grows up to become a passive, unfeeling, and immoral person, doling out the same injustices he suffered as a child in exchange for a bit of money or power.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

WINE

Wine plays an important role throughout the book as a symbol of the bittersweet: the entanglement of virtue and vice. As a drink which is sweetly intoxicating and also fermented (and therefore slightly toxic to the body), wine has a dual nature. In keeping with this dual nature, wine gets Lazaro into trouble as often as it saves his life. Although Lazaro is injured badly as a punishment for stealing wine from the blind man, wine is also the disinfectant the blind man uses to wash Lazaro's wounds afterwards. Most notably, the blind man makes a prophesy that Lazaro will have more to thank wine for than any other man—a prophesy that comes true in the final chapter, when Lazaro has become a town crier who makes his money advertising wines. Here, wine is the source of Lazaro's livelihood even as his life is a deeply flawed and unlucky one. Wine is present throughout the text as a staple in the lives of poor people, bringing them temporary happiness in a world full of pain—not by providing any lasting solutions to their problems, but rather by numbing them to the pains of their everyday reality.

HORNS

At the time of this book's publication it was a common practice to depict a cuckolded man (a man whose wife has been unfaithful to him) with horns coming out of his head. Experts have not been able to agree on a single explanation for why horns began to be used as the symbol for a man with an unfaithful wife, but, in keeping with this convention, animal horns appear several times throughout the text of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, always as a symbolic foreshadowing that Lazaro's fate is to become a cuckolded husband. Although it is painfully clear, based on his own account, that Lazaro's wife is also the archpriest's mistress and that Lazaro therefore suffers from what is seen by others as the ultimate social disgrace, he is nevertheless determined by the end of the book not to admit to the reality of his circumstance. Instead, Lazaro is content to benefit from the arrangement with the archpriest, who gives both Lazaro and Lazaro's wife money, even though it has cost Lazaro his dignity and sense of morality. Lazaro's evident satisfaction with his own state of disgrace is representative of the hardened, cynical perspective on life that he has developed over the course of the book. Moreover, his willingness to feign ignorance of the ways in which he is being deceived by a religious figure of such high office (i.e., the archpriest) demonstrate his moral indifference toward the hypocrisy of the church.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the NYRB Classics edition of *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes* published in 2004.

Prologue Quotes

> And therefore nothing of this sort should be destroyed or thrown away unless it is utterly detestable, but on the contrary such things should be brought to the knowledge of everyone, especially if they are utterly harmless and even likely to bear some fruit.

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

This sentence is written by Lazaro in reference to the story he is about to tell, but could just as easily have come from the mouth of the book's anonymous author. Lazaro is preparing his reader for the harsh realities he will present in his life story, but this passage can be read to have a coded double meaning, in which the author is defending his right and responsibility to tell the ugly truth about the hypocritical society he lives in, despite the consequences. Indeed, writing a book so critical of corruption and hypocrisy within the Catholic Church was a controversial act that could have gotten the author killed—due to that, it seems reasonable that the author might seek to defend his actions. That bringing such knowledge to light might even "bear some fruit" is a nod to the author's apparent hope that, by openly criticizing the Church, meaningful reforms might result. Because little is known about the author, it's through passages like these that the reader is able to see beyond the character of Lazaro to glean some understanding of what the author's opinions and motivations may have been.

> If it were otherwise, there are very few who would write for just one reader, because it is hard work, and those who undertake it hope to be rewarded, not in money, but in having the efforts seen and read and, when possible, praised. That is why Cicero says: "Honor is the nurse of the arts."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

There are two levels of subtle irony to this passage. Lazaro, the speaker, is explaining that he hopes the hard work he has put into writing his life story will be rewarded with praise and wide recognition—for why else, he asks, would somebody do such hard work, if not for the honor? On one level, this is ironic because the story Lazaro is about to tell is not honorable; it proves only his own duplicity, cruelty, and complicity in corruption. Even Lazaro's direct impetus for writing—to explain, in a letter, the circumstances of his being cuckolded—is an admission of something which would have been seen as highly dishonorable. Thus, Lazaro's pursuit of honor through writing his story seems about as superficial and deluded as the squire's attempt to appear wealthy. On another level, this statement is ironic because of its relationship to the book's author. The author, simply by publishing the book anonymously, provides his own answer to Lazaro's question: telling the truth is a moral act and therefore it has an inherent value which is entirely unrelated to the honor or recognition it may bring. If, in other passages, the voice of Lazaro is indistinguishable from the author's own perspective, here the author cleverly and subtly puts distance between himself and Lazaro, who seems unable to fathom the rationale for undertaking a dangerous and difficult writing project anonymously.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ I was very small at the time but I was struck by what my little brother had said, and I thought, "How many there must be in the world who run away from others because they do not see themselves!"

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), Zaide

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Lazaro is recalling that his younger half-brother would often become afraid of his own father's dark skin and would run to his white-skinned mother in fear, not yet having realized that he himself was dark-skinned, too. This passage points out the illogic of prejudice, and the tendency to be cruel or punitive towards people based on characteristics that are out of their control. Indeed, the notion that even a dark-skinned person would absorb a prevalent racial prejudice and become afraid of his own father echoes the treatment of the poor throughout the book. Despite that the poor are shown to be oftentimes more kindhearted than the rich, those in power are consistently skeptical of and unjust towards the poor, punishing poor people for desperate acts while the corruption of the rich goes unremarked. Just as racism instills an unfounded distrust of dark-skinned people, the book will show that a rigid class hierarchy creates a system of violence and distrust towards the generally-innocent poor.

In addition, Lazaro's observation about cruelty stemming from a person's inability to see himself foreshadows the hypocrisy that pervades the remainder of the book and possibly illuminates the author's motives. If religious corruption is a result of the Church's inability to see its own hypocrisy, then there's a strong case for writing a controversial book that critiques the church. It's also notable that this is the most lucid and insightful observation that Lazaro makes about hypocrisy throughout the entire book. As Lazaro ages, he seems to become less and less able to reflect on his own actions and motives. Perhaps this is the author's way of suggesting that people tend to become numb or blind to such obvious injustices as they grow older, and that children are better judges because they are innocent.

❝ It seemed to me that at that moment I awoke out of the simplicity in which I had remained like a sleeping child. And I said to myself, "He's right. I'd better keep my eyes open and my wits about me, for I'm on my own, and I'll have to figure out how to manage for myself."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The blind man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, following the incident in which the blind man knocks Lazaro's head against the stone bull, Lazaro reflects on the blind man's admonishment of him for his stupidity and he resolves that he will learn everything he can from the blind man about what it takes to survive on his

own. This incident and the realization it produces in Lazaro will prove to be a major turning point in the development of Lazaro's character—what Lazaro once would have seen as an unjustifiable act of cruelty, he now sees as an exercise of power and cunning that he would do well to imitate. That this shift occurs only after Lazaro is the victim of an act of deception and violence suggests a broader sociological point: that violence begets violence. Being a victim makes Lazaro less empathetic and less compassionate, as he believes that such betrayals are the norm and that he must himself become hardened in order to survive. Considering the book's portrayal of society-wide corruption and brutality, this passage seems to indicate that abuses of power can rot a whole society from the top down. Lazaro's determination to learn from and adopt the blind man's deceptive ways marks the end of Lazaro's childhood and the beginning of the end of his innocence. From this moment forward, Lazaro is responsible for his own fate.

❝ It is a joy to me to recount these childish matters to Your Excellency, to show how much virtue there can be in those who are born to low estate and drag themselves up, and how much vice in the great who let themselves be dragged down.

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes just after Lazaro has recounted the incident in which the blind man bashed Lazaro's head against the stone bull. In the midst of praising the blind man for his cleverness and expressing gratitude for the lessons the blind man taught him, Lazaro, in one his few direct addresses to the reader, writes this line about virtue. While the passage alludes to one of the book's central lines of social critique—that those thought to be the most holy and honorable in society are devoid of virtue, while those of low social standing are the actual moral backbone of the society—the meaning of the quote seems to contradict the story to which it refers. Though Lazaro here implies that the blind man has demonstrated his virtue, Lazaro has described the blind man engaging only in violent and deceptive behavior. Lazaro's hypocrisy adds venom to the author's critique of corruption, and the quote also foreshadows Lazaro's fate, since, although he spends the first half of the book dragging himself up, by the end of the book he has lost his honor and his sense of morality. It's also possible that the subtext of this remark may be an intentional jab at the person to whom the letter is addressed

❝ He put wine on the places where he'd cut my face with the broken jug, and he smiled and said, "What do you think of that, Lazaro? The same thing that got you hurt heals you afterwards and gets you back into shape."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The blind man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

After the blind man smashes the wine jug on Lazaro's face, he cleans the cuts using the wine. He makes this remark in reference to the wine, pointing out its dual nature as something that has the power to do harm even as it is a source of joy and healing. But the statement could just as easily apply to the blind man himself—a cruel and bitter master who harms and deceives Lazaro while simultaneously caring for him and teaching him valuable life lessons. That the blind man uses his power over Lazaro to both harm and heal him bears a notable parallel to the treatment of the poor by Spanish society. The book insinuates that poverty is an avoidable cruelty perpetuated by those in power—the rich cast the poor as being morally inferior, punishing them for crimes of desperation (like stealing bread for their families) or wrongfully accusing them of crimes they haven't committed at all. Despite this, the rich engage in token acts of generosity, like giving alms to the blind man or giving free indulgences to townspeople, though they make no attempt to meaningfully improve the lives of the poor. Thus, the wine, the blind man, and the ruling class have in common their dual nature, which is shown to be a way in which they maintain their power over others.

"Oh wicked object, the fruit of worse behavior! How many there are who would like to see you on their neighbors' heads, and yet how few want to have you for themselves, or even want to hear you mentioned in connection with them! … It's a bad dinner and supper I've got in my hand here, but I'll give it to you one of these days… What I've said is true. You'll see, if you live long enough."

Related Characters: The blind man (speaker), Lazaro de Tormes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

The blind man utters these cryptic but prophetic words at the inn in the town of Escalona, after he has rested his hand on an animal horn that is mounted to the exterior wall of the inn. At this time in Spain, horns were a common symbol for a cuckold, or a man with an unfaithful wife. Therefore, by reacting to the presence of a horn as a bad omen, the blind man is repudiating the practice of cuckoldry by cursing the horn which symbolizes it. The blind man's statement that many people wish their neighbors would be cuckolded but would not want it for themselves echoes the prevalence of cruelty and hypocrisy throughout the book. While Jesus asked Christians to love thy neighbor, the blind man suggests that most people would rather that their neighbors suffer. While the blind man's suggestion that Lazaro will some day himself be cuckolded ("I'll give it to you one of these days") seems, in this context, to be an illustration of a person wishing ill on their neighbor, Lazaro will remember these words years later in Toledo after the blind man's prophecy has come true.

"Honestly, I waste more wine washing this boy in one year than I drink myself in two. Lazaro, to put it at its very least you owe more to wine than you do to your own father. He only gave you your being once, whereas wine has brought you to life a thousand times. … I'll tell you, if there's anyone in this world to whom wine will be a blessing, it will be you."

Related Characters: The blind man (speaker), Lazaro de Tormes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

The blind man says these words to Lazaro after he has beaten him for stealing the sausage and then used the wine to clean Lazaro's injuries. Once again, the blind man distorts the narrative of Lazaro's misfortune, ignoring the fact that the blind man was the person who injured Lazaro in the first place and choosing to focus instead on the resources he is wasting on healing Lazaro's injuries. This should evoke the hypocrisy of the Spanish ruling class, whose superficial handwringing about poverty and morality masks their own corruption and complicity in perpetuating class inequality.

This is also the third and final prophesy made by the blind man about Lazaro's eventual fate. Years later when Lazaro has become a town crier who makes a living advertising wines, he will remember these words and see that, as wine is now his livelihood, the blind man's words have proven true. Beyond their prophetic significance, the words are an obvious jab at Lazaro, implying that Lazaro will have a great many troubles to which the only solution will be wine—which is itself not a solution for anything.

Chapter 2 Quotes

All I can say is that my new master had collected all the stinginess in the world and was hoarding it. Whether he had been born with that character or had put it on with his priest's cassock I don't know.

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The priest

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33-34

Explanation and Analysis

This is how Lazaro introduces his second master, the priest. It sets the tone for all that is to follow in the chapter by highlighting the priest's utter lack of charity. Beyond that, the quote establishes a relationship between members of the clergy and a moral character typified by selfishness and self-interest. This characterization of the priesthood stands, of course, in stark contrast to the moral standard of generosity, compassion, and selflessness that the clergy is supposed to uphold. The fact that Lazaro so instinctively

equates the "priest's cassock" (the garment worn by church officials) with moral corruption suggests that the Church's hypocrisy is widely known. Lazaro's lack of shock that this particular priest turned out to be such a deplorable figure indicates that the priest's depravity is very much in line with the typical behavior of priests.

"I've had two masters. The first one nearly starved me to death and when I left him I took up with this one who's virtually brought me to the edge of the grave. If I quit this one now and land myself with another one who's even worse, there's only one thing that can happen to me: I'll die."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The priest

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Lazaro is speaking to himself here, lamenting his bad fortune and reasoning with himself as to why he can't leave the priest. In fact, as Lazaro will find out, his luck can and will become worse, but not in the way he anticipates in this passage; instead of a master who gives Lazaro too little, his next master goes so far as to take bread from his own servant. So the pattern of "bad to worse" that Lazaro articulates in this passage does, in fact, continue. The fear and hopelessness in Lazaro's speech is expressive of the extreme difficulty faced by the poor, which this book depicted honestly, as few books before it had. This passage also bodes poorly for Lazaro's moral future, as Lazaro must become more hardened and cunning in response to his worsening fortunes.

So it went on, and we kept it up at a great rate, fulfilling the old saying that "Where one door shuts another opens."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The priest

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Lazaro is describing the process of stealing bread from the priest by making holes in the priest's locked chest, only to have the priest discover the holes and cover them up. This has become a cycle of, night after night, Lazaro creating holes and the priest patching them. To illustrate his point, Lazaro invokes a biblical proverb, but to unintentionally humorous effect. The meaning of the proverb Lazaro quotes is that God provides for those in need, but Lazaro turns the proverb on its head and casts it in a cynical light by interpreting it literally—Lazaro must "open doors" to steal the bread, and once the priest closes these doors, Lazaro is forced to open more in order to avoid starvation. It's notable here that Lazaro replaces God as the opener of doors—this underscores the notion that the poor are, in fact, on their own, and it contributes to the sense that such crimes of desperation are justifiable rather than sins. The quote is yet another example of the author taking an element from Christianity and twisting it by showing it in an improper or unfavorable light; it would have been seen as offensive to take a passage from scripture and use it to justify acts of vandalism and theft.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"Stuffing is a pursuit for pigs, and men who have any self-respect should eat moderately."

"Oh, I know what you mean alright!" I said to myself. "And to hell with all the medicinal qualities and other virtues which every master I take up with manages to find in my hunger."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The squire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Here Lazaro responds under his breath to the squire, who has congratulated him for knowing how to endure hunger. Obviously, the squire has said this without believing it; the squire's inability to admit his own hunger results from his pride. He wouldn't want anyone to think that he couldn't afford to feed himself or his servant, so he must reframe hunger as a virtue in order to save face. This should evoke the Christian notion that poverty is virtuous. While this can be interpreted to mean that people should *choose* not to focus on accumulating material possessions lest it distract from spiritual pursuits, the notion that an involuntary social ill, such as poverty, can be framed as a virtuous choice provides a justification for not systematically addressing

poverty in society. In other words, the squire's disingenuous justification for his and Lazaro's hunger echoes a broader political trend.

Lazaro's response to the squire's ludicrous claim indicates that he is developing a growing awareness of the hypocrisy of those around him. Whereas with the blind man and the priest Lazaro simply grumbled about his hunger, in this passage he mocks the squire's suggestion that there is some virtue to be associated with starvation. Lazaro's sharp retort also suggests a growing skepticism of the moral values and virtues espoused by the adults that surround him as he comes to realize that oftentimes the acts regarded as "virtuous" are motivated by selfishness and hypocrisy rather than the underlying morals that people claim to embody.

"Oh Lord, how many of this sort must there be scattered through the world, suffering things for the moldy misery they call honor which they would never suffer for thee!"

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The squire

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Here, again, Lazaro demonstrates a sharpening sensitivity to the hypocritical conduct of the adults around him. He makes this remark to himself after watching the squire walk to church, dressed very well and walking so proudly that Lazaro thinks no one would ever be able to tell that he lives in dire poverty. Lazaro clearly thinks the squire's sense of honor, which the squire values and protects above all else, is a hollow and ridiculous pursuit that does more harm than good. In addition, Lazaro recognizes that what the squire sees as honorable has everything to do with outward appearances and very little to do with virtue, happiness, or even real wealth. This quote is addressed to God, and Lazaro's conclusion that the squire's vain pursuit of honor requires suffering that few would endure for God shows that, despite the political power of the Catholic Church in Spain, Lazaro sees the Church as wielding very little spiritual power. Perhaps this is due to the Church's loss of moral authority in light of its corruption, and perhaps it's due to the vanity and hypocrisy of Spanish Christians—regardless, this quote shows that Lazaro lives in a world of people more concerned with themselves (and, particularly, with how they appear to others) than with God.

"He's poor," I said to myself, "and nobody can give what he hasn't got. Whereas that miserly blind man and that niggardly skin-flint of a priest had both done alright for themselves in the name of God, the one with his hand-kissing and the other with his line of patter, and they starved me half to death. So it's perfectly fair to be down on them and to take pity on this one."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The priest, The blind man, The squire

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Lazaro says this to himself in the squire's bedroom one night after having looked through the squire's pockets to see if he has any money. Upon discovering that the squire has not a single *blanca* in his purse, Lazaro takes pity on the squire, recognizing that his poverty makes him worthy of compassion. Here Lazaro, more directly than anywhere else in the text, speaks to the religious hypocrisy of his first two masters. Although the sequence of events in Lazaro's life until now has been "from bad to worse," it is noteworthy that Lazaro's response to learning that he has been deceived by the squire is one of mercy and compassion, as distinct from the hatred he felt toward his prior masters. This chapter overall is the highpoint of Lazaro's moral behavior, and this quote marks Lazaro's most morally self-aware and compassionate moment,

"Sinner that I am," I said, "that's why God doesn't put Himself out to keep you, because you won't let anybody ask Him to!"

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The squire

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Having listened to the squire's life story—which includes the admission that the squire's poverty came after his pride led

him to purposefully insult a knight—Lazaro marvels to himself at the absurdity of the squire's behavior. The squire had found it insulting that the knight's greeting to him had been the common "God keep you," as opposed to a loftier greeting reserved for the higher classes. As a result, the squire had refused to take his hat off to the knight, and the incident had forced him to leave his home and live in poverty. Again, Lazaro's response is indicative of a keen moral compass and a nose for hypocrisy. The squire is the victim only of his own overinflated sense of pride, not the social slight he blames for his condition. Lazaro, recognizing this, reasons that the squire has had such difficulty because he refuses the help of others. It's rare in this book that such help is even offered—many characters, Lazaro included, are driven to sin because nobody can help them besides themselves. The squire's story is an inversion of this, one that suggests that it is likewise sinful to refuse the generosity of others out of vanity. The squire's account of this episode, as well as Lazaro's response to it, fit into the book's broader critique of the society's concern for appearances over substance and the tendency to undervalue simple goodwill.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ When they tried this out the first time, I must admit to my shame that I was frightened by it like most of the others, and thought it was just what it appeared to be. But afterwards, when I saw how my master and the constable laughed over the affair and made fun of it, I realized that it had all been worked out by my industrious and inventive master.

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The seller of indulgences

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

After the first episode in which the seller of indulgences conspires with the constable to trick the townspeople, Lazaro admits that he was initially fooled by the pardoner's theatrics, but he later recognized his master's genius for collaborating with the constable in this act of deception. While the act of preying on Catholics' fear of damnation in order to make money through false promises of salvation is shameful and depraved, Lazaro expresses shame only in the context of having been deceived by his master's trick like everyone else. This is consistent with Lazaro's goal to become as cunning and duplicitous as his cruel masters in order to ensure his survival—just as Lazaro felt naïve instead of angry after the blind man slammed his head into the bull statue, Lazaro is ashamed rather than outraged by falling prey to the seller of indulgences' trick.

Though this passage implies that Lazaro is innocent of any complicity in the con, this is perhaps the first instance in the book in which the reader may have reason to question the truth of Lazaro's narrative. Later, Lazaro claims that he allowed these tricks to continue out of fear for his master, but this master isn't cruel to Lazaro—in fact, he's the first one that feeds Lazaro appropriately. Lazaro's admiration for his master's cunning is apparent here, and between that and the material security that Lazaro experiences while in his service, it's not hard to imagine that Lazaro cooperated for his own gain—behavior that seems entirely consistent with Lazaro's changing values.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ I did so well at this trade that at the end of the four years which I spent at it, by carefully putting aside my money I'd saved up enough to outfit myself decently in a suit of second-hand clothes.... Once I was respectably dressed I told my master to take back his donkey because I didn't want to follow that trade any more.

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), The squire

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111-112

Explanation and Analysis

Here Lazaro refers to the time he spent working for the chaplain, at the end of which he was able to afford a cloak and a sword just like those that belonged to the squire he served. That Lazaro spent his very first financial savings on clothes is a subtle but clear indicator that a remarkable transformation has occurred in the years since he served the squire, during which time Lazaro derided the squire's superficial value system. Specifically, Lazaro had looked with pity on the squire's obsession with maintaining the appearance of a nobleman when he hadn't the wealth to match the image. Yet here Lazaro himself is doing exactly that—donning the wardrobe of a wealthy man, and spending all his money to maintain the false appearance. Throughout the book, readers have been led to expect that wealth doesn't lead to virtue, and this passage seems to confirm it. While Lazaro once gave away his only bread to the starving squire out of generosity, now that Lazaro has real money he

uses it neither virtuously nor wisely.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"I'll swear by the consecrated host that she's as virtuous as any woman living within the gates of Toledo, and if any man says otherwise, I'm his enemy to the death."

Related Characters: Lazaro de Tormes (speaker), Lazaro's wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

These words are some of Lazaro's last in the book. He writes them about his wife, whom he has been given every reason to believe is the mistress of the archpriest. This passage shows the willful blindness that Lazaro has chosen to show toward his own wife's infidelity, the misconduct of the archpriest, and his personal disgrace that results from their behavior. Lazaro has made a steadfast resolution by the end of the book to deny the reality of his circumstance—and to kill anyone who dares to remind him of that reality. It's also possible to read Lazaro's cynicism into what appears to be an indignant denial of his wife's infidelity. Note that Lazaro doesn't strictly claim that his wife is virtuous; he says instead that "she's as virtuous as any woman living within the gates of Toledo." Lazaro's experiences since setting out with the blind man have taught him that almost everyone is corrupt, particularly those (like members of the Church) who profess to be virtuous. In this way, Lazaro might not even believe that he is lying—if nobody is virtuous, then his wife can't be seen as being any worse. This is in keeping with the social critique at the center of *Lazarillo de Tormes*: growing up in a corrupt society molds impressionable young people into accepting the kinds of moral compromise that harden the heart and encourage otherwise compassionate people to turn a blind eye to their own wrongdoing.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

The book begins with a short prologue addressed to "Your Excellency." The narrator does not introduce himself in the prologue or identify the person to which it is addressed. While noting that some may find the text's contents disagreeable, the narrator says that he believes there is value in bringing even unappealing truths to light.

The prologue establishes that the narrator's primary aim in telling his story is to expose the truth, however ugly. However, as the story unfolds, what seems like a simple promise to tell the truth will become more and more complicated. By noting that some readers may find the text disagreeable, the narrator is foreshadowing the book's heretical content, such as negative depictions of clergymen, for which it was banned after its initial publication in Spain.

The narrator admits that, although his storytelling is clumsy at times and his life as a poor boy was not particularly remarkable, he wrote the story with some hope that he would be rewarded by having it seen and read by others. He hypothesizes that everything is done out of a desire for honor and recognition.

The narrator's clumsy storytelling style is attributable to his status as someone of low class, having had no formal education. A low-born protagonist is the defining feature of the picaresque novel, a genre which many critics argue actually was originated *by this book. The narrator's assertion that everything is done for fame and recognition is particularly notable in relation to the fact that the book was published anonymously, implying that the narrator, in contrast with the author, is only concerned with worldly matters and his own reputation.*

The narrator suggests that he is telling his story from the beginning instead of starting in the middle so as to respond to the addressee's prior inquiry into a certain matter, the specifics of which he does not make clear. He concludes by stating that he hopes his story will confront its wealthier readers with the harsh realities and adversities faced by those who are born with less than them.

The prologue establishes the fact that the book has been written as a letter with a particular purpose in mind—a purpose which, while clear to both the letter's writer and its addressee, remains unknown to the reader. The unanswered question of why the letter was written imbues the book with a sense of mystery that remains unresolved until the book's last page.

CHAPTER 1

The story begins with the narrator introducing himself as Lazaro de Tormes, son of Tomé Gonzáles and Antona Pérez, born in a village near Salamanca. Lazaro explains that his father was a miller who, when Lazaro was eight years old, was caught stealing from the mill and was exiled as part of his sentence. Tomé Gonzáles was later killed while fighting in a Church-backed military campaign against the Moors (a northwestern African Muslim people who had settled throughout Spain).

Lazaro's origin story foreshadows the relationship between poverty, crime, and violence that will pervade the rest of his life story. Lazaro's father dies fighting in a war against one group of people who are persecuted by the Church (the Moors), while he himself belongs to another group that is persecuted by the Church (the poor).

Lazaro's widowed mother moves to Salamanca to look for work (the author gives slight innuendo that this work might be prostitution) and she eventually settles down in the home of the Comendador of La Magdalena, for whom she cooks and washes the clothes of his stable boys. There, Lazaro's mother meets Zaide, a black slave who works in the stables. Lazaro, though initially mistrustful of Zaide, is quickly won over by the gifts of food and firewood that Zaide brings with him. Zaide and Lazaro's mother spend many nights together and they eventually conceive a dark-skinned child, Lazaro's half-brother.

The loss of Lazaro's father leaves the family with diminished prospects of finding financial security. The fact that Lazaro's mother remarries a black slave is representative of their reduced social standing. The care and generosity Zaide shows toward his new family are especially remarkable in light of the fact that he is of even lower social and economic standing relative to them.

Lazaro recalls how his younger half-brother would often become afraid of his own father's dark skin and would run to his white-skinned mother in fear, not yet having realized that he himself was dark-skinned, too. Lazaro remarks that there must be many in this world who run away from others because they don't see themselves.

Lazaro's comment about his half-brother's lack of self-awareness establishes hypocrisy as one of the central focuses of the text. Many of the characters Lazaro meets later in life behave immorally but regard themselves as morally superior to others.

Eventually Zaide and Antona's relationship comes to the attention of the stable owners, who launch an investigation and discover that Zaide has been stealing from the stables. Zaide is whipped and basted with boiling oil in punishment for his crime. Antona, who is also put on trial, is given ten lashes and banished from the Comendador's house, so she finds work at the Solana Inn, where Lazaro helps by fetching wine for the lodgers.

The subtext in this passage is that Zaide's employers were searching for a reason to get rid of him because they disapproved of his relationship with a white woman. Zaide, like Lazaro's father, resorts to petty theft to provide for his family and is eventually caught and punished for his crime. Importantly, Zaide is not portrayed in the book in a negative light because he is a criminal. Instead, he is portrayed as a kind and generous figure who stole to provide for those in need.

One day a blind man comes to the inn and, thinking that Lazaro could be of use to him, asks Lazaro's mother to give the boy to him. Lazaro's mother agrees, telling the blind man that Lazaro's father was a good man who died for the glory of the faith, and so she asks the blind man to take good care of her son. The blind man tells her that he will take care of Lazaro as his own son.

The fact that Lazaro's mother was willing to give her son away to a blind beggar shows just how desperate she was, and how difficult it would have been for a poor woman to provide for a child alone. The book is always making clear just how insufferable the conditions of poverty are. Here, poverty is shown to be a force that breaks up families.

The blind man realizes that he isn't making any money in Salamanca and decides that he and Lazaro should leave the town, so Lazaro returns to the inn to say goodbye to his mother, who says she will never see him again and gives him her blessing to leave.

Lazaro leaves his mother at a young age, marking the beginning of a long and difficult journey of growing up. The poor, meanwhile, are always searching for ways to somehow make enough money to survive.

As the blind man and Lazaro are leaving Salamanca they come across a statue of a stone bull by a bridge. The blind man tells Lazaro to put his ear close to the bull so he can hear the sound coming from inside. As soon as Lazaro has done this, the blind man knocks Lazaro's head against the stone **horns**, hurting him badly. The blind man remarks that anyone who wants to be his servant will need to know more than the devil himself, and Lazaro recognizes truth in what the blind man says, resolving at that moment to learn everything he can from the blind man about what it takes to survive on his own.

This experience is the first in which Lazaro's innocence is taken advantage of, and it catapults him into a lifelong journey of learning how to outwit and deceive those who wish to outwit and deceive him. The fact that Lazaro is injured by a statue with horns takes on significance later in the text, as horns come to symbolize Lazaro's fate as a cuckold, or a man whose wife is unfaithful.

Lazaro describes how the blind man is able to collect a fair amount of money by affecting an air of religious devoutness and reciting prayers and blessings in exchange for alms. Yet as skilled as the blind man is at his trade, and although he makes enough money, he keeps Lazaro very hungry all the time. The blind man wears a canvas bag around his neck with provisions inside it, and, though he keeps it locked, Lazaro learns to carefully unstitch the bag from the bottom and steal pieces of bread and meat before re-stitching the seam. Lazaro also learns to stealthily intercept the *blancas* that are offered to the blind man in exchange for his prayers; just as the coins are changing hands, Lazaro swaps them out for *half-blancas*.

Lazaro's description of the blind man's routine of saying prayers in exchange for alms is the book's first example of a character's false piousness. Though many figures in the book seem to have built their lives around religious beliefs, the author means to point out the hypocrisy of many such figures. Lazaro's habits of unstitching of the canvas bag to feed himself and swapping out coins are the first of many instances in which he learns to deceive others in order to provide for himself.

During this time Lazaro also learns to steal swigs of **wine** from the blind man's jug, but the blind man notices the jug getting lighter and learns to always keep his hand on it. Lazaro adapts by placing a straw in the top of the jug, but the blind man catches onto this, as well, and begins to rest his hand over the mouth of the jug. Finally, Lazaro pokes a hole in the bottom of the jug and covers it with wax, removing the plug whenever he wants a drink. When the blind man finally discovers this trick, he lifts the wine jug and brings it crashing down on Lazaro's face, knocking Lazaro's teeth out and injuring him badly. The blind man then cleans the cuts on Lazaro's face with the wine. Lazaro takes his revenge by beginning to lead the blind man through muddy or rocky parts of the road whenever possible.

Wine becomes one of Lazaro's only sources of pleasure at an early stage in life, and he devises many tricks in order to get into the blind man's jug. However, wine's intoxicating properties also have a dark side, and Lazaro's tricks eventually backfire, causing him a great deal of pain and suffering. Wine's dual nature is again symbolized through its use in washing Lazaro's cuts, which is both painful and purifying.

In their travels, the blind man and Lazaro come to the town of Almorox where a kind stranger gives the blind man a bunch of grapes. The blind man agrees to split them with Lazaro, and the two agree to eat no more than one at a time. As they are eating, however, the blind man begins to eat two at a time and Lazaro, noticing this but saying nothing, begins to eat three. After the bunch of grapes is finished, the blind man admonishes Lazaro for eating three at a time, saying he knew this was the case after he himself started eating two at a time and Lazaro kept silent.

Here is another instance of Lazaro learning to deceive the blind man, though in this instance Lazaro thinks he has outwitted his master only to learn that his master was aware of Lazaro's dishonesty. This interaction is emblematic of the type of society the author is portraying through Lazaro's story—a society in which the efforts of people to constantly deceive each other are openly acknowledged and the real contest is not so much about who can win without debasing themselves, but rather who comes away from the game the richest.

In Escalona, Lazaro and the blind man stay in a shoemaker's shop where ropes are hung from the ceiling. The blind man, hitting his head on the ropes, takes it as a bad omen and tells Lazaro it's time to go, explaining, "It's a bad dish which chokes without nourishing." Later, arriving at an inn, the blind man is feeling his way along the exterior of the building, where **horns** have been mounted for mule drivers to tie up their animals. When the blind man's hand touches the horns, he curses them as another bad omen, this time making a prophesy that the bad luck they symbolize will fall on Lazaro some day.

The blind man's cryptic words about the rope in the shoemaker's shop are a reference to the common practice of hanging, in which rope is used to kill by choking. When the blind man curses the horns at the inn, he is making a reference to horns as a common symbol for a cuckold (a man whose wife is unfaithful), foreshadowing that Lazaro's fate is to be deceived by his most intimate partner. In both of these episodes the blind man seems to have some sort of prophetic power, as blind men in literature often do.

One night while they are staying in Escalona, the blind man is roasting sausages and cooking a stew. He gives Lazaro some money and asks him to go fetch some wine. Lazaro takes the money, but before he goes to fetch the wine he steals a sausage from the fire and replaces it with a soggy turnip that had been fished out of the stew. Then, when he is out of sight, he eats the sausage and drinks the wine for himself. When Lazaro returns, the blind man is furious to have discovered his sausage is missing and he sticks his nose into Lazaro's mouth to see if he can smell the meat, causing Lazaro to vomit on the blind man's face. This sends the blind man into such a rage that he beats Lazaro nearly to death.

Again Lazaro tries to deceive the blind man, and again the blind man is too clever to be deceived. Although Lazaro enjoys the temporary pleasure of eating the blind man's sausage, he pays for it shortly afterward by taking a terrible beating as punishment. This further illustrates the author's point that the cycle of crime and punishment—deception and retaliation—is a seemingly never-ending game which no one ever wins.

In the subsequent days, Lazaro is nursed back to health by the friendly innkeeper's wife, who uses the wine Lazaro stole from the blind man to clean his wounds. The blind man jokingly makes another prophesy that Lazaro, more than anyone else in the world, should be grateful for **wine** because it has saved his life a thousand times. During this time Lazaro resolves to leave the blind man when the opportunity arises.

This marks the third and final prophetic statement made by the blind man in Escalona. More than just a literal statement about wine being of great importance to Lazaro's life, the statement can also be interpreted to mean that Lazaro's life will have a dual nature much like that of wine—bittersweet, with every pleasure having a dark side. Notably, it is a woman who shows Lazaro compassion by helping him.

They leave Escalona a few days later, passing through a town where the blind man stops to beg. As night falls and it begins to rain, the blind man decides that they should find an inn for the night. Lazaro, seeing his opportunity for both escape and revenge, leads the blind man through the rain and positions him so that he is standing directly in front of a large stone pillar at the center of the town square. Lazaro tells the blind man that he is standing on the edge of an overflowing gutter and that he has to jump over it if he wants to keep his feet dry. The blind man, believing Lazaro, backs up and takes one big leap forward, slamming his head against the pillar and splitting it open. Before fleeing town, Lazaro mocks the badly injured blind man, asking him why he had been able to smell the sausage but hadn't been able to smell the pillar. Lazaro remarks that the injury may have been fatal, but he never found out what became of the blind man.

This episode is the climax of Lazaro's time serving the blind man and it symbolizes a moment of both personal growth and moral corruption for Lazaro, as he manages to finally outwit the master who has taught him so much about deception and taking advantage of the ignorance of others. Although Lazaro is happy to take his revenge in this moment, he lives to regret the cruelty of this act in the final chapter, an acknowledgement of the bitterness of a life that moves people to commit such acts of violence against one another.

CHAPTER 2

Lazaro meets his next master in Maqueda, where he goes to the priest to ask for alms. The priest asks if Lazaro knows how to help with mass and Lazaro says that he does—a skill he learned from the blind man—and so the priest agrees to take Lazaro as his servant. Almost immediately Lazaro realizes that he will be even worse-off with the priest than he had been with the blind man, for the priest keeps Lazaro hungry constantly.

Although Lazaro describes the time spent he spent serving the blind man as miserable, he comes away with many skills and life lessons that continue to prove helpful to him throughout his story. In addition, while priests are supposed to be the moral backbone of the Church, the fact that this priest starves Lazaro makes a strong statement about religious hypocrisy that will be repeated throughout the text.

The priest has a habit of taking the holy bread from the church and locking it away in a chest for himself. While the priest feeds himself quite liberally, Lazaro is only permitted one old onion every four days and a little bit of bread with which to try to fill himself. Sometimes the priest throws Lazaro the bones from his plate. Lazaro looks for opportunities to steal *blancas* from the offering at church, but the priest is shrewd and sees everything, so Lazaro continues to go hungry, eventually becoming so malnourished that he doesn't trust his legs enough to try to escape.

It is a particularly contemptible offense for the priest to feed himself with the holy bread—this bread is intended for use in the ritual of communion, in which the bread is eaten as a symbol for the body of Christ. As if the priest's behavior was not hypocritical enough, this behavior is almost sacrilegious.

The only opportunities Lazaro has to feed himself adequately are at funerals, when he and the priest both stuff themselves on the funeral feast provided by the families of the deceased. Lazaro confesses that he would often become so hungry that he would pray for townspeople to die just so that he could feast on the food at their funerals. He becomes convinced that he, with God as his accomplice, is responsible for every death that occurs during the six months he spends with the priest.

Again, the priest abuses his position of power by taking advantage of the feasts at funerals—another of the book's many examples of religious hypocrisy. Lazaro becomes complicit in the priest's wrongdoing by praying for the death of townspeople, making his survival and his loss of innocence again two entangled processes.

One day a tinker comes to the door while the priest is away and Lazaro convinces the man to give him a key that will open the priest's chest of bread. Lazaro eats an entire loaf of bread and locks the chest again, feeling pleased that he has found a way to survive. However, the priest suspects that a loaf has gone missing and he begins to keep count of how many are in the chest, which makes Lazaro distraught. The following day when the priest goes out, Lazaro opens the chest and nibbles small pieces of bread from a loaf that had already been partially eaten, and then puts it back, feeling that this is all he can get away with.

Here, again, Lazaro's survival depends on a stroke of good luck and his own cleverness in finding ways to provide for himself. Here as elsewhere in the text, Lazaro's good fortune depends on the kindness of strangers. The priest is portrayed as both a crueler and more shrewd master than the blind man, making Lazaro's survival all the more difficult.

Then Lazaro gets the idea that, instead of stealing entire loaves, he can break off many little pieces from each of the loaves, and that way the priest will think that mice have gotten into the chest through one of its many holes. But no sooner has Lazaro done this than the priest discovers his bread half-eaten, assumes it was eaten by mice, and patches all the holes in the chest. Again, Lazaro is distraught, and spends the next days thinking of a way to feed himself. One night while the priest is snoring heavily Lazaro decides to carve holes in the weakest parts of the wooden chest to make it look as though mice are chewing their way in. Then he unlocks the chest and continues to eat. Each morning when the priest discovers missing bread and more holes in the chest, he fixes whatever damage Lazaro had done the previous night, becoming more and more enraged daily. Lazaro supposes that he and the priest are the source of the Christian proverb, "where one door closes another one opens."

Lazaro's reference to scripture in this passage is a misinterpretation of the original meaning of the biblical proverb, but it shows both Lazaro's naivety and the author's sense of satire. This passage captures the "tit for tat" nature of Lazaro's struggle for survival, in which he must find a new way to deceive his master each day.

The priest begins to lay mouse traps inside the chest, baiting them with pieces of cheese, but Lazaro is able to take the cheese from the traps without setting them off. When the priest discovers the empty traps he is at the end of his wits. A neighbor suggests to the priest that perhaps a snake is responsible for eating the bread and cheese without setting off the traps, and from that point on the priest does not sleep soundly enough for Lazaro to be able to steal from the chest. The priest paces around at night, ransacking the house in search of the snake while Lazaro, starving, pretends to sleep. For fear of being searched and having his key to the chest discovered, Lazaro sleeps with the key in his mouth, as he learned to do with *blancas* when he was serving the blind man. One night, while Lazaro is asleep in his bed of straw, the key slips partway out of his mouth, and it begins to produce a loud whistling sound as he breathes. The priest hears it and, thinking it must be the snake, he clobbers Lazaro with a club in the darkness. When the priest gets a closer look, he sees the key sticking out of Lazaro's mouth and he understands that he has been deceived.

In this passage, the dangerous game of deception that Lazaro is playing comes to its climax as the priest grows more and more obsessed with finding whatever is stealing bread from his chest. Although the priest mistakenly thinks he is striking the snake when he hits Lazaro, the mistake is a symbolic one, as snakes are often used as symbols of deception. It is also notable that Lazaro was beaten so badly by a priest, a figure of restraint and dignity.

Lazaro regains consciousness three days later, nursed back to health by a local healer and the neighbors. They begin to repeat the story the priest had told them, and, while they are filled with laughter, Lazaro begins to cry. He looks at himself, bandaged and bruised, and realizes how horribly he has been injured. The woman and neighbors give him something to eat and after fifteen days he is strong enough to stand. As soon as Lazaro is on his feet again, the priest takes him by the hand and leads him into the street, leaving him there and releasing him from his service.

Here, as throughout the rest of the book, female neighbors are figures of mercy and compassion who help Lazaro in times of need and embody the true spirit of Christianity more than any other character. The author seems to suggest that only those without power to abuse can embody the values and virtues espoused by Christians.

CHAPTER 3

Lazaro makes his way to the city of Toledo, where people give him alms when he begs because he is injured. However, when his wounds heal people are no longer as generous, telling him to go find a job instead of begging. Lazaro meets his third master, the squire, while begging on the street. Lazaro notes the squire's decent appearance and dress. The squire asks Lazaro if he is looking for a master and Lazaro replies that he is.

By observing that the townspeople stop giving alms when he is no longer injured, Lazaro implies that their generosity, while well-intentioned, is superficial and reactionary rather than a sign of real virtue or compassion. When Lazaro meets the squire he thinks he has had a stroke of good luck because the squire's appearance makes him seem respectable. These two observations set the tone for a chapter that centers on false appearances.

Lazaro spends the entire morning following the squire around town and through the market, where Lazaro is surprised to see that the squire does not buy anything. Lazaro goes with the squire to church and watches him, noting that his demeanor is very devout. Lazaro gets hungrier and hungrier as the day progresses but the clock strikes 1:30 and still the squire has not stopped to buy food. This puzzles Lazaro, who thinks the squire seems to be the kind of person who provides well for himself.

In this passage Lazaro gets his first hint that something is suspicious about the gap between the squire's behavior and his appearance. The squire parades himself proudly around town and makes a show of piousness at the church, all the while letting Lazaro go hungry.

Finally, Lazaro and the squire arrive at the squire's home. Once inside, the squire questions Lazaro about his past. Lazaro does his best to take his time and tell a detailed story, despite the fact that he is very hungry. He is careful to leave out any details he thinks the squire might find disagreeable.

By now Lazaro is well-seasoned in the art of tweaking the truth to serve his own interests. He is eager to impress the squire because he recognizes in this new master an opportunity for him to improve his social standing.

Lazaro notices that the squire's house seems completely empty of furniture or food. The squire asks Lazaro is he has eaten, and Lazaro says that he has not. The squire says that he ate breakfast just before meeting in the street that morning, and then he explains that he never eats lunch, so he encourages Lazaro to be patient until dinner. Lazaro is on the verge of fainting from hunger when he hears this and it reminds him of his past suffering. Lazaro begins to cry over his bad luck, but he hides his feelings from the squire and instead tells the squire that he doesn't need to eat much. The squire commends Lazaro, saying that moderation is an important virtue.

By this point it is probably more than clear to the reader that all is not as it seems with the squire. The squire's barren house and empty stomach—and the flimsy lies he makes up to conceal the truth—should be early warning signs to Lazaro that something is amiss. Yet Lazaro's willingness to believe the squire—despite some initial skepticism and the obvious clues that the squire is lying—are signs that Lazaro has maintained some of his youthful innocence and gullibility.

Lazaro takes out a piece of bread he had saved from begging and begins eating it. When the squire sees Lazaro eating, he becomes excited and says the bread looks delicious. The squire takes the largest of Lazaro's three loaves for himself and begins eating it quickly. Lazaro, realizing that the squire is hungry enough to eat whatever he can get his hands on, finishes eating the rest of the bread as fast as he can. After they are finished eating, the squire offers Lazaro a drink from his jug and Lazaro refuses, explaining that he doesn't drink **wine**, but the squire explains that it's just water.

Although the squire stoops to taking his servant's food in this passage, he remains too proud to admit that he is also starving and ask for the food outright. When Lazaro refuses the squire's offer of something to drink, he again lies to create a better impression.

Lazaro and the squire go into the squire's bedroom, where Lazaro sees that the bed is made up of some tattered, old bedclothes lying on top a mattress that has lost its shape. Nonetheless, the squire teaches Lazaro how to make the bed, and afterwards the squire says to Lazaro that they may as well go without dinner because it's late and there is no food in the house and the town plaza is far away. The squire lies down to go to sleep, and instructs Lazaro to sleep at his feet. Lazaro, uncomfortable and starving, doesn't sleep all night but makes an effort to lie still so as not to disturb the squire.

The squire's insistence on making his bed even though it is barely more than a pile of rags shows both the tenacity and the ridiculousness of his pride and his concern for appearances. By the time the two go to bed with empty stomachs, it is all too clear that Lazaro has not found himself in the hands of a master who will be able to provide for him any more than his previous two masters.

In the morning, the squire dresses himself very slowly. He shows Lazaro his sword, which is very finely crafted. Then, as the squire is leaving to go to church, he instructs Lazaro to make the bed and fill the jug of water at the river. The squire tells Lazaro to leave the house key in a crack outside so he will be able to let himself in when he returns. As the squire walks away Lazaro takes note of how proudly the poor squire walks and says a silent prayer, asking God how many proud men there must be in the world who suffer to protect their honor.

The fact that the only two chores to be done in the house are fetching water and making the bed is demonstrative of the modesty of the squire's living situation. Lazaro's prayer shows that, although he has played along with the squire's charades, the superficiality of the squire's excuses has not been lost on Lazaro. The empathy implicit in Lazaro's prayer is also a precursor to Lazaro's later charity towards the squire.

After Lazaro has made the bed, he leaves the house to fetch water from the river. While he is out he sees the squire in a garden talking to two women. The women ask the squire for lunch, but the squire makes different excuses, at which point the women quickly lose interest and wander off. Lazaro returns to the house without being noticed by the squire.

The passage involving the two women by the river shows how every social interaction—including romantic courtships—is deeply intertwined with the economic interests of those involved. In this scene, even what seems like light flirtation becomes a moment of transaction in which someone is looking for a free lunch.

Lazaro becomes hungry while waiting for the squire to return and leaves the house again to beg for some bread. The townspeople are generous and he returns with four pounds of bread, a piece of cow's foot, and a few pieces of tripe (cow's stomach). When he returns, he finds the squire is already home. The squire says he has already eaten lunch but asks Lazaro to share the food with him, which Lazaro does. The squire asks Lazaro not to tell any of the townspeople that they live together, wishing to protect the squire's honor, and Lazaro consents. The squire tells Lazaro that the house must be cursed, explaining that nothing has gone well for him since he moved in. After they are finished eating, Lazaro fetches the water jug and notices that it is still full, taking it as a sign that the squire had lied about having eaten lunch earlier. For more than a week things continue this way between the squire and Lazaro, the squire going out in the mornings while Lazaro takes care of things around the house and begs for food in the town.

Again in this passage the squire remains too proud to admit to his own hunger and he invents and fabricates yet another elaborate excuse for wanting some of Lazaro's food—an excuse which Lazaro seems not to believe, though he pretends to. This interaction is another example of an exchange in which each party involved knows that the other is lying but both play along anyway to maintain the appearance of civility. It is particularly disgraceful that the squire takes Lazaro's food despite that he would be ashamed if anyone found out that a beggar was living with him. Of course, the real reason the squire doesn't want the townspeople to know that he lives with Lazaro is that his inability to feed his own servant would tip the townspeople off to the squire's poverty.

One night when the squire gets out of bed to use the bathroom, Lazaro decides to see whether the squire is as poor as he seems and digs through the pockets of the squire's trousers. He finds a small purse without a single *blanca* inside it and understands that the squire is only concerned with mainlining appearances. Lazaro pities the squire, thinking to himself that while he was right to leave his other masters, the squire deserves compassion.

This moment of revelation is a turning point for Lazaro's character. Instead of reacting with anger or indignation that he has been lied to, Lazaro has compassion for the squire, recognizing that they face the same problem of not having enough to get by. This compassionate response is particularly remarkable in contrast to the stinginess of other figures in the book. Lazaro is charitable even when he has nothing to give.

Meanwhile, the city council decides to throw all the poor people out of Toledo who are not from there because of a crop failure that left the city with a short supply of food. Four days after the announcement is made, Lazaro sees long lines of poor people leaving the city and becomes so afraid of being discovered that he doesn't go begging anymore. During this time, he is fed by the women who live next door, who spin cotton for a living.

The city council's banishment of the poor foreigners shows the callousness and indifference of the Church and government to the suffering of the poor. Echoing Lazaro's compassion for the pitiable squire, the cotton-spinners next door show Lazaro compassion although they are strangers who have little themselves. In this passage, the stark contrast between the actions of the "haves" and the "have nots" makes a hard-to-ignore critique of the society's system of values, simultaneously suggesting that the poor are the only group of people who really live according to the values of Christianity.

One day the squire comes home with a *real* (the equivalent of around 68 *blancas*) and tells Lazaro that they will be moving away from the cursed house. He sends Lazaro to the market to fetch some bread, wine, and meat. As Lazaro is walking down the street, he encounters a funeral procession. The dead man's widow is crying loudly, shouting out that they are taking her husband to a dark and gloomy house "where they neither eat nor drink." Lazaro becomes afraid, thinking that they are bringing the dead man to the squire's house, and he runs back to alert the squire. The squire sees the mistake Lazaro has made and thinks it is very funny, though Lazaro remains shaken by the incident for days.

The humor of this passage is subtle, but it reveals something important about Lazaro—namely, that he is still a child, capable both of being frightened by such an incident and of misunderstanding the widow's words so completely. It is also the author's way of humorously reminding the reader of how miserable Lazaro's living conditions must be in order for him to think that the widow is referring to the squire's house when in fact she is referring to death.

In the days that follow, Lazaro and the squire eat very well. One day, when the squire is in a good mood, Lazaro decides to ask the squire about his life story and how he came to be living this way in Toledo. The squire explains that he is from Old Castile (a region in Spain), where he still owns some land. The squire had left his home after insulting a knight by refusing to remove his hat for the knight. Lazaro asks the squire why he would not remove his hat and the squire replies that the knight had greeted him using a common salutation ("God keep your excellency") rather than one of the salutations reserved for people of a higher class. Lazaro remarks to himself that this must be why God doesn't help the squire—because "he won't let anybody ask Him to." The squire then gives a long speech about his tarnished honor and the hypocrisy of those of high class in society.

The squire's backstory is illuminating not only of his character, but of a society in which social status is deeply encoded in everything, down to the smallest detail of a person's dress or speech. Although to Lazaro it would seem foolish for the squire to have sacrificed everything he owned over a slight that may have even been unintentional, this story underscores the disparity between the experiences of those of high class versus those of low class. In this light, the squire's unrelenting obsession with maintaining the appearance of a nobleman, which leaves him unable to cope with the reality of his own poverty, makes him into a kind of victim of the customs and conventions of the upper class. In this sense he is similar to Lazaro.

A man and woman come to the door who turn out to be creditors, seeking payment for the rent for the house and for the old mattress. The amount they ask for is more than the squire makes in a year, but the squire responds that it's not a problem and that he just needs to go to the market to get change for a doubloon. The squire instructs the creditors to return in the afternoon. When the man and woman come back later, the squire still has not returned. By night time, Lazaro becomes afraid of sleeping in the house alone so he goes to the house of the neighbors who fed him before and he explains everything to them. They invite Lazaro to spend the night.

Here the cotton-spinners are, again, figures of mercy and compassion, whereas the creditors are persecutory figures who strike fear into Lazaro's heart. The squire's abandonment of his home and of Lazaro reveals him to be a figure with no real sense of loyalty or morality, since he evidently feels no need to return the kindness and compassion with which Lazaro has treated him. The squire's abandonment of Lazaro is a betrayal that may ultimately contribute to Lazaro's gradual development of a more hardened worldview.

In the morning, the man and woman return with a notary and an officer of the law. Upon entering the house and finding it empty, they accuse Lazaro of stealing the squire's valuables and hiding them elsewhere. Lazaro begins to cry and explains that the squire had no possessions beyond his cloak and sword, and a small plot of land back in Old Castile. The neighbors testify to Lazaro's innocence and beg for his pardon. Seeing that Lazaro is innocent, the creditors let Lazaro go without punishing him. The constable and the notary take the old mattress as payment for their services, though in the end their "services" had amounted to nothing. Lazaro remarks at how strange it is to have been abandoned by his master, since usually it is the master who is abandoned by his servant.

In this passage Lazaro is on the verge of suffering punishment for a crime he did not commit—notably, the same crime for which both his father and step-father were punished—despite there being no real evidence that he had stolen. This highlights the fact that the poor are seen as morally corrupt, even when they have done nothing wrong, and that they are often easily scapegoated for the wrongdoing of others because they have no one to defend them.

CHAPTER 4

Lazaro's neighbors help him find his next master, a friar from the monastery who loved wandering around and visiting people, and hated spending time at the monastery. The friar gives Lazaro his first pair of shoes, but the pair doesn't last longer than a week because of all the friar's running about, which Lazaro finds exhausting. Because of this, and other reasons that Lazaro says he prefers not to mention, Lazaro leaves the friar after a short time.

The fourth chapter of the book marks a sudden and dramatic shift in the style of Lazaro's storytelling. Whereas the previous three chapters gave long and detailed accounts of Lazaro's suffering under each of his masters, this chapter is vague in its details and very brief. If the previous chapter marked a moral highpoint for Lazaro's character, this chapter might be understood to mark the beginning of a shift in a different direction—away from kindness and compassion, toward a more cynical and opportunistic way of looking at the world. This hardened outlook finds expression in Lazaro's more restrained and economical storytelling style. Furthermore, it is notable that the friar Lazaro serves is so preoccupied with "worldly matters"–which might be taken as a euphemism for sexual affairs—considering he is supposed to be confined to the monastery. This serves as yet another example of blatant religious hypocrisy.

CHAPTER 5

Lazaro's fifth master is a seller of indulgences (also referred to as a pardoner) whom Lazaro meets by chance in Toledo. Lazaro describes the seller of indulgences as a cunning and ruthless salesman who had dozens of tricks up his sleeve, such as giving small bribes of fresh fruit to the priests so that they would help him sell his indulgences.

The sale of papal indulgences (printed pieces of paper that were claimed to have the power to pardon the sins of whoever purchased one) was a highly controversial practice during this time. Many saw it as a way of transforming the notion of moral purity into nothing more than a matter of wealth. Sellers of indulgences were therefore seen as highly morally suspect characters, whose livelihood depended on tricking people into giving their money away. This particular seller of indulgences earns the reader's suspicion immediately by offering bribes to the clergy.

The seller of indulgences has been preaching in a region of Toledo for three days but has failed to make any sales. One night at the inn, the seller of indulgences gets into a fight with the constable after the constable calls the seller of indulgences a fraud, saying the indulgences he sells are fake. The fight attracts a lot of attention from the townspeople, who eventually break up the fight by leading the constable away. After that everyone goes off to bed.

As the primary law enforcement official for his town, any constable would naturally have an interest in protecting the citizenry from someone he saw as a fraud. The public nature of their dispute later becomes an important detail in understanding the ruse that the constable and the seller of indulgences have worked out together.

The next morning, the seller of indulgences goes to the church and asks that the church bells be rung because he wants to give a sermon. When all the townspeople gather, they are still talking about what had happened the previous night and repeating to one another what the constable had said about the indulgences being fake. Once the sermon is almost finished, the constable enters the church, declaring loudly that the indulgences are false and warning the people against wasting their money. The seller of indulgences responds by saying a prayer that the constable will be punished if what he says is false, and that he himself will be punished if what the constable says is true. As soon as he has finished his prayer, the constable falls off his bench and begins foaming at the mouth and flailing his limbs. It takes more than fifteen men to hold the constable steady. Meanwhile Lazaro's master remains on his knees in the pulpit, in a kind of religious trance. When the seller of indulgences wakes up from his trance he encourages the people to pray for the constable. Everyone gets on their knees and prays with the seller of indulgences. Then the constable is brought to the pulpit, and the pardoner places an indulgence on the constable's forehead, at which point the constable regains consciousness and asks the pardoner for forgiveness, saying his actions had been guided by the devil. Everyone who witnessed the episode then rushes to the pulpit to buy indulgences and nobody leaves without buying one. News of the event travels to surrounding villages, so that people are already eager to buy indulgences when the pardoner arrives. Lazaro admits that he was initially fooled by the pardoner's theatrics, but later recognizes his master's genius for collaborating with the constable in this act of deception.

While sellers of indulgences were criticized for conflating moral purity with wealth (the ability to buy indulgences), it's notable that indulgences are so popular in the world of the book. Considering that the poor have been portrayed as more generous and Christian than the rich, despite that they are looked down on and more likely to be wrongfully punished, the logic of indulgences—that the wealthy deserve moral authority—is actually consistent with the values of Inquisition-era Spain. In that sense, despite the public's professed ambivalence about indulgences, they are actually primed to be receptive to the seller of indulgences's elaborate act of deception. This deception makes for a scathing critique of both government and church officials, who together conspire to defraud the people they are supposed to serve. Of all the masters Lazaro has served, the seller of indulgences is the most ruthless and conniving. Lazaro does not say much about the role he played in all of this, though it is clear by his account that he was a witness to all of it. While he claims not to be complicit in the con, the admiration Lazaro professes for the scheming pardoner is yet another indicator of the narrator's shifting set of values.

In the next village, the townspeople are strongly opposed to buying the pardoner's indulgences, even after he announces that they can have an entire year to pay for them. The pardoner realizes that he won't make any sales and begins giving away indulgences by throwing them from the pulpit, smiling and shouting that they are being given to the people by the grace of God. The townspeople scramble to pick up the indulgences, and soon everyone in the town has taken an indulgence for themselves and their family members, dead or alive. Before Lazaro and the pardoner leave the town, the local clergymen approach the pardoner to ask whether an indulgence's coverage extends to unborn children, to which the pardoner replies that they will have to consult more learned scholars than himself.

In this village, the townspeople make a show of being morally opposed to the sale of indulgences, but as soon as the pardoner begins handing them out for free, the moral pretensions of the townspeople vanish and a violent free-for-all ensues as the townspeople scramble to get their hands on the slips of paper. The moment when a member of the clergy asks about indulgences for unborn children is the height of the author's satirical commentary on the ridiculousness of papal indulgences and the hypocrisy it represents in the church.

On their way to the region of La Mancha, the seller of indulgences and Lazaro come to a village that is even more reluctant to buy indulgences. Here, the seller of indulgences has another idea. He has a small cross which he rests on top of a brazier (a small heater) until it becomes very hot, and at the end of his sermon he takes the cross in a handkerchief and holds it out for the local clergymen to kiss. An old magistrate is the first to kiss the cross, and he jumps back when he feels how hot it is, but the pardoner exclaims that it must be a miracle. One by one the clergymen kiss the cross and are burnt by it. When the pardoner suggests that this miracle is God's response to the village's lack of charity, there is a rush to buy indulgences. Lazaro guesses that three thousand indulgences were sold this way. As they are leaving the village, the clergymen beg the pardoner to leave the cross with them. The pardoner agrees only after the clergymen offer him a much older and more valuable cross, made of silver, in exchange.

In the third and final act of deception in this chapter, it is the brazenness and unscrupulousness of the seller of indulgences that is most striking, in contrast to the utter gullibility of the clergymen. The pardoner's easy success in getting others to believe that such a simple trick was in fact a miracle would have been seen as particularly blasphemous, since it insinuates that other miracles are falsified for the purpose of bringing financial gain to the church.

Lazaro explains that he was too afraid of his master to expose his lies, and that he swore never to tell the truth about the false miracle with the cross. Lazaro excuses himself in part by saying that he was too young to know better, and that he had thought many of the pardoner's tricks were funny. He also mentions that although he suffered plenty of hardships while serving the pardoner, he was always well-fed.

Lazaro's claim that he didn't know any better seems dubious at this point in the story. It's much more likely that, because he was well fed, it was in Lazaro's interest to go along with the pardoner's acts of deception.

CHAPTER 6

Lazaro's next master is a tambourine painter. Lazaro helps the tambourine painter mix his colors and suffers many ills under this master, too.

Much like Lazaro's account of his time with the friar, his account of his time with the tambourine painter is brief. It may be inferred that, although there was a great deal of suffering under this master, Lazaro doesn't feel the need to describe it in detail because suffering has become such a normal part of his life.

One day Lazaro enters a cathedral where he meets a chaplain, who employs Lazaro by putting him in charge of four jugs of water and a mule. This way, Lazaro sells water around the city, splitting the profits with the chaplain. Lazaro keeps this job for four years, and he is happy during this time because the money he makes enables him to have a stable diet for the first time in his life. After four years, he has finally saved enough to buy himself a used jacket, a nice old cloak, and a sword. Once he is well-dressed, he returns the donkey to his master and quits the job.

The most striking detail of Lazaro's description of the time he spends working for the chaplain is that he spends the money he saves on the exact set of items worn and carried by the squire, though he doesn't seem to notice this parallel himself. This is significant because it represents the gradual convergence of Lazaro's system of values with that of the squire's—values that Lazaro had previously mocked because he saw them as empty. It is also worth noting that the chaplain—a religious figure—employs Lazaro in a commercial venture. This would have been seen as conflicting with the chaplain's religious vows and obligations.

CHAPTER 7

Lazaro settles down with the second constable (different from the first constable who helped the pardoner sell indulgences), but the job is dangerous. One night, not long after Lazaro entered his service, the constable is getting beaten-up by a band of fugitives and Lazaro decides to abandon him. Lazaro's goal becomes to find a job working in government because he believes that nobody in those positions faces real obstacles.

This brief anecdote reveals Lazaro's cowardice and his lack of a sense of moral duty or loyalty. In contrast to the compassion he showed the squire in chapter three, here he seems to be interested in nothing more than his own well-being and self-interest. His interest in a government job, when considered in relation to the corruption of every government figure Lazaro has met up to this point, seem to confirm that he more and more prizes financial security above doing what he believes is right.

Lazaro finds work as a town crier in Toledo. His job is to advertise the local **wines** and announce the news, crimes, and lost property. One day Lazaro is helping to hang a petty thief in the town square and he notices that the rope being used to hang the thief is of high quality. The sight of the rope reminds him of what the blind man had said about the ropes in the shoemaker's shop in Escalona, and the memory makes Lazaro regret how badly he hurt the blind man after everything the blind man had taught him.

Lazaro's sudden recollection of the blind man serves as a moment of reflection for him, in which the dramatic change he has undergone since the beginning of the book becomes clear. Lazaro's complicity in the hanging of the petty thief is worth noting, not just because even the dastardly old blind man of Lazaro's past so clearly felt that the practice of hanging was morally repugnant, but because Lazaro's father and stepfather were both thieves who were punished for providing for their families.

One day the archpriest of San Salvador takes notice of Lazaro for his skill in selling the archpriest's **wines**, and he arranges for Lazaro to marry one of the maids in his service. Lazaro, thinking it would be beneficial to associate himself with the archpriest, agrees and is married to the archpriest's maid. Lazaro describes his wife as a good and dutiful woman, and he is thankful because the archpriest continues to supply Lazaro and his wife with occasional gifts of wheat and bread and old stockings. The archpriest even rents Lazaro and his wife a small house next to his and invites them for meals on Sundays.

It is clear from Lazaro's description of the process of becoming engaged to the archpriest's maid that he sees his marriage as an economical and practical relationship rather than a romantic one. Growing up in such a cruel and hypocritical society seems to have robbed him of the ability to think beyond his financial security. Why the archpriest is so generous with Lazaro and his wife is a question Lazaro does not seem concerned with trying to answer.

However, Lazaro's marriage is plagued by rumors that his wife is the archpriest's mistress. Lazaro tries to ignore the rumors, but sometimes his wife stays late in the archpriest's chambers, causing Lazaro suspicion. As a result, Lazaro is often haunted by what the blind man said to him long ago in Escalona about the **horns** on the wall of the inn.

The truth of the blind man's prophetic words stands in contrast to the naivety that is often associated with blindness. By the end of the book, the blind man is shown to have been a source of great insight for Lazaro, proving again the book's maxim that nothing is merely as it seems, and often things thought to be one way prove to be just the opposite.

One day the archpriest tells Lazaro he would do well to ignore the rumors, assuring him that his honor and the honor of his wife are intact. Lazaro responds by alluding to a rumor that his wife had given birth to three children before Lazaro had married her, but this only causes his wife to weep and curse so profusely that Lazaro vows never to speak of the rumors again. To soothe his wife, Lazaro has to declare that he is convinced of her virtue, and he permits her to visit the archpriest as she pleases, night and day. From that day forward, whenever Lazaro hears any rumor of his wife's infidelity, he responds by saying that he doesn't want to hear about it, and that anyone who repeats such lies is his mortal enemy. This way, he keeps peace in his life.

The fact that Lazaro is cuckolded by a religious figure of such high office is another detail that would have been seen as highly sacrilegious at the time of the book's publication, since archpriests are moral figureheads of the church and were expected to remain celibate. In this final passage of the book, Lazaro has transformed completely into one of the characters that so perplexed him in his youth—people without a sense of morality who knowingly entangle themselves a web of lies to their own detriment and dishonor.

Lazaro concludes by noting that this all took place in the same year that the emperor took up residency in Toledo, and that Lazaro had found prosperity and the height of good fortune. He promises to keep his reader, who he again addresses as "Your Excellency," informed of whatever happens to him next.

In this passage it becomes evident that the matter Lazaro mentions in the preface is his arrangement with the archpriest regarding his wife. It remains unclear why the person to whom the letter is addressed may have inquired into the matter, though it is possible that the archpriest is in danger of punishment for keeping a mistress. It is ironic that Lazaro feels that he has come into prosperity and is living at the height of good fortune in light of his moral depravity, his lowly economic standing, and his tarnished reputation as a cuckold.

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