

Misery and the Figurative in *Lazarillo de Tormes*

Within *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the picaresque protagonist experiences a vast array of misery ranging from his mother abandoning him to nearly starving to death. Within this picaresque novel, figurative speech conveys misery; figurative speech is necessary to develop the depth of suffering and the complexity of human emotion. A figure of speech is either "radical" or "basic" alteration to the essence of a word or words (Harmon 213).

This essay will explore how figurative language informs the understanding of cruelty. Then, this essay will elaborate upon the varieties of suffering Lazarillo experiences, such as hunger and suicidal ideation. Moving on, this essay will examine how the additional abstract concept of Lazarillo's ill fate is essential to understanding the unreal. As an extension of the discussion of fate, this essay will analyze the figurative rhetoric of the blind man's two prophecies. Finally, this essay will close with a rare use of the metaphorical to describe a brighter spot in Lazarillo's life.

Lazarillo experiences his birth into consciousness as the result of a figurative aphorism from the blind man. After the blind man thrusts Lazarillo's head onto the horn of a bull, the blind man says to Lazarillo, "Dumbbell, learn that a blind man's boy needs to know a little more than the Devil does" (306). This is to say that Lazarillo needs to be clever to survive. The keyword within this sentence is "Devil" because it uses the idea of supreme evil to connote the degree to which Lazarillo's world does not operate within the benevolent, and the importance Lazarillo needs to be smart to survive in this paradigm. Invoking the Devil introduces the element of malevolence. This advice begins an ongoing pattern of relegating Lazarillo's life to the realm of suffering. The blind man's abuse, without this dictum, would leave Lazarillo without a message to take away, making the beating useless. It is only after the blind man gives his advice that Lazarillo

experiences an awakening to the cruelty of the world—and the importance of protecting himself from it in any way possible.

Lazaro endures immense hunger and uses figurative language to convey the depths of his sorrow. After surviving on one onion every four days in the care of the Priest, Lazaro remarks about the unfairness of his hunger keeping him awake at night because "at that age, even the worries of the King of France should not have robbed" him of his sleep (318). It is one thing to know something, and it is entirely another to understand and empathize. Knowing Lazaro is starving is sad on its own. However, this fact does not create empathy and an understanding of the psychological impact of a young starving Lazaro. Using a metaphor to compare the magnitude of troubles a regent may have to the amount of worry that Lazaro would have been able to withstand makes the fact that his starvation *still* keeps is awake more heartbreaking because the audience now understands the full impact. Sorrow is the sort of feeling that utilitarian language cannot adequately convey because it will never be able to draw on these metaphorical comparisons to command compassion.

Lazaro uses figurative language to convey his want to die. As the blind man discovers that the young picaro stole his sausage and wine, Lazaro wishes, "[Lazaro] [is] already burned... because [Lazaro] was already a dead man" (312). Lazaro anticipates that his punishment for consuming the blind man's sustenance will be so horrific that he would prefer suffering akin to dying an excruciating and fiery death. Lazaro begins the story as a young boy and does not reach adulthood until the end. Yet in this moment of fear, Lazaro retroflects upon himself as a man, highlighting his premature loss of innocence. This makes Lazaro victim three times over because now he can be understood as not only someone who has been starved and wishing for death, but now someone who has also been robbed. Lazaro's lack of agency is the root cause of his

profound suffering. As a young boy, he is the most vulnerable to exploitation, and yet here he embraces death; he should be safe under the cloak of his childhood, yet it has been ripped from him. All of this analysis would not be possible without the figurative language's insight into Lazaro's mental state. Lazaro has nothing but these ideas about death to mollify him.

Fate is another metaphysical aspect of Lazaro's miserable coming of age that necessitates figurative language. When Lazaro hides the key to the breadbox in his mouth as he sleeps, "[the key] [whistles] very loud, as [his] lucky star would have it" (320). Here, the term "lucky star" means fate. The term luck can evoke ideas of trickery, gambling, and powerlessness. These concepts all apply to Lazaro. Lazaro often uses tricks to survive and steal himself some food, as he does in this case, having an illicit key to the breadbox so he may take crumbs to keep himself from dying of starvation. It is a gamble anytime Lazaro picks a new master to serve regarding whether they will be kind to him or worse than the last (314). In the case of the priest, Lazaro is powerless over his quality of life *until* the priest kicks him out and tells Lazaro it is time for him to begin taking responsibility for himself (321). The word "luck" modifies "star." "Star" is a metaphor for fate. Stars, like fate, are immense forces that occupy somewhere far away and can only be understood from a distance. Fate appears in this text as a force that decides the path of people's lives, and Lazaro's path, is one with legions of pain. The sound from the key wakes the priest (as his "luck" would have it), who then consequently discovers Lazaro's thievery and beats Lazaro severely as punishment (320). The language of "lucky star" is necessary because it requires mediation on emotional undertones and metaphorical significance. This sort of emotional introspection aligns the reader with the Lazaro as a highly psychological character.

The blind man makes a prophecy using a metaphor that cements Lazaro's lackluster future. While the blind man is holding the horn of the cuckold, he prophesizes to Lazaro, "one day, what

"I'm holding will give you an unpleasant meal and supper" (311). Lazaro fulfills this prophecy when he marries a woman who carries on an affair with his employer so that he may obtain a better job (340). Supper symbolizes Lazaro's career because it is what gives him the ability to provide the food he once was denied. In using the metaphor of food, the gloom of Lazaro's past starvation contrasts with that of having an unfaithful wife. This speech act creates Lazaro's future as a place that will never be absent of pain because of the emotional color that the figurative gives.

That is not to say that Lazaro's life is monolithically horrendous. In one of the few examples of figurative language surrounding positivity, Lazaro remarks that "in [Lazaro's wife], God shows [Lazaro] a thousand favors" (341). Human emotion is complex and relative. To know suffering, Lazaro must also know some amount of good. For Lazaro, one good comes in his wife. God is synonymous with the omnipotent and omnibenevolent—the idea of a being like that granting a mere human a favor, much less a thousand, conveys the magnificent intensity of gratitude Lazaro feels for his wife. However, exalting the love Lazaro feels for his wife exists within the same paradigm that he knows she is cheating on him. Lazaro is a human, and human emotionality does not follow the binary rules of logic. This is what makes them complicated and need a more abstract system of description.

Misery can only be described within Lazarillo de Tormes using figurative language. Pain is not just an emotion, which is abstract in itself, but it is an emotion of a vast negative magnitude. The real extent misery has on the picaro can only be explored truly with figurative language. Figurative language requires imagination, which therefore implies empathy. To truly make Lazaro's words come alive, the audience needs to empathize. It is through this empathy that new realities can be understood.

Works Cited

Harmon, William, et al. *A Handbook to Literature*. 12th ed. London: Longman, 2010.

Lazarillo de Tormes. *Norton Anthology of World Literature, Vol. C*, edited by Martin Puchner, Norton, 2012, pp. 302-341.