

Interpersonal and Commodity Fetishism in *Cárcel de amor* and *Lazarillo de Tormes*

Partiendo de la descripción del papel del narrador/protagonista de La cárcel de amor (1492) de Diego de San Pedro, se analiza la transición del fetichismo interpersonal (la atribución de valor natural a una persona) al fetichismo de la mercancía (la atribución de valor esencial a productos y personas como mercancías) en el Lazarillo de Tormes (1554). El fetichismo de mercancías se asocia con “el sujeto supuesto a creer” (Žižek), es decir, el sujeto que no cree en el reconocimiento equivocado (méconnaissance) fetichista, pero cree en la creencia de los otros. La razón fundamental del relato de Lázaro es que él no cree en el valor de su persona, pero cree que su destinatario, Vuestra Merced y los lectores, lo creen. El análisis del fetichismo en el Lazarillo permite una reflexión sobre la arbitrariedad de la atribución de valor al capital cultural en nuestro presente.

La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes, y de sus fortunas y adversidades, first published shortly before 1554,¹ is undisputedly a classic of Spanish literature, and one of the few Early Modern Spanish language texts known to readers and critics outside of the Hispanic world.² This elegant little text is essentially characterized by multiple layers of meaning and irony, and there is some irony in calling it a classic, too. “Classic” derives from the Roman words *classis*, which means in this context not just social class, but the “first class” - that is, the social and economic elite. The label classic thus indicates that a work of art or literature is detached from the world of the plebeians. By implication, a classic has value in aesthetic terms that naturally translates into economic value. This nexus was established by nineteenth-century French critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve in his seminal essay “Qu’est-ce qu’un classique?” (“What is a classic?”), dated 21st October 1850 and published in his *Causeries du lundi*:

Un classique, d’après la définition ordinaire, c’est un auteur ancien, déjà consacré dans l’admiration, et qui fait autorité en son genre. Le mot *classique*, pris en ce sens, commence à paraître chez les Romains. Chez eux on appelait proprement *classici*, non tous les citoyens des diverses classes, mais ceux de la première seulement, et qui possédaient au moins un revenu d’un certain chiffre déterminé. Tous ceux qui possédaient un revenu inférieur étaient désignés par la dénomination *infra classem*,

au-dessous de la classe par excellence. Au figuré, le mot *classicus* se trouve employé dans Aulu-Gelle, et appliqué aux écrivains: un écrivain de valeur et marque, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, un écrivain qui compte, qui a du bien au soleil, et qui n'est pas confondu dans la foule des prolétaires. (30-31)

A classic, according to the usual definition, is an old author canonised by admiration, and an authority in his particular style. The word *classic* was first used in this sense by the Romans. With them not all the citizens of the different classes were properly called *classici*, but only those of the chief class, those who possessed an income of a certain fixed sum. Those who possessed a smaller income were described by the term *infra classem*, below the pre-eminent class. The word *classicus* was used in a figurative sense by Aulus Gellius, and applied to writers: a writer of worth and distinction, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who is of account, has real property, and is not lost in the proletariat crowd. (1)³

It is striking how much this definition emphasizes the economic dimension of classic literature both in the sense that classic literature is related to the socio-economic status of the author and to the value of his text. The value of a classic derives from its timeless intrinsic qualities as a work of literature and, at the same time, translates into its exchange value as a commodity on the book market. As a classic, Lazarillo's *Vida* has value for modern readers. However, at the moment of its composition and publication it seemed to disqualify itself as a valuable text, because it is situated *infra classem* in the world of poverty and immorality, and because it is narrated by a *pícaro*, a man without "value and distinction/brand" ("valeur et marque"), who does not "count" ("qui compte") because he lacks wealth ("bien"). The first picaresque novel is a particularly interesting classic text because it emphatically calls attention to the fact that it is steeped in the economic and social reality of the time of its composition. Thus it debunks the notion that a classic derives its value exclusively from timeless qualities that allow readers of different time periods to relate it to their world and experiences. In the present article, I will show that *Lazarillo* should be read today not in spite of this essential relation to a world that is not ours, but because of its anchoring in a very specific historical context.

The society depicted in the *Lazarillo*, Spain in the first half of the 16th century, the so-called Golden Age, bears uncanny resemblances with the societies and cultures of today's "Western" capitalist world: Our world is still close to the "cumbre de buena fortuna" (*Lazarillo* 135), as Lázaro says in the last *tratado*, but there are clear signs of decadence and instability due to a growing inequality of wealth that benefits a parasitic class which

casts the blame for injustice on the victims of this process. Like Lázaro's, it is a world ruled by cynicism and hypocrisy, and a more or less articulated awareness of the hollowness of the elites' grand narratives.

Usually these similarities between a past epoch and our own invite readings that derive lessons from historical texts. I propose that rather than postulating actual or objective parallels between our present and the early modern period this resemblance between our world and the world evoked by Lázaro's narration should be understood as a *coincidence* in the original sense of the word: both worlds "fall together." I adapt C.G. Jung's notion of *synchronicity*, which postulates that events (or a series of events) are not connected by mechanistic causality but by meaning, resulting from a hermeneutic operation. Although Jung devised his concept to explain simultaneous events, it can also be used to establish, by an act of interpretation, the meaningful relation between a historical text and today's reality. In this perspective it is necessary that the literary text evoke events, situations and structures that "fall together" with our lived experience, allowing the attentive reader to see the historic text as an answer to topical problems. In the case of the *Lazarillo* these coincidences are clearly given since there are clear signs that capitalism as we know it, with its presumed ties to democracy and a utopian promise for a better life for all, is morphing into something whose contours are still unclear. *Lazarillo* was written when capitalism was still nascent and yet profoundly affected European societies, indicating what is being undone today. According to Fredric Jameson, "the individual narrative, the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction" (*Political Unconscious* 62). As fiction, literature does not provide solutions or lessons but an "imaginary resolution;" it allows us to discern the contradiction in the first place. If we establish the coincidences between the historical literature and our present, the imaginary resolutions encapsulated in fictional texts may reflect on our current contradictions.

In the present article, I will trace the coincidences between a text written nearly half a millennium ago and our situation today. A growing body of scholarship has related *Lazarillo* to the economic transformations that Europe and its hegemonic power, Spain, experienced in the 16th century. I will focus on one aspect of the emergence of early modern capitalism that has not attracted the interest of *Lazarillo* scholarship: the transition from interpersonal fetishism to commodity fetishism. While precapitalist societies ascribed "natural value" to certain individuals (the nobility), in a capitalist society things or commodities are "magically" endowed with value, obfuscating the labor necessary in their production.

We will see that this transition is instrumental in the emergence of what Slavoj Žižek has called the “interpassive subject,” the subject who is aware of the deception at the heart of any kind of fetishism but who believes through the other: I do not believe this, but I believe that the other believes. I contend that this form of essentially capitalist subjectivity and the related notion of the “subject supposed to believe” provides an answer to the perpetual question of whether Lázaro the Toledan town crier is a hypocrite and on the function of his “inquisitor” or narratee, Vuestra Merced.⁴ Lázaro does not believe in his “cumbre de buena fortuna” and his status as an honorable man, but he believes that the other (Vuestra Merced) believes, and this fetishist operation affirms his value as an individual and subject. Thus this article has, on one hand, the objective to shed light on a historical process through the lens of a classic literary text. On the other, this process helps us to understand the shape of the “imaginary resolution” in the classic text. Finally, both aspects of this analysis of *Lazarillo* reflect on the ideological bias of the question of value of cultural capital and what is still worth reading in the 21st century, of what should be the subject of institutional and publically funded teaching and research.

Before I analyze Lázaro’s life story I want to take one step further back, to Diego de San Pedro’s *Cárcel de amor*. Although this late 15th-century text is acknowledged by specialists as a masterpiece of so-called sentimental romance, it does not enjoy the same reputation as the *Lazarillo* among critics and general readers.⁵ It rarely merits the label classic because it is a text marked by an aesthetic and epistemological underpinning alien to the modern reader. In spite of obvious differences between the exuberant, artificial language and the setting in the lofty world of the wealthy and noble in *Cárcel de amor*, and the “realism” of the first picaresque novel, both works coincide in a crucial aspect: the emergence of the authorial subject. Although San Pedro created a narrator who has many similarities with Lázaro de Tormes - posturing as an author, narrator, and an interpassive subject - he ultimately validates his text and his authority through interpersonal fetishism.

San Pedro’s masterpiece *Cárcel de amor* is related to the *annus mirabilis* 1492, the convenient reference date for the beginning of our age: Modernity.⁶ The first extant edition of the text was printed in Seville (Cuatro Compañeros Alemanes), in the year 1492.⁷ The publication of this short *tratado* seems a pale afterthought to the monumental changes associated with 1492; yet *Cárcel* is a text that reflects, in many respects, the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity.⁸ Like other authors of sentimental fiction, San Pedro explored a disastrous, perhaps tragic love

story, in a highly rhetorical style and with allegorical elements reminiscent of contemporary *cancionero* poetry. Like other sentimental romances, *Cárcel* ends with a somber note: Leriano's self-inflicted death. The frustrated lover, in anguish at his rejection by the noble and "ungrateful" Laureola, "lets himself die" ("se dexava morir"; San Pedro 64).⁹ In terms of language, imagery, and, more importantly, the psychological make-up of the lovers, *Cárcel* is a typical *novela sentimental*. It resonates with literary tradition and earlier specimens of the genre rather than foreshadowing the apotheosis of literature in the Golden Age. However, in one respect this text is highly original and a milestone in Spanish literature: while it has, like other sentimental romances, a pseudo-autobiographic or epistolary narrative structure, the narrator is not the heroic noble lover, but a confidant who is not his equal.

Leriano, a nobleman, loves princess Laureola of Macedonia, who does not return his affections. Suffering lovesickness, Leriano is abducted by a wild man called Deseo, an allegory of the contradictions of courtly love (Deyermond, "Hombre salvaje" 108) and mirror image of the chivalric lover, to the allegorical Prison of Love. He escapes when a letter from Laureola sparks his hope; he returns to Macedonia, causes Laureola to be imprisoned, and frees her heroically, only to be rejected in the end. He takes to his bed, refuses food and drink, and dies after drinking Laureola's letter, which he has dissolved in water, muttering the words "Acabados son mis males" (San Pedro 79).

This story is narrated by a character called El Auctor. El Auctor is not only a witness to the events, but an impresario of sorts: he meets the prisoner Leriano and follows him to the Prison of Love; he delivers Leriano's letter to Laureola; he is Leriano's confidant, counsellor and go-between; he witnesses the knight's pathetic death. Since El Auctor interprets Laureola's pity as a sign of love and advises Leriano falsely (Folger, *Images in Mind* 215-217), he is ultimately responsible not only for Leriano's escape but also his ultimate undoing.¹⁰

Several critics have acknowledged that San Pedro created a remarkable character and narrator in El Auctor. Elaborating on Peter N. Dunn's claim that San Pedro "discovered how to do an allegory of authorship" (198), Jeanne Battesti Pelegrin discerns a progression from El Auctor's initial total absorption by Leriano to his emancipation as an objective narrator (16-17). Similarly, James Mandrell opposes the "psychological simplicity" (100) of the other characters in *Cárcel* (and sentimental romance, in general) to El Auctor's sophistication and complexity as character and narrator.¹¹ He discerns in the novel a gradually achieved "mastery of various systems of signs ... The misreadings

constitute a record, the traces of a developing analytic ability and ultimately of discursive authority" (101). Rogelio Miñana also compares El Auctor favorably to the old-fashioned courtly lover Leriano: the "superimposition" of author (San Pedro) and character (El Auctor) has the effect of bolstering the narrator's authority and gradually turning El Auctor into the "emotional protagonist" of *Cárcel* (142). E. Michael Gerli aptly summarizes the critical appreciations of El Auctor: "*Cárcel de Amor* is, in the final analysis, more the story of *El Auctor's* entanglement and the chronicle of his affective reactions than the story of Leriano and Laureola" (475). The actual protagonist of *Cárcel* is not the suffering and passive hero Leriano, but El Auctor, "the only one," as Dunn points out, "among all these love-bound, honor-bound, obedient or fearful characters, who is free to create his own role. In that sense, of course, he is the real author's surrogate..." (198).

El Auctor is an alter ego of the failed courtly lover Leriano, usurping the knight's protagonism, both as a narrator and as a character.¹² Is Dunn right in describing him as the "real author's surrogate" and, if so, who is this narrator/author? The marvelous illustrations of the 1493 Rosenbach edition of a Catalan translation (Barcelona: Bernardi Vallmanya) provide clues to how he was perceived by contemporary readers.¹³ In contrast to Leriano's courtly attire he wears a scholar's cloak: the illustrator imagined him not as a member of the traditional elites, but as a *letrado*, a man belonging to the class of university-trained functionaries who played a crucial role in the genesis of the Spanish nation state from the time of the Catholic Monarchs.¹⁴ According to Ruth el Saffar, *letrados* embodied a new individualist "mentality," a sense of self based not on genealogy ("earlier notions of regional or tribal loyalty") but on "ideological linkage" (165-166). The illustrator's representation of El Auctor as a "clerk" is confirmed by the description of his actions. He is a man of letters, not of arms. His relationship to the noble Leriano is best described as a secretary. Without belonging to courtly society, he inserts himself smoothly into the Macedonian court (Mandrell 106), becomes Leriano's confidant, and manages his affairs.

Although little is known about the historical San Pedro, it is reasonable to conjecture that the author of *Cárcel de amor* belonged to this class of *letrados*. The rhetorical brilliance of his texts makes it likely that he was socialized in the university milieu.¹⁵ He was possibly of *converso* descent, and, as he indicated in his last known work, the *Desprecio de la Fortuna*, he served the Count of Ureña, of the powerful Tellez-Girón family, for 29 years.¹⁶ The *incipit* of the text explains that San Pedro composed *Cárcel de amor* at the request of "Diego Hernandes, alcaide de los donzeles, y de

otros caballeros cortesanos" (3). Moreover, San Pedro's introduction is addressed to a "muy virtuoso señor" (3), and both *incipit* and salutation indicate that the addressee is a knight with relations to the court, a man of arms with a taste for courtly love.

On one hand, El Auctor/San Pedro constructs his authority in the text at the expense of the traditional noble and courtly narrator/protagonist. On the other, San Pedro's new auctorial subject serves the nobleman Leriano in the narrated world, and writes his novel in the "real world," at the request of his aristocratic master. His printed text is a commodity on the book market, and San Pedro himself "sells" his services to Diego Hernández.¹⁷ Yet despite these modern features, *Cárcel de amor* is a text at the threshold to the Golden Age, still anchored in the courtly world. There is at first sight no economic dimension to this work. It evokes a world of psychological suffering but apparent affluence. Destitution appears in the end, with Leriano's hunger strike, but this suffering is presented not as the result of poverty but as his own "heroic" choice. His refusal of food is marked as a privilege of the nobleman, and ultimately, as a sign of his noble condition.

Yet in this archaic world El Auctor, the *letrado* and proto-bourgeois subject, roams freely. He serves various masters and determines his own fate. The final line of the text indicates that *Cárcel de amor* is at the crossroads of two historically distinct forms of subjectivity and authorship: El Auctor, now become San Pedro, kisses the hands of "vuestra merced" (79). At the end of the narration and his travels the narrator-turned-author returns to his master. His text is, as a product of print culture, a commodity, and addresses an absent and anonymous reader, but it ultimately evokes a face-to-face situation typical for medieval literature. This final encounter between narrator and narratee is an encounter between the author and his noble master. The noble master is naturally invested with virtue and he is, as the ritual kiss indicates, the source of authority and, at the same time, the object of libidinal investment.

My reading of *Cárcel de amor* has foregrounded the parallels of this presumably medieval text and the first modern novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The actual protagonist of *Cárcel* is a commoner who serves noble masters, although in apparently comfortable economic circumstances. San Pedro wrote his *Cárcel de amor* "a pedimiento" (3) of a high-ranking aristocrat; in the very last passage of the text, this personality, Diego de Hernández, reappears as "vuestra merced" (79). The fact that *Cárcel* is formally a letter, commissioned by Vuestra Merced, has occasionally earned San Pedro's sentimental romance a passing mention regarding the similarities with the narrative setting of Lázaro's *Vida*.¹⁸ Despite these common features, both

texts are not only characterized by a fundamentally different subject, style, and aesthetics, but also differ in the ideology they transmit.¹⁹

While in *Cárcel de amor* the socio-economic situation of the Age of the Catholic Kings is implicit and silenced, in the *Lazarillo*, the realities of everyday life in Golden Age Spain are foregrounded in the protagonist's struggle to *medrar*, to improve his situation and prosper socially and economically.²⁰ Early in his life, Lazarillo and his family struggle for survival. He is born to a miller and his wife in a mill in the river Tormes. The father has to abandon the family after committing petty theft, and the family relocates to Salamanca where the mother cooks and washes for students and grooms and possibly prostitutes herself. In order to support the family she has a relationship with a black stableman who is probably a slave. After Lazarillo's "stepfather" is cruelly punished for stealing to buy food, his mother is no longer able to feed the family. She entrusts Lazarillo to a blind beggar as a guide and servant (*mozo*). The *ciego* gives Lázaro his first lessons in the art of survival in a world characterized by hunger and violence against the powerless. He takes revenge for the beggar's abuse when he lures him into jumping against a stone post, and looks for a new master. This master, the priest of Máqueda, a miser and hypocrite, nearly starves him to death. After losing a game of wits and roguery he is violently punished, and has to look for a new master. He joins a squire who maintains the façade of an honorable man, but has no economic means himself. Lazarillo's situation improves because he does not suffer physical and psychological abuse from the squire, but he still suffers from destitution. The squire abandons Lazarillo, who subsequently serves a series of other masters who deal in dubious trades. The theme of hunger gradually disappears from the narration and his fate takes a turn for the better when a chaplain makes him a water seller. Lazarillo is able to accumulate some capital that allows him to buy used clothes, an "hábito de hombre de bien" (*Lazarillo* 127). This is the decisive step to becoming a respectable man: "Y con favor que tuve de amigos y señores, todos mis trabajos y fatigas hasta entonces pasados fueron pagados con alcanzar lo que procuré, que fue un oficio real, viendo que no hay nadie que medre, sino los que le tienen" (*Lazarillo* 128-29). This royal office is the position of town crier (*pregonero*) of Toledo and *criado* of the Archpriest of San Salvador, who marries him to a servant of his. Although *pregonero* is a lowly office, and there are rumors that his wife is the Archpriest's concubine, Lázaro has escaped hunger and violence, and enjoys a comfortable life.²¹ This is the story he tells to his addressee, Vuestra Merced, who has requested information on "the case:" "Vuestra Merced escribe se le escriba y relate el caso" (*Lazarillo* 10).

Lázaro's account portrays endemic poverty and a whole range of the sort of unproductive occupations that plagued 16th-century Castile. In this respect it is a realist text because Spain suffered an economic crisis in the "Golden Age" that was related to the political developments of the time, and particularly to the profound socio-economic changes caused by the first wave of European-led globalization.²² With the establishment of a colonial empire, Spain extracted large amounts of resources (mainly bullion) from the subjugated territories that fueled nascent capitalism and widened social inequality. Unsurprisingly, scholarship has increasingly focused on the economic dimension of the *Lazarillo* in the last few decades.

In a seminal 1982 article, John Beverley related the *Lazarillo* to Marx's original accumulation (*ursprüngliche Akkumulation*), describing *Lázaro*, in the words of Georg Lukács, as an "epic of alienation" (30):

Capitalism, Marx held, was a mode of production based on the extraction of a surplus value from the production and sale of commodities; this is why within capitalism human relations and human needs come to be increasingly mediated by, or transformed into, the commodity form. ... It is, therefore, the transformation of the human capacity and propensity for creative labor into a commodity which can be bought and sold - labor power - that essentially distinguishes capitalism from other social systems and epochs. (34)

Beverley depicts Lázaro de Tormes, who is an eminently mobile subject and "free" to "sell himself" to his masters, as the emblematic figure of the early urban proletariat, which was necessary for the functioning of capitalist forms of production. Maurice Molho sees in early 16th-century Spain the establishment of a "suerte de capitalismo especulativo, que no es el del trabajo, sino el de la ociosidad" (205). He reads the picaresque novel as a disavowal of all forms of acquisition, "según la ideología del grupo dominante" (26).²³ Subsequent studies by Anne J. Cruz (*Discourses of Poverty*) and Juan Carlos Rodríguez have explored the relation between picaresque fiction and actual poverty, and the heated debates waged by moralists and economists in the Golden Age. In 2003, Giancarlo Maiorino and Francisco Sánchez published two monographs that focus on the economic underbelly of the first picaresque novel. Maiorino argues that "conspicuous destitution ... makes Lázaro de Tormes dream of becoming a consumer amid laborers who toil at the periphery of affluence" (16). Following Rodríguez's lead, Sánchez analyzes the "bourgeois" ideology underlying the *Lazarillo* and "the formation of a private sphere of social action and the formation of a literary sphere to represent early bourgeois values and feelings" (11). In 2011, Susana Camps Perarnau proposed a

“lectura fiscal” which sees the economic reality of 16th-century Spain not only as the background for the narration but its *raison d’être*. Reconstructing the fiscal system of the time, she argues that the “denominador común” (666) of the *dramatis personae*, their occupations and ambitions, is tax evasion or tax fraud. She holds that Lázaro’s dream of obtaining an *oficio real* is fueled by the desire to be exempt from tax, too. In the same year Felipe Ruan studied the convergence between *pícaro* and *cortesano*, the rogue’s tale and the manuals of courtly conduct, and the underlying logic of economic calculus.²⁴

This substantial and growing body of scholarly work on the *Lazarillo* and the economic reality of early modern Spain is heterogeneous in its classification of *Lazarillo* as a criticism of this reality (from the perspective of the lower class, the bourgeoisie or the traditional elites) or as an expression of early bourgeois desires and phantasies.²⁵ However, all of these studies unmistakably point to the *Vida*’s relation to nascent capitalism, with its ramifications of alienation, financial speculation, and class antagonism.

According to Marx, capitalism has a very curious effect on the relationship between humans and the things they produce:

Es ist nur das bestimmte gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Menschen selbst, welches hier für sie die phantasmagorische Form eines Verhältnisses von Dingen annimmt... Hier scheinen die Produkte des menschlichen Kopfes mit eigenem Leben begabte, untereinander und mit den Menschen in Verhältnis stehende selbständige Gestalten. So in der Warenwelt die Produkte der menschlichen Hand. Dies nenne ich den Fetischismus, der den Arbeitsprodukten anklebt, sobald sie als Waren produziert werden, und der daher von der Warenproduktion unzertrennlich ist. (86)

[It is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.... In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities]. (47)

The capitalist fetishism has its most extreme manifestation in the form of money, which does not have use value per se, but must be seen as the materialization or symbolization of socio-economic relations.

Žižek has argued that a “humanist ideological opposition” is at the

heart of Marxist fetishism, that is, the differentiation between humans and things:

[T]here is another, entirely different - structural - concept of fetishism already at work in Marx: at this level, "fetishism" designates the short-circuit between the formal/differential structure (which is by definition 'absent,' i.e. it is never given 'as such' in our experiential reality) and a positive element of this structure. When we are victims of the 'fetishist' illusion, we (mis)perceive as the immediate/'natural' property of the object-fetish that which is conferred upon this object on account of its place within the structure. ("Interpassive Subject")

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek elaborates on the notion of fetishism, making it the principle of attribution of value in all processes of exchange. A corollary of this thought is that fetishist *méconnaissance*, the "misrecognition" of an element as positive when it is actually the product of a differential structure, is not limited to capitalism. In other historic formations fetishism takes different manifestations. In feudal society, individuals *believe* that they treat their lord as their lord, whom they revere and obey, because he is their lord *essentially* - that is, before entering the Symbolic Order and social relations:

"Being-a-king" is an effect of the network of social relations between a 'king' and his 'subjects;' but - and here is the fetishistic misrecognition - to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of 'being-a-king' were a 'natural' property of the person of a king. (20)

The king's sacred aura, which the aristocracy derives from him in order to justify their privileged position vis-à-vis their subjects, is not the expression of a natural quality (or value) of the royal person, but an effect of socio-economic relations that should be properly described as a relation between *Herr* and *Knecht*.

In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the interpersonal fetishism directed at the master endowed with "magical" qualities gives way to commodity fetishism. In a capitalist order, we do not have a master and a "slave" who accepts the former's rule, but supposedly free and equal subjects involved in exchange processes - to the alleged benefit of both parties.²⁶ In capitalism a fetishist projection ascribes value not to "nobles" but to things, products, and commodities, obscuring the actual power relations.

In *Cárcel de amor*, we still see the workings of interpersonal fetishism when El Auctor/San Pedro returns to his master's manor and kisses his hand as a symbol of submission - as well as veneration and libidinal attachment. In the *Lazarillo* the situation has obviously changed. As an effect of the primitive accumulation described by Beverley, Lázaro is a mobile, "free" subject who is not fetishistically attached to an inherently "worthy" master but offers his services to the master who promises the greatest reward. He, and all other individuals in the novel, have been commodified, and "human relationships" are conceived "as an exchange of goods and services" (Albrecht 12).

The new capitalist monetary economy and the fetishist valuation of "things" manifests itself in the first *tratado* clearly in an episode reminiscent of the grubby financial practices of the epoch, in the "exchange" of the *medias blancas* for *blancas*, when Lazarillo exchanges the coins (*blancas*) the blind beggar receives for his prayers to less valuable *medias blancas* which he keeps in his mouth.²⁷ The fetishist character of things is also apparent in the second *tratado* in Lázaro's pseudo-sacred "adoration" of the bread locked away in a chest by the *clérigo* of Máqueda. After his apprenticeship, Lázaro accumulates a modest sum of money that allows him to buy used clothes. His new apparel gives him the appearance of an honorable man, secures him the desired "royal office" as a town-crier and enables him to become a *pater familias*.²⁸ I will return to the question of whether this move "deproletarianizes" (Beverley 38) Lázaro and allows him to escape capitalist exploitation through free menial labor and a biased tax system (Camps Perarnau).

While the fetishist attachment to commodities is initially "naturalized" and obscured by its association with subsistence (food and wine), the dissolution of interpersonal fetishism is explicitly displayed in the first *tratado*. When Lazarillo is forced to abandon his "close-knit family" (Herrero 883), he first accepts the blind beggar as a father figure, but quickly realizes that his master is just a competitor for resources.²⁹ The process of his disillusionment culminates when the blind man tricks him into pressing his ears against the stone bull at the old bridge in Salamanca only to smash his head against it: "Parescióme que en aquel instante desperté de la simpleza en que, como niño, dormido estaba. Dije entre mí: 'Verdad dice éste, que me cumple avivar el ojo y avisar, pues solo soy, y pensar cómo me sepa valer'" (*Lazarillo* 23). He discovers his own value (as a commodity) and the need to increase this value. This insight is confirmed by his experience with the *clérigo* in the next *tratado*. Lazarillo does not build a fetishist relation with this member of the traditional elites; on the contrary, he understands that this master does not have a "value" as a

human being, but is merely another subject obsessed with the accumulation of riches.

His relationship with his third master, the impoverished *escudero*, is apparently different. While Lazarillo loathes his former masters, he feels compassion for the *escudero*: “Tanta lástima haya Dios de mí como yo había dél, porque sentí lo que sentía, y muchas veces había por ello pasado y pasaba cada día” (*Lazarillo* 89). Compassion, however, is an emotion incompatible with traditional interpersonal fetishism, because compassion implies identification, and identification is only possible if the other is recognized as similar or equal. While it could be expected that Lazarillo feels the “natural” value and superiority of the nobleman, he sees the *escudero* as a subject like himself.³⁰ This nobleman still dreams of a fetishist feudal relationship, as he reveals in the “relación de su *persona valerosa*” (*Lazarillo* 106; my emphasis), as Lazarillo sardonically calls it. The squire complains to his servant: “Caballeros de media talla también me ruegan; mas servir con éstos es gran trabajo, porque de hombre os habéis de convertir en malilla...” (*Lazarillo* 103). Yet he is not willing to undertake any “gran trabajo:” “Y vine a esta ciudad pensando que hallaría un buen asiento ... Ya cuando asienta un hombre con un señor de título, todavía pasa su lacería” (*Lazarillo* 103-104). The desired *asiento* is the opposite of the jobs Lazarillo is willing (or forced) to take on. By *asiento*, the squire means a permanent attachment to a powerful and *worthy* “señor de título” which will secure him a carefree existence at the cost of subjecting himself to an authority figure.

This phantasy of the *escudero*, who does not realize his dream, shows that interpersonal fetishism is residual or even anachronistic in the 16th century. The still hegemonic ideogeme of the aristocracy, the natural, genealogically guaranteed supremacy and economic domination of the elites, is in contradiction with the socio-economic realities, that is, with a social system based on capital accumulation and a waning of aristocratic interpersonal fetishism.³¹ While in *Cárcel de amor* bourgeois subjectivity is still checked by the attachment to a powerful master, Lázaro’s *Vida* reflects the decisive shift from interpersonal fetishism to commodity fetishism. If we accept this premise, it becomes possible to shed new light on three debates in *Lazarillo* scholarship: firstly, the sincerity of his claim to be an honorable man; secondly, his suspicious insistence on having succeeded in “arrimarse a los buenos” (*Lazarillo* 15); and, thirdly, the nature or function of *Vuestra Merced*.

Following his analysis of the workings of the fetish, Žižek discusses the epistemic status of “fetishist knowledge.” “[P]eople are well aware how things really stand, they know very well that the commodity-money is

nothing but a reified form of the appearance of social relations” (“Interpassive Subject”). However, they behave as if they were not aware of the realities. Žižek sees the explanation for this phenomenon in the structure of the “subject supposed to believe,” analogous to Jacques Lacan’s *sujet supposé savoir*.³²

[A]t its most radical, the status of the (Lacanian) big Other qua symbolic institution, is that of belief (trust), not that of knowledge, since belief is symbolic and knowledge is real (the big Other involves, and relies on, a fundamental “trust”). The two subjects are thus not symmetrical since belief and knowledge themselves are not symmetrical: belief is always minimally “reflective,” a “belief in the belief of the other” (“I still believe in Communism” is the equivalent of saying “I believe there are still people who believe in Communism”), while knowledge is precisely not knowledge about the fact that there is another who knows. For this reason, I can BELIEVE through the other, but I cannot KNOW through the other. (“Interpassive Subject”)

We have seen that Lázaro is primarily concerned with the value (*valor*) of his person, and value is a matter of belief. His value as a human being is essentially related to the presumed *ménage à trois* between him, his wife, and the archpriest: “Hasta el día de hoy nunca nadie nos oyó sobre el caso. ...Que yo juraré sobre la hostia consagrada que es tan buena mujer como vive dentro de las puertas de Toledo. Quien otra cosa me dijere, yo me mataré con él” (*Lazarillo* 134-135). He is convinced that his defense of his honor and value has been successful: “Desta manera no me dicen nada, y yo tengo paz en mi casa” (*Lazarillo* 135). However, swearing on the host is not a demonstration of knowledge, but a publically performed act of believing. M. J. Woods’ conclusion that Lázaro “in all likelihood ... knows no more than his friends” (594) is compelling. Lázaro does not know for sure; he probably does not even believe that his wife is not having an affair with the archpriest, but he believes that the others believe, and does everything to assure that. This is ultimately the rationale of his own “relación de su persona valerosa” (*Lazarillo* 106).

Whoever the intended narratee may have been, his response to *Vuestra Merced* is also an address to the subject supposed to believe, who has the *function of believing* that Lázaro is an honorable man who has achieved his “buen puerto” (*Lazarillo* 11), as he says in the prologue.³³ Under the conditions of early capitalism, where the individual is a commodity with a certain value, he must believe that somebody believes in his value as a *pater familias* and successful self-made man, or *homo novus* (Truman); in responding to a query about “the case” with the “entera

noticia” of his “persona” (*Lazarillo* 11) Lázaro reacts as an interpassive subject.³⁴ Hence he is not simply a hypocrite, as many critics hold, although he himself does not believe in his story, he believes through the other.

To sum up, we can see in Lazarillo’s attempt to escape poverty through capital accumulation and his detachment from his masters the transition from interpersonal fetishism to commodity fetishism. We have seen that in capitalism commodity fetishism presupposes or produces an interpassive subject that believes through the other. In Lázaro’s case this belief through the other is directed at *Vuestra Merced*, whose believed belief ratifies Lázaro’s self image, providing a Jamesonian “imaginary resolution” to a contradiction of Early Modern Spanish society and culture. This reading of *Lazarillo* produces more coincidences between the historical text and our present situation if we have a look at the mechanisms of capital exchange, the exchange of different forms of capital in the novel, and, most importantly, the more or less arbitrary assignment of value to cultural capital based on the misrecognition by interpassive subjects.

History shows that the development of capitalism stalled in the Spanish Empire for various reasons. One of them is the rejection of the new economic regime based on the accumulation, exchange, and investment of capital by the elites, and a broader public that tried to emulate the unproductive aristocratic way of life. Lázaro’s career seems to illustrate this. His office as a water seller is his “primer escalón ... para venir a alcanzar buena vida” (*Lazarillo* 126). This job enables him to accumulate enough capital (*recaudo*) to make an investment:

Fueme tan bien en el oficio, que al cabo de cuatro años que lo usé, con poner en la ganancia buen recaudo, ahorré para me vestir muy honradamente de la ropa vieja, de la cual compré un jubón de fustán viejo y un sayo raído de manga tranzada y puerta y una capa que había sido frisada, y una espada de las viejas primeras de Cuéllar (*Lazarillo* 126-127).

Most critics have seen in his attempt to emulate the squire’s “razonable vestido” (72) a pathetic failure, making a “buffoon” of himself “who is unaware of his own buffoonery and provides him with the illusion of his self-determination in a society where everyone is subject to the desires of others” (Sieber 85).³⁵ However, if Lázaro is a buffoon then all subjects in capitalism are buffoons, because they attribute value to things exceeding their use-value.

Of course, Harry Sieber is right in pointing out that that self-determination is an illusion, but I do not think that Lázaro entertains this

illusion. He does not simply emulate the noble squire because of this nobility (which would be an instance of interpersonal fetishism), but because he has learned an important lesson: there is value in the *habitus*, both in its meaning as clothing and in the sense given to the term by Pierre Bourdieu: “a *habitus*, understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perception, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (*Outline* 82-83; my emphasis).³⁶ The third *tratado* indicates that Lazarillo attentively studies the aristocratic habitus of the *escudero*; he admires not his person but the public display of nobility and honor.³⁷ With the purchase of his new attire he transforms his economic capital, the little money he has earned, into symbolic and cultural capital.³⁸

It is explicitly only with the help of his “razonable vestido” and the habitus he has acquired that he is eligible to become *pregonero* and *criado* of the archpriest of San Salvador. This investment is the first step in assuring not only his social standing, but also a comfortable life. Lázaro’s strategy resonates with a fundamental insight we owe to the studies of Bourdieu: the sphere of culture (ostentatious tastes and styles) is not separated from the sphere of the economy, because all forms of cultural production have an economic aspect to them. Under certain circumstances, though not necessarily always, as the squire’s sorry fate shows, cultural and symbolic capital can be converted into economic capital.

Lázaro does not opt out of capitalism, as it were, but invests in other forms of capital. However, this choice indicates that the exchange rate of economic and cultural/symbolic capital differed significantly from ours and the high valuation of cultural and particularly symbolic capital was one of the major obstacles to the flourishing of capitalism in Early Modern Spain. Bourdieu explains that the working of cultural capital is predicated upon veiling its relation to economic capital, both as a precondition for its acquisition and its favorable exchange into economic capital (“Ökonomisches Kapital” 187). *Lazarillo* reveals cultural capital’s dependency on wealth, but also his society’s attempts to obscure this relation. Moreover, Bourdieu holds that the exchange value of cultural capital grows in those societies in which the direct and visible forms of transmission of economic capital are socially repudiated and controlled (188). The social rejection of economic capital accrued through capitalist production in Golden Age Spain makes Lazarillo’s exchange of economic capital for cultural and social capital a good investment, and is also one explanation for the “obsession” with honor and the slow development of capitalism proper.

I began this essay by postulating a certain “synchronicity” between the Spanish Golden Age and our present. In both eras, the exchange rates of cultural and economic capital were undergoing a shift. Today cultural capital is dramatically devalued because the accumulation and the transference of capital is done in the open, and socially (or at least politically) fully accepted. *Lazarillo*, then, illustrates that there is always a fetishistic side to economic and cultural products, including scholarship, which - at least in the humanities - produces cultural capital rather than commodities. Fetishism “magically” ascribes value to commodities (things and people), obfuscating the arbitrary nature of this value and the actual power relations.

If something can be learned from this - in the sense of providing an “imaginary resolution” - it is that the value of cultural capital will evaporate if we are led to believe through the other (I do not believe but I believe others to believe) that value is conceived in purely economic, utilitarian, and ultimately monetary terms, and that this contingent historical formation is natural and without alternatives.

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NOTES

- 1 In 1554, *Lazarillo* was published in four different editions in Burgos, Medina del Campo, Antwerp, and Alcalá de Henares. None of them is the *editio princeps*, which was probably published shortly before 1554. For more on the editorial history, see Martino 1: 2-45.
- 2 Accordingly, *Lazarillo* scholarship is all but unmanageable. Martino provides the most comprehensive overview of studies before 1999. I discuss more recent pertinent monographs below.
- 3 Lee’s translation tends to blur the recurring theme of the economic dimension of the classic text.
- 4 Several scholars have established a link between inquisitorial practices and Lázaro’s *relación* (for a survey of scholarship see my *Picaresque and Bureaucracy* 67; 90-91); I argue that it is not the Inquisition, but a broader economy of *mercedes* and the “invitation” (interpellation) to autobiography that are the matrix of the text.
- 5 For a survey of current scholarship on *Cárcel de amor*, see Folger, *Escape*.
- 6 See Jameson’s critique of postmodernism and the concept of postmodernity in his *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

- 7 Textual evidence (Minervini 29-30) - and the fact that a Catalan translation was published only a few months later, with elaborate illustrations including a banner with a Castilian title in the first woodcut of the allegorical prison - suggests that the actual *editio princeps* may have been printed slightly before 1492.
- 8 On the emergence of new forms of subjectivity and related forms of literature in *Cárcel*, see Folger, *Escape from the Prison of Love*.
- 9 The rationale of Nicolás Núñez's continuation (*tratado*) was to rehabilitate the failed courtly lover and blame the ungrateful Laureola (see Folger, "Gender Trouble").
- 10 I analyze the role of el Auctor in the emergence of modern forms of (authorial) subjectivity in detail in Chapter 3.2 of *Escape from the Prison of Love* (132-153).
- 11 See also Rohland de Langbehn (144). Ihrle attributes to El Auctor a "great resemblance to Mercury, god of rhetoric" (10).
- 12 See my *Escape from the Prison of Love* regarding San Pedro's complex arrangement of mirrorings between El Auctor, Leriano, and Deseo, along the axis constituted by the "phallic image" of Laureola.
- 13 The image has been reproduced in numerous editions and studies; see, for instance, Deyermond ("The Woodcuts"), who also provides information on the Catalan translation.
- 14 See Maravall and Phillips.
- 15 For San Pedro's biography see Parrilla's introduction to her edition of *Cárcel* (37-44) and Whinnom.
- 16 See Parrilla 37-38.
- 17 See Severin's *Del manuscrito a la imprenta en la época de Isabel la Católica*, in which she argues that the author reacted to the editorial success of his *Arnalte y Lucenda* with the composition and preparation of *Cárcel* for the letterpress (7). See also Beverley, who reflects on the printed book's nature as a fetish (29).
- 18 See, for instance, Lázaro Carreter 42.
- 19 Ideology is, according to Althusser's classic definition, a "*rapport imaginaire des individus à leurs conditions réelles d'existence*" (296; his emphasis ["imaginary relation between individuals and their real condition of existence"; my translation]. I provide a detailed analysis of *Lazarillo's* relation to early modern bureaucracy and its interpellative ideological function in *Writing as Poaching* (chapter 3). Elsewhere, I also analyze the relation between *Cárcel* and *Lazarillo*, particularly regarding the emergence of "autobiographic" discourse (see "'Besando las manos de vuestra merced'").
- 20 Márquez Villanueva and Weissberger tease out the political implications.
- 21 The nature and desirability of this office is another bone of contention in *Lazarillo* scholarship; see Folger, *Picaresque and Bureaucracy* 97-98.

- 22 Camps Perarnau gives a good impression of the reasons for this crisis and the shape it took.
- 23 Molho argues that, despite the authors' ideological bias, the picaresque novel enables the *pícaro*, in a twist of the Hegelian *Herr/Knecht* dialectic, to gain self-consciousness (214).
- 24 Ruan draws on Bourdieu and his notion of the *habitus*, taking into account not only forms of economic, but also cultural and social capital.
- 25 I do not claim that this overview is exhaustive, as most readings of the *Lazarillo* necessarily address the historical socio-economic "context." Manuel Cabado holds that, with the advent of economic modernity, "comienza a acentuarse una división naturalista entre necesidades reales e imaginarias que intenta ser representada en los orígenes de la literatura picaresca" (2). Playing on the German pun of *Täuschung* (fraud, deception) und *Tausch* (exchange), Urban shows how the "performative competence" of the *pícaro*, that is, his guiles and trickeries, are related to capitalist exchange. In my own reading of the *Lazarillo* (*Picaresque and Bureaucracy*), I focus on the emergence of a modern "self-determined" form of subjectivity related to capitalism.
- 26 It should be noted that the common translation of "slave" for Hegel's *Knecht* is somewhat misleading, as it subsumes various forms of bondage. Lázaro's relationship to his early masters can be properly described as *Knechtschaft*.
- 27 Rico analyzes the economic implications of this episode.
- 28 The question of whether he has really reached, as I believe, the "cumbre de toda buena fortuna" (*Lazarillo* 135), or descended in moral degradation and dishonor does not bear on the argument I make in this study; see Folger, *Picaresque and Bureaucracy*, particularly chapters 3.2 and 3.6.
- 29 Regarding the "corruption" of the maternal *imago* see Cruz ("Abjected Feminine" 102).
- 30 In *Escape from the Prison of Love* I trace the emergence of a form of "strong subjectivity" necessary for identification.
- 31 Jameson defines the ideologeme as a "pseudo-idea" and, at the same time, "proto-narrative" (*Political Unconscious* 87-88).
- 32 Lacan discusses the notion in relation to transference (230-243). According to Lacan the subject supposed to know is not the actual analyst but the *function* he embodies for the analysand.
- 33 See notes 4 and 30.
- 34 This reading is congruent with my earlier interpretation of *Vuestra Merced* as a stand-in for Althusser's *Sujet*; see Folger, *Picaresque and Bureaucracy* 143-154. Žižek's interpassive subject and the figure of the believer through the other can also shed new light on the vexing question of the supposed insincerity or hypocrisy of the Golden Age code of honor.

- 35 The relationship between picaresque fiction and the figure of the buffoon has
 been explored by recent scholarship; see, for instance, Roncero López.
- 36 See Folger, *Picaresque and Bureaucracy* 106-134, and Ruan, who also
 emphasizes the importance of habitus formation for an understanding of the
 picaresque novel.
- 37 “¡Y velle venir a mediodía la calle abajo, con estirado cuerpo, más largo que
 galgo de buena casta!” (*Lazarillo* 94). The entire *escudero* episode can be
 described as a study of his habitus and the economic reality it covers up.
- 38 Bourdieu succinctly explains his thoughts on the different forms of capital and
 their mutual transformability in an article first published in German
 (“Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital”).

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