

## *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the Motif-Index.

### Some comments on J. Wesley Childers's *Tales from the Spanish Picaresque Novel: A Motif-Index*.

The question of the relationship of folklore to literature is one of long standing, especially in the field of the Spanish picaresque novel, in which specific episodes have descended directly from traditional folklore, whilst other motifs (which may have been original to the picaresque) have themselves become traditional.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between an author's direct borrowings from a folk tradition and the artistic use to which he has put such borrowings within his work of art. Further, as R. O. Jones has pointed out with regard to the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, "to search too ingeniously for 'origins' of this kind, and to try and find folklore in everything in the book, can easily lead to absurdity."<sup>2</sup>

My purpose now is to analyze the classifications which J. Wesley Childers<sup>3</sup> has made of certain motifs from *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and to show how, when removed from their context, these motifs are distorted from their true meaning. It will soon be obvious that some motifs are highly ambiguous even within their contexts. Such ambiguities are not accounted for within the motif-index. First, however, some definitions will be necessary especially as none are present within Childers's text.

Stith Thompson has suggested that, for the study of folk narrative "a clear differentiation between type and motif is necessary, for the problems of arrangement are essentially different in the two fields."<sup>4</sup> He also shows that a "complete tale (type) is made up of a number of motifs in a relatively fixed order and combination" (*FT*, p. 415). A type is defined as "a traditional tale that has an independent existence," whilst a motif is the "smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition" (*FT*, p. 415). The purpose of the motif-index is to show identity or similarity in the tale elements, so that motifs from all parts of the world may be conveniently studied (see *FT*, p. 416).

There is, unfortunately, no statement of intent in Childers's motif-index; there is also a lack of clarity in his classification of individual motifs, as will be seen when some of the more relevant of Childers's motif-index entries from *Lazarillo de Tormes* are examined. For example, the blind man (*ciego*) from the first *tratado* (of *Lazarillo*) is indexed in a reasonably consistent manner, being referred to as a "blind man," an "old blind man," "master," "blind deceiver—master," and "blind beggar—sham wise man" (pp. 30, 38, 58, 116, 140, 154, 169, and 188). The most obvious difficulty is that of the classification of the *ciego* as a "sham wise man" since *Lazarillo* constantly

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, "Función del cuento popular en el *Lazarillo de Tormes*," *Actas del I Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas* (Oxford: Dolphin, 1964), pp. 349-59; F. Lazaro Carreter, *Lazarillo de Tormes en la picaresca* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1972); Marcel Bataillon, *Novedad y fecundidad del Lazarillo de Tormes* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1968); A. D. Deyermond, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1975).

<sup>2</sup>*La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963; rpt. 1966), p. xxiv.

<sup>3</sup>J. Wesley Childers, *Tales from Spanish Picaresque Novels. A Motif-Index* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1946), p. 415. Subsequent references will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *FT*.

reflects upon his master's undoubted wisdom and cleverness. In fact, Lazarillo emphasizes the role of the blind man as seer when he states that "después de Dios éste me dio la vida y, siendo ciego, me alumbró y adestró en la carrera de vivir."<sup>5</sup>

The entry "blind deceiver" is indexed under the general heading "Deceiver falls into his own trap" (p. 154), and is written up as follows: "Blind deceiver outwitted by boy guide. Latter ate three grapes at a time when master broke agreement and ate two at a time instead of one" (p. 154). Within the context, however, it is difficult to maintain that the blind man is the deceived and not the deceiver, as this passage shows:

—Lázaro, engañado me has. Juraré yo a Dios que has tú comido las uvas tres a tres.

—No comí—dije yo;—mas ¿por qué sospecháis eso?

Respondió el sagacísimo ciego:

—¿Sabes en que veo que las comiste tres a tres? En que comía yo dos a dos, y callabas.

Reime entre mí y, aunque mochacho, noté mucho la discreta consideración del ciego.

(LT, p. 63)

Clearly the motif, in context, points out the sagacity of the blind man rather than revealing him as the deceiver falling into his own trap.

The squire (*escudero*) of the third *tratado* is indexed initially as a "sham rich man" and then as a "nobleman" (pp. 165-66, 207, 250). Both classifications are highly debatable and merit further attention, as does the indexing of the Archpriest from the final *tratado* as an "incontinent monk" (p. 243). This matter is further complicated by the fact that there are considerable differences in the three editions of *Lazarillo de Tormes* which appeared in 1554, "una de Burgos, impresa por Juan de Junta; otra de Amberes, 'en casa de Martin Nucio', y otra de Alcalá de Henares estampada por Salcedo."<sup>6</sup> There is little in the editions of Burgos and Amberes to prove conclusively that the relationship between the Archpriest and Lazarillo's wife is adulterous. On the other hand, the interpolations of the Alcalá de Henares edition (the one followed by Childers)<sup>7</sup> seem more compromising. In fact, the reader's interpretation of the *Lazarillo* is radically changed if these interpolations are accepted as authentic.<sup>8</sup>

The greatest discrepancies occur with regard to the classification of Lazarillo himself. A somewhat more detailed analysis of three specific entries will suffice

<sup>5</sup>*Lazarillo de Tormes and El Abencerraje*. Intr. Claudio Guillén (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 58. All future references will be to this edition, and will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *LT*.

<sup>6</sup>José Varela Muñoz, "El *Lazarillo de Tormes* como una paradoja racional," *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 1, 2 (1977), p. 154.

<sup>7</sup>Childers follows the text of Alcalá de Henares and refers exclusively to A. Valbuena Prat, *La novela picaresca española* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1946). Unfortunately, the interpolations of the Alcalá de Henares text include the first two items indexed by Childers (*Motif-Index*, pp. 30, 38). A similar problem arises with regard to the inclusion in the motif-index of three additional tales taken from Mabbe's English version of the Italian translation of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (see *Motif-Index*, p. xii).

<sup>8</sup>"Actualmente conocemos dos versiones de *El Lazarillo*, que se diferencian por su extensión. Desde nuestro punto de vista, la naturaleza de las interpolaciones exige que, para los efectos del análisis literario, ambas sean enfrentadas como dos obras distintas" (J. Varela Muñoz, "El *Lazarillo* . . ." p. 153).

to show, yet again, how the motif can be distorted when removed from its context. The first entry to be considered is indexed as follows: "Hungry servant prays that sick will die. He always eats well at funerals" (p. 72). This entry is accurate enough as far as it goes. What it does not reveal is that not only is Lazarillo the servant of a priest, but that he accompanies this priest to the homes of the sick and dying, and it is there, at their bedsides, that he prays, not for their lives, but for their death. Nor does the entry reveal that while Lazarillo is living with the priest he is actually dying of hunger.

The second entry that bears reexamination is "Thief copies key by making wax impression. Steals bread from priest's pantry. He is later detected" (p. 113). In this cryptic item there is no mention that the thief is Lazarillo; nor is it clear that (1) he is actually the starving servant of the miserly priest from whom he takes the bread; (2) Lazarillo is already inside the priest's house; and (3) the key is to be used on the priest's wooden chest—Lazarillo's breadly paradise, "paraíso panal" (*LT*, p. 70). Further, it is a wandering tinker who comes to Lazarillo's rescue and prevents him from starving by trying various keys from a large bunch which he carries until one key finally fits and the chest opens (see *LT*, p. 70). Given the treatment which Lazarillo receives from the priest, it is possible to defend Lazarillo's taking of the priest's bread; consequently the classification of Lazarillo as a "thief" seems particularly harsh.

The third entry reads "Trickster steals food from blind man. Rips open seam in food sack, takes out food, and resews sack" (p. 116). The description "rips open the seam" needs further explanation, as does Childers's use of the term "trickster." When Lazarillo was only eight years old his father was punished for theft: "Pues siendo yo niño de ocho años, achacaron a mi padre ciertas sangrias mal hechas en los costales de los que allí a moler venían" (*LT*, p. 55). The image "bleeding a sack" is very vivid and the anonymous author returns to it in the course of the motif outlined above: "Después que cerraba al candado y se descuidaba . . . por un poco de costura que muchas veces del un lado del fardel descosía y tornaba a coser, sangraba el avariento fardel" (*LT*, p. 59). The cryptic motif-index entry loses sight of the image and, more important, it fails to acknowledge the circular movement which associates the deeds of the father with those of the son, since the first incidence of "sack bleeding" is not indexed.

The application of the term "trickster" to Lazarillo raises a question of much wider dimensions. Childers uses "tricks," "tricking," "trickery," and "tricksters" with some frequency in the introduction (especially on p. vi),<sup>9</sup> yet he never offers definitions, nor does he suggest that there may be a relationship between the Spanish *pícaro* (in this case represented by Lazarillo) and the anthropological Trickster of North American Indian folklore and legend.<sup>10</sup> Clearly the *pícaro* has many of the facets of the North American Indian Trickster, and it is even possible to imagine the European jest books with their culmination

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<sup>9</sup>Childers cites F. W. Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), and no other critical work on the picaresque novel. This may account for his statement that the "picaresque novel was often a crude, unpolished, and disjointed work of fiction . . ." (*Motif-Index*, p. xii), as well as for his frequent reference to the *pícaro* as a "rogue." For a description of the *pícaro* as a juvenile delinquent, see A. A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Stith Thompson, *The Folktale*; John Greenway, *Literature among the Primitives* (Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1964); and Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956).

in the figure of the *picaro* as an advanced society's approximation to a Trickster cycle." In fact, this would account for the presence of so many anecdotal type jokes and jests in the picaresque novel rather more satisfactorily than Childers's somewhat unconvincing conclusion that his motif-index contains an abundance of items under the headings "Deception" and "The Wise and the Foolish" because "Spanish writers of the picaresque genre presented the *picaro* as a nomadic person who learned to survive primarily by cleverness and deception" (p. 262).

Stith Thompson has written that the main purpose of the index is to classify traditional narrative, by type or motif, in order to furnish an exact style of reference for analytical study or for accurately itemizing large bodies of material. Further, the index should promote accurate terminology and should serve as a key to unlock large inaccessible stores of traditional fiction (see *FT*, p. 427). In *Tales from the Spanish Picaresque Novel*, J. Wesley Childers has certainly itemized a large body of material. Whether or not this material is "traditional fiction" in Thompson's sense of the word remains to be proved. In fact, there are many problems to be resolved with regard to the exact relationship between folk narrative and the Spanish picaresque novel. A motif-index is a useful tool, but it must be compiled and consulted with great care. Obviously it can be no substitute for the original text to which the literary critic (and even the anthropologist) must always return in order to correct the inevitable distortion which is caused by the isolation of a motif from its immediate surroundings.

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<sup>1</sup>Some attempts to link the *picaro* with the Trickster of North American Indian Legend have already been made; see, for example, Rosa Perelmutter Pérez, "The Rogue as Trickster in *Guzmán de Alfarache*," *Hispania*, 59 (1976), 820-26.