

# A guide to the Unfortunate Traveller? The emerging prose voice in two early picaresque narratives of early modern England and Spain

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The anonymous Spanish text of 1554, *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* ('The life of Lazarillo of Tormes'), and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, published in 1594 London, are generally considered the earliest examples of picaresque novels produced by Spain and England. Consisting of the first-person, pseudo-autobiographical and episodic narratives of characters who seemed to exemplify the Spanish word *pícaro*, or rogue, they seem typical of the genre of 'rogue literature' becoming increasingly popular in the jest-books and cony-catching pamphlets of early modern Europe. Nonetheless, critics have also noted that the picaresque structure of both texts seems a means to a more complex end: A. A. Parker defines the *Lazarillo* as a precursor rather than a prototype of the Spanish picaresque,<sup>1</sup> while J. B. Steane describes the picaresque elements of *The Unfortunate Traveller* as mere introductory devices to Nashe's style.<sup>2</sup> I shall consider these texts more as examples of developing prose fiction than of the picaresque, examining the extent to which their realism and self-awareness may reflect the development of a more complex and subjective prose voice in contemporary fiction.

In the tradition that originated from Germany's 1520 *Liber vagatorum*, the novels show a fascination with 'low-life' themes, and in particular with the linguistic facility that goes with trickery. They represent an alternative world to earlier prose combinations of biography and invented history, such as *The lyf of great Alexander*, whose late fifteenth-century translation into English was also anonymous, and to the idealistic world of such pastoral and

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<sup>1</sup>A. A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe, 1599-1753* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1967) 6.

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Steane, introd., *The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)

chivalric novels as Diego Hernández de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor*, ('The prison of love'), translated by Lord Berners before 1533 as '*The castell of love*'. Emerging from a background of poverty and criminality, Lázaro de Tormes learns from his first master, an itinerant blind beggar, to fend for himself through *sotileza y buenas mañas* ('artfulness and skilful knacks'), as he passes from one master to another.<sup>3</sup> The description of the *burlas endiabladas* ('devilish tricks') he plays upon his masters,<sup>4</sup> coupled with the use of familiar tropes of folk tales and jest-book literature like the blind man and his boy, and the miserly cleric and false pardoner, connect the novel to previous examples of prose fiction on 'low-life' themes, such as the German examples of *Howleglas* of 1515, or *The Parson of Kalenborow* of 1520.

Nashe's Jack Wilton introduces himself as an unabashed rogue, an 'appendix or page' of the English court living by his wits in Henry VIII's military camp in France at the siege of Tournoi and Turwin.<sup>5</sup> 'What stratagemical acts and monuments do you think an ingenious infant of my years might enact?' he asks, displaying clear awareness of his roguishness and asserting a highly individual voice which takes pleasure in its inventive wit.<sup>6</sup> As the Elizabethans understood it, wit denoted both verbal and written ingenuity. Jack's persuasive speeches to his gullible victims are recorded verbatim in these early stages of the novel, and he frequently addresses an imagined audience of fellow-pages, almost an alternative coterie to the kind that inspired novels like Sidney's *Arcadia*: 'Here let me triumph a while and ruminate a line or two on the excellence of my wit; but I will not breathe neither till I have disfraughted all my knavery.'<sup>7</sup>

The *Lazarillo* does not show such open delight in knavery and wit. Indeed, the deliberately anti-social 'delinquent' qualities attached to the Spanish picaresque by A. A. Parker seem more evident in Jack Wilton's brash voice than in Lázaro de Torme's internalised and subtle exploration of his world's social inequalities and religious hypocrisy.<sup>8</sup> As Michael Alpert acknowledges,

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<sup>3</sup>*La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*, ed R.O. Jones (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1963) 8, lines 134-35. This and all subsequent translations from the *Lazarillo* are mine unless otherwise stated.

<sup>4</sup>*Lazarillo* 8.138.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Nashe, 'The Unfortunate Traveller', in *Elizabethan Fiction*, eds Robert Ashley and Edwin M. Moseley (New York: Rinehart, 1953) 203.

<sup>6</sup>Nashe 203.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Parker 4-6.

Lázaro's story is one of a search for acceptance by his world: unlike later heroes of the Spanish picaresque, such as Jack Wilton's closer contemporary Guzmán de Alfarache, he does not choose the life of an outcast wanderer.<sup>9</sup> His purpose is not to join the sort of criminal coterie portrayed in Cervante's novela *Rinconete y Cortadillo* ('Rinconete and Cortadillo') but to *arrimarse a los buenos* ('attach himself to good-quality people').<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Jack places more virtue in verbal felicity than in material prosperity, appearing to relish his role as rootless observer. His voice moves between cynicism and an apparent acceptance of a violent and disjointed world. In the most simplistic terms, it might be argued that the contrast of the *Lazarillo's* restrained style and Nashe's clear aim to entertain reflects a fundamental contrast between a Spain of consolidated religious and political ideologies, and an England of growing internal conflict and uncertainty.

The books are, after all, products of very different reformation periods, which were aided and often defined through the developing voice of the individual. Prose was increasingly the chosen mode of expression. Marcel Bataillon, and A. A. Parker, have been among those who argue that the *Lazarillo* is influenced by the intellectual and cultural reforming spirit of mid-sixteenth-century Erasmian humanism; the Spanish humanist Diego Hurtado de Mendoza has frequently been suggested as its author.<sup>11</sup> According to the classical rules of parallels, the plain style of its prose suited the themes of poverty and mild criminality. But *The Unfortunate Traveller* often seems to emphasise stylistic inventiveness, even extravagance, above plot symmetry and effective characterisation. The novel is the most obviously fictional work of an enthusiastic pamphleteer whose pioneering involvement in the anti-Martinist cause demonstrates the increasing importance of the individual prose voice to navigate and generate contemporary controversy. Charles Nicholl pinpoints Nashe's use of historical parallels, as in Jack's description of the Münster Anabaptist revolt, to convey his hostility to England's developing Puritan factions.<sup>12</sup>

Such hostilities, of course, were not confined to Puritans. Following the

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Alpert, ed. and trans., *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels* (London: Penguin, 1969) 9.

<sup>10</sup>*Lazarillo* 54.50.

<sup>11</sup>Francisco Rico, introd., *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994) 34-39; Parker 19-20.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 158.

defeat of the Spanish Armada, contemporary prose and drama reflected a popular image of Spain and Spaniards as excessively proud, and concerned with external appearance to the detriment of interior moral worth. Nashe's friend and mentor, Robert Greene, delineated this image in his pamphlet *The Spanish Masquerado*, printed a year after the Armada defeat. In *Love's Labours Lost*, Nashe's contemporary, William Shakespeare, introduces Don Armado, who, as 'a refined traveller' and 'fashion's own knight' conforms to both popular prejudices about Spaniards.<sup>13</sup> The most sinister and ruthless villain of *The Unfortunate Traveller* is a Spaniard, Esdras of Granado, whose depravity is effectively contrasted with the lovable roguery of English traveller Jack. When an exiled English earl saves Jack from execution after Esdras has implicated him for his crimes, he admonishes the youth against travel, describing the shortcomings of every race he is likely to encounter on the continent. His description of a typical Spaniard focuses on fashions: 'a skull-crowned hat of the fashion of an old deep porringer, a diminutive alderman's ruff with short strings like the droppings of a man's nose ... a rapier that is lineally descended from half a dozen dukes at least.'<sup>14</sup> He goes on to describe how personal contact will awaken the stereotypical Spanish pride:

A soldier & a braggart he is (that's concluded); he jetteth strutting, dancing on his toes with his hands under his sides. If you talk with him, he makes a dishcloth of his own country in comparison of Spain, but if you urge him more particularly wherein it exceeds, he can give no instance but in Spain they have better bread than any we have; when (poor hungry slaves) they may crumble it into water well enough, & make misers with it ... which is more, they are poor beggars, and lie in fowl straw every night.<sup>15</sup>

This conventional advice is dismissed by Jack, whose central narrative voice caricatures the fervent Englishman as a pedant not dissimilar to Shakespeare's Armado. The anti-Spanish stereotypes are more fully admitted by the Spanish text itself: in its third chapter, or *tratado*, Lázaro is employed

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<sup>13</sup>William Shakespeare, 'Love's Labours Lost' in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 1988) 282.

<sup>14</sup>Nashe 283.

<sup>15</sup>Nashe 283-84.

by a nobleman who takes great pride in his ancestry, but who, behind the external trappings of his cape, sword and large house, is penniless, starving, and deeply in debt. Fooled by his new master's prestigious appearance, Lázaro finds himself having to use his skills as a beggar to support the nobleman as well as himself. His reflection on his master's lifestyle is similar in tone to that of the disillusioned English traveller:

¿A quién no engañara aquella buena disposición y razonable capa y sayo, y quién pensara que aquel gentil hombre se pasó ayer todo el día sin comer ...? ... ¡Oh Señor, y cuántos de aquéstos debéis vos tener por el mundo derramados, que padecen por la negra que llaman honra lo que por vos no sufrirían!<sup>16</sup> 'Who wouldn't be deceived by that good disposition and reasonable cape and tunic, and who would think that that fine man went the whole day yesterday without eating ...? Oh Lord, how many of those men must you have scattered throughout the world, who suffer for the misfortune they call honour what they wouldn't suffer for your sake!'

While this passage makes it plain that exaggerated pride is to be considered a worldwide problem, it also links this individual flaw to a scattering of people through the world, a rootless journey. The nobleman has left his home region because of a perceived insult to his honour and will continue to wander, eventually discomfiting Lázaro by running away from him, a reversal of the master-and-servant roles the boy has hitherto known. David Rouland<sup>17</sup>, in his 1586 English translation *The Pleasaunt Historie of Lazarillo de Tormes*, translated Lázaro's reference to the Spanish honour code as 'vainglory', in keeping with the English stereotype.<sup>18</sup> In the main, though, Rouland's translation, which would have been available to Nashe, bears little similarity to the political propaganda evident in pamphlets that appeared in the years following the Armada defeat.

Though Rouland, like Nashe, had travelled on the Continent, we do not know whether he had been to Spain; however, he chose to dedicate

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<sup>16</sup> *Lazarillo* 33.200-09.

<sup>17</sup> The modern spelling of David Rouland's surname is Rowland, as used in the 1991 Alban Davies edition of his translation. I use the sixteenth century spelling of Rouland when referring to him.

<sup>18</sup> *The Pleasant History of Lazarillo de Tormes, drawn out of Spanish by David Rowland of Anglesey*, ed Gareth Alban Davies (Newtown: Gwasg Gregynog, 1991) 59.

his translation to Sir Thomas Gresham, who had spent time in Spain on business and as an ambassador.<sup>19</sup> Like Jean Saugrain's 1560 translation of the *Lazarillo* into French, which popularised it outside Spain, Rouland's work stressed the narrative's amusing and ironic aspects, emphasising it as an insight into Spanish life and culture, 'so that by reading hereof, such as have not travelled Spaine, may as well discern much of the maners and customes of that countrey ...'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the book includes many marginal explanatory notes about details of Spanish customs and terms referred to in the text. It seems to have been translated very much in the spirit of a guidebook, an introduction to unfamiliar territory in both geographical and cultural senses. Rouland's prefatory invitation to Gresham to use his experience of foreign travel 'to judge, whether these reports of litle Lazaro be true or not,' recommends a spirit of independent discovery not unlike that voiced by Jack Wilton.<sup>21</sup>

The motif of traveller and guide, locked in a relationship of growing complexity and interchangeability, becomes as much if not more important to the *Lazarillo* and *The Unfortunate Traveller* as the subordinate role of professional rogue more openly associated with the picaresque. The literal and metaphorical journeys undertaken by the protagonists are rarely as aimless as they can appear; rather they reflect and recreate an increasingly individualistic search for direction and self-knowledge. In the course of the first *tratado*, Lázaro describes the physical and emotional conflicts played out between the blind man and his boy, a well-known contemporary trope of folk tales and jest-books. Having promised to treat Lázaro as a father, the blind man begins their journey by tricking the boy into putting his ear against a stone bull, and proceeds to slam his head against it to supply the promised 'noise', and to illustrate the need to be on the guard against such tricks for the future. Many of his lessons in survival are taught through crude physical violence, but the adult Lázaro narrates them to illustrate the important formative influence of this master: '... *después de Dios, éste me dio la vida, y, siendo ciego, me alumbró y adestró en la carrera de vivir.*'<sup>22</sup> ('after God this man gave me life, and, while he was blind, he enlightened me and fitted me for the course of life.')

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<sup>19</sup>J. E. V. Crofts, introd., *The Pleasaunt Historie of Lazarillo de Tormes*, trans. David Rouland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924) ix.

<sup>20</sup>Crofts viii; Parker 112.

<sup>21</sup>*The Pleasant History of Lazarillo de Tormes*, ed Alban Davies, 7.

<sup>22</sup>*Lazarillo* 8.106-07.

This description not only links the blind man to the role of surrogate father, but to a degree of wisdom and illumination that may prove a deliberately humanist reference to such figures of classical enlightenment as the blind prophet Tiresias, a link reinforced by Lázaro's later observation that his master must have possessed *spíritu de profecía*<sup>23</sup> ('the spirit of prophecy'). The connection, however, is as deliberately prosaic as the link between Lázaro's progress in life and the resurrection, or exaltation, of his namesakes in the New Testament. The blind man's crucial life-lessons, and the *buen ingenio*<sup>24</sup> or 'sharp wit' displayed by the boy, are of a distinctly low-life nature. Beginning with the trickery of language, the blind man teaches his apprentice *jerigonza*, or the cant of confidence tricksters, and displays an astonishing knowledge of prayers and remedies which he recites in return for alms. An apt pupil, the boy learns his trade well enough to take advantage of his master's blindness in order to steal food and coins, thereby repeating the crime of stealing from his employer that had led to his natural father's judicial banishment. Traveller and guide enter into an unspoken battle for mastery, with the boy leading the man down the worst roads in revenge for beatings, while the blind man becomes more sadistic in his punishments because he senses that the boy is the agent of his misfortune. Eventually, Lázaro escapes, leaving his master stunned by fooling him into dashing his head against a post. The re-enactment of the Salamanca jest simultaneously denotes independence and indebtedness.

Jack Wilton's creator, Nashe, was characterised on the private stage by Shakespeare as Armado's page Moth, and by his former university as Ingenioso in *The Return to Parnassus*.<sup>25</sup> Moth and Ingenioso exemplify the type of verbal intellectual facility and ingenious trickery displayed by Jack; Moth's relationship with Armado contains a dual aspect of servitude and companionship comparable to Lázaro's relationship to his third master and the more obviously contrasting partnership of Jack and his master Henry

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<sup>23</sup> *Lazarillo* 15.371.

<sup>24</sup> *Lazarillo* 7.102.

<sup>25</sup> Moth's similarity to Jack Wilton has led Charles Nicholl and other scholars to suggest that Shakespeare must have known *The Unfortunate Traveller* in manuscript: it was published some four or five months after the first private performance of *Love's Labours Lost* at the Hampshire home of Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton. The anonymous Parnassus plays, performed in St John's College Cambridge, show how two idealistic students resort to picaresque trickery in order to make ends meet, after they find few opportunities to lead an honest life in the world outside academia. Nicholl 231-33, 160-62.

Howard, Earl of Surrey. Surrey is presented as a courtly lover, his efforts to describe and woo Geraldine through neo-Platonic praise very different from Jack's 'quick motions of wit'.<sup>26</sup> Jack exploits the differences between his master's elaborate, idealistic language and his own more pragmatic approach. He seems to represent a greater linguistic and narrative freedom than the older literary traditions followed by Surrey, and when master and servant exchange identities, it is at first by mutual agreement: 'only because in his own person, which he would not have reproached, [Surrey] meant to take more liberty of behaviour: as for my carriage, he knew that he was to tune it at a key, either high or low, as he list.'<sup>27</sup> The contrasting styles of the pair are put to an ultimate test when, as prisoners in the master of the mint's house in Venice, they are joined by the beautiful and intriguing Diamante, whom Charles Nicholl connects with Shakespeare's unknown 'Dark Lady'.<sup>28</sup>

Imprisoned on her husband's suspicions of unfaithfulness, Diamante has emerged from an intense psychological battle of love-intrigue, not dissimilar to the plot of *El curioso impertinente* ('The intrusive curious man'), Cervantes's interpolated tale to the first part of *Don Quixote*. Both Diamante's fellow-prisoners are attracted to her, but she seems as impenetrable as her name suggests. She also has the most obviously Spanish name of all the characters in the novel, and Surrey's poetic 'prattling' moves her far less than Jack's 'dunstable tale', or plain speaking.<sup>29</sup> Hearing Surrey's courtly overtures, Jack persuades himself that his amorous master 'was more in love with his own curious forming fancy than her face; and truth it is, many become passionate lovers only to win praise to their wits ...'<sup>30</sup> He seduces Diamante by playing upon her personal pride, namely her vengeful wish to give her husband genuine cause for complaint; when they are released from prison on the suit of the satirical writer Aretino, a divorce has to be arranged because Diamante is pregnant. Jack tells us that 'she invested me in the state of a monarch ... she decreed to travel whithersoever I would conduct her.'<sup>31</sup> The chivalric journey planned by Surrey has been taken over by a love which, while hardly idealistic, is no less sincere.

The identification of the unfortunate traveller, then, becomes more

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<sup>26</sup>Nashe 249.

<sup>27</sup>Nashe 241.

<sup>28</sup>Nicholl 161-62.

<sup>29</sup>Nashe 240.

<sup>30</sup>ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Nashe 254.



complex and subjective: is it Jack, who faces many more daunting adventures, the unrequited Surrey, or the scandalously pregnant Diamante? By adopting the roles of Surrey and Geraldine, Jack and Diamante throw the journey into greater uncertainty. When Surrey catches up with them in Florence, discomfited at the ease with which Jack has usurped him, it seems that the scene is set for outright confrontation between cynical realism and courtly romance. But Surrey's first reaction is to laugh: in prosaic territory, these conflicts of perspective can be addressed through a gentler humour. The pair revert to their former roles in a ceremony that is at once burlesque and poignant: 'He was loth to distract from one that he loved so ... He gave me his hand and swore he had no more hearts but one, and I should have half of it in that I so enhanced his obscured reputation ...'<sup>32</sup> It is as though Surrey, with typical chivalric modesty, is acknowledging the paucity of his role in the travels of Jack Wilton. There are more revelations to come, and he cannot be part of them. Having fulfilled his courtly mission, he is suddenly recalled to England; Jack and Diamante travel on into Italy, one of the original homes of prose *novelle*, and, certainly, of the earliest extant comic novel, Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*.

From now on, the novel develops a darker side. In Rome, Jack and Diamante fall into the hands of the villainous Zadoch and Dr Zachary, whose plots to slaughter Christians are on the one hand typical of anti-Semitic tropes in contemporary literature. However, they also represent other preoccupations of the time. Charles Nicholl notes that anti-Papist diatribes of the kind that Puritans might have uttered are distanced from the narrative voice by being placed in the mouths of these Jewish characters.<sup>33</sup>

Given that Old Testament figures such as Josiah and Solomon were of great importance to the development of England's Protestant Reformation,<sup>34</sup> the demonising of Jews in juxtaposition with a traveller's description of an ancient and venerable Rome may have been less compliant with England's newly-established political and religious conventions than was at

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<sup>32</sup>Nashe 256.

<sup>33</sup>Nicholl 159.

<sup>34</sup>The propaganda of the English Reformation aimed to link Edward VI to two Biblical counterparts: Josiah, the boy-king who rid his realm of idols and Solomon, the wise heir to King David. This reflected the twofold ideal aims of Edward's reign: to destroy the idolatry of unreformed faith and to complete the work of his father in building a new Church of England. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*, (London: Penguin, 1999.) 14-15.

first apparent; Nashe's Cambridge contemporary and friend Marlowe, whose dramatic character Barnabas is similar in many respects to the corrupt Jews of Nashe's text, is also considered to have been suspiciously ambivalent in his attitude to Catholicism. His apparent Catholic loyalties allowed him to infiltrate English Catholic seminaries on the continent.<sup>35</sup>

Zachary and Zadoch are associated with the two types of literal anatomisation prevalent in the Elizabethan world: medical dissection of corpses, and judicial disembowelling of traitors and other criminals. As Francis Barker argues, spectacular punishment was a defining public performance of the time<sup>36</sup> the purported last confessions of the condemned were particularly relevant to contemporary popular fiction.<sup>37</sup> From the self-incriminating tirades of Zadoch, we move to an unsparing description of his public execution. When Jack and Diamante have escaped to Bologna they find themselves attending another execution, this time that of Cutwolfe, the vengeful brother of the accomplice Esdras murdered. Cutwolfe's last confession is recorded verbatim at the novel's conclusion, as Jack's gulling speeches were at its opening. He describes an entirely new type of linguistic depravity, as well as revealing an unexpected complexity within the Spaniard who now becomes the object of his narrative: Esdras had repented of his murderous activities, moved by the pious appeals of Heraclide when he violated her. He therefore begged Cutwolfe for time to redeem his soul before death: 'in destroying me, thou destroyest thyself and me.'<sup>38</sup> It is Cutwolfe's refusal of mercy that compels

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<sup>35</sup>Christopher Marlowe was a Cambridge contemporary of Nashe. In 1587 the Cambridge authorities withheld his M. A., probably on the grounds of his apparent Catholic sympathies, but were instructed by the Privy Council to allow him to graduate because he had served his country by working in secret 'affaires'. It appeared that he had been posing as a possible candidate for the exiled English Catholic seminary at Rheims in order to collect information from Catholic circles at Cambridge for Thomas Walsingham, cousin of Elizabeth's chief minister Sir Francis Walsingham. The Walsinghams' interest in the university probably followed the Babington Plot of the year before, begun by a Cambridge graduate who had emigrated to Rheims in 1581. Nicholl 30-31.

<sup>36</sup>Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, (London: Methuen, 1984) 9-10, 13-14.

<sup>37</sup>It is known that notorious condemned criminals of the time, such as the highwayman Gamaliel Ratsey, hanged in 1605, would find themselves the subjects of many pamphlets as the cony-catching genre met the increased focus on individual confessions of experience. The act of reading was already juxtaposed with those of exemplary punishment: places like Paul's Yard, where so many bookstalls were to be found, were often transformed into public execution sites by the addition of a temporary scaffold. Gãmini Salgãdo, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (1977; Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1995) 11.

<sup>38</sup>Nashe 304.

Esdras to play the part of the villainous Spaniard:

Respite me a little from thy sword's point, and set me about some execrable enterprise, that may subvert the whole state of Christendom, and make all men's ears tingle that hear of it. Commend me to cut all my kindreds' throats, to burn men, women, and children in their beds, in millions, by firing their cities at midnight. Be it pope, emperor, or Turk that displeaseth thee, he shall not breathe on the earth. For thy sake will I swear and forswear, renounce my baptism, and all the interest I have in any other sacrament. Only let me live how miserable soever, be it in a dungeon amongst toads, serpents, and adders, or set up to the neck in dung. No pains I will refuse however prorogued; to have a little respite to purify my spirit: oh, hear me, hear me, & thou canst not be hardened against me.<sup>39</sup>

This litany of depravity has a surprising conclusion of spiritual self-abasement. Of course, Esdras is a desperate man pleading for his life. But in these last moments it is the traveller Cutwolfe, given a markedly English name, who takes linguistic vainglory to the point of blasphemy: '... my thoughts travelled in quest of some notable new Italianism, whose murderous platform might not only extend on his body, but his soul also.'<sup>40</sup> In return for life, he compels Esdras to renounce the faith that now sustains him, to blaspheme verbally and by written articles committing his soul to the devil. As soon as he has complied with all these demands Cutwolfe shoots him in the throat, symbolically annihilating the voice which has destroyed body and soul. 'The farther we wade in revenge, the nearer come we to the throne of the Almighty,' he announces, referring to another literary and dramatic convention which explicitly links stage and scaffold.<sup>41</sup> The light-hearted freedom of Jack's ingenious world has been invaded by the 'truculent tragedy' of revenge, which leaves the young man 'mortified, abjected and daunted.'<sup>42</sup> Cutwolfe has certainly publicly presented himself, in Barker's argument, as 'the locus of the desire, the revenge, the power and the misery of this world.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Nashe 305.

<sup>40</sup>ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Nashe 306.

<sup>42</sup>Nashe 307.

<sup>43</sup>Barker 22.

But he did this through a linguistic subversion of the hierarchies which have condemned him, an ‘Italianism’, or witticism, which has revealed a greater moral redundancy than that of the stereotypical Spanish villain, Esdras.

Marrying Diamante and repenting of his sins, Jack leaves Italy and ends his story at the camp of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, once again in Henry VIII’s military camp, but this time one which eschews bloodshed in favour of external display. He announces his unwillingness to resume the role of ‘outlandish chronicler’; it is as though his travels have led him to discover a sinister discourse beyond the externality of wit, a private register which can reveal many unexpected aspects to extend the possibilities of self-definition.<sup>44</sup> The chronicler Lázaro has also ended his journey through the discourse of spectacular justice. As a *pregonero*, or ‘town crier’, in Toledo, he loudly proclaims the wrongdoing of criminals being led out for punishment or execution. But his autobiography emanates from the same subjective register reached through the ingenuity of Nashe. When questioned about himself by his third master, the boy displayed his ability to edit his own story, *diciendo mis bienes y callando lo demás*,<sup>45</sup> (‘telling out my good deeds and keeping silent about the rest.’) Having also learnt to *disimular*, or ‘dissimulate’, and grown somewhat accustomed to disillusionment, he pretends to share his master’s ideas about frugality and honour. In reality, of course, he is materialistic and unscrupulous, choosing to measure social respectability according to prosperity rather than moral worth.

Lázaro’s most telling insights, such as the anti-clerical sentiments levelled against his hypocritical second master, are made *entre mí*<sup>46</sup> (‘within myself’), and this containment, particularly with regard to the humanist theme of clerical reform, is a preparation for the final *tratado*, a masterpiece of deceptive prose. Its title refers to his apprenticeship with a constable, but this ends within the first paragraph as he finds the work too dangerous. However, the title gives a respectable gloss on Lázaro’s attainment of the office of *pregonero*, through the patronage of an archpriest. Against his public pronouncement of judicial condemnation, we find the private register of the gossips who imply that the archpriest arranged Lázaro’s marriage to his servant in order to hide his own ongoing affair with the woman. The archpriest admonishes his town crier that *quien ha de mirar a dichos de*

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<sup>44</sup>Nashe 308.

<sup>45</sup>*Lazarillo* 29.57-58.

<sup>46</sup>*Lazarillo* 18.44, 21.147.

*malas lenguas nunca medrará*<sup>47</sup> ('the man who gives credit to evil tongues will never prosper'), and assures him that his honour is truly served by his wife's habit of frequenting his benefactor's house. Like Esdras, Lázaro blasphemes in order to maintain his individual interpretation of honour: his retort to gossips culminates in a promise to swear upon the consecrated Host that his wife is the most honourable woman in Toledo. *Esta manera no me dicen nada, y yo tengo paz en mi casa*,<sup>48</sup> ('Thus they say nothing to my face, and I have peace in my house'), he ends tersely. But this, of course, does not excise the register of *malas lenguas* from Lázaro's story.

What appeared at first to be a triumphant autobiography becomes something more complex at the moment of a reader's realisation that the book originates from Lázaro's need to justify his dishonour. Private shame constitutes public prose. Yet, the anonymity of Lazarillo and his dedicatee known only as 'V. M.', or 'Your Worship', challenge the validity of this prose as biography and history. Readers are challenged to question the identity of fictional characters more deeply than they might hitherto have been. Similarly, the readers of Nashe are challenged to follow his own fictional hero's deliberate manipulations of language and history, and to find within them the same type of independent, challenging discourse emerging from Jack Wilton's brash wit. David Margolies writes that Nashe was 'too superficial and too alienated to put together the separate pieces of the Elizabethan world to which his prose gives enduring life.'<sup>49</sup> However, such alienation may have helped to create a new fictional standpoint, from which 'separate pieces' could be considered in the reality of their increasingly public divisions. The variety of popular idioms enhance Nashe's figures to dynamic effect. This discursive liminality demonstrates how the many elements of a copious style may be brought into interaction rather than compelled to reunite in support of a truth that has been proved invalid. This in itself reflects the changing intellectual and cultural background which produced such a text.

The ordered hierarchical universe of Ptolemaic spheres, challenged throughout the sixteenth century by political, humanistic and scientific prose, becomes just such a 'separate piece' in Jack Wilton's perspective as he observes it in purely mechanical form, decorating a summer-house in

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<sup>47</sup> *Lazarillo* 54.44-45.

<sup>48</sup> *Lazarillo* 55.76.

<sup>49</sup> David Margolies, *Novel and Society in Elizabethan England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) 104.

Rome.<sup>50</sup> The long description of this counterfeit ‘golden age’ both isolates and empowers the individuals who feature in it: fictional traveller, author and reader. Not only does it reflect the heightened technology of the age, but it bears out Margolies’ equation of this with the increasing importance of linguistic inventiveness. Through the imagination, whose individual potential was increasingly acknowledged, the writer of fiction could build an independent universe into a ‘separate piece’ of consciousness.

The fictional journey created by the *Lazarillo*, and by Nashe’s novel, becomes a process of discovery of selfhood, using the private and public connotations of the word ‘discovery’, far more than a revelation of external realities. There is no conclusive evidence to show that Nashe’s most fictional work was influenced by the *Lazarillo*, but both works do move beyond social and political caricatures to a more subjective discourse. Like Don Armado, Lazarillo and Jack grow in restraint and discernment, and demonstrate that ‘the words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo.’<sup>51</sup> This need not mean, as Walter Allen asserted, that Elizabethan drama was ‘the form that fiction took.’<sup>52</sup>

While chivalric and pastoral prose offered escapism, early modern Europe also traditionally faced and explored contemporary uncertainties through prose, as the essays of Montaigne and Bacon do meticulously.

To this end, I believe that the figure of the *pícaro*, as misguided traveller and deceptive guide, can be viewed as a metaphor for the search for a more individual, questioning prose voice at a time when a greater reading market was developing in early modern England and Spain. While Lazarillo and Jack are made rootless by personal circumstances, Don Quixote and his later English counterparts like Henry Fielding’s Abraham Andrews, choose to travel in search of greater appreciation of fictional and human existence. But their journeys are similar in the sense that they are educational experiences requiring their subjects to go through a process of self-discovery and by implication self-improvement, not unlike that of the individual reader who becomes the witness to their narratives.

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<sup>50</sup>Nashe 267-70.

<sup>51</sup>LLL, 5. 2. 913-14.

<sup>52</sup>Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (London: Penguin, 1960) 22-23.