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# The Unholy Holy Man in *Guzmán de Alfarache*

*Lazarillo de Tormes* was first published in 1554 and, because of its obvious satire of the clergy, the Inquisition banned it in 1559. However, according to general critical opinion, this is the one picaresque element that does not appear in *Guzmán de Alfarache*. This apparent absence is easily explained by the strong forces of the Counter-Reformation which arose in Spain between the times that the two works appeared. As Donald McGrady says:

In view of the historical circumstances prevailing in Spain in the second half of the sixteenth century—the kings who conceived as their principal mission the propagation of Catholicism, the enormous power of the Inquisition, the ideals of the Counter-Reformation, the strict censorship of books by the Church—it is not surprising that no writer was foolish enough to continue the tendencies of the author of *Lazarillo*, who dared not reveal his identity.<sup>1</sup>

Alemán realized that any blatant criticism of the Church and its hierarchy would lead to censorship of his work and probably to personal persecution. Therefore, in order to criticize an institution which he viewed as corrupt, Alemán used a subtle form of criticism that went totally unnoticed by those he was attacking. This has led many critics to state that he lashed out at everything “con excepción de los eclesiásticos.”<sup>2</sup> However, if one compares the Cardinal in the *Guzmán* with the Priest of Maqueda in *Lazarillo*, Alemán’s criticism becomes more apparent.

It is the intention of this study, therefore, to examine the episode involving the Cardinal in *Guzmán de Alfarache* in order to understand the way in which Alemán actually viewed the clergy. It will evaluate to what extent the period influenced the manner in which Alemán presented his views and examine whether, in fact, such critics as A. A. Parker and Enrique Moreno Báez were correct in believing that the *Guzmán* is an arch-Catholic work.

If, indeed, Alemán did want to criticize the Church hierarchy, he had to devise a stratagem wherein, on the surface, the clergy was made to look good, but, upon more careful examination, his criticism would become obvious. It is important to note that Alemán sets this episode in Rome, the center of the Church’s world, and chooses as his clergyman a Cardinal. Both of these elements serve to symbolize the core of the Church and its hierarchy.

Alemán begins I, iii, 6 with a sermon about charity and the purpose it serves in society. Guzmán feels that the rich exercise Christian charity

only to insure their own salvation and not for altruistic reasons. In Guzmán's words:

Rico amigo ¿no estás harto, cansado y ensordecido de oír las veces que te han dicho que los que hicieres por cualquier pobre, que lo pide por Dios, lo haces por el mismo Dios y él mismo te queda obligado a la paga, haciendo deuda ajena suya propia?<sup>3</sup>

In the course of this sermon Alemán inserts the anecdote about the emperor Zenón, who uses acts of charity to buy his own salvation. Thus Alemán demonstrates that it is not absolutely necessary to be a good person or a good Christian to attain salvation and that God can be bought.

Following Alemán's exposition on charity, the reader is introduced to the Cardinal. Upon seeing Guzmán, who is feigning injury, and hearing his cries, the Cardinal orders his servants to take the boy to his home and put him to bed. This action, in itself, seems selfless and charitable. However, in light of the preceding sermon, the reader is inclined to wonder whether the Cardinal is acting selflessly or if he is, in fact, only trying to secure his own salvation through charitable acts. Guzmán refers to him as "El buen cardenal, a quien sólo caridad movía" (p. 239). It remains dubious, however, as to which aspect of charity Guzmán is referring.

Once Guzmán reaches the Cardinal's home, the Cardinal orders that two doctors examine the boy's leg. Guzmán realizes that the doctors will discover that his injury has been a sham to gain the sympathy of monseñor (the Cardinal). His fear, however, is not of offending monseñor or of being caught, but, rather, "el temer a monseñor, cuán bravo castigo me había de mandar hacer por la burla recebida" (p. 236). Though the Cardinal might be angered at being fooled, one would expect him to undertake the reform of this young boy, showing him the road to his salvation instead of reacting with strong punishment. Since it is Guzmán-galeote narrating retrospectively at this point, he must be speaking from experience, i.e. that he is well familiar with monseñor's temper and knows that punishment rather than sound counseling will follow.

The next chapter also begins with a sermon whose lesson is closely related to the adventures that will immediately follow. This anecdote deals with la Verdad and la Mentira. During this sermon there is a physical description of la Mentira and the style in which she travels. The richness of her possessions and her clothing parallels descriptions of the interior of a large cathedral and the clothing of a man in the upper echelons of the clergy, possibly even the pope. In essence, it is a portrait of the Cardinal and the manner in which he lives. The narrator goes on to say "Quien buscare a la Verdad, no la hallará con la Mentira ni sus ministros" (p. 246). As the following chapters will show, the Cardinal is the personification of la Mentira; thus Guzmán will not encounter la Verdad, the word of God, at monseñor's home.

Unlike that of the Priest of Maqueda in *Lazarillo*, the Cardinal's home is filled with food and the servants are well cared for.<sup>4</sup> We see in the *Guzmán* a situation corresponding to the different levels of the two clergymen. Although Guzmán is being well fed he says "Ibame tras la golosina, como ciego en el rezado"(p. 254). It is not really hunger that moves him to steal, as it does Lazarillo; it is his desire for sweets.<sup>5</sup> Like the Priest of Maqueda, monseñor has a chest in which he keeps edibles, but his is filled with sweet dried fruits instead of a few crumbs of bread. Like his counterpart in *Lazarillo*, the Cardinal keeps his prized possessions under lock and key. Only in his presence may a servant remove what is desired. Clearly, monseñor, like the niggardly Priest of Maqueda, trusts no one alone with his hoard. His lack of trust in his servants (fellow man, if you will), and his selfishness create yet another un-Christian feeling in Guzmán, who says: "Desta desconfianza nació ira, de la ira deseo de venganza"(p. 254-55). This desire for vengeance is obviously antithetical to the doctrine of Christian charity.

Guzmán, determined to partake of the delicacies that the chest contains, breaks into it without the aid of a key. In *Lazarillo*, this act would have constituted a violation against God himself, since that chest is directly related to God and religion.<sup>6</sup> However, in the *Guzmán*, the chest has nothing to do with either. Its function has been corrupted to one of being the wordly larder of monseñor, who thus perverts its religious aspect. The theft of the sweets by Guzmán, therefore, is not a religious experience. In fact, the reverse is true: "Así, era señor de cuanto dentro estaba"(p. 256). Since Guzmán has gained control over the contents of the chest he becomes a type of deity, ruling over the destiny of its contents. As the boy has eaten one of monseñor's favorite sweets, the loss is noticed immediately: "Y desto pesara mucho a monseñor, tener en su casa quien se atreviera a falsarle cerraduras y más las den dentro de su retrete"(p. 256). The monseñor is less bothered by the fact that a servant has committed an un-Christian act than furious at someone's pilfering that which was reserved exclusively for his own gluttony. To discover the thief, he has all of the servants locked up, hoping to reveal the truth; but, in the house of la Mentira, this is impossible. This cruelty and total mistrust is hardly exemplary conduct for a man of God, yet, like the Priest of Maqueda, monseñor will do anything to protect the material gains that his position in the Church affords him.

Guzmán is finally caught in the act of stealing. It is strange that, for the first time, we see Guzmán assuming what appears to be a religious position. When the Cardinal finds him with his arm in the chest, Guzmán is "de rodillas" and realizes that his must "confesar" his sin. However, this first seemingly religious situation disintegrates due to the humor that the Cardinal sees in the scene: "Dióle tanta gana de reir en verme de aquella manera, que llamó a los que con él jugaban, para que me vieran"(p. 258). Not only does monseñor prevent Guzmán from confessing his sins and possibly repenting, but, in addition, he exposes him to ridicule in the eyes of his friends.

The situation, however, worsens. Although his friends try to dissuade him, monseñor insists on having Guzmán beaten in order to avenge the loss of his possessions. It is out of place for a man of God to desire vengeance, especially when the need is so strong that it causes him to go against the advice of everyone else present.

This episode has several consequences: Guzmán is beaten more severely than the Cardinal has ordered; then there is a series of retaliations back and forth between the participants as each avenges his injury and is, in turn, subjected to retribution. In this atmosphere of practical jokes and levity, Alemán is best accomplishing a goal of his work: criticism of the clergy. Since " 'lo picaresco', en su esencia, no era materia amena, sino más bien amarga bajo un exterior de burlas"<sup>7</sup>, Alemán uses this burlesque climate to demonstrate how many people in the Cardinal's house are consumed by a desire for vengeance. All of these acts are not only disregarded by monseñor, since he does not punish these people, but he finds humor in each tragic incident. The retribution and pain it causes serve as a form of entertainment for the Cardinal. Even when these jokes turn the *camarero*, an "hombre donoso, sin punta de malicia, todo del buen tiempo, hecho a la buena fe"(p. 261) into a man who is bent on retaliation, the Cardinal does not act. The perverted atmosphere of monseñor's home turns a good Christian man into one whose feelings go against Christian doctrine. It is obvious that the Cardinal fails to set a proper example for the servants in his home.<sup>8</sup>

When the Cardinal receives a shipment of dried fruits Guzmán immediately steals a barrel without anyone's knowledge. Monseñor, unaware that one of the barrels is missing, puts temptation directly in Guzmán's path. He shows the fruit to the boy and, in effect, encourages him to steal some of it, saying that if he can get away with it, he will be rewarded with a second barrel. It is un-Christian to encourage a boy not only to steal, but, in addition, to make it a rewarding experience. Once again, the Cardinal encourages negative characteristics in his followers. He also backs up this negative enforcement with the threat of punishment if Guzmán cannot accomplish this feat. In other words, stealing is a positive action, while failure to steal is negative in the home of the Cardinal, who himself establishes these inverse ideals. When the Cardinal finds that Guzmán has succeeded, it becomes apparent that monseñor never intended to teach Guzmán through negative example, thus showing him where he was going wrong. Instead, "Cuando monseñor la vió, admiróse"(p. 270) that Guzmán had gotten away with it. The Cardinal is impressed by sin and admires Guzmán for his cunning. Stealing in the house of monseñor acquires a positive value because of his encouragement, reinforcement, and reward.

When monseñor rewards Guzmán for the theft with the second barrel of fruit, Guzmán gives it to the rest of the pages "para que conociesen de mi ánimo ser noble"(p. 272). Guzmán has been converted into a "rich" man at this point. He finds it possible to submit to the perverse

form of charity previously mentioned and to attempt to buy himself salvation with the fruit he receives for his sins.

The beginning of chapter 9 restates the notion that the rich and powerful can buy salvation through charity. Guzmán says that the Cardinal "Deseaba tanto mi remedio como si dél resultara el suyo" (p. 275). Monseñor allows Guzmán to continue his delinquent ways in his home and rewards him with food from his own table, hoping that by being "good" (charitable) to the poor youth, God will reward him with salvation. The Cardinal is also hoping that by giving the boy food freely it will keep him from stealing the more precious possessions that he wants for himself. Instead of showing Guzmán the proper way to conduct himself, monseñor finds it easier to buy his own salvation and not worry about the boy's at all. In reality, the Cardinal's encouragement further reinforces Guzmán's negative attitudes.

In the following chapter monseñor again receives a shipment of fruit and assigns Guzmán the task of drying it in the sun. In this instance monseñor gives Guzmán permission to eat as much of the fruit as he wants at one sitting, hoping that it will prevent him from stealing it. This is not to keep the boy from sinning through theft, but, rather, an attempt to preserve the Cardinal's own material possessions. Notwithstanding, having seen how he is rewarded for stealing, Guzmán does not eat any fruit, but begins to steal some of it and fixes the boxes so that no one will know it is gone. When Guzmán finally reveals what he has done, monseñor becomes furious. The Cardinal's pattern of reinforcing negative qualities at this point becomes inconsistent. When Guzmán tells him that he has not yet eaten any of the fruit, monseñor forgives him. He asks to know how the boy has been concealing the fact that there is fruit missing from the boxes, since he himself has been checking them. When Guzmán explains, the Cardinal admires the theft and praises Guzmán for his ingenuity rather than resorting to punishment.

After completely corrupting whatever values Guzmán may have had, monseñor gets boored with this entertainment. Although Guzmán says, "Sentíalo monseñor en el alma. Nada pudo aprovechar conmigo amonestaciones, persuasiones, palabras ni promesas, para quitarme de malas costumbres" (p. 284), the reader knows better. Monseñor would rather see Guzmán lost forever than to continue sharing with him. The idea that Guzmán's gambling is the last straw for the Cardinal is ludicrous. The Cardinal himself has been known to gamble on occasion. He evicts Guzmán, hoping that the boy will realize how good the house is and will want to come back as a loyal, but undemanding, servant.

Guzmán blames everything on himself when he leaves: "Extendime como ruin, quedéme para ruin, pues fuí ingrato a las mercedes y beneficios de Dios" (p. 286) In reality, however, none of the fault is his. He has simply been a pawn in the games of the Cardinal. During the entire time he spends in the service of the Cardinal there has been no attempt to introduce him to the benefits of organized religion. Since the *Alum-*

*brado* movement has died out or been stifled by the Counter-Reformation at this point, Alemán is demonstrating the difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility, of encountering God through the "proper" channels of the Church hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> If most clergymen of the time were like monseñor, the people could not depend on them for religious guidance. Even the men holding the highest positions in the Church, like monseñor, were far more concerned with their own comfort than with the souls of their followers. As Alemán presents it, direct contact with God was being quashed by both the Counter-Reformation and the corrupt hierarchy of the Church. The people were prevented from attaining any kind of salvation unless they could buy it.

It is obvious that Mateo Alemán is presenting a picture of a Cardinal who is greedy, gluttonous, perverse, vengeful, untrusting, and devoid of religion. Monseñor appears to be a most charitable man who has taken a poor youth off the street in order to help him. Guzmán arrives in the holy city and "lo recoge un bondadoso cardenal, quien lo emplea como paje y le ofrece, amén de instrucción, todas las oportunidades deseables para regenerarse."<sup>10</sup> But, as we have seen, the Cardinal only reinforces the boy's unsavory traits. The Cardinal's bad example has been effective because under his tutelage Guzmán's morality has eroded. If, indeed, monseñor were really virtuous, Guzmán's degeneration may have been reversed.

The most astonishing point in this episode, one which serves Alemán's critical goal best, is that throughout monseñor's presence in the work there is never any trace of religion. Only once does the narrator refer to the fact that the Cardinal is going to church. This is strange since even the cruel Priest of Maqueda held mass. The Cardinal does nothing but enjoy life along the same hedonistic lines as would any rich and powerful man. In this sense the Cardinal is a "síntesis admirable a los hombres de la Iglesia, que engrosan las filas clericales para vivir bien la vida del cuerpo."<sup>11</sup> Alemán, like the anonymous author of *Lazarillo*, is stating that the religious responsibilities of the clergy are secondary to the material gains that their positions allow them. The entire episode, then, is a clear, though subtle, attack upon the Church hierarchy.

At the end of the episode of the Priest of Maqueda in *Lazarillo* the protagonist is ejected from his Garden of Eden.<sup>12</sup> The situation in *Guzmán de Alfarache* is similar, but there is an important reversal of roles. In the case of the *Guzmán*, the protagonist is "hijo de Eva" and, through his own admission, "metido en un paraíso de conservas, podríame tentar la serpiente de la carne" (p. 278). The serpent, in this case, is the Cardinal. It is he who tempts Guzmán with the forbidden fruit time and time again. It is he who encourages Guzmán to steal (sin) and, when he does, he is the one finally ejected from "paradise." But this paradise, unlike *Lazarillo*'s, is devoid of God.<sup>13</sup> Guzmán has been expelled for his "sins" against the earthly possessions of the unholy Cardinal.

It seems evident that Alemán, like the author of *Lazarillo*, was aware that the Church hierarchy was corrupt and desperately in need of reform. Alemán gives a high official of the Church the same negative qualities that the anonymous author of *Lazarillo* had given his lowly parish priest—hardly an arch-Catholic attitude on the part of our author. The different presentation of this criticism attests to growing strength of the Counter-Reformation.

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#### NOTES

1. Donald McGrady, *Mateo Alemán* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), p. 60.
2. Enrique Moreno Báez, *Lección y sentido del Guzmán de Alfarache* (Madrid: Revista de filología española, 1948), p. 53.
3. Mateo Alemán, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1969), p. 230. All quotations from this text will be taken from this edition.
4. The Priest of Maqueda appears in the *Tratado segundo* of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and familiarity with this character and this chapter are recommended for comprehension of comparisons made in this article.
5. See McGrady, p. 111.
6. For a definition of the symbolism of the chest (arca) in *Lazarillo de Tormes* see Piper, Anson C., "The 'Breadly Paradise' of *Lazarillo de Tormes*", *Hispania*, v. XLIV (1961), pp. 269-71.
7. Marcel Bataillon, *Pícaros y picaresca: La pícaro Justina* (Madrid: Taurus ediciones, S.A., 1969), p. 218.
8. For a similar discussion of vengeance in *Guzmán de Alfarache*, see Carroll B. Johnson, *Inside Guzmán de Alfarache* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
9. *Alumbrismo* comes from Erasmian influence in the form of the *alumbrado* movement. Arising from the Reformation, the main point upon which the *alumbrados* insisted was a direct relationship between the believer and the deity, with total circumvention of the established hierarchy of the Church and its ministers. With the advent of the Counter-Reformation, this movement was quashed.
10. Francisco Rico, *La novela picaresca y el punto de vista* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S.A., 1973), p. 64.
11. Ciro Espinosa, "La novela picaresca y el *Guzmán de Alfarache*" in *La idea* (Havana, 1935), p. 21.
12. *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1966), pp. 141-45. According to Anson Piper in his article cited above, "The priest's war against heresy is, of course, successful in the end. Lázaro is brutally beaten by the zealous cleric who assumes, quite incorrectly, that the whistling noise emerging from the boy's pallet is the hissing of the snake which is said by neighbors to be the real cause of the diminishing bread supply. Lázaro's ultimate defeat, therefore, stems from the last-minute intrusions of a serpent into his 'breadly paradise.'" The priest's house for *Lazarillo* is a hell and a paradise. At the end of the chapter, however, it is more of a paradise since he has been eating, but it is the snake that is the cause of his eviction.
13. In *Guzmán de Alfarache* the protagonist views the Cardinal's home, with all its comforts, as a paradise on earth. This paradise, unlike *Lazarillo's*, is complete with "forbidden fruit." But the situation is reversed in this work. The protagonist is not the sinner. He proclaims himself the child of Eve, and the Cardinal is the snake who places the temptation and when he succumbs, he is ejected from paradise. He is ejected by the "god" who rules this material "paradise"—the Cardinal.