



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (025)

TEXT: *El matadero* + “Apología del matambre”o

AUTHOR: Esteban Echeverría (1805–1851)

EDITOR: [Stockcero Edition based on original texts and comparative notes]

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

AUTHOR, PERIOD, AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Romantic liberal and nation-builder:

Esteban Echeverría is a central figure of Argentine romanticism and early liberal thought. Member of the Salón Literario in Marcos Sastre’s bookstore and later founder of the Asociación de Mayo (modeled on Mazzini’s Giovine Italia), he sought to shape a modern, democratic Argentina in opposition to caudillo rule.

Rosas’s dictatorship:

El matadero is set during the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas, whose rule (1829–1852) combined federalist populism with brutal repression. Rosas’s closure of the Salón Literario and persecution of intellectuals force many, including Echeverría, into exile. The story reflects this climate of censorship, violence, and ideological fanaticism.

EL MATADERO: POLITICAL PAMPHLET AND LITERARY “JEWEL”

Origin as pamphlet:

El matadero was conceived as a political pamphlet. Though not published in Echeverría’s lifetime, it circulated among friends as a fierce denunciation of Rosas’s tyranny and the culture of barbarism it fostered. Contemporary critics noted its “precipitation and naked realism,” assuming it was not meant for print. Yet those very traits—speed, roughness, unfiltered brutality—have become its greatest virtues.

Hybrid form:

Often labeled a nouvelle or long short story, *El matadero* blends:

Costumbrista detail (popular types, slang, urban spaces);

Allegory and symbolism (the slaughterhouse as Argentina; the lone young “unitario” as intellectual conscience);

Political satire (religious hypocrisy during Lent, Federalist fanaticism, judicial impunity).

Juan María Gutiérrez compared Echeverría here to a painter who opens his sketchbook to capture street scenes quickly, intending to compose a more polished “picture of customs” later. In practice, the sketch became the masterpiece.

Realism and modernity:

The story’s stark, almost documentary realism—bloody carcasses, insults, torture, sexualized violence—anticipates later naturalist and realist trends, freeing Echeverría’s prose from the constraints of romantic ornament. This “defect” of being too raw made the text resistant to fashion’s swings and helped secure its modernity.



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SCENE AND SYMBOL: THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE AS ARGENTINA

A microcosm of barbarism:

The Buenos Aires slaughterhouse becomes a stage where children, women, butchers, workers, and officials enact a grotesque ritual. The Federalist rabble (with its red badges and slogans) persecutes any sign of “unitario” difference. Religious practices (Lent, fasting) are emptied of ethical content, replaced by superstition and cruelty.

Violence as spectacle:

The capture and torture of the young liberal, his humiliation, and death turn political violence into public entertainment. The crowd’s enjoyment of pain and degradation illustrates the erosion of moral boundaries under authoritarian rule.

Civilization / barbarism debate:

Though Facundo will later theorize the opposition between “civilization” and “barbarism,” El matadero offers a vivid fictional prefiguration: urban space is not inherently “civilized”; when institutions collapse, the city itself can become a slaughterhouse. The “barbarism” here is not just rural gaucho violence but an entire social order shaped by fear, fanaticism, and impunity.

“APOLOGÍA DEL MATAMBRE”: COSTUMBRISMO, IRONY, AND NATIONAL TASTE

Genre and tone:

“Apología del matambre” (c. 1837) is a humorous cuadro de costumbres, a prose sketch that playfully defends the humble matambre (a specific beef cut) against the gastronomic pretensions of other nations. It appears in Gutiérrez’s 19th-century edition of Echeverría’s works.

Irony and national identity:

The piece mixes mock-heroic rhetoric and concrete culinary detail to celebrate a distinctly porteño food. Echeverría contrasts the hearty, virile matambre with English roast-beef and plum pudding, Italian macaroni, French omelettes, Spanish olla podrida, poking fun at foreign gastronomies while asserting a robust national appetite: “apretándonos los flancos soltaremos zumbando el palabron, matambre, y taparemos de cabo a rabo su descomedida boca.”

Body, appetite, and politics:

Behind the humor lies a serious meditation: food shapes bodies and, metaphorically, character. The matambre nourishes “pechos varoniles” and “estómagos robustos,” linked to those who “wrote Independencia, Libertad” with bloody steel. Yet the text also warns that even the best things have defects; there are good and bad matambres, as there are in all human affairs. In pairing El matadero with this piece, the edition invites students to see how everyday customs (food, appetite, humor) intersect with grand political and moral narratives.

Metafiction and “words, words, words”:

The closing anecdote, where a friend interrupts to ask “¿qué haces?” and Echeverría replies he is writing an apología of the matambre, ends with a Hamlet allusion: “words, words, words, palabras, palabras.” The sketch self-reflectively comments on its own status as “humorada,” while insisting that even playful words shape collective imagination.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

From Pamphlet to Classic:

The backcover notes that *El matadero* “was not written to be published,” yet it is now considered a foundational text. What specific literary qualities (realism, structure, voice) make it more than mere pamphlet? How does its “improvised” feel contribute to its lasting impact?

Slaughterhouse as Allegory of the Nation:

In what ways does the slaughterhouse function as a microcosm of Rosas’s Argentina? Identify details (characters, rituals, language) that link this local space to national politics. How does the story complicate the easy equation “city = civilization, countryside = barbarism”?

Violence, Spectacle, and Morality:

Discuss how public executions and torture are portrayed in *El matadero*. What role do bystanders (children, women, workers) play? How does the text invite readers to judge the morality of spectatorship and mob justice?

Food, Nation, and Irony in “Apología del matambre”:

How does Echeverría use humor and exaggeration to build a “national” gastronomic pride? What do the contrasts with English, Italian, French, and Spanish dishes reveal about 19th-century Argentine anxieties and aspirations?

Body Politics: From Matambre to Matadero:

Compare the treatment of the body in both texts: the slaughtered animals and tortured young unitario vs. the celebrated digestive prowess of “grandes estómagos” who eat matambre. How do eating, violence, and masculinity intersect in Echeverría’s vision of the nation?

Realism, Costumbrismo, and Early Naturalism:

To what extent can *El matadero* and “Apología del matambre” be read as precursors to later realist and naturalist writing in Argentina (e.g., Cambaceres)? Consider descriptive techniques, social critique, and focus on the everyday.

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary texts

- Echeverría, Esteban. *El matadero*. (Various Argentine editions; often included with *Dogma Socialista* and other writings.)
- Echeverría, Esteban. “Apología del matambre.” In Juan María Gutiérrez, *Obras Completas de D. Esteban Echeverría*. Buenos Aires: Carlos Casavalle, 1870–1874.

Historical and critical studies

- Gutiérrez, Juan María. Prologue and notes in *Obras Completas de D. Esteban Echeverría*.
- Shumway, Nicolas. *The Invention of Argentina*. (Chapters on Sarmiento, Echeverría, and nation-building.)
- Ramos, Julio. *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina*.



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- Sarlo, Beatriz. Essays on 19th-century Argentine literature and the civilización/barbarie paradigm.
- Viñas, David. Literatura argentina y realidad política.
- Anderson Imbert, Enrique. Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana. (Sections on early Argentine romanticism.)

PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What historical regime provides the backdrop for *El matadero*?

- A) The presidency of Sarmiento
- B) The Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata
- C) The dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas
- D) The first Peronist government

Correct Answer: C

***El matadero* was originally conceived primarily as:**

- A) A children's story
- B) A religious allegory against Protestantism
- C) A political pamphlet denouncing Rosas's rule
- D) A cookbook preface

Correct Answer: C

According to Juan María Gutiérrez, *Echeverría* in *El matadero* resembles:

- A) A scientist in a laboratory
- B) A painter opening his sketchbook to record street scenes rapidly
- C) A priest delivering a sermon
- D) A lawyer writing a legal brief

Correct Answer: B

In "*Apología del matambre*," which of the following is TRUE?

- A) The matambre is condemned as unhealthy and immoral.
- B) Foreign dishes (roast-beef, macaroni, omelette, chorizos) are uncritically praised above Argentine food.
- C) The matambre is humorously celebrated as a distinctly porteño food that nourishes strong bodies and national character.
- D) The sketch avoids any mention of national identity.

Correct Answer: C

How does *Echeverría's* closing reference to "*words, words, words... palabras, palabras*" in "*Apología del matambre*" function?

- A) As a rejection of literature in favor of silence
- B) As a Hamlet allusion that self-consciously frames the text as a playful "humorada," while acknowledging the power of words
- C) As a literal translation exercise
- D) As a religious invocation

Correct Answer: B

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