



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (071)

TEXT: *Tradiciones Peruanas – The Shortest Traditions: Between Proverb and Short Story*

AUTHOR: Ricardo Palma

EDITOR: Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas.

1. Overview for Instructors

This volume offers a curated selection of **Ricardo Palma's shortest Tradiciones Peruanas**, together with a substantial critical introduction by **Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas**.

The edition is designed to help students:

- **Understand how Palma uses very short narrative forms (often just a page or two) to encode:**
 - Social rules and norms (reglas constitutivas y regulativas).
 - Collective memory and national imaginaries.
 - Implicit political and cultural commentary.
- **Work concretely with genre boundaries:**
 - Refrán (e.g. «Aceituna, una»).
 - Anécdota (e.g. «Don por lo mismo»).
 - Leyenda (e.g. «La achirana del Inca»).
 - Cuento (e.g. «La fiesta de San Simón Garabatillo»).
- **Situate Palma's work within 19th-century Peruvian sociocultural context: race, class, colonial legacies, and nation-building.**

Because the texts are short and often humorous, they are particularly effective in:

- Intermediate and advanced Spanish language courses (reading, vocabulary, pragmatics).
- Introductory courses in Latin American literature and culture.
- Thematic courses on **memory, identity, and narrative strategy**.

2. Why These Short Traditions Work in the Classroom

Brevity + density

Even the shortest texts (some under 200 words) are packed with cultural references, implicit norms, and stylistic play.

Clear links to oral tradition

Refranes, anécdotas, and legends allow discussions of **orality vs. writing**, popular vs. elite discourse, and how Palma mediates between them.

Strong pragmatic dimension

As Rodríguez-Arenas points out, in the short Tradiciones the emphasis shifts from “what is said” (semantics) to “what is meant by what is said” (pragmatics):

- Indirect speech acts.
- Irony and double meaning.
- Cultural presuppositions the reader must infer.



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Good entry point into Palma's larger project

These compact pieces exemplify his broader effort to:

- Re-write Peruvian history from below.
- Create shared imaginaries across divided social groups.
- Secure his own place as a mixed-race intellectual within elite culture.

Suggested course contexts:

Introduction to Latin American Literature (unit on 19th-century prose).

Latin American Cultural Studies (memory, nation, race).

Courses on short narrative forms (micro-story, proverb, anecdote).

3. Suggested Reading Sequences

A. Refrán and pragmatic meaning – «Aceituna, una»

- **Core text:**
«Aceituna, una»
- **Key points:**
Palma starts from a proverb that seems opaque or trivial and reconstructs a possible **historical origin** and web of related refranes: – «Aceituna, una»
– «Aceituna, oro es una; la segunda, plata, y la tercera mata»
– «Éste tiene la suerte de las aceitunas»
– «Llegar a las aceitunas»
– «Aceituna zapatera»
– «Aceituna, una, mas si es buena, una docena».
- **The tradition is less a “story” than a mini-essay in narrative form: – Shows Palma’s knowledge of popular speech.**
– Uses humor and indirectness to signal social attitudes (e.g. about aging women).
– Illustrates Searle’s distinction between **direct and indirect speech acts**.
- **Teaching focus:**
 - How do proverbs encode shared cultural norms and biases?
 - Where does Palma simply “explain” a saying, and where does he add his own ironic commentary?
 - What does this piece reveal about: – Gender attitudes (e.g. «aceituna zapatera»).
 - Class and everyday life (e.g. jokes about shoemakers and cheap olives)?

B. Anécdota and character – «Don por lo mismo»

- **Core text:**
«Don por lo mismo»
- **Context:**
Two short anecdotes about **Marshal Ramón Castilla**, four-time president of Peru.
- **Key elements:**
Presents Castilla as:
– Arbitrary and authoritarian (forcing bystanders into his card games).
– But also generous and fair in the end (not making them pay losses, sharing winnings).



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The “Don por lo mismo” nickname arises from his stubborn, illogical insistence during a game of tresillo.

- **Teaching focus:**

- Formal features of **anécdota**: – Short, autonomous narrative.
- – Centered on a known historical figure.
- – Aimed at revealing “true character” through a small incident.
- How does Palma’s framing (opening praise, closing punchline) guide our judgment of Castilla?
- What implicit political commentary about caudillos and authority emerges through these seemingly light stories?

C. *Leyenda and Inca imaginary – «La achirana del Inca»*

- **Core text:**

«La achirana del Inca»

- **Context:**

Legend about an Inca irrigation canal (achirana) in the Ica region, linked to Pachacútec.

- **Key elements:**

Arquetypal figures:

- The wise, benevolent Inca ruler.
- The virtuous young woman who requests not personal benefit but a work that will serve her people.

The legend embodies:

- Pre-Columbian engineering achievement.
- An image of Andean leadership based on reciprocity and public works.

- **Teaching focus:**

- **Distinguish leyenda from myth and anecdote:**

- Localized in a specific place.
- Mix of historical memory and imaginative elaboration.

- **How does Palma’s portrayal of the Inca past contrast with his portrayal of contemporary indigenous people in other Tradiciones (e.g. «Por beber en copa de oro»)?**

Discuss the **ambivalence**: idealization of Inca past vs. prejudice toward present-day indigenous populations.

D. *Cuento and civic pedagogy – «La fiesta de San Simón Garabatillo»*

- **Core text:**

«La fiesta de San Simón Garabatillo»

- **Context:**

Post-independence Peru, around 1828–1830, in the town of Lampa. Simón Bolívar’s legacy and popular indifference.

- **Plot outline:**

Faustino Guerra, ex-soldier and now schoolteacher, is upset that no one celebrates Bolívar’s feast day.



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Without explanation, he beats his pupils with a strap he calls “San Simón Garabatillo”.

The boys, deeply impressed, never forget the date or its significance and gather every 28 October to honor Bolívar, their teacher, and “San Simón Garabatillo”.

- **Teaching focus:**
- **Why is this piece best considered a cuento rather than a mere anecdote?**
 - Clear beginning, middle, and end.
 - Single, focused conflict and resolution.
 - Strong, unified character (Faustino).
- **How does the story dramatize: – The gap between official heroes and popular memory.**
 - The use of corporal punishment as a tool of civic education.
- **What is Palma’s attitude toward Bolívar here, given his own complex relationship to the Liberator in other texts?**

4. Sample Discussion Questions

You can adapt these for discussion, online forums, or brief written responses.

Semantics vs. pragmatics

Using «Aceituna, una» as a case study, identify passages where the literal meaning (“lo que se dice”) diverges from the intended meaning (“lo que se quiere decir con lo que se dice”).

- How do indirect speech acts and irony work in this text?

Identity and race

From Rodríguez-Arenas’s introduction: how did Palma’s mixed racial background (mestizo / cuarterón) shape his position in 19th-century Peruvian society?

- How do these tensions appear (implicitly) in the Tradiciones?

Memory and nation

In what ways do the short Tradiciones contribute to building a **Peruvian collective memory**?

- Consider colonial episodes, Inca legends, and early republican anecdotes.
- What (and who) is emphasized or omitted?

Gender and language

Examine the representation of women in at least two short Tradiciones (e.g. «Aceituna zapatera», «Pues bonita soy yo, la Castellanos!»).

- What stereotypes are reinforced?
- How do refranes and popular sayings encode androcentric norms?

Genre and expectation

Pick one text that Palma himself labels (or that Rodríguez-Arenas classifies) as refrán / anécdota / leyenda / cuento.

- What expectations do you bring to that genre label?
- Does the text confirm or subvert those expectations?



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5. Short Written Assignments

- **1–2 page close reading**

- Ask students to choose one very short tradition (e.g., «La misa a escape», «El carajo de Sucre») and:
 - Paraphrase the text in their own words.
 - Analyze how Palma packs irony, social critique, or character into such a small space.
 - Identify at least one refrán, fixed phrase, or allusion, and explain its function.

- **3–4 page analytical essay**

- **Possible prompts:**

“Between proverb and story: Analyze how Palma transforms a refrán or anecdote into a full tradition in at least two short texts.”

“Discuss the role of orality in the short traditions: how does Palma simulate spoken storytelling on the printed page?”

- **Creative + reflective exercise**

Have students write a 1–2 page “modern tradition” based on a contemporary proverb or campus anecdote:

- It should: – Start from a saying or short anecdote.
– Develop at least one character and a mini-plot.
– End with a witty or ironic twist.

Follow with a 1–2 page reflection on what they learned about Palma’s narrative strategies.

6. Assessment Ideas

Reading journals

- Note each appearance of a proverb or saying; explain what social rule it encodes.
- Track Palma’s narrative intrusions vs. more “transparent” storytelling.
- Reflect briefly on where you agree or disagree with the implied values.

Group presentations

- Assign small groups one short tradition each to present: – Plot summary.
- Type (refrán-based, anecdote, legend, cuento).
 - Historical or social context.
 - One key passage for close reading.

Exam-style questions

- “Explain how Palma’s short traditions contribute to constructing a shared Peruvian memory, even as they reflect elite biases.”
- “Compare the treatment of the Inca past and the Indigenous present in one legend-based tradition and one 19th-century anecdotal tradition.”



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