



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (086)

TITLE: *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*

AUTHOR: Anonymous

EDITOR: Asima F.X. Saad-Maura

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(Based on Prof. Saad-Maura's Preliminary Note)

I. OVERVIEW & SIGNIFICANCE

This critical edition presents the foundational text of the picaresque genre, *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*. Published anonymously in 1554, the novel broke abruptly away from the idealism of chivalric, pastoral, and sentimental romances of its time. Instead, it introduced a stark, cynical, and highly realistic portrayal of 16th-century Spanish society through the eyes of a marginalized antihero fighting for survival. Edited by Asima F.X. Saad-Maura, this volume carefully respects the original 16th-century orthography (maintaining forms like *tractado*, *ansí*, *mochacho*, and enclitic pronouns) to provide students with a rich philological experience, supported by accessible footnotes validated against Sebastián de Covarrubias' 1611 *Tesoro de la lengua castellana*.

Beyond its literary innovation, *Lazarillo de Tormes* is a devastating social critique. Written in the form of a continuous autobiographical letter addressed to an enigmatic "Vuestra Merced" (Your Grace), Lázaro recounts his life from his impoverished birth on the banks of the Tormes River to his dubious "success" as a town crier in Toledo, comfortably married to an archpriest's mistress. Through his successive masters—a blind beggar, a miserly cleric, a starving squire, and an exploitative pardoner—the text mercilessly exposes the hypocrisy, clerical corruption, and profound inequality of Imperial Spain. Its anticlerical satire was so biting that the Inquisition placed it on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1559.

II. CONTEXT & CRITICAL APPROACHES:

This text provides a multifaceted framework for exploring the intersections of literature, social history, religious censorship, and the evolution of the novel in Early Modern Europe.

The Birth of the Pícaro and the Anti-Romance::

Discuss how *Lazarillo* dismantles the literary paradigms of its time. Contrast Lázaro's sordid origins, chronic hunger, and reliance on deceit for survival against the nobility, courtly love, and heroic deeds of contemporary chivalric and pastoral novels. Analyze the essential traits of the pícaro: low social standing, lack of traditional honor, service to multiple masters, and the use of a cynical, first-person narrative voice to justify moral compromises.

Clerical Satire and the Inquisition:

Examine the novel's scathing portrayal of the Catholic clergy. Analyze the specific vices represented by Lázaro's masters: the cruelty of the blind man (who sells prayers), the avarice of the priest of Maqueda, the worldliness of the Mercedarian friar, the outright fraud of the pardoner (buldero), and the hypocrisy of the archpriest



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of San Salvador. Discuss the historical context of the Counter-Reformation and why the text was considered dangerous enough to be banned and later expurgated.

Honor, Hunger, and Social Decadence:

Analyze the Third Treatise (the episode with the Squire). How does the Squire embody the Spanish obsession with honra (appearances and social status) at the expense of material survival? Discuss the reversal of roles when Lázaro, the servant, must beg to feed his master. Examine hunger not just as a physical reality, but as the central driving force of the narrative and a metaphor for the profound inequality during the reign of Charles V.

The Architecture of "El Caso":

Deconstruct the epistolary structure of the novel. What is "el caso" (the case) that Vuestra Merced has asked Lázaro to explain? How does Lázaro use the recounting of his entire life to justify his final, morally compromised position in a ménage à trois? Discuss the unreliability of the narrator and how Lázaro's adult cynicism colors his recounting of his childhood innocence

III. ADVANCED DISCUSSION & RESEARCH PROMPTS

These prompts encourage deep engagement with the text, critical thinking, and historical connections suitable for undergraduate and graduate-level courses.

The Anonymity of Authorship: Over the centuries, scholars have attributed the novel to various figures (Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Alfonso de Valdés, Fray Juan de Ortega). Discuss why the author likely chose to remain anonymous. Does knowing the true author change our interpretation of the text's social critique?

Lázaro's "Success" vs. Moral Decay: In the final treatise, Lázaro claims to have reached "the summit of all good fortune." Do you agree with his assessment? Analyze how the novel forces the reader to weigh material survival against moral and spiritual corruption.

Autobiography vs. Fiction: David Gitlitz and others have suggested that the novel mimics the structure of an Inquisition confession or an Auto de fe, where the accused had to narrate their genealogy and life to prove their "cleanliness of blood" (limpieza de sangre). Analyze the text as a parody of these official and terrifying documents.

The Evolution of the Spanish Language: Use this specific edition to trace linguistic shifts. Have students compare the 16th-century vocabulary and syntax (e.g., the use of enclitic pronouns like entrábase, fuile) with modern Spanish, utilizing Covarrubias' definitions as a bridge.

Modern Parallels of the Pícaro: As Saad-Maura points out in the introduction, the reality of abandoned, exploited children surviving on the streets is not confined to the 16th century. Have students draw parallels between Lázaro's situation and contemporary issues of child poverty and marginalization.



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IV. SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

This section complements the study of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, providing avenues for deeper research into the picaresque genre and Early Modern Spain.

Primary Text:

- Anonymous. *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*. Edited by Asima F.X. Saad-Maura. Stockcero. (TK ORDER: 86)

Key Secondary Scholarship:

- **Blecua, Alberto.** *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1975.
- **Covarruvias, Sebastián de.** *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*. Ignacio Arellano and Rafael Zafra, eds. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006.
- **García Cárcel, Ricardo.** *Pícaros y homosexuales en la España moderna*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005.
- **Gitlitz, David.** "Inquisition Confessions and Lazarillo de Tormes." *Hispanic Review* 68 (2000): 53-74.
- **Marañón, Gregorio.** *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1940.
- **Rico, Francisco.** *La novela picaresca y el punto de vista*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1970.

V. RELATED STOCKCERO RESOURCES

- **Origins, Picaresque & Costumbrismo (6-Book Bundle).**
- *Other titles in the bundle: El lazarrillo de ciegos caminantes, Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez, La Quijotita y su prima, Don Catrín de la Fachenda, Manuela. Novela bogotana.*

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