

Lazarillo de Tormes (Anonymous, 1554)

Issues to consider while you are reading / reviewing the text

- Does that fact that this is an epistolary novella potentially change the way we might approach the narrator's words? Who is Lázaro writing to, and might that affect both what he says and *how he says it*? What is the significance of the title "Vuestra Merced"? What is "el Caso" that Lázaro refers to?
- What are we told about Lazarillo's background and upbringing? What kind of "family" does he come from? What does the narrator hope to achieve by giving us these details?
- What is the significance of the protagonist's name, Lazarillo de Tormes? Why is he associated with a river? What do you associate with rivers?
- What does Lazarillo learn from his first master, the Ciego? What kind of morality is this, and how might it relate to the principal moral precepts of the time?
- What might have been considered scandalous at the time in the presentation of the second master, the Clérigo?
- What wry social commentary is being made by the Escudero's obsession with appearances and clothes? What do we make of the fact that Lazarillo ends up procuring food and provisions for him rather than vice versa? What echoes are there of the Escudero in Lazarillo's final employment at the end of the book, and what is the significance of this?
- Why is the fourth *tratado* so short, and what is the effect of it being so short? Is there something we're not being told overtly here? What back narrative can you piece together by reading "between the lines" and looking carefully at the innuendo and double meanings of words here? How scandalous would this have been at the time? How does this coded, suppressed story relate to the narrative mode of the novella as a whole?
- Does Lazarillo's life begin to look up after this? Does he seem to be ascending the social ladder? Yet are there any hints that he is regressing at the same time? What kind of family structure does he end up in? What is the significance of his profession? Has he finally achieved a public voice of his own?
- Is there a difference between Lazarillo and Lázaro? Does thinking this difference allow us to understand more about the duplicitous mode of narrating the story? What is the point of this narrative splitting?
- Why do you think the novella was banned shortly after its publication and placed on the Catholic Index of prohibited books? A censored version was allowed to circulate after 1573, without *tratados* four or five. Why were these chapters censored (in Spain, until the nineteenth century)?
- Why do you think the text was published anonymously? What might this tell us about the author's likely position in society?

Now answer one of these essay questions:

1. In what sense does the beginning of *Lazarillo de Tormes* anticipate the end, and the end return us to the beginning?
2. "The gap between Lázaro the narrator and Lazarillo the character is difficult for the reader to bridge." Discuss with reference to *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

3. "En este grosero estilo escribo." In the light of this quotation, discuss the way in which style affects meaning in *Lazarillo de Tormes*.
4. "The author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* is less concerned with the errors of the individual than with those of society." Discuss.
5. "*Lazarillo de Tormes* is a deceptive account of a life." Discuss.
6. "*Lazarillo de Tormes* is a book primarily about the use of language." Discuss.
7. "Lázaro is a master manipulator who deceives the reader at every step and whose ultimate goal is to justify himself by blaming others for his own mistakes in life." Discuss.
8. "Lázaro's attempts to divert the reader's attention from 'el caso' paradoxically highlight his own misdeeds." Discuss with reference to *Lazarillo de Tormes*.
9. "*Lazarillo de Tormes* is fundamentally an anticlerical invective." Discuss.

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