

INTRODUCTION

"Lazarillo of Tormes" emerged in sixteenth-century Spain as a groundbreaking work amidst the plethora of chivalric novels, offering a refreshing perspective with its focus on the realistic struggles of its protagonist, Lazarillo, for survival and sustenance, rather than the fantastical exploits of knights. The novel quickly gained popularity, leading to several editions in its debut year, 1554, and translations into numerous languages, establishing the picaresque genre.

The text underwent censorship due to its critical portrayal of the clergy, leading to abridged versions that excised controversial sections until the complete work was accessible in Spain in the nineteenth century. The novel's authorship remains a topic of speculation, with suggestions ranging from Juan de Ortega and Sebastian de Horozco to the more favored Diego Hurtado de Mendoza. Some scholars suggest the author might have been a Jewish convert to Christianity or an adherent of Erasmian thought, based on thematic elements in the book.

The narrative intertwines with European folklore and biblical references, notably aligning its protagonist, Lazarillo (little Lazaro), with the biblical Lazarus, enhancing its thematic depth through allusions to traditional tales and societal commentary. The novel's depiction of sixteenth-century Spanish society—marked by inflation, social disparity, and moral decay, particularly among the clergy and nobility—provides a critical lens on the era's socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

Though "Lazarillo of Tormes" paints a mainly negative image of Spanish society by focusing on its ills and ignoring the positive aspects, it represents a segment of the broader societal experience, contrasting sharply with the idealized narratives common in contemporary chivalric and pastoral literature. Critics have debated the novel's unity and completeness, noting its innovative use of recurring themes, detailed

episodes, and character development as elements that contribute to its narrative cohesion and literary significance.

The novel's influence is profound, contributing to the emergence of modern narrative forms and setting precedents for character development and social satire. Its style, characterized by linguistic plays and conceits, adds layers of meaning, enriching the text's thematic concerns and reader engagement.

Sequels and adaptations followed, though none matched the original's critical acclaim or impact. These subsequent works variously continued Lazarillo's story with varying degrees of success and narrative coherence, reflecting the enduring appeal and influence of the original novel in the literary canon.

