Lazarillo de Tormes
No one will know my name... this will make a better story. Yes, Lázaro will be the author and with the help of a scribe he will write about his case.

Moreover, I believe that things worthy of attention shouldn’t be left unheard and unseen, buried in the grave of oblivion. Some reader might find them agreeable and those ready to pay more than passing attention will be rewarded.

I’m already imagining the speculations this little book will arise... but it’s better like this, writing my name is too dangerous and besides, the format of this book lends itself to it. Definitely, this story will be anonymous... it is more convenient for all of us.

Not only heroes make a good story... I will be content if everyone can enjoy this book and see how a real man lives surrounded by uncertain fortune, dangers and adversities.
The English loved it! Mostly because the content of the novel was a gift to Protestant propaganda attacking the Roman Church. English readers liked to read of Spanish corruption in the church, incompetence of military officials and chaos in industrial life in general!

But it is also true that they liked it for many other reasons... We just have to think that Lazarillo was a literary predecessor to Henry Fielding's Tom Jones; Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Charles Dickens' Oliver and all the many anti-heroes and underdogs that came much later...

Reader, here is Lazarillo translated from the Spanish into English... in case you want to know, this book was first translated into English in 1576 but this translation is lost. The earliest one available is from 1586, translated by David Rowlands, who used two texts: the French translation from 1560 and the Spanish uncensored version published in Antwerp in 1554.
Since Your Excellency has written asking to know about my case, I thought best to begin not in the middle but at the beginning, so as to offer a full picture of myself.

And now... I should explain my case...

And so as those of nobler origins will realize how equally limited they are, since fortune was as partial to them as to the rest of us, and how much accomplished are those who have fortune against them, for their aptitude and strength will bring them to a safer harbor.
First Treaty

YOUR EXCELLENCY SHOULD KNOW, FIRST OF ALL, THAT MY NAME IS LÁZARO DE TORMES, SON OF TOMÉ GONZÁLEZ AND ANTONIA PÉREZ, ORIGINALLY FROM TEJARES, A VILLAGE IN SALAMANCA.

I WAS BORN ON THE RIVER TORMES, WHICH IS WHY I HAVE THIS NAME.

WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD,

MY FATHER WAS CAUGHT STEALING FROM THE SACKS BELONGING TO THE MILL. HE WAS ARRESTED AND CONFESSIONED, DENYING NOTHING.

HE WAS PROSECUTED AND EXILED BY THE LAW.
His life ended when he and his gentleman were killed.

In those years, there was a campaign against the Moors and my father took part in it. He was a mule driver for a gentleman that went to the campaign.

My widowed mother, opted to approach some good patrons and thus came to live in the city.

She began to cook for students...

...and to wash clothes for the stable boys, so she hung about the stables quite a bit.

There she met a black man. He would sometimes come to our house and leave in the morning.
Seeing that, I thought...
There must be many in this world who run away from others because they don't see themselves!

At the beginning, I was afraid of him because of his color.

But when I realized that his arrival meant better food, I started to like him. He always brought bread, meat and firewood to warm up during the winter.

From conversing so amicably with him, my mother gave birth to a very pretty brown-skinned boy, whom I juggled in my arms, taking care of him with much love.

From memory, my stepfather playing with the boy one day, and the little one saw that my mother and I were white, and he wasn’t. He would run away, afraid of him. The moment he reached my mother, he would say:

Mommy, the bogeyman!
Son of a bitch!

Seeing that, I thought... there must be many in this world who run away from others because they don’t see themselves!
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MY MOTHER AND ZAIDE, WHICH WAS HIS NAME, CAME TO THE EARS OF EVERYONE AND AT THE STABLES THEY FOUND OUT THAT ZAIDE WAS STEALING ABOUT HALF THE OATS USED FOR THE CATTLE.

HE ALSO RESCUED FIREWOOD, CURRY COMBS, APRONS, HORSE SHEETS, AND BLANKETS. WHEN THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT TO STEAL, HE WOULD TAKE THE SHOES OFF THE HORSE’S FEET. ALL THIS HE WOULD GIVE TO MY MOTHER TO SELL FOR HER TO RAISE MY LITTLE BROTHER.

LET US NOT MARVEL THAT A PRIEST OR A FRIAR ROBS HIS FLOCK TO SUPPORT HIS VICES OR THOSE OF HIS PEERS WHEN LOVE LEADS A POOR SLAVE TO ACT THIS WAY.
Even though the book was included in the Index of Forbidden Books, people still continue reading it. I'm of the opinion that the book imitates the reality of our Spain with such finesse that keeping it forbidden in its entirety is going to be difficult if not impossible.

You came very well recommended from my friend, Juan de Ovando and the Counsel of the Indies. No doubt, you are the man for the job.

Yes, of course... this silly book can be a threat if we don't take the right measures. Valdés, my predecessor already did but there weren't sufficient. We should study other alternatives...

Then, it's settled... I leave the purge of this book in your able and loyal hands. Let's finish once and for all with such a daring story and let Lazarillo condemn himself...

I'm of the same opinion, Your Excellency. Let Lazarillo bite the bait...and die by opening his mouth!

Hahaha...well said, Velasco. You make me think of the terrible second part of Lazarillo in which that impertinent character turns himself into a fish. What a daring tuna fish he is! Nevertheless, let's punish the original Lazarillo by publishing it censored and most importantly, void of its original message.
Characters implicated in the ins and outs of the Lazarillo’s editorial history

(Fernando Valdés (1483-1568))

General Inquisitor (from 1546-1566) responsible for Lazarillo’s prohibition and inclusion in the Index of Forbidden Books in 1559. During those fourteen years (1559-1573) Lazarillo is presumably out of circulation in Spain.

Diego de Espinosa (1513-1572)

General Inquisitor (from 1567-1572). It’s very probable that it was under his rule as Inquisitor that the decision to publish the Lazarillo’s censored version was taken. It is also possible that he was in close contact with the censor, Juan López de Velasco, during the process. Espinosa was one of Philip II’s confidant. At his death, the King is known to have said: “Here lies burried the best of my ministers.” Gaspar de Quiroga (1512-1594) succeeded him as General Inquisitor (from 1573-1594) but at this point, the project to publish Lazarillo in a censored version was well underway.
Benito Arias Montano (1527-1598)

Spanish Theologian and erudite. In 1566 he was appointed the King’s Chaplain and his secret advisor in Flanders and Portugal. Upon returning to Spain, he was in charge of organizing the library of The Royal Site of San Lorenzo del Escorial, the King’s residence. He was also appointed as the chief editor of The Antwerp Polyglot Bible better known as the King’s Bible; he also directed the compilation of the Indexes of Forbidden Books in the Low Countries. He was responsible for taking Lazarillo out of this Index in 1571 with the intention of censoring it partially. It was very probable that his advice was taken into consideration when publishing the censored version of Lazarillo in Spain.

Juan López de Velasco (1530-1598)

In 1565 he was working as information gatherer for the Counsel of the Indies; in 1571 he was appointed as Chronicler-Cosmographer by the same Counsel, which was under the direction of Juan de Ovando y Godoy. In 1572 López de Velasco was designated The King’s Cosmographer and in 1573 he was also selected as the censor of some of the literary works previously prohibited by the Inquisition. This partial censorship allowed the circulation of books like Lazarillo de Tormes, Propaladia by Torres Naharro, and the works of Cristóbal de Castillejo. López de Velasco was also commissioned by the King to write The Geography and Description of the Indies. Given the wealth of information this work provided, the King prohibited its publication and ordered to have the six existing manuscripts under lock and key only available to the members of the Counsel of the Indies. In 1591 López de Velasco, while still serving as Cosmographer, received the honor of being appointed as the King’s Secretary.
He was a very religious and austere man, perfectly prepared for the work of governing a vast Empire to which he devoted all his energies. Philip II of Spain, also known as the “Prudent King,” was responsible for modernizing the administration of the Hispanic Monarchy. He developed a centralized bureaucracy and personally supervised all matters of the State. During fifty years, Philip II governed the world’s greatest empire, described at the time as twenty times bigger than the Roman Empire. His Kingdom was governed following the model of a centralized administration managed by counsels and royal secretaries. He used the services of the Tribunal of the Inquisition frequently. It is very probable that the decision to examine and officially censor the Lazarillo had been reviewed by a group of individuals which included almost for certain: Espinosa, Ovando, López de Velasco and Arias Montano.

Juan de Ovando y Godoy (1514-1575)

Spanish lawyer and president of the Counsel of the Indies (1571-1574). Ovando y Godoy was also the King and the Inquisitor’s man of confidence. López de Velasco was his protégé and right hand man. Ovando was behind the meticulous procedure in which the Counsel of the Indies was information gathering, so much that he was responsible for changing the methods and organization of the New World’s Geographical studies. It was thanks to his support that López de Velasco composed in 1569 the Recompilations of the Laws and Provisions of the Indies. During the reorganization of the Counsel of the Indies undertaken by Ovando, López de Velasco was appointed with the newly created position of Chronicler-Cosmographer. López de Velasco’s instructions were to give a clear account of the new lands in order to systemize all the information. Ovando had an important input in The Book for the Spiritual and Temporal Governing of the Indies. He remained throughout his life the King and the Inquisition’s advisor in many matters.
Your Excellency Diego de Espinosa, General Inquisitor,

I am writing to your Excellency not only as an advisor but also as a friend in order for your Excellency to consider the censoring of the book entitled Lazarillo.

I have been in conversations regarding this matter with our mutual friend, Don Benito Arias Montano and we have come to the conclusion that the book of this picaro deserves to be published only after giving it a good purge. We need do this in a very subtle way so the reading public will not be aware that by purging it we will also take away its very essence. This editing job can only be carried away by expert hands for which I recommend, Juan López de Velasco, a man who deserves my total trust and who I am sure will not be a disappointment to any of us.

Your loyal servant and friend,

Juan de Ovando

Sevilla, Counsel of the Indies
Royal License for the Printing of La Propaladía and Lazarillo

I, King Philip, by the grace of God and of the Spanish Empire, have been informed that you, Juan López de Velasco, have been commissioned by the Holy Inquisition to correct and amend the book of Lazarillo. You are requesting from me, the King, that given the service you have provided, you or whomever you deemed appropriate, that you be permitted to print this book in our Kingdom.

As King I hereby grant you, Juan López de Velasco, permission to print said book. I decree that a fine of three hundred Aragonese florins be paid by whomever, other than you, prints Lazarillo in my Kingdom. Moreover, all the print plates and books already printed will be confiscated. I give testimony of this on the fifth day of August in the year of our Lord 1573.

I, the King

[Signature]
My poor stepfather was whipped and basted in boiling oil. My mother was put on trial, which resulted not only in the usual punishment of a hundred lashes but her being forbidden to enter the stables, and worse of all, to never have Zaide in her house.

LIKE I WAS SAYING... ALL THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ZAIDE WERE PROVED... AND THEN MORE BECAUSE THEY THREATENED ME TO MAKE ME TALK, SINCE I WAS JUST A BOY AND WAS TERRORIZED, I TESTIFIED AND EVEN DESCRIBED HOW I SOLD A BLACKSMITH SOME HORSESHOES WHEN MY MOTHER ASKED ME TO.

MY POOR MOTHER MADE AN EFFORT AND OBEYED THE COURT. TO AVOID DANGER AS WELL AS GOSSIP SHE BECAME A SERVANT AT THE SOLANA INN. THERE, SUFFERING A THOUSAND INDIGNITIES, MY LITTLE BROTHER WAS RAISED UNTIL HE LEARNED HOW TO WALK AND I BECAME A LAD.
AT THAT TIME, A BLIND MAN CAME TO STAY AT THE INN. HOPING I COULD BE OF USE TO HIM ON THE ROAD.

HE ASKED MY MOTHER IF HE COULD TAKE ME AND SHE AGREED.

I BEG YOU TO TREAT MY SON WELL AND TAKE GOOD CARE OF HIM SINCE HE IS AN ORPHAN.

I EMBRACE YOU NOT JUST AS A BOY BUT AS A SON!

SON, I KNOW I WON’T SEE YOU AGAIN. TRY TO BE GOOD AND MAY GOD GUIDE YOU. I HAVE RAISED YOU AS BEST I COULD. NOW I HAVE FOUND YOU A GOOD MASTER. FIND YOUR WORTH.
AND THIS IS HOW I BEGAN SERVING AND GUIDING MY NEW OLD MASTER...

WE LEFT SALAMANCA AND REACHED THE BRIDGE.

THERE IS AN ANIMAL STONE THERE THAT ALMOST LOOKS LIKE A BULL.

LAZARO, PUT YOUR EAR CLOSE TO THE BULL. YOU WILL HEAR A LOUD NOISE INSIDE IT.

I DID IT. WHEN HE FELT I HAD MY HEAD NEXT TO THE STONE,

HE GAVE ME SUCH A BLOW THAT MY HEAD CRASHED AGAINST IT. THE PAIN FROM THE GORING LASTED MORE THAN THREE DAYS.

YOU ARE DUMB! YOU MUST LEARN. THE BLIND MAN’S BOY MUST KNOW MORE THAN THE DEVIL HIMSELF.

AT THAT MOMENT I FELT AS IF I HAD SUDDENLY WOKEN UP FROM A STUPOR.

I SAID UNDER MY BREATH: “HE TELLS THE TRUTH. I MUST BE ALERT BECAUSE I AM ALONE, I NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO SURVIVE ON MY OWN.” WE BEGAN TRAVELLING, AND IN JUST A FEW DAYS HE TAUGHT ME THIEVES’ SLANG...

I CAN’T GIVE YOU GOLD OR SILVER; BUT I’LL TEACH YOU LESSONS FOR LIFE.

HE DID INDEED. AFTER GOD, HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO LIVE, AND BECAUSE HE WAS BLIND, HE GAVE ME LIGHT AND PREPARED ME FOR THE PATH.
I must tell these childish stories to Your Excellency to show the virtue of men who know how to rise from the lowest levels and how those on top often fall because of vice.

Now, getting back to the blind man and to further tell Your Excellency about my affairs, you must know that in this world there has never been anyone more astute and cunning.

Beyond this, he had a thousand ways to steal money from people. He knew prayers for diverse purposes: for women who couldn’t get pregnant, for women giving birth, for wives stuck in bad marriages, and for those eager to recover their husbands’ love. In short, he knew how to deal with all types of evils.
He earned more in a month than what a hundred blind men earn in an entire year.

As a result, the entire world sought him, especially women who believed everything he told them.

Even with all the money he collected, I never knew a meaner, stingier man than him. This is true because I almost died of hunger with him.
DURING OUR MEALS, THE BLIND MAN USED TO PUT A JUG OF WINE NEXT TO HIM. SHREWDLY, I WOULD GRAB IT AND DRINK WITHOUT HIM NOTICING BEFORE I GAVE IT BACK. THIS TRICK LASTED A SHORT TIME. SOON HE WOULD LIFT IT AND REALIZE IT WAS LIGHTER.

FOR ALL HIS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE, I FOUND WAYS NOT ONLY TO SURVIVE BUT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIM.

TO KEEP HIS WINE SAFE, HE NEVER LET IT GO FROM HIS HANDS AGAIN.

TO DO SO I HAD TO BE SLY SO AS TO GET THE BEST OF WHAT WAS GOING ON. BUT NOT ALWAYS... I WILL TELL YOUR EXCELLENCY SOME OF THE STORIES TO GET THE IDEA.

THIS ONE SHOWS YOU MY EARLY FONDNESS FOR WINE...
When the heat from the little fire we had going melted the wax, the wine pour out as a fountain. I placed myself in such a way so that no drop was ever lost.

But I had a trick... I introduced a long rye straw into the mouth of the jug, sucking the wine at night.

I decided to make a little hole at the base of the jug so it could have a jet of wine. I delicately covered with a wax plug.

Clever as he was, he sensed what I was doing and placed the wine between his legs and covered its top with his hands.

I had gotten used to the wine and would die for it. Realizing my straw was of little use,

While we ate our meals, I used to pretend I was cold and crawl between the blind man's legs to get warm.

When the heat from the little fire we had going melted the wax, the wine pour out as a fountain. I placed myself in such a way so that no drop was ever lost.
When the poor man was ready to drink, he found nothing in the jug. He didn’t have a clue what had happened.

The blind man realized this was the perfect time to take his revenge and from high above, with all his might...

He touched the jug all over until he finally discovered the trick but pretended he hadn’t.

The next day, I was sitting in the usual position with my face turned to heaven and my eyes closed to better receive those sweet drops.
Such was the little tap that I was knocked out.

I haven't got any to this day.

He used the wine to wash my cuts and said, smiling:

Once the bunch was finished, he shook his head and said:

...he let the jug fall right on my face.

Pieces of the broken jug got incrusted in my face and my teeth were broken.

I didn't like the blind man from that moment on.

You never know, Lázaro:

What makes you sick also heals you and makes you healthy again.
Lázaro, now I want to be fair with you. Both of us should eat from this bunch of grapes. You take a grape and then I’ll take one, but you must promise that you won’t take more than one grape at a time.

As soon as we started... he was in his second pick, the traitor changed his mind and started to take two grapes at a time.

When I saw this, I went to three at a time.

Lázaro, you fooled me. I swear to God you’ve been eating the grapes three at a time.

No, I didn’t... what makes you think that?

Do you know when I knew? When I started eating two and you said nothing.

It happened that upon arriving at a place during the grape harvest,

A grave picker gave my master a bunch of grapes in lieu of alms.

Once the bunch was finished, he shook his head and said:
I have many more stories to tell about the blind man...
but I’ll finish with this last one as my farewell and graduation from my first master.

We were staying at an inn, there the blind man gave me a piece of sausage to grill for him. When I had cooked the sausage, he told me go and get some wine from the tavern. Lying on the floor, next to the fire was a long, thin, rotten turnip... since we were there alone, the devil and the smell of the sausage made a thief of me! While the blind man was taking the money out of his bag, I took the sausage, replacing it with the turnip. My master took hold of the spit and started to turn it over the fire.
What’s this, Lazarillo?

I went for the wine and wolfed the sausage with it.

When I came back, I found him with a turnip between two slices of bread, not yet having tasted it.

As soon as he did, instead of finding the sausage, he was shocked to find the rotten turnip.

Agitated, he said:

What do I know? Didn’t I just come back from getting the wine?

He stood up, seized me by the head, and smelled me from top to bottom. Then, he opened my mouth and inserted his nose in it, so much that he reached my throat with the tip of his nose.

In fear, and giving the brevity of time I had to digest the black sausage, unsettled as it still was in my stomach, I felt the need to return everything back to my master.
As Your Excellency will see, the blind man’s prophesy did not prove wrong…

I’m sure he wouldn’t have left me alive if people didn’t come when they heard all the commotion.

To be honest, I waste more wine washing this boy in a year than I drink. Lázaro, I must say that you should be more grateful for the wine than you are to your father because wine has brought you life not only once but a thousand times.

I tell you that if there’s any one in this world who should be thankful for wine, it should be you.

As your excellency will see, the blind man’s prophesy did not prove wrong…
A few days later, a day in which it had rained heavily and everything was quite wet, he told me...

Lázaro, it doesn't look as if it will stop raining soon. Let's find an inn now.

Tío, the water is very wide. I can see a place to cross it without getting wet. We can jump where it's narrower without getting wet.

On our way back, we needed to cross a gulley that was overflowing.

Take me there.
I took him straight in front of the post or stone mast in the main square.

The poor blind charged like a billy goat, though not before taking a few steps back to gain momentum.
The sound was very loud and he fell on his back, half dead, his head split open.

How come you smelled the sausage but not the post?

I left him in the hands of others coming to his rescue and started trotting until I reached the gates of the town. I never found out what God did to him, nor did I try to.
A VERY IMPORTANT YEAR FOR THE LAZARILLO BOOK

1599
THE COMMERCIAL SUCCESS OF PUNISHED LAZATILLO DIDN’T REALLY HAPPEN UNTIL 1599, THE YEAR IN WHICH EL GUZMÁN DE ALFARACHE WAS PUBLISHED. IN THIS MOMENT, THE PUNISHED – HOW THE CENSORED VERSION OF LAZARILLO WAS KNOWN BY THE PUBLIC – ACQUIRED NEW LIFE... PARTLY THANKS TO THE WIT AND GOOD EYE OF BOOKSELLERS SUCH AS JUAN BERRILLO, A MAN FROM MADRID WHO WE WILL GET TO KNOW IN A FEW MOMENTS.

Miguel de Cervantes

IT IS QUITE PROBABLE THAT HIGH CALIBRE AUTHORS LIKE MIGUEL DE CERVANTES READ THE PUNISHED VERSION OF LAZARILLO, SINCE IT WAS THE ONLY ONE LEGALLY AVAILABLE UNTIL THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE INQUISITION.
What a book! It deals with such well-written, entertaining truth that there is no fiction that can compare with it. What a groundbreaking renewal for literature!

I have no doubt this book is going to generate a great deal of talk not to mention ink...

Dear friend, what a pleasure to see you and in such good company in your hands.

I was starting to feel sorry for myself for not been able to share the experience of such wonderful reading.
You are right, this book is very refreshing! I have already read it twice... Since I came back from Antwerp I can't stop thinking about it. I also read the second part after I read the original.

What? The one I'm reading is the censored version. You may be in danger if someone finds out... with the church we met, dear friend.

Anyways, if you don't mind I would love to check out your copy when you have a chance.

I am preparing my new book, a story like no other which if I say so myself it's very ingenious. Reading both Lazarillos would be a great help for my creating process.
Ha, Ha, Ha… Yes, the son of a bitch!

That would be my pleasure, my dear friend Cervantes… I am already dying to read this ingenious book that you are talking about.

But tell me, what did you think about the pícaro?

I thought it was extremely original with a lot of potential. For example, the end of the story is open-ended…

...that is to say that the pícaro's story doesn't end even though the book is over.

You know what…

It would have been wonderful that Lázaro's little brother, the son of Zaide, the black slave, had wander around with Lázaro.

What Spain would those two had been able to describe!

Ha, ha, ha… Yes, the son of a bitch!