

Are you Lázaro? Picaresque Childhood in Baldur's Gate 3

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A child was the protagonist of the first Picaresque Novel in history, *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (Anonymous 1555). Picaresque Literature used young rogues as a reflection of the harsh condition of the lower classes in classic novels such as *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Alemán, 1599-1604) or *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1838). These children were usually portrayed as the sons and daughters of delinquents, members of racial minorities or homeless orphans. Following what Rico (1970), Bataillon (1969; 1973), Lázaro Carreter (1972), Molho (1972) and Sevilla (2001) explain, these children were used to reflect the consequences of the corruption and decadency of certain social classes and social institutions in the most vulnerable members of society. At the same time, they include childish and funny mockery using pranks that are directed towards those who deserved criticism. Additionally, since they are minors their actions have almost no legal consequences, allowing the inclusion of more crimes. Rogue children create playgrounds where lesser crimes and jokes are common. Similarly, the episodes that happen during their childhood are the ones that caused their criminal career. As Vallecillo (2005) indicates, the Picaresque Novel is one of the main influences behind the Bildungsroman since it focuses on the learning process of a young pariah from an innocent child to a mature rogue that must break the law to survive. This way, young rogues feature narratives where they experience difficult situations in their childhood that teach them about life. Thus, the effects of rogue children in Picaresque literary texts have consequences in the configuration and the themes addressed in them.

Computer Role-Playing Games (CRPG), and Role-Playing Games (RPG), usually include children in their cast of rogues. For example, *Final Fantasy IX* (Square 2000), *Dragon Age II* (BioWare 2011), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011) or *Dragon Quest XI* (Square Enix 2017). They bring to the table enjoyable Picaresque episodes or stories of extreme necessity and oppression, both sides of this type of characters in Picaresque Literature. *Baldur's Gate III* (Larian Studios, 2023) is a computer role-playing game that includes several rogues in its cast of characters. Among them, there are a group of tiefling children, one of the most oppressed races within the game's world, that have created a naïve gang of rogues, similar to what we find in *Huckleberry*

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Finn (Twain 1884). These characters are featured in several scenes and quests where they behave, apparently, like the young rogues from Picaresque Literature.

This paper's objective is focused on studying what elements of literary rogue children are included through these characters and how they are articulated in a different cultural medium. While answering these questions, this paper will show how the influence of the literary Picaresque determines certain design choices as an example of the pollination of Picaresque Literature across the history of Literature and the remediation of literary episodes in an interactive medium such as video games. For example, it will explore if the addition of children rogues implies the introduction of naïve criminal episodes and pranks that creates funny interactive narrative emergent episodes for the player. To achieve this, the studies about the creation and consequences of this type of narratives in video games will be used, such as those of Jenkins (2004), Walsh (2011), Cardoso and Carvalhais (2013), Chauvin et al. (2015) and Gustafsson et al. (2020) will be used. Similarly, Ryan's (2006; 2008), Thon's (2016) and Mukherjee's (2015) ideas about the relationship between Literature and video games will be also considered. Additionally, this paper will study if their inclusion implies any type of social commentary, implicit or not, about the different institutions included in the video game or other possible relationships with real problematics. Johnson and Tulloch's (2017) research about the political unconscious in video games will be key to understand how we can interpret the possible social commentaries included using *Baldur's Gate III's* rogue children. Thus, this paper will explore the inclusion of rogue children in this video game and its narrative and mechanical consequences, while also highlighting it as a case of the influence of Picaresque Literature in this medium.

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