



My Guide, my Captain

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Reader's name:

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The storyline is basic: an elementary school child describes her walks to school alongside her father. On the way they play a game with the cars, picking out the ones that have animal names. They greet people they know, comment on their surroundings. Normal, unremarkable. Familiar.

The book's text is sparse; the illustrations, on the other hand, are full of visual stimulation, bright colors, detailed figures and landscapes. Some illustrations are realistic, some literally fantastic, some a combination of both. They stand in sharp contrast to the indistinct world the narrator says she sees when she walks out her door: "una selva de luces y sombras."

It's not until several pages into the book the narrator, whom Papá has nicknamed "Lazarilla", matter-of-factly shares their reality: "Yo apenas veo, y papá no ve. Es ciego." But she doesn't dwell on what they can't perceive, she tells us all about what they can. They recognize cars by their sounds. Papá knows when a stranger they encounter is sad or the sea is beautiful. Lazarilla is very proud of Papá's sensory skills; she believes they surpass everyone's: "Papá ve cosas que los demás no ven."

Their daily life is mundane. On a typical weekday morning, like all parents, father and daughter run through the exit checklist: "¿Gafas?" "Sí." "¿Parche?" "Tapando." "¿Mochila?" "Sí." "Bocata?" "Que sí, que síiii ..." Eye patch. For Lazarilla, just one on the list of items. Nothing special.

That is exactly the point: Visual impairment is not the story in this book. It is a practical fact and has practical implications, but it does not define who Papá and Lazarilla are. It does not diminish their quality of life and human interaction, or their capacity to laugh, feel joy, and appreciate beauty. This is reinforced in the illustrations. Most of the images of Lazarilla and Papá show them from a side angle or from the rear, intentionally drawing attention away from the sight of Papá's cane and Lazarilla's eyepatch.

When examined using the criteria in the article, "Analyzing and selecting children's picture books that feature blind characters"¹, *Mi Lazarilla*, *Mi Capitán* earns gold stars, particularly with regard to not making "the disability or the person with the disability the 'problem'," and for "portray[ing] the emotional, mental, or physical disability as part of a full life, not as something to be pitied or overcome."

A translator will have to grapple with how best to work with the nickname "Lazarilla," its function and meaning, in English. Problematic too are the references to the Fiat Panda and B.E.A.T. León, as the automobiles are not known in the U.S. (nor, it seems, in other English-speaking population centers like the UK, Canada or Australia.) The cars could be changed, for example, to Dodge Ram

and Fiat Spider - but what to do about the illustrations?

Its plot is simple, but *Mi Lazarilla, Mi Capitán* will, as I believe its creators intended, inspire many questions and discussion among its 5 to 10-year old audience. Kids are likely to start with: Why can't Papá see? Why does Lazarilla wear a patch? What happened to her? Were they born that way? Etc. The book is pointedly silent. That is the cue to guide the young reader away from what makes Lazarilla different toward the real heart of this story: What do Papá and Lazarilla like to do? What do you like to do? What makes Lazarilla happy? What makes you happy? Ultimately: how are you and Lazarilla alike?