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The Underdogs

Mariano Azuela · *1915 (English 1929) · translated by E. Munguía, Jr. (1929)*

A woman stares into the darkness of the sierra. “That’s no animal,” a voice says; a dog is barking; it must be a human being. Demetrio Macías will rise from his plate, take the rifle from under the mat, and be drawn into the Mexican Revolution. The hosted text is E. Munguía, Jr.’s 1929 English, Project Gutenberg #549, complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What becomes of a man who is forced from his house into a revolution, fights with famous skill, and is last seen still pointing a gun in the sierra, and how should a school read that end?

“That's no animal, I tell you! Listen to the dog barking! It must be a human being.”

I, opening

The Underdogs (Los de abajo) is not a romance of war. Demetrio is a man of the sierra who becomes a leader almost as the fight requires it, and who does not step out of the war into a tidy peace. The last page leaves him at the foot of a hollow, “his eyes leveled in an eternal glance,” still pointing the barrel of his gun. Teach the revolution with gravity, for older students. Quote this translation’s wording; keep “Macías” as the file spells it when it does.

KEY CHARACTERS

Demetrio Macías
The man of the sierra who is hunted from his house, becomes a leader, and is last seen still pointing his gun

The woman of the opening
The first watcher in the dark, who stares into the sierra and warns him

The men of the band
Those who gather around Demetrio as the Revolution takes him

A DOG IN THE DARK, AND A LAST AIM

> *“That's no animal, I tell you! Listen to the dog barking! It must be a human being.”*
>
> I

> *“At the foot of a hollow, sumptuous and huge as the portico of an old cathedral, Demetrio Macias, his eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun.”*
>
> the close

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Voice in the Sierra

I, OPENING

In the dark, a woman and a man hear something that is not an animal. Demetrio is told he had better hide. He finishes eating, drinks, and stands. The rifle is under the mat.

- The first spoken lines are exact, including “That's no animal, I tell you!”
- “Well, Demetrio, I think you had better hide, all the same.”
- The house, the sierra, and the fear of soldiers are the first facts
- This is already a story of a hunted man, not of a general at headquarters

> *“That's no animal, I tell you! Listen to the dog barking! It must be a human being.”*
>
> I

02

Into the Revolution

THE EARLY AND MIDDLE PARTS

Demetrio is driven from his place and gathers men. The Revolution, which the preface of this file already places in the years of Villa and of Huerta, becomes the weather of his life.

- The hosted file includes a brief account of Azuela’s own wartime knowledge; quote the novel itself for Demetrio’s story
- The band, the villages, and the changing fortunes of the fight make the middle of the book
- Do not tidy the Revolution into a single slogan; the book is rougher than a legend
- For older students; there is violence, and it should be taught as cost, not as spectacle

03

A Marksman, and a Leader

THE LATER FIGHTING

Demetrio’s marksmanship is famous in the book. Leadership comes with the fighting. The war does not become simpler as his name grows.

- On the last pages he still “does not waste a single shot”
- “Where he settles his glance, he settles a bullet.”
- The joy in the skill is in the text; so is the waste of the war around it
- Keep the sierra in view; this is not a city novel

04

An Eternal Glance

THE CLOSE

The enemy scatters. Locusts chant. Doves coo. The cows graze. At the foot of a hollow, Demetrio Macías, his eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun.

- The last image is not a victory parade and not a quiet return home
- The sierra “is clad in gala colors”; the contrast with the pointing gun is the book’s close
- Do not invent a last speech or a later peace the file does not give
- Teach the ending with gravity

> *“At the foot of a hollow, sumptuous and huge as the portico of an old cathedral, Demetrio Macias, his eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun.”*
>
> the close

05

The Hosted Translation

PG #549, MUNGUÍA 1929

The hosted English is E. Munguía, Jr., 1929, complete. The Spanish title is Los de abajo. Quote this wording, including the spelling of names as printed in each passage.

- The close in this file spells “Demetrio Macias” without the accent; earlier pages may vary; quote the line as it stands
- A short introductory account of Azuela stands in the file; do not take it for the novel’s first sentence
- For older students; a book of the Mexican Revolution, taught with gravity
- It may be read as a short, hard war novel, not as a textbook of the Revolution

A Revolution’s Cost · The Sierra · A Hunted Man · Skill and Waste · No Tidy Peace · Loyalty among the Underdogs

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The novel itself begins: “That's no animal, I tell you! Listen to the dog barking! It must be a human being.” A short account of Azuela stands earlier in the file; cite the scene in the sierra as the opening of the story.
2. This is the 1929 English of E. Munguía, Jr., PG #549, complete. Quote this wording. In the last sentence the file prints “Demetrio Macias” without the accent.
3. The Underdogs is not a romance of war. Teach the Revolution with gravity, for older students.
4. The close leaves Demetrio “his eyes leveled in an eternal glance,” still pointing the barrel of his gun. Do not invent a later peace.
5. The Spanish title is Los de abajo. The book is short, hard, and exact.

Quotations are verbatim from the translated by E. Munguía, Jr. (1929), Project Gutenberg #549, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-underdogs/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.