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Satire in the Neopicaresque Novel: The Committed Poetic in European and American Picaresque Fiction 1942-1962

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August 2021

Abstract

The picaresque genre was a formative influence on the development of the novel in Western literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Previous research has suggested that there were significant new currents of picaresque writing in British, German, Spanish, and American fiction during the mid-twentieth century. This study aims to substantiate and analyse the existence of a transnational neopicaresque phenomenon at this time, and to examine the use of picaresque elements in the context of the midcentury. Drawing on existing research within the different national literatures, this study asks: Can we speak of a transnational neopicaresque novel? And if so, why did this neopicaresque novel emerge in these nations and at this time?

This study considers the committed poetic (*poética comprometida*) or satiric orientation described by Antonio Rey Hazas to be the factor that most clearly explains the authors' interest in reviving the picaresque genre. A comparative analysis of satire was carried out on eight examples of neopicaresque fiction (two from each nation, in their original languages). This analysis investigates the

recurrence of classic picaresque themes, considering their significance in the modern context in order to determine the satiric orientation of the works. The analysis indicates that the satire of the neopicaresque novel, like that of its antecedents, is concerned with unmasking the unreality of the social world, exploring themes of marginalisation and identity, and dramatising a perceived conflict between man and his society. The neopicaresque novels continue in the tradition of the picaresque genre, satirising analogous social issues of modernity, but do so with a strong connection to the specific postwar contexts of each of the nations in question. This analysis leads us to the conclusion that the formal features of picaresque writing are revived in the neopicaresque novels in response to particular postwar concerns about man, modern society, and the future of human civilisation.

LAY SUMMARY

The picaresque novel is a genre of prose fiction that developed in Spain in the mid-sixteenth century. *Lazarillo de Tormes* (c.1552) is widely considered to be the initiator of a tradition of picaresque fiction that achieved popularity in western European literature between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Broadly defined, the genre is characterised by an episodic narrative written in prose, using a first-person narrative voice, and featuring a protagonist-narrator who is a pícaro – a Spanish term meaning rogue or rascal, from which the genre takes its name. The pícaro is an amoral character who survives in a hostile society by trickery and wit. Many literary historians consider *Lazarillo* to be not only the first example of the picaresque novel, but also the first example of the modern novel itself. As such, the picaresque genre is closely connected to the birth and development of the novel in western literature.

In the mid-twentieth century, a number of novels were published in Europe and America that came to be described as neopicaresque novels. These included a number of highly significant works of modern literature,

including novels that were enormous popular and critical successes of their time. Although it has been suggested that these novels write into the same picaresque tradition initiated by *Lazarillo*, in that they exhibit the formal features used to define the picaresque genre, the connections between these neopicaresque novels and their relationship to the historical picaresque tradition has not, until now, been explored.

This thesis engages in a comparative analysis of eight novels from Britain, Germany, Spain, and the United States that have all, separately, been labelled as examples of neopicaresque writing. The aims of this analysis are to better understand the nature of the neopicaresque novel, to ascertain why picaresque writing became attractive to writers of these nations at this time, and to offer insight into the enduring relevance of the picaresque tradition to the ongoing development of the novel. I consider the satiric orientation of picaresque writing to be the feature that most clearly explains the appeal of the genre. An investigation into the satire of the neopicaresque novel indicates that these writers were motivated by the similar postwar contexts in which they were writing, and that the neopicaresque novel, like its predecessors, developed in

response to a perceived era of crisis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Wolfson Foundation for believing in this project and funding this research through a Postgraduate Scholarship in the Humanities. This work would not have been possible without the foundation's generous financial backing.

I am extremely thankful for the support of my supervisors, Dr. Alex Thomson and Prof. Peter Davies, both of whom have been an invaluable source of knowledge, encouragement, and advice through the many ups and downs of PhD life. I have benefitted from their wisdom in matters both academic and personal, and am grateful for their expertise and for the understanding they have shown me over the years. Thank you as well to my examiners, Prof. Alexis Grohmann and Prof. Julian Preece, for their thoughtful feedback and kind words of encouragement.

My gratitude extends to all of the friends and colleagues that I have come to know through the School of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures. I am especially grateful to the many members of staff in the Department of European Languages and Cultures who have generously shared their time with me, and offered assistance and a

listening ear on many occasions. Thank you to Dr. Francesco Stermotich-Cappellari, Dr. Farshid Kazemi, and Dr. Paul Leworthy for all of the fascinating conversations we have had about theory over the years. Our discussions have always been a great source of inspiration.

I am also extremely grateful to all of the wonderful friends I have come to know through other connections in Edinburgh, and who have kept me sane on this long journey. Thank you to the dear friends I made at Richmond Place: Jamal Bajali, Aaron Niles, Phedra Komodromou, Dr. Yu Mei Li, Dr. Dagmar Medeiros, and Masood Rehman. Thanks to Alicia Khoshdel for bringing music and sunshine into my life when I needed it most. Thank you to Maya Hoole for your enduring friendship and laughter. And a heartfelt thank you to Boyd, for making the final weeks before submission such a joy. I don’t know how I would have got this over the line without you.

Finally, my deepest thanks to my family, for believing in my dreams, and supporting me every step of the way. A profound thank you to my parents, Malcolm and Vejaya, and my brother, Richard. I could not have done this without your unfailing guidance, patience, and love.

INTRODUCTION

> Each epoch brings with it a basic interpretation of man. Or rather, each epoch does not bring it but constitutes in itself a basic interpretation of man. For this reason each epoch prefers a definite genre.
>
> – José Ortega y Gasset, *The Nature of the Novel*

In the middle of the twentieth century a number of novels were published that subsequently, and separately, came to be described as examples of neopicaresque writing. The novels that were ascribed this label included some of the most celebrated works of modern literature, produced by authors whose names have gone down in the annals of literary history as giants of twentieth century letters: Nobel laureates, recipients of prestigious national and international honours, and authors of notable best-sellers. The novels that invited this label were a diverse group, including works written in different languages by authors of different nations, and concerned with different social and political contexts. Nevertheless, they all came to share a common critical designation: one that implies both

a certain unity of style within this group, as well as a mutual connection to the historical tradition of the picaresque novel. What is remarkable, however, is that while many of these novels, owing to their popularity and the impact they have had on contemporary literature, have individually been the subjects of a great deal of scholarly interest in the decades since their publication, the intertextual relationships implied by their common description as neopicaresque novels have received surprisingly limited attention.

The notion that picaresque writing enjoyed a certain renaissance in the mid-twentieth century is significant not only due to the number of popularly and critically acclaimed novels that have been described in these terms, but also because of the timing of their publications. Much has been made in picaresque studies of the genre's popularity, amongst both writers and their reading audiences, during periods of social or political upheaval. The emergence of the very first picaresque novels (the anonymously published *Lazarillo de Tormes,* c. 1552, and Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache,* 1599), is often linked to the tumultuous socio-political contexts of sixteenth century Spain. The genre's subsequent popularity in other European literatures

(including French, English, and German) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tends, similarly, to be understood in terms of contexts involving monumental social change in each nation. Thus, the suggestion that the turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century – a period of unprecedented global warfare and until then unimaginable social disturbance – may have inspired writers from different nations to simultaneously revive the picaresque tradition is compelling. The significance of this timing, however, has also received scant consideration.

This thesis seeks to address both of these points by highlighting the connections between some of the novels that have shared the neopicaresque label, and considering them in terms of the contexts of their publication. In the pages that follow, I examine the apparent resurgence of picaresque fiction in European and American literature during the mid-twentieth century with a view to clarifying the existence of a transnational neopicaresque trend or sub-genre, and to understanding the reasons behind its emergence at this moment in world and literary history. I have included novels from Britain, Germany, Spain and the United States in my analysis, and I have studied each of the primary texts in its original language to ensure a rigorous

and accurate reading in each case. As I am particularly interested in the way that the authors of these novels have engaged with and responded to the contexts in which they were writing, my analysis centres on the use of satire in these texts, and investigates the moral and social concerns that arise therein.

This is the first in-depth study to analyse and compare examples of neopicaresque novels from such a range of different national and linguistic backgrounds in their original languages. It is also one of the first studies to acknowledge the centrality of satire in the development of the neopicaresque novel, and the first to engage in a close comparative analysis of the satiric orientation of these texts. This analysis shines new light on the individual novels in question, allowing us to reappraise their achievements and situate them in terms of broader cultural and literary contexts. Furthermore, the findings of this analysis also present the opportunity to evaluate the legacy of the picaresque tradition in modern western literature.

Research Context

To conduct research in this area is a complicated and challenging undertaking. One fundamental difficulty is that

there exists no universally accepted definition of precisely what constitutes picaresque writing. The tradition of the picaresque novel, initiated in Spain by the publications of *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán,* but imitated and further popularised in German, French, and English literature with notable works including Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (c. 1668), Alain-René Lesage's *Gil Blas* (1715-1735), Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), is discussed in scholarship variously as a genre, a mode, or a myth. General theoretical approaches tend to differ between the respective national literature disciplines, and attempts to define picaresque writing concretely in terms of constituent criteria often vary quite considerably from one individual critic to the next.

This lack of clarity in definitions of the picaresque novel is only magnified in discussions of a possible neopicaresque revival. Without an established definition, there is a risk of defining the field too loosely and including an almost infinite number of works that bear only a minimal resemblance to the classic picaresque novels, just as there is also a risk of defining the field too tightly and obscuring the significant intertextual relationships implied by different

writers' common use of picaresque conventions. It has been necessary, therefore, before attempting to analyse individual texts, to achieve some clarity in this respect. To this end, I present a reviewed taxonomy of picaresque writing that negotiates this need for a balanced and practical approach, and is capable of functioning in relation to modern literature. In the first part of this thesis, I survey the history of the picaresque tradition and the scholarship that has sought to define it. Drawing on a number of prominent and influential works of picaresque theory, including the once-dominant definitions set out by Ulrich Wicks and Claudio Guillén as well as more recent advances by, amongst others, Antonio Rey Hazas, Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, and J. A. Garrido Ardila, I offer a concise definition that helps us to recognise the similarities, as well as some nuanced differences, between the historical picaresque novel and its neopicaresque descendants.

This review finds that the picaresque novel consists, in brief, of a pseudo-autobiographical account told by a *pícaro* (ie. a protagonist-narrator characterised as an amoral social outsider), the plot of which is structured as a series of episodic events that collectively explain a central case, and which expounds, in its totality, an implicit moral or

ideological thesis. This final point, a feature Rey Hazas refers to as the *poética comprometida*, or committed poetic,[1] of the picaresque novel is particularly significant, for it is here that we may encounter the author's motivation for participating in the genre. This is the core element of picaresque writing that connects the text to its context, and will be key, therefore, to understanding the development of the neopicaresque novel in the mid-twentieth century.

The novels that I examine as case studies of the neopicaresque have each at some point (by reviewers, critics, and in some cases also the authors themselves) been described as picaresque or neopicaresque novels, and display all of these essential criteria. This thesis looks at eight primary texts in total, including two from each national context, whose publication dates span a period of two decades between 1942 and 1962. These novels are: Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (Spain, 1942), Darío Fernández Flórez's *Lola, espejo oscuro* (Spain, 1950), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (USA, 1952), Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (USA, 1953),

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1. Although Rey Hazas does not explicitly make the connection in his works of picaresque theory, his use of the term *poética comprometida* is conceptually similar to that of *littérature engagée* (lit. engaged literature), as described by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Thomas Mann's *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (Germany, 1954), Günter Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* (Germany, 1959), Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* (UK, 1959), and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (UK, 1962).

This group of texts exemplifies the heterogeneity of neopicaresque writing. The novels here are united by their common use of picaresque conventions, but are nevertheless diverse in many other respects. They vary not only in terms of langage and national context, but also in terms of content, character, and reception. Between them, these novels broach a wide range of social and moral themes, including: race and nationhood, criminality and justice, and adolescence and maturity. Their protagonists also represent a wide spectrum of morality, from the relatively inoffensive characters of Billy Fisher and Augie March, to the much darker, criminal characters of Cela's Pascual Duarte or Burgess' Alex. The narrative worlds that these novels describe are diverse too, ranging from recognisable and realistic contemporaneous societies, to the dystopian future vision of *A Clockwork Orange*. Finally, we might also note that these texts do not belong to a single 'class' of literature, either: some are highly-acclaimed, even canonical, modern classics, while others

such as *Lola* and *Billy Liar* were popular successes of their time, but are comparatively less well-known today. This diversity in my choice of corpus is intentional. Collectively, these texts show that the neopicaresque novel is adaptable and wide-ranging. A comparative perspective is necessary to appreciate this, and to reveal the full extent of the genre's past and continued contributions to the development of western literature. I have sought not to limit this study to a narrow group of texts, but to offer instead a broad and representative vision of midcentury picaresque writing.

Previous Research on the Neopicaresque

Although this group of novels has not previously been brought together for a comparative reading such as this one, many of the individual texts have been included in more limited studies of neopicaresque writing. Most often these studies focus on a single national context, but there are a small handful of existing studies that have sought to compare neopicaresque novels, including some of the above works, from more than one nation.

In Spanish literature, in particular, the notion that a neopicaresque trend began to develop in the years following the Spanish Civil War is reasonably well

established, and both *Lola* and *Pascual Duarte* are frequently cited as key examples of this. We can assume with great confidence that both Cela and Fernández Flórez were familiar with the history of the picaresque novel in the Spanish literary tradition, and it is highly likely that they consciously emulated its generic features.[2] It is unsurprising, therefore, that much of the existing scholarship on these two authors considers the influence of the historical picaresque tradition on their writing. Two notable studies that look into the idea of an emergent neopicaresque novel during the midcentury in Spain are Gonzalo Sobejano's paper "Sobre la novela picaresca contemporánea" (1964, "On the Contemporary Picaresque Novel"), which discusses both *Lola* and *Pascual Duarte* as key examples of a picaresque revival in the Spanish post-Civil War period, and Antonio Rey Hazas' book *La novela picaresca* (1990, *The Picaresque Novel*), which names *Pascual Duarte* as a paradigmatic example of

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2. Fernández Flórez alludes unambiguously to the picaresque lineage of *Lola* in his author's preface to the novel. The publication of Cela's *Nuevas andanzas y desventuras de Lazarillo de Tormes* (1944) just two years after *Pascual Duarte*, meanwhile, confirms the author's familiarity with the picaresque novel, and suggests his interest in reviving the genre.

neopicaresque writing (89).

Sobejano would later go on to supervise a thesis by Irene Zoe Alameda Nieto entitled *Escribir en la posguerra: la novela picaresca en la literatura europea 1942-1963* (Colombia University, 2004, *Writing in the Postwar: the Picaresque Novel in European Literature 1942-1963*). Alameda Nieto's thesis is notable, for it demonstrates that the neopicaresque trend identified by Sobejano is not limited to Spanish literature, but arises similarly in German midcentury fiction as well. Alameda Nieto compares the Spanish novels with a number of German novels, including both *Die Blechtrommel* and *Felix Krull*, and finds pertinent analogies between their respective post-war contexts. Her insistence that the neopicaresque novel was *more* significant in these two nations than elsewhere, however, prevents the recognition of a broader trend also emerging in British and American fiction at a similar time.

The picaresque genre has a comparatively less prominent position in American literary history. Nevertheless, a number of studies have begun to accumulate that recognise both a historical American picaresque tradition and a modern revival thereof. These include doctoral theses by Stephen D. Warner

(*Representative Studies in the American Picaresque: Investigations of Modern Chivalry, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and The Adventures of Augie March,* Indiana University, 1971), Patrick W. Shaw (*The Picaresque Novel in America: 1945-1970*, Louisiana State University, 1971) and, more recently, Cory James Dahlström (*The Cultural and Rhetorical Elements of American Picaresque*, University of Northern Iowa, 2016). Warner and Dahlström share a similar approach: both of their theses explore the development of an American picaresque tradition between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Warner names Bellow's *Augie March* as his key example of the modern American picaresque novel, while Dahlström names Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

Shaw's thesis, meanwhile, focuses exclusively on the mid-twentieth century, and suggests that both of these novels were participants in a post-World War II American picaresque revival. Interestingly, Shaw also includes an analysis of Mann's *Felix Krull* in this thesis, justifying its place in his study of specifically American fiction with the assertion that the novel was "technically written by an

"American"" (30).[3] Though it is difficult to argue with Shaw's assessment that Mann's novel deserves to be included as an outstanding and influential example of neopicaresque writing, it is to be noted that he chooses to discuss the text only as a work of American literature and seems to downplay its German contexts.[4] In doing so, Shaw's thesis obscures the transnational nature of the neopicaresque phenomenon he identifies.

There exist a number of relatively early studies written in German that investigate the idea that a renewal of the picaresque genre, or a new picaresque model, developed in European literature during the twentieth century. These include Wilfred Van der Will's *Pikaro heute* (1967), which

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3. Shaw argues this point on the basis that Mann had been a naturalised American citizen for ten years prior to the completion of the first part of the novel. He does not account for the portions of the novel that were written before Mann's exile to the United States (Mann began work on Felix Krull in the first decade of the twentieth century, whilst based in Germany), nor for the fact that the novel was written in German and first published in Frankfurt am Main. In his analysis Shaw quotes exclusively from the English translation by Denver Lindley published in 1955.

4. Shaw demonstrates that *Felix Krull* is significant in the American literary context. However, as I discuss the novel here principally as a German novel, it is worth clarifying that Felix Krull was written in German and first published in Germany, that Mann had been working on the novel for almost three decades prior to his move to the US, and that the frame of reference within the text is basically European.

notes a substantial change in the model of the German pícaro in the twentieth century and raises the question as to whether this exists in other national literary traditions as well, and Helmut Heidenreich's (ed.) anthology *Pikarische Welt* (1969), credited as the first published anthology of picaresque criticism. Heidenreich's anthology includes papers on both *Die Blechtrommel* and *Felix Krull*: Laurence A. Rickels' "*Die Blechtrommel* zwischen Schelmen- und Bildungsroman" and Thomas Sebastian's "*Felix Krull*: Pikareske Parodie des Bildungsromans." Also of note are Ulf-Heiner Marckwort's *Der deutsche Schelmenroman der Gegenwart* (1984), and Gerhart Hoffmeister's (ed.) *Der moderne deutsche Schlemenroman* (1986) and *Der deutschen Schelmenroman in europäischen Kontext* (1987).

Shaw is not alone in regarding *Felix Krull* as an outstanding example of modern picaresque writing. Indeed, the novel is discussed as such in relatively early scholarship. In a paper published in 1951,[5] Werner Hollman compares Mann's novel to *Lazarillo*, describing the former

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5. Although the version of Felix Krull studied in this thesis was not published until 1954, some of the novel's early chapters were published long before that as short stories of the same name. Hollman's paper is based on a 1938 publication in Mann's *Stories of Three Decades.*

as a "perfect specimen" (446) of the modern picaresque novel, and in a paper published later that same decade, Robert B. Heilman argues that Mann, through *Felix Krull*, is involved in "constructing 'the picaresque myth'" (559). Interest in Mann's novel as an example of neopicaresque writing has continued through the decades, with numerous scholars in German studies continuing to regard *Felix Krull* as one of the clearest examples of picaresque fiction in the twentieth century. Frederick A. Lubich's chapter on *Felix Krull* in the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann* (2002, ed. Ritchie Robertson) emphasises the significant influences of both *Lazarillo* and *Simplicissimus* on the composition of Mann's novel.

Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* has likewise been recognised as a key example of the neopicaresque in German writing. Peter Arnds describes Grass' work unequivocally as "a picaresque novel written in opposition to the Bildungsroman" (*Representation, Subversion, and Eugenics,* 128), citing its "principles of homelessness and social marginalisation" (ibid). Simon Loesch compares Grass' novel to Bellow's *Augie March*, and finds the former to be a clear example of the modern picaresque novel, but the latter not.

Finally, Bernhard Malkmus' extensive study of the German neopicaresque novel, *The German Picaro and Modernity* (2011), includes both *Felix Krull* and *Die Blechtrommel* in its assertion that "some of the most memorable picaresque characters of the twentieth century" (4) were born in German literature. Malkmus connects the picaresque revival he sees in German letters to the nation's turbulent history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and offers significant insight into the relationship between picaresque texts and context. The focus of his study is limited to the German context, however, and thus does not note that similar tendencies are evident elsewhere in Europe and America. Most recently, Eva-Maria Kronsteiner mentions both *Felix Krull* and *Die Blechtrommel* in her recent study of the picaro and trickster figure in the modern German novel. Again, however, this thesis does not look beyond the German context.

Bruno Schleussner's 1969 book *Der neopikareske Roman: Pikareske Elemente in der Struktur moderner englischer Romane 1950-1960* (*The Neopicaresque Novel: Picaresque Elements in the Structure of Modern English Novels 1950-60*) is often credited with popularising the term itself. Schleussner compares the structural and modal

features of three British postwar novels, amongst them *Billy Liar*, to those of the classic picaresque novels of the Spanish Golden Age. His analysis finds both similarities and differences, and so he suggests the term *neo*picaresque to refer to more recent works, preferring this term for its ability to convey both affinity and divergence between the two periods. Schleussner alludes to comparable trends in German and American fiction, but does not offer an investigation into these.

More recently, Ligia Tomoiagă has brought renewed attention to the British neopicaresque novel with her study of *Elements of the Picaresque in Contemporary British Fiction* (2012). Tomoiagă, like Schleussner, notes a resurgence of certain picaresque features in popular fiction of the 1950s and '60s, and links this in particular to the postwar generation of Angry Young Men. Her analysis reveals the enduring impact of the midcentury picaresque revival as she traces its continuation into the twenty first century. It is also, however, limited to the British context[6]

6. Note, however, that Tomoiagă's definition of British literature is very broad, and refers to "literature coming from the United Kingdom *and former colonies*" (3, emphasis added). Nevertheless, this still excludes a consideration of other European or American literatures.

alone.

Finally, the work that has offered the broadest picture of the neopicaresque novel to date is Shelley Godsland's chapter in the 2015 anthology *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque* (ed. J. A. G. Ardila). Here, in the final chapter, "The Neopicaresque," Godsland offers a concise overview of picaresque writing in the twentieth century. She names, amongst others, all eight of the novels to be analysed in this thesis as possible examples of a twentieth century picaresque revival in American and European literatures and, following a survey of the stylistic and modal features of each, emphatically confirms "that there exists a recognisable current of neopicaresque fiction that was particularly rigorous during the twentieth century in Spain, Great Britain, the United States and Germany" (265). Godsland seeks to identify participants of the picaresque myth,[7] but does not, however, go beyond this. She does not engage in a close or comparative reading of the texts, and does not suggest reasons as to why the neopicaresque

7. Godsland follows Claudio Guillén and Alexander Blackburn in considering the neopicaresque novels as examples of the myth, rather than genre, of the picaresque.

trend gained such traction in multiple national literatures during the same period.

Contributions of this Research

This thesis, then, goes much further than any of these previous studies. This is the first piece of research to bring together eight novels, all of which are widely recognised as key examples of neopicaresque fiction, from four national contexts for a close comparative analysis. No other study to date has attempted to engage in a close comparative reading of neopicaresque works from such a wide range of different national literatures. The existing scholarship on the neopicaresque novel, as shown in the overview above, continues to be mostly divided by national context. A comparative approach is urgently needed to bridge the gaps between these separate streams of research, and to offer a more complete picture of the neopicaresque novel. This thesis offers just such a comparative perspective, allowing us to better understand the nature of the neopicaresque novel, to better appreciate the wide range of its influence, and to better discern the motivations behind its development. A close comparative reading of neopicaresque writing from a range of national contexts helps to bring much-needed unity to a hitherto fragmented

area of research, and vital coherence to our vision of the picaresque genre and its legacy.

This is also the first study to read these novels together in their original languages. All of the novels in question are readily available in English translation, and these translations have proved useful to the advancement of picaresque scholarship thus far. Godsland's work on the neopicaresque, for example, points to significant similarities in mode and structure between novels from a wide range of national contexts through the study of these texts in translation.

While translations may be suitable for the study of certain generic features, however, close analytical reading benefits from engagement with the works in their original languages. Reading in the original language allow us to go deeper into the linguistic subtleties of the text, and seek a more profound insight into its motivations and orientation. A device such as satire, which often plays upon linguistic context and nuance, can be more sensitively understood in the language in which it was written. Thus, to ensure an accurate and rigorous analysis of satire in these neopicaresque novels I have worked with the original language editions of all of the primary texts. Where I have

included quotations in support of the analysis, I have provided both the original language text and its English translation (with additional notes where necessary) to make this thesis accessible to readers who are not familiar with either German or Spanish.

The ability to work across these different languages has been of critical importance to the theoretical basis of this research, too. One of the reasons that research on the neopicaresque has been slow to progress is that language barriers have hindered the transmission of advances in picaresque theory between scholars of different national literatures. In the context of English-language scholarship, much of the existing research continues to rely on the theories set out by Claudio Guillén in his paper "Towards a Definition of the Picaresque." These theories were first presented in 1961,[8] before being printed in *Literature as a System* in 1971. Since Guillén's time, however, numerous scholars have worked to advance these theories, and there exists a substantial body of more recent picaresque scholarship. Much of this later research is in Spanish,

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8. This paper was first presented at the Third Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in 1961, before being printed as a chapter in *Literature as System* (1971).

however, and remains, as yet, untranslated. It has thus been largely overlooked outwith Hispanic studies. This, it has been suggested,[9] is one of the main factors that has prevented, until now, a wider investigation into the transnational significance of the neopicaresque novel.

Such seems to be the case with Antonio Rey Hazas' work on the nature of the picaresque genre, published in his book *Deslindes de la novela picaresca* (*Boundaries of the Picaresque Novel*) in 2003. Following Guillén, who suggests that the picaresque is inherently political, Rey Hazas coins the term *poética comprometida* to refer to the genre's necessary engagement with social, political, and ideological concerns. This committed poetic of picaresque writing, Rey Hazas argues, is central to the genre's development, and crucial to understanding its attraction to different writers at different times. Rey Hazas' theories have gained traction in Hispanic studies, with scholars such as Florencio Sevilla Arroyo and Garrido Ardila both emphasising in their own later works of picaresque theory the importance of the committed poetic described by Rey Hazas. This concept

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9. "The lack of English translations (in most cases)," writes Garrido Ardila, "is partly to blame for the lack of a broad comparatist background in many studies of the picaresque" ("Transnational Picaresque," 3).

has not, until now, been considered in relation to the neopicaresque novel, however. This is thus the first study to examine the neopicaresque novel in light of these more recent advances in picaresque theory.

The picaresque is a satiric, rather than panegyric,[10] genre, and the committed poetic of picaresque writing is thus to be found in its satiric orientation. My analysis focuses on the use of satire in the neopicaresque novel in order to understand the committed poetic of these texts, and to thereby understand the authors' aims and motivations. My reading of satire in these novels is underpinned principally by the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin set out in two of his major works: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin's understanding of the development of the menippean tradition of satire in the novel, and above all his theories of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism, are particularly useful in interpreting satire in the context of picaresque writing. The picaresque, and later neopicaresque, novels develop from a similar comic tradition as the works that

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10. Aristotle distinguishes between the satiric and panegyric orientations of realist literature. On this distinction, and the picaresque novel in relation to this, see: Ardila "Origins" p.11

form the basis of Bakhtin's theories. A Bakhtinian approach thus serves to clarify the ideological basis of satire in these novels, whilst simultaneously foregrounding a connection to the comic literary traditions of the sixteenth century and earlier.

Research Aims & Hypothesis

This analysis provides an insight into the ways in which the conventions of picaresque writing resonate within and between these texts. This thesis aims to shed light on the transnational significance of an apparent midcentury picaresque revival, and to evaluate the continued impact of the picaresque genre on the development of the novel in recent literary history. The research itself is motivated by three fundamental questions: What is the neopicaresque novel? Why did it develop in multiple national contexts, almost simultaneously, during the 1940s and '50s? And how, in light of the answers to these first two questions, might we re-evaluate the legacy of the picaresque genre? The objectives of this thesis have thus been to:

1. Consider the nature of the neopicaresque novel;
2. Examine the committed poetic, or satiric orientation, of a number of examples of the

neopicaresque novel from different national literatures;

3. Determine how these neopicaresque novels relate or respond to the respective social and political contexts of their composition;
4. Assess the extent to which the picaresque tradition continues to be relevant to the development of modern fiction.

The chapters that follow tackle these objectives in turn by first exploring definitions of picaresque writing, before examining the ideological orientation of satire in the primary texts, considering this in relation to contextual factors surrounding the writing and publication of these works, and ultimately seeking to bring into focus the ongoing significance of the picaresque genre.

An examination of the features of picaresque writing reveals that the genre is an attractive vehicle for both inquiry and dissent. Indeed, many scholars consider that the picaresque novel was developed by its first authors for precisely such purposes. Rey Hazas describes the genre as being especially suited to ideological debate, with an inherent poetic necessarily concerned with contemporary social, political, and moral themes (*Deslindes* 34-5). Ardila echoes this sentiment, and proposes that the genre and this poetic arise specifically "from the conditions of modern

society" ("Origins" 19), namely the rapidly changing social and moral landscapes of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. The original picaresque novels are inextricably connected to these particular early modern contexts. For novelists in the twentieth century, then, the appeal of picaresque writing may be twofold: not only is the genre useful for social and moral inquiry in general, but its association with the early modern period also allows for a potential referential effect. That is to say that the renewal of interest in the picaresque may indicate actual or perceived parallels between the contexts of picaresque writing past and present.

This thesis posits that just as the first picaresque novels can be understood as a response to particular contexts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so too can the neopicaresque novel be understood as a response to the turbulent social and political contexts of the postwar midcentury. At this time, Britain, Germany, Spain, and the United States were nations all reeling from the social and economic effects of war. The brutal Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, and by the 1940s Spain was in the bloody early years of the Francoist dictatorship. Meanwhile, the Second World War (1939-45) brought Britain, Germany, and

the US into international conflict, and come the 1950s these nations were facing new domestic postwar challenges. As the US economy boomed, and many Americans were enjoying greater prosperity than ever, growing civil unrest associated with the intensifying struggle for equal civil rights revealed that inequality and discrimination still plagued American society. Meanwhile Germany, now divided, faced complex social and moral questions as the nation grappled with its recent National Socialist history. For German literature and society the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a coming to terms with the past, was just beginning. In postwar Britain, a series of reforms brought in the modern Welfare State and promised new opportunities for all, but class and regional barriers persisted for many, and the looming threat of the Cold War made the future appear uncertain.

In short, each of these nations experienced violent conflict, political polarisation, societal reorganisation, and rapid modernisation within the space of a few decades. The emergence of the neopicaresque novel at this particular time and in these particular nations, I propose, can only be properly understood in terms of these analogous contexts.

Thesis Layout and Findings

In the chapters that follow I investigate the nature of the neopicaresque novel by analysing the satiric orientation of the primary texts, and considering the ways in which they respond to these unsettled and unsettling times. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the theories that have guided my approach, and that underpin my reading of the texts. This includes a discussion of the need for a broad comparative perspective on the neopicaresque, and details the comparative methods that have supported my development of this. These include David Damrosch's theory of elliptical reading, which allows us to conceive of the neopicaresque as an elliptical field with multiple foci in different national contexts; and theories of literary evolution discussed by, amongst others, Franco Moretti, which help us to understand these national foci as the result of the earlier divergence and subsequent convergence of the picaresque tradition. The second chapter presents an overview of existing definitions of picaresque writing, and sets out a reviewed taxonomy of the picaresque that aids in identifying examples of neopicaresque writing. Here the significance of the

committed poetic of picaresque writing, as described by Rey Hazas, is apparent. The third and final chapter of this first part examines theories of satire in the novel, and considers how the satiric orientation of these texts may be read and interpreted. Of particular importance here are Dustin Griffin's theory of the four rhetorics of satire, and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque.

The second part of this thesis then presents a close comparative reading of satire and its orientation in the eight primary texts in light of the theories discussed in part one. These analytical chapters are presented thematically, rather than by novel or nation, to allow for a true and proper comparison of the texts and their central concerns. The first chapter investigates the theme of food and hunger, wherein an aesthetic connection between the neopicaresque and classic picaresque novels is found. The prominence and use of this theme suggests that the satire of the neopicaresque novel, like that of the earliest picaresque novels, is underpinned by a carnivalesque philosophy, which seeks to subvert social hierarchies and affirm a base material principle. The second chapter considers how this theme contributes to the central narrative progression of the texts. The images of food and hunger discussed

previously serve to highlight and drive the main quest of the protagonist: a search for acceptance and the discovery of an individual identity. The satire at play within this quest works to dismantle perceived tensions between personal and political notions of identity, and to attack suggestions that man can be understood in terms of clear-cut social categories. The third chapter of analysis examines the antagonist in this quest: not another individual character, but the faceless and impersonal institutions of modern mass society that dominate the neopicaresque world. The final chapter brings these analyses together to assess the overall implications of this satiric orientation. The findings of the preceding chapters point always towards a more fundamental concern: the perceived breakdown of the distinction between civilisation and barbarity.

The satire of the neopicaresque novel, conceived in the aftermath of the twentieth century's catastrophic wars, questions the stability of the social and moral values upon which modern society is founded, and testifies to an era of disillusion and uncertainty.

I: Theory & Methods

1. Comparative Reading

> Most people do not start with comparative literature, they end up with it some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure.
>
> – Susan Bassnet, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*

A number of existing studies have shown that the picaresque novel was an active phenomenon in Spanish, American, British, and German literature during the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, this notion has become a widely-acknowledged point of discussion in the literatures of each of these nations. What is remarkable, however, is that so many of these studies have failed to look beyond the borders of one or two nations, and so few have sought to explain why the neopicaresque novel achieved such prominence across such a wide international area at the same historical moment. The great majority of existing studies on the neopicaresque are limited in focus to only one or two national contexts and, consequently, the bigger picture of the neopicaresque as a literary phenomenon of transnational importance has remained largely out of view.

The one study that has clearly shown that a neopicaresque trend was active as well as culturally significant across multiple national contexts is Shelley Godsland's chapter on the neopicaresque in the anthology *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque* (ed. J. A. Garrido Ardila, pp. 247-266). Although relatively short, Godsland's study successfully brings together ideas from some of the existing islands of scholarship on neopicaresque writing in different national contexts and, guided by these, investigates a number of American and European novels from the twentieth century that have been suggested as examples of a neopicaresque tradition. Godsland's analysis finds that the neopicaresque novel developed more or less concurrently in Spanish, American, German, and British literature during this period.[11] The prominence, vigour, and proliferation of this neopicaresque renaissance, Godsland concludes, is "testament to the long course of the

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11. In addition to British, German, Spanish, and American works, Godsland also considers a number of Soviet-era Russian novels that have been posited as possible picaresque works, including Venedikt Yerofeyev's *Moscow-Petushki* (written 1969, first published in Israel in 1973) and Sasha Sokolov's *Palisandriia* (1985). She concludes, however, that the Russian novels "are not works that can truly be labelled as neopicaresque" (265).

picaresque genre and to how, 400 years after the publication of *Lazarillo*, picaresque themes and style still served some of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century" (266). It is also apparent, though Godsland does not make the point explicitly, that the majority of works she identifies as being strong examples of neopicaresque writing fall within a relatively short span of time in the middle of the century.

Godsland's study is significant because it highlights something that most studies of neopicaresque writing fail, on their own, to show: the fact that the impulse to revisit the picaresque tradition during the twentieth century was not unique to a particular national or linguistic context. Godsland's work demonstrates, rather, that the neopicaresque novel developed across a broad international area, and that the genre was particularly popular during the decades of the midcentury. By bringing together texts that have been suggested as examples of neopicaresque writing from multiple national contexts, Godsland gives us a glimpse of that bigger picture that had formerly remained out of focus. Her study shows that the neopicaresque novel was active and of cultural significance

on a much larger scale than previous studies had implied.[12]

If we are to go further, however, and to attempt to understand both how and why the conventions of the picaresque genre came to acquire particular relevance across this range of national contexts during the midcentury we must take a closer, comparative look at these neopicaresque works. Godsland's study provides an important overview of the neopicaresque, but it does not engage in close reading, and neither does it draw any comparative conclusions between the works discussed. As such, there is much that it cannot tell us about the neopicaresque: what motivated this range of writers to utilise the conventions of the picaresque tradition? Why did these works achieve national and international renown? And what made the midcentury a particularly fruitful time for the neopicaresque? These are some of the unanswered questions that this thesis seeks to answer. The analysis that follows engages in a close comparative reading of a number of neopicaresque novels from different contexts so that we may begin to add colour and detail to that bigger

12. It is also only by bringing these works together that Godsland is able to confidently eliminate the Russian context as being significant in the development of the neopicaresque novel.

picture that Godsland's study has shown to exist. An in-depth comparison of the texts allows us to better understand how the neopicaresque novels relate to one another, to better understand how they reference and develop conventions of the historical picaresque genre, and to better understand the motivations that inspired the authors of these novels to revisit the picaresque tradition. A comparative approach is necessary for us to appreciate not only the magnitude, but also the nature, intentions, and cultural significance of the neopicaresque novel.

Defining the Discipline

Comparative literary analysis, however, like so much in literary studies, is fraught with its own uncertainties and controversies. The questions of what constitutes comparison, why it is valuable, and how it ought to be conducted are problems that have troubled literary comparatists for many decades. The American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) publishes a decennial state of the discipline report,[13] and several of its

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13. The ACLA has, since its formation in 1960, sought to chart the development of comparative literature as a discipline with the publication of (roughly) decennial reports on the state of the discipline: the 1965 Levin Report, the 1975 Greene Report, the 1993 Bernheimer Report (with responses), the 2006 Saussy Report (with

most recent iterations show that these most essential of questions have been, and continue to be, a major point of contention amongst comparative literary researchers. The 1993 Bernheimer Report, written by Charles Bernheimer and later printed together with a collection of response papers under the title *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (1995, ed. Charles Bernheimer), highlights the "anxiogenic" (1) nature of the discipline – a sentiment clearly confirmed by those response papers, wherein the same basic questions about the definition, value, and methods of comparative research predominate. The same questions also reappear in both the 2006 Saussy report and the ACLA's most recent 2014/15 digital report. What it means to read comparatively, and how comparative reading can enrich our understanding of literary phenomena such as the neopicaresque, are contentious matters within comparative literary studies, and require some examination before we may proceed.

These matters have not always been considered so

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responses), and the 2014-15 digital report edited by Ursula Heise (available online at: stateofthediscipline.acla.org). Neither the British Comparative Literature Association (founded 1975) nor the European Society of Comparative Literature (founded 2003) produces a comparable report.

problematic. An earlier postwar generation of comparatists seemed once able to define the field with confidence. Alfred Owen Aldridge, in his introduction to the 1969 book *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method,* for example, does not struggle to define the discipline as he sees it, nor to explain its value. Comparative literature, Aldridge writes,

> provides a method of broadening one's own perspective in the approach to single works of literature – a way of looking beyond narrow boundaries of national frontiers in order to discern trends and movements in various national cultures and to see the relations between literature and other spheres of human activity. The study of comparative literature is fundamentally not any different from the study of national literatures except that its subject matter is much vaster, taken as it is from more than one literature and excluding none which the student has the capacity to read. The comparatist, instead of being confined to the wares of a single nation, shops in a literary department store. Briefly defined, comparative literature can be considered the study of any literary phenomenon from the perspective of more than one national literature or in conjunction with another intellectual discipline or even several (1).

Much of Aldridge's assertion still applies. The notion that comparative reading allows literary research to transcend national boundaries, and to thereby make visible a bigger

picture of trends and movements that function transnationally certainly holds true for this study. It is only by reading examples of the genre from different national contexts alongside one another that we are able to discern the scale and influence of the neopicaresque in the twentieth century. Comparative reading has the advantage of making visible the international or transnational significance of certain cultural currents.

Some of the underlying assumptions of Aldridge's definiton, however, have since been robustly and rightly challenged. Bernheimer, for one, considers Aldridge to be representative of an earlier generation of comparatists whose confident assurances about the purpose and value of comparison are no longer tenable. Bernheimer finds problematic the suggestion that comparative reading is only comparative in so far as it traverses national borders, and suggests that this stems from particular postwar sentiments. Comparatists in the mid-twentieth century, Bernheimer suggests, sought to bring into comparison the literatures of nations that had recently been in conflict with one another with the specific, though usually unstated, aim of discovering cultural common ground between them. The work of these midcentury comparatists, Bernheimer

concludes, was founded upon a divisive premise, but oriented towards a conciliatory conclusion. This approach, Bernheimer proposes, rests upon the underlying dictum that “division promotes unity” (3).

There are a number of objections that we might raise against this basic premise, but pertinent to this study are two in particular. The first is that the prioritisation of national or linguistic difference as the main axis of comparison is unhelpful and misleading. To suggest that analysis is only comparative when one of an established set of boundaries (often national, preferably linguistic, occasionally disciplinary) is traversed risks affirming the fallacy that literary cultures can be defined by and within these set bounds. Whether these bounds are national or linguistic, the premise suggests that literary cultures may be basically understood as discrete, contiguous, and internally homogenous islands. This is, of course, an inaccurate understanding of how literary cultures develop, interact, and overlap. The concern here is that an insistence on conducting comparison principally across national frontiers risks obscuring the value of both intranational and transnational comparative possibilities.

It is more accurate, and more helpful, to conceive of

literary cultures in ways similar to those that we might consider any other form of human culture, and for this we may look to the social sciences, in which the notion that modern cultures can be understood as distinct and isolated entities has been roundly rejected. James Clifford, for example, in his influential anthropological work *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), rejects what he sees as an outdated notion that cultures can be understood as static and contained "bounded sites" (21). Clifford proposes instead that in our "global world of intercultural import-export" (23) we ought to "rethink cultures as sites of dwelling *and* travel" (31, emphasis in original). Clifford contrasts the metaphorical image of the isolated, parochial "village" (20) with that of the cosmopolitan "hotel lobby" (21) to illustrate the difference between these two understandings of culture. The hotel lobby, with its connotations of residence and transcience, movement and exchange, Clifford concludes, is a more accurate metaphor for culture in the modern world.

Likewise, cultural geographer Joël Bonnemaison, in his book *Culture and Space: Conceiving a New Cultural Geography* (trans. 2005, first published in French as *La géographie culturelle* in 2000) similarly stresses that

cultures are dynamic systems of exchange that do not easily fit the notion of a bounded site. Bonnemaison defines culture as

> the aggregate of what human beings inherit from previous generations: representations, knowledge, values, ideas and types of sensitiveness. Culture is also what they invent and what they experience within a given space and time. For instance, there is the culture of the 1930s or the 1960s; the culture of a given region, town, or suburban area; company culture, and so forth. Every generation and every group innovates at the same time as it receives. Every culture reinvents itself. There is no such thing as pure tradition, even for fundamentalists. A new generation or group reinterprets traditions and makes them its own by enriching them with new features or discarding aspects it no longer validates (59).

Cultures, Bonnemaison continues, are therefore to be understood as “living tradition[s]” (60) engaged in a “continuous process of creation – or, more exactly, of recreation” (ibid). Bonnemaison’s work on culture shows cultural spaces are neither static nor discrete; they are living traditions, constantly under flux and constantly interacting with outside forces to produce new and different shades of culture. The theories of both Bonnemaison and Clifford remind us that cultures are neither fixed nor pure. They are

living traditions, capable of manifesting at national, intranational, and transnational levels, and that all of these manifestations are liable to change and exchange.

More recent work within the discipline of comparative literature has begun to acknowledge the similar complexities of literary cultures. In her seminal work of comparative theory, *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak rejects the use of the adjectives 'global,' 'national,' or 'world'[14] in relation to literature, and calls instead for literature to be understood in "planetary" (68) terms. Spivak's notion of "planetarity" (pp.68-92) rejects the aforementioned terms primarily because they connote an idea of literary cultures being contained within national borders, and proposes instead that we conceive of the literary cultural landscape as an "undivided 'natural' space rather than a differentiated political space" (68). Spivak thus rejects the map of national literatures often evoked by that earlier generation of comparatists, and denounces what she

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14. The term world literature – or *Weltliteratur*, as coined by Goethe in 1827 – is often used to describe the comparatist's object of study, but has long been considered a point of contention in its own right. For an overview of the history of the term, and contemporary debates surrounding its usage see, for example, *World Literature in Theory* (2014, ed. David Damrosch).

describes as “the arrogance of the cartographic reading of world lit. [sic] in translation as the task of comparative literature” (69). Her call for a planetary understanding of the literary cultural sphere is a reaction against the idea that literatures can be easily divided by national or linguistic borders.

Haun Saussy, author of the ACLA’s 2006 report, has expressed similar reservations about the term world literature and its implied vision of mappable national literatures. In a 2011 paper entitled “Dimensionality in World Literature” Saussy challenges the spatial connotations inherent to the term and criticises its use specifically for what he sees as the subordination of literature to space. To conceive of literary cultures in terms of a two-dimensional world map, Saussy argues, is to falsely suggest that “nothing more than a plane surface is required to capture what matters most about literature” (289). Moreover, to define literatures by national boundaries, Saussy continues, is to ignore “something that literature says, repetitively and obsessively, about itself under all skies and climates: namely that literary experience negates determinate space and time” (292). Both Saussy and Spivak directly challenge the notion that literary cultures might be mapped in the

same way as nations or states, and undermine the traditional insistence on comparison across national frontiers.

The ACLA reports of the last two decades reveal that these issues remain key points of contention within the discipline, and demonstrate as well that understandings of the scope and value of comparative literature are continuing to change. In a contribution to the 2014/15 digital report,[15] Gail Finney celebrates the fact that "much comparative work of the past decade [has been] characterised by the destruction of walls or boundaries." Finney goes yet further to suggest that comparative literature departments themselves will soon cease to be differentiated from cultural studies departments, and welcomes this monumental change on the basis that it may "lead to [a further] opening up, in terms of both genre and level of discourse, of the material studied." We might be circumspect at the prospect of losing the discipline's focus on literature, and thereby

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15. The 2014/15 ACLA State of the Discipline Report does not feature a principle statement; rather, it is comprised of a collection of responses to an open call for papers from ACLA members of any rank and from any institution, collated by a diverse editorial team. It thus presents a less definitive, though perhaps more complex, picture of the discipline at this time.

losing the discipline altogether, but Finney's remarks are significant for they testify to a sense of uncertainty that even Bernheimer could not have predicted, and to which there is no end in sight. In the same 2014/15 report, Saussy writes of "a continued sense of crisis" across the discipline: "Ten years from now," he writes, "comparative literature will [still] be in a state of crisis. It is always in crisis."

One thing that we can say with some confidence, however, is that the comparative aspect of comparative literature need no longer hinge on the national or linguistic difference of the texts studied. If we acknowledge that literary cultures are not defined by and within national borders, we find that compelling comparative readings can be conducted across a range of different kinds of differences. In the analysis that follows I have sought to not only compare the novels by nation, but also in other, less obvious ways too. Certainly there are significant points to be made about how the neopicaresque novel manifests in, say, Spain versus Germany, or Britain versus America, but I have not limited my comparison of the texts to only these national differences. Equally valuable comparisons can be made between texts from the same nation. Ellison's use of the picaresque, for example, differs in certain ways from

Bellow's, and it is worth considering the comparative possibilities of these texts from the same nation. There are also worthwhile comparisons to be made between the texts entirely irrespective of nation. The works of Bellow and Mann, for example, may have particular similarities that are worth drawing out, and these noted similarities might then contrast against the works of Cela and Grass. Although this study does engage in comparison across national borders, it is worth emphasising that this is not the only, or even primary, focus of its comparative aspect.

The second objection to that ethos of "division promotes unity" that Bernheimer sees as underpinning the approach of postwar literary comparatists is that the predetermined aim of discovering similarity is simply of limited value and limited interest. René Wellek and Austin Warren, in their influential 1949 book *Theory of Literature*, define the value of comparative literature in terms very similar to those used by Aldridge a few years later. Comparative literature, Wellek and Warren assert, "asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve." Their words are echoed by Aldridge when he likewise describes the discipline as providing "a method of broadening one's own

perspective [...] a way of looking beyond narrow boundaries of national frontiers" (1). Wellek and Warren, however, go yet further to state their goal of discovering unity amongst national literatures quite directly. "Literature is one," they write, "as art and humanity are one."

Susan Bassnett, even more so than Bernheimer, is highly critical of such lofty statements about the discipline. In her 1993 book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Bassnett takes aim at Wellek and Warren, amongst others, for the grandiosity of their statements about the value of comparative analysis. Bassnett is scathing of those that would envision comparative literature as "some kind of world religion" (4), and repudiates the notion that the comparatist be seen as "a kind of international ambassador working in the comparative literatures of united nations" (ibid). Bassnett, again like Bernheimer, attributes this desire to find similarity beneath superficial difference to attitudes rooted specifically in the contexts of postwar academia, writing that:

> It is an idealistic vision that recurs in the aftermath of major international crises [...] Wellek and Warren offered the cultural equivalent of the movement towards a United

> Nations Assembly that was so powerfully felt in the aftermath of the Second World War (ibid).

While some of Bassnett's criticisms of Wellek and Warren are phrased in jocular terms, she nevertheless raises an important point. The declared aim of discovering similarity between different national literatures now seems both quaint and fundamentally platitudinous.

The pitfall of platitude lurking beneath comparative analysis is a central concern in Saussy's theories of comparative reading. In his essay "Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes" – the essay which leads the ACLA's 2006 state of the discipline report[16] – Saussy notes that the temptation to seek similarity, or to find a common and unifying ancestral "trunk" from which the objects of study may similarly have sprung, is widespread across many comparative disciplines. This feature, Saussy proposes, does not necessarily arise from a postwar conciliatory effort (although it might find fertile ground for growth there), but finds its origins instead in the comparative sciences, such

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16. The Saussy Report, published with responses papers under the title *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2006, ed. Haun Saussy).

as comparative anatomy, which predate and prefigure the foundation of comparative literature as a discipline. Saussy writes that,

> the comparative disciplines on the analogy of which comparative literature was first proposed thought of their subject matter as needing to be organized in the shape of a genealogical tree. Comparison enabled one to discover the distal events in the past that had produced branchings; it read difference as differentiation, a process unfolding in past time [...] Named for the tree-shaped disciplines yet not entirely like them, [comparative literature] had to find its own equivalent of a trunk (13).

That equivalent, Saussy continues, is often assumed to be human experience itself:

> What is the trunk – what does comparative literature discover? The most obvious, and usually untheorized candidate for 'trunk' status is simply the universality of human experience. Situations, emotions, ideas, [and] personalities seem to recur across any corpus of world literature, be it ever so diverse (ibid).

The temptation to seek similarity in comparative literary analysis stems from the fact that so many literary cultures share the same essentially human themes.

However, whilst acknowledging that similarity may provide a stimulating impetus for comparison (as indeed it

has for this present study), Saussy cautions against a reliance on this similarity for any sort of conclusion. “Although thematics, or subject matter, is the starting point of many an investigation,” he writes,

> it is never enough simply to discover the same themes appearing in different places: an account of *how* the works make their subject manifest is the only thing that can save a comparison of nature poetry in Wordsworth and Xie Lingyun, for example, from platitude. An enabling hypothesis at best, the universality of selected themes cannot serve as a conclusion (13-4, emphasis added).

Saussy revisits this point in his 2011 paper on “Dimensionality in World Literature,” wherein he reiterates that “the likening of like with like” is “a hollow gesture with a predetermined outcome” (337). The anterior goal of discovering unity through comparison does not provide a worthwhile conclusion. To be of scholarly value, comparative reading must do something more.

The Comparative Perspective

Comparative literature is distinct and valuable not for the broad international scope of its source material, nor for the comparatist’s ability to recognise common human themes at the heart of superficially different literatures. The

definitive feature of the discipline is, rather, its comparative perspective: a particular outlook and means of approaching literature and literary cultures that allows them to be understood and appreciated in new ways. While precise definitions of the discipline remain contentious to this day, one point on which Saussy and many other recent comparatists do seem to agree is that the essential value of comparative literature lies in its methods of approach. Saussy considers "the comparative reflex, the comparative way of thinking" ("Exquisite Cadavers" 5) to be the discipline's central contribution to literary scholarship. "Our many 'modes of reading'" he notes, "fix on texts from elsewhere, transform them, then send them out again" (11). A particular "investment in methods rather than subject matter" (ibid), he continues, is what differentiates the study of comparative literature from that of the national literatures. For Saussy, these different modes of reading, and studied methods of analysis, are the distinctive features that give comparative literature its disciplinary identity.

The idea that the discipline is defined by methods rather than materials is a suggestion that has gained significant momentum since the publication of the Saussy report. Ali Behdad, in a 2014 paper ("A Comparative Frame

of Mind") argues that "comparative literature ought to be viewed as a practice of engaging and realising ideas *through a comparative frame of mind*" (emphasis added) – a proposal which Behdad repeated in his 2015 Presidential Address to the ACLA. Michael Swacha, in his paper "Comparing Structures of Knowledge" in the 2014/15 state of the discipline report, quotes from Behdad's speech the assertion that "literature should be secondary; we are [first] comparatists" (Behdad qtd. in Swacha). Swacha himself, in the same paper, likewise argues that comparative literature ought to invest first and foremost in methods, for these underpin the comparative aspect that differentiates the discipline from other fields of literary research. Saussy, Behdad, and Swacha all similarly affirm that comparative literature is distinguished not by the range of texts studied, but by the way in which these texts are approached. These present day comparatists profess, contrary to Aldridge's statement, that comparative literature *is* fundamentally different from the study of national literatures and, furthermore, that this distinction lies not in subject matter but in method.

The question that arises, then, is: how exactly does this comparative perspective differ from other approaches? This

question has been a major point of focus in the work of David Damrosch. Damrosch, like Saussy, Behdad, and Swacha has also suggested that comparative literature is defined by a unique comparative perspective, and this is what he seeks to explain with his theory of ‘elliptical’ reading. The comparatist, Damrosch argues, unlike scholars of national literatures, studies literature in the shape of an ellipse: “that geometric form generated from two foci” (“Elliptical Age” 128). The theory proposes that while the scholar of national literature has a single cultural focus and thus a circular field of vision, the comparatist by contrast has more than one focus and thus an elliptical field of vision. The comparatist, Damrosch continues, engages with these multiple foci on “relatively equal terms” (ibid), whereas the scholar of national literature would instead “characteristically have a single culture in view, at least in the centre of their vision” (ibid). Thus the work of comparative literature, according to Damrosch, is defined by an ability to “read in the field of force” (“World Literature Today” 18) generated by multiple foci of equal importance. What distinguishes the work of comparative literature, he argues, is that the comparatist is prepared to read in the elliptical spaces generated between multiple foci.

Thus, where the Germanist studying *Simplicissimus* might consider *Guzmán* to be an important influence on the work of Grimmelshausen, Alemán's novel would generally remain of peripheral interest to the focus of the study. Likewise, the Hispanist studying *Lazarillo* might investigate the *Maqamat* of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani as a parallel or early precursor to the development of the picaresque novel, but *Lazarillo* would typically remain the central focus of the research. For the comparatist, however, these texts are to be read on the same level. The comparatist, to use Damrosch's metaphor, would read in the elliptical space generated between *Lazarillo* and the *Maqamat*, between *Simplicissimus* and *Guzmán*, or even between all four.

Damrosch's theory furthermore suggests a literary landscape that is neither a map fragmented by national frontiers, nor an undifferentiated 'planetary' space. Instead, the concept of elliptical reading allows for a multitude of comparative possibilities to be seen as overlapping ellipses, each one connecting multiple cultural points. In this way, we are able to better see the ways in which different literary cultures overlap, interact, and reach out beyond themselves. In these fields of force generated between different points focus, new meanings can be brought to

light. Comparatists are not limited to comparing across national or linguistic difference, nor are they left sprawling before a planetary colossus; they are in a position to recognise comparative possibilities at all scales and across different cultural environments, and this allows significant or previously-unappreciated intertextual relationships to be brought to light.

National Internationalism

This comparative perspective is greatly advantageous for the study of literary phenomena like genre. The elliptical approach of comparative reading allows for multiple cultural contexts to be simultaneously foregrounded. When multiple foci are brought together, the wide extent of a given literary phenomenon, or the diverse range of influences that shaped it, can be more clearly illuminated, and it is important that these multiple foci are engaged on equal terms. Furthermore, this approach allows for specific local, regional, or national contexts to be foregrounded alongside broader international or transnational contexts, too. In his examination of comparative literature, Damrosch coins the term ‘national internationalism’ to describe what he sees as one of the discipline’s key contributions to literary research.

"More than ever," he writes,

> serious study of national traditions can benefit from a multilingual and comparative perspective; conversely, comparative study must engage directly and affirmatively with national traditions, which are hardly about to wither away. Nationalism and internationalism are inextricably intertwined today, to their mutual benefit ("Comparative Literature" 328).

In a comparative literary study it is possible, and indeed desirable, to unravel both local and wider contexts together. This, according to Damrosch, is one of the great strengths of comparative literature as a discipline. "Far from having to choose between the nation and the world," Damrosch writes, comparatists are able "to look freshly at the intimate interanimation of these seemingly opposed terms" ("Figure and Ground"). National distinctions are not the central concern of comparative literature, but national contexts do still have an important place within comparative literary studies. Productive comparative work can be achieved on many different local, national, and international scales, and often these occur within the same analysis.

The notion of national internationalism is especially helpful in understanding the development of neopicaresque novels. In the analysis that follows I show that the

neopicaresque may be best understood as a transnational genre, but it is worth stressing that this ought not to obscure the fact that many of its participant texts arise from picaresque traditions rooted in national literary contexts. Hence, while we might regard all of the primary texts studied here as participants in a transnational picaresque revival, we must not lose sight of the fact that they are influenced by both national and international cultures.

Bellow's *Augie March*, for example, has been hailed by some critics as, perhaps, the great American novel of the twentieth century. Certainly much about the text – its setting, its argot, its cultural archetypes – is distinctly American. Bellow's use of the picaresque follows in the tradition of another great American novel, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), itself often cited as the clearest example of the picaresque novel in American letters. We know, too, that Bellow was a close friend of another giant of American literature, Ralph Ellison,[17] and

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17. The friendship between Bellow and Ellison is well documented. Although the exact date of their first meeting is unknown, it is believed that they became friends in the late 1940s, and that they read each others' work prior to the publication of either *Invisible Man* or *Augie March*. Mark Grief writes in *The Age of the Crisis of Man* that "we do know they were personal acquaintances before either was publicly famous, before their walks [in Riverside Park, NY], and before

that these two contemporary American novelists were in close communication around the time that they both produced their respective neopicaresque novels. Bellow wrote of being immensely moved by *Invisible Man*,[18] and it is known from Ellison's letters that the two American novelists exchanged ideas during the period that Bellow was composing *Augie March*.[19] All of this would suggest that Bellow's *Augie March* is firmly rooted in an historical and contemporary American literary culture.

The novel also exhibits a sense of Midwestern, and more specifically Chicagoan, cultural identity. "I am an American, Chicago born," Bellow's protagonist, Augie, famously declares in the novel's opening sentence. Throughout the narrative, it is suggested that Augie's cultural identity is Midwestern or Chicagoan, and that this is distinct from, say, the culture of the East Coast. There is, then, a strong sense of regional identity within this great American novel. Equally clear, however, is the fact that the

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Ellison had published a book" (146). We know, as well, that Bellow and Ellison lived together for a period in the 1950s. Bellow himself wrote about this time in an article for *The Los Angeles Times* ("Ralph Ellison in Tivoli," 10 May 1998).

18. See Bellow's review of *Invisible Man* in *Commentary* (June 1952).

19. In a letter to Albert Murray dated 1952 Ellison describes how he and Bellow read and discuss one anothers' writing.

novel reaches out and beyond these regional or national cultural spheres, and draws influences from a broad range of international spheres. Bellow himself named the Russian picaresque novel *Dead Souls* (1842) by Nikolai Gogol as a formative influence on his literary career. We know, as well, that Bellow was impressed by the time he spent time in Spain,[20] and that he was familiar with writers whose names loom large in the Spanish picaresque tradition, including Cervantes and Cela.[21] Bellow's novel, thus, cannot be fully understood as simply American: *Augie March* is certainly that, but the text is inscribed with regional concerns, and a broad international heritage as well. A study that both compares and contrasts this novel with a range of other participants of the same genre – with works that share certain aspects, and works that differ – helps to make this range of influence visible. This is the value of that 'national internationalism' that Damrosch holds in such high regard.

National internationalism is close to the surface in all

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20. See: Bellow's "Spanish Letter" in *There Is Simply Too Much To Think About (*Saul Bellow, ed. Benjamin Taylor, 2016) pp. 11-26

21. Bellow enthusiastically reviewed Cela's *The Hive* (*La colmena*) for the New York Times in 1953. In this article he describes Cela as "the only considerable novelist to appear in Spain since the end of the civil war."

eight of the neopicaresque novels studied in this thesis. In each case, these authors write into the picaresque tradition in comparable ways, drawing on diverse international literary influences, whilst inscribing their work with clear national and regional cultural identities. The conventions of a genre with an international history are, in each instance, adapted and localised. The novels by Cela and Fernández Flórez are both presented as descendents of the Spanish picaresque tradition initiated by *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*; nevertheless each depicts very different experiences of the Spanish postwar period. Ellison's novel, like Bellow's can be considered a distinctly American novel for similar reasons, but its narrative focuses on the cultures of the Deep South and, later, New York, and its emphasis lies on a black American experience, rather than the Russian or Jewish American experience portrayed by Bellow. The novels by Grass and Mann are rooted in German literary culture, with the influences of Grimmelshausen and Goethe, for example, being particularly noteworthy in both cases. Equally, Burgess and Waterhouse contribute to a continued British literary tradition. Their use of the picaresque recalls Daniel Defoe, Samuel Johnson, and Tobias Smollett, amongst others.

The above are broad and brief examples that simply illustrate the point that these works all belong to a range of regional, national, and international cultures – both literary and otherwise. Although this thesis argues that the neopicaresque novel is a significant transnational phenomenon pertaining to the mid-twentieth century – a phenomenon, moreover, that was present and prominent across a broad international area – it nevertheless affirms that the participant texts are rooted in and shaped by their respective national contexts. An engagement with national as well as intranational and international contexts is necessary to appreciate the aims and achievements of these neopicaresque novelists. The elliptical comparative approach described by Damrosch allows us to perceive the national internationalism inherent to the individual neopicaresque novels. The comparative analysis that follows does not emphasise national difference as the primary axis of comparison, but it does nevertheless recognise the influence of national traditions and social and political contexts on the development of these works.

A New Vantage Point

Damrosch's theory of elliptical reading helps to show that comparative analysis can benefit our understanding of

the individual texts, as well as our understanding of the genre in which they similarly participate. This grasp of the comparative perspective, however, does more than just this. Damrosch goes a step further to propose that the elliptical model of comparative reading helps us to acknowledge our own position as readers. The anxiety described by Bernheimer in his 1993 report can perhaps be attributed to the "spectre of amateurism" ("World Literature?" 284) that Damrosch believes to haunt the discipline. The sense of unease about working outwith one's own culture has become a familiar trope in discussions of the discipline, and suggests that comparatists, whose work inevitably takes them beyond their own cultural sphere, often feel a heightened awareness of cultural distance between themselves and the objects of their study. However, such an awareness, Damrosch argues, need not be seen as a disadvantage. A sensitivity to these cultural differences may in fact be an advantage, creating opportunities to bring new insight to a text, and to reflect on one's own situation. The multi-focal nature of elliptical reading maintains space for comparatists to keep sight of the position from which they themselves read, even as they engage with the different contexts of the

principal objects of study. Comparatists, Damrosch writes,

> encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras [...] As we triangulate between our own present situation and the enormous variety of other cultures around and before us, we won't see works of world literature so fully enshrined within their own cultural context as we do when reading those works within their own traditions, but a degree of distance from the home tradition can help us to appreciate the ways in which a literary work reaches out and away from its point of origin. If we then observe ourselves seeing the work's abstraction from its origins, we gain a new vantage point on our own moment (*World Literature?* 300).

The idea of triangulating between cultures that include our own allow for reflection on our own present moment, and this can lead to a greater understanding of a text's cultural translatability, or its enduring significance. This new vantage point hence provides a better position from which to examine not only the neopicaresque novel *per se*, but allows its later relevance and legacy to become more apparent.

Far from being an inherently understood tenet of the discipline, the comparative aspect of comparative literature has, for decades, been a contentious subject, and the most

recent ACLA reports suggest that this will continue to be the case for some time to come. What has become established within the discipline is the sense that comparative literature is defined not by its subject matter, but by its methods. These methods are rooted in a unique comparative perspective, defined in Damrosch's theory of elliptical reading by a plurality of foci. This ability to read in the field of force generated between multiple points of focus, all studied on relatively equal terms, is what allows comparative literature to bring new insight to texts, the traditions from which they draw influence, and, indeed, to our own present moment. Comparative literary analysis is able to engage with national contexts as well as international, transnational or local contexts, to show the scope and variation of the literary phenomena it examines, and encourages comparatists to recognise their own position as well. Thus, a comparative study of the neopicaresque novel allows us to better understand the transnational scale of this trend, to perceive national or local differences within it, and to reflect on its legacy in contemporary literature. A comparative study is necessary for us to properly comprehend the significance and impact of the twentieth century's neopicaresque novel.

2. Genre, Myth, and the Neopicaresque Novel

I am now alone, and if I do not keep a sharp lookout for myself, I shall find none to assist me.

– *Lazarillo de Tormes*

The suggestion that a neopicaresque trend can be observed in American and European literature from the mid twentieth century presupposes, of course, at least some degree of continuity from an earlier picaresque tradition. This historical picaresque tradition, rooted in sixteenth century Spanish literature and contemporaneous, if not synonymous, with the development of the modern novel itself, has inspired both novelists and critics alike. The sheer volume of research that has been produced within the field of picaresque studies, and indeed the fact that we might speak of picaresque studies as a field unto itself, attests to both the significant impact and enduring relevance of this picaresque tradition in literary history and its scholarship. Within this field of scholarship, however, we find once again a remarkable lack of consensus regarding definitions of the term itself. What exactly is the picaresque? A genre, a

mode, a myth? What are its features, and how might we identify its participant texts? The lack of clear answers to these questions cannot be attributed to neglect: there is a great deal of existing research concerned with the task of answering precisely these points, and thereby establishing a suitable definition.[22] Yet in spite of the abundance of suggestions, none commands unanimous acceptance. This presents a particular problem for the study of the neopicaresque. If we are to understand how and why novelists of the twentieth century emulated and adapted aspects of the picaresque novel in their own work, we must begin from a reasonably stable understanding of the features that define the picaresque in its historical sense.

In the following pages, therefore, we will examine several of the most prominent theories of picaresque writing, establish the criteria that they most frequently cite as essential, and build from these a single, practical

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22. The issue of precisely what constitutes a picaresque text has been the focus of innumerable studies over the course of more than a century of scholarship: from the publication of F.W. Chandler's *Romances of Roguery* (1899), to the twentieth-century studies of Fernando Lázaro Carreter, Ulrich Wickes and Antonio Rey Hazas. Many recent works of picaresque theory have come from hispanic studies, including those by Florencio Sevilla Arroyo, Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, and Juan Antonio Garrido Ardila, to name but a few.

definition that can be used to clearly identify examples of picaresque writing irrespective of national or historical context. This reviewed taxonomy considers the picaresque as a transnational and transhistorical phenomenon, and thus provides a more suitable model for identifying modern picaresque works than some more conservative definitions would allow.[23] It is only through such a reassessment of the term itself that a proper evaluation of the legacy of the picaresque tradition in modern literature can be conducted. Only then might we begin to see more clearly the impact of the historical picaresque tradition on the development of the modern novel in western literature.

A Problem of Genre

To study the picaresque, or neopicaresque, novel is to begin with the premise that the term itself has a useful application: that the 'picaresque' label may be used to classify a range of works into a literary genre (or mode, or myth) of some coherence. That is to say, that by identifying works as participants of a picaresque tradition, we are

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23. Existing definitions range from those that would include any novel featuring an antiheroic protagonist, to those that would exclude all but a very small number of 'pure' picaresques. Francisco Rico, for example, suggests in *La novela picaresca* (1970) that only two texts (*Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*) may be described as truly picaresque.

acknowledging a significant set of similarities between individual texts, and that these similarities are meaningful. While we have in the previous chapter noted that such similarity is indeed recognised as a legitimate enabling hypothesis for comparative analysis, the emphasis that this premise places on genre is not without its own contentions. Genre is an ancient polemic in the study of literature and continues to incite heated debate amongst scholars of the picaresque.

While many picaresque scholars support and defend the use of genre as a means of classifying literary works, there are others who are more circumspect about its usefulness. Peter N. Dunn, a Hispanist who has written extensively on the picaresque tradition, leans towards the latter perspective. Dunn acknowledges that genre can be an instrument of meaning within a text, as well as a useful tool for its interpretation, but he also notes two kinds of "violence" that genre exerts, particularly in the picaresque context:

> the first is the repression or devaluation of highly significant individual differences between these novels; the second is the distortion of the relation between them and the works not classified as picaresque ("Problem of Genre" 2).

Both of the above are pertinent points, and ones that we must bear in mind as we examine the neopicaresque novels. On the second point, first of all, it is important to stress that although the eight novels studied here participate, I argue, in a neopicaresque revival, this is not to say that their picaresque or neopicaresque elements are the only feature of significance, nor is it to say that they are excluded in any way from participation in, or adaptation of, other genres as well. That Burgess engages with the picaresque tradition in his composition of *A Clockwork Orange* does not exclude the possibility that the same novel also engages with the traditions of, for example, the Bildungsroman, the dystopian novel, or any other novelistic genre. I do not argue that the eight novels studied here are *exclusively* neopicaresque, but simply that their emulation of picaresque conventions is sufficiently marked as to contribute to the creation of meaning. And on Dunn's first point, that there may exist highly significant differences between texts of a single genre, I wholeheartedly agree. Indeed, when we compare picaresque works from different nations and different periods this is very clear – and a point to which we will return within this chapter.

Even with Dunn's objections in mind, it is evident that

genre remains a useful concept for literary analysis. Genre provides a horizon of expectation,[24] allowing authors to communicate their intentions in, and guide the reader's reception of, their work. Genre, in other words, communicates particular rhetorical goals, and advertises the direction in which the text will go even before it arrives at its conclusion. So effective is genre in communicating these objectives that a text need not achieve its goals with any great success for them to be understood. A comedy can be identified as such without the reader finding the text amusing; horror fiction is recognisable as horror fiction even when the reader is not actually frightened. And so the use of picaresque conventions, we might suppose, are intended to communicate a particular sentiment or ethos, regardless of whether or not the author is successful in the final execution.

Many picaresque theorists have thus defended the

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24. From the German *Erwartungshorizont,* coined by Hans Robert Jauss in his reception theory. Briefly defined, this refers to "the shared 'mental set' or framework within which those of a particular generation in a culture understand, interpret, and evaluate a text or an artwork. This includes textual knowledge of conventions and expectations (e.g. regarding genre and style), and social knowledge (e.g. of moral codes)" ('Horizon of Expectations', Oxford Reference Online)

field's reliance on genre. Juan Ramón Rodríguez de Lera considers genre to be an "absolutely necessary" instrument to picaresque studies, and one that is essential to the study of literature more broadly.[25] Garrido Ardila, citing specifically the intertextual relationships between early examples of the picaresque, such as *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, argues that it would be entirely inappropriate to deny the existence of a meaningful genre (222). Antonio Rey Hazas, likewise, argues that the formal features of those early picaresque novels are and were significant, for they communicated to their readers a particular expectation:

> The picaresque novel [...] bore a specific and very defined semantic load, which inevitably accompanied its formal features; in short, a poetic that, although implicit, was perfectly clear to writers and readers of the seventeenth century, and that was satisfactorily suited to particular semantic goals [translation my own][26]

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25. Rodríguez de Lera writes that genre is "un instrumento absolutamente necesario e intrínseco a los estudios sobre literatura" (359) ["an absolutely necessary instrument, and intrinsic to studies about literature," translation my own]

26. "La novela picaresca soportaba [...] una carga semántica específica y muy definida, que acompañaba, inevitablemente, al conjunto de sus rasgos formales; una poética, en suma, que aunque implícita, era perfectamente clara para los escritores y lectores del XVII, y que se adecuaba satisfactoriamente a determinados propósitos semánticos" (*Novela picaresca* 68-69)

The very use of these common features communicates, in itself, a certain level of meaning: it indicates a common intent, guides a similar reception, and suggests the relationship of these texts to one another. Genre, even when broadly defined to include the case of the picaresque, describes not only a collection of texts with a similar form, style, or aesthetic, but indicates a similar semantic purpose as well.

In the case of the picaresque, this sense of commonality is particularly cultivated. One of the most prominent picaresque theorists Ulrich Wicks notes in his paper "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach" that in many picaresque novels there is "an awareness of the picaresque itself as a tradition" (245). This awareness of the picaresque may be expressed either externally (as "the author's stated intent" [ibid]), or internally ("within the fiction" [ibid]), but in either case demonstrates a conscious decision on the part of the author to write into the tradition, and a desire to ensure that the work is understood within the context of other picaresque novels. The picaresque can thus be considered a very self-aware tradition; many picaresque works specifically reference their

participation in a perceived picaresque genre.[27] It makes sense, then, for us to briefly consider the early development of the tradition, in order to understand this literary context.

History of the Picaresque Tradition

The history of the picaresque novel cannot be easily separated from the history of the novel itself. The text almost universally considered to be the first example of the picaresque novel and the primogenitor of the picaresque

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27. Examples of picaresque novels that write directly and explicitly into the picaresque tradition abound. An early example is Francisco López de Úbeda's *La pícara Justina* (1605, sometimes translated into English as *The Spanish Jilt*), wherein not only the title shows an awareness of a picaresque tradition, but also the cover of the first edition, which features an illustration entitled the 'ship of picaresque life,' and includes images of figures identified as Lazarillo, Celestina, and Guzmán de Alfarache. As Garrido Ardila notes, this illustration "leaves no room for doubt: in 1605, the editor of Justina understood that López de Úbeda's book belonged to a literary tradition that included *Lazarillo*, *Celestina*, and *Guzmán*" ("Origins and Definition" 13). In a later example, Tobias Smollett, in his preface to *Roderick Random* (1748) states that he has modelled his novel on LeSage's *Gil Blas* (1715-35) – a french picaresque novel, itself clearly modelled on some of the early Spanish picaresques named above (a reference to the stone of Salamanca in Gil Blas' opening letter to the reader, for example, instantly evokes the Salamancan stone bull [the *verraco del puente*] by which Lazarillo is first initiated into picarism). Much later, in Fernández Florez's *Lola, espejo oscuro* (1950), an author's introduction places the work within a Spanish picaresque lineage, including *Lazarillo, Guzmán*, and *Justina*. These are but a few examples to demonstrate the point that picaresque writers often make the intended picaresque context of their work unambiguous from the first pages.

tradition, *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* [*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*], is sometimes also considered to be the first modern novel in western literary history.[28] The text itself is a short and, to the modern reader, fairly unassuming piece of narrative prose fiction, written in Spanish and published anonymously in the middle of the sixteenth century. Although literary historians have put forward various possible names, no consensus has been reached on the question of its authorship. There is no firm agreement, either, on the date of its first publication. The four oldest known editions of the text date from 1554, when it was printed anonymously in Burgos, Medina del Campo, Alcalá de Henares, and Antwerp almost simultaneously. Its sudden appearance and proliferation across this range of cities within the span of a few months suggests that the first edition must have appeared some years earlier. An original publication date of between 1550 and 1552 is generally posited.[29]

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28. In his paper on the "Origins and Definition of the Picaresque Genre" (2015) Garrido Ardila notes *Lazarillo* exhibits Aristotelian literary realism, as well as formal realism (according to Ian Watt's definition in *The Rise of the Novel*). Accordingly, Garrido Ardila writes, "critics have regarded *Lazarillo* as the first modern novel, and it is of note that it appeared some fifty years before *Don Quixote* (1605)" (11).
29. For discussion on the provisional dating of the lost first edition of

Despite these uncertainties, however, it is widely acknowledged that the publication of *Lazarillo* is a landmark moment in the history of western literature. In terms of both form and content, this text presented something radically new. Its narrative takes an epistolary format, with the eponymous protagonist writing to an unnamed recipient (addressed only as "*Vuestra Merced*" – Your Honour) in order to explain a particular, as yet undisclosed, case. Lazarillo then recounts several episodes of his life, beginning with an impoverished childhood and followed by years of service under a series of different masters (a blind beggar, a priest, a squire, a seller of papal indulgences, a pedlar, a chaplain, and a constable). Each episode follows a familiar pattern: Lazarillo suffers abuse at the hands of his master, but learns to overcome this by developing his own cunning tricks. He thereby becomes able to move onwards and upwards through society. By the end of the tale, Lazarillo has raised himself, by guile and wit, to a respected position, and taken a wife. The central case, revealed only on the final page, relates to his wife's adulterous

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Lazarillo see: Antonio Rey Hazas' *Deslindes de la novela picaresca* (75), or Alexander Samson's chapter on *Lazarillo* in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature* (24-5).

relationship with an Archpriest. Lazarillo's concluding words suggest tacit complicity in this situation in exchange for financial security. He has learned from his experiences, the story seems to suggest, to place practical material concerns before abstract moral principles.

Lazarillo, of course, does not come from nowhere. The narrative draws on a wide range of earlier classical and folk traditions, but reworks their familiar tropes into a new form of literature. Scholars have suggested influences as diverse as Petronius' *Satyricon* (late 1st century) and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (late 2nd century), the Arabic tradition of *maqamat* (popular in Islamic Spain during the 11th and 12th centuries), the German chapbook *Till Eulenspiegel* (c.1510-2), and various Spanish proto-novels, including Juan Ruiz's *El libro de buen amor* (c. 1330), Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* (1499), and Francisco Delicado's *La lozana andaluza* (1528).[30] The author of *Lazarillo* draws significantly on particular aspects of these literary

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30. For a discussion of the possible influences of these various texts on *Lazarillo* and the picaresque genre more broadly see: Garrido Ardila's "Origins and Definitions of the Picaresque Genre" in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque* (pp. 1-23); Rey Haza's *Deslindes de la novela picaresca* (p.39)

predecessors: the satire of the Menippean tradition, the antiheroic trickster figure of the *maqamat* and *Till Eulenspiegel*, and the realistic social underworlds of the Spanish prose dialogues. *Lazarillo* is distinguished from these antecedents, however, by its unique combination of these features: its formal realism, its iconoclastic moral message, and its sequential prose narrative. “The greatest contribution of *Lazarillo* to the history of Western literature,” writes Garrido Ardila, is that

> the author had turned to a vast range of folk stories, jokes and anecdotes in order to organise them and construct a coherent narrative structure wherein events are never chosen randomly and the protagonist undergoes a patent psychological change (2015, 16).

Taken in their broadest extension, these are the features that would come to define the modern novel itself. In their narrower sense, these same features become essential to the development of the picaresque genre.

Lazarillo has long been considered to be the archetype of the picaresque by both novelists and critics alike, though it is only with the publication of *Guzmán* in 1599 that we might begin to speak of an emergent genre. The two novels have a number of notable features in common. First, there

is the (often bleak) social realism of their narrative worlds, reminiscent of the Spanish prose dialogues cited above. The setting in each case is recognisably that of sixteenth century Spain (ie. contemporary with their composition), and the narrative offers a realistic vision of life in the lower echelons of society at that time.

The novels are also both sharply satirical (or at least we might reasonably interpret them so). Indeed, the dissenting, even heretical, themes found in *Lazarillo*'s sharp satire have led a number of scholars to propose a heterodox, possibly *converso*, authorship.[31] Scholars have similarly proposed that Alemán's postulated *converso* background influenced his writing of *Guzmán*.[32] In 1559, *Lazarillo* became one of the first vernacular texts to feature on the Spanish Inquisition's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum,* presumably as a

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31. Many literary historians have discussed the problem of the authorship of *Lazarillo*, and put forth various possible names. Many put forth that the text's satirical thrust suggests a heterodox, and often specifically *converso* or "New Christian" origin. See, for example: Bjornson (1977), or Samson (2015).

32. John R. Yamamoto Wilson writes that "part of Mateo Alemán's purpose in writing his enormously popular picaresque novel *Guzmán de Alfarache* was almost certainly to air his frustrations at the ill-treatment he received as a converso (ie. Christian of Judaic descent) in Spain at the turn of the sixteenth century" (137).

consequence of the novel's barely-veiled anticlericalism.[33] *Guzmán* did not suffer the same fate; taken at face value the novel is a pious conversion story. It does not take much imagination to read irony into the same story, however, and find then that the text presents a caustic parody of the Counter-Reformation.

Finally, in the characters of Lazarillo and Guzmán we also find the paradigms of the picaresque protagonist: the pícaro himself. These characters are shrewd, guileful, and streetwise, their personalities shaped by the hard knocks they experience. They are not villainous or immoral, but they learn from experience that they cannot be overly concerned with moral matters if they are to survive the hostile world in which they live. Pragmatism, the pícaro soon discovers, must come before principles. Thus it is with these unheroic protagonists, the sharply satirical telling of their tales, and the amalgamation of earlier literary genres that we find the foundations of the picaresque genre are laid. It is into the tradition initiated by *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*

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33. In a paper entitled "Market, Audience, and the Fortunes and Adversities of Lazarillo de Tormes Castigado," Felipe E. Ruan attributes the censure of *Lazarillo* to its "combination of irreverent satire and pointed anticlericalism" (191), which he suggests give the text Erasmian and/or Lutheran resonances.

that so many later picaresque novelists write.

Towards A Definition

By studying *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, and considering how later authors emulate, adapt, and reimagine the most striking features of these early initiators, scholars interested in the picaresque have long sought to satisfactorily define the picaresque tradition. The quantity of existing scholarship, with its wide range of differing perspectives, can be daunting. Indeed, many present-day researchers find themselves caught in a confusion of literary theory. Rodríguez de Lera suggests that while an enduring fascination with the tradition is indeed indicative of its fruitfulness for research, the quantity of existing research has its drawbacks too:

> While it is true that the plurality of perspectives from which to study the picaresque, or any other artistic manifestation, does nothing more than demonstrate the richness thereof, it is also true that said diversity of views can introduce a considerable confusion[34] [translation my own].

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34. "Si bien es cierto que la pluralidad de perspectivas desde las que estudiar la picaresca o cualquier otra manifestación artística no hacen más que mostrar la riqueza de la misma, también es cierto que dicha diversidad de miradas puede introducir una considerable confusión" (Rodríguez de Lera, 360).

Klaus Meyer-Minneman writes similarly of a 'theoretical confusion'[35] within picaresque studies, and attributes this to a lack of communication between individual specialists working on the same area of research (14, note 1).[36] Three decades before Meyer-Minneman's comments, Ulrich Wicks wrote of a need to "reconcile" (240) the diversity of critical perspectives that had already emerged even then. The tangle of the theory at the heart of picaresque studies has long been an impediment to progress. To limit this sense of confusion, and create room for the field to advance, any new attempt to define the picaresque ought to aim to resolve, rather than perpetuate, the conflict of this debate. Thus, I have not relied on the work of a single theorist here, nor have I proposed anything radically new. I have, instead, reviewed the taxonomy of the picaresque by examining several existing definitions, and seeking the underlying consensus within these.

The term 'picaresque,' in its broadest usage, has been applied indiscriminately to describe any work of fiction with a barely episodic plot and a protagonist of questionable

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35. "confusión teórica" (Meyer-Minneman, 14).

36. Incidentally, this same criticism has been cited as the reason for a lack, until now, of a detailed analysis of the neopicaresque. See: Garrido Ardila's "Transnational Picaresque" p.3.

moral character. Such an approach, of course, leaves us no closer to meaningful analysis, for it might include an almost infinite number of works of modern literature. In this case, the term loses its usefulness, and is clearly inadequate for the present study. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who would limit the picaresque to *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán* alone, considering these two novels to be the only 'true' or 'pure' examples of picaresque writing.[37] This approach is likewise inadequate, for it asks us to close our eyes to the very real impact that these two radically different novels had on the development of later novels across Europe and North America. While two texts might indeed initiate a genre, they cannot alone constitute it; genre comes to life, as we have already suggested, only when it is widespread and familiar enough to create a horizon of expectation. Whether or not the picaresque is truly a genre at all has been debated. The picaresque is therefore sometimes reformulated as a mode, or a myth. I do not wish to become entangled in this debate over semantics, and have for this reason most often referred to the historical picaresque as a tradition, and the neopicaresque as a literary trend that writes into, or follows

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37. See, for example, Francisco Rico's *La novela picaresca* (1970)

on from, said tradition. Alexander Blackburn's book *The Myth of the Picaro* makes a convincing argument that we might consider different eras of the picaresque in different terms,[38] and this perhaps is one of the best ways to resolve this aspect of the debate. The real challenge before us is to find a sense of balance between this range of different approaches: to find a practical definition, that allows us to use the term 'picaresque' as an analytical tool, through which we are able to discover relevant intertextual relationships, with neither too broad nor too narrow a scope. Without such balance, there is a risk that the term itself will be lost to all usefulness.

A certain level of flexibility is therefore required. Richard Bjornson's proposed solution is to accept, first of all, that "it might be impossible to reconstruct faithfully every dimension of a complex literary phenomenon like the

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38. On this point, Alexander Blackburn makes a convincing argument for considering different stages of the picaresque in different terms. The Spanish novels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Blackburn proposes, might constitute a genre, but their relevance as a genre declines significantly thereafter. Later manifestations of the tradition, and especially those of the twentieth century, are better understood as myth (defined according to Claudio Guillén as "an essential situation of significant structure derived from the novels themselves" [Guillén qtd. in Blackburn, 7]). See Blackburn's *The Myth of the Picaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954* (1979).

European picaresque novel," but that an examination of its key characteristics can bring us close enough: "perspective can be gained by focusing upon three of its most significant aspects" (5-6). In this respect, the approach that I have taken is similar to that of Bjornson. I am not seeking here to define every last detail of the picaresque, but simply to sketch its most significant features. This provides a concise definition that can help us to identify the picaresque and its influences. This is the practical tool that picaresque studies seems to be lacking. In order to identify those features most commonly understood as indispensable, I have drawn on several of the most recent theories (including those by Garrido Ardila, Meyer-Minneman, and Rey Hazas), and sought to reconcile these with the most influential theories of earlier decades (such as those by Guillén and Wicks).

The Nature of the Picaresque Novel

The first and most obvious requisite for a work to be considered picaresque is that its protagonist must be a pícaro. Often translated into English as rogue, rascal or vagabond, and into German as *Spitzbube, Schurke,* or, most often, *Schelm*,[39] the Spanish word *pícaro*, which gives

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39. The picaresque novel is most often referred to in German as *der Schelmenroman*. It is sometimes also referred to as *der Picaroroman*,

the picaresque its name, is not easily rendered into other languages. *Pícaro* is defined in the RAE's dictionary of the Spanish language as a "person of low status, cunning, resourceful, and unsavoury"[40] [translation my own], and its adjectival sense as including notions of deceit and dishonour.[41] These are the basic qualities of picarism, which are repeated with varying degrees of emphasis in literary studies of the picaresque. Maurice Molho, for example, emphasises the term's negative connotations. Molho defines the pícaro as the "antithesis of honour [...] social rubbish, who lives by stealing, begging, or black market deals"[42] (129, translation my own). Wicks likewise notes the "unheroic" (242) nature of the pícaro, but proposes a more nuanced definition, suggesting moral ambivalence rather than villainy. Wicks defines the pícaro as:

> a pragmatic, unprincipled, resilient, solitary figure who just manages to survive in his chaotic landscape, but who, in the ups and

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or der *pikarische/pikareske Roman*.

40. "pícaro, ra: m. y. f., persona de baja condición, astuta, ingeniosa, y de mal vivir, protagonista de un género literario surgido en España en el siglo XV"

41. "pícaro, ra: adj. Tramposo y desvergonzado"

42. "antítesis de honor […] un desecho social que vive de robos, mendicidades o trazas estraperlísticas" (Molho, 129)

> downs, can also put that world very much on the defensive (245).

Wicks' definition highlights a crucial point: that the pícaro's dishonourable conduct is not necessarily an indication of wickedness, but often presented as the result of the amoral pragmatism required to survive a hostile environment. This point is emphasised in Garrido Ardila's study, which states that the pícaro "is not a pícaro by inclination, but by necessity"[43] (*Género picaresco*, 233, translation my own). The point that both Wicks and Garrido Ardila stress is that the pícaro's bad behaviour is usually framed as a symptom of his struggle to survive. Criticism of his conduct thus tends to become criticism of his society.

This idea of the struggle for survival being a quintessential aspect of the picaresque condition is particularly emphasised in Garrido Ardila's theory, which describes the typical picaresque protagonist in a precise and succinct rundown of six particular traits. The pícaro, Garrido Ardila writes, is:

> characterised by: *a*) an ominous backstory, which conditions his temperament and subjects him to a vital determinism; *b*) undergoing a

43. "el pícaro no es pícaro por inclinación, sino por necesidad" (*Género picaresco*, 233)

> psychological evolution; *c*) trying to overcome his backstory, usually by seeking social advancement, using his free will or agency; *d*) being an outsider, a disinherited globetrotter who performs various professions; *e*) having in crime his main means of subsistence; *f*) using deception in his criminal activity[44] (226, translation my own).

While the first point (*a*) alludes to the pícaro's moral ambivalence, the points that follow all describe aspects of his struggle to survive: as an "outsider" to his society (*d*), the pícaro faces a hostile world which he survives by means of crime (*f*), cunning (*e*), and adaptation (*b*), whilst seeking to overcome the conditions that marginalised him in the first place (*c*). As an explanatory undercurrent to his amorality, then the issue of survival is an equally critical trait of the picaresque condition.

There are two points here worth highlighting as particularly significant. Firstly, the idea that the pícaro is by definition an outsider (point *d*) is crucial, for it is from this

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44. "una prehistoria ominosa que condiciona su temperamento y lo somete a un determinismo vital; b) sufrir una evolución psicológica; c) tratar de superar su prehistoria, de ordinario procurando el ascenso social, valiéndose de su voluntad o albedrío; d) ser un outsider, trotamundos desheredado que desempeña diversas profesiones; e) tener en la delincuencia el principal medio de subsistencia; f) valerse del engaño en su actividad delictiva" (226)

that a sense of social alienation arises. This alienation is the root cause of the pícaro's lifetime of difficulties, and hence also his moral ambiguity. Garrido Ardila further highlights the significance of this point by reiterating that "the pícaro always ends up being a socially marginalised character"[45] (233, translation my own). This statement echoes Rey Hazas, who likewise describes the pícaro's existence as one situated "outside of society, on the margins of its conventions"[46] (32, translation my own).

Secondly, it is important to note as well that the pícaro undergoes a significant change over the course of the narrative (point *b).* Wicks describes the pícaro as "a protean figure" (245) whose defining feature is his "personality [in] flux in the face of an inconstant world" (*ibid.*). Garrido Ardila is more specific in this point and specifies further that the pícaro usually undergoes not one but two essential psychological changes: the first in his 'awakening' to the picaresque lifestyle, and the second in a later submission to the conventions of his society (233). The pícaro starts off as

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45. "El pícaro siempre resulta ser un personaje socialmente marginado" (Garrido Ardila, 233)

46. "fuera de la sociedad, al margen de sus convenciones" (Rey Hazas, 32)

an outsider, but by the end has often ingratiated himself into society. The pícaro is thus a changeable character, rather than a stock type, who adapts to the fit the requirements of his situation.

Next, for a work to be considered truly picaresque, this character of the pícaro must serve as both protagonist and narrator. The picaresque novel is always presented as a first-person account, told by the picaresque protagonist himself. The novel, or at least its central narrative, must appear to be an autobiography. This point is rarely disputed, and indeed is often considered to be an absolute requirement. Wicks quotes and reaffirms Guillén's statement that "the absence of the first person form prevents a story […] from being picaresque in the fullest sense" (Guillén qtd. in Wicks, 244). This first-person perspective is, in Wicks' own words, "indispensable in projecting the picaresque condition" (244). A great number of picaresque theorists, in fact, including Lázaro Carreter (206), Jenaro Taléns (26), and Rey Hazas (42) to name just a few, similarly state the need for a picaresque novel to take the form of the autobiography of the pícaro. Meyer-Minneman declares simply and categorically that "without

autobiography, there is no picaresque novel"[47] (29, translation my own).

As a consequence of this autobiographical form, the narrative of the picaresque novel invariably operates across two distinct narrative planes: one in which the role of the pícaro is predominantly that of protagonist (ie. the story being told), and another in which the same pícaro fulfils the role of narrator (ie. the telling of the story). This has the effect of exposing, indeed foregrounding, the act of storytelling. The conspicuity of the act of narration is noted as a distinctive feature of picaresque writing by both Wicks (244) and Ardila (226). This aspect of the picaresque may be presented in different ways. It is common for picaresque novels to follow an epistolary format, but they might instead appear as self-reflexive memoirs, or otherwise feature a pronounced oral quality in the narrative voice, as Meyer-Minneman also notes (36-37). However the effect is achieved, the typical picaresque narrative is not only autobiographical in format, but the pícaro's act of storytelling is clearly foregrounded.

The autobiographical story that the pícaro tells should

47. "sin autobiografía no hay novela picaresca" (Meyer-Minneman, 29)

also follow an episodic structure. This characteristic of picaresque writing is so ingrained in understandings of the genre that for many it has become, alongside the idea of an anti-heroic protagonist, one of the two most popular defining features of the picaresque novel. Wicks, for one, summarises his understanding of the picaresque thus:

> The essential picaresque situation […] is that of an unheroic protagonist, worse than we, caught up in a chaotic world, worse than ours, in which he is on an eternal journey of encounters that allow him to be alternately both victim of that world and its exploiter (242).

The idea of a journey of encounters is repeated in many definitions of the picaresque, including those by Talens (26) and Garrido Ardila (226). The pícaro is a disinherited wanderer,[48] writes Garrido Ardila, and it is his peripatetic nature, and the resulting series of encounters, that gives the picaresque novel its episodic framework.

These episodes play both individual and collective roles within the narrative. On the one hand, this narrative structure allows for the episodes to be understood as a series of vignettes, with each one exhibiting a different aspect of the narrative world through which the pícaro

48. "[un] trotamundos desheredado" (Garrido Ardila 226)

travels. This narrative world is grounded in social reality, and so the travelling lifestyle of the pícaro allows authors to represent different facets of their own contemporary society. Meyer-Minneman stresses this connection between the picaresque world and the author's real-life contexts, stating that:

> the world of the picaresque novel is invariably constituted [...] according to the requirements of verisimilitude, that is, according to the vision of the world and its operation, shared by authors and readers (recipients) of the time corresponding to the work being analysed[49] (27, translation my own).

That is to say that the picaresque narrative is always grounded, to a great extent, in realism. This is not a feature unique to the picaresque novel,[50] but is particularly significant here. The requirement that the picaresque journey of encounters is grounded in a recognisable reality has the effect of ensuring that the journey of encounters shows or says something direct about contemporary

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49. "El mundo de la novela picaresca está constituido invariablemente […] según las exigencias de verosimilitud, esto es, según la visión del mundo y su funcionamiento, compartidos por autores y lectores (receptores) de la época correspondiente a la obra que se analice" (Meyer Minneman 27)

50. It is, rather, generally understood to be an established feature of the novel itself. See, for example, Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (1957).

society. The journey through society, in the picaresque novel, is always an observation of society.

Although it is told episodically, the early picaresque novel is differentiated from earlier trickster tales by its coherent and continuous plot, which arrives at a conclusive end. The episodes of the picaresque are sequential and consequential: they cannot be rearranged without meaning being lost. This is a point that Garrido Ardila's theory names as one of three strictly essential characteristics (233). Specifically, Garrido Ardila stipulates that the picaresque narrative must relate a central case that leads to a final situation (ibid). Lázaro Carreter similarly argues that the picaresque narrative must revolve around the explanation of a final state, that is, the outcome of a central case. The episodes, therefore, are not entirely independent of one another; they work collectively to further the narrative progression by contributing to the explanation of a central narrative case.

Finally, the revelation of this case is significant not only from a structural perspective, but also for the fact that it brings a central ideological thesis to the fore. Garrido Ardila and Rey Hazas both concur that this ideological intent is critical to the picaresque. Garrido Ardila writes that the

picaresque narrative always contains a 'dogmatic thesis'[51] (226), and considers this so significant that he cites it as the second of his three strictly essential criteria (223). He further suggests that for most picaresque novelists, this ideological intent is the key motivation for writing (231). This view coincides with Rey Hazas' claim that most picaresque writers are drawn to the genre more by social or ideological motives, than by literary interest (*Deslindes* 35).

From the ideas discussed up to this point, we can establish a reasonably complete and sufficiently clear definition of the picaresque novel. Stated in brief, then, the essential characteristics of the picaresque novel are as follows:

> I. The protagonist is a pícaro: a morally ambivalent social outsider, who learns to rely on his/her own cunning and wits to survive in a hostile world.
>
> II. This pícaro is both protagonist and narrator. The novel thus appears as a first-person autobiography, and its narrative is divided across two narrative planes: a diegetic level in which the pícaro is protagonist, and another in which s/he is recounting his/her own story.
>
> III. The narrative is episodic. It describes a series of distinct incidents, encounters, or

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51. "tesis dogmática" (Garrido Ardila, 226).

> experiences which function individually, as vignettes of the pícaro's society, as well as collectively to explain a central case or final situation.
>
> IV. The narrative world is grounded is social reality. It is verisimilar, and bears some connection to the contemporary contexts of the author.
>
> V. The narrative expounds an (implicit) ideological thesis.

These five criteria describe the essential features of picaresque writing, and together provide a clear and practical model for identifying works that belong to the picaresque genre or tradition. This definition is based on the most influential and most recent theories of the picaresque produced by a range of scholars. Crucially, this definition is based on the features of the text alone; it does not specify a particular national or historical context, and therefore allows us to recognise the transnational and transhistorical scope of the picaresque. This thus provides a suitable model for identifying historical picaresque works, as well as also helping to identify modern neopicaresque works.

Genre, Myth, and the Neopicaresque

Such a formal understanding of a phenomenon as complex as the picaresque novel, however, can only take

us so far in our quest for a better understanding of the neopicaresque novels. Previously we noted the two kinds of 'violence' that Dunn considers the study of genre to exert on texts. Dunn's first objection was that the reading of a text through the lens of genre may lead to the repression or devaluation of significant differences between individual works, and such an objection is certainly not without some merit. In practice, literary genres are less clear-cut than any theory might suggest, and the challenge when approaching actual texts in terms of their participation in genre is to balance the premise of similarity against the inevitable reality of real and significant differences.

The problem is that formal taxonomic approaches necessarily present genre in terms of exclusive and definitive criteria. In reality, texts rarely conform in all respects. In his study of genre theory, John Frow problematises the discrepancy between theory and reality that exists just beneath the surface of genre-based research. Genres, writes Frow:

> create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood […] These effects are not, however, fixed and stable, since texts - even the simplest and most formulaic - do not 'belong' to genres but are, rather, uses of them.

> They refer not to ‘a’ genre, but to a field or economy of genres, and their complexity derives from the complexity of that relation. Uses of texts (‘readings’) similarly refer, and similarly construct, a position in relation to that economy (2).

Frow stresses that literary texts are “rarely or never pure” (25) instances of genre, and that while theoretical taxonomies create the illusion of consistent, complete, and exclusive categories, in practice “no real-world system meets these requirements: in every system, principles are mixed, and there are anomalies and ambiguities which the system sorts out as best it can” (56). That is to say that while taxonomies may provide a helpful set of guidelines to clarify the scope of a genre, when it comes to practical application such definitive approaches must be taken with a pinch of salt.

This is certainly true in the case of the picaresque novel. Indeed, it is apparent that the theoretical scholarship on the picaresque novel is so vast and contentious precisely because there is such diversity of content and style between the texts so widely recognised as participants. Howard Mancing stresses this point. “The picaresque novel,” Mancing writes,

> is a protean form; it exists in a variety of sizes (very long, quite short) and shapes (first- or third-person narrative, dialogue). The pícaro may be a man, a boy, a woman, a tuna fish, a dog, or a migrating soul; he or she may be a beggar, a social climber, a servant to many masters, a trickster, a delinquent, a criminal, a victim, a prostitute, a lay brother, or a mature squire […] The tone may be anything from deadly serious to completely frivolous, but it usually involves some degree of social satire. A picaresque novel may be as realistic as a nineteenth-century classic realist novel, or as fantastic as something out of Ovid, Lucian, or Apuleius. It is, like the novel itself, the most flexible of forms, the hardest to make conform to any set of rules or poetics (48).

The texts to which Mancing here seems to allude are widely acknowledged instances (indeed several near-archetypal instances) of the picaresque,[52] and yet considered in these terms there is perhaps a greater sense of difference than of similarity between them.

Mancing's observation of diversity within the

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52. Mancing's allusions clearly reference, amongst others: *Lazarillo* and a sequel of 1555 entitled *El Lazarillo de Amberes*, *Guzmán*, *La pícara Justina*, and Cervantes' "El coloquio de los Perros" ("The Dialogue of the Dogs") published in *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613). They may equally well include: Smollett's *Roderick Random*, LeSage's *Gil Blas*, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842) etc.

picaresque tradition is a clear reminder, first of all, that individual texts do not represent whole genres. Accordingly, a single text need not fully exemplify a genre to be a member thereof. As Frow writes, “a sermon is not the genre of the sermon; a Western is not the genre of the same name” (25). Likewise a picaresque novel is, in itself, not the picaresque. Rather, it must be understood that, in practice, genre is not a mere matter of taxonomy, but an implied field of intertextual relationships: it is a referential effect, rather than a classifying box, or set of dogmatic rules. Individual texts are, to borrow the terminology of Jacques Derrida, “participants” of genre (230); or, as Frow alternatively formulates, they are “uses” “performances” or “allusions to the norms and conventions” of genre (26). Such participation does not necessarily indicate complete conformity. The relation of text to genre is not one of subordination, but one of contribution. By partaking of genre, the participant text necessarily becomes an active contributor thereto, and consequently has the potential to modify its norms from within. The conventions of any given genre, in other words, are almost necessarily subject to change.

Secondly, we ought also to note that genre negotiates

not only the relationships between participant texts, but also the relationships between those texts and their contexts. Frow formulates a basic definition of genre in these terms, writing that genres are, in essence, the "relationship between textual structures and the situations that occasion them" (14, emphasis in original). A primary function of genre, he writes, is "to mediate between a social situation and the text which realises certain features of this situation, or which responds strategically to its demands" (14-15). As genre spans the gap between text and context, even relatively minor variations in the social, cultural, and historical circumstances of textual production can elicit variations. As genres emerge, develop, and travel, therefore, a certain degree of divergence is inevitable. Genre is, in this sense, an inherently and necessarily protean phenomenon.

This propensity to change is all the more pronounced in the case of derivative genres or sub-genres, such as the neopicaresque. When the conventions of a pre-established genre are emulated, revived, or reimagined in a significantly different contextual environment, it is to be expected that at least some of its formal features may change. In her 2015 paper on the neopicaresque Shelley Godsland emphasises

the inevitable mutation of generic standards between the earlier and later manifestations of picaresque writing. Her work demonstrates that there exist a number of texts from the twentieth century that seek to revitalise the picaresque tradition by imitating its formal features. However Godsland recognises, too, that there are notable differences between these neopicaresque texts and their ancestors. Godsland writes that

> with the passage of time, some of the defining features that scholars attribute to the picaresque genre necessarily suffer mutation and adaptation, while others wane and disappear because they become stylistically or contextually redundant […] The neopicaresque is comprised of those fictions that, although they may not always qualify as examples of the picaresque genre, do use one or more core characteristics of the picaresque and therefore can be classed as examples of the picaresque myth. [… This] shows that the picaresque genre was still functional in the twentieth century (247).

The picaresque novel, in some ways the ur-novel, began its development when the novelistic form was still in its infancy. It is little wonder, then, that as the basic form has evolved, so too have many of the genre's formal and stylistic features.

Godsland follows Blackburn in defining the neopicaresque phenomenon as a myth, rather than a genre. Blackburn distinguishes genre from myth by suggesting that the former is more concerned with technical features (ie. the sort of criteria we have discussed above), while the latter is more concerned with the essence, culture, or referential effect elicited by their use. Blackburn writes:

> If picaresque *genre* may be viewed as traditional model or conventional pattern, then let us view picaresque *myth*, as Claudio Guillén declares, "as an essential situation of significant structure derived from the novels themselves." Whereas genre and myth both assume continuities, those of genre are more concerned with technical characteristics, those of myth more concerned with cultural characteristics [...] Although useful, the genre approach leaves readers sprawling before the probable truth of the proposition that picarism is the contemporary, post-World War II ethos of Western culture. From genre we turn to myth, and suddenly the myth of the pícaro expresses and shapes, through the participation of readers who understand themselves in a correlative way, a story that is culturally conspicuous, however infrequently or incompletely imitated (7-8, emphasis in original).

Blackburn not only recognises that a text may incompletely participate in a genre, but argues that in the case of later neopicaresque novels an acceptance of this deviation in

fact helps us to further clarify the field. What is important in the case of the neopicaresque novels, and perhaps more important than the simple application of the criteria noted above, is their reproduction of a picaresque ethos or culture. Whether or not the noted characteristics of the picaresque novel are successfully emulated, the effort to recall or reference the myth of the pícaro is what ensures that these novels are understood as neopicaresque works.

Certainly there are notable differences between the historical picaresque genre and the later neopicaresque novels. To begin with, the pícaro of the sixteenth century is morally ambiguous: he is a rogue, a scoundrel, involved in certain unsavoury activities, engaged in trickery or deceit, but generally stops short of criminality or outright villainy. The neopícaro, however, is markedly less restrained. In the neopicaresque novels, it is not unusual for the protagonist to be engaged in crime, including serious or violent crime. Burgess' protagonist Alex, for example, is infamous for his sprees of random "ultra-violence," including acts amounting to grievous bodily harm, rape, and murder. Cela's protagonist Pascual is guilty of similarly grave and inexplicable offences: his volent outbursts are likewise unprovoked, and he commits several cold-blooded

murders, including those of his own wife and mother. Other neopicaresque protagonists engage in less serious crimes, but almost all are involved in some level of criminal behaviour: Lola, Augie, Felix, and Oskar, for example, all steal, swindle, or vandalise property. The neopícaro is still morally ambiguous as opposed to outright villainous (those that commit the most heinous crimes still, usually, present some moral justification), but the character treads much closer to the line than his predecessors.

Secondly we might note that, while the genre's autobiographical form remains significant, the neopicaresque novels tend to play with this feature in new and different ways. They often employ particular narrative devices that frame, qualify, or interrupt the voice of the protagonist-narrator. Cela and Fernández Florez, for example, both use the device of the discovered manuscript to provide a frame for their novels' main first-person narrative accounts. Pascual Duarte includes, in addition to Pascual's account, a number of letters and documents written by other characters, the most dominant of these being the two transcriber's notes used to open and close the novel. Not only do these supplementary documents influence our understanding of Pascual's account by

colouring our reading, but there are also suggestions from the fictional character of the transcriber that he has censored, edited, or otherwise changed Pascual's account. In *Lola, espejo oscuro*, the epilogue to Lola's own account includes a character by the name of Darío (an apparent reference to the author's own first name), who discusses the preceding account and offers his own thoughts and interpretations. Oskar's account in *Die Blechtrommel* is interrupted at a number of points by other narrative voices: those of his guard/nurse Bruno, and his friend Vittlar. More subtly, in *A Clockwork Orange* the existence of an alternative or parallel version of Alex's account is suggested by his discovery of a text within the narrative, also entitled 'A Clockwork Orange,' and also written by an Alex (F. Alexander). Thus, while the neopicaresque novels are ostensibly autobiographical, there is often a strong implication that this autobiography is either incomplete, or has been edited or influenced by an external force. In this sense, the neopicaresque novel is usually not an entirely straightforward first-person autobiographical account.

Finally, perhaps as a consequence of those two differences, it is clear that the neopicaresque novel is burdened with a heavier degree of pessimism. The earlier

picaresque novels generally find, in their conclusions, a balanced sense of resolution. In *Lazarillo*, the protagonist's final situation is not an especially happy one, but neither is Lazarillo unhappy with the way things turn out for him. Lazarillo is forced to compromise conventional morality, but it is a compromise that ultimately benefits him. This sense of resolution is often found in the picaresque novels: Guzmán repents and converts; Roderick Random marries and lives happily ever after; Simplicius Simplicissimus denounces the world, but finds his own peace as a hermit.

The neopicaresque novels, by contrast, end on rather darker notes. All, in fact, (with the exception of *Felix Krull*, which Mann never finished) end with a death of some sort: literal in the case of Pascual Duarte, who is finally executed, but suggested or symbolic in all others. Lola, in the final pages of her account, contemplates suicide. The epilogue tells us that her fate is unknown, but Juan notes that she has "died" ([248]) from his life. The two American novels conclude similarly with a symbolic death, and suggested future rebirth: the unnamed 'Invisible Man' retreats into the bowels of the earth, from where he contemplates, but does not yet enact, a future reemergence; Augie flees to Europe, discarding the American dream, and returning to the lands

his ancestors once left behind. Billy Fisher fails to board the train that will take him to a new life. Alex abandons his anarchic worldview, and sets out on a path of unhappy conformity. Even the ending of *Die Blechtrommel*, which concludes with the ostensibly happy news of Oskar's acquittal and release, is haunted by death. The Black Witch, Oskar's spectral nemesis and a narrative symbol of death and decay, pursues him into the very final lines with an ominous call-and-response: "Ist die Schwarze Köchin da? Ja – Ja – Ja!" (779). The neopicaresque novel is altogether more pessimistic than the historical genre from which it emerges.

The Continued Function of Genre

These differences notwithstanding, the functional value of the genre remains very much alive. While the formal features noted above are sketched with, perhaps, a somewhat looser hand, the referential effect of the picaresque continues to function. Indeed, several of the neopicaresque explicitly situate themselves within the picaresque tradition. This is achieved most directly by Fernández Flórez, who describes *Lola, espejo oscuro* as a continuation of the picaresque lineage in his introduction to the novel. In the other cases, the intertextual references

may be more subtle, but all of the primary texts evoke or recall the myth of pícaro, as it has manifested in their own national literary traditions.

We have already established, in the definition of picaresque writing proposed above, that the genre is always grounded in contemporary social reality. The narrative need not, necessarily, be set in the very same time and place as those in which the author writes, but there should be evident parallels between the setting and the real world. This is because, at a fundamental level, the picaresque genre is concerned with representing and critiquing the contemporary society. Individual instances of picaresque writing are thus inherently and inextricably linked to the historical contexts of their production. Giovanni Levi argues that a key function of the picaresque genre is to provide a testament to under-represented human experiences. The texts that comprise the genre, Levi argues, provide a kind of social history unavailable in non-fictional documentation. Levi writes that by engaging with “the problem of documenting that which leaves no documents behind” (23), the picaresque novel effectively serves to function as a microhistorical record. Through its vignettes of cities, landscapes, and everyday life, Levi

argues, picaresque writing offers “a social history of places and things that lends substance to characters and actions” (24). The formal features of the genre ensure that the picaresque novels record lesser-known historical social realities.

This is a point of more than mere aesthetic significance. Levi shows that by its focus on social reality, the picaresque genre necessarily develops in response to the historical contexts of the author. Discussing *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán* specifically, Levi argues that the development of the picaresque genre between these two specific historical moments is itself significant. Levi posits that:

> it is no coincidence that *Lazarillo* was published at the close of the imperial dream of Charles V, or *Guzmán* at the end of the reign of Philip II. These were years of crisis, a strong and more or less conscious colouring of social indictment and a questioning of the fossilized power structures governing society (24-5).

Levi suggests that some aspect of these two novels – a characteristic common to the two works that would come to define the genre throughout its history – allowed them to address the comparable concerns of these two historical moments in a way that pre-established literary genres were unable to. The picaresque genre, it seems, developed in

order to make a point about these times. If, as Levi argues, the emergence of the picaresque genre in sixteenth century Spain is no coincidence, then it must follow that the emulation of these formal features 400 years later is still less of a conicidence.

The re-emergence of the picaresque myth in the mid-twentieth century thus raises two interconnected hypotheses. The first relates to that referential effect of genre we have already discussed. Writers aware of the picaresque tradition, either in its original sixteenth century Spanish form or as one of the various later manifestations in other European national literary traditions, may have emulated its features, or evoked its myth, in conscious allusion to previous texts. Knowing the strong connection between the genre and its contexts, this allusion functions equally to suggest a parallel between the contexts of the two periods. Where a twentieth century writer emulates the generic conventions as they appear in *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán*, for example, there may be suggestion of parallels between the author's contexts and those of late sixteenth century Spain.

In addition, genre also plays a role in making specific aspects of these socio-political contexts intellectually

accessible. In their landmark work of literary theory, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1978), Bakhtin and Medvedev consider this to be a primary function of genre. They describe “the intrinsic thematic relationship [of genre] to reality and the generation of reality” (133), and posit that genre functions as a twofold negotiation between art and circumstance, offering both a framework for representing aspects of reality as well as a means of perceiving them. They write that:

> The process of seeing and conceptualizing reality must not be severed from the process of embodying it in the forms of a particular genre […] In real fact, seeing and representation merge. New means of representation force us to see new aspects of visible reality, but these new aspects cannot clarify or significantly enter our horizon if the new means to consolidate them are lacking. One is inseparable from the other (134).

The artist must learn to see reality with the eyes of the genre. A particular aspect of reality can only be understood in connection with the particular means of representing it. On the other hand, the means of expression are only applicable to certain aspects of reality. The artist does not squeeze pre-made material onto the surface of the work. The surface helps him to see, understand, and select his

material.

In much this way, the formal features of the picaresque genre allow and encourage the representation of specific social realities. Indeed, it is through the framework of this genre that these realities are made visible. As such, the referential effect of the genre, important as this is, is still only part of its overall significance. The norms and conventions of genre are also a logical consequence of a particular situation: they provide the most adequate means of understanding and embodying a given aspect of reality. The use of the conventions of genre may indicated perceived contextual parallels on the part of the genre, but may equally well indicate a natural response to a repeated event. That is to say, that novelists need not, necessarily, be aware of the tradition into which they are writing for the use of these conventions to be significant. It is possible that the genre may develop, or re-emerge, as it were organically.

The Committed Poetic of the (Neo)Picaresque

As well as providing a model for identifying picaresque texts in their historical and modern manifestations, the understanding of picaresque writing that we have established above also provides the key to

understanding *why* the tradition (and here we may include both genre and myth) has maintained its relevance and attraction across such a range of historical and cultural contexts. As a consequence of the five essential criteria that we have already established as the defining formal features of the picaresque, the picaresque novel is a form particularly well-suited to the tasks of social commentary and criticism. Though rarely cited as a definitive feature itself, the picaresque's propensity for social satire is widely acknowledged in theories of the genre. Even where Mancing notes the diversity of the picaresque tradition, for example, he adds that "some degree of social satire" (48) remains a consistent feature across the picaresque canon. Indeed a majority of theorists recognise that the picaresque novel is essentially, to follow Aristotle's distinction, a satiric rather than panegyric form of literature.

The satiric orientation of the picaresque novel is a particular point of focus in Rey Hazas' theory. Rey Hazas notes that the basic structural form of the picaresque novel (again, that form determined by its defining features) makes it an ideal canvas for social and moral critique (*Deslindes*, 19). The most crucial aspect, Rey Hazas suggests, is the protagonist's necessary status as a social outsider. This

ensures, he continues, that the protagonist, the pícaro, is:

> capable of observing, seeing, and relating a multitude of ills and defects that are hidden to others, owing to his condition as an outcast (32, translation my own).[53]

This sense of social alienation grants the protagonist a uniquely privileged perspective: he is an observer of his world, as opposed to a fully-integrated subject. As an outsider who travels, the pícaro observes the world around him dispassionately, and is able to perceive the flaws of his society with a degree of objectivity. The autobiographical nature of the picaresque novel provides an opportunity for the pícaro to articulate these observations, and in that voice the novelist finds a spokesperson for his own ideological thesis. These formal features make the picaresque novel ideally, even inevitably, suited to social satire. The picaresque novel, Rey Hazas writes, developed, in short, as:

> a genre especially adequate for ideological debate, whose implicit poetic forced, almost necessarily, the handling of a series of

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53. El protagonista de estos relatos, el pícaro, […] es capaz de observar, ver, y contar multitud de lacras y defectos que se velan para otros, debido a su condición de marginado" (Rey Hazas, *Deslindes* 32).

> contemporary social, political, and moral themes[54] (34, translation my own).

This implicit poetic is what Rey Hazas elsewhere terms the *poética comprometida*, or committed poetic, of the picaresque novel.

This committed poetic described by Rey Hazas is similar to the concepts of *literatura comprometida* (committed literature) or *poesía social* (social poetry) which developed in Spanish literature of the 1950s, as well as to Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée* (engaged literature), as described in his 1948 essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (*What is Literature?*). In each of these concepts, engagement is understood as the text's active involvement in social issues: its ability to communicate meaning, to denounce social injustice, and to inspire change. Committed literature rejects the indulgence of art-for-art's-sake, and aims instead towards a purpose. This engagement in, or commitment to, real world social issues, Rey Hazas proposes, lies at the fundamental heart of the

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54. La novela picaresca, en definitiva, era un género especialmente adecuado para el debate ideológico, cuya poética implícita forzaba, casi necesariamente, el tratamiento de una serie de temas sociales, políticos, y morales de plena actualidad" (Rey Hazas, *Deslindes* 34)

picaresque. Its committed poetic is its *raison d'être*.

Rey Hazas further proposes that it is precisely this committed poetic, the picaresque's unwavering engagement in real social issues, that has ensured the longevity of the tradition. The picaresque's suitability for social satire, he argues, was the determining factor in its development in sixteenth century Spain (32-5), and continued to be the reason that novelists of later centuries and different nations sought to emulate and adapt its conventions (15). A similar view is shared by Garrido Ardila, who suggests that the genre's earliest examples set a precedent in this respect. Garrido Ardila writes that:

> *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán* became models of writing for the literati, and outlined a horizon of expectation for readers. They also outlined, thanks to their committed poetic, an aesthetic and satirical signal[55] (*Género* 222, translation my own).

Garrido Ardila emphasises the archetypal roles played by Lazarillo and Guzmán in setting up a horizon of expectation, and stresses as well that their committed poetic set a

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55. "El Lazarillo y el Guzmán se convirtieron en modelos de escritura para los literatos y perfilaron un horizonte de expectativas en los lectores, a más de perfilar, a merced de su poética comprometida, una señal estética y satírica" (*Género* 222).

similar horizon of expectation for their style and, significantly, satiric orientation. These novels' use of satire, Garrido Ardila likewise suggests, played a significant role in triggering and sustaining the development of the picaresque tradition.

It is this aspect of picaresque writing that thus holds the key to understanding the continued legacy of the picaresque genre. A fuller understanding of the enduring relevance of the picaresque in modern and contemporary contexts can therefore be most satisfactorily achieved through the analysis and interpretation of the texts' treatment of social and moral concerns. The significance of the neopicaresque novel, in other words, can best be understood through an assessment of its committed poetic and this, furthermore, is to be achieved through an assessment of its satire. The picaresque, as a satiric form, does not engage in overt didacticism, nor does it lay praise on positively conceived issues. Rather, it uses satire to simultaneously instruct and entertain. As Garrido Ardila writes, the picaresque novel always includes a central dogmatic thesis, but this it strives to teach in an enjoyable

way (*Género*, 203).[56] To this end, the social and moral concerns at the heart of the picaresque narrative are treated with humour and irony. Thus, the committed poetic of the picaresque novel finds its clearest expression in satire. An investigation into the use and significance of satire in the neopicaresque novels sheds light on the the social and moral engagement of these texts, and thus explains the reasons for their development.

The definition of picaresque writing that we have established here, a definition based on the most influential and advanced theories to date, provides a clear and practicable model for the identification of picaresque, and neopicaresque, novels. This model allows for an understanding of the picaresque tradition that is unbounded by specific national or historical contexts, and thereby provides a means of illuminating the picaresque legacy in modern literary history. A strict emphasis on formal features reveals the picaresque genre in its strict sense; a looser application of these features and an emphasis instead on the picaresque ethos helps us to identify the picaresque myth as it manifests in the twentieth

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56. "una tesis dogmática […] que procura instruir de modo deleitoso" (Garrido Ardila *Género*, 203)

century. This ethos is determined by those original formal features. The basic situation of an outcast protagonist who travels through and comments on a narrative world that is grounded in the author's reality, and through which an ideological thesis is brought to the fore, almost necessarily ensures the text's engagement in social and moral criticism. This committed poetic of the picaresque novel has been, and continues to be, central to the picaresque tradition. This commitment is generally expressed in an entertaining manner, relying on wit and humour to promote a more serious message. The picaresque novel uses satire to achieve its objectives. This presents the clearest opportunity for enriching our understanding of the traditions enduring appeal. A fuller appreciation of the significance of satire in the neopicaresque novel is our best hope of understanding the significance of the revitalised picaresque tradition in the twentieth century.

3. Satire in the Novel

Of all kinds of satire, there is none so entertaining and universally improving as that which is introduced, as it were occasionally, in the course of an interesting story.

– Tobias Smollett, Apologue to *Roderick Random*

As might be clear from the preceding chapters, there are few uncontroversial matters in the study of literature. The issue of what constitutes satire, and how to approach its analysis and interpretation is no exception. These are questions as fraught with uncertainty and debate as those of the picaresque genre, and of the discipline of comparative literature itself. Satire is a fully protean phenomenon: complex, multifaceted, and capable of being moulded to suit the needs of rhetoricians and their audiences. Further, it has appeared, over the centuries, in many different guises: as a literary form in its own right, as a genre within different literary forms, or as a mood or tone. In the following pages we will consider satire according to this latter understanding: as a mood and rhetorical device employed within the

narrative fiction of the neopicaresque novel. The approach we will take to understanding satire in the novel draws on the seminal theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, and understands these within the analytical framework proposed by Dustin Griffin in his research on satire. These theories, combined, provide a formal methodological basis to help us interpret the satiric aims and achievements of the texts under examination. By refocusing our attention on these elements of satire, we may shed new light on the aims and achievements of the novels themselves, and thereby better understand their development and popularity in the twentieth century.

In its simplest sense, the satire that we are speaking of here may be understood as a brand of socially-engaged humour used to reproach powerful individuals or attack pervasive cultural norms. Often this is understood to be employed with the aim of instigating either personal or collective reform. It is, by definition, engaged, or committed, and thus, in the case of the picaresque or neopicaresque novels, contributes substantially towards their committed poetic. Andrew Stott, in his study of comic modes *Comedy: The New Critical Idiom* (2014), defines satire in these terms. Stott writes that

> satire aims to denounce folly and vice and to urge ethical and political reform through the subjection of ideas to humorous analysis. In the best instances, it takes its subject matter from the very heart of political life or cultural anxiety, re-framing issues at an ironic distance that enables us to revisit fundamental questions that have been obscured by rhetoric, personal interests or Realpolitik (156).

Stott's understanding of satire conforms to a long history of theory that has consistently emphasised the need for satire to have a clear and fundamental objective: one of ethical reform provoked by the humorous analysis of a given social, cultural, or political concern.

This suggestion that satire operates according to a clear and singular purpose has been a recurring point through several decades of scholarship. Ronald Paulson, in his influential book *The Fictions of Satire* (1967) considers satire to have "a strong sense of efficiency" such that "nothing is done without purpose" (4). Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe, in their jointly-authored 1995 essay "Theorizing Satire: A Retrospective Introduction" affirm that satire "emphasizes - indeed, is defined by - its intention (attack)" (5). So strong is this sense that satire is always founded upon a clear sense of intent that it is often popularly de-

scribed in the simplest of terms as ‘comedy with a purpose.’

The belief that satire functions according to a singular purpose, and that that purpose is the propagation of a clear and uncomplicated moral message, was repeated often in theories of the 1950s and 60s, especially. Theorists of this generation tended to perceive the satirist as one who understands morality in absolutes, and is dogmatic in his insistence on the validity of his own views. John Bullitt, in his study *Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire* (1954) considers satire to be constructed around “fixed intellectual ideas” (1); Alvin Kernan, in his influential study of satire in the English Renaissance, *The Cankered Muse* (1965), writes of satire’s focus on “monolithic” moral messages. According to this school of thought, the satirist is steadfast in his moral convictions, and zealous in his desire to instigate moral reform. Accordingly, these theorists held satire to be a didactic and moralistic tool; a rhetorical device with a specific and unswerving purpose.

More recent theories of satire, however, have begun to challenge these ideas. Erin Mackie, in a paper on the satire of Jonathan Swift published in Connery and Combe’s 1995 anthology *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*, ar-

gues that the notion of satire being oriented solely towards reform is specious. “Rational and benevolent reform,” Mackie writes, “is satire’s social alibi, but it is often maintained on only the shakiest of grounds” (173). Far from dogmatically pursuing reform, Mackie continues, satire “often stumbles, revealing motivations and producing effects irrelevant to reform” (ibid). In his own, more extensive study *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (1994), Dustin Griffin is likewise critical of the notion that satire is founded upon absolute moral principles, questioning how, if this were the case, satire could ever have gained and maintained relevance with a mature readership. Consequently, Griffin concludes, “the confident assurances about the way satire works” seen in theories of the previous generation now “seem almost quaint” (36).

The reasons behind this shift in critical opinion are complex and multiple, but one point we might well bear in mind is that satire itself is a greatly changeable device. Far from being a defined and static phenomenon, satire has, over centuries, demonstrated an immense capacity for adaptation and change, from the formal verse satires of ancient Rome, to the satirically-charged books, films, and other cultural artefacts of our own time. Combe describes this

evolutionary process using the analogy of a shark: a creature whose existence depends on perpetual motion. Combe writes that:

> satire ceaselessly moves and feeds in whatever cultural waters it swims. The satiric tradition is a living, omnivorous organism, not a fossilized skeleton of regulations. Satire is always in the process of formulating and leaving a legacy to its next generation of practitioners (91).

For satiric theory to adequately inform analyses of modern subjects, therefore, it must be founded on both an understanding of the inherited legacy of the satiric tradition, as well as an understanding of its modern manifestations. If the object of study itself is open to change, so too must be the theory that describes it. The modern satire of the neopicaresque novel requires a modern theoretical approach capable of accounting for the tradition's history and its most recent evolutionary progress.

It is this sense of an inadequacy within those formerly predominant theories on satire that Dustin Griffin cites as the central motivation for his re-examination of the satiric tradition in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (1994). Griffin notes that there is a "curious disjunction between the best current critical writing about individual works of satire, and

the old rhetorical consensus about the genre established in the 1960s" (1), and seeks to rectify this with a fresh perspective on satire that recognises both earlier and later theoretical work. Griffin specifically excludes satire in the novel from his analysis "for reasons of space" (ibid), but acknowledges that "if we consider satire as a mode or a procedure rather than a literary kind, then it can appear at any place, at any time" – including, and even especially, within the novel (3). "The novel, more than any other literary form," Griffin writes, "has proved extremely hospitable to satire" (4). Thus, while Griffin's theoretical framework is not based specifically upon an analysis of satire in the novel, it nevertheless provides a firm and suitably-advanced starting point from which to establish our methods.

Griffin rejects the notion that satire is a simple rhetorical and didactic device. His theory is founded instead upon the belief that

> satire is problematic, open-ended, essayistic, ambiguous in its relationship to history, uncertain in its political effect, resistant to formal closure, more inclined to ask questions than to provide answers, and ambivalent about the pleasures it offers (5).

Griffin suggests that the old consensus, in which satire was

understood to have a clear, identifiable purpose, misjudges its nature and obscures its nuances. Absolute moral standards, where these appear, are merely a building block of satire, he suggests, rather than a conclusion – "a place to begin rather than to end" (37). A better understanding of satire can be achieved, Griffin proposes, if we see consider satire not merely as comedy with a singular moral purpose, but rather as a complex weave of four kinds of rhetoric:

> We may arrive at a fuller understanding of the way satire works if we think of a rhetoric of inquiry, a rhetoric of provocation, a rhetoric of display, a rhetoric of play (39).

By approaching literary satire in terms of these four constitutive elements, it is possible to expose and appreciate that there lie a plurality of motivations, objectives, and ideologies within any given work of satire.

The basic message of Griffin's theory is that the primary purpose of satire lies not in the pronouncement of moral certainties, but in the exploration and exposition of ideas and ideologies through guided intellectual inquiry. On this distinction, Griffin writes that,

> what we behold in satire is not a neatly articulated homiletic discourse but the drama of an inflamed sensibility, or a cool and detached mind playfully exploring a moral topic. The

> reader's interest is not in rediscovering that greed is a bad thing or that deceit is to be avoided but in working through (with the satirist's help) the implications of a given moral position […], the contradictions between one virtue […] and another […], or the odd similarities between a vice […] and a virtue […] (37-38).

Griffin proposes that satire is founded upon an open sense of purpose that is "concerned rather to inquire, explore, or unsettle than to declare, sum up, or conclude" (95). Satire does not each through proclamation, but through discourse and reasoning.

This notion of satire has much in common with Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on the development of comedy and satire in the novel. In his landmark work of literary theory, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), Bakhtin connects the modern satire of the novel to the classical tradition of Menippean satire. Bakhtin posits that the Menippean satires of the second and third centuries BC were concerned primarily with the subjection of ideas and ideologies to considered and contextualised analysis, a process that Bakhtin evocatively describes as "the adventures of an idea or a truth in the world" (115). The Menippean genre, he proposes, is one of "ultimate questions" in which "ultimate

philosophical positions" (ibid), ie. fixed monolithic morals, are not propagated, but challenged. Bakhtin's theory proposes that this satiric tradition developed as an intellectual testing ground for ideas, in which accepted values and societal norms could be opened up to inquiry and critical examination.

This tradition of satire, Bakhtin suggests, is both polyphonic and dialogic. As part of the process of examining subject matter through experimental analysis, the satiric work must embody a plurality of perspectives. The satirist, that is to say, is required to speak with multiple voices, including those that stand in opposition to his own worldview. The satirist must convincingly imitate the faults or fallacies that he seeks to examine, so that they may be exposed to critical evaluation. The internal voices of the narrative are thus distinct from one another, and independent from the voice of the author. This is a point noted by John R. Clark, in his contribution to Connery and Combe's anthology *Theorizing Satire*. Clark considers the role of the satirist to be that of "a first-rate mimic, a creator of tones and styles and voices" (23). The work of satire gives air to not just one voice, but many. This is what Bakhtin's theories describe as polyphony.

For Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is one in which the author is able to create, or recreate,

> not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; [but] rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combined but […] not merged in the unity of the event (6).

The polyphonic novel is one in which conflicting ideological ideas may be set alongside one another. This is an important feature of satire in the novel. The satirist is able to employ polyphony as part of a strategy to build satire's rhetoric of inquiry; through polyphony the author forces diverse and competing voices into dialogic interaction. Observing these dialogues, the reader may then actively discover, rather than passively receive a particular conclusion. Polyphony feeds satire's rhetoric of inquiry, and encourages the reader to participate in the discovery of a moral message.

This rhetoric of inquiry, and these dialogic processes, often serve to challenge accepted beliefs. By encouraging critical re-examination of a familiar topic, the satirist urges the reader to question the status quo and interrogate seats of power. Satire in the novel thus often leans towards the carnival sense of the world as set out in Bakhtin's further

theories. Much like the carnival cultures Bakhtin describes, satire's rhetoric of inquiry tends to profane and destabilise assumed social values and hierarchies. The close relationship between satire in the novel and the carnivalesque mode is also emphasised by Bakhtin, who considers that as the Menippean satiric tradition evolved and modernised, it "became one of the main carriers and channels for the carnival sense of the world in literature, and remains so to the present day" (*Doestevsky's Poetics* 113).

Satire in the novel, according to Bakhtin, carries the inherited legacy of this earlier satiric tradition, with roots stretching back through the carnival cultures of medieval Europe. Bakhtin's theories on the carnivalesque, expounded most clearly in his 1965 book *Rabelais and His World*, hence also provide a significant means of understanding and interpreting the underlying motives of satire in the novel. Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque mode by its comic ethos. This carnivalesque laughter, Bakhtin writes,

> is, first of all, a festive laughter […] Carnival laughter is the laughter of all of the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants […] Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the

> same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (11-12).

The carnivalesque spirit described by Bakhtin is both unruly and democratic. It is also founded upon a basic premise of common human materiality, an idea which works to dismantle any pretensions to the contrary. Social hierarchy is undermined, and privileged authority is profaned. Significantly, the carnivalesque spirit regards everyone, including its participants, as legitimate targets. Thus where the carnivalesque emerges in modern literature, it frequently includes self-reflexive satire, which challenges the positions not only represented in the narrative, but also those of both reader and satirist. It is also to be noted that the carnivalesque spirit is not characterised not by "bare negation" (Bakhtin 11), but by a more complex understanding of morality which allows for criticism and celebration to operate simultaneously. The carnivalesque is fundamentally opposed to singular moral pronouncements.

In Griffin's theory of the four rhetorics of satire, the "positive" rhetoric of inquiry is counterbalanced by a "negative" rhetoric of provocation (52). While the rhetoric of inquiry encourages critical and independent examination of the topic, the rhetoric of provocation works to challenge the

reader with unsettling, confronting, or even offensive material. This antagonistic approach serves to force into question the readers' own beliefs about themselves and their society. This, in Griffin's terms, is the paradoxical nature of satire; paradox not in the sense of contradiction, but rather in the etymological sense of something contrary to tradition: "para-dox challenges ortho-dox," (53) Griffin explains. The provocative tone of this paradox is used "for stimulating a thinking temper" (ibid.) in the reader. Works of satire do not merely encourage critical inquiry, therefore, they also incite it.

While Griffin coins the term paradox here, the idea that satire is both provocative and subversive is, of course, one discussed by many theorists. Paulson's theory describes the satirist's attempts "to discomfit his reader, shake up his cherished values, and [thus] disrupt his orthodoxy" (Paulson *Satire and the Novel* 135). P.K. Elkin, in the 1973 book *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, writes of the satirist's goal "to challenge […] attitudes and opinions, to taunt and provoke them into doubt, and […] disbelief" (201). More recently, Mackie's paper on satire emphasises the same duality as Griffin, suggesting that, by virtue of its social engagement, satire is "an eminently social production" (173), but that its

provocative presentation gives it an "often doggedly antisocial" (ibid.) edge. The incendiary or controversial character of satire is part of its rhetoric of provocation, intended to goad the reader into rethinking the issues at hand.

In addition to satiric paradox, Griffin also cites satire's "calculated 'difficulty' " (52) as a further form of rhetorical provocation. Griffin asserts that the author purposefully "cultivates obscurity" (ibid) within the work of satire, employing techniques such as "elliptical syntax, cryptic or abrupt allusiveness, brevity, and roughness of rhythm" (ibid) in order to disguise his own voice, and to draw the reader into a game of wits. To this list we might also add the device of irony, which works similarly to obscure the true voice of the satirist and provoke the reader into a new way of thinking. These techniques and devices create significant ambiguity within the text. The reader is thus challenged to reconstruct meaning from this obscurity, and in doing so actively participates in the creation of that meaning. The use of satiric obscurity is thus a form of intellectual provocation, which exercises the reader's mental capabilities in order to encourage active engagement with the text and its rhetorical aims.

The difficulty with this aspect of satire is that it is al-

most impossible for the reader to be sure of reconstructing intended meaning accurately. This may be particularly problematic in cases of irony, for irony relies almost entirely on the reader's ability to discern the moments in which words and their meaning are discordant, and those in which they are not. Griffin suggests that this line is problematic not only for the reader, but often also for the writer. He writes that while the reader "may find it virtually impossible to know where irony stops," (69) so too may the satirist "find it [equally] impossible to draw a line" (ibid.) beneath his own irony. Griffin argues against an earlier consensus that irony is a rhetorical "weapon" (65) wielded under the satirist's full "control" (ibid.). He disputes, for example, Wayne Booth's claims that irony is widely and easily understood, and argues instead that it is an inherently "unstable" (ibid.) device, which often escapes the intent of the satirist, outstrips its own rhetorical purpose, and "tends toward an infinite regress" (69). The satirist's irony, in other words, has a tendency to get out of hand.

One of the possible reasons for this is that satiric obscurity has a two purposes: it serves not only as a source of provocation designed to draw the reader into intellectual debate, but also as a means of showcasing the oratorical

skill of the satirist. In challenging the reader's ability to cope with complicated syntax, abstruse allusions, and ironic expression, the satirist exhibits his own ability to construct and manipulate these devices. The unrestrained use of irony is perhaps one of the most conspicuous examples of the satirist putting on an oratorical display. By speaking ironically, the satirist demonstrates an ability to argue the very opposite of what he considers to be the truth. The cultivation of obscurity, and particularly the device of irony, therefore contributes to not only the rhetoric of provocation but also that of display. Meaning, or moral significance, is occasionally superseded by artistry, or ostentation. Thus, as Griffin writes, there may be instances in which "the satirist-as-moralist is supplanted or overtaken by the satirist-as-artist" (65), and a form of epideictic rhetoric eclipses the deliberative or forensic rhetorics more commonly assumed to be at work. We must not forget that the work of satire is as much a work of art intended to demonstrate the skill of its creator as it is an exercise in moral or ideological inquiry.

Similarly, we must not forget either that satire also aspires to be entertaining. We have seen already that the rhetorics of inquiry, provocation, and display contribute to the creation of meaning in the work of satire, and to this we

may now add the rhetoric of play. Griffin argues that "when rhetoricians are separated from situations calling for decision [as in epideictic rhetoric], they become entertainers" (75). The Menippean tradition, in particular, writes Griffin, sought to divert and entertain audiences through "its fantastic invention, its exaggerations, and its tongue-in-cheek manner" (86). Such devices lighten the tone of the satire, lifting its reception from education to entertainment, and this continues to be the case in satire in the modern novel. This is not entertainment for its own sake, however, but has its own rhetorical purpose. Charles A. Knight, in a 2004 work of satiric theory entitled *The Literature of Satire*, notes that the "combination of cosmic gloom with personal comedy is a recurrent motif" (223) in satire. What Knight here observes is that satire's rhetoric of play goes hand in hand with the often dark realisations uncovered by the rhetoric of inquiry. The playful lightheartedness of satire serves to disguise the pessimism of its revelations about society and mankind. It is the age old technique of the sugar-coated pill.

Griffin's theory, though it does not specifically address satire in the novel, nevertheless offers a clear and comprehensive understanding of the four rhetorics that operate

within satire in its formal sense. The rhetorics of inquiry, provocation, display, and play work collectively to guide, taunt, and draw the reader towards a particular conclusion, and furthermore allow the reader to actively participate in the creation of that meaning. Where conventional satiric theory has seen satire as motivated by a strong and singular sense of purpose, with a fixed sense of morality and dogmatic attitude, Griffin's model sees an open sense of purpose that is led by a fundamental desire to explore and reveal the implications of given ideologies or moral positions. This primary rhetoric of inquiry is then supported by those of provocation, display, and play, which variously serve to make the process of investigation both engaging and entertaining for the reader. Griffin presents a far more sensitive understanding of the satiric tradition than conventional theory allows, and recognises the complex history and range of influences that have brought it into the modern era. Bakhtin's theories on polyphony, dialogism, and the carnivalesque all support and further inform such a reading of satire, and show more specifically how these rhetorics operate within satire in the novel.

II: Analysis

1. Food and Hunger

Hunger, because it had the first and last word,
was a source of gnawing pain,
but also a source of sparkling inspiration.
– Günter Grass, *Peeling the Onion*

The theme of food and hunger has long been recognised as a common and highly significant, if not fully requisite, feature of picaresque writing. In many of the most well-known historical picaresque novels, hunger functions as a key device in the development of both plot and satiric ethos. Several studies of *Lazarillo* have brought this aspect of the narrative into focus, recognising that hunger is not only a prominent trope throughout the text, but that this also serves as an important narrative drive.[57] Indeed, the entire narrative progression of *Lazarillo* is founded upon this thematic basis: it is hunger that drives Lazarillo to commit the transgressions that propel him from one master to the

57. See, for example, studies by F. Courtney Tarr's "Literary and Artistic Unity in Lazarillo de Tormes" (1927), Stephan Gilman's "The Death of Lazarillo de Tormes" (1966), or Ulrich Wickes' "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach" (1974).

next through the first three episodes of the narrative (which together comprise the greater part of the text), and incidents involving food account for many of the work's most significant comic and satiric moments. It is no overstatement to assert, as Ulrich Wickes does, that "hunger is what Lazarillo's life is all about" (246).

In this respect, *Lazarillo* is not exceptional. A great number of the classic picaresque narratives that came thereafter employ the same trope to the same effect. Hunger has been highlighted as the central drive in both Mateo Aleman's *Guzmán de Alfarache* and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's *Los infortunios de Alonso Ramírez* (see: Quiñónez-Gauggel 92). It is has also been recognised as a key component of the plot development in Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* (see: Speier 11), and the narratives of Lesage's *Gil Blas* and Smollett's *Roderick Random* have together been summarised as "grand culinary tour[s] punctuated by meals in the best and worst of circumstances" (Runte 698). Thus, although they are rarely cited as definitive for the genre, the themes of food and hunger have become a major point of discussion in theories of the picaresque. Miguel Ángel Teijeiro Fuentes goes so far as to name hunger as "the principal motor" (239) behind the

typical picaresque narrative.

Food and hunger have continued to be extremely significant themes within neopicaresque writing, too. In all eight of the novels studied here, references to food and hunger, as well as to the related bodily functions of consumption, digestion, and excretion, abound. Significantly, these themes also continue to be employed in support of the development of both plot and satire in these novels. Food is a primary concern of the neopicaresque protagonist, just as it was for the pícaros of sixteenth century Spain. The characters of Pascual, Lola, Augie, Felix, Alex, and Invisible Man all recount, often at great length, their experiences of hunger, while Oskar and Billy discuss food in significant symbolic terms. Many of these characters also rely on metaphorical references to food and digestion in order to express heightened emotions. Consequently, the injustices observed and suffered by these characters during their adventures are often retold in the language of food and hunger. Likewise, the satire of these works is also frequently couched in these terms. The common trope of food and hunger, then, not only presents a further point of connection between these neopicaresque novels and the historical picaresque genre, but also directs the reader towards the

central social and moral concerns of these works. These themes offer a particular insight into the committed poetics of the neopicaresque novels.

Nevertheless, there are clear and significant differences between the use of these themes in the historical picaresque novels, and their use in the neopicaresque novels. While the classic pícaro suffers from hunger as a result of poverty and social injustice, and actively seeks out sources food, the protagonists of the neopicaresque novels often have a more complicated, ambivalent relationship to food. In the neopicaresque novels, food is often loaded with negative symbolic meaning, and its consumption, especially of specific types or in excessive quantities, may be linked to negative social stereotypes, deviance, criminality, and exploitative modes of power. With these associations, food's desirability for the protagonist is often diminished, though its application to satiric discourse is increased. In this chapter, we examine how the themes of food and hunger manifest in each of the neopicaresque novels, and consider how they underpin the satire and inform the committed poetics of these works.

HUNGER AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN *PASCUAL DUARTE* AND *LOLA, ESPEJO OSCURO*

The Spanish neopicaresque novels follow the themes of the historical picaresque tradition most closely. Cela's *Pascual Duarte*, and Fernández Flórez *Lola* both continue to employ the device of hunger, specifically, as a drive for both plot and satire. In the case of Cela's novel, first of all, hunger is a persistant concern for Pascual, and provides one possible motive for the events that constitute the novel's central case. Pascual's first-person narrative account begins with a brief description of his hometown, before focusing on a description of his family home, and more specifically its kitchen. The Duarte house is located close to Almendralejo, Badajoz, on a road that Pascual evocatively describes as being "lisa y larga como un día sin pan"[58] (109). This seemingly throwaway line at the beginning of the narrative soon becomes more pointed as we begin to notice further, subtle allusions to Pascual's experience of hunger.

The great emphasis that Pascual places on the family kitchen as the locus of his world, for example, very quickly

58. "as empty and endless as a day without bread" (14)

acquires ironic undertones. The kitchen, Pascual informs his reader, was the only decent room of the house, the first room encountered on entry, and one that was maintained with great care:

> En realidad lo único de la casa que se podía ver era la cocina, lo primero que se encontraba al entrar, siempre limpia y blanqueada con primor; cierto es que el suelo era de tierra, pero tan bien pisada la tenía, con sus guijarrillos haciendo dibujos, que en nada desmerecía de otras muchas en las que el dueño había echado porlan por sentirse más moderno (111)[59]

Pascual continues to describe the room in great detail, attentively naming the objects and ornaments that fill the space and cover the walls. He gives a thorough account of the items therein, and wistfully describes the fluctuating seasonal ambiences. The paragraph describing the kitchen fills almost an entire page. Its length and detail speaks of Pascual's great emotional attachment to the room – a senti-

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59. "In actual fact the kitchen was the only room that was really decent; it was the first room as you entered the house, and it was always clean and kept whitewashed. True enough, the floor was earthen, but it was so well trodden down and the small paving stones were set in such nice patterns and designs that it was in no way inferior to many other floors where the owner had laid down cement in order to be modern" (16). All translated passages from *Pascual Duarte* are taken from Anthony Kerrigan's 1964 translation, unless otherwise indicated.

ment that, the narrative later demonstrates, Pascual feels for little else in life. As if to emphasise this point, the description of the kitchen is contrasted by a brief and dismissive report on the rest of the house: “El resto de la casa no merece la pena ni describirlo, tal era su vulgaridad”[60] (112). The kitchen, Pascual seems to indicate, is a site of particular importance to him.

The inventory that Pascual provides for the kitchen, however, is so gratuitously meticulous that one key omission stands out: nothing in Pascual’s description of the room suggests that the kitchen ever functions as a site of cooking or eating. There is crockery in the room, but this appears to be primarily ornamental (Pascual describes these as decorative, bearing mottoes, names, and illustrative designs). He tell us about the hearth in the room, but this is described only as a source of heat during winter, with no mention of its use at other times, and no suggestion that it is used in cookery. There are images and allusions to food in the room – a calendar advertising fine foreign groceries, and a portrait of a bullfighter ready to slaughter an animal that will later be sold for meat – but there is no actual food

60. “The rest of the house scarcely deserves describing, it was so ordinary” (17).

present in the kitchen itself. These basic resources appear only as decorative imagery, and seem to lie beyond Pascual's reality. These are subtle inferences, to be sure, but they nevertheless work to establish a nagging sense that this kitchen is not a place of bounty, and that Pascual and his family are not overly well-fed.

The suggestion that Pascual and the Duarte family suffer from a lack of resources quickly gains narrative and satiric significance. As Pascual concludes his description of his hometown, he describes his habitual fishing spot near to the house, and recounts a joke that his wife would make about the eels caught there:

> Por detrás del corral pasaba un regato, a veces medio seco y nunca demasiado lleno, cochino y maloliente como tropa de gitanos, y en el que podían cogerse unas anguilas hermosas, como yo algunos tardes y por matar el tiempo me entretenía en hacer. Mi mujer, que en medio de todo tenía gracia, decía que las anguilas estaban rollizas porque comían lo mismo que don Jesús, sólo que un día más tarde (113).[61]

61. "Beyond the corral ran a stream, sometimes half dry and never very full, always dirty and stinking like a troop of gypsies. Still, sometimes, when I wanted to kill an afternoon, I'd catch some fine eels there. My wife used to say, and despite everything, what she said was humorous enough, that the eels were so fat because they ate the same as Don Jesús - only a day later" (19).

While Pascual ostensibly admires his wife's good humour in the midst of their circumstances, the implicit social hierarchy and extreme social inequality that underpin her quip are impossible for the reader to ignore. While don Jesús, the Count of Torremejía, enjoys an enviable diet, Pascual, a mere "hombre del campo"[62] (ibid), is reduced to foraging for food in the stream of sewage that passes out of the count's home. Pascual and his wife sustain themselves only by consuming the creatures that feed on his excrement. The humour is dark, if it is there at all, and the line serves only to highlight the extreme social disparity within the society of the narrative world.[63]

There is clear acerbity in the joke's recognition of social inequality, and in its implicit criticism of the obliviousness of both don Jesús (who, at the top of this grotesque food chain, has no stake in the processes below) and the other villagers (who are blind to such indignities), but there is more to this witticism than first meets the eye. The scatolo-

62. "a country man" (ibid).

63. Robert C. Spires' reading of the passage presses this point yet further, to suggest that the telling of this joke is part of a co-ordinated effort on the part of Pascual the narrator (distinguished from Pascual the protagonist) to alienate the fictitious reader of the account (D. Joaquín) by emphasising the socioeconomic gulf between Pascual and the likes of both don Jesús and don Joaquín.

gical basis of the joke fits a long picaresque tradition of using grotesque bodily images to challenge, subvert, or undermine assumed social hierarchies by reducing the human condition to the level of basic matter. Bakhtin, in his 1965 work *Rabelais and his World,* describes the use of grotesque scatological images as signposts indicative of basic cosmic principles. Bakhtin writes:

> Dung and urine lend a bodily character to matter, to the world, to the cosmic elements, which become closer, more intimate, more easily grasped, for this is the matter, the elemental force, born from the body itself. It [scatological humour] transforms cosmic terror into a gay carnival monster. […] The struggle against cosmic terror in all its forms and manifestations did not rely on abstract hope or on the eternal spirit, but on the material principle in man himself. Man assimilated the cosmic elements: earth, water, air, and fire; he discovered them and became vividly conscious of them in his own body. He became aware of the cosmos within himself. […] We must here stress that it was in the material acts and eliminations of the body – eating, drinking, defecation, sexual life – that man found and retraced within himself the earth, sea, air, fire, and all the cosmic matter and its manifestations, and was thus able to assimilate them. Indeed the images of the material bodily lower stratum have a prevailingly cosmic connotation (335–6).

The sharp one-liner recounted by Pascual rests upon these cosmic connotations: it describes the cyclical transformation of earthly matter from food into waste into food again. It does not mock Pascual for his socioeconomic inferiority, but in fact emphasises that, on a material level, Pascual and don Jesús remain equals, both tied into the same regenerative cycle of the cosmos. The joke demonstrates an innate awareness of the natural order to which man and fish, count and peasant, are all equally bound.

The joke, of course, does not immediately resolve the pretence of hierarchy against which it takes aim, but for Pascual the realisation is ultimately empowering. This line reflects a turning point for Pascual: the moment at which he begins to realise that the social injustice he has suffered is man-made, and does not reflect ultimate (or cosmic) reality. With this realisation, Pascual moves closer to the possibility of reclaiming a lost autonomy. The joke does not take aim at the cosmic terror described in Bakhtin's theory, but rather at a social terror elicited by the prevailing hierarchical system. By presenting the injustice of his situation in playful terms, Pascual transforms this social terror into an object of fun (the "gay carnival monster" of Bakhtin's theory) and in doing so negates its power over him. Once released from

the mental bonds of this social conditioning, Pascual is free to reassert himself as equal to don Jesús. This is something that Pascual, perhaps, seeks to achieve in the act of killing don Jesús: the killing is a performance of Pascual's agency, and a demonstration that the count holds now material (or cosmic) superiority over him. It is through the telling of this joke about the eels that the reader first gets a sense of motive for this central case[64] of the novel.

It is significant, too, that this one-liner undermines the social positions of both don Jesús and don Joaquín. The two characters are similarly positioned in terms of socioeconomic status, a point indicated both by their friendship and their similar titles.[65] Pascual's realisation, and the satire of the narrative here, ostensibly takes aim at don

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64. Though little is confirmed in the text about it, the killing of don Jesús is the single event around which the rest of the narrative revolves. Pascual's first-person account is preceded by an epigraph to the late don Jesús ("A la memoria del insigne patricio don Jesús González de la Riva, Conde de Torremejía, quien al irlo a rematar el autor de este escrito, le llamó Pascualillo y sonreía. P.D." [107] / "To the memory of the distinguished patrician Don Jesús González de la Riva, Count of Torremejía, who, at the moment when the author of this chronicle came to kill him, called him Pascualillo [diminutive form of Pascual] and smiled. P.D." [11]), indicating Pascual's involvement in his death. This is the only narrative event that could explain Pascual's incarceration and execution.

65. For a brief discussion of the socio-economic parallelism between D. Jesús and D. Joaquín, see Spires (292).

Jesús, but by virtue of their close relationship, don Joaquín is very much implicated, too. Don Jesús, of course, we know by insinuation, is already dead at the point of Pascual's writing, but don Joaquín is alive, and is to him that Pascual addresses the story. In this sense, as the intended (intra-diegetic) reader of the account, don Joaquín represents a kind of avatar of the (extra-diegetic) reader. Where Pascual challenges don Jesús, therefore, he also challenges, by implication, don Joaquín; and where Pascual challenges don Joaquín, he also symbolically challenges the reader. Readers of the novel are thus reminded that they cannot claim social superiority over the protagonist, though they are invited to pass judgement on his conduct. Thus Pascual's hunger underlies not only the basic satiric orientation against social injustice and socioeconomic inequality, but also a suggestion that the reader is morally implicated, and must therefore engage with, the satiric commentary that is to told through the novel. This implication is a central feature of the satire of Cela's novel, and a point that we will continue to examine in the chapters that follow.

The experience of hunger is likewise central to the narrative and satire of *Lola, espejo oscuro*. During the novel's early stages, Lola, like many of her picaresque prede-

cessors, is propelled from one place to the next by hunger: it is hunger that drives Lola and her gypsy parents through the mountains of Andalucía, and hunger that necessitates her search for employment in both Cádiz and Almería. In these early stages of the narrative, the theme of hunger appears, as in *Pascual Duarte*, to be underpinned by the cosmic connotations described in Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. In La Bermeja's presentiment of her own death, it is the sensation of chronic hunger – a tugging within the belly – that makes her aware of the earth's greater hunger for her material body (40). The experience of hunger reminds both La Bermeja, and her confidant Lola, of the earthly elements within themselves, and of the cosmic forces to which they are both subject. It is here that Lola confronts mortality for the first time, and here that a thematic connection between food and the cycles of life and death is first established.

These themes continue to intertwine throughout the narrative. The Spanish Civil War, though rarely mentioned directly, is a significant and looming presence in the novel,[66]

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66. In a recent paper on the role of Darío Fernández Florez as both writer and censor under the Franco regime, Jacqueline Hurtley denies the significance of the war in *Lola, espejo oscuro*, describing the narrative as "a heady mix in which the Civil War will be mentioned but

and the backdrop against which Lola's struggles play out. The novel's first reference to the war, however, appears inconspicuously as an apparent aside to the more central narrative point of explaining Lola's own increasing hardship and worsening hunger:

> Así me vi de nuevo en la calle y apretando bien el hambre en la portería, porque los españoles andábamos ya en guerra y los hombres se mataban con una prisa que daba miedo, sin saber por qué, pero más encorajinados que nunca. Sin embargo, en lugar de bajar las cosas y haber más tajadas que llevarse a la boca, cuantas más muertes se hacían menos teníamos todos que comer y más subían los precios. Por eso me coloqué otra vez de niñería, para suprimir así un estómago en la portería (54).[67]

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is glossed over in a manner which carries little substance" (140). She further asserts that the novel "lack[s] overall any solid or sustained analysis" (140-1). While such criticism is not new (see, for example, Gerald E. Wade's scathing 1951 review of the novel), to deny the relevance of the war on the basis that it is rarely named directly is to miss much of the meaning within the text. The present analysis, I believe, demonstrates that the Civil War is meaningfully present in the narrative, and that Fernández Florez's efforts to recreate a wartime context are clear.

67. "Once more I was out on the street and suffering from an empty stomach. The Civil War had started already and men were killing each other with astonishing swiftness. Though they had no idea why they were doing it, they were becoming more and more inflamed. Instead of prices lowering - with so many deaths there were fewer mouths to feed - it was the reverse. As the deaths increased, what was left for

In this passage, Lola directly attributes her hunger to the conflict and its mounting death toll. Her observation of the irony that the increasing rate of mortality is exacerbating rather than alleviating the pressure on local food supplies, serves to underscore both the senselessness of the war itself, and the absurd logic of wartime society. By side-stepping the horrors of the battlefield, and instead playfully attacking the irrationality of the war and its consequences, the narrative suggests an underlying, though deeply cynical, carnivalesque situation: a world in which actions lack anticipated consequences, and conventional logic is subverted.

The threat of hunger shapes the course of the narrative. Realising the threat of impending famine, Lola is forced to eschew conventional morality in pursuit of material sustenance. It is the fear of hunger that drives Lola into the picaresque lifestyle. Indeed, in typical picaresque fashion, Lola spends much of the rest of the narrative manoeuvring herself into positions that will provide sustenance, though these often come at personal emotional expense. Having

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the living decreased. There was nothing to eat and the prices soared. In order to quiet my stomach I decided once more to get a job as a nursemaid" (32).

realised the shortages likely to follow the outbreak of war, Lola takes up employment in a household closely connected to a sugar factory (wryly-named *La Esperanza*, The Hope). Here, in pursuit of a stable food supply, Lola is coerced into her first transactional sexual relationship:

> Pero, ¡comía, comía! Y esto del comer se hizo muy difícil durante la dichosa guerra. Yo me di muy pronto cuenta de ello y comprendí que, si la cosa duraba, no íbamos a tener por aquellas tierras nada que llevarnos a la boca, porque todo andaba embarullado y hasta los pescadores dejaban la mar para buscarse un palacio y repantigarse en la silla de algún comité. […] La verdad fue que aquella colocación nos salvó la pelleja a los de la portería, pero a mí me perdió lo que sólo se pierde una vez [...] Y entre aquel hombre y yo no había pasado nunca nada que anunciara aquello. Pero él insistió, insistió tanto... que yo me vi sin azúcar, aborrecida por mi madre, maldita por mis hermanos de portería y, a lo peor, tirada en la cárcel, porque el tío era un «mandamás» de cuidado. Por eso me entregué (55–6).[68]

68. “But how we ate! And during that sweet war eating was a major problem. I sized up the problem and realized that if the war were to last, soon we wouldn’t have anything left to put in our mouths. The country was in complete turmoil. Even the fishermen had left the sea and were out for a soft spot on some committee... [...] I realize that the job saved our skins. Though in the process I lost that which one only loses once. [...] Between the boss and me there had never been

This profane exchange sets a grim precedent for the rest of the narrative: from here on, Lola's body becomes the currency with which she earns her subsistence. Here she learns that in order to sustain her body, she will have to commodify it. Lola submits to necessity in order to survive, and in doing so is compelled to forgo her own moral agency. Fernández Flórez's novel depicts a society in which the individual is denied the possibility of moral principles, and is reduced to an entirely physical, material existence.

What becomes clear is that Lola's society operates according to a material economy in which sexual contact is traded for essential, especially nutritive, resources. The characters of the narrative world fall more or less clearly into two groups: a male-dominated social and financial elite on the one hand, and a disenfranchised lower class of women on the other. While the former group wields both power and resources; the latter, Lola included, lacks both. The distinction between the haves and have-nots of Lola's world is reflected in the characters' physical attributes and dispositions, and these are emphasised through the use of

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any forewarning of what was to happen. But he insisted, he insisted so much that... I saw myself without sugar, despised by my mother, cursed by my step-sisters, and, what was worse, maybe thrown into prison as the man had power. For those reasons I gave in" (33).

overtly gustatory language. The male characters with whom Lola conducts business are consistently described in terms of a superfluity of food. They are almost invariably fat, gluttonous, or otherwise excessive: there are the profitable and generic "gorditos, con sus carnes bonachones y felices"[69] (69), the saccharine procurer reminiscent of "una especie de empalago, de asco pringoso y dulzón, como el que producen algunos golosinas [...] y todas las cosas excesivamente almibaradas y sin sal"[70] (220), and the psychiatrist who smells overwhelmingly of cheese (362). At the other end of the spectrum, the female characters of this world are depicted as thin, hungry, and dependent: from Lola's mother, who waits for her daughter to return from the sugar factory "con la boca hecha un agua, de hambre que tenía la pobre"[71] (55), to Lola herself who, by the novel's later stages, when famine is no longer an immediate threat, continues to regularly spend "unas semanas de hambre y mal humor"[72] (345) to maintain her figure and remain in the good

69. "fat ones - jovial and solid" (41) – Literally: "with their good-natured and jovial meats" [translation my own]

70. "Something unpleasantly sticky and sweet, like the aftertaste of candy [...] Something excessively sugary and minus seasoning" (140)

71. "her mouth watering from hunger, she was so badly off" (33)

72. "several unpleasant weeks hungry and bad-tempered" (218)

graces of her male benefactor.

In the novel's epilogue, the distinction between male and female is emphatically reiterated in Juan's assessment of the female psyche. "Su imaginación es totalmente egoísta," Juan states,

> absolutamente antirromántica. Pero siempre está hambrienta, siempre está sedienta. Hay que echarles mucha carne para comer, mucha sangre para beber" (395–6).[73]

Juan's statement summarises a social dynamic that has been established over the course of the preceding narrative: one in which desperately hungry female characters receive food at the discretion of a male-dominated social elite.

These material assets are traded in a way that is mutually but not equally beneficial. While Lola engages in these transactions out of necessity, her male patrons are motivated instead by their passions. The hunger and thirst intrinsic to Lola's 'feminine imagination' is, at least at the outset, a matter of basic survival;[74] the desire for intimacy

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73. "Their imagination is completely selfish, totally unromantic. But it's always hungry, always thirsty. You have to throw it a lot of meat to chew on and a lot of blood to drink" (249)

74. Although Lola eventually comes to covet luxury goods as she ascends the social ladder, it remains the case throughout that she

implied in the equivalent 'masculine imagination' of her patrons is, instead, innate but nonessential. Juan's lament of Lola's 'anti-romantic' disposition therefore wields a certain irony, for the preceding narrative has consistently portrayed a society in which female characters lack the opportunity for any such spiritual development. Moral and ethical concerns are, for Lola and her associates, superseded by physical necessities. The plot is driven by hunger, and allusions to the material bodily lower stratum work to undermine the pretence that human society is anything but material. However, though Fernández Flórez employs the same themes towards a similar satiric goal, one that denounces injustice of an acutely polarised and spiritually bereft society, the tone of the novel lacks the joyous celebratory ethos of the carnivalesque. The theme of food and hunger does not provide Lola with the realisation of a way out, as it does for Pascual. In Lola's account, carnivalesque humour does not provide an escape from the social terror of her life.

In both *Pascual Duarte* and *Lola, espejo oscuro* we begin to see how the neopicaresque novels adapt a classic picaresque trope to new uses. In both cases, hunger contin-

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relies entirely on the men around her for the fulfilment of her most basic material needs.

ues to be the principal narrative motor, either driving the plot forward or triggering the protagonist's initiation into the picaresque lifestyle, in a manner reminiscent of *Lazarillo* and many of the historical picaresque novels that followed thereafter. The same trope of hunger also works to orient the narratives towards a particular satiric goal. The two texts both examine the symbolic significance of food and hunger in Spanish wartime society, using this theme to suggest a situation of extreme socioeconomic disparity as well as debased social and civil values. The carnivalesque undertones of the imagery further work to expose to criticism the social hierarchies that are implied therewith. The theme of food and hunger continues to be significant here, and provides the first suggestions of a the novels' committed poetics.

Food as Cultural Heritage in *Invisible Man* and *Augie March*

In the American novels a more complex relationship between food and the neopicaresque protagonist begins to emerge. The protagonists of both Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Bellow's *Augie March* do not experience hunger in the ways that Lola and Pascual do. Neither, therefore, are their narratives driven by the same determined quest for food

that typifies so many of the earlier picaresque works. We might attribute this difference, perhaps, to the very different contexts of American civilian life during the Second World War as compared to that of Spaniards during the Spanish Civil War. Augie and Invisible demonstrate, rather, ambivalent attitudes towards food. Nevertheless, the themes of food and hunger retain a strong presence within these narratives, and continue to orient the texts' satire towards particular targets. In both cases we see that the protagonist's ambivalence is not simple capriciousness, but the external manifestation of these characters' internal conflicts. Here, again, we find that references to food and hunger serve to direct readers towards the central concerns of the texts.

In the case of *Invisible Man*, the sense of an internal conflict within the character of the protagonists stems principally from his struggle throughout the narrative to reconcile various competing aspects of his racial and personal identity. This tension is first established in a brief passage at the beginning of Invisible Man's account, in which he recalls the dying words of his grandfather:

> On his deathbed [my grandfather] called my father to him and said, "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a

> traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. *Live with your head in the lion's mouth*. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, *let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open* [...] Learn it to the younguns" he whispered fiercely; then he died (16, emphasis added).

The significance of this passage to the rest of the novel is clearly highlighted to the reader. Invisible Man describes how these words became a "constant puzzle" (ibid.) of his youth, and exerted a "tremendous effect" (ibid.) on the trajectory of his life. We are left in no doubt that these words are a key to the rest of the narrative. Indeed, Dexter B. Gordon, in a paper on "Humour in African American Discourse" (1998), notes that what he regards as the "devastating and caustic satire" of Ellison's novel "is maintained throughout on the back of the deathbed advice of the youthful protagonist's grandfather" (263).

This passage is significant for it proposes a model of the racial dynamics of Invisible Man's society using the extended metaphor of a food chain. Here the white man is envisioned as an apex predator – the carnivorous lion – and the black man is suggested as his prey. This interpretation

shapes Invisible Man's early attitudes towards race, and establishes food as symbolically loaded. Hunger, in these early stages of the narrative, is an attribute associated primarily with whiteness. This is not the hunger-as-physical-necessity seen in the previous novels, however, but hunger in its most negative senses: rapacious, greedy, insatiable. In the early episode of the battle royale, for instance, Invisible Man sees hunger in the predatory behaviour and lustful salivation of an attendant white merchant (20), and in the following chapter, during his drive with Mr. Norton, Invisible Man is spooked by a "lean, hungry face" (41) that he fearfully associates with a particular "kind of white man" (ibid). One consequence of this worldview is that Invisible Man begins to regard himself, on the basis of race, as a sacrificial material resource; he understands his personal value to lie in his ability to sustain a higher level of the social food chain. Thus, like Lola, Invisible Man is taught early on to regard his own body as a material commodity. There are carnivalesque implications in the grandfather's suggestion that the consumed prey might be vomited into a new life, or reborn through the lion's stomach, but these images remain, for the protagonist, an enigma that is not solved until much later.

As the narrative progresses and the protagonist gains more experience of the world the racial distinctions established in the grandfather's dying words begin to blur. Hunger retains its negative associations, but becomes associated less specifically with race. Jim Trueblood's account of the parasomnial rape of his own daughter is a turning point in this respect, destabilising Invisible Man's prior understanding of race relations. Trueblood's account is, as Gerald T. Gordon writes, "enigmatic" and "seasoned with dark humour [...] which belies its traumatic impact" (201). Trueblood's statement describes how his thoughts about the next day's meal, the smell of meat in the air, and his concerns about his daughter's relationship with a young boy, coalesced to trigger a chain of emotions that culminated in his incestuous crime (54). He describes his mind on the night in question as a swirl of romantic memories interwoven with heavily eroticised visions of watermelons (55–6).[75] As the full horror of his tale is disclosed, Trueblood re-

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75. "Then I got to thinking 'bout way back when I left the farm and went to live in Mobile and 'bout a gal I had me then [...] You see one of them young juicy melons split wide open a-layin' all spread out and cool and sweet on top of all the striped green ones like it's waitin' just for you, so you can see how red and ripe and juicy it is and all the shiny black seeds it's got and all [...] and us, me and the gal, would lay there feelin' like we was rich folks" (*Invisible Man* 55-6).

peatedly stresses hunger as the determinant emotion: "I don't quite remember it all," he insists, "but I remember that I was lookin' for some fat meat" (57). This depiction of the black man as consumer rather than consumed challenges the food chain metaphor set out at the start of the novel, and serves to undermine the suggestion of a clearcut predator-prey dynamic between white and black Americans.

In Trueblood's statement, Ellison plays with the symbolic resonances of food to further challenge and discomfit his reader. The watermelon, in particular, is employed as a powerful double-edged symbol: representative, on the one hand, of black liberation (watermelon was a crop commonly grown by emancipated slaves in the years following the American Civil War) whilst, on the other, suggesting a racist stereotype (advanced in later years by certain disgruntled white groups who sought to portray the black man as lazy, unclean, and child-like in his supposed love of the fruit).[76] The erotic overtones in the fruit's description are likewise dualistic: suggestive of an unbridled sexuality that feeds the romantic liberation of Trueblood's adolescent love, as well as the violence of his incestuous crime. The themes of food

76. See: Ralf Norrman and Jon Haarberg's *Nature and Language: A Semiotic Study of Cucurbits in Literature* (1980)

and hunger, as they are employed in this episode, clearly demonstrate how Ellison utilises the rhetorical devices of "understatement, irony, *double-entendre*, and calculated ambiguity" (29, emphasis in original), that Robert Bone notes are central to Ellison's satiric voice. These devices contribute to that rhetoric of provocation that Griffin's theory on satire proposes is part of the satirist's attempt to draw the reader into a game of wits, and involve the reader in the creation of meaning. No easy answers are offered here, but the readers are shown that social issues of the narrative world are far more complicated than they at first seemed.

The narrative continues to utilise gustatory symbolism in this way as it develops into an increasingly complex exploration of race, nationhood, and identity in the American context. On more than one occasion, there is disagreement amongst the characters regarding the associations of particular foods. In one of the novel's most memorably ironic moments, Invisible Man performs a personal "act of discipline" (178) in declining a serving of pork chops and grits at a New York cafe after (incorrectly, it transpires) perceiving a racial or regional prejudice in the waiter's recommendation (177-9). In this incident Invisible Man demonstrates most

clearly his considered and deliberate avoidance of certain foods that he fears may associate him with a stereotype of black agricultural workers in the southern United States. For Invisible Man, food is highly symbolic, and his conscious antipathy towards the cuisine of his upbringing is part of the strategy of his youth to advance socially by minimising his association with African American cultural, and especially culinary, symbols.

When Invisible Man eventually succumbs to the temptation of streetside baked yams, however, he discovers that an acceptance of culturally symbolic foods, with all of their connotations, is not denigrating but liberating:

> I took a bite [of the yam], finding it as sweet and hot as any I'd ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control. I walked along, munching the yam, just as suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom – simply because I was eating while walking along the street. It was exhilarating. I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper. To hell with all that, and as sweet as the yam was it became like nectar with the thought. If only someone who had known me at school or at home would come along and see me now. How shocked they'd be! I'd push them into a side street and smear their faces with the peel. What a group of people we were, I thought.

> Why, you could cause the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked. Not *all* of us, but so many. Simply by walking up and shaking a set of chitterlings or a well-boiled hog maw at them during the clear light of day! What a consternation it would cause! (264–5, emphasis in original).

In this spontaneous and natural enjoyment of the yam, Invisible Man begins to accept his own personal taste, to drop the pretence of cultural mimicry, and to celebrate his own cultural heritage. “I am what I am! I wolfed down the yam” (266), narrates Invisible Man, before pointedly reformulating the same declaration into “I yam what I am” (ibid) and proclaiming yams to be his “birthmark” (ibid). Through the yam’s symbolic associations, and by allusion to the catchphrase of that quintessentially American cartoon character, Popeye, Invisible Man declares his identity to be simultaneously black, American, and individually self-reliant. The symbolic imagery of this food inspires the protagonist to realise a concept of the self as individual broadly in line with Emersonian transcendentalism.[77]

It is through the consumption of the yam, too, that Invisible Man begins to solve the puzzle of his grandfather’s

77. See Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1841 essay “Self-Reliance.”

enigmatic advice. The consumption of the yam reveals to the protagonist the irrationality of his former shame, and opens his eyes to the injustice of the socially-imposed cultural hierarchy behind these feelings. He imagines himself confronting Dr. Bledsoe (the black president of Invisible Man's former college, and the man who first cast him into his picaresque lifestyle) with arms full of chitterlings – a dish of pork intestines associated with rural Southern cuisine:

> I saw myself advancing upon Bledsoe, standing bare of his false humility in the crowded lobby of Men's House, and seeing him there and him seeing me and ignoring me and me enraged and suddenly whipping out a foot or two of chitterlings, raw, uncleaned and dripping sticky circles on the floor as I shake them in his face, shouting: "Bledsoe, you're a shameless chitterling eater! I accuse you of relishing hog bowels! Ha! And not only do you eat them, you sneak and eat them in *private* when you think you're unobserved! You're a sneaking chitterling lover! I accuse you of indulging in a filthy habit, Bledsoe! I accuse you before the eyes of the world!" And he lugs them out, yards of them, with mustard greens, and racks of pigs' ears, and pork chops and black-eyed peas with dull accusing eyes (264–5).

In his imagination, Invisible Man reclaims these culturally symbolic foods to expose the hypocrisy that he sees in Bledsoe's capitulation to racial stereotypes. In the image of

the chitterlings, especially, the grandfather's earlier words – "let 'em swoller yer till they vomit or bust wide open" (16) – resonate with renewed strength. The raw, uncleaned intestines, forced out into the open, become the burst gut of the grandfather's metaphor. Here, as well, the carnivalesque implications of the image are clarified. The raw, uncleaned, dripping intestines simultaneously evoke food and bodily waste, as well as the processes of consumption, digestion, and excretion. The battle to rebalance the racial and cultural hierarchies of the narrative world is brought down to a visceral, material level.

It is significant, of course, that this climactic epiphany is instigated by the yam (ie. the sweet potato), a root vegetable drawn from the earth. It is this edible root that allows Invisible Man to at last retrace his own cultural roots, and through which he rediscovers the earthly element within himself. It is this that leads his imagination to that carnivalesque image of the chitterlings, in which gustatory and scatological imagery is combined and blurred. The satiric significance of the image is comparable to that of Pascual's eels. In his fantasy of confronting Bledsoe with the hog bowels to prove their shared cultural heritage, Invisible Man also emphasises their common, base materiality. It is not

only Bledsoe's personal hypocrisy that Invisible Man exposes, but the hypocrisies of the entire social system that rests upon racial and cultural hierarchy. The theme of food is employed by Ellison to raise questions about the reality of these social constructs, and to begin to explore the issues of race and humanity with which the novel is principally concerned.

In *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow utilises symbolic food imagery in a similar way to explore questions of racial and cultural identity. In this case, food appears initially as the protagonist's principal connection to his Russian-Jewish ancestry. It is through food that Augie first observes a cultural difference between his family life and that outside the home, and it is likewise through food that a positive understanding of this difference is made possible. Outside the family home, the March brothers are routinely "chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers" (12) by the Catholic Poles of their neighbourhood. Within the home, however, the culinary influence of the Odessan widow Grandma Lausch – the character whom Andrew Hoberek quite justifiably names "the novel's presiding spirit of Jewishness as ethnic difference" (81) – provides a positive counterpoint to these negative experiences. Grandma

Lausch produces, alongside the bologna sandwiches favoured by Simon and Augie, dishes redolent of Ashkenazi cuisine: bowls of boiled chicken and gizzards (4), or noodles and chicken necks (10). These childhood meals, recalled by Augie decades later, are symbolic of the boys' mixed cultural upbringing. The quintessentially Midwestern baloney sandwiches reflect the boys' desire for assimilation; the chicken, gizzards, and noodles provided by Grandma Lausch indicate her steadfast cultural influence. Grandma Lausch's insistence on traditional foods within the home anchors the boys' understanding of their identity in these early stages of the narrative.

Significantly, this insistence on traditional foods fosters an understanding of Russian-Jewish identity that is underwritten by neither religion nor nationalism. Augie describes Grandma Lausch's cultural philosophy as a "kitchen religion" (12) – a term he uses to denote her respect for traditional cultural practices, above all in the domestic space of the kitchen, with neither the rigour nor stringency of pious observation or patriotic fervour. "Although [Grandma Lausch] never went to the synagogue, ate bread on Passover, sent mama to the pork butcher where meat was cheaper, [and] loved canned lobster and other forbidden

food," Augie notes, "she was not an atheist and free-thinker" (11). She practises instead small-scale domestic rituals within the sacred space of the family kitchen: the lighting of candles, the burning of food offerings, incantations, and other superstitious acts. These, Augie emphasises, have "nothing to do with the giant God of Creation who turned back the waters and exploded Gomorrah, but [are] on the side of religion at that" (12). Grandma Lausch's steadfast adherence to these cultural practices, so many of which revolve around food, eating, and the kitchen, teaches Augie to view his Russian-Jewish identity as a cultural birthright sustained through inherited traditions.

As Augie leaves home and moves out into the wider world, however, he bears witness to the loss of these culinary traditions to cultural assimilation. Hoberek acknowledges that the novel "does to a certain extent equate ethnic Jewishness to childhood" (82), but also proposes that its "developmental narrative has as much to do with the American middle class" (ibid) as it does with matters of ethnicity. Indeed, as Augie moves from household to household (from the March home, to the Coblins', to the Einhorns', and later the Renlings') he ascends through the ranks of the American middle classes, and reveals how the

kitchen religion of Grandma Lausch declines in significance with prosperity and integration. In each case, it is substantially through the symbolic imagery of food that the social status and ethnic consciousness of each family is marked.

At the Coblins' house, the meals laid out by Anna – a "strong believer in eating" (21), much like Grandma Lausch – are not disimilar to those of Augie's childhood, once again juxtaposing traditional Ashkenazi dishes alongside popular American convenience foods:

> Bowls of macaroni without salt or pepper or butter or sauce, brain stews and lung stews, calves'-foot jelly [*p'tcha*] with bits of calves' hair and sliced eggs, cold pickled fish [*silodka*], crumb-stuffed tripes [*kishke*], canned corn chowder, and big bottles of orange pop (ibid).

These abundant spreads demonstrate both the success of the Coblins' business ventures, and their degree of cultural assimilation. This becomes clearer when the food cultures of the different households are contrasted. The more successful Einhorns dispense with traditional cooking altogether and favour "ready-meals [and] easy meals" (74), while the high status Renlings are famous for their extravagant dinner parties in which luxury delicacies, such as "veal kidneys with cognac" (131), are served in demonstration of their

wealth and cultural refinement. The culinary cultures of these households mark them with a particular socioeconomic status, and corresponding set of values.

Hoberek proposes that food imagery is used by Bellow to suggest “in terms that might easily apply to a nostalgic reading of assimilation, that with refinement comes a certain loss of plenitude” (82). Although he does not say so directly, his proposition suggests also that as Augie climbs the social ladder he witnesses not only a loss of quantity, but also a loss of a certain quality. With the progressive ‘refinement’ of the food cultures in these households, we notice an equivalent decline in the value ascribed to traditional cultural practices. The kitchen religion of Grandma Lausch is maintained to some degree by Anna Coblin, but for the Einhorns and Renlings of Augie’s world this has been displaced by expedience and display. Robert Shulman argues that “free-swinging acquisitive materialism” (113) is one “major antagonist” (ibid.) of the novel. In the different culinary cultures of the households through which Augie travels we see how this force drives the creeping deracination and sense of dislocation that Augie experiences. The loss of the kitchen religion once espoused by Grandma Lausch is symptomatic of a broader loss of traditional cultural identity

brought about by the pressures of postwar American consumerism.

It is also worth noting that we can identify certain traces of the carnivalesque in this food imagery too. In the food of the Coblins we see both the festivity of abundance and the material reality of the grotesque. Augie is conscious of the "stupendous filth" (19) where these feasts are prepared, and dwells on details that allude to the biological provenance of the dishes, such as the hair and hooves in the calves'-foot jelly. Augie's room at the Coblins' house is also symbolically located "between the kitchen and the toilet" (16). Five Properties' crude refrain, "Don't shit where you eat" (21), thus acquires a pointed relevance for Augie, who resides precisely between the spaces associated with these bodily processes. At the Coblins' home Augie is fully aware of the material processes of his existence, but with his advancement in society, and his experiences at the Einhorns' and the Renlings', this material consciousness declines. As Augie becomes increasingly integrated into this social world, his awareness of that material reality fades.

Through his involvement with Thea Fenchel and the eagle Caligula, however, Augie begins to see through the

façade of that social world, and to reconnect with that original material reality. In an apparently incongruous digressionary episode, Augie trades the quotidian struggles of his "somber city" (3) to train reptile-hunting eagles with Thea in "risky" (319) rural Mexico. In his 2001 introduction to the novel, Christopher Hitchens acknowledges the uneasiness with which many readers regard this apparently dissonant episode, but emphatically affirms its narrative relevance as "essential" (xiv). Indeed, this episode is pivotal to the narrative. In his experiences with Caligula in the Mexican wilderness, "city-bred" (332) and socially-inculcated Augie encounters the non-social, natural world. The unyielding and untameable bird Caligula functions as a foil to Augie's vacillating sociability, and becomes both a source of inspiration for the protagonist and a catalyst for his development. In their first encounter, Augie recounts a string of associations that the bird inspires. He begins by thinking about a Russian poem from his childhood, before reeling off a list of automatic associations:

> the eagle of money,[78] the high flying eagles of Bombay, the NRA eagle with its gear and

78. The obverse of the Great Seal of the United States features an eagle, and appears on the reverse of every dollar bill.

> lightings,[79] the bird of Jupiter and of nations, of republics as well as of Caesar, of legions and soothsayers, Colonel Julian the Black Eagle of Harlem;[80] also the ravens of Noah and Elijah, which may well have been eagles; the lone eagle, animal president. And, as well, robber and carrion feeder (332–333).

Augie sees in Caligula a distillation of the wide, sometimes contradictory, often chaotic, spectrum of American social life that he has encountered thus far: a vision encompassing childhood, home, and far-flung lands; capitalism, depression, and economic recovery; hierarchy, power, and civil rights; faith, history, and progress. In Caligula he finds the means of expressing a sense of duality within the US between Republic and Empire. In short, Augie sees in the bird a reflection of his own American consciousness.

Underpinning these connotations, however, he also finds, refracted through the bird's feeding habits, a reminder of that material reality. In his acknowledgement of the eagle as 'robber and carrion feeder,' Augie faces up to the material reality of existence. This image of the eagle vividly evokes

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79. The Blue Eagle was the official symbol of the National Recovery Administration, a New Deal agency established in 1933.

80. Hubert Julian, an aviation pioneer, member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and follower of Marcus Garvey.

the intertwining of life and death, as well as the material basis of that existence. As Augie becomes more familiar with Caligula, he notes the bird's indifference to social cues ("he looked the other way from that" [333]) and remarks with admiration on the straightforwardness of his motives ("meat was how you came to terms with him" [ibid]). By his untamed nature, and above all in his primeval appetite, Caligula models a natural mode of existence unbound by the dictates of the social world to which Augie is more accustomed. The episode with Caligula has a profound impact on Augie, and inspires a period of intense reflection. Upon his return to civilisation, Augie muses, in gustatory terms, that,

> it takes some of us a long time to find out what the price is of being in nature, and what the facts are about your tenure. How long it takes depends on how swiftly the social sugars dissolve. But when at last they do dissolve there's a different taste in your mouth, bringing different news which registers with dark astonishment and fills your eyes. And this different news is that from vast existence in some way you rise up and at any moment you may go back. Any moment; the very next, maybe (362).

Through his relationship with the eagle Caligula, Augie rediscovers a cosmic reality that transcends the social world

within which the majority of the narrative is set.

This existential realisation is consolidated in a ratifying epiphany aboard the medical training cruise in Chesapeake Bay that Augie undertakes in the twenty third chapter. Here he seeks to reconcile the acquisitive materialism of his social world with the base materiality of the natural world. Riffing on these tensions, he envisions the ship as “an iron, floury, adrift bakery” (469) sailing upon “a huge bed of endive” (ibid.). He describes “spoiled lettuces, oranges, turds, and little crabs” (ibid.) ebbing and flowing in the wake of the ship, and is vividly reminded of,

> the picture of the fools with fish and cake and the boaters with soup-ladle oars in the painting of the old master Hieronymus B.- this idle craft with the excursion strummers, roast chicken trussed in a tree; death’s hand in the little twigs above. Other scenes too: eggs spitted on knives trotting with tiny feet; men inside oyster shells carried to a cannibal banquet. Herring, meat, and other belly-goods. But, all the same, human eyes were looking out (ibid).

The images described here are deeply symbolic. That of the hand of death hovering above the roast chicken recalls the intertwined forces of life and death that Augie first saw in Caligula, while the surreal notion of spitted eggs with human feet and oyster-men preparing to be cannibalised

combine and conflate man and food, emphasising the corporeality, or fleshliness, of both.

These images are drawn directly from the work of Hieronymus Bosch,[81] a point that Bellow makes explicitly clear. The passage most directly references Bosch's *Ship of Fools* (c. 1500-1510), a painting broadly understood, as Stephan Fischer writes, to illustrate the vices of "Gluttony, Lust, Folly and sheer obliviousness to the world" (283). In this painting and the others from which these images are drawn – specifically, *The Last Judgement*, c. 1506, and *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1503 – distinctly carnivalesque images prevail. Fischer notes a strong thematic connection in these paintings between "eating, excreting and the digestive organs" and "the impurity and vileness of sin" (244), such as those noted above. Augie's perception that this is the condition of modern American society is not only deeply satirical, but also indicates his own psycholo-

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81. This is not the first instance in which the relationship between Bosch's artwork and the picaresque perspective has been made clear. Helmut Heidenreich's paper "Hieronymus Bosch in Some Literary Contexts" (1970) discusses the influence of Bosch's vision on the developing picaresque novel, as does Maximilian C. Maier's doctoral dissertation *Picaresque Comedy and its Discontents* (2012), the latter paying specific attention to the connection between Bosch and the early German picaresque novel.

gical development. Augie has fully learned to see through the deception of the social world, and to recognise the material basis of reality.

The satire of Bellow's novel, however, remains ambivalent, rather than critical, to the end. Just as Bosch depicts human folly "not with a pointing finger" (Fischer 167) but with a considered dispassion, so too does Bellow remain evenhanded in this suggestion of an opposition between the social and natural worlds. He maintains the festive laughter of these carnivalesque themes to the very end. The novel concludes with Augie declaring himself to be the *"animal ridens* [...], the laughing creature forever rising up" (536). He both recognises and accepts the falsehood of the social world, and finally overcomes any sense of social terror through festive laughter. Writing about the novel, Philip Roth observes that

> from Chicago to Mexico and the mid-Atlantic and back, it's all Brobdingnag to Augie, observed, however, not by a caustic, angry Swift but by a word-painting Hieronymous Bosch, an American Bosch, an unsermonizing and optimistic Bosch, who detects even in the eeliest slipperiness of his creatures, in their most colossal finagling and conspiring and deceit, what is humanly enrapturing. The intrigues of mankind no longer incite paranoid

> fear in the Bellow hero but light him up. That the richly rendered surface is manifold with contradiction and ambiguity ceases to be a source of consternation; instead, the “mixed character” of everything is bracing. Manifoldness is fun (140).

Bellow thus employs the theme of food, and specifically symbolic food imagery, to again evoke that carnivalesque sense that the text’s satire lifts the veil of a false social reality to reveal a material cosmic reality.

In these two American novels, symbolic food imagery is used to raise questions about race, ethnicity, and national identity in the American context. In both cases, this imagery continues to draw on the carnivalesque themes common in historical picaresque fiction, but direct the festive laughter of their satire against a perceived social, rather than cosmic, terror. In *The Myth of the Picaro* (1979), Alexander Blackburn notes that the picaresque novels of the Spanish Golden Age depicted “two contradictory ideas of reality” (21). Blackburn distinguishes these as “the absolute reality of the supernatural other-world,” and “the relative reality that the individual experiences in the world” (ibid). These two notions of reality identified by Blackburn correspond, more or less faithfully, to those that we have thus far termed

the cosmic reality and the social reality, respectively. In the picaresque novel, Blackburn continues, social reality "stubbornly affirms its unreality" (ibid), while the picaro comes to accept that this unreality cannot be transformed (21-2). Blackburn considers this dual vision of reality that he identifies in the historical picaresque novels to lie at the heart of the picaresque myth as well. He writes that

> the critical view that the Spanish picaresque novels are primarily a stage in the development of realism in the novel is more than suspect because, while these novels do indeed represent everyday life and imitate historical actualities (poverty, vagabondage, delinquency, and the like), in the moral scheme of ironic autobiography such realities are conveyed as illusory [...] The poetics or myth of picaresque fiction, incorporating techniques not of realism so much as of irony that distorts perceptions of reality, continues in novels from *Lazarillo* to *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrommel*, 1959). [...] The common denominator of the picaresque myth may then be summarised by the word *disintegration*. This word implies an undoing of a previously formidable orthodox tradition, the collapse of personality or its submission to an experience of nothingness (22, emphasis in original).

The notion that there exists a transcendant cosmic reality behind the façade of a social (un)reality is present in all four

of the texts discussed thus far. This achieves a particular thematic predominance, however, in those American novels, which engage the carnivalesque connotations of food and hunger to frame a central discussion of identity. As Blackburn notes, and as we shall see, this same poetic is a defining feature of the satire of many later picaresque narratives too. The theme of food and hunger, with its carnivalesque undertones, continues to be central to the development of this picaresque myth, as we shall continue to see.

The Metamorphic Power of the Cook in *Die Blechtrommel* and *Felix Krull*

In the case of *Die Blechtrommel*, named by Blackburn as a much later carrier of this poetic, the sense of an ultimate cosmic reality behind the false social reality is present from the very beginning. The theme of food and hunger is fundamental to the exploration of this idea. Oskar's relationship with food is different to any of those that we have seen thus far: he does not hunger for food, and nor does he find symbolism of ethnic, religious, or racial identity therein. Nevertheless, the narrative is saturated with references to food, consumption, and cookery. It is especially notable that the two most prominent supporting characters in the

narrative, Anna Bronski and the folkloric Black Cook, the same two female characters who dominate the beginning and end of Oskar's life, are closely connected to these themes. Oskar, like Invisible Man, begins his account with a prefatory episode relating to his grandparents. He emphasises the importance of this, stressing that

> niemand sollte sein Leben beschreiben, der nicht die Geduld aufbringt, vor dem Datieren der eigenen Existenz wenigstens die Hälfte seiner Großeltern zu gedenken (12)[82]

It is thus that Oskar begins the account of his life in the potato fields of Kashubia at the turn of the century, where a chance encounter between peasant farmer Anna Bronski and fugitive arsonist Joseph Koljaiczek leads to the conception of Oskar's mother, Agnes. From this event Oskar weaves a complex and highly symbolic personal creation myth and this, he suggests, provides the means by which readers might make sense of his tale.

Central to this myth is the figure of Oskar's grandmother: Anna Bronski. Oskar describes her as being seated be-

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82. "No one should describe his life who lacks the patience to commemorate at least half of his grandparents' existence before detailing his own" (5) [All English translations of *Die Blechtrommel* are taken from the 2010 edition translated by Breon Mitchell, unless otherwise indicated]

side a potato fire at the edge of a potato field dressed in four layers of uniformly potato-coloured skirts – "die Farbe muß ihr gestanden haben,"[83] (13) – where she blends harmoniously into the agricultural landscape. Her Anna Bronski remains, rooted to the spot, as events unfold around her. She does nothing but reach for a potato from the fire, and slowly consume this in time with the action. With Anna's first bite of the potato Koljaiczek and his pursuers appear on the horizon; with the second Koljaiczek approaches and hides beneath Anna's skirts; and with the third Agnes is conceived:

> Als meine Großmutter das gesagt hatte, seufzte sie ein bißchen, doch laut genug, daß die Uniformen wissen wollten, was es zu seufzten gäbe. Sie nickte dem Feuer zu, was besagen sollte, sie hätte wegen des mäßigen Feuerchens geseufzt und wegen der vielen Leute im Qualm auch etwas, biß dann mit ihren weit auseinanderstehenden Schneiderzähnen der Kartoffel die Hälfte ab, verfiel ganz dem Kauen und ließ die Augäpfel nach oben links rutschen (19)[84]

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83. "[The colour] must have suited her" (6)

84. "Having said this, my grandmother heaved a gentle sigh, but loud enough that the uniforms asked why she was sighing. She nodded towards the fire to indicate that she was sighing because the little fire was burning poorly, and because of all the people standing right in the smoke, then she bit off half the potato with her widely spaced

Here the pleasure of eating and that of sexual climax are conflated. Anna Bronski's eyes roll to indicate the pleasure of both, and indeed the term used for eyeball – "Augapfel," literally "eye apple" – works in this passage to construe both a sense of intimacy or tenderness (as in "the apple of one's eye"), and to suggest by lexical similarity a synonym for Kartoffel, "Erdapfel," literally "earth apple". The potato, already so closely associated with the character of Anna Bronski, acquires additional connotations of sexuality, sensuality, and fertility.

The confluence of earth and fertility imagery in the portrayal of Anna Bronski is used to a further suggest a supernatural aspect to her character. By the end of this first chapter, there are fantastic undertones already in her acute rootedness.[85] Then, in Oskar's final summing-up of events, a distinct elemental quality is suggested:

> An jenem Oktobernachmittag des Jahres neunundneunzig [...] wurde zwischen Dirschau

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front teeth, lost herself entirely in chewing, and rolled her eyeballs up and to the left" (10)

85. When, at the end of this episode, Anna Bronski finally moves, she does so "so mühsam, als hätte sie Wurzeln geschlagen und unterbräche nun, Fäden und Erdreich mitziehend, das gerade begonnene Wachstum" (21) ["as laboriously as if she had struck root and was now interrupting that incipient growth, pulling forth tendrils and earth" (12)]

> und Karthaus, nahe der Ziegelei Bissau, unter vier gleichfarbigen Röcken, unter Qualm, Ängsten, Seufzern, unter schrägem Regen und leidvoll betonten Vornamen der Heiligen, unter den einfallslosen Fragen und rauchgetrübten Blicken zweier Landgendarmen vom kleinen aber breiten Joseph Koljaiczek meine Mutter Agnes gezeugt (23).[86]

Summarised in these terms the potato fields and Anna Bronski's potato-coloured skirts; the falling rain; the rising smoke and breathy sighs; and the serendipitous appearance of the pyromaniacal Joseph Koljaiczek may easily be interpreted as elemental symbols, representing the basic principles of earth, water, air, and fire, respectively. The conception of Agnes, then, appears as a sublime occurence brought about by the convergence of these elemental forces around the rooted central figure of Anna Bronski.

Edward Diller's reading emphasises this elemental aspect, noting that,

> the four wide skirts of Oskar's grandmother quickly grow in significance to represent the

86. "On that October afternoon in eighteen ninety-nine [...] between Dirschau and Karthaus, by the Bissau brickworks, beneath four skirts of a single colour, beneath smoke, shock, sighs, and saints' names sorrowfully invoked, beneath the slanting rain, beneath the smoke-filled eyes and hapless questioning of two rural constables, short but stout Joseph Koljaiczek begot my mother Agnes" (13)

> four sheaths of terrestrial space, the four corners of the earth, the points of the compass, the four basic elements, and therefore the whole sweep of the earthly realm and its embracing framework of creation (8).

It is not too much of a stretch then to suggest, as Diller does, that in her fantastical association with the potato Anna Bronski appears here as an avatar of the goddess Demeter in the form of the "Potato-Mother (*Axo-mama*)" (13), or "Old Potato Woman" (ibid.) of north European legend. Patricia Pollock Brodsky similarly regards Anna Bronski as "a kind of unacknowledged goddess figure, the earthbound healer, source of life, [and] ancestral womb" (244) to which Oskar longs to return.

The significance of the potato in this first episode is thus twofold. In the first instance, its loaded symbolism feeds the fantastical element of Oskar's personal mythology, and this in turn contributes to establishing, in these opening pages, the unreliable grandiloquence of Oskar's narrative voice. Secondly, there is a more profound suggestion that, as Oskar retraces his family history he rediscovers not only his personal ancestral roots, but also that earthly matter and the elemental principles from which all life springs forth. This creation story thus positions Oskar

not only as the teller of his own story, but also as a spokesperson for mankind as a whole, whilst establishing Anna Bronski as his mythic creator and patron.

As Oskar's life unfolds, however, it is not Anna Bronski that presides over its trajectory, but her terrifying countertype: the spectral "Schwarze Köchin." First conjured in the nursery rhymes sung by the children of Oskar's neighbourhood, the Black Cook[87] lurks in the shadows of Oskar's life before re-emerging as his antagonist in the final pages of the novel. As Oskar flees towards Paris in the novel's conclusion, he is tormented by the ominous refrain of her song and becomes increasingly disturbed by its affirmative final line: "Ist die Schwarze Köchin da? Jajaja..."[88] (768-9).

Oskar looks back over the events of his life and begins to see her hand in its darkest moments. He suggests the presence of the Black Cook in Susi Kater and her grisly

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87. The first English edition of the novel, translated by Ralph Mannheim, renders the "schwarze Köchin" simply as "witch, black as pitch." Breon Mitchell's new translation of 2009 restores this name to the more literal "Black Cook" (see translator's note in the 2010 English edition [571])

88. Mannheim rather strangely renders this refrain in English as "Better start running, the Black Cook's coming! Ha! Ha! Ha!" (556-63). A more direct translation would serve better here: "Is the Black Cook there? Yes, yes, yes!" [translation my own].

'soup' of frogs, spittle, and urine that she forced Oskar to drink as a child; he sees her in the snitch Luzie Rennwand, who handed The Dusters over to the authorities whilst devouring the sausage sandwich with which Oskar sought to appease her; in the eels and the insatiable cravings for fish that brought about the death of his mother, Agnes; in the suicide of Sigismund Markus on Kristallnacht; in the execution of Jan Bronski during the Defence of the Polish Post Office; and in many more mundane moments as well. The Black Cook, Grass suggests, is true to her name. The character's narrative function is to cook up the darkest and most traumatic moments of the protagonist's life.

There are obvious parallels between the characters of Anna Bronski and the Black Cook. As Oskar tells it, both of these prominent female figures wield great power over his life, both have a supernatural nature, and both are thematically linked to food. However, where Anna Bronski is associated with the beginning of the narrative, with creation, with comfort, with the East (Danzig), with the golden hue of potatoes, nourishment, and life; the Black Cook by contrast is associated with their opposites: with the end of the narrative, with destruction, with fear, with the West (Paris), with darkness, poison, hunger, and death. Thus, as Diller writes,

> Anna Bronski constitutes an absolute starting point from which there is a gradual falling off into figures of lesser goddesses, into corruptions or distortions of her nature, until finally the literally absolute reversal of her presence – the antithetical Black Cook – appears and succeeds in dominating the destiny of the hero (14).

Anna Bronski and the Black Cook thus appear as two sides of a single coin: the alternating *Chefinnen* (in the German sense, as both cooks and chiefs) of Oskar's life.

This understanding of Anna Bronski and the Black Cook as co-operative doppelgängers invites, like the symbolic potato discussed, two levels of interpretation. On the one hand, these emblematic female characters serve to frame Oskar's life in fantastical terms. The suggestion that his path is governed by the hands of supernatural or semi-divine beings pushes the limits of Oskar's typically histrionic narrative voice yet further, bringing it into increasing tension with the sober subject of twentieth century German history that it claims to describe. Patrick O'Neill credits precisely this "eccentric" and "entirely inappropriate" (40) narrative style with the novel's post-war success, arguing that its disorienting blend of the historical and the outlandish asks the reader to critically consider the reliability of any account of

history. This narrative approach, O'Neill continues, "draws the reader's attention to what is omitted by allowing Oskar to exaggerate grotesquely what is not omitted" (42).

The improbable attribution of real, historical events (such as Kristallnacht and the Defence of the Polish Post Office, as well as the many personal family tragedies that Oskar, like his real-world compatriots, experiences under Nazism) to a supernatural struggle between his mythic creator and her villainous doppelgänger implies, in fact, quite the opposite. Grass suggests, rather, that the traumatic events assigned to the hand of the Black Cook are not her crimes at all. As much as Oskar may believe in her, the reader is under no illusion that the Black Cook is anything more than a fairytale, a childhood phobia that Oskar never overcomes. The implication, as O'Neill writes, is quite clear:

> Nazism was not at all some kind of demonic hero-frenzy of the German psyche, some kind of almost supernatural eruption of evil incarnate [...] Rather it was the coordinated channelling on a monstrous scale of the petty viciousness and frustration and hypocrisy of very ordinary people, leading very ordinary lives until presented with a clearly defined and universally agreed upon focus for their discontent and resentment (41-2).

The Black Cook is a scapegoat of Oskar's own conjuring,

who bears the burden of guilt for those crimes that we, as readers, can see are committed instead by society and its individuals. The absurdity of Oskar's belief in supernatural forces in fact draws attention to the more chilling mundane reality of Nazism.

On the other hand, however, there is a simultaneous suggestion that the apparent opposition between Anna Bronski and the Black Cook – an opposition that is emphatically affirmed by Oskar in the novel's final pages – is in fact untenable. These two mythic figures govern Oskar's life co-operatively (albeit rather differently), and as such appear not as adversaries, but as two parts of a single whole: Anna Bronski as maternal creator, and the Black Cook as maternal destroyer. Oskar credits Anna Bronski alone with the forces of procreation and life, and fears the Black Cook for her forces of destruction and death. Yet readers may notice that there are events in Oskar's life that deny such a distinction. In the death of his mother, Agnes, for example, we see quite clearly the symbolic intertwining forces of creation and destruction. The eels that drive Agnes to her death are fished from the mouth of Mottlau river (notably the same waters in which Oskar's grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek is presumed to have drowned) where, the narrative suggests,

the fish have grown fat on the bodies of horses and men. “Besonders nach der Seeschlacht am Skaggerrak sollen die Aale mächtig fett gewesen sein,”[89] (194) remarks the dock worker who extracts them from a black horse’s head that he has pulled from the water. The same eels that feed on the corpses in the Mottlau become the Good Friday dinner that Agnes is forced to eat, and then the root cause of an insatiable desire for fish that soon kills her. At her funeral Oskar acknowledges the material cycle that underpins these events, blaming her death on:

> einige Stückchen Aal [...] einige weißgrünliche Fasern Aalfleisch, Aal von der Seeschlacht im Skagerrak, Aal von der Hafenmole Neufahrwasser, Karfreitagsaal, Aal aus dem Haupte des Rosses entsprungen, womöglich Aal aus ihrem Vater Joseph Koljaiczek, der unters Floß geriet und den Aalen anheimfiel, Aal von deinem Aal, denn Aal wird zu Aal... (210)[90]

The eel thus takes on a similar significance to that noted in *Pascual Duarte*. Here it reveals the cyclical transformation

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89. “They say the eels were mighty fat after the Battle of Skagerrak” (138)

90. “a small chunk of eel, a few greenish white tendrils of eel meat, eel from the naval battle at Skagerrak, eel from the harbour jetty at Neufahrwasser, Good Friday eel, eel that sprang from the head of the horse, perhaps even eel from Joseph Koljaiczek her father, who slipped under a raft and fell prey to the eels, eel of thine eel, for eel thou art, and to eel returnest...” (150)

of not only food into waste into food, but emphasises in particular the grand cycle of existence: the eels of Oskar's world transform death into life into death.

With this in mind, Diller's reading of the Black Cook as a manifestation of the earth mother hungering for the flesh of own children becomes persuasive. Diller writes that,

> Oskar's maternal demon is both *cook* and *black* in the alchemic sense of organic fermentation and putrefaction. In that context she takes on even larger significance as the chthonic cook herself who is ever present in life and death, ready to gather more human ingredients for her huge, simmering cauldron somewhere at the bottom of the life cycle [...] The term cook is largely a creative one, for the substance she decomposes initially becomes with time the nutrients for the regeneration of new life and another round of creation (160).

Thus the opposition between Anna-Bronski-as-earth-mother and the spectral Black Cook cannot be maintained: they simply represent different aspects of the same regenerative cosmic cycle. What Oskar flees at the end of his narrative is not a tangible villain, but rather the unwelcome realisation of his own mortality, and the uncomfortable discovery that what he once believed was a postive force of creation is indistinguishable from its opposite.

In these two parallel readings, just as in the two parallel readings of the symbolic potato discussed previously, we see the narrative's dual vision of reality. In the first instance we see how Grass uses the theme of food and gastronomy to heighten the fantastical elements within his novel. This is a prime example of the satirist's use of calculated difficulty to stimulate the reader: the eccentricity of Oskar's narration draws the reader, conversely, towards a more prosaic though less palatable conclusion about this society. Here, the satire of the novel attacks social (un)reality. In the second, however, we see that these same references to food also suggest a more basic truth about the nature of existence. Oskar observes the material cycles of food and digestion, life and death, and rediscovers the earthly matter, the cosmic elements, within himself. This realisation is not, however, carnivalesque. Oskar is not empowered by this discovery, nor is he able to laugh off the cosmic terror that he confronts. The novel ends with him attempting to flee the Black Cook, but the repetition of her song in the novel's final words suggest that this is futile. This level of meaning is concerned not with social reality, but with fundamental cosmic truths. Grass, like Bellow, however, leaves his protagonist uncertainly caught between the two.

In Mann's *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*, on the other hand, the protagonist takes a more definitive stance. Felix, like Oskar, seems to have an awareness of this dual nature of reality from the earliest stages of the novel. Unlike Oskar, however, and in a departure from the what we might expect of the picaresque myth, Felix exhibits a clear preference for the social world over the material. Felix-as-narrator affirms repeatedly, and throughout the narrative, that he is made from "edlerem Stoffe" (18)[91] and cut from "dem feinsten Holze" (ibid.).[92] Each such statement acknowledges on the one hand an inherent material nature (Felix readily identifies himself as organic 'stuff,' or natural matter), but is instantly qualified by a claim to superiority. Felix seems to believe, against the grain of that carnivalesque mode we have seen thus far, that man is indeed able to overcome his material reality by the construction of a social reality.

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91. "made of superior stuff" (15) [All English translations of *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* are taken from the 1997 edition translated by Denver Lindley, unless otherwise indicated].

92. Lindley renders this phrase as "[made] of the finest clay" (15). A more direct translation, however, would be "cut from the finest wood" [translation my own]. The original text, therefore, does not contain the allusion to Genesis and the creation of Adam that the Denver's translation perhaps suggests.

This notion first crystallises for Felix in his childhood encounter with the opera singer Müller-Rosé. Meeting the man in person, Felix discovers that Müller-Rosé's alluring on-stage persona belies an ugly reality. "Die wahre Gestalt des seligen Falters" (40),[93] he discovers, is the "unappetitliche Erdenwurm" (ibid.).[94] The discrepancy between the performer's carefully-constructed social image and the reality behind this does not trouble Felix, however, but rather inspires him:

> Ist er nicht ganz wie eines jener eklen Weichtierchen, die, wenn ihre abendliche Stunde kommt, märchenhaft zu glühen befähigt sind? Die erwachsenen und im üblichen Maße lebenskundigen Leute aber, die sich so willig, ja gierig von ihm betören ließen, mußten sie nicht wissen, daß sie betrogen wurden? Oder achteten sie in stillschweigendem Einverständnis den Betrug nicht für Betrug? Letzteres wäre möglich; denn genau überdacht: wann zeigt der Glühwurm sich in seiner wahren Gestalt, – wenn er als poetischer Funke durch die Sommernacht schwebt, oder wenn er als niedriges, unansehnliches Lebewesen sich auf unserem Handteller krümmt? Hüte dich, darüber zu entscheiden! (ibid.)[95]

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93. "the true form of the blessed butterfly" [translation my own]

94. "unappetising worm" [translation my own]

95. "Is he not like one of those repellent little creatures that have the power of glowing phosphorescently at night? But the grown up

Felix's own decision here is quite clear: far from condemning the deception enacted by Müller-Rosé, he affirms its goodness, and indeed praises the performance for satisfying "ein allgemeines, von Gott selbst der Menschennatur eingepflanztes Bedürfniss" (41).[96] Felix, having discovered early on that the social world is a deception, nevertheless professes its facade to be both true and good. Man's greatest power, as Felix tells it, is a God-given ability to transform basic matter into transcendant beauty. In actuality, what Felix describes is the power of the social world to veil or conceal a less attractive material world.

Inspired by this realisation, Felix sets out on a path to claim this metamorphic power for himself. In the novel's early stages, Felix begins by seeking mastery over the physical matter of his own body. To this end he begins a childhood regime of bodily 'self-conquest' epitomised in the

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people in the audience, who on the whole must know about life, and who yet were so frightfully eager to be deceived, must they not have been aware of the deception? Or did they privately not consider it one? And that is quite possible. For when you come to think of it, which is the real shape of the glow-worm: the insignificant little creature crawling about on the palm of your hand, or the poetic spark that swims through the summer night? Who would presume to say?" (35)

96. "a general human need, implanted by God Himself in human nature" (35)

bouts of feigned illness he performs before his family and Dr. Düsing.[97] Through the practice of this boyhood mischief – what he calls playing "schulkrank" (54)[98] – Felix trains himself to control the involuntary bodily symptoms of illness, and to recreate these on demand. He learns to change the shape of his face, to produce muscle twitches and spasms, to raise and lower his body temperature, and to slow or quicken his pulse all by force of will alone. Felix's stomach, above all else, is central to his success. What begins as an habitual prank, becomes an apprenticeship under the unsuspecting Dr. Düsing. The skills Felix learns through these games are put to the test when he his called

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97. It might be noted that Felix's behaviour in this episodes – the feigning of illness with the explicit goal of eliciting sympathy – is characteristic of Munchausen's syndrome. The syndrome, first described by the British physician Richard Asher in a 1951 article in *The Lancet*, is named for Baron Munchausen, the protagonist of Rudolf Erich Raspe's 1785 novella *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*. Raspe's novella was popularised in German by Gottfried August Bürger, whose translation and reworking was published in 1788 as *Die Abenteuer des Freiherrn von Münchhausen.* Though not strictly a picaresque work itself, Bürger's text was influential in the development of the German picaresque tradition in the period between the publication of *Simplicius Simplicissimus* and the emergence of a clear neopicaresque tradition in the twentieth century. Felix's particular proclivity for feigning illness, then, may be read as a somewhat esoteric acknowledgement from Mann of his protagonist's place within this particular literary tradition.

98. "school sick" (44)

for military service. By convincingly feigning illness, Felix is exempted from conscription. By learning to control his bodily processes, Felix appears to conquer his own material nature, and thus graduates into adulthood.

After the death of his father, Felix moves out into the wider world, and his focus shifts accordingly from the self to the other. Having mastered his own body, Felix now seeks to master the matter external himself. Under the guidance of his godfather Schimmelpreester, whose name (priest of mould) appropriately suggests an ability to elevate low-level matter to a higher status, Felix begins to construct his new life. Schimmelpreester animates Felix on to this next stage using the language of gastronomy. “Sie sind der Küche zu Hause,” he tells Felix,

> verzeihen Sie diese linkische Wendung! – Sie wissen einen Pudding aus gesammelten Brotabfällen, und aus Fleischresten von vorgestern ein saures Haché zu machen. Sie sind überdies gewöhnt, Leute bei sich zu sehen, sie zu speisen, ihnen Unterhaltung zu bieten (81).[99]

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99. “You are at home in the kitchen – forgive my inept expression – you know how to make a pudding out of crumbs and a tangy hash out of day-before-yesterday’s leftovers. Furthermore, you are used to feeding [lodgers] and entertaining them” (75)

Schimmelpreester's gastronomic metaphor rests on the premise that the world, and life itself, is essentially material. Furthermore, it confirms Felix's belief, observed in the case of Müller-Rosé, that this matter can be transformed through human ingenuity. Thus inspired, Felix sets out for Paris, and embarks on his career as a confidence man. He becomes the figurative cook of Schimmelpreester's advice as he develops the creative ability to elevate the leftover scraps of his former life into a finer future. Where Oskar feared the social machinations of the Black Cook, Felix envisions himself as a golden cook, preparing the alchemical transformation of his own life.

In the novel's third part, Felix is confronted repeatedly with that cosmic materiality reality from which he has thus far sought to distance himself. Even here, however, Felix continues to reject this fundamental truth in favour of the more attractive social reality he has cultivated. In one conversation, Zouzou recounts a verse which suggests both the falsity of social reality, and the material nature of true reality: "Der Mensch, wie schön er sei, wie schmuck und blank, / Ist innen doch Gekrös' nur und Gestank"[100] (412).

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100. In Lindley's translation this is rendered as: "However fair and smooth the skin / Stench and corruption lie within" (379). The original

This elicits an impassioned response from Felix, who vigorously defends the importance of that constructed social reality. “Das Verschen, mit dem Sie mir da kommen, ist himmelschreiend,” Felix responds,

> Warum, wollen Sie wissen? [...] Weil dies tückische Verschen den Glauben zerstören will an Schönheit, Form, Bild und Traum [...] Nun ist denn vor einiger Zeit aus dem leblosen, unorganischen Sein durch Urzeugung, um diees an und für sich schon eine dunkle Sache ist, das organische Leben hervorgegangen, und daß es damit innerlich nicht zum saubersten steht noch zugeht, das versteht sich von vornherein. Ein Kauz könnte ja sagen, die ganze Natur sei nichts als Fäulnis und Schimmel auf dieser Erde, aber das ist nur eine bissige, kauzige Anmerkung und wird bis ans Ende der Tage die Liebe und Freude nicht umbringen, die Freude am Bilde. Es war ein Maler, den ich sagen hörte, und er malte den Schimmel in aller Ergebenheit und nannte sich Professor dafür [...] Es allezeit auf Erden gewimmelt hat von Käuzen, die sich im geringsten nicht um das geistliche Reimwort kümmerten auf ›schmuck und blank‹ sondern die Wahrheit erblickten in Form und Schein und Oberfläche und sich deren Priester machten (413-4).[101]

German is somewhat more visceral. *Gekröse*, literally, refers to the mesentery.

101. “That verse you’ve just recited stinks to high heaven. And do you want to know why? [...] Because this villainous little verse is

Here Felix affirms the value of beauty, even as he recognises its artificial construction. His references to *Schimmel* (mould or mildew) and to priestliness unambiguously recall Felix's tutelage under his godfather Schimmelpreester. Felix, we see, continues to live by Schimmelpreester's advice, and to advocate the transformation of basic matter into something more beautiful. Furthermore, it is significant that by this point in the narrative Felix has taken on the role of a waiter. Symbolically, he is now not only the cook that Schimmelpriester advised him to be, but has moved beyond the kitchen and into the dining room, wherein he now serves the dishes that he has prepared.

This extended gastronomic metaphor is used by Mann to suggest an important thematic idea. Throughout the nar-

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designed to destroy belief in beauty and form, image and dream [...] Now some time ago by the mysterious process of spontaneous generation organic life emerged from lifeless, inorganic Being. That its inward processes and essence are not the cleanest goes without saying. Indeed, a smart aleck might say that all nature is nothing but mildew and corruption on the face of the earth, but that is simply the wisecrack if a smart aleck and never, to the end of time will it succeed in killing love and joy – the joy in images. It was from a painter that I learned that. He painted the mildew with devotion, and was highly respected for it in the end. [...] At all times the earth has been full of fellows who paid not the slightest heed to your spiritual rhyme, but saw truth in form and appearance and surface, and made themselves their priests" (379-80).

rative, Felix is concerned with transforming his material reality into a more attractive illusion of reality. He not only accepts the artifice of the social world, but delights in its deception, and celebrates the idea that matter may be elevated by man: that there is a way to transcend the cosmic base reality, even if this transcendence is momentary and illusory. The same desire to elevate base matter into something that might be considered beautiful runs throughout the novel. Indeed, Felix's own narrative voice, with its often over the top grandiose flourishes, suggests that in the text itself a less attractive social reality has been concealed behind a facade of beauty. The theme of food is used by Mann to suggest that appearances are deceptive, and to indicate that Felix's narration is itself part of a deception.

In the two German novels, then, the theme of food and hunger is used to not only foreground the notion of two levels of reality, but to explore and examine the interaction between these with a degree of complexity that we have not seen thus far. In both texts, a symbolic cook appears within the narrative to suggest the possibility of transforming matter from one thing into another. In Grass' novel, the Black Cook is a dark spectre that haunts Oskar with reminders of material impermanence, and the terrifying real-

isation that life and death are interwoven processes. She operates within the social reality, but threatens to pull the protagonist back into her dark earthly realm. In Mann's novel, it is the protagonist himself who learns this metamorphic power. Under Schimmelpreester's tutelage Felix becomes the chef that learns the secrets of turning mere matter into something more, into the beauty or artistry valued by the social world. The satiric thrust of these novels is concerned with exposing the artifice of social reality, though they do not celebrate the cosmic reality that lies beneath.

Maturing Tastes in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Billy Liar*

In the British neopicaresque novels, food and digestion continue to be prominent tropes, although they do not point towards the dual concept of cosmic and social realities in the same way that we have seen thus far. Rather, the symbolic significance of food takes on a particular prominence here, and these symbols are used to emphasise the texts' common central themes of maturity and generational difference. Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* is packed with such symbolism. The novel is condensed and carefully organised into a three-part dialectical structure: the first part depicting Alex's youth and criminality, the second his

incarceration and 'cure', and the third his release and maturity. The total of twenty-one chapters (seven per part) is itself symbolic of the protagonist's final coming-of-age. The novel is, at least on one level, about growing up.

Accordingly, the food that dominates the first part of Alex's account (that of his youth) is milk – although it is no ordinary milk. Central to Alex's gang culture is the Korova Milkbar, a place where Alex and his droogs regularly spend their evenings preparing for their ultra-violent rampages. Their drink of choice is "milk plus" (7), or "milk with knives" (ibid): a prepared drink of milk spiked with the patron's drug of choice ("vellocet or synthemesc or droncom" [ibid]), in a cynical effort to circumvent the narrative world's strict licensing laws. The Korova Milkbar appears as to parody those milkbars established and promoted by the Temperance Society during the 1930s and 40s. By Alex's time, in his postwar dystopian future, these venues that once represented a more wholesome alternative to licensed establishments have become quite the opposite. The milk served here as an alternative to alcohol has far worse social consequences than alcohol itself, and these are soon demonstrated.

The 'knives' in the milk, Alex explains, serve to

“sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one [rhyming slang: fun, ultra-violence]” (ibid). In one of the novel’s earliest episodes, Alex announces that he “could feel the knives in the old moloko [milk] starting to prick” (10), and indicates that this is a sign that the gang are ready for their rampage. Alex then narrates a spree of gratuitous, entirely meaningless violence. As the gang strips and beats an old man, Alex describes how the “the knives in the milk-plus were stabbing away nice and horrorshow” (11). They then rob a newsagent, beat up a drunk vagrant, engage in a “proper” fight (21) with a rival gang, steal a car and drive around town intentionally threatening pedestrians and animals, before finally breaking into the home of a writer, destroying his working manuscript (entitled “A Clockwork Orange” [27]), and forcing him to watch as they gang rape his wife. The droogs then drive back into town “running over odd squealing things on the way” (30), before finally returning to the Korova Milkbar where they had first started. The milk that they had drunk here before setting off, we are reminded, was the fuel for their ultra-violence. The milk that feeds Alex’s youth is no mother’s milk, but rather a grotesque corruption thereof. The milk on which Alex is raised nurtures only his worst and most violent

impulses.

Stanley Edgar Hyman, in his afterword to the first American edition of the novel (1963) suggests that Burgess' decision to use milk as Alex's drink of choice is indicative of a Freudian subtext (299). There is, however, scant further evidence in the text, and no indication in the portrayal of Alex's relationship with his parents, to sustain such a reading. Rather, the choice of milk-plus is symbolic of something within the character of the protagonist, and by extension within man himself. Alex's diet throughout this first part of the narrative is consistently infantile. In addition to the milk he drinks at the Korova Milkbar, Alex describes himself consuming fruit pie by the fistful (38), tea with "spoon after spoon after spoon of sugar" (46), and "toast dipped in jammiwam and eggiweg" (47). The child-like palate that these foods imply, and the child-like terms in which they are described, emphatically demonstrate Alex's juvenility, and with this evoke a sense of vulnerability. This appears as an attempt on the part of Alex-as-narrator to evoke a sympathetic, perhaps even affectionate, response from the reader. Alex utilises the first part of his narrative account to set up the suggestion of his own vulnerability in order to make his later experiences seem all the more unjust.

Nevertheless, it is difficult for the reader to ignore the irony of these claims to vulnerability, which appear alongside his own confessed crimes. Alex himself appears as dualistic: both childlike and savage, creative and destructive, charismatic and thoroughly repulsive. His character represents a certain tension between innocence and corruption, or between vulnerability and power. This same tension is represented symbolically in that milk-plus of Alex's youth. The adulterated milk that Alex consumes, which drives the action of this first part of the narrative and sets the plot in motion, has a dual symbolic resonance. It is the milk of childhood innocence corrupted with stimulants that lead to violent experience. It connotes both life-giving sustenance and life-destroying violence. In this we encounter the first and most significant symbol of the tension between good and evil that dominates the narrative.

The bodily processes of consumption, digestion, and excretion are significant in Burgess' novel, too, although they lack the carnivalesque connotations we have seen elsewhere. In the final chapter of part one, Alex's arrest and incarceration marks a watershed between his criminal youth and the beginning of his reform and rehabilitation. As the narrative focus shifts towards his incarceration and cure,

the symbolic imagery of the text also shifts from consumption (of the foods discusses thus far) to the opposing bodily acts of expulsion. The police station to which Alex is first taken has a strong smell of “sick and lavatories” (75). Here Alex is beaten until he vomits (77), before being confined to a cell with a group of other inmates, who sit in postures that each recall excretory bodily processes: one sits with his mouth gaping open, a second drools uncontrollably, and a third appears to have defecated in his trousers. In this cell, Alex vomits again (79). The repeated vomiting that Alex experiences, and the symbolic positions of his companions, indicate a shift in focus of the narrative, and prefigure Alex’s experience of the Ludovico treatment he endures in part two.

This Ludovico treatment is an extreme form of aversion therapy to which Alex is subjected in order to cure him of his violent behaviour. As part of this, Alex is given emetics before being made to watch ultra-violent footage of assaults, rapes, and Nazi atrocities. The emetics cause Alex to vomit violently as he watches the film reels, and thereby condition a severe and involuntary disgust response to violent stimuli. The Ludovico treatment seeks to expunge Alex’s violent inclinations through the forced and literal ex-

pulsion of his interior contents. As Alex begs to throw up during his first round of treatment (116) it becomes clear that the thrust of his interaction with the outside world has now been abruptly reversed. Where once Alex consumed, he now expels; where once he brought external matter within himself, now his inner matter is forcibly brought out into the external world. Alex formerly exerted power; now he is powerless. His vomiting suggests both the excision of a part of his inner self, as well as his unwilling – and indeed unwitting – reconciliation with the external world and its rule of law.

Accordingly, when Alex is released and begins to recover his autonomy in part three, this is signalled by a renewed emphasis on consumption. Having suffering through the retributive violence of his former victims, Alex is picked up by the writer F. Alexander (a public critic of the Ludovico technique, and the author of the "Clockwork Orange" manuscript that Alex encountered in part one), who nurses him back to strength. F. Alexander initiates Alex's recovery by encouraging him to eat, even donating his own food to the protagonist: "Eat well, poor boy [...]" he implores over breakfast, "Eat, eat. Eat my eggs as well" (174). Their breakfast exchange precipitates a chain of events that

eventually returns Alex to hospital, where the effects of the Ludovico therapy are abruptly reversed. There, Alex recovers by "munching away at eggiwegs and lomticks of toast and peeting bolshy great mugs of milky chai" (190). The joy of his recovery is articulated in gustatory language: "it was gorgeousity and yumyumyum" (192), Alex rejoices.

After his discharge, he encounters one of his former droogs, Pete. This time they meet not at the Korova Milkbar, but at a café where the speciality is not milk-plus, but "harmless chai and coffee" (199-200). Pete no longer frequents the milkbar, but instead speaks of attending "winecup" (200) parties. Alex considers how his friend has changed, before envisioning his own future following a similarly conventional path, with "Your Humble Narrator Alex coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner" (202). The food that Alex consumes here in this final part is not tainted in the way that the milk-plus of the first part was. Alex has reached a state of maturity, and that destructive adulterant has been excised. In Burgess' novel, both food and the processes of consumption are employed symbolically to chart the development and eventual maturity of the protagonist.

Although Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* lacks this structural

symbolism, there are nevertheless clear parallels between this and Burgess' novel in terms of the gastronomic symbols employed. In *Billy Liar*, as in *A Clockwork Orange*, breakfast foods in particular carry symbolic meaning. They suggest the juvenility of the protagonist, as well as a particular desire to break free of social convention. For Billy, the breakfast table is a site of inter-generational conflict. Here, at the beginning of his day, the traditions and expectations of his older family members are set directly against his individual desire for change and difference. Billy is contemptuous of the "breakfast ceremony" (4) that his family hold each morning, and is habitually slow to make his appearance. His mother complains that he is too late for the food ("Your boiled egg's gone stone cold," she remarks, "and *I'm* not cooking another" [3, emphasis in original]), while his grandmother complains that he does not eat it properly ("Why does he always leave the white of his egg?" she enquires at the end of the meal, "It's all goodness, just thrown down the sink" [8]). These criticisms of his eating habits frame a longer breakfast exchange, in which Billy's parents chastise him for his lack of routine, his state of dress, the company he keeps, and the uncertain direction of his career. The family, we learn from this first episode, value order,

convention, and conformity.

Billy, on the other hand, rails against these values. He laments the lack of fun in this routine, and recounts one "disastrous attempt to break the monotony" (4) of the breakfast ceremony by playfully poking fun at the solemnity of this family tradition. In this anecdote, Billy enters the room in the character of a sleep-walker, and narrates the scene before him in an exaggeratedly formal voice:

> 'Ay York-shire breakfast scene. Ay polished table, one leaf out, covahed diagonally by ay white tablecloth, damask, with grrreen stripe bordah. Sauce-stain to the right, blackberry stain to the centre. Kellogg's corn flakes, Pyrex dishes, plate of fried bread. Around the table, the following personnel: fathah, mothah, grandmothah, one vacant place' (ibid).

Billy's delivery, his melodrama, and playful impertinence mock the formality of his family's morning tradition. This attempt to inject humour into an otherwise sobre scene, however, is not well received. Billy is forced from then on to conform, reluctantly, to the breakfast ceremony. This episode exposes from the beginning of the narrative a tension between Billy's casual and carefree attitude, and the formal expectations of his family.

For Billy and his peers, like Alex and his droogs, a milk-

bar transformed serves as the main gathering place. In Billy's hometown of Stradhouton, the Kit-Kat café, a revamped milkbar modelled on contemporary American coffee culture, is the focal point of the youths' social world. Billy, however, though he frequents the café too, is disdainful of the its history and its attempts to modernise. "The Kit-Kat," he explains,

> was another example of Stradhouton moving with the times, or rather dragging its wooden leg about five paces behind the times [...] The Kit-Kat was now a coffee bar, or thought it was. It had a cackling espresso machine, a few empty plant-pots, and about half a dozen glass plates with brown sugar stuck all over them. The stippled walls, although redecorated, remained straight milkbar (33).

The conversion of the milkbar into a coffee bar is compared by Billy to the encroachment of the industrial revolution. "Dark satanic mills I can put up with," he quips, "[...] but when it comes to dark satanic power stations, dark satanic housing estates, and dark satanic coffee bars – " (34). Billy trails off without finishing, but his suggestion is clear: the Kit-Kat café is as soulless and impersonal as the mills of the nineteenth century. Its incongruity with the local setting of Stradhouton is further mocked by Billy and Arthur in their

“two Yanks in a drugstore routine” (36).

Conclusion

In the historical picaresque novels, hunger often provided the principle narrative motor, while references to food, consumption, digestion, and excretion carried symbolic carnivalesque meaning. It is clear that the themes of food and hunger continue to have similarly significant narrative and symbolic functions in the neopicaresque novels, too. In all eight of the primary texts analysed here, we see that food and hunger continue to contribute substantially to the narrative and satiric orientations of these works. It is to be noted, however, that significant differences exist within this neopicaresque corpus, and that these differences are particularly noticeable when the novels are considered by nation.

The Spanish neopicaresque novels appear to follow most closely in the tradition of the historical picaresque genre. Both Cela and Fernández Flórez employ hunger as a key narrative drive, and both also utilise the symbolic carnivalesque resonances of food and digestion to orient their satire towards and against Spanish wartime society. In the American novels, hunger is a less significant motor. Never-

theless, food and digestion are themes that are employed symbolically with similar carnivalesque connotations to those of the Spanish texts. In the texts by Bellow and Ellison, specific food items are used to symbolise the complex ethnic, racial, or national identities of the protagonists, as well as to suggest the falsity of social pretence. This sense of a social unreality and an underlying absolute reality is even more prominent in the two German novels, both of which develop themes of cooking and gastronomy to suggest the constructed, artificiality of the social world, and the terrifying reality of the material world. In both cases the preference is for the former, despite its obvious unreality. In the British novels, such a dual sense of reality is less clear, but food is used symbolically to instead suggest a comparable dualism within man himself. Burgess uses food symbolically to indicate man's potential for good and evil, while Waterhouse uses similar symbols to suggest a generational divide and a related tension between tradition and progress.

In the theme of food and hunger, we can see that the neopicaresque novels have much in common with their picaresque predecessors, but rework and reimagine the classic trope in relation to new contexts. References to food,

hunger, consumption, and excretion are used to direct the reader towards the central social, historical, and philosophical concerns of the texts. Through a comparative analysis we see that the committed poetic of the neopicaresque novel is founded upon a strong sense of dualism. In most cases, this is a dual vision of reality: a contingent social reality (ie. what Blackburn considers to be a social unreality) and a material or cosmic reality (described by Blackburn as the absolute reality). Alternatively, this duality may be seen instead within man himself. In the chapters that follow, we will consider how this sense of dual or opposing forces manifest in the protagonist and antagonist of the texts.

2. The Protagonist's Quest for Identity

> All novels are about certain minorities: the individual is a minority. The universal in the novel – and isn't that what we're all clamouring for these days? – is reached only through the depiction of a specific man in a specific circumstance.
>
> – Ralph Ellison, interview in *The Paris Review*, 1955

One of the defining features of picaresque writing, as we have previously noted, is that the protagonist must be a pícaro: that is, a morally ambivalent social outsider. The social marginalisation of the picaresque protagonist has been a consistent feature of the genre throughout its history. The pícaro, by definition, survives on the edge of his society; he is excluded from its centre most often by poverty and low-birth, or by some other characteristic beyond his control, and thus begins life on the backfoot. This is an important and innate device of the genre, for the pícaro's social marginalisation is precisely what allows the character to observe and relate the shortcomings of his society. Indeed, Rey Hazas considers the marginalisation of the protagonist to be one of the constituent and driving forces in the cre-

ation of the genre. The privileged position of observer afforded by this kind of marginalisation, Rey Hazas argues, is without a doubt one of the features that made the genre appealing to the first picaresque authors. These initiators of the genre, Rey Hazas continues, many of whom were not usual writers, were driven primarily by an interest in examining and exposing the social and moral state of their society (*Deslindes*, 32). The marginalised status of the protagonist has in this way a close connection to the objectives of the writer, and hence also the satiric orientation of the text.

The same continues to be true for the neopicaresque novels, too. The protagonists of the neopicaresque novels are, like their predecessors, shown to be socially marginalised in significant ways. In the analysis of the previous chapter we have already uncovered some of this sense of marginalisation. This idea is perhaps most evident of all in *Augie March* and *Invisible Man*, both of which are, at least on the surface, concerned with the exploration of minority racial and ethnic identities in relation to a concept of a majority national identity. In this chapter we will begin by comparing how the two American novelists, Bellow and Ellison, employ the picaresque feature of social marginalisation in the development of their satires, before then considering

how analogous ideas are utilised by the other neopicaresque authors. A close comparative reading of these texts shows that in the neopicaresque novel the idea of social marginalisation is often overlaid with a degree of irony. The protagonists' marginalised status is used to explore the creation (or recreation) of individual identity on the one hand, as well as collective constructions of identity or the notion of universal humanity on the other. The picaresque model provides an ideal form for the development and articulation of these ideas.

The Multiply-Marginalised American

Augie March and *Invisible Man* are comparable novels in many respects. One of their most striking points of connection, however, is the similarity with which Bellow and Ellison explore the idea of an American national identity through the experience of a multiply-marginalised protagonist. Augie and Invisible Man both conform to the template of the pícaro as a social outsider, though it is especially notable that both do so in a multitude of different ways. These neopicaresque protagonists are not only marginalised, but are *comprehensively* marginalised. In the case of *Invisible Man*, the unnamed protagonist is a young black man who grows up in the American Deep South during the 1920s,

before later moving to Harlem, New York as the narrative progresses. Invisible Man himself describes his native region as "that 'heart-of-darkness' across the Mason-Dixon line" (579) – a reference to the demarcation line that once separated the historically slave-owning states of the south from the free states of the north. With a single phrase combining this reference with allusion to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Ellison suggests a friction within American society, a cultural gulf between its northern and southern states, and an ongoing sense of racial tension, all of which are intertwined. Invisible Man is presented as marginalised on the basis of his skin colour, but there is more to his marginalisation than race alone.

The first six chapters of *Invisible Man* recount the protagonist's life in the southern United States, where de jure segregation persisted even at the time of Ellison's writing.[102] Invisible Man is marginalised here on the basis of his skin colour, and this marginalisation is enshrined in law: he is disenfranchised in the most literal sense. His later experi-

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102. *Invisible Man*, first published in 1951, predates, for example, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court ruling which precipitated the end of segregation in schools, as well as the *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States* (1964) Supreme Court ruling prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodation.

ence of Harlem, however, is no more enlightened than this 'heart of darkness.' In New York, Invisible Man remains socially and culturally marginalised, no longer simply on the basis of his skin colour, but also on the basis of his regional background, and distinct cultural upbringing. Racist attitudes continue to be commonplace, but the addition of these further points of difference exacerbates the sense of social alienation felt by the protagonist. His exchange with the black waiter at a New York café (177-9), for example, demonstrates the depth of regional cultural difference between those who share the same skin colour.

In a paper entitled the "Southern Elements in Ellison's Invisible Man" Bhoendradatt Tewarie argues that regional difference is at least as significant as racial difference in the novel. "Ellison uses the first six episodic chapters of Invisible Man as an allegorical representation of what is distinctive and significant in the Southern black experience," Tewarie writes, while the novel's later chapters "[...] focus on the Northern experiences of the nameless protagonist-narrator, who is essentially a Southern Negro who has migrated to Harlem" (190). While the racial aspect of Invisible Man's experience is often the focus of critical analyses of the novel, Tewarie takes a different route by emphasising the regional

element specifically. What we must note here, however, is that the two dominant factors behind Invisible Man's social marginalisation – his racial and regional identities – cannot be easily separated out from one another. These marginal identities function together to ensure the protagonist's comprehensive exclusion from the cultural centre of his society. His marginalisation is enacted first legally, and then culturally. The protagonist of Ellison's is a black man from the rural south, navigating a narrative world where power is concentrated amongst white men in the cosmopolitan north. Invisible Man is thus marginalised in multiple ways and on the basis of multiple characteristics. He is, at every stage, an outsider to the cultural centre of his society.

Bellow's protagonist, Augie, is likewise multiply-marginalised. Augie is of Russian-Jewish descent and, as we have seen in the analysis of the preceding chapter, is made acutely aware of ethnic and religious difference from a young age. The traditions, superstitions, meals, and other cultural foundations that Augie recounts of the March family home (including the literature they read, the games they play, and the inflections of their speech) are obvious manifestations of this heritage, and mark his childhood experience as different from the cultural mainstream. Further-

more, though the family live within a community of other Eastern European immigrant families, the March family are marked by religious difference. The Catholic Poles of the surrounding neighbourhood verbally and physically abuse the March boys, singling them out as "Christ-killers" (12). Even within this immigrant community, therefore, Augie's sense of identity remains marginalised.

In addition to this sense of ethnic and religious difference, Augie is presented as socially and culturally marginalised in several other respects, too. It is no coincidence that Bellow's protagonist is a defiantly proud "Chicago-born" (3) Midwesterner. Bellow himself was vocally critical of what he saw as New York-based cultural elitism, and wrote often of his belief that the Midwest was unjustly denigrated by the American East Coast establishment.[103] His Midwestern protagonist proudly represents a region often relegated to the margins of American cultural life. To all of the above we may also add the more common picaresque tropes of an illegitimate birth and impoverished background. The result is, as Brian Way observes, that Augie appears to be "cut off

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103. See for example Bellow's essays "Man Underground" (60-4) and "A Jewish Writer in America" (356-73) in *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About: Collected Nonfiction* (2015).

from social approval in every way" (37):

> He is of Central European immigrant stock, cut off from most other immigrants through being Jewish. He is illegitimate. Worst of all, he is poor and a slum-dweller. Naturally he has no sense of loyalty or connection to this society and awakens to its pressures with a genial readiness to take what comes (ibid).

Augie is thus marginalised on the basis of ethnicity, religion, region, birth, and poverty. His marginalisation is about as comprehensive as it could be, and he explicitly draws attention to this as a determining factor in the course of his life: "all the influences were lined up waiting for me," he laments early on, "I was born, and there they were to form me, which is why I tell you more of them than of myself (43). Augie, like Invisible Man, is thoroughly disconnected from the social and cultural mainstream by factors beyond his control, and feels disempowered in relation to his own life trajectory.

Notable here is the fact that, although these two novels are often discussed in critical analyses as works that explore African American or Jewish American experiences respectively, in neither case does race or ethnicity alone determine the protagonist's social alienation. In both cases, racial and ethnic difference emerges as one aspect within a

wider range of minority or marginalising characteristics, and these cannot be easily separated out from one another. Race and ethnicity are subjects that contribute to, but do not entirely explain, the protagonists' social marginalisation.

This is not, however, to downplay the significance of race or ethnicity within these narratives. Writing with specific reference to the early scholarship on *Invisible Man*, Kun Jong Lee has, with some justification, criticised what he sees as a "tendency to focus [only] on the 'universality' (or the 'Americanness') of the black protagonist's experience" (332). This, Lee suggests, feeds "a fairly consistent inclination – at least in essays that place the novel in a literary-historical frame – to transcend or bleach the protagonist's racial identity" (ibid). Similar criticisms could be levelled against at least some of the scholarship published on *Augie March*, which likewise emphasises Augie's American or human experience at the expense of acknowledging the contexts of the character's background. Lee is right to criticise such simplifications where they encourage the reader to disregard specificities of the texts. Ellison indeed depicts a particular black American experience, and Bellow similarly depicts a particular Jewish American experience. However, it is clear that these racial and ethnic identities are not to be

understood in isolation from all else. It is clear that Ellison does not seek to write *only* of the black American experience, and nor does Bellow seek to write *only* of the Jewish American experience. These notions of identity are inextricably connected to other socio-cultural characteristics, which together ensure the characters' alienation from society. The fact that these protagonists are both multiply and comprehensively marginalised suggests, rather, that the emphasis here lies not on a singular experience, but on the broader theme of alienation. It should come as no surprise, then, that both authors should find recourse to the picaresque model. The pícaro is the novel's prototype of marginalisation: the archetypal social outsider who lives by his wits in a society that fails to offer a true point of connection.

While Lee is critical of the temptation to focus only on the universality or Americanness of Invisible Man's experience, we must note that in addition to the senses of marginalisation described above, both Ellison's and Bellow's novels do stress a strong sense of American identity and universal human experience. Both novels begin with similarly emphatic declarations of identity. "I am an Invisible Man" (3) begins the protagonist of Ellison's novel; "I am an American, Chicago-born" (3) echoes Augie in Bellow's nov-

el, published the following year. Augie's statement is categorical: he is confidently American and proudly Chicagoan, and for him these identities come before any suggestion of ethnic or religious difference. In this respect, it is difficult to avoid seeing in Augie a reflection of his author. Bellow, at least in his younger years, was similarly categorical in identifying primarily as "a Midwesterner and not as a Jew" ("Starting Out in Chicago" 2). He resented the 'otherising' label of "Jewish-writer"[104] applied to him by contemporary critics, and would later suggest that this critical marginalisation elicited the "defiant spirit" ("Jewish Writer" 359) in which he wrote *Augie March* and its famous opening line. The composition of *Augie March*, Bellow stated, was an exercise in reaffirming his American identity, and reclaiming cultural territory:

> To let them (the hostile American WASPs) determine once and for all what the American psyche is, not to challenge their views where those views are narrow, or to accept the

104. "I am often described as a Jewish writer;" Bellow lamented, "in much the same way, one might be called a Samoan astronomer or an Eskimo cellist or a Zulu Gainsborough expert. There is some oddity about it. I am a Jew, and I have written some books. I have tried to fit my soul into the Jewish-writer category, but it does not feel comfortably accommodated there" ("Starting Out in Chicago" 2).

> transmission of European infections and racial poisons, would be disloyal and cowardly (ibid).

In his defiant opening line, Augie appears to voice the frustrations that Bellow himself expresses in his non-fiction writings by asserting an American identity that is independent of ethnic or cultural qualification. In doing so, Bellow's novel firmly dissociates national identity from other characteristics, and suggests the primacy of the former. Augie is an American before he is anything else.

Invisible Man's opening line, though rhetorically more convoluted, indicates a similar basic ethos. His declaration of invisibility is intended ironically: "No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms," Invisible Man continues, "[...] I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (3). The irony of his existence – manifest-yet-unseen – on the one hand prefigures, and on the other is heightened by, the subsequent revelation of his skin colour. John F. Callahan, in his 2001 introduction to the novel, notes the paradox of black invisibility that Ellison's metaphor implies, and makes explicit the satirical comment on contemporary society that lies therein. Nationally, Callahan writes,

> [...] in life as well as in fiction, the 'high visibility' of African Americans rendered them vulnerable as a group and invisible as individuals (x).

It is in the face of a collective and wilful blindness, then, that Invisible Man must stake his own claim to space within the American cultural tradition. "Though invisible," he continues,

> I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me akin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a "thinker-tinker" (7).

The giants of American history he names here as his forerunners (motor magnate Henry Ford, inventor of the modern lightbulb Thomas Edison, and abolitionist and Founding Father Benjamin Franklin) poetically suggest Invisible Man's fundamental ambitions: to illuminate and advance the politics of race in America. His opening declaration of invisibility is thus not an acquiescence to an impassive society, but a wry acknowledgement of its failings and a preamble to a declaration of identity and statement of intent. It leads the reader, through rhetorical process, to the unambiguous conclusion that the protagonist is, like his named predecessors, an American. The opening lines of both Invisible Man and Augie March thus establish the same basic

premise: that although these characters face alienation and marginalisation, they nevertheless remain just as American as those seated at the centre of American social and cultural life. These neopicaresque protagonists may be regarded by others as social outsiders, but they do not relinquish their right to belong.

Repetition and Isomorphism

The experiences recounted by these two protagonists, however, run contrary to their confident opening affirmations of identity. What emerges from the development of their stories is the revelation that these emphatic statements are made preemptively for good reason. The episodes that follow, in both cases, repeatedly depict the same frustrating experience: in both novels, the protagonist struggles to shake off the classifying and marginalising labels projected onto him by other characters. The protagonist's desire to affirm his connection to a larger group identity – either American, or more broadly human – is undermined by the 'otherising' effect of these labels relating to smaller, minority, and marginalised group identities. The principle quest of the narrative for these neopicaresque protagonists relates to their struggle to retain or rediscover a complex personal sense of identity. Both Ellison and Bel-

low utilise the pícaro's social alienation not only to place him in the position of observer and critic of his society, but also to bring into focus fundamental thematic questions about identity and the condition of modern man.

The episodic narrative of *Invisible Man* recounts time and again experiences in which the protagonist's complex human personality is reduced by others to the colour of his skin. This pattern is initiated in the first chapter, in which Invisible Man, having graduated top of his class, is invited to repeat his triumphant convocation speech at a gathering of important local white men. The anticipated celebration of the protagonist's achievements and oratory skill is overshadowed by the 'battle royal' in which he and his black classmates are forced to participate on arrival. The disconnect between Invisible Man's intellectual nature (he is "the smartest boy [...] in Greenwood" [29]) is hinted at throughout the ordeal, and finally brought to the fore in the closing moments of the fight. Distracted by a philosophical train of thought, Invisible Man receives a blow to the head that knocks him out. He is a thinker not a brawler, and far out of his depth in this exercise. To the white organisers of the event, however, the individual personalities of the black students called to perform for them are irrelevant. The stu-

dents are addressed not by name, but through a variety of generic racial slurs – "coon" (22), "black boy" (ibid), "black bastard" (ibid), "Sambo" (26), "nigger" (21, 27, 28) – that deny their personal identities, and denigrate their social status. Stripped of their names, they are primed to fulfil the simplistic racial stereotypes dictated by their hosts. The battle royal forces them to enact a racially-prejudiced vision in which blackness is associated with violence, barbarity, and brutish physical prowess. The fact that the protagonist does not conform to any of these expectations is ignored. He is seen only through the lens of a simplistic racial stereotype.

Tewarie argues that the physical and psychological violence of this scene stands as "an allegorical representation of power relationships in Southern American society" (194), and emphasises "the essentially feudal nature" (191) of race relations in the south specifically. In this first episode, he writes,

> the South is presented as an area of darkness where the Negro can exist only in a state of powerlessness, as an Uncle Tom or Sambo on the periphery of society; where the daily experience is one of psychological terror and perpetual humiliation; and where the Negro is

> denied his individuality and expected to suppress his humanity (195).

While Tewarie's reading of this episode is justified, he fails to note that the narrative's subsequent development in fact shows that this experience of humiliation and dehumanisation is not exclusive to the south, and nor is it perpetuated by a single racial group. Rather, the psychological terror and suppression of humanity seen here is shown to be typical of the protagonist's experiences of American society irrespective of racial or regional context. The episodic picaresque structure of the novel is used to retell the same experience repeatedly. Variations on the setting and perpetrators in each episode show that this experience is ubiquitous.

In these early chapters set in the south, we see that Invisible Man's complex personality is imperceptible not only to the white organisers of the battle royal, but also to Dr. Bledsoe: the principal of the college where Invisible Man studies, and a southern black man like the protagonist himself. Bledsoe's accusation that Invisible Man's supposedly improper personal conduct has besmirched their race (140) reveals his own racially-prejudiced worldview. While the organisers of the battle royal expected the protagonist to be-

have with savagery and brute force based solely on the colour of his skin, Bledsoe expects obedience, respectability, and decorum for the very same reason. These two attitudes parallel one another as two sides of the same coin: in both episodes the protagonist is held accountable to rigid expectations of personality and behaviour on the basis of skin colour alone.

This pattern continues to play out repeatedly in the episodes that follow. Invisible Man's experiences in New York hardly differ from those in the south, and indeed reiterate many of the same tropes present in the battle royal. At Mr. Emerson's office, Invisible Man is once again denied the courtesy of being addressed by name, as he was at the battle royal. The clerk rebuffs his attempt to introduce himself with the cry: "Identity! My God! Who has an identity anymore anyway?" (187). At Liberty Paints, he is again treated as part of a faceless mass. "There're about six of you guys out here already," (197) the office boy announces upon his arrival. And in his involvement with Sybil, he is addressed, in language reminiscent of the slurs used at the battle royal, as "big black bruiser" (522). His attempts to meet Sybil's expectations and fulfil her racial rape fantasy are laced with the same irony as his efforts in the battle roy-

al. His experiences with these white characters in New York repeatedly recall his experience of the battle royal in the south.

Again, however, such prejudicial views are expressed not only by white characters, but by the black characters living in New York as well. The character of Ras the Exhorter, the larger-than-life leader of the black nationalist movement in Harlem, is perhaps the most forthright of all in his prejudice towards the protagonist. “Brothers are the same color,” Ras insists,

> how the hell you call these white men *brother?* [...] We sons of Mama Africa, you done forgot? You black, BLACK! [...] They hate you, mahn. You African. AFRICAN! (370-1).

Ras’ uncompromising demands for racial unity recall Dr. Bledsoe’s similar insistence on a united racial front. Time and again, through each episode and encounter, the same experiences are retold. In different settings, and through interaction with different characters, the protagonist experiences the same kinds of prejudice and abuse, and is regarded in terms of the same racist stereotypes. Nobody, it seems, is able to see beyond the colour of his skin. Each time he fails, in the same ways, to conform to the preconceived expectations of others.

The repetition of these tropes across a range of regional, racial, and ideological contexts, refutes Tewarie's suggestion that the experience of humiliation and denigration at the battle royal is intended as a comment on southern society specifically. In fact, the irony noted by Callahan – that the conspicuity of dark skin renders the man within invisible – builds precipitously as the narrative progresses. The north is no region of light to contrast with the darkness of the south. Invisible Man does not find himself any less marginalised in Harlem, nor does he find there any respite from the psychological terror he had experienced previously. In fact, his experiences of prejudice and discrimination are shown to be unrelenting and ubiquitous. The narrative does not limit itself to a single social context, for Ellison seeks to show that the predicament Invisible Man faces is not unique to one single social setting. The failure of this society to recognise the individual behind the racial identity is shown, instead, to be a problem that affects American society more broadly. The episodic structure of the narrative provides the necessary framework for these repeated experiences to play out over and over again in different contexts. It is through the picaresque structure of the novel that Ellison is able to make this point about the pervasiveness of

the discrimination, marginalisation, and consequent alienation suffered by his protagonist.

Bellow utilises the episodic structure of his own neopicaresque novel to similar effect. Just as in *Invisible Man*, the episodic narrative structure of *Augie March* provides a framework within which the protagonist's experience of social marginalisation and alienation can be depicted as a pandemic social concern. Augie, like Invisible Man, finds himself judged according to others' preconceived ideas of his identity, and struggles to fit these prejudicial expectations. Where Invisible Man is conscious of the visibility of his difference, however, Augie is not. In fact, Augie's awareness of ethnic difference is, at least once he has left home, largely de-emphasised. There are very few instances in the novel in which explicit attention is drawn by others to Augie's Jewish background, and on each occasion Augie regards the label with detached indifference. In the accusations of "Christ-killer" (12) levelled against him in childhood, for example, Augie finds no relevance to his own life and remains thus unmoved:

> All of us, even Georgie, [were] articled, whether we liked it or not, to this mysterious trade. I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being by and large too larky and boisterous to

> take it to heart, and looked at it as needing no more special explanation than the stone-and-bat wars of the street gangs [...] It wasn't in my nature to fatigue myself with worry over being born to this occult work (ibid).

The slur fails to impact Augie emotionally for he has neither an understanding of, nor interest in, the social politics of religious or ethnic difference.

Later, in his first encounter with Mr. Renling, Augie is asked directly about his ethnic background:

> "Jehudim?" said Mr. Renling, still looking neutrally at the buyer.
>
> "Jew?" the buyer said to me. He well knew the answer; he merely passed the question on.
>
> "Yes. I guess."
>
> "Ah," said Renling, this time to me. "Well, out there on the North Shore they don't like Jews. But," he said, brimming frostily with a smile, "who makes them happy? They like hardly anybody. Anyway, they'll probably never know" (129).

Augie's response is characteristically apathetic. It is of course true that Augie is Jewish by birth and ancestry, but beyond this the label seems to have little bearing on his later life. It is notable, in fact, that for a novel widely considered to be a landmark work of Jewish American literature, *Augie March* features very little in the way of obviously

Jewish content. Augie does not, for example, in his extensive adventures, encounter a synagogue or rabbi, nor does he describe any Jewish festival, ceremony, or rite. Without the insight into the culinary and cultural life of his childhood shown in the first few chapters, we would not know, as Mr. Renling suggests, that Augie is Jewish.

It seems strange, then, that W. M. Frohock criticises Augie's characterisation on the basis of him being an essentially Jewish protagonist. Frohock writes that

> a picaresque novel with a Jew for a hero has to be seen to be imagined for it is very hard to remember any kind of novel having a Jewish character at or near the center of the action that does not overflow with moral concern [...] Consequently the concept of a Jewish picaro is hard to accept. Actually there is very little in *The Adventures of Augie March* to make the idea more acceptable (40).

Frohock's criticism of *Augie March* seems to be based primarily on his dissatisfaction with Bellow's own reaction against a contemporary tendency to write highly moral Jewish literary protagonists. Augie is Jewish, but to consider him an essentially and primarily Jewish protagonist is to fail to see the point of his character. For Augie, his Jewish background, something of which we are in no doubt, has

limited and indeed diminishing significance to his life. Augie makes no definitive statement of Jewish identity (in contrast to his strong identification with both the American nation and the city of Chicago), nor does he live a religiously-oriented life. Mark Greif, in *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (2015), notes that Augie's Jewish background is notable for its presentation as "a forgettable fact, not a problem" (191) of the narrative, and argues that in this Bellow is "doing something deliberate and profound" (ibid). This is certain, but quite what Bellow seeks to achieve with this is open to some debate.

One way that we might interpret Bellow's intention is to read *Augie March*, as Bernice Schrank does, as a novel concerned with representing the assimilation of ethnic difference into modern American society. Schrank suggests that during the post-word period "assimilation supplanted the trauma of immigration as the dominant trope of Jewish-American writing" (29). *Augie March,* with its narrative progression from Russian-Jewish childhood to cosmopolitan American adulthood, is seen by Schrank as a prime example of such a shift. Augie's character, she suggests, is a pioneer of this experience: "Jewish by birth, cosmopolitan by choice, Augie eventually escapes the confines of all eth-

nic categorization to best realize his authentic, non-hyphenated self" (30). Bellow himself, in his non-fiction writings, was highly critical of the 'hyphenation' of personal identity. In an essay entitled "Americans Who Are Also Jews" (1976), Bellow disavows the hyphenated descriptors 'Jewish-American' or 'Jewish-Writer,' considering these to oversimplify and exoticise individual identity, and proposes instead the extension of the title, wherein neither characteristic subordinated to the other.[105] Augie's hesitant reaction to the exoticising label of *Jehudim*, and his non-hyphenated declaration of American identity in the novel's opening line, suggest a similar aversion to hyphenated identity labels, and would seem to support Schrank's suggestion that the novel is about the discovery of an "authentic, non-hyphenated" sense of self. Augie is not intended, as Frohock suggests, to be read as a Jewish-picaro or even a Jewish-protagonist, but rather more simply as a protagonist who is also a Jew.

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105. Bellow's dislike of these ethnic labels is well-documented. Though he remained proud of his own ethnic background, he wrote and spoke often of his discomfort at being labelled a 'Jewish writer.' In addition to "Americans Who Are Also Jews" (301-4), see also "Starting out in Chicago" (1-10), both published in *There is Simply Too Much to Think About*: *Collected Non Fiction* (2015).

To read *Augie March* simply as a novel about assimilation, however, is to miss something important. Just as Ellison does in *Invisible Man*, Bellow employs the episodic narrative structure of the picaresque in the development of his novel's satire. Over the course of the narrative, character types, images, and idioms from Augie's youth re-form, re-emerge, and repeat themselves across different contexts. His episodic account is thus tied together by force of repetition, and unified by a symbolic continuity rooted in Augie's childhood. Greif's analysis of the novel notes these repeated tropes:

> Episodes that would furnish the material of one whole novel are each played over at least two or three times by the end of *Augie March*, driven by characters who become variations on fundamental types. The oversized male teacher resurfaces in Einhorn and Mintouchian; the domineering female teacher in Grandma Lausch and Mrs. Renling; and the professing madman in Robey and Bateshaw (192).

Greif argues that the repetitions of these character types are used to show Augie's traversal of a series of "isomorphic communities" that "reproduce themselves in multiple locations" (ibid). As Augie undertakes his adventures, he travels, according to Greif, through a series of "concentric worlds" (191), each one representing a different level of

community. The first level, Greif writes,

> is Jewish, where disparate characters are linked by last name or Yiddishisms or kinship (I think of the book's undertaker, Kinsman, as if, at death, they're all kinsmen under the skin). The second level is Chicagoan and American. Here disparate people can be recognized by their common language, slang, and mores. The third level is *human*, known by "love." We learn of it in the late pages of the book (Greif 196, emphasis in original).

The narrative development, as Greif sees it, depicts Augie's progression from a specific local context, to a broader national context, and finally a universal human context.

The isomorphic patterns that Greif identifies in *Augie March* contribute to the novel's satire in a manner comparable to those repetitions noted in Ellison's novel. These are, once again, made possible by the episodic structure of the picaresque model that Bellow follows. The repetition of tropes, character types, and situations across a range of different socio-cultural contexts is used to indicate that Augie's experiences are not limited to a single, specific social environment, but are, rather, ubiquitous. Augie's episodic journey from one small, specific community into the wider world shows that the same patterns and experiences occur in multiple different contexts. Bellow, like Ellison, sets

his satire not against a single social group, but against American society, and modern society, more broadly.

We must also note that to read *Augie March* as a novel primarily concerned with assimilation, as Schrank suggests, risks missing this point. Augie does not move out of his smaller home community in order to assimilate into American or global society. In fact, there is little sense of Augie's assimilation at all. Rather, Augie's journey from the Jewish immigrant community in Chicago, into wider American society, and finally a grander universal human universal experience affirms Augie's identity as simultaneously Jewish, American, and finally human.

The Complex Human Individual

The affirmation of a complex and multi-faceted sense of identity is, in both *Augie March* and *Invisible Man*, the protagonist's central quest. Augie himself is famously reluctant to be pinned down, and throughout the narrative fiercely rejects any kind of classifying label that threatens to constrain his individual personality. At every stage of his life, Augie eschews classification and rejects codifying titles. So significant is this trait that it is acknowledged and discussed at the diegetic level too. "You've got *opposition* in

you," Einhorn says to Augie at one point, "you don't slide through everything. You just make it look so" (117, emphasis in original). Augie himself recognises the veracity of Einhorn's assessment:

> This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself. I felt it powerfully. That, as he said, I did have opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance and to say "*No*!" which was clear as could be, as definite a feeling as a pang of hunger.
>
> The discoverer of this, who had taken pains to think of me – to *think* of me – I was full of love of him for it. But I was also wearing the discovered attribute, my opposition. I was clothed in it. So I couldn't make any sign of argument or indicate how I felt (ibid, emphasis in original).

The parallel Augie draws between his own contrarian character and that classic picaresque motor, hunger, is notable. Just as hunger functioned in the earliest picaresque novels, so does opposition function here. It is Augie's spirit of opposition that leads him to reject the proposed marriage to Friedl and leave the Coblins; to dabble in criminality and leave Einhorn; to dismiss the offer of adoption and leave the Renlings; and to refuse to tame the eagle Caligula at the expense of his relationship with Thea Finchel. In each instance, a deep-seated aversion to any situation that might

corral his individuality, by tying him down to the role of faithful husband, son, or employee, drives Augie to the next experience of his life. Augie's opposition effectively replaces hunger as the principle narrative motor. It is the protagonist's own defiant spirit that propels him from relationship to relationship, job to job, and episode to episode.

As a result, Augie's journey through society is experienced as a series of attempted strikes against his individuality. Augie is fearful of the labels by which others attempt to classify him, suspecting that they threaten to limit his personal potential. In a paper on "The Absurd Man As Picaro" in Bellow's novels, David D. Galloway links the attraction that other characters feel towards Augie and Augie's own opposition to their advances to the picaresque tradition. "Like so many *picaros*," Galloway writes,

> Augie is singularly "adoptable." Almost everyone he meets wants either to adopt him or at least to plan his life. [...] Augie is perhaps the most adoptable character in American literature since Huckleberry Finn, but it is essential that the opposition in him arise in time to leave him absolute control over his own spirit. His persistent refusal to become involved or to conform to the will of others is in effect positive criticism of things as they are. Even when he falls in love with women who try to "adopt" him, he refuses to be wholly recruited to their views

> of reality. What Augie fears when such overtures are made is the destruction of the self, and to him the contemporary world seems infinitely resourceful in its devices for destroying the self (235-6).

The desires of other characters to adopt Augie manifest in those attempts, noted above, to tie him down to a single role with a simple, classifying label. Augie's opposition to these advances is not mere contrariness but, as Galloway notes, symptomatic of a deeper aversion to any form of categorisation that might constrain or prescribe Augie's individual identity. Augie fears the labels that others attempt to impose upon him, for they threaten to limit his personal potential. His basic predicament, and the quest that he undertakes in the narrative, centres on his struggle to overcome these forces, and to retain the complexity of his own human personality.

In *Augie March*, Bellow mobilises the formal features of the picaresque to conduct an exploration of this idea of complex human individuality. The episodic structure of the narrative and the 'adoptability' of the protagonist combine to create a narrative that shows a world hostile to complex individual expression. Episode by episode, Augie is repeatedly confronted with others' attempts to categorise and

constrain the complexities of his personality. By his opposition, Augie resists. This personal resistance becomes the focus of his journey: the central quest is to retain a complex personal identity. The episodic narrative moves from a specific and clearly-defined socio-cultural centre through a series of gradually wider isomorphic communities in order to emphasise, on the one hand, the ubiquity of this assault on individuality, and on the other to work through the different facets of the protagonist's sense of identity. Augie, to borrow Bellow's turn of phrase, is shown to be an American who is also a Jew who is also a man. In an essay published whilst he was working on the novel,[106] Bellow writes that " 'the life of a man in the United States' is, to begin with, 'the life of a man' " (45). "The task of a novelist," he continues,

> is still, as I see it, to attempt to fix a scale of importance and to rescue from style, languages, abstractions, as well as from the assault and distraction of manifold social facts, an original human value (ibid).

Augie's quest for identity is that of retaining this original human value in spite of the abrasive social forces he encoun-

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106. "The Sharp Edge of Life" (1951). By this point work on *Augie March* was already well underway. An early version of the first chapter was published in *Partisan Review* in 1949 under the title "From the Life of Augie March."

ters. Bellow depicts a society that contrives to deny man of his complex human spirit. This is where the committed poetic of Bellow's novel has its focus.

A very similar thesis underpins the narrative of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. As in *Augie March*, the narrative's gradual unfolding from a specific social situation (in this case, the college campus for southern black males) to a progressively broader one (the cosmopolitan cultural nexus of New York), combined with the repetition of characters and events over the course of an episodic narrative, works to emphasise the ubiquity of Invisible Man's experience, and to guide the reader towards an underlying statement on society and its treatment of the complex human individual. Like Augie, Invisible Man experiences repeated assaults against his individuality, as other characters try to categorise and define him. Each episode, as we have already seen, details a similar encounter of prejudice in which the complex interior personality of the protagonist remains unseen by others. Again, like Augie, Invisible Man's quest revolves around the retention or rediscovery of an original human value in the face of a society hostile to this.

It is not until Invisible Man's first emotive speech for the Brotherhood – an episode almost two thirds of the way

through the novel – that the protagonist's own humanity becomes an apparent and pressing concern. During the speech, Invisible Man's voice drops "to a husky whisper" (346) to emphasise the magnitude, solemnity, and intensely personal value of this realisation. "I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*," Invisible Man reveals,

> "Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human. [...] I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey I have come home ... Home! With your eyes upon me I feel that I've found my true family! My true people! My true country! I am a new citizen of the country of your vision, a native of your fraternal land. I feel that here tonight, in this old arena, the new is being born and the vital old revived. In each of you, in me, in us all. SISTERS! BROTHERS! WE ARE THE TRUE PATRIOTS! THE CITIZENS OF TOMORROW'S WORLD! WE'LL BE DISPOSSESSED NO MORE!" (ibid, emphasis in original).

In this moment, Invisible Man feels the promise of his humanity: a sense of identity that transcends the divisive social taxonomies of race, region, and nation to which he has previously been subject. Surrounded by members of the Brotherhood and their purported doctrine of universal human fellowship, the protagonist gains a sense of that origin-

al human value that had previously been obscured.

The Brotherhood turns out to be a sham and its doctrines deceitful, but the seeds of Invisible Man's great realisation have already been sown. "What had I meant by saying that I had become "more human"?" he later wonders,

> [...] Perhaps it was something Woodridge had said in the literature class back at college. I could see him vividly, half-drunk on words and full of contempt and exaltation, pacing before the blackboard chalked with quotations from Joyce and Yeats and Sean O'Casey; thin, nervous, neat, pacing as though he walked a high wire of meaning upon which no one of us would ever dare venture. I could hear him: "Stephen's problem, like ours, was not actually one of creating the uncreated conscience of his race, but of creating the *uncreated features of his face*. Our task is that of making ourselves individuals. The conscience of a race is the gift of its individuals who see, evaluate, record ... We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great astonishment we will have created something far more important: We will have created a culture [...]" (354, emphasis in original).

Through allusion to James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (the "Stephen" to whom the imagined voice of Woodridge refers is the protagonist of Joyce's novel: Stephen Dedalus), and in the explicit description of the task of lit-

erary analysis, Ellison directs his reader's interpretation. The characters mentioned take on symbolic significance: the protagonist Stephen represents our own protagonist Invisible Man, while Woodridge as analyst represents us, the reader. Just as Woodridge understands that Stephen's quest is not, in the end, about "creating the uncreated conscience of his race," but about something "far more important," so too are we to understand that Invisible Man's quest is, similarly, not about the representation of racial consciousness, but concerns, rather, the discovery of a more fundamental human culture. Invisible Man, Ellison tells us, does not speak as a racial representative, but as a fully complex individual on the brink of discovering his own personhood. "For the first time, lying there in the dark," Invisible Man concludes hopefully, "I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race. It was no dream, the possibility existed" (355).

Several more episodes must play out before Invisible Man begins to follow through on this possibility, but the central quest of the protagonist and the central thrust of the novel's satire have both been clearly established. Ellison creates in Invisible Man a protagonist who challenges the expectations (of other characters and of readers) that a

member of a racial minority must somehow represent that group, and affirms instead the character's complex, individual humanity. The committed poetic of his novel seeks to expose the social forces that deny or disregard this basic truth. In an essay written in the same period that he began work on *Invisible Man,* "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity",[107] Ellison criticised what he saw as the lack of humanity afforded to black American characters in the nation's historic works of literature. The greats of the American literary canon, Ellison lamented,

> seldom conceive Negro characters possessing the full, complex ambiguity of the human. [...] Seldom is he drawn as that sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality, which great literary art has projected as the image of man (82).

In his 1981 author's introduction to *Invisible Man*, Ellison reiterates this goal specifically in relation to the novel. "My

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107. Ralph Ellison's "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" was first published in 1953 with an author's note dating the essay's composition to 1946. *Invisible Man* was already underway at this point. The episode of the 'Battle Royal' was published the following year in 1947, before the publication of the complete novel in 1952. The essay was reprinted in *Shadow and Act* in 1964, as well as in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* published in 2003, with an introduction by Saul Bellow. The page reference refers to the latter edition.

task," he writes, "was one of revealing the human universals hidden within the plight of one who was both black and American [...] to reveal the human complexity which stereotypes are intended to conceal" (xl). Ellison utilises the picaresque model – with its complex, ambiguous, and marginalised protagonist, its episodic narrative, and committed poetic – to explore these ideas. Ellison's neo-pícaro discovers and exposes the racial prejudices of his society, develops an increasingly complex self-awareness that frees the character from stereotypes or literary convention, and affirms his underlying individual humanity.

Critics have tended to emphasise the symbolic intentions of this commentary, reading the protagonist as symbol of modern man and humanity itself. Richard Pearce, in a paper entitled "The Walker: Modern American Hero" (1964), for example, extrapolates from Invisible Man's narrative account that

> *no one*, white or black, sees him as he really is, and that this is the condition of the negro in America – *indeed of man in the modern world* (763, emphasis added).

Albert Murray, in his landmark essay collection *The Omni-Americans* (1970), summarises Ellison's novel similarly, as

> a prototypical story about being not only a twentieth-century American *but also a twentieth-century man*, the Negro's obvious predicament symbolizing *everybody's essential predicament* (167, emphasis added).

While there is certainly some truth to these broad-stroke interpretations, Ellison's novel seems to first and foremost on a more simple, prosaic truth. Before guiding his reader to the conclusion that the protagonist *symbolises* modern man, Ellison makes the more basic point that he *is* a modern man. To borrow Bellow's maxim, the life of a modern American man, in this case the life of a black American man, is to begin with the life of a man. Through the depiction of his protagonist's blossoming self-awareness Ellison frees the image of the black American from preconceived stereotypes, exposes the racial prejudices of American literature and society, and affirms his character's complex individual humanity. Invisible Man, we are shown, is a complicated, Daedalian (as we are reminded with the reference to Joyce) individual. Invisible Man's story may have something to say about the condition of modern man more broadly, but its focus remains on the complex individuality of the protagonist. Indeed, it is this which makes him relatable. Only once Invisible Man is understood as a fully complex

character can the novel's concluding proposition of universality demand an affirmative response: "It is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (581).

A comparative reading of *Augie March* and *Invisible Man* makes clear that the protagonists, their dilemmas, and the central quests that they undertake bear significant similarities. Both Augie and Invisible Man are socially marginalised, unable to conform to the expectation imposed upon them by others, and unwilling to submit to the impersonal prescriptions of their societies. Each must similarly undertake the task of rediscovering, and reasserting a complex personal identity before a society incapable of perceiving complexity. Bellow and Ellison similarly utilise the formal features of the picaresque genre to achieve these similar explorations of identity in the context of modern America. In both novels, the social marginalisation of the pícaro, his complicated characterisation, and the episodic narrative structure, are all used in tandem to construct a satirical commentary on society's treatment of man as an individual.

Storytelling and Narrative Self-Construction

The central quest for identity is finally realised in each of the novels by the very telling of the protagonists' stories. In both cases, the act of storytelling becomes the final heroic act of the protagonist: the neo-pícaros of these novels affirm their own unique identities, and rescue their own humanity from abstraction, by creating the autobiographical narrative account that we find before us. The text itself is the product of their quest, and the evidence of their success. In this aspect we see again how Bellow and Ellison mobilise another formal feature of picaresque writing – in this case the autobiographical form and conspicuous narrative voice characteristic of the picaresque genre – to examine the central theme of identity and the individual in contemporary society. The autobiographical nature of the account allows the protagonist to not only affirm, but to actively create or construct his own personal sense of identity to contrast the group identity labels forced upon him. Accordingly, both novels feature highly distinctive and unique narrative voices.

The voice of Invisible Man is unique for its musical inflections and jazz-inspired underpinnings. The narrative it-

self is framed by allusions to jazz music and philosophy. The epilogue and prologue are noticeably different in style and tone to the main narrative account. In these sections, the protagonist's thoughts and personality take precedence over narrative events, hence their content is similarly abstract and philosophical. Additionally, these opening and closing sections of the novel are further unified by the repetition of references to jazz music in both. Louis Armstrong, specifically, is named in both parts as a role model of the protagonist and a formative influence on his final worldview.

For Invisible Man, listening to jazz is not simply a recreational passtime, but a profound emotional experience. In the prologue he describes a desire to "*feel*" (8, emphasis in original) the music resonate throughout his body, and the song that he wants to feel most of all, played simultaneously on five radio-phonographs no less, is Armstrong's cover of the 1929 Fats Waller jazz standard "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue." The refrain quoted in the prologue ("Louis Armstrong innocently asking, What did I do / To be so black / And blue?" [12]) is rich with meaning. Its lyrics combine impersonal racial prejudice (the singer questioning the significance of the black colour of his skin) with universal, human experiences of suffering, both physical

and emotional (the “black and blue” of bruising, and the “blue” feeling of despondency). Furthermore, the quotation of the refrain invites continuation into the song’s highly relevant second verse, which describes a racialised experience of social injustice and individual suffering.[108] The repeated references to this song, and these lines in particular, serve to emphasise that key point of the novel’s satire: that behind the protagonist’s skin colour stands the unseen individual.

Over and above the overt message of the song’s lyrics, however, it is the underlying philosophy of the music – the implications of its jazz roots and blues sentiment – that the protagonist highlights as most significant. Invisible Man finds in the syncopated rhythms of jazz music itself an understanding of his own social situation, and in its improvisational breaks the prospect of creative self-realisation. “Social invisibility,” he theorises,

> gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on the beat. Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you

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108. Following the refrain, Louis Armstrong’s version of the song continues: “I’m white inside but that don’t help my case / ‘Cause I can’t hide what is in my face / How will it end? Ain’t got a friend / My only sin is in my skin / Oh what did I do / To be so black and blue?”

> are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music (8).

In his analysis of the novel, Steve Pinkerton focuses on this passage and emphasises the connections it makes between race, jazz, and self-expression. On the above passage, Pinkerton writes that

> this famous evocation of African American identity as a time-bending, jazz shaped invisibility relies on the figure of Louis Armstrong, who functions here and throughout Ellison's writings as a heroic paragon of African American agency and artistry. The 'breaks' into which the narrator slips are those moments in a jazz performance when the accompaniment recedes entirely, or nearly, so that it falls to the solo performer both to keep the beat and to transform it, to mark time and to transcend it (187).

Pinkerton quotes Albert Murray's[109] definition of the jazz 'break' to emphasise its referential significance. The break, Murray asserts, is

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109. A critic of both jazz and literature, Albert Murray's close friendship with Ellison is well-documented. Their correspondence is published in *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray* (2001), which reveals that the close working relationship between Ellison and Murray began while the former was working on *Invisible Man*.

> the moment of truth. It is on the break that you "do your thing." The moment of greatest jeopardy is your moment of greatest opportunity. This is the heroic moment... It is when you establish your identity; it is when you write your signature on the epidermis of actuality. This is how you come to terms with the void (Murray qtd. in Pinkerton 187).

The composition of the narrative account takes place, at the diegetic level, in just such a break. Invisible Man composes his account as he sits alone in his underground retreat, temporarily isolated from wider society, and sheltered from its acoustic intrusions. It is here, in this constructed 'break' from society, that Invisible Man finds the space and quietude to create his autobiography, and thereby establish his identity: to inscribe his name, in Murray's terms, "on the epidermis of actuality". The telling of his life story is, in essence, an extended riff on identity, a solo improvisation through which he finally affirms his own personhood.

The voice with which Invisible Man speaks throughout is imbued with this jazz influence. Readers of the novel are often struck by the its idiosyncratic narrative style, and critics have long highlighted its unique style. Pearce, for example, notes the novel's distinctive "new voice" (763), while Murray describes the narrative voice in specifically musical

terms as “par excellence the literary extension of the blues” (qtd. in Callahan, xv). The novel reads, he continues,

> as if Ellison had taken an everyday twelve bar blues tune (by a man from down South sitting in a manhole up North in New York singing and signifying about how he got there) and scored it for a full orchestra (ibid).

Callahan likewise alludes to the narrative’s musical underpinnings when he describes its characters as “spellbinding soloists” whose voices lead the reader through “a picaresque American labyrinth” (xviii). All of these impressions derive from a general sense that the narrative voice expresses the powerful improvisational spirit and creativity of the jazz soloist. Ellison’s prose draws on jazz philosophy, combining conceptual motifs (seen in the precise visual vignettes of the battle royal, Tod Clifton’s flight from the police, or the image of Harlem in flames, for example) with an acoustic aesthetic (evident in the lively and distinct voices of reported speech: Sybil, Ras, or Jim Trueblood), and a proclivity for spontaneous free-form expression (the narrator’s characteristic philosophical abstractions on a theme: the symbolism of the yam, the ideology of Bledsoe’s college, or the nature of man). Through this unique jazz-inspired narrative voice, and its application to the task of

storytelling, the source of Invisible Man's marginalisation is transformed to his advantage. His racial identity is no longer an obstacle to individuality, but connects him instead to a cultural tradition that celebrates individual self-expression.

The act of telling his own story is Invisible Man's heroic moment. Through the recounting of the narrative, and the expression of his own voice, the protagonist is liberated from the overbearing pressures of his society, and able to reclaim his own, human complexity. Significantly, however, this self-creation does not coming from nowhere. Invisible Man's experiences, encountered on his journey through contemporary society, are precisely what fire up his ability to recognise and reclaim this sense of self. His unique narrative voice is not entirely his own either, but constructed through reference to Louis Armstrong and the jazz traditions from which his music emerges. As in jazz, Invisible Man's self-creation is achieved by the reworking familiar themes even as fresh ideas are explored – just as the jazz soloist re-works standards with his own inspiration. What we in fact find at the end of this quest for identity is that the protagonist is unable to achieve his heroic moment alone. His construction of identity through the articulation of his own story

is, in a sense, a collaborative effort. The protagonist is unable to recreate himself without reference to the social unreality he has disavowed. This is the central poetic of Ellison's satire.

Bellow's *Augie March* has been similarly noted for its distinctive narrative voice. Writing shortly after the novel's publication, Norman Podhoretz describes the "new prose style" of *Augie March* as "the first attempt in many years to experiment with the language in fiction" (15). Decades later, critics continue to emphasise the novel's innovative style of narration. "Not until Bellow published *Augie Marc*h in '53," writes Barbara Probst Solomon, "[...] did the voice of the American novel change" (96). Augie's unique voice is exuberant and bombastic, blending coarse quotidian speech, with rhapsodic thematic detours, and relentless, often ambiguous, references to classic literature and classical learning. Even at relatively inconsequential moments of the narrative, Augie's voice is characteristically grandiloquent. Describing, for example, Cumberland (Stella's former lover, a minor character in the novel's closing pages) Augie says that he is:

> built up to be about like Jupiter-Ammon, with an eye like that new telescope out at the Mount Palomar observatory, about as wicked as

> Tiberius, a czar and mastermind. To tell the truth, I'm good and tired of all these big personalities, destiny molders, and heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big-wheels and imposers-upon, absolutists. After Bateshaw clobbered me I took an oath of unsusceptibility. But this oath is probably a mice-and-men matter, for here the specter of one of this breed was over me. Brother! You never are through, you just think you are! (524)

In just a few sentences, Augie breezes through references to the mythologies of ancient Egypt (Ammon) and Rome (Jupiter); to the politics of the first, fifteenth, and twentieth centuries (Tiberius, Machiavelli, and the 'czars' of the Roosevelt administration, respectively); to classic literature (the "mice-and-men matter" evoking both John Steinbeck and Robert Burns) and to cutting-edge advances in science and technology (the Hale telescope at Mount Palomar, and the work of nuclear chemists ["heavy-water brains"] who paved the way for the development of the atom bomb). This eclectic barrage of erudite allusions is interwoven with colloquial vocabulary and oral expressions to produce Augie's own, unique idiom: a peculiar mix of the demotic and the donnish.

Augie's voice represents a defiant rejection of all of the social pressures to conform that he has experienced over

the course of his adventures and works, as in *Invisible Man*, to reclaim a sense of personal identity, and to affirm the protagonist's existence as a complex human individual. Jules Chametzky notes that there is authority, assurance, and precision in Augie's narrative voice (177). This, observes Chametzky, derives from its calculated balance of high and low styles:

> one resource that saves [the narration] from pretension, mere rhetoric, or sentimentality, is Bellow's sure use of the ironic, deflating energy of the vernacular [...] The combination of learning and observation, of high style and vernacular, by its wits and delicate irony convinces us that here is an author *in control*. The voice of this "I" is free of inhibitions, his mind free of preconceptions, it is the voice of a narrator at ease with himself (ibid, emphasis in original).

The voice with which Augie recounts his tale comes through, certainly at one level, as the expression of a confidence and fortitude hard-won by life experience. Augie's internal opposition is, in the end, not defeated but transformed into self-acceptance and resolute faith in his own, complex identity. Augie suppresses neither his natural urban vernacular nor his cultivated urbane scholarliness, for he refuses to conform to a single, simple category. Instead, he

develops a unique voice characterised by a bold kind of heteroglossia. Augie's sense of identity, articulated through this distinctive voice, suggests an identity constructed through the negotiation and re-appropriation of available discourses. As in Ellison's novel, the act of narration itself is the defiant and heroic articulation of an individual personality, but this is achieved only through participation in, and with reference to, that social reality that the narrative decries as false.

For a number of critics, *Augie March* is remarkable for its pioneering elevation of the voice of the marginalised protagonist to the level of American literary hero. Barbara Probst Solomon, for example, praises the manner in which Bellow takes the voice of a "marginal but buoyant American Jewish protagonist" and makes it "*the* American fictional voice" (97, emphasis added). Hitchens similarly notes the novel's radical depiction of the voice of a Jewish Midwesterner as "an indissoluble and inseparable element in the great American tongue" (ix). For Bellow, "the ancient idea of the individual and the many, the single Self in the midst of the mass or species" ("American Fiction" 61) was the fundamental problematic of contemporary literature. The task of the modern American protagonist was, as Bellow saw it,

to “bring under cultivation [...] a barren emptiness within himself” (60). Augie’s meandering journey is just such a quest, and leads him, in the end, to self-understanding and a newfound vocal confidence. Through the voice of Augie, Bellow rescues the individual from the abstract national consciousness. He exposes the superficiality of social taxonomies (whether national or ethnic), and affirms the indomitable complex spirit of modern man, and of humanity. At the same time, however, the satire suggests that Augie does not achieve this alone: that his identity is constructed only with reference to his social environment.

Both Ellison and Bellow similarly utilise the formal features of the picaresque genre to make this point. In both novels, the author presents a multiply-marginalised protagonist, whose episodic journey of encounters exposes him to the same social pressures in different social contexts. Both narrative worlds present a society in which only the exterior qualities of man are seen, while his interior life is neglected or denied. In both cases, as well, the narrative act – the process of storytelling by which the autobiographical account is produced – becomes the final heroic act of the protagonist’s quest for identity. Through the construction of a distinctive narrative voice, these authors highlight

the autobiographical presentation of the text, and suggest that the individual protagonist is able to achieve selfhood through articulation. Especially notable, however, is the fact that this voice is distinctive but not singular. Both protagonists negotiate the discourses available to them in order to construct an individual sense of self that is, nevertheless, still reliant on that social world that they have come to distrust. The satire of these novels suggests that the individual is only able to exist in relation to the collective. A comparative analysis of the formal features of these novels, and the ways in which these contribute to their central themes, makes this clear to see. As we shall see, these same formal features are employed in analogous ways in each of the neopicaresque novels, though their contexts may vary.

Analogous Concerns across the Neopicaresque

Just as Ellison and Bellow depict a socially-marginalised protagonist experiencing, episode by episode, a ubiquitous pressure to conform to others' expectations of a particular demographic identity, so too do the other neopicaresque protagonists face similar challenges, and undertake a similar quest for identity. In each instance, as we have seen in the American novels thus far, this quest is finally realised in the heroic act of narration. The autobio-

graphical nature of picaresque writing allows the text itself to become the evidence of this final act of heroism. The neopicaresque novels thus often feature distinctive narrative voices, or some other unique performance of self-creation, to demonstrate the neo-pícaro's resistance to social pressure to conform, and his affirmation of a unique, complex, and human personality.

As we already noted in the previous chapter, Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* shows the protagonist's struggle to resist the expectations and social values of his parents' generation, and to find his own way in the world. Billy's habitual telling of lies and his frequent retreat into the imaginary world of Ambrosia constitute a rejection of his present social reality and a desperate (if ultimately futile) attempt to forge his own path in a world of well-established roads. He is, in spite of his youth, weary of his uninspiring job, and stifled by pressures to conform to a sense of propriety and normalcy espoused by his family. Though the narrative spans only a single day in Billy's life, its short episodes show the range of contexts in which he faces pressure to conform. The breakfast table episode shows the pressures he faces at home, the episode at Shadrack and Duxbury's shows the pressures he faces at work, and his romantic

misadventures show the pressures he faces in his personal life. Billy's dishonest, slothful, and adulterous behaviours are to be seen as his resistance to the prescribed labels of dutiful son, industrious worker, and faithful lover that Billy, much like Augie, rejects.

Contrasting this outer world of social pressure to conform is Billy's rich internal fantasy life. Billy daydreams about exchanging the everyday drudgery of his present life in parochial Stradhoughton for the promise-filled unknown of London, and dreams all sorts of alternative realities and fictions that allow him a temporary mental escape. In his 2010 introduction to the novel, Blake Morrison suggests that Billy's lies and fantasies can be separated into two categories. Morrison proposes that

> Billy's private fantasies are harmless fun; they help make his life more interesting. But the lies Billy tells to impress his girlfriends are more troubling and show how confused he is about what he wants (vii).

While Blake proposes that a distinction can be drawn between the lies Billy tells and the fantasies he imagines, it is important to recognise that there is a great consistency across all of Billy's untruths. Separately and collectively, Billy's habitual falsehoods indicate his distrust of his social

reality, and rejection of the constraints pressed upon him. Billy's lies and fantasies equally offer resistance and escape from a society that he fears threatens his individual way of doing things.

Billy's imaginative creation of Ambrosia suggests a fundamental dissonance between his external social reality and his internal ambitions. Ambrosia represents Billy's creative potential, and simultaneously provides a location within which that creative spirit can be realised. As a personal space, Ambrosia is analogous to Invisible Man's underground sanctuary: it is the 'break' from society that he falls back into, the quiet space where he is able to examine himself honestly, free from the external pressures and distractions of the outer world. It is here that Billy is able to foster the creative impulse that drives him to narrate the events of this day.

In a paper on "The Different Faces of Parody in *Billy Liar*" (2015), Anna Śliwińska connects Billy's fantasy life to the philosophy of the generation of Angry Young Men.[110]

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110. The 'Angry Young Men' to which Śliwińska refers are those writers of the postwar, and especially 1950s, whose works are defined by "scorn and disaffection with the established sociopolitical order" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). John Osborne's stage play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is often credited as the clearest exponent of the

The "unusual" attitudes of this postwar generation, Śliwińska suggests, are to be understood as:

> a reaction to the omnipresent artificiality and uniformity of reality. Hence, Billy's escapes into the world of his imagination [are] a way of detaching himself from the everyday patterns of family life that so annoyed the post-war generation (83).

Billy's fantasy life of Ambrosia indeed indicates precisely this rejection of the expectations and values of the previous generation, but Śliwińska goes further to suggest that through Billy's creative mythomania "we discover the truth about a man who is unable to live a real life" (82). To interpret the novel in this way, however, is to overlook the thrust of its satire. Waterhouse does not condemn his protagonist for wishing to do things differently. To the contrary, the episodes we witness shine a critical light on those family members, employers, and girlfriends that seek to corral and constrain Billy's free and creative spirit. The emphasis of the novel's satire is, rather, the reversal of Śliwińska's proposal. Through Billy's experiences of society, his inability to con-

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generation.

form, and alienation from reality, we discover the truth about a society unable to accommodate the complex creative personality of man.

A similar irreverence for traditional values and expectations is essential to the narrative of Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, too. Alex's criminality, like Billy's insubordination, indicates a rejection of the patterns of life espoused by his parents' generation, and an aggressive refusal to conform to their ideas of normalcy and respectability. Alex is contemptuous of both family and civic life. He derides the government mandate of total employment ("everybody not a child nor with child nor ill [must] go out rabbiting [ie. working]" [42]), and refuses to participate in the "corrective schooling" (44) he has already been prescribed. Instead, Alex engages in his drug-fuelled sprees of ultra-violence as an apparently angst-driven protest against those social expectations championed by his family and the state.

This rebellion is ultimately counter-productive, however. Alex's crimes lead not to his liberation but to his incarceration. The episodes that follow then depict society's attempt to bring Alex under control, to force his conformity by eradicating his personal capacity for free will. This is what we see in the application of the Ludovico treatment and its later

consequences. Alex, much like Augie and Invisible Man, eventually overcomes this attack on his individuality through the act of narration, and more specifically the development of a distinctive and unique narrative voice. Burgess achieves this sense of Alex's individuality by developing a voice unlike any other seen in literature before. Burgess creates the fictional teenage patois Nadsat to give his protagonist-narrator a distinctive narrative voice, thereby emphasising his individuality as a character in literary history, and drawing attention to the narrative aspect of the pseudo-autobiography. From the reader's point of view, this vernacular belongs entirely to Alex. Nadsat is the argot of his generation, also used and understood by Alex's peers in the early chapters, but for the reader it is a unique idiom, unprecedented and unparalleled in literary fiction. At the diegetic level, it is unintelligible to adults and obsolete by the time Alex is released from prison. It belongs, hence, to a unique moment of Alex's youth, and represents his character at a specific point in time.

While critics have long emphasised the generational divide highlighted by Alex's use of Nadsat, such an interpretation can be probed yet further to reveal the more fundamental divisions that underpin the narrative world. For

Gorman L. Beauchamp, Nadsat illustrates “the alienation of the young from the old,” and thereby underscores the generally “fragmented, uncohesive nature” (475, note 6) of Alex’s society. Alex’s idiom, Beauchamp further suggests, stands defiantly as “one unofficial discourse in an increasingly officialized society” (ibid). Indeed, Alex’s very use of the language already, in and of itself, demonstrates his irreverence for standardisation of all kinds (of language, as much as of man), and reveals an internal desire to enact change.

Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack’s analysis of Alex’s idiom suggests that there are specific linguistic features that might further indicate the sense of a conflict between social reality and the internal, personal condition of man. Davis and Womack suggest, for example, that Alex’s repeated use of the indefinite filler word “like” indicates his struggle to unify internal emotions with external experiences. Nadsat, they write,

> despite its braggadocio succeeds rather ironically in demonstrating Alex’s tremendous feelings of insecurity, his lack of sophistication, and his naïveté (25).

Alex’s idiom is unique, and provides the means of expression he requires to construct and assert a unique sense of

self. Again, the autobiographical form of picaresque writing provides the ideal structure for the realisation of the protagonist's quest for an individual, human identity. The occasional imprecision of Alex's expressions, however, indicate a less optimistic and less confident voice than those we have seen in Ellison's and Bellow's novels. The central quest of the novel, and the direction of its satire remains the same: here again is a society unable to accommodate man in his full complexity.

Again, Alex does not achieve the realisation of his quest for identity in isolation. The language that Alex uses to articulate his sense of self, that distinctive narrative voice with which his story is told, is constructed by negotiating between available discourses. The Nadsat that Alex uses to communicate his story is almost entirely derivative. Davis and Womack's study notes that Alex is "unable to grasp" how the cultural systems of his social reality influence and impinge upon his capacity for free choice (27). His use of Nadsat is, at the diegetic level, a sign of his conformity to a particular youth sub-culture. At the linguistic level, it is heavily influenced by a range of different cultural forces: predominantly Russian, but also Romani, and the traditions of British rhyming slang. Indeed, this is a point emphasised

in the text, when one of the psychologists treating Alex comments on his unusual speech patterns, and notes that he uses "odd bits of rhyming slang. A bit of gipsy talk, too [though] most of the roots are Slav." Alex's sense of identity, like those of the other neo-pícaros we have seen thus far, is founded upon a particular heteroglossia, and indicates a reliance upon existing cultural discourses.

Similar patterns are to be found in the German novels, though these protagonists are yet more extreme in their opposition to social conventions and categories. The protagonists of both *Felix Krull* and *Die Blechtrommel* each exhibit a firm resistance to even the most basic kinds of social labels. Mann's protagonist Felix, for one, is a thoroughly elusive character, able not only to slide between different social roles with ease, but capable of vacillating between apparently immutable characteristics. "Er hat einen Kostümkopf," (30) declares Schimmelpreester, which Felix interprets as meaning:

> daß alles mir zu Gesichte stünde, jede Verkleidung sich gut und natürlich an mir ausnähme [...] jedesmal schien es, und auch der Spiegel versicherte mich dessen, als ob ich gerade für diesen Aufzug recht eigentlich bestimmt und geboren sei; jedesmal gab ich, nach dem Urteile aller, ein vortreffliches Beispiel

> der Menschenart ab, die ich eben vertrat; ja mein Pate wies darauf hin, daß mein Gesicht mit Hilfe von Tracht und Perücke sich nicht nur den Ständen und Himmelsstrichen, sondern auch den Zeitaltern anzupassen scheine (30-1).[111]

Felix is the ultimate everyman, appearing to fit not only every profession but also every epoch. As the narrative develops this mutability goes yet further to include both gender and sexuality. At one point, Felix describes himself as androgynous, and indicates his bisexuality:

> Die Frau bemerkt nur den «Herrn» – und ich war keiner. Ganz anders nun aber verhält es sich mit gewissen abseits wandelnden Herren, Schwärmern, welche nicht die Frau suchen, aber auch nicht den Mann, sondern etwas Wunderbares dazwischen. Und das Wunderbare war ich (128-9).[112]

As that 'something wonderful in between' Felix challenges

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111. ""He's a natural costume boy" [Schimmelpreester] would say, meaning that everything became me, and that in each disguise I assumed I looked better and more natural than in the last [...] whatever the costume, the mirror assured me that I was born to wear it, and my audience declared that I looked to the life exactly the person whom I aimed to represent. My godfather assured me that with the aid of a costume and wig I seemed able not only able to put on whatever social rank or personal characteristics I chose, but could actually adapt myself to any given period or century" (26).

112. "Women only notice "gentlemen" – and I was not one. Matters stood otherwise with certain vagrant gentlemen, eccentrics who were seeking neither a woman nor a man, but some extraordinary being in between. And I was that extraordinary being" (118).

the fundamental binary distinction between male and female. Similarly, the implication of sexual encounters with men as well as women suggests that he is neither simply heterosexual nor simply homosexual. In respect of both gender and sexuality, Felix refutes definitive categories and claims instead an ambiguous and intentionally under-defined middle ground. Felix refuses to conform to any type of demographic distinction.

While Ernest Schonfield's analysis suggests that this ambiguity serves to challenge and disrupt the traditional binary models of gender and sexuality,[113] Felix's comprehensive opposition to all forms of definition seems to indicate a more broadly subversive spirit. Felix rejects *all* social categories – not only gender and sexuality, but also profession, and even epoch – and embraces instead the liberating ideal of endless possibilities. His narrative account is a defiant celebration of the potential to escape the confines of

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113. Though it may be tempting to read this aspect of Felix's character in light of modern gender theory, such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), such an approach is not really helpful here. As Schonfield notes, central to Butler's theory is the proposition that coercion and oppression are involved in the construction of gendered identities. Mann's text, however, depicts no such coercive force: Felix is free to shift and adapt his identity to suit his own needs. For a brief discussion of *Felix Krull* and *Gender Trouble* see: Schonfield's *Art and its Uses in Thomas Mann* (40).

social pressure to conform to set categories and expectations, and to realise instead an infinite range of personal ambitions. In his rejection of all kinds of categorisation, Felix celebrates the complexity of human potential, and suggests an ability to transcend the limiting constraints of that social (un)reality.

Once again, Mann employs the formal features of the picaresque model to construct this message. Felix, like the other neo-pícaros, is socially-marginalised from a young age (following the suicide of his father), and alienated from society by his unwillingness to conform to a clear role or category. Felix finally succeeds in his own quest for identity by, once again, constructing this sense of identity himself, through the articulation of his own narrative account. Felix's narration is distinctive for its self-indulgent, flowery, over-the-top verbosity. This style is constructed with apparent reference to Goethe's *Dichtung and Wahrheit* (1846), an intertextual reference that further suggests Felix's conceit. In true picaresque style, and in keeping with his own confidence man character, Felix constructs his own identity, but is able to achieve this only with reference to existing traditions.

The protagonist of *Die Blechtrommel*, Oskar, similarly

resists the most basic kinds of social categories, and similarly asserts his own identity through the act of storytelling. Professing to be a fully mature adult in the body of a small child, Oskar challenges the fundamental physical and psychological distinctions of adulthood and childhood. He categorically denies ever having experienced the normal processes of human development. “Ich gehörte zu den hellhörigen Säuglingen,” he asserts, “deren geistige Entwicklung schon bei der Geburt abgeschlossen ist und sich fortan nur noch bestätigen muß” (52).[114] While his intellect requires no further maturation, his physical development ceases at the age of three. The thirty-year-old Oskar who narrates thus claims to exist in the body of a three-year-old child. Notably, Oskar states that his failure to grow was a conscious decision, made specifically in order to evade the future categories of adult life:

> Da sagte, da entschloß ich mich, da beschloß ich, auf keinen Fall Politiker und schon gar nicht Kolonialwarenhändler zu werden, vielmehr einen Punkt zu machen, so zu verbleiben – und ich blieb so, hielt mich in dieser Größe, in dieser Ausstattung viele Jahre lang. [...] Ich blieb der

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114. “I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is complete at birth and thereafter simply confirmed” (35).

> Dreijährige, der Gnom, der Däumling, der nicht aufzustockende Dreikäsehoch blieb ich, um Unterscheidungen wie kleiner und großer Katechismus enthoben zu sein (70-1).[115]

Oskar sees peril in conforming to the social pressures and expectations of adulthood. His decision to cease physical development is depicted as a conscious and radical rejection of the future career paths he sees himself being forced into: following in Matzerath's footsteps as a grocer or politician. Like Billy and Alex, Oskar rejects the precepts of his parents' generation, and seeks to evade the categorising forces of the adult world. Like Felix, he rejects fundamental demographic distinctions. And like Augie and Invisible Man, he refuses to be corralled by others' expectations.

Again, Grass develops a highly distinctive narrative voice for his protagonist, and it is through this unique narrative account that Oskar seeks to assert his own sense of identity. Oskar's narration rejects conventional grammar, frequently shifting between the first and third person voices,

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115. "There and then I decided, there I declared, there I decreed, that I would never be a politician and most certainly not a grocer, that I would make a point instead of remaining as I was – and so I did, remained that size, kept that attire, for years to come. [...] I remained the three-year-old, the gnome, Tom Thumb, stayed the half-pint that's never topped up, all to bypass distinctions like big and little catechisms" (48-9).

and features long, complex, digressionary sentences. Like Ellison, Bellow, and Burgess, Grass creates a narrative voice unlike any that has come before: one that is unique to and instantly recognisable as that of Oskar. The effect of this is to emphasise both Oskar's social alienation (he is unlike any other, and is thus able to observe circumstances more clearly) and, similarly, his individuality.

Oskar's character is not merely ambiguous, like Felix, however, but altogether contradictory. In the same paragraph that he affirms his adult intellect and child's body, he also states that he is inwardly *and* outwardly fully mature (ibid). Such contradictions typify Grass' protagonist. In the same way that Oskar's character undermines the fundamental binaries of childhood and adulthood, so too does he call into question more nuanced psychological and moral binaries. In addition to Oskar's unclear state of maturity, a question mark hangs over his sanity. The admission of his famous opening line – "Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt" (9)[116] – serves to cast doubt both ways. There is a similar lack of clarity over his complicity in the events of the narrative and the atrocities of National So-

116. "Granted: I'm an inmate in a mental institution" (3)

cialism that it includes. Oskar is both a child and, in Nazi terms, an Untermensch, but nevertheless appears to collude out of convenience on at least two occasions, denouncing both Jan Bronski and his own gang of Dusters to the authorities. Peter Arnds thus finds Oskar to be not merely ambiguous, but a "deeply duplicitous" (54) character. This duplicity problematises a whole series of binary distinctions: maturity and immaturity, sanity and madness, innocence and guilt.

While the protagonists of the novels discussed thus far face an interior quest to realise and affirm their own complex human personality, Oskar's realisation of this truth has broader social consequences. His subversion of the above binaries cannot be understood apart from the specific contexts and particular social anxieties of post-war German society. In the wake of National Socialism, notions of responsibility and guilt were being collectively re-examined. Oskar's ambiguous and even contradictory characterisation brings these issues to the fore. Whereas Augie, Invisible Man, Billy, and Alex grapple with their own, interior complexity in the face of others' demographic simplifications, Oskar grapples with complexity in a sense much more explicitly connected to contemporary moral concerns. Oskar

does not only represent the suppressed creative individual, but also, quite directly, represents the complicated human reality hidden beneath the broad, generalising sweep of history and politics.

In this respect, there are strong parallels between Grass' novel and those by Cela and Fernández Flórez, which seem similarly concerned with unearthing the complicated human reality beneath the broad brush strokes of political history. The narratives of both *Pascual Duarte* and *Lola, espejo oscuro* take place during the polarising conflict of the Spanish Civil War, during which both protagonists remain ambiguously unaligned. In the case of *Pascual Duarte*, the text contains only one direct reference to the war: in the transcriber's final note, which remarks that, with the exception of the killing of don Jesús, to which he had confessed, Pascual's actions during the fifteen days of revolutionary turmoil that swept over his village remain unknown (221-2 [160]). Beyond this, the reader is given no indication of Pascual's involvement in the deeply divisive conflict. Critics remain divided on Pascual's affiliation. This is a key issue which we will discuss in greater depth in the next chapter, but for now we may note that Pascual's motivation for killing don Jesús can be convincingly interpreted as belying

either Republican or Nationalist sympathies. Like the neo-pícaros we have already seen, Pascual evades easy categorisation. His ambiguity in relation to the war suggests an unwillingness, at least at the extra-diegetic level if not also at the level of the narrative, to conform to the expectations of his divided society.

Cela, like the other writers of the neopicaresque novels, is not forgetting to provide the necessary details, but intentionally building ambiguity into his protagonist so that he may represent not only a small and specific social demographic, but a broader human one. Pascual represents not simply the experience of the Republican revolutionaries during the war, nor that of the Nationalists. His characterisation, rather, lifts from obscurity a more essential human experience. This is articulated, once again, through the autobiographical form of the picaresque model. By voicing his own account, Pascual presents a human face from within that divided and dehumanised conflict. The socially marginalised and morally ambiguous character of the pícaro is combined once again with the autobiographical form of picaresque writing in order to examine contemporary issues of socio-political identity.

The character of Lola is presented similarly in the novel

by Fernández Flórez. As in *Pascual Duarte*, the narrative of *Lola, espejo oscuro* mentions the Civil War only once as a brief aside (PP [33]). Here Lola suggests that the cause of the conflict is not ideological but entirely pragmatic. Fishermen, she suggests, are leaving their boats behind and joining the conflict in the vain hope of securing a less taxing career in politics. Perceiving the dishonesty of this situation, Lola herself remains uninterested and unaligned in relation to the war. She rejects the binary division of its politics, and acts only in her own personal interests. Lola, like Pascual, represents neither side, and stands instead for the human individual caught in between. Her cynical interpretation of the motivations of those engaged in the conflict reveals a deep distrust of the conflict's political rhetoric, and a disavowal of its social divisions.

For Lola, like the other neopicaresque protagonists, the act of writing of her own account becomes a way of establishing and stabilising a sense of a unique personal identity. Again, this is a process achieved not alone, but in collaboration. From the opening paragraph of her account, Lola acknowledges that it is the character of Juan who assured her of her own uniqueness and inspired her attempts to reconstruct this on paper. "De no haber conocido a Juan," she

begins, "jamás hubiera dedicado una tarde a conseguirme unos papeles decentes y una de esas plumas escaperuzadas que vienen de América" (11).[117] It is through her relationship with Juan, Lola claims, that she discovered the importance of articulating her own identity, and inscribing this into recorded history. "Siempre me barruntaba yo que mi vida no era la vida de cualquiera," she continues on the first page,

> [...] Pero Juan asegura que soy una mujer «maravillosa y difícil como una primavera» [...] Yo soy, desde luego, algo rara. Siempre me di cuenta de ello, alegrándome mucho el sentirme tan distinta a los demás. Pero hasta que conocí a Juan no supe que esta rareza puede hacerme immortal [...] Siguiendo con lo mismo, quiero decir que nunca se me había ocurrido esto de que una pueda dejar cosas que vivan después de muerta, descubrimiento que ha llegado a preocuparme. Cosas que, como dice Juan, fijen la imagen immortal de una mujer interesante, digna de ser conocida por alguien más que por sus conocidos (11-2).[118]

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117. "If I hadn't known Juan I would never have dedicated myself one afternoon to buying some decent paper and one of those fancy American fountain pens" (5).

118. "I have always guessed that my life was not the life of just anyone [...] But Juan insists that I am a marvellous headstrong creature [...] I am, after all, someone unique. I've always known this and am delighted to be different from the rest of the world. But until I met Juan I didn't realise that my special qualities could bring me

Just like the other neopicaresque protagonists, Lola articulates her own story as a means of resisting the pressures of the social world that has, until now, regarded her only in simple terms.

Fernández Flórez utilises those same formal features of picaresque writing to examine the relationship between the complex human individual, and the simplifying pressures of their society. Lola, marginalised by her gender and profession, ambiguous in terms of personal morality, and ambivalent towards political ideologies, discovers on her journey of encounters a society that refuses to see her as anything other than sexual object. It is only through the act of narrative storytelling that Lola is able to establish in stable terms a clear sense of individual identity. The autobiographical form of the picaresque thus provides the means for that final heroic act. It is to be noted, however, that this individual identity is not discovered or recreated alone: Lola, like the other neopicaresque protagonists, succeeds in her quest for identity only by collaborative effort.

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immortality [...] Actually, it never occurred to me before that one could leave something which lives on after one's death. Something which, according to Juan, would make immortal the image of a fascinating woman – a woman worthy of becoming known beyond the circle of her friends (5-6)

Conclusion

The neopicaresque novels similarly utilise the formal features of picaresque writing in order to conduct an exploration of identity and individuality in relation to contemporary culture. The primary rhetoric of inquiry in the satire of these works is concerned with examining the complex human individual so often obscured by demographic labels, whether these be racial or ethnic, related to gender or age, region or class, political affiliation, occupation or some other role. In each case, the socially marginalised and morally ambiguous character of the pícaro is employed to challenge these preconceived types, while his picaresque journey of encounters reveals the hostility of his social environment to this individual human complexity. It is by the act of storytelling, ie. the narration of the autobiographical account that forms the main text of each novel, that the protagonist is able to rescue his personal identity from the abstraction of these labels, and to assert for himself a sense of individuality. While the central quest of the neopicaresque novel is this very quest for identity, however, we must note that in each instance this heroic act of storytelling is made possible only by some degree of collaborative effort.

The neopícaro does not discover a pure identity unique to himself, but constructs one by reference to others. Although the neopicaresque novels suggest the unreality of the social world, they nevertheless show that the individual cannot understand himself entirely apart from this social world. The satire of these neopicaresque novels suggests that the human individual, even the alienated neopícaro, cannot entirely extricate himself from the social world that he disavows.

3. The Hostile Society

The words Right and Wrong in themselves mean nothing. They have a smell of police disinfectant about them.

– Anthony Burgess, unpublished interview of 1972[119]

We have seen in the previous chapters that food and hunger remain, as they were in the classic picaresque novels, themes significant to the development of the satiric ethos of each of the neopicaresque novels too. This literal kind of hunger, however, no longer drives the plot. The neopícaro is propelled from episode to episode not by physical hunger, as his predecessors once were, but instead by a figurative kind of hunger: a yearning for self-understanding, solidarity, and acceptance, all of which are hard to find in his narrative world. The central quest of the novel is a quest for identity, and this culminates in the act of narration to produce the pseudo-autobiography encountered by the

119. From an unpublished interview dated 25 October 1972, printed in *A Clockwork Orange: Restored Edition* ed. Andrew Biswell (2013) p. 254

reader. The act of first-person storytelling is itself a performative construction of the protagonist's identity, and an affirmation of his complex and creative spirit. This final outcome of the narrative, however, is always hard won. The narrative world of the neopicaresque novel, as we discover episode by episode, is dominated by powerful adversarial forces that hinder the protagonist, and are hostile to his quest. The protagonist of the neopicaresque novel is man as individual in his full, creative, and human complexity. The antagonist of the neopicaresque novel is the antithesis of this: not another individual character, but rather the impersonal mass society within which the protagonist is embedded. This form of modern society is dominated by impersonal social institutions that seek to isolate, subdue, and curtail the complex and creative potentials of the protagonist.

This notion of society itself providing the antagonistic force within the narrative is one common to the earliest picaresque novels. In fact, this is often considered to be the essential premise of the picaresque. Richard Bjornson, referring to the Spanish picaresque novels of the early modern period, summarises this basic situation as the "paradigmatic confrontation between an isolated individual and a

hostile society" (4). In the earliest picaresque novels, this hostile society is to be encountered in the form of other characters who are, generally, not, like the protagonist, complex individual personalities, but instead broad representative types. In *Lazarillo*, for example, each episode revolves around a different 'master' to whom Lazarillo himself is indentured: he is apprenticed first to a blind man, then to a priest, a squire, a seller of papal indulgences, a pedlar, a chaplain, and finally a constable. These characters are depicted not as psychologically complex individuals, but appear instead as simplistic and easily-recognisable generic social types of the period. They serve primarily to represent, and parody, the different social classes or estates that formalise and regulate the narrative world. Individually, these set types represent the religious, commercial, judicial, and aristocratic forces that govern the social world. Collectively, however, they also represent something bigger than these parts. Together they evoke a sense of standardisation and officialdom in early modern society. They represent, in other words, precisely that which, in Bakhtin's theory, stands in opposition to the unruly democratic spirit of the carnivalesque mode. The historical picaresque novels utilise stock character types to dramatise a perceived conflict

between the free-spirited individual protagonist (the pícaro) and the official, institutionalised culture that regulates the society in which he lives.

The neopicaresque novels depict a similar tension between a free-spirited individual protagonist and a hostile society, although there are significant differences in the presentation and development of these ideas. In the neopicaresque texts we generally do not find a succession of generic social types representing official classes or estates. Instead, the threat of a society hostile to the individual personality of the protagonist is to be found in the representation of certain social institutions. This conflict is dramatised most strikingly in Cela's *Pascual Duarte*, Grass' *Die Blechtrommel*, and Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. Each of these narratives revolves around the incarceration of the protagonist, a premise which establishes from the outset an opposition between the individual and an institutional authority. This premise invites the reader to engage critically in a moral evaluation of the character of the neo-pícaro and the ethics of the institution within which he is incarcerated in a way that the historical picaresque genre generally does not. In the neopicaresque novels, a complicated relationship between protagonist and antagonist emerges. In each

case, there is a significant degree of moral ambiguity. The societal antagonist of the neopicaresque novel often appears as an anti-villain, paralleling the anti-heroism of the neo-pícaro himself.

Many picaresque theorists regard the pícaro as a character who, although wayward and unscrupulous, generally stops short of criminality, and always has some justification for his misdeeds. The protagonist of the historical picaresque novel is not bad because he is evil, but because a harsh and hostile world forces him to be so in order to survive. In the neopicaresque novels, and particularly those which dramatise the conflict between the individual and the institution through a premise of incarceration, the moral ambiguity of the protagonist is pushed to its furthest limits. The neo-pícaro does not necessarily stop short of criminality,[120] but the confrontation between personal protagonist and impersonal, antagonistic mass society asks readers to

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120. Burgess' Alex is the most clearly criminal of the neo-pícaros we have before us, but several of the other protagonists are also engaged in crime: Pascual commits at least two murders in addition to his involvement in the death of don Jesús; Oskar participates in crime with his gang of Dusters; and Augie is involved in a criminal racket stealing and re-selling academic textbooks. The neo-pícaro appears, thus, to have even fewer scruples than his predecessors. For the neopicaresque protagonists the criterion of non-criminality no longer stands.

critically consider whether badness – even at its most extreme manifestation – might be excused by circumstances.

Ambiguity and Polysemy in *Pascual Duarte*

In *Pascual Duarte*, the narrative premise of Pascual's incarceration in the Badajoz penitentiary is based on a narrative presupposition of guilt. Pascual's first-person account appears, initially, as a confessional autobiography written during his imprisonment while he awaits execution. Notably, however, Pascual's confession does not, in fact, confess to the offence for which he was detained and later executed. Though he does not deny his guilt, and in fact purports to seek forgiveness for an undisclosed crime, Pascual fails to name the offence for which any of this is necessary. The supplementary documents that accompany his account (the opening and closing notes of the transcriber, and the two letters of testimony from the prison guard, Cesáreo Martín, and the chaplain, Father Santiago) all similarly fail to provide any details on the charges faced by Pascual. Each additional narrator, like Pascual himself, appears simply to confirm the same presupposition of guilt. The verdict and sentence handed down to Pascual are presented as *faits accomplis*, and their legitimacy is tacitly assumed.

The authors of the supplementary documents that strengthen this assumption of guilt (the chaplain, the guard, and the transcriber) bear certain parallels to the masters of Lazarillo. Like Lazarillo's masters, these characters, each of whom claims some social superiority over Pascual, are not developed as psychologically complex individuals, but appear as symbolic representatives of particular institutional organisations that command power and prestige in Nationalist Spain: the chaplain representing the Church, the guard representing the military, and the transcriber, as editor and analyst of the text, representing the academy. In his reading of the novel, Garrido Ardila argues that Cela encourages this interpretation by bestowing these characters with overtly suggestive names. The priest, Father Santiago, Garrido Ardila suggests, is named for the patron saint of Spain (St. James the Great); the guard, Cesáreo Martín, for the famous Roman general and statesman Julius Caesar; and the transcriber's elected anonymity, Garrido Ardila proposes, suggests the postwar intellectual proceeding with utmost caution ("Perspectivismo" 265). Individually these characters represent particular institutions that function as pillars of this society; collectively, however, they suggest a broader sense of an institutionalised society. The guard,

chaplain, and transcriber all support both the verdict and the sentence faced by Pascual: the chaplain and the guard as employees of the penitentiary, and the transcriber as public apologist for its actions. It is by the combined power of these separate institutional organisations that Pascual's death is eventually decreed, enacted, and justified. Pascual is thus shown to exist only under the control of these powerful societal institutions. This collective, institutionalised power is shown to be the force that opposes the protagonist.

Pascual's subordination to this institutional power is evident not only at the diegetic level, but also in the structure of the text itself. The first-person narrative account – ie. the artefact of Pascual's final act of self-realisation – is carefully framed by the voices of these institutional representatives. Though Pascual's autobiography is the most substantial of the documents that comprise the novel, Pascual himself is granted neither the first nor last word on his life. The transcriber's opening and closing notes, and the two letters of testimony included in the latter, ensure that readers are guided both into and out of Pascual's memoirs. Readers' access to Pascual's version of events, in other words, is carefully mediated by those symbolic voices of in-

stitutionalised power. Additionally, there are strong suggestions in the opening note that the transcriber, in particular, has engaged not only in simple editing but also more heavy-handed censorship in his transcription of the papers penned by Pascual. Those symbolic officials thus wield an insidious power over the narrative: they are in control of the voice of Pascual, and influence our reception of his account.

As we have noted in previous chapters of our analysis, it is possible to deduce from two brief references to the death of one Don Jesús González de la Riva that it is for his killing that Pascual has been imprisoned and executed. The first of these references immediately precedes Pascual's account, in the fictitious epigraph dedicating the text

> a la memoria del insigne patricio don Jesús González de la Riva, Conde de Torremejía, quien al irlo a rematar el autor de este escrito, le llamó Pascualillo y sonreía (107)[121]

Here, in what appears to be an admission of involvement in the death of Don Jesús, Pascual's vocabulary is curious. He

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121. "To the memory of the distinguished patrician Don Jesús González de la Riva, Count of Torremejía, who, at the moment when the author of this chronicle came to kill him, called him Pascualillo, and smiled" (11).

does not use the standard verb to kill, *matar*, but rather *re-matar*, to 're-kill,' suggestive of a finishing blow or coup de grâce. It is also notable that he describes a calm, even welcoming response from Don Jesús who, Pascual reports, addresses his apparent assailant with an affectionate diminutive, and smiles. The epigraph, then, while suggesting Pascual's involvement in a fatal incident, does not show any indication that this was a criminal act, and neither does it suggest any direct connection between this event and Pascual's incarceration. Rather than providing clarity, the dedication instead raises a number of intriguing questions: How had Pascual and Don Jesús know one another previously? Why, if they were on familiar terms, might Pascual deliver a fatal blow? What could Pascual's motive have been? These are all legitimate questions, the answers to which are likely to affect our judgement of the incident, and the legitimacy of Pascual's incarceration and execution at the hands of those institutional representatives.

The narrative, as it continues, however, remains silent on all of these questions. There is only one further reference to the death of Don Jesús, and this appears not in Pascual's own account, but in the transcriber's closing note. The transcriber draws the narrative to a close as he writes:

> Si hacemos excepción del asesinato del señor González de la Riva – *del que nuestro personaje fue autor convicto y confeso* – nada más, absolutamente nada más, hemos podido saber de él (222, emphasis added).[122]

Pascual's involvement in the death of Don Jesús seems to be here confirmed, as is, finally, the notion that he has been convicted of a criminal offence for this. To reach the conclusion that the death of Don Jesús is the central case of the narrative and the reason for Pascual's sentence, however, we must recall and interpret the sparse facts ourselves: 1) that Pascual was involved in the death of Don Jesús, 2) that he was at some point convicted of murder relating to this event, 3) and that his account does not describe any other criminal activities for which Pascual had not already faced justice.[123] The reader must actively engage in deduction to

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122. "Except for the killing of Don Jesús González de la Riva, Count of Torremejía – *a deed of which our man was the confessed and convicted author* – we know nothing, absolutely nothing, about Pascual in his later epoch; [...]" (160, emphasis added). [NB. Kerrigan's translation here makes explicit the name of D. Jesús, by repeating the full name and title used by Pascual in the earlier dedication. Cela's text, however, does not do this. In this later reference, the Spanish text refers to D. Jesús by surname alone as "señor González de la Riva." The change in the presentation of his name creates, in Cela's original text, a slightly more cryptic reference than Kerrigan's translation would suggest.

123. Pascual describes his involvement in two other murders: first that of El Estirao, and later that of his own mother. These crimes are

identify the death of Don Jesús as the case upon which Pascual's incarceration and death rest.

The sustained lack of answers to the many questions raised by the dedication, however, does seem to invite the reader to continue in the game of deduction. Perhaps, we might think, this missing information might be similarly extrapolated from suggestions or allusions within the text. As if responding to such temptation, the transcriber explicitly cautions the reader against creative gap-filling. Of Pascual's central crime, the transcriber reminds us is in the same closing note,

> sabemos, cierto es, lo irreparable y evidente, pero ignoramos, porque Pascual se cerró a la banda y no dijo esta boca es mía más que cuando le dio la gana, que fue muy pocas veces, los motivos que tuvo y los impulsos que le acometieron. Quizás de haberse diferido algún tiempo su ejecución, hubiera llegado él en sus memorias hasta el punto y lo hubiera tratado con amplitud, pero lo cierto es que, como no ocurrió, la laguna que al final de sus días aparece no de otra forma que a base de cuento y de romance podría llenarse, solución que repugna a la veracidad de este libro (222).[124]

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confessed without ambiguity, and we know from his own account that he has already served prison sentences for these.

124. "we know only the stark irreparable fact, and nothing about his

The enigma of the epigraph thus remains unresolved. The reader is left without answers to the questions raised, and is explicitly cautioned against the temptation to independently rationalise these particulars. The ambiguity we find in the narrative premise is sustained throughout, and the central case remains opaque to the end.

Such lack of clarity on what ought to be an elementary plot point serves to induce doubt in the reader. The confident assurances of Pascual's guilt professed by the transcriber, guard, and chaplain, are undermined by their conspicuous failure to disclose even the most basic details of the case upon which everything else rests. Readers might suspect, too, that Pascual's account lacks this information because he has been denied the opportunity to complete his confession: either that his execution was carried out before the completion of his autobiography, or that the transcriber, in his editing of the text, has suppressed these

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motives or the impulses which possessed him. For he was closed mouthed and talked only when the mood was upon him, which was seldom. Perhaps if his execution had been deferred, he might have reached that point in his memoirs and have gone into the event with some detail. But there was no stay of execution, and the only way we could fill the gap now would be to invent some fictional end, and that is something that would ill befit the authenticity of this narrative" (160).

details.

Of course, the transcriber's advice to readers that they ought to respect Pascual's version of events and avoid creative interpretation is clearly undercut by irony, for the extent to which the transcriber himself has already modified the text is decidedly unclear. The transcriber vacillates between confessing and denying the strength of his editorial hand. In the opening note he assures the reader that he has neither corrected nor added so much as a diacritical mark to Pascual's transcript, before admitting in the very next sentence that he has, however, redacted a number of passages he found to be distasteful (99-100 [3-4]). "Me pareció más conveniente la poda que el pulido,"[125] (100) he admits – before changing tack again to urge the reader, apparently in all sincerity, to let Pascual speak for himself: "Dejemos que hable Pascual Duarte," he implores, "que es quien tiene cosas interesantes que contarnos"[126] (ibid). Within the text of Pascual's account, however, the reader is often reminded that there are points at which the transcriber has not, in fact, allowed Pascual to speak. Dotted

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125. "Pruning rather than polishing seemed to me more appropriate" (translation my own)

126. "Let us allow Pascual Duarte himself to speak, for it is he who has interesting things to tell us" (4)

lines of a full page width mark the sites of (at least some of) his redactions. Such markers appear in the third, fifth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and eighteenth chapters, and indeed often appear multiple times in each. In the case of chapter twelve,[127] especially, it appears that more of the text has been redacted than preserved. These dotted lines, which visually suggest perforated or stitched paper, repeatedly remind us that the transcriber is not only editor but also censor of the manuscripts. Knowledge of this additional role of the transcriber serves to cast irony over the entreaties of his opening and closing notes to avoid interfering with the text as we find it.

This irony again undermines the confident assurances of those institutional representatives. Here the transcriber seems to ascribe a greater value to the preservation of Pascual's unintended grammatical and orthographic errors more than he values the preservation of all of the content intended by Pascual. The transcriber is willing, it seems, to make drastic cuts where the content is deemed objection-

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127. It is worth noting that some readers interpret the redactions in chapter twelve as an indication that this is the point at which the killing of D. Jesús should have appeared in Pascual's account, had this information not been removed by the transcriber. See, for example, Garrido Ardila, "Perspectivismo Narrativo."

able, and fails to recognise that this approach conflicts his repeated appeals to remain faithful to the words penned by Pascual. The transcriber's disingenuous plea to let Pascual speak for himself thus highlights the hypocrisy of an institutionalised culture that seems to ascribe disproportionate value to certain codes over others.

The ambiguity built into the premise of Pascual's incarceration leaves open two approaches: we may either take the text of the novel at face value and follow the advice of the transcriber (hypocritical though he may be) to avoid further speculation, accept the judgement that has already been made against Pascual, and regard the protagonist as a bad example deserving only of our condemnation; or, alternatively, we may find in the irony of the transcriber's directions an invitation from Cela to challenge this interpretation of the events of Pascual's life, to speculate on the missing information, and to perhaps reach a different conclusion about the moral message of Pascual's experience.

Convincing readings can be made either way, and the sharp division in critical interpretations of the novel is testament to the ambiguity that Cela accomplishes here. There are those who follow the moral judgement of the transcriber and read Pascual as essentially bad. Garrido Ardila reads

Pascual as “an unremorseful murderer,” (“Perspectivismo”), whose execution is an act of “justice” (ibid). Others, however, argue to the contrary, that Pascual is “basically a good man” (Feldman 656). So writes Daniel Feldman, who sees the protagonist as the unfortunate “victim of external forces he is unable to control” (ibid). Norma Louise Hutman similarly finds evidence in the text to suggest that Pascual is a hapless “scapegoat who suffer[s] from and in society a disproportionate doom” (199). He is “too well intended to be evil” (202) she argues, (though also “too wise to be innocent” [ibid]), and endures more than his fair share of misery before he is imprisoned. “Pascual no more merits fate's fury,” Hutman writes, “than in its turn does the dog la Chispa merit the fatal wrath which [...] Pascual turns on his hound” (ibid).

The divided and contradictory critical reception of *Pascual Duarte* has become a point of discussion in itself. In his 1992 paper “The Monster Speaks” José B. Monleón emphasises that the novel received sharply conflicting responses in the first years of its publication. “In the desolate cultural landscape immediately following the Civil War,” he writes,

> the appearance of [*Pascual Duarte*] caused passionate reactions: it inspired vehement praise as well as tempestuous criticism. The book had been supported by official organisms and did not encounter major obstacles during its required revision by the censors [in 1942]. One year later [in 1943], a second edition was prohibited. How can one account for this drastic change of attitude by the authorities? [...] Does the the text contain different levels of signification, a polysemy so contradictory that it allowed for opposing ideological appropriations? (257)

William Scherzer, writing in 2002, notes that the novel has continued in the decades since then to receive an "enormous amount of disparate and contradictory critical attention" (357). This extends from opposing moral interpretations of Pascual's character, to the attribution of entirely irreconcilable political motives to both the protagonist and the text. Gonzalo Sobejano ("Reflexiones sobre *La familia de Pascual Duarte*") and Karen Breiner-Sanders have both argued that the text expresses an anti-Francoist position; Pedro Caballo, J.A.G. Ardila, and Eloy Merino, by contrast, all find a pro-Francoist sentiment in the same novel. Cela "returns to the picaresque model," writes Ardila, "in order to write a work that *celebrates* the new [Falangist] social and political order of the post-war, and *condemns* the [preced-

ing] Republic" (265, emphasis added, translation my own). Faced with these conflicting interpretations we must consider the same questions that Scherzer poses:

> Can a character, especially the main character of a novel, represent two diametrically opposing political ideologies? Can Pascual be a falangist for some readers and a metaphorical victim of fascist violence for others? (363)

The answer seems to be in the affirmative.

This ambiguity is surely intentional. In fact, it it not only possible to interpret the bare facts of Pascual's biography in contradictory ways, but the divergent routes that we may take as reader are even suggested within the novel itself. Though the transcriber directs the reader along a single path of interpretation, the two letters of testimony that he appends to Pascual's account show the possibility of understanding the same basic facts in different ways. The guard, Cesáreo Martín, and the chaplain, Father Santiago, bear many similarities: both are employees of the same penitentiary, both have a similar familiarity with Pascual, and both are present to witness Pascual's execution. Although these characters do both accept the presupposition of Pascual's guilt, the conclusions they draw on his character and fate are very different. Father Santiago's letter paints

a sympathetic portrait of Pascual as “un manso cordero acorralado y asustado por la vida”[128] (223), while that of Martín portrays Pascual as a brute and criminal of unsound mind: “De la salud de su cabeza,” Martín writes, “no daría yo fé”[129] (225). Their accounts of Pascual’s execution also differ. Father Santiago stresses that Pascual’s conduct in his final moments was exemplary: “Dispuso los negocios del alma con un aplomo y una serenidad que a mí me dejaron absorto,” the chaplain states, “[...] nos dejara maravillados con su edificante humildad [...] Ejemplo de todos los que la presenciamos hubo de ser”[130] (224). Martín, on the other hand, recalls these final moments differently: “[Pascual] terminó sus días escupiendo y pataleando, sin cuidado ninguno de los circunstantes y de la manera más ruin y más baja que un hombre puede terminar; demostrando a todos su miedo a la muerte”[131] (226). These two witness state-

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128. “a poor tame lamb, terrified and cornered by life” (163)

129. “I would not be able to vouch for the soundness of his mind” (164)

130. “He disposed of his soul’s business beforehand with an aplomb and serenity that left me astonished [...] We were all amazed by his edifying humility [...] He set an example for all who witnessed his end” (ibid)

131. “he ended his days spitting and stamping, with no thought for the persons around him, in the most abject and the vilest way a man can die, letting everyone see his fear of death” (166)

ments not only contradict one another, but the very fact of their divergence also undermines the transcriber's earlier insistence on a single path of interpretation.

These supplementary documents are a crucial part of the text's composition and key to understanding its satire. Scherzer describes these later pages as "Cela's final tongue-in-cheek statement" (368), for here the contradictory polysemy of the novel is made explicit. The "presentation of two contrastive perspectives of Pascual" allows, Scherzer concludes,

> for two alternative readings of the character he has developed by the end of his confession: the man who has been convinced of falangist values (Father Lureña's reading of him) or the eternally rebellious antisocial being (Cesáreo Martín's). And if this question [...] was not satisfactorily answered by the author during his lifetime, [it] may never be answered now that he has left us (368).

Leon Livingstone, meanwhile, argues that these conflicting statements do provide an answer to problem of the novel's sustained ambiguity. "To the question [...] of whether Pascual is good or bad, hero or coward, victim of fate or the hewer of his own destiny," Livingstone posits, "the novel replies not with an either-or criterion, but with an assertion

of both-and” (101-2), stressing moreover that “if both points of view are valid they are so only when taken together. The application of one criterion to the exclusion of the other makes for falsification” (102). Cela maintains a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the central case, Livingstone suggests, in order to a cultivate a very deliberate ambivalence in its conclusion.

What we find in the character of Pascual is a degree of complexity that cannot be properly accommodated within the systems of this institutionalised society. Pascual is judged and executed according to an absolute, monolithic verdict on the central case. Readers, however, are denied the opportunity to understand or corroborate the validity of this judgement. The very systems that decree and enact Pascual’s death also work together to ensure that the records of this case are scrubbed clean. This, alone, suggests a certain insecurity in the judgement, which those representatives of the institutional authorities seek to smooth over by insisting on an opaque presumption of guilt from the beginning of the novel. Nevertheless, the differences in the accounts written by the chaplain and the guard later indicate that divergence does indeed exist. The suggestion put forth by the transcriber, then, – that there is only one possible

way to interpret Pascual's case – is thus shown to be false. Cela's satire here works to undermines the authority of the social institutions that regulate the narrative world, to criticise the opacity of their judgements, and to suggest that they do not adequately serve or support the complex individual.

Furthermore, the ambiguity in Pascual's case serves to underscore the absurdity of the political polarisation of the general population during the Spanish Civil War. Throughout his account, Pascual gives no indication of political affiliation or even interest, nevertheless the critical response to the text from the 1940s to the present day has been to seek in Pascual's alleged crime a political motive. That Cela leaves entirely open the question of Pascual's involvement in the war and his motivation in the killing of don Jesús is critical to the text's satire, too. Whatever Pascual's motives, his life ends the same way. Ultimately, it makes no difference which side he aligns himself with, or whether he is aligned at all. In the end, Cela suggests, it is all the same.

Obscurity and Paradox in *Die Blechtrommel*

The premise of an ambiguous incarceration is employed to similar effect in Grass' *Die Blechtrommel*. Oskar,

like Pascual, writes his first person narrative account from within a state detention facility. This is, in fact, the first thing we learn about him, and thus the foundation from which we understand Oskar as both protagonist and narrator. "Zugegeben: Ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt," Oskar begins, "mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, [und] läßt mich kaum aus dem Auge"[132] (9). Despite the apparent candour of this opening sentence, however, and as in *Pascual Duarte*, there is a fundamental ambiguity within this premise. No suggestion is made as to the reason for Oskar's detention, and indeed there is no mention at all of any case against him. For most of the narrative it remains this way. The reason for Oskar's incarceration will not be addressed until the penultimate chapter of the novel, some 750 pages further on. For the vast majority of the text, therefore, the question as to why Oskar has been incarcerated hangs unanswered.

From the opening declaration we may deduce only a few basic ideas about this situation. The first is that Oskar is no ordinary detainee. The early disclosure that he is being

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132. "Granted: I'm an inmate in a mental institution; my keeper watches me, [and] scarcely lets me out of sight" (3).

held not in a jail or prison, but a psychiatric facility[133] casts intrigue over the nature of his presumed offence, as well as doubt over the extent of his culpability. Additionally, the suggestion that Oskar, as narrator, may be mentally unwell raises a question about the reliability of the account that is to follow. We also learn that Oskar is under near constant observation, and might conclude that he is deemed to be a high risk prisoner. Beyond this we have only questions: Why is Oskar here? What has he done? And can we trust his version of events? Grass does not even begin to address these questions until the novel's final pages. As in *Pascual Duarte*, then, we find a calculated rhetorical ambiguity constructed within the narrative premise of the protagonist's incarceration.

This ambiguity is sustained, again, to the very end. When we do finally learn of the case against Oskar, the information does little to clarify the questions raised in the opening lines. The central case, the so-called rye-field deed, is this: having been found in possession of a severed

133. In Mannheim's translation the facility where Oskar is detained is rendered as a "mental hospital," in Mitchell's translation it is rendered as "mental institution." The German text describes the facility as a "Heil- und Pflegeanstalt," literally "a health and care institution."

finger, which may or may not have come from the body of the missing, presumed dead, Sister Dorothea, Oskar has been convicted of murder, judged to be insane, and committed to the psychiatric facility from which he has been writing. Oskar himself denies the allegation of murder, but admits to knowing Sister Dorothea, to possessing the finger in question, and to intentionally heightening the appearance of his own guilt. He summarises the case in his own idiosyncratic blend of first- and third-person voices:

> Oskar aber, der auch nichts eingestand, doch ein belastendes Fingerchen im Weckglas besaß, verurteilten sie des Roggenfeldes wegen, nahmen ihn aber nicht für voll und lieferten mich in die Heil- und Pflegeanstalt zur Beobachtung ein. Allerdings floh Oskar, bevor sie ihn verurteilten und einlieferten, denn ich wollte durch meine Flucht den Wert jener Anzeige, die mein Freund Gottfried machte, erheblich steigern[134] (766).

By the time this information has been disclosed to the reader, it has further transpired that the legal case against Oskar

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134. "Oskar, who likewise confessed to nothing but owned an incriminating finger in a canning jar, was found guilty of the rye-field deed, but since they were not sure he was all there, they placed me in a mental institution for observation. Of course Oskar fled before they found him guilty and committed him, for by my flight I hoped to enhance substantially the value of my friend Gottfried's accusation" (554).

is about to collapse, and that Oskar is now on the verge of release. Oskar's response to this turn of events is unexpected: he expresses not relief, but apprehension at the thought of an imminent acquittal. What we are left with by the point at which the novel concludes is a decidedly bizarre case, an unstable conviction, uncertainty as to the protagonist's involvement, and his unpredictable emotional response. The revelation of this central case, when it finally comes, provides no sure conclusion, and readers are left with at least as many questions as they had at the beginning.

The 'rye-field deed' is the central case of *Die Blechtrommel*. Its discussion in the text is brief, but the case nevertheless provides the bedrock of the premise of incarceration and is the event that instigates and unifies the rest of Oskar's episodic account. It is in order to make sense of how he came to be in the psychiatric facility that Oskar writes his autobiography in the first place. The case against Oskar and the case against Pascual have very similar narrative functions, and their limited treatment within the narrative, in both cases, does not diminish their significance. To the contrary, both Cela and Grass choose to withhold details of the central cases of their novels in order to

heighten a sense of intrigue, and to build ambiguity into the heart of the narrative.

In the case of *Die Blechtrommel* this narrative ambiguity is not so much polysemic as paradoxical. While critics are divided over their moral interpretations of Pascual and *Pascual Duarte*, there is broad agreement that Grass' novel deliberately plays along the lines of obscurity and paradox, and that contradiction is itself the point. Amos Leslie Willson, writing in 1966, identifies the ambiguity of Oskar's guilt as the main concern of the novel. The tension between innocence and guilt that his character evokes is refracted throughout the narrative, Willson argues, evident in the repeated use of dual or binary images and metaphors, as well as in Oskar's own split personality.[135] Willson describes Oskar as "a paradox whose profundity demands to be plumbed" (131):

> He is a dichotomous creation mysteriously unified like the universe. He speaks of himself as I and as Oskar; he is tempted and tempts others; he is Jesus and Satan; he riots with Rasputin and gambols serenely with Goethe [... He] retains the innate form of a bi-structured creature cryptically one (ibid).

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135. See the previous chapter of this thesis, pp. X-Y, for a discussion of the textual evidence that supports this claim.

Oskar's internal contradictions are not merely potential, they are real. As Willson observes, Grass shows Oskar to *be* both one thing and its opposite.

Almost half a century later, this is still the predominant view of Oskar. The essays compiled in Stuart Taberner's 2009 *Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass* similarly grapple with the paradox of Oskar being characterised as both one thing and another – specifically, both innocent *and* guilty, good *and* bad (which we might contrast with the critical disagreements over whether Pascual is good *or* bad). Contributions to the collection by Julian Preece, Peter Arnds, and Patrick O'Neill are all concerned with the issue of the contradictory and dualistic character of Oskar. Preece finds that, following the ultimate acquittal, Oskar is left "to live with the contradiction of being guilty in the wider sense but innocent of any particular charge" (12), and posits that this reflects the postwar experience of many Germans who lived through the Third Reich. O'Neill emphasises that the novel's "relentless obliquity" (41) confounds the matter of the already bizarre central case, and likewise argues that the confusion inherent to the case against Oskar is intended to signal a wider confusion over guilt and responsibility in the German post-war context. Arnds reads

Oskar's case similarly, and further suggests that the publication of Grass' autobiographical work *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*[136] in 2006 lends new weight to such a reading. He writes that after the revelations made by Grass in this autobiography,

> the protagonist of his densely picaresque novel *The Tin Drum* may appear in a new light as a reflection of the author's double identity as both a victim, in the sense of having lost his home, and as a perpetrator with his tarnished past (54).

It is clear to readers of the novel that Oskar is a complicated and contradictory character, who demonstrates conflicting personal qualities. The most significant of these, highlighted time and again in critical analyses, is that Oskar appears simultaneously as both victim *and* perpetrator of violence, and that he thus appears as both innocent in some senses and guilty in others.

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136. *Beim häuten der Zwiebel* (2006, *Peeling the Onion*) caused controversy at the time of its publication, for here Grass, who had been an outspoken critic of those who refused to admit their own complicity and involvement in the Third Reich, revealed for the first time that he himself had served in the Waffen SS during WWII. His belated admission of his own involvement in the military was seen by many as hypocritical. It should be noted that Grass' autobiography repeatedly and directly references *Die Blechtrommel* – its very title being an allusion to the novel's 42nd chapter, 'Im Zwiebelkellar' ('In the Onion Cellar'), in which characters peel onions in order to cry for the sorrows they have never been able to naturally mourn.

Undiscussed, however, is the point that this paradox places Oskar's character in direct opposition to the authorities that hold him and the system that has mandated this detention. The institutionalised society of the narrative world is able to neither acknowledge nor accept the Oskar's internal complexity, contradiction, and paradox. The system within which Oskar is detained recognises, rather, only two possibilities: 1) guilt, requiring his detention, or 2) innocence, specifying his release. Whichever judgement Oskar faces – and Oskar faces both – it is a disservice to his complex character. The binary moral judgements of the system cannot accommodate the enigma that is Oskar. The ambiguity that Grass cultivates in relation to the central case of the novel, and the related ambiguity that characterises its protagonist, works to undermine the draconian 'either-or' judgements of the institution. As in *Pascual Duarte*, the narrative sets up an opposition between the complex human protagonist, and an inflexible, faceless system. Through this confrontation, Grass satirises the institutionalisation of the society of the narrative world, and specifically its purported access to clear and categorical truths.

The Problem of Evil in *A Clockwork Orange*

The incarceration of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* is, by contrast to both of the above, a far from ambiguous case. Unlike the cases of Pascual and Oskar, there is no doubt about Alex's offences, nor any question that he poses a threat to his society. In the first part of the novel Alex confesses to his crimes in great, even excessive, detail. The sprees of recreational 'ultra-violence' that he and his droogs regularly carry out include, by Alex's own account, acts amounting to robbery, grievous bodily harm, rape, murder, and more. There is no ambiguity about Alex's involvement in these acts, and he does not deny, excuse, or express any remorse for his litany of offences. To the contrary, the first part of the novel shows Alex to be an enthusiastic and unrepentant criminal. So much so, in fact, that the pleasure he finds in violence is equated with the pleasure he finds in fine music. Alex unapologetically associates Beethoven's Ode to Joy, a piece he recognises as a "lovely blissful tune all about Joy being a glorious spark like of heaven" (52) with the pleasure that he experiences from committing some of his most heinous crimes. For Alex, the music and the pain he inflicts on others equally evoke the same feeling of "Joy

Joy Joy Joy" (ibid), and both, to his mind, are divinely sanctioned.

Alex stands out amongst the neopicaresque protagonists for this unflinching defense of his own villainy. Where Pascual's guilt is ambiguous and Oskar's guilt is paradoxical, Alex's guilt is instead unmistakeable, and Burgess makes no attempt to obscure or complicate this point. "My hero or anti-hero, Alex, is very vicious, perhaps even impossibly so," wrote Burgess in a 1972 article responding to the controversy sparked by Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of the novel,

> but his viciousness is not the product of genetic or social conditioning: it is its own thing, embarked on in full awareness. Alex is evil, not merely misguided ("Clockwork Marmalade" 247-8).

Although the narrative indeed suggests that Alex's criminality is a path consciously embarked upon, and that Alex's behaviour is unequivocally bad, it nevertheless fails to support Burgess' assertion that this has nothing to do with social conditioning. To the contrary, in fact, the novel shows Alex's crimes to be a direct response to his social circumstances. Alex's criminality is not, as Burgess seems to suggest, purely inherent evil, but rather part of a (somewhat

misguided) battle against the intensely conformist and heavily institutionalised mass society of the narrative world. It is, in fact, precisely because of his social conditions that Alex feels compelled to engage in ultra-violence. His badness is cast as a form of cultural resistance, and is absolutely conditioned by the dystopian society in which he lives. We must note, however, that while there is no ambiguity in the matter of Alex's guilt, there is a significant degree of ambivalence in the way the text frames his response.

Alex presents the crimes of his youth as deliberate acts of rebellion directed against an inflexible, authoritarian, and heavily institutionalised state. The young Alex is under constant pressure to conform to a narrow set of social expectations, including the blanket requirement that "everybody not a child nor with child nor ill [must] go out rabbiting [working]"(42). Here, the use of Nadsat suggests Alex's disdain for this mandate. The term 'rabbiting' (from the Russian *rabota*, работа, to work) takes on new connotations in its anglicised Nadsat form: the image of the working rabbit suggesting a kind of frenetic activity within the communal, and impersonal, world of the warren. In this future, Alex perceives a threat to his individuality. His rejection of the education system, evident in his constant truancy from school,

is a rejection of this future working life.

Alex frames his unwillingness to cooperate with the laws of his society, and his radical rejection of these demonstrated in his extreme criminality, as responses to the demands of this over-regulated and institutionalised society. “Badness is of the self,” Alex declares in the fourth chapter,

> [it is of] the one, the you or me on our oddy knockies, and that self is made by old Bog or God and is his great pride and radosty [joy]. But the not-self cannot have the bad, meaning the government and the judges and the schools cannot allow the bad because they cannot allow the self. And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines? I am serious with you, brothers, over this (46).

Alex clearly articulates here a perceived conflict between himself as individual – a self that he sees as being of divine origin – and the antithetical and antagonistic “not-self,” which he sees embodied in the profane institutions of the government, educational, and judicial authorities. These institutional machines, he suggests, work mechanically, without thought or understanding of the people that they ought to serve. Alex’s penchant for violent behaviour is construed here as his weapon in an ongoing project of resist-

ance against their official culture of conformity, an expression of human free-will against the automated morality of these inhuman institutions. Alex sees badness as the only course of action that will allow him to retain his God-given right to autonomy. The conclusion that Alex reaches is a direct result of the totalitarian pressures of his society. In this sense, his badness *is* socially conditioned, and directly challenges the institutions that regulate his society.

Alex concludes this statement of his personal philosophy with a final defiant assertion: “what I do I do because I like to do” (46). Here Alex seems to reformulate the declaration of God from Exodus 3:14, “I am what I am,”[137] – a further reminder of his belief that the self, even when it is bad, is of divine origin. In Alex’s reformulation, the main verb is transformed from the stasis of ‘being’ to the action of ‘doing.’ Alex’s existence is not peaceful and passive, the change of verb seems to suggest, but an active and continuous struggle. The addition of the extra clause takes his statement one step further to assert that inclination – what one *likes* to do – is the foundation of right, or justified, action. The moral code prescribed by the official institutions of

137. Alternatively “I am who I am,” “I am that I am,” or “I will be what I will be,” from the Hebrew *ehyeh ’ăšer ’ehyeh.*

the narrative world is unsuitable for the governance of man, Alex suggests, because, being of the 'not-self' it is inherently inhuman, and unable to tolerate the whims of human inclination. True morality must derive from the self and, being thus unique to each individual, is contingent upon free choice. Alex's choice has been to follow the path of badness, and that, by his logic, is a morally righteous course of action.

Alex's philosophy, followed to its logical conclusion, leads down a dangerous and destructive path. Clearly Alex's decision to behave reprehensibly as a protest against the conformist and institutionalised state is, ultimately, neither moral nor successful. The failure of this approach is made clear by his prompt arrest, incarceration, and increasing institutionalisation in the second part of the novel. It is as a direct result of his rebellion that Alex finds himself subjected to the logical extension of the converse philosophy of the state and its institutions. This alternative to Alex's anarchic approach is shown to be no better.

The mechanical morality of the state, in which compliance with a limited range of social expectations is not only promoted but demanded, reaches its zenith in the development and application of the Ludovico technique to which

Alex is subjected. The idea that if compliance cannot be achieved through command and coercion it must be achieved by the forcible elimination of any other choice is dramatised in Alex's treatment within the prison facility. Through subjection to the extreme aversion therapy prescribed by the Ludovico technique, Alex is robbed of his ability to choose between good and evil, and thus transformed into a human automaton: the clockwork orange of the title.[138] This is where the path of prescribed 'goodness' leads, the novel suggests. When right and wrong are absolute moral judgements defined by an impersonal institution and applied without discretion, the humanity of the individual is compromised – with disastrous results.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, then, we see again the same fundamental conflict between a complex human protagonist on the one hand, and an impersonal institutional antagonist on the other. The central drama of the novel occurs precisely because Alex is unable and unwilling to comply

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138. For Burgess (who was fluent in Malay) the Cockney slang expression "queer as a clockwork orange" is here entwined with the Malay word for man (orang). Burgess writes that "the Cockney and the Malay fused in my mind to give an image of human beings who are juicy and sweet like oranges, being forced into the condition of mechanical objects" ('Programme Note,' 259).

with the expectations of the conformist, institutionalised society in which he lives. As a deliberate act of resistance, he engages in the most extreme expression of deviance he can conceive of, and invites, in response, the most extreme methods of control the authorities can devise. The institution in which Alex is detained in part two of the novel is actively engaged in preventing Alex's (misguided) expression of identity.

Especially notable in Burgess' novel is the fact that the satire of this dramatic conflict cuts both ways. This is emphasised in the text's dialectical structure, which presents, in parts one and two, the flaws apparent in both of the opposing viewpoints. Alex's destructive expression of individuality is shown, in the first part, to be both immoral and counter-productive. Furthermore, it places the viewpoint of opposition to the institutionalised mass society of the narrative world in the mouth of a character who is not only unreliable, but unashamedly a sociopath. By doing so, Burgess satirises the routine Romantic criticisms of modern mass society as empty and futile. The response provoked in part two, however, is shown to be equally unhelpful. The impersonal culture of this modern mass society is attacked, as its methods are exposed as inhuman and detrimental to

the humanity of the very people it represents. By placing this conflict in a dystopian future setting, Burgess ensures that all moral frameworks are suspect from the start. The ambivalence of *A Clockwork Orange*, rather than presenting an interpretative dilemma, asks us to critically examine both sides of this perceived conflict within modern society.

From Reconciliation to Alienation

In each of the novels discussed thus far we have seen that the central dramatic conflict of the narrative revolves around a confrontation between a complex, individual protagonist, and an antagonistic, impersonal, and institutionalised mass society. The protagonist finds his quest for identity hindered by a culture hostile to individual complexity, and is as result physically segregated from normal society and institutionalised within a state facility. In Cela's novel, there is a calculated ambiguity in the central case that works to expose the senselessness of wartime politics, and the inflexibility and opacity of the authoritarian post-war system. Grass similarly builds paradox into the character of Oskar and the novel's bizarre central case to satirise a social culture that sees the world in mutually-exclusive, binary moral judgements. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the satire of this conflict is double-edged: Burgess shows that both the sys-

tems of this impersonal mass society and the extreme rebellion of the individual are equally damaging. In the dramatic conflicts of these three novels we see a change in the genre of the picaresque. Here, in the neopicaresque novels, it seems that the protagonist is offered no prospect of reconciliation with his hostile society, but becomes, by his incarceration, increasingly alienated. In each case, the narrative shows that institutionalisation has become the exemplary form of modern society, and that the only option for existence therein is conformity. For those, like the neo-pícaros, who refuse to conform, there is no alternative but exclusion.

This dynamic between the neo-pícaro and his hostile society is repeated, in different but analogous ways, in each of the neopicaresque novels we have before us. In Waterhouse's *Billy Liar*, Billy's rejection of social norms and expectations is very similar to Alex's rejection of society in the first part of *A Clockwork Orange*. Billy, much like Alex, rails against the pressure he feels to conform to a single set of established, one-size-fits-all social expectations. He scorns the precedent modelled by his parents' generation, what Anna Ślwińska summarises as his family's "typical middle class behaviour [...] their double morality and living accord-

ing to fixed patterns" (82), precisely because their way of life demands compliance with an inflexible and impersonal culture of conformity. Billy's disinterest in his work at Shadrack & Duxbury's is analogous to Alex's reluctance to attend school. In both cases, the protagonist is resentful of an expectation that everyone must live according to the same inflexible standards, and in both cases the protagonist responds to this pressure with deviant acts of subversion.

In *Billy Liar* it is the character of Mr. Shadrack who most clearly represents the detached impersonality of the narrative world's conformist mass society. Shadrack is depicted as the model of soulless conformity: the heir to a family undertaking business, he is a stern and humourless boss who battles to constrain his employee's wayward behaviour. Billy's view of Shadrack is scathing:

> He was, for a start, only about twenty-five years old, although grown old with quick experience, like forced rhubarb. His general approach and demeanour was that of the second-hand car salesman, and he had in fact at one time been one in the south. He was in the undertaking business because his old man was in it before him [...] He was a member of most churches in Stradhoughton and to my certain knowledge was a card-carrying Unitarian, a Baptist, a Methodist, and both High and Low Church (28).

For Billy, Shadrack embodies the spirit of establishment culture: blindly mimicking the same life as his forbears, subscribing unscrupulously to a multitude of formal organisations, and prematurely aged by the burdensome demands of a bureaucratic system that has swallowed him.

So entrenched in this system is Shadrack that even his speech is stripped of subjectivity:

> 'It's been noticed that you were half an hour late again this morning.' He always said 'It's been noticed.' It's been noticed you haven't sent those accounts off yet' (18-9).

Shadrack's habitual use of the passive voice evokes the unemotional, mechanical response of the disinterested bureaucratic, and the omission of the subject pronoun drives home the point that Shadrack is devoid of all personal agency. Furthermore, the same passive voice gives Shadrack an air of detached authority. He speaks, it seems, not for himself, but on behalf of that faceless mass society. In Shadrack, then, we see concretely the dehumanising effects of the establishment culture that threatens to absorb Billy, as well as a symbolic figure to represent society as a whole.

Billy, again like Alex, expropriates power from this conformist mass society by engaging in deviant acts of rebel-

lion. The running joke of Billy gradually destroying the two hundred and eleven promotional calendars that he was supposed to deliver to clients of Mr. Shadrack is a prominent example of this. The calendars themselves are inscribed with toothless platitudes that encourage docile conformity to the big system: "*Think all you speak, but speak not all you think*," "*It takes sixty muscles to frown, but only thirteen to smile. Why waste energy?*" and "*It is a gude heart that says nae ill, but a better heart that thinks none*" (26, emphasis in original). In one of the novel's most memorable comic scenes Billy attempts to flush a number of these calendars down the lavatory at work. Here Waterhouse employs a combination of slapstick and scatological humour to emphasise Billy's contempt for authority, the establishment, and the solemnity of his workplace. The novel's satire attacks the conformist establishment culture for being banal and burdensome, and celebrates the small victories like this that the protagonist strikes against it. Though its satire is gentler than that of *A Clockwork Orange*, that of *Billy Liar* is founded again upon that same fundamental conflict between a complex individual protagonist contending with the uniform expectations of an impersonal mass society.

The same conflict can be see in *Lola, espejo oscuro,*

too, this time in Lola's problematic associations with the lawyers and financiers of Madrid. In Fernández Flórez' novel the institutionalised and conformist culture that threatens the protagonist is symbolically represented in Lola's powerful male patrons. Like those symbolic masters of Lazarillo, the men that control Lola's life are devoid of personal names and referred to mostly by profession: the factory manager, the procurer, the lawyer, the doctor, etc. Lola is not physically imprisoned in the way that Pascual, Oscar, and Alex are, but she is figuratively held captive to the demands of these powerful establishment figures and is, as a consequence, deprived of crucial aspects of her humanity: treated as a commodity, and divested of personal agency.

Lola's disenfranchisement is clearly evidenced in the incident at the Madrid apartment towards the end of part two (139-157 [220-236]). In this pivotal episode, Lola is paid to attend a gathering of the Madrileño legal elite as the escort of a powerful and well-known procurer, who intends to trade her with a lawyer in order to secure a business deal. The trade goes awry, however, when Lola develops and expresses feelings for a third man, who is then killed in a subsequent brawl. Lola's silence on the matter is bought in order to protect the reputations of the men involved, and as a

condition of this she is denied the opportunity to mourn the death of her friend. The implications of the incident are stark: Lola is treated by the establishment figures as a commodity to be bought and sold, and is deprived of the human emotions of both love and grief.

Lola responds not with deviant acts of subversion, but instead learns to play the system to her own advantage, securing not only a subsistence living but a luxury lifestyle in exchange for her capitulation. The result, however, is that she is drawn ever deeper into what the character of Juan later observes to be a "vida motorizada" (312)[139] – a mechanical life stripped of human emotion and directed by the powerful establishment elite. The pervasive culture of conformist and institutionalised society turns Lola into a human automaton – a clockwork orange like Alex, who is unable to make her own life choices, or to experience the full spectrum of human emotions. Her escape from this system is achieved only by the rebellious cultivation of a personal inner life. Juan encourages Lola to develop introspection through psychotherapy, and to later bring this to fruition in the final heroic act of writing. The poetic life of the individu-

139. "mechanised life" (198)

al, Juan reminds her, is “tan necesario, tan real como el otro, como el de la vida corriente y moliente” (310).[140] The satire of the novel attacks the exploitative and dehumanising culture of a corrupt institutional elite, and shows that resistance can be achieved through the defense of an individual inner life.

In Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the narrative drama is underpinned by the same basic conflict between personal protagonist and impersonal and conformist social culture. This dynamic is dramatically established in the early episode of the battle royale, wherein a group of young black students, including the protagonist, is coerced into participating in a violent competition by the “big shots” (17) of the local community. The group of “bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants [and ...] pastors” (18) that organise the event unambiguously represent the financial, legal, educational, and religious institutions that hold power in the narrative world. Their insistence that the group of young black students be initiated into adult life by being stripped of their clothes, deprived of their names (they are addressed only by racist epithets), and made to compete

140. “as necessary and real” as “the humdrum daily grind” (197)

for gold coins and the approval of the establishment elite requires little unpacking: the institutions that govern this world, Ellison shows, deprive the individual of identity and dignity, and furthermore fabricate spurious interpersonal conflicts between disenfranchised individuals in order to misdirect their grievances away from the real antagonist.

The battle royale of the first chapter is an accurate portent of Invisible Man's later experience of the world. In the episodes that follow, the protagonist passes from organisation to organisation, finding in each instance that his personal identity, dignity, and fraternal relationships with others are threatened by an impersonal establishment culture that seeks to regulate and pigeonhole the individual. This is his experience of the college of Dr. Bledsoe, of his employment at Liberty Pains, and of the social activist group the Brotherhood. In his involvement with each of these organisations, as discussed in the previous chapter, Invisible Man is pressed to conform to particular stereotypes and prejudices, and as a consequence of his failure to comply to these expectations he is driven away. The words that Invisible Man dreams after the battle royale ("To Whom it May Concern [...] Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" [33]) become the implicit refrain of these organisations.

Each one fails to see the protagonist as an individual, is unable to accommodate his human complexity, and eventually casts him out.

It is this anti-individual culture upheld by the institutions of the narrative world that finally drives Invisible Man underground. “Up above there is an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern” (576), he laments, but underground, separated from that conformist society, he feels free. “Diversity is the word,” he continues, “let man keep his many parts and you’ll have no tyrant states” (577). From his underground refuge, Invisible Man strikes back against his own tyrannical society with a symbolic transgression analogous to those subversive acts of deviance we have seen carried out by Billy and Alex. The protagonist of Ellison’s novel similarly expropriates power through intentional wrongdoing, this time by wiring his underground hideout with a deliberately excessive number of lightbulbs (1,369 and counting), and powering them with electricity stolen from the grid. In this act Invisible Man begins his symbolic “battle” (7) with Monopolated Light & Power, a battle that represents his greater war on the over-regulated, impersonal, and institutionalised society that has failed to see him all along. The stolen light, he says, “confirms my reality, gives

birth to my form" (6). Invisible Man himself metes out a poetic justice against the institutional culture that has wronged him, and in this way claims a small victory in this central narrative conflict.

In these examples we see that the antagonist of the neopicaresque novels is not confined to the walls of the cells in which we find Pascual, Oskar, and Alex. Rather, a broader vision of modern mass society is always implied. Though it may take the form of a penal institution, or be represented in powerful establishment figures, the hostile society of the neo-picaresque novels is one that is heavily institutionalised, operates in absolutes, and is unable to recognise or accommodate the complex personality of the protagonist. It is from this basic conflict that the narrative drama of the neopicaresque novel arises. The committed poetic of the neopicaresque novel is concerned with the fundamental conflict between man and the impersonal mass society that he has created in the modern age.

Anti-Heroes and Anti-Villains

It is notable, however, that in several of the neopicaresque novels the dynamic between protagonist and antagonist is decidedly more complex than that between heroes

and villains. In several cases, and most clearly in those three novels that set up the narrative conflict through the situation of incarceration, the opposition between the neo-pícaro and a hostile society is morally and thematically complex. In the novels by Burgess, Grass, and Cela, it is apparent that the detention facilities or penal institutions within which the protagonists are incarcerated are not entirely without redemptive connotations. For Alex, Oskar, and Pascual, these institutional facilities provide a microcosm of the world outside, within which their conflict with modern mass society is given clear and structured form. Through this symbolic representation of the hostile society of the neopicaresque world, we see that the antagonist is, like the protagonist, morally ambiguous and complex: an anti-villain, to parallel the anti-hero that is the neo-pícaro.

In *A Clockwork Orange* Burgess utilises a tripartite dialectical structure to show that the conflict between Alex and his society is not a simple moral opposition. With each part of the novel, the dynamic between protagonist and antagonist, hero and villain, shifts. In the first part Alex is shown, as we have noted previously, to be unambiguously evil. His violence and criminality appear, at this stage, to be unjustified and indefensible. His declaration of intent in which Alex

frames his behaviour as a warranted act of rebellion against a perversely institutionalised society remains, at this point, suspect: it is not until the second part of the novel that readers discover the extent of this society's corruption and institutionalisation. If we can accept Alex as the hero of his own account he is, most definitely, an anti-hero.

Alex's rebellion, however, is not only ineffective, but precipitates the change in dynamic that we see in part two. By this very behaviour, Alex brings about his own disempowerment, and bolsters the power of that hostile society against him. Charles Sumner, in his paper "Humanist Drama in A Clockwork Orange," notes that Alex unintentionally invites his own arrest, imprisonment, and subjection to the Ludovico technique. Alex's crimes, Sumner writes, "represent local moments of autonomy from political and legal forces that, paradoxically, serve to strengthen these very forces" (49). His intention to defend his liberty in fact leads to its loss, and "his exercise of authority paradoxically underscores his impotence" (51). In this way, the villanous Alex of part one is transformed into the pitiable tragic hero of part two.

A similar variance between intention and outcome takes place within the institutions of the narrative world,

and this radically transforms the dynamic between protagonist and antagonist in part three. In seeking to guide its citizens down the path of ethical and good behaviour, the social institutions of the novel themselves become the very apotheosis of unethical conduct. They overstep the mark in trying to force, rather than guide, individual character development, and thus fail their own standards. The Ludovico technique to which Alex is subjected succeeds in preventing him from engaging in violent behaviour towards others, but this does not make him a better person or a more contributing member of society. Instead, following his release Alex is left a helpless wretch. He is powerless to defend himself against the violent retributive actions of his former victims, homeless, destitute, and finally suicidal. By the end of the first chapter of his release, Alex is wishing he were back in prison (150); by the second chapter he is contemplating suicide (155); and by the fifth he makes an attempt on his own life (181). His treatment at the hands of the corrective facilities within which he was institutionalised is no longer merely dubious, it is obviously harmful. In seeking to improve Alex, the institution succeeds only in destroying him. The corrective regime of the institution in part one, is thus shown to have become a destructive regime in part

two.

These shifting notions of goodness and badness, heroism and villainy, are further complicated with another shift in part three. Stripped of his autonomy and unable to fend for himself, Alex now encounters the outside world anew. He is no longer to able to exert his physical dominance over others, and is thus forced to experience the ordeal of being on the receiving end of the violence he once dealt. Alex faces poetic justice, and only now begins to understand the fallacy of his earlier immature and truncated understanding of freedom. The anarchic freedom for which Alex once fought, now stripped of idealism, is unmasked as chaos, and Alex soon yearns to return to the relative safety of the prison. In the short period between his release and his attempted suicide, Alex repeatedly expresses his longing and affection for the "dear old Staja [prison]" (150) where he was formerly incarcerated. Faced with the chaotic outside world of uninhibited individuals, Alex now re-conceives of the institution as a safe refuge, and bastion of order. The penal facility acquires, or rather re-acquires, some of the positive connotations of its earlier intentions. The antagonistic institution of part two is transformed into something more ambiguous: an anti-villain, to parallel the anti-hero that is Alex. In Burgess'

novel, we see that morality is shifting and unstable. Readers cannot reliably say what is good or bad, right or wrong, in this conflict between the anti-heroic individual and the anti-villainous society. With the back-and-forth reversal of intentions and outcomes, perceptions and reality, these binary distinctions are shown to no longer provide the confident assurances they once did.

A similarly complicated portrayal of the dynamic between protagonist and antagonist can be seen in Grass' *Die Blechtrommel*. Here, the threat of the institutional authorities is represented most clearly in the character of Bruno: the ever-present guard who keeps watch over Oskar through a eyehole in the cell door. Oskar is under constant scrutiny from Bruno, and this, he suggests, inhibits his ability to recall and recount the events of his own former life:

> Es ist gar nicht so einfach, hier, im abgeseiften Metallbett einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, im Blickfeld eines verglasten und mit Brunos Auge bewaffneten Guckloches liegend, die Rauchschwaden kaschubischer Kartoffelkrautfeuer [...] nachzuzeichnen (23).[141]

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141. "It's not so easy, lying here in the scrubbed metal bed of a mental institution, within range of a glazed peephole armed with Bruno's eye, to retrace the swaths of smoke rising from Kashubian potato fields" (13).

Oskar's description of the eye-hole being "armed with Bruno" indicates the latent threat of violence that he perceives from the apparatus of surveillance, and from the figure of Bruno himself. Oskar also indicates here both that he requires the assent of the institution to be able to tell his story, and that without this opportunity to recount the past he would lose his own sense of self altogether:

> Hätte ich nicht meine Trommel, der bei geschicktem und geduldigem Gebrauch alles einfällt, was an Nebensächlichkeiten nötig ist, um die Hauptsache aufs Papier bringen zu können, und hätte ich nicht die Erlaubnis der Anstalt, drei bis vier Stunden täglich mein Blech sprechen zu lassen, wäre ich ein armer Mensch ohne nachweisliche Großeltern (ibid).[142]

For Oskar, the articulation of his own life story is what ensures its reality. The institution's ability to permit or deny this suggests the existential threat that its power poses.

Nevertheless, though cognisant of this threat and displeased with the constant scrutiny to which he is subjected, Oskar expresses positive, even affectionate, sentiments to-

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142. "If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled properly and patiently recalls all the little details I need to get the essentials down on paper, and if I didn't have the institute's permission to let my drum speak three or four hours each day, I would be a poor fellow with no known grandparents" (ibid).

wards Bruno. He refers to Bruno not as *Wärter* or *Wächter* (guard) but as *Pfleger* (guardian, or carer). The choice of vocabulary not only links Bruno closely to the institution (the *Heil- und* ***Pflege****anstalt*) but also somewhat negates any antagonism between the two characters. In fact, Oskar emphasises that he does not himself see Bruno as an adversary. “In der Tür ist ein Guckloch,” narrates Oskar on the first page of his account,

> und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann. Mein Pfleger kann also gar nicht mein Feind sein. Liebgewonnen habe ich ihn, erzähle dem Gucker hinter der Tür[143] (9).

The noted difference in colouration between Oskar and Bruno has led some to suggest that the novel presents the two characters as opponents. Reiko Tachibana Nemoto, for one, argues that the unexpected reference to Bruno’s darker colouring “induce[s] estrangement as the reader puzzles over whether or not the narrator is expressing an Aryan, ‘superior’ Nazi viewpoint and accusing the non-Aryan keeper of inferiority” (744). While it is tempting to read this im-

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143. “There’s a peephole in the door, and my keeper’s eye is the shade of brown that can’t see through blue-eyed types like me. So my keeper can’t possibly be my enemy. I’ve grown fond of this man peeping through the door” (3)

agery as an expression of veiled Nazi prejudices on the part of Oskar, and his observation of difference as an attempt to arrogate a sense of power for himself, the pages that follow do not support a reading of hostility between the two characters.

In fact, to the contrary, Oskar describes an important correspondence between himself and Bruno. Oskar declares explicitly that he believes that, their differences notwithstanding, the two men who sit on either side of the cell door share certain significant qualities. In the outside world, Oskar tells us, individuals no longer exist: they have been subsumed by a wave of common loneliness that has transformed society into a single, nameless, and heroless mass (12).[144] This collective and homogenising grief is, of course, most vividly depicted in the episode of the Onion Cellar (the nightclub in which patrons would gather to peel onions together and release their pent up sorrows from the Nazi and war years). Oskar and Bruno, however, both shielded from this sorrowful outside world and bolstered by their unlikely friendship, are able to remain steadfast in their heroic, individual existences. “Für mich, Oskar, und meinen Pfleger

144. P.5 in the Mitchell translation.

Bruno möchte ich jedoch feststellen," he narrates:

> Wir beide sind Helden, ganz verschiedene Helden, er hinter dem Guckloch, ich vor dem Guckloch; und wenn er die Tür aufmacht, sind wir beide, bei aller Freundschaft und Einsamkeit, noch immer keine namen- und heldenlose Masse[145] (12).

It is, paradoxically, within the walls of the institution, Oskar suggests, that he is able to remain free from the post-war desolation outside. It is, furthermore, in solidarity with an agent of this institution that Oskar, alongside Bruno, remains an individual, and thus a hero.

It is clear, in fact, that Oskar's detention is not an entirely unwelcome circumstance, and that he finds a degree of safety and security within the psychiatric facility that he does not see in the outside world. He describes the railed, white metal bed of the institution as his refuge, a fortress that he wishes to fortify yet further against the intrusions of the free outside world:

> Mein weißlackiertes metallanes Anstaltsbett ist also ein Maßstab. Mir ist es sogar mehr: Mein

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145. "As far as I and my keeper Bruno are concerned, I beg to state that we are both heroes, quite different heroes, he behind his peephole, I in front of it; and that when he opens the door, the two of us, for all our friendship and loneliness, are still far from being some nameless mass devoid of heroes" (5)

> Bett ist das endlich erreichte Ziel, mein Trost ist es und könnte mein Glaube weden, wenn mir die Anstaltsleitung erlaubte, einige Änderungen vorzunehmen: Das Bettgitter möchte ich erhöhen lassen, damit mir niemand mehr zu nahe tritt"[146] (9-10).

A number of recent studies of the novel have noted this sense that Oskar finds security in his own incarceration. Stacey Olster suggests that the fortified shelter of the bed becomes for Oskar a substitute for the ancestral womb that he seeks throughout the novel, and a symbolic parallel to the skirts of Anna Bronski that once sheltered the fugitive Josef Koljaiczek, while Sien Uytterschout similarly emphasises that this white-enamelled bed is for Oskar a "safe haven" (187) from the bleak and disappointing world outside. The institution within which Oskar is detained appears, therefore, not as a prison, but as an asylum in both senses of the word: a place designed to contain madness, now providing a sanctuary from the greater madness outside.

Oskar's experience of the institution can be compared

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146. "My white-enamelled metal hospital bed thus sets a standard. To me it is more; my bed is a goal I've finally reached, it is my consolation, and could easily become my faith if the administration would allow me to make a few changes: I'd like to have the bed rails raised even higher to keep anyone from coming too close" (3-4)

to that of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*. For both protagonists the institution poses an acute existential threat. In Alex's case this threat is realised: stripped by the institution of his human capacity for free choice he is driven to the point of self-destruction. For Oskar, the threat is latent: stifled by the surveillance he faces, and cognisant that permission to 'drum out' his story is contingent on the permission of the institution, Oskar is fearful that the history he relies upon for his sense of identity might be lost. For both characters, however, the threat of the institution must be weighed against the dangers of the outside world. When viewed in this wider context, the ordered and regulated culture of the institution provides a safe haven. The institution gives the social world a contained, structured, and clarified form, and provides thus a comparative refuge from the chaos and corruption that lies beyond its walls. The despair that reigns outside poses an equal or greater peril than the threat against their individual existence. Thus the institutionalisation of society becomes an ambiguous phenomenon. The institution itself becomes an unlikely ally for the neo-pícaros, and a complicated anti-villain to parallel their complicated anti-heroism.

In *Pascual Duarte*, the ambiguity we have already dis-

cussed draws us towards a similar conclusion. Pascual's first person account speaks very little of his conditions during incarceration, but there are indications that, like Alex and Oskar, Pascual finds refuge and safety in his cell. His life outside we know to be chaotic and violent. The unexplained deaths of children close to Pascual show the outside world to be cruel and capricious. The deaths of Pascual's younger brother, Mario, of the unborn child whom Lola miscarries, and of their infant, Pascualillo, are all depicted as random tragedies dealt by the hand of fate. Pascual himself internalises this random violence, and strikes out with a similar volatility. It is on impulse that Pascual kills the dog la Chispa and the pregnant mare, that he attacks Zacarías, and that he murders El Estirao, his own mother, and perhaps also Don Jesús. The meaningless destruction of life that Pascual sees and imitates is suggestive of the brutal and similarly senseless destruction of life during Spain's violent war and post-war years. Pascual's experience of the world is undoubtedly chaotic and violent

The penitentiary, and what little we learn of it, appears in contrast to this outside chaos. Its firm rules and regulations, and its clear understanding of morality, offer the structure and order that has been missing from Pascual's

life. Pascual describes long periods of quiet solitude within the penitentiary, and in these he is finally able to find the peace he needs to reflect on his life. He describes himself:

> dejando volar libre la imaginación, lo único que libre en mi puede volar; contemplando los desconchados del techo; buscándoles parecidos, y en este largo mes he gozado – a mi manera – de la vida como no había gozado en todos los años anteriores: a pesar de todos los pesares y preocupaciones[147] (176).

Sheltered by the walls of the institution, Pascual finds the quietude he needs to turn inward and to understand his own actions and experiences. It is this newly-discovered introspection that allows Pascual to write his account, and to thereby realise his individuality. As in both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Die Blechtrommel*, the institution, in spite of its latent threat against the protagonist, provides a temporary refuge and, in this case, becomes an unlikely ally in the protagonist's quest for identity.

For Pascual, however, there is no acquittal, no release

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147. "letting my imagination soar, fly about freely, since it's the only thing about me that can soar or fly free. I've stared at the cracks and chips in the ceiling, trying to find likenesses to people I know. In this long month, in all truth, I've enjoyed my life – in my own way – as I never had before, not in all the long years of my life, and that's a fact in spite of all my griefs and worries" (100).

and, as the transcriber reminds us in his closing note, no stay of execution. Pascual is killed in a final conclusive sentence that appears to confirm the absolute power of the institution. By Pascual's execution, the individual is destroyed, and institutionalised society triumphs in its antagonistic quest to eliminate deviance. Yet even here, Cela leaves open an ambiguous alternative reading. Pascual's name, cognate with the Latin *pascha*, suggests that the protagonist may be the sacrificial lamb (the "manso cordero" that Fr. Santiago sees) that provides public penance for the sins of Spain's wartime society. Such a reading offers hope, perhaps, that the violent chaos of Pascual's life belongs to a past world and that, in his death, this can be redeemed. As in the rest of the novel, Cela leaves these two contradictory possibilities open. The polysemy of the novel is maintained to the very end, and the possibility of conclusive resolution is denied.

Conclusion

A comparative reading of these texts reveals that the central drama of the neopicaresque novel revolves around the conflicting values of a complex, individual, human protagonist, and an impersonal, inflexible, and heavily institutionalised vision of a modern mass society. While the neopí-

caro is engaged in a quest to (re)discover and affirm a unique and complex personal identity, the institutions and broader institutional culture of the narrative world conspires to obstruct this. This conflict is dramatised most concretely in those novels by Cela, Burgess, and Grass, wherein the narrative premise of incarceration establishes an immediate opposition between prisoner and prison, captive and captor, man and society. In each of these texts, ambiguity, ambivalence, or paradox is built into the central case in an effort to satirise the oversimplified visions of politics and morality that the societies of the narrative world present. Parallel conflicts between the complex individual and a conformist mass society are evident in the other neopicaresque novels too.

Where the historical picaresque genre relied on stock character types to represent the hostile society of their narrative worlds, however, the neopicaresque novels instead represent the antagonistic role of the neopícaro's society through faceless institutions and their representative employees. The dramatic conflict of the neopicaresque novels sets their satiric orientation against the impersonality of modern mass society. We might note, however, that the portrayal of this institutionalisation is not purely negative:

for Alex, Oskar, and Pascual, the institution is also an unexpected and unlikely source of refuge from a chaotic outside world. The neopicaresque novel depicts a complicated relationship between an anti-heroic individual protagonist, and an anti-villainous impersonal and institutionalised vision of society. These authors similarly suggest a dissolution of the binary distinction between heroes and villains.

4. Civilisation and Barbarism

Man, in a book like *The Stranger*, is a creature neither fully primitive nor fully civilized, a self devoid of depth

– Saul Bellow, "Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," 1963

In the preceding chapters we have seen that the neopicaresque novels revisit several core themes from the historical picaresque genre, but revise these in response to modern contexts. Food and hunger, once the principle narrative drive for the picaresque novel, continues to be a significant theme, but now functions to guide the reader towards the idea that social reality conceals an underlying absolute, or cosmic, reality. The main narrative motor is no longer hunger, but a central quest for identity that sees the protagonist seeking to rediscover a complex interior personality threatened by exterior social forces. The antagonist in this quest is the hostile society of the narrative world, whose formal, regulated, and heavily institutionalised culture seems to be at odds with the creative, individual spirit of the neopícaro. Both protagonist and antagonist, however, are shown to be similarly complex. The same hostile society

is simultaneously both captor and refuge, paralleling the moral ambiguity of the protagonist. The satiric force of the neopicaresque novels is broadly concerned with problematising moral perspectives, challenging perceived binaries, and revealing hidden complexities. Paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence are significant rhetorical devices within these novels, and the satiric implications of these cannot be fully understood apart from the contexts of the works.

As we have noted previously, the development of the picaresque genre is closely connected to the development of the modern novel itself. The publication of *Lazarillo* (c.1550-1552[148]) is considered a landmark moment in western literary history, for in terms of both form and content the text presented something radically new. Drawing on a range of different classical and folk traditions, the unknown author of *Lazarillo* created a text that many literary historians con-

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148. The four oldest known editions of the text date from 1554, when it was printed anonymously in Burgos, Medina del Campo, Alcalá de Henares, and Antwerp almost simultaneously. Its sudden appearance and proliferation across this range of cities within the span of a few months suggests that the first edition must have appeared some years earlier. An original publication date of between 1550 and 1552 is generally posited. For a discussion on the provisional dating of the lost first edition of *Lazarillo* see: Antonio Rey Hazas' *Deslindes de la novela picaresca* (75), or Alexander Samson's chapter on *Lazarillo* in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature* (24-5).

sider to be both the initiator of the picaresque genre, as well as the first example of the modern novel in European literary history. Many scholars have proposed that the innovative features of *Lazarillo* arose in relation to the specific social and political contexts of sixteenth century Spain, and the broader cultural contexts of the early modern period. Garrido Ardila proposes that the features of *Lazarillo* suggest its author had a "commitment to portraying modernity" ("Origins" 11), and that both the text and the genre it initiated arose from the "new conditions of modern society" (18).

Levi's study on "Microhistory and Picaresque" states the connection between *Lazarillo* and the contexts of its composition more directly. It is "no coincidence," writes Levi,

> that *Lazarillo* was published at the close of the imperial dream of Charles V, or *Guzmán* at the end of the reign of Phillip II. These were years of crisis, a strong and more or less conscious colouring of social indictment and a questioning of the fossilized power structures governing society (24-5).

In his book on *Spanish Picaresque Fiction* Peter N. Dunn likewise suggests that the picaresque genre arose

> from a set of overlapping cultural matrices – the absolute singularity of individuals; the necessary struggles of individuals for freedom within their social bonds; the moral value of literature; and, on a lower level of generality, the decadence of Spanish society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (7).

Blackburn acknowledges a more general sense of connection between the impulse towards the picaresque and particular sociocultural contexts, writing that the picaresque novel

> is a seriocomic form that tends to appear at times when the literary imagination is unusually threatened by catastrophe: that is, at times when the very idea of existence commingles with the world of illusion (14).

It is hence clear that the development and use of the picaresque is widely considered to be driven by contextual factors: in particular, a sense that social upheaval, political uncertainty, and the increasingly singular position of the individual in modern society drove an impulse towards the genre.

The Devastation of War in *Pascual Duarte* and *Lola, espejo oscuro*

It is hard to imagine a greater sense of upheaval and uncertainty than that felt in western Europe and the United

States during those midcentury decades when the neopicaresque emerged. In the Spanish context, first of all, it is no coincidence that Cela and Fernández Flórez both had recourse to the picaresque tradition in writing their novels in the years immediately following the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). Published in 1942 and 1950 respectively, both *Pascual Duarte* and *Lola, espejo oscuro* are often discussed in literary scholarship as key examples of Spanish postwar fiction. Cela's novel, in particular, is widely held to be a critical early example of the postwar novel in Spain, and an initiator of what would later come to be recognised as a postwar literary revival in Spanish letters.[149] Adolfo Sotelo Vázquez, in his 1995 introduction to the novel, notes that the publication of *Pascual Duarte* is generally considered to be *the* starting point of the Spanish postwar novel (61), and argues that its protagonist, Pascual, serves to represent and record the collective experience of Spaniards during the preceding war years. "By his fierce and pious heart, by his primitive justice and violent murders," Sotelo Vázquez writes, "Pascual Duarte is the notary of a Spain that had

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149. Other notable works that follow Cela in this postwar literary revival include, for example, Carmen Laforet's *Nada* (1945) and Miguel Delibes' *La sombra del ciprés es alargada* (1948).

just lived through the civil war" (80, translation my own).[150] The character of Lola in the novel by Fernández Florez functions similarly: through her first-person narrative account, Lola records the civilian experience of the war and its aftermath. Both novels are thus presented as witness testimonies to the war years, and their narratives quite explicitly explore the consequences for man and society of that chaotic and violent period in the nation's very recent past. When we consider Cela's and Fernández Flórez's satiric achievements, we must do so with these contexts in mind.

Cela's novel is rather abstruse in its references to the Spanish Civil War. Nevertheless, we can determine with some confidence that the two most significant deaths of the novel – those of don Jesús and, subsequently, of Pascual himself – both take place within the first twelve months of the conflict, while the supplementary documents that frame and analyse Pascual's account relate to the early postwar years, roughly contemporary with the time in which Cela was writing the novel. The closing note of the transcriber indicates that Pascual's conduct during the "fifteen days of

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150. "Desde su corazón piadoso y fiero, desde su justicia primitiva y sus violentos asesinatos, Pascual Duarte es el fedatario de la España que acaba de vivir la guerra civil" (80)

revolutionary turmoil that swept over his village" (160) in 1936 are unknown, but also places the death of don Jesús at around this same time. Based on the location and dates, it is likely that the two weeks of turmoil mentioned here refer to particular events of the Extremadura Campaign (2nd to 14th August 1936) during the Civil War – specifically, the Battle of Almendralejo (7th to 15th August), the nearby Battle of Badajoz (14th August), and the subsequent Badajoz Massacre (15th August 1936).[151] The suggested reference to these events provides a possible context for the death of don Jesús, and allows us to ascertain with relative certainty that this pivotal event of the narrative takes place during the summer of 1936 – the same period during which Nationalist forces seized control of the region in which the novel is set. We can also surmise that Pascual's subsequent execution is carried out early the following year, at some point after the 15th February 1937 (the date of his letter to don Joaquín), but before the 10th May (the date of

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151. These battles were significant early events in the Spanish Civil War. The Battle of Badajoz was one of the first major battles of the conflict, and a strategic early victory for the Nationalist side. The massacre that followed, in which an estimated 2,000 to 4,000 Republicans (up to 10% of the population of Badajoz at that time) were executed in the city's bullring, came to feature prominently in propaganda produced by both sides during the war (Preston, 323).

don Joaquín's death, as stated on the extract of his will). Thus the two most significant deaths of the narrative can both be dated with confidence to the first twelve months of the war.

With this in mind, we can make two further inferences about the timeframe within which the events of the narrative take place. Firstly, since the death of don Jesús takes place within the early months of the war, we can determine that the events recounted by Pascual take place some time before this, and thus well before the outbreak of war. Secondly, we also know that the supplementary documents (including the transcriber's notes, and the two letters of testimony) belong to the postwar period. These are all dated to January 1942: some five years after the death of Pascual, and three years after the official end of the war. This sets these supplementary documents apart as belonging to the early years of the Franco regime, and establishes a significant temporal distance between the events of Pascual's life and the other characters' evaluation thereof.

This timeframe is significant, for it does not allow the reader to easily make political inferences about the events of Pascual's life. As discussed in the previous chapter, Cela builds ambiguity into the central case behind Pascual's in-

carceration and execution in order to leave open the question of his affiliation during those events of the war. Stripped of political rhetoric, only the stark facts remain: that an act of aggression perpetrated, for whatever reason, during the first year of fighting, leads finally and inexorably to the destruction of both victim and perpetrator. Whether Pascual is to be read as a Nationalist, a Republican, or neither, this final outcome does not change, and therein surely lies a sharp comment on the senseless and mutually-destructive nature of the brutal Civil War.

We should note, however, that the context of the Civil War cannot be used to explain the majority of the chaos in Pascual's life. Pascual's experiences, from his childhood in the 1880s right through to his incarceration in the 1930s, are marked throughout by brutal and often inexplicable violence. Much of this he perpetrates himself – in addition to the killing of don Jesús, Pascual is responsible for several other deaths, including those of El Estirao, Lola and her unborn child, and his own mother, as well as those of his dog and horse – but others he witnesses or simply suffers: the violent abuse and tragic death of his younger brother Mario, and later the inexplicable death of his infant Pascualillo. As his first wife Lola remarks moments before she, too, is killed

by Pascual, "blood seems [to be] a kind of fertilizer" (121) in his life. Throughout the narrative, violence breeds further violence, and drives Pascual towards his final fate.

The transcriber's suggestion that it is the outbreak of war that causes two weeks of turmoil seems ludicrous in the context of the preceding narrative. Pascual's pre-war life has been far from peaceful, and only matches, if not exceeds, the violence and chaos that the fighting brings to his hometown. In fact, the most peaceful period of Pascual's life is *during* the war, when his incarceration offers a brief respite from the turmoil of the world outside, before his execution is finally carried out. Pascual's relentlessly chaotic life indicates a lack of distinction between war and peacetime. The pre-Civil War decades of Pascual's life (a period encompassing, in historical terms, the reign of Alfonso XIII, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, and the Second Spanish Republic) are, from Pascual's point of view, indistinguishable from the chaos of the Civil War. In this, Cela offers a satirical comment on the senselessness of the war, the inevitable and inescapable nature of man's violence against man, and a lack of hope for anything better.

The bleakness of *Pascual Duarte* has invited comparisons between Cela's novel and existentialist ideas in other

works of postwar European literature. In his 1964 introduction to the novel, Anthony Kerrigan emphasises the similarities between *Pascual Duarte* and Albert Camus' *L'Etranger* (1942). He notes that the two novels were published just a few months apart, Camus' novel in June and Cela's in October of the same year. "Perhaps it is not inconsequential," he continues,

> that both books revolve around meaningless murder. Both books, like two great tolling bells, resound with the sound of a spiritual void. The knells come across a sparse empty steppe of the soul [...] Behind and below both books, there is the abyss of a War just passed into its climax, the encroaching desolation of the aftermath already foreseen, a lack of belief in anything not immediate, the myth unraveled, the absurdity of chance (ix).

In *Pascual Duarte*, this lack of belief and sense of desolation extends not only forwards beyond the climax of the war, but backwards through those pre-war decades. Cela's satire does not suggest the brutality of the war so much as it suggests the brutality of modern civilisation overall.

The same sense of destruction, desolation, and spiritual emptiness characterises Fernández Flórez' novel, too. As in Pascual's case, the Civil War is not the first cause of devastation in Lola's life – her life is precarious and chaotic long

before the outbreak of the official conflict – but the war nevertheless increases certain social and economic pressures, forcing Lola to fully abandon any possibility of spiritual values, and to find subsistence at a base material level. It is with clear irony then that the novel's concluding discussion between Juan and Darío suggests the attribution of spiritual significance to Lola's biography. With explicit reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12 (the passage from which the novel takes its title, and which is also quoted in the epigraph) the character of Juan suggests that Lola herself is the dark mirror through which readers might gain spiritual insight. She is, he suggests,

> aquel espejo oscuro del que nos habla San Pablo [...] «*Ahora vemos por un espejo, oscuramente; mas entonces veremos cara a cara*» [...] Así es; así era ella: el espejo oscuro. Pero detrás, oscuramente, estaba también Dios. Porque Dios está siempre tras todas las cosas oscuras, tras todas las cosas irreales [...] Y Cristo es el caudillo de la verdad en la lucha contra la hipócrita, retórica y utilitaria realidad.[152]

152. "She was a dark mirror. The dark mirror that Saint Paul speaks of [...] Now we see ourselves in a dark and clouded mirror; more truly, we see ourselves face to face. [...] That's it, that's the way she was – a dark mirror. But behind, in the shadows, was God. Because God is always behind all clouded and dark things, behind all unreal things [...] And Christ is truth's leader in the battle against hypocrisy, rhetoric and utilitarian reality" (250).

There is irony in the idea that we might find divine enlightenment in the life of a character who, the narrative has repeatedly shown, is herself spiritually bereft, and there is hypocrisy in the desire of these men to attribute higher spiritual values to Lola, for whom the possibility of developing her own spiritual values was denied by other men. The final line of this passage links the insincerity of this profession to the contexts of the postwar. The description of Christ as caudillo – an epithet coopted by and associated with Franco – ironically places the postwar regime at the vanguard in the battle against hypocrisy and rhetoric, and in doing so pessimistically suggests this cause is already lost.

If there were any doubt about the intended irony here, it is confirmed in the continuing passage, which juxtaposes this talk of higher moral signification against the desolation of postwar social reality. In response to Juan's impassioned moralising, Darío casts his eyes over their surroundings:

> Callamos nuevamente, porque había poco que decir. El bar se había llenado de gente. Y todos tenían su misma cara, su mismo cuerpo, su misma copa de siempre. Estuve a punto de gritar de terror [...] Son cadáveres que arrastran su cadáver [...] Hay demasiados muertos en la

> ciudad. Y, a veces, su hedor nos llega a las narices.[153]

The desolation of the postwar is made all the more stark by the preceding discussion. Where Juan speaks of spiritual insight and divinity, Darío sees the devastating material reality of death and decay. The satire of the novel dismantles the hypocrisy of wartime ideology and, like that of *Pascual Duarte,* exposes a spiritual void beneath the rhetoric of the war and postwar.

Both Cela and Fernández Flórez respond to the Civil War, as well as the preceding years of crisis and the subsequent years of dictatorship, with novels that similarly express a lack of faith in anything beyond the immediate moment and material plane, a deep cynicism for the state of modern society, and a lack of hope for the future. The narratives strip back the social pretences that attribute ideological or spiritual significance to the events of these turbulent first decades of the twentieth century, and reveal nothing but desolate emptiness beneath. Where previously

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153. "We were quiet for a little while. There was little to say. The bar had filled up with people. Each of them had the same face, the same body, the same drink as always. Seeing them, I felt like screaming in terror. [...] They're corpses who are dragging along their own cadavers [...] There are too many dead in the city. Their stench fills our nostrils" (250).

we noted the suggestion of an underlying carnivalesque spirit, here the satire lacks the festive tone of the carnivalesque. Instead, the narratives point towards a bleak existential nihilism. Both expose the political rhetorics of pre-, post-, and wartime society as not only false, but deceitful and hypocritical. The Civil War is the catalyst that prompts these writers to examine the principles of modern civilisation, and find them bereft of meaning.

In his paper on the "Origins and Definition of the Picaresque Genre" Garrido Ardila argues that

> the picaresque is hardly without a political message. It is a form of *Bildungsroman* that reflects on men's place in society and how they came to understand and accept their status. This aim addresses issues of philosophical concern; the picaresque urge to understand the social meaning of life elaborated a complex existential philosophy. Alemán, for example, is an obvious precursor of Hobbes's dictum *homo hominis lupus est* (17).

In the neopicaresque novels of postwar Spain we see that much of this still holds true. The novels by Cela and Fernández Flórez reflect on the condition of modern man, the state of modern society, and the relationship between the two. Their satires shed light on the brutal social reality of the contemporary world, revealing the hypocrisy and

cruelty that man inflicts on man in the name of (empty) higher values. They sketch the perceived superficiality, desolation, and decadence of twentieth century civilisation in the wake of extreme social and political upheaval, and conclude with a nihilistic lack of faith in anything beyond the immediate material reality. The Spanish neopicaresque novels lean into the existentialist tradition that was emerging in European literature towards the end of the Second World War.

Indeed, Edwin Murillo, in an article entitled "Existential(ist) Echoes: Bad Faith Poetics in *The Family of Pascual Duarte*" (2009), proposes that the Spanish Civil War inspired the development of a postwar existential novel in Spanish literature in the same way that the Second World War likewise inspired the development of the more widely recognised existential novel in western European and American literature shortly thereafter. "The existential peninsular novel," Murillo writes,

> reflects the search for ethical values within a culturally fragmented space destroyed by the horrors of civilized society emerging from war. The Spanish Civil War was the impetus for the peninsular writers, as the Second World War was for the canonical existentialist throughout the rest of Europe and America (238).

The texts by Cela and Fernández Flórez suggest that, as with the historical picaresque genre, there is a close affinity between the neopicaresque outlook and existentialism, and that this is driven primarily by the texts' examination of contemporary social contexts. The perception of social crisis that seems to inspire writers' use of the picaresque seems to lead likewise towards a nihilistic existential conclusion.

Existential Freedom in *Augie March* and *Invisible Man*

Where the neopicaresque emerges elsewhere, however, this existential slant, while likewise connected to postwar contexts, is more positive. In Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March*, the significance of the contexts of the Second World War is most apparent in the final chapter. Here, in the novel's conclusion, Augie is directly, and at last, confronted with the devastation of postwar Europe. The narrative ends with Augie in Dunkirk where, he narrates,

> the British were so punished [during the Battle of Dunkirk that] the town is ruined. Quonset huts stand there on the ruins. The back of the ancient water was like wolf gray. Then on the long sand the waves crashed white; they spit themselves to pieces. I saw this specter of white anger coming from the savage gray and meanwhile shot northward, in a great hurry to Bruges and out of this line of white which was like eternity

> opening up right beside destructions of the modern world, hoary and grumbling (536).

The ruins of Dunkirk are, for Augie, a compelling evocation of the violence of the war that, until now, had largely passed him by. The foaming, “savage,” “wolf gray” water of the Normandy coast becomes a metaphor for the nature of man and his modern civilisation, evoking again that same ancient maxim: *homo hominis lupus est*.

Although the image is bleak, Bellow’s conclusion lacks the pessimistic nihilism of the Spanish novels. Augie rejects the agression he sees in the landscape, and seeks instead to transform the hostility of that past conflict into a more positive future. Faced by the desolation of the ruins of Dunkirk, Augie bares his teeth not in rancour, but in joy: “I got to grinning again,” he continues, “that’s the *animal ridens* in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up” (536). Augie’s levity in the face of unhappy circumstances is characteristic throughout, but acquires particular significance in this final confrontation with the devastation of postwar Europe.

The wartime atrocities are mostly sidestepped by the narrative, and come through only in brief and passing allusions. Augie arrives in Europe to establish a new business

venture trading in "Army surplus goods bought cheap in Germany" (517). The narrative of post-Holocaust grief that readers might expect from Jewish Augie's arrival immediately after the war is quickly transformed by his unexpected and unabashed celebration of entrepreneurial acumen: "we were making a lot of dough" (ibid), Augie boasts exuberantly. His business then takes him to Florence where, upon entering the cathedral he is confronted with gilded frescoes depicting the "supposedly common fathers and mothers" (517) of Judaism and Christianity. He notes her lack of familiarity with the stories they represent – she gets "everything balled up" (ibid), he laments – and suggests that there is heavy irony in her judgement that Augie, as an American, will "never understand things like these without [her] help" (ibid). The conversation between the two takes a more personal turn with her defensive denial of collusion with the Nazis, and a vague suggestion of her great personal losses during the war. "Did she still have fresh in her mind the villa she had lost, the husband or lovers, the children, the carpets and piano, the servants and money?" Augie wonders, "What was the matter that she still was as if in the first pain of a deep fall?" (ibid). The exchange between Augie and the Italian tour guide is deceptively simple, but

hints repeatedly at at the misunderstanding and misappropriation of scripture, the tragic downfall of human civilisation, and the dark shadow of the war just passed.

This brief encounter with personal postwar tragedy galvanizes Augie's rebellious spirit in the same way as his contemplation of the ruins of Dunkirk. In both situations, Augie does not mourn the calamities of war, but leans instead into a Sartrean existential philosophy of personal freedom. Augie comes away from the above exchange – one which touched on the personal and civilisational consequences of the war – not deflated, but invigorated and filled with a renewed defiance. "This ancient lady was right," he muses,

> [...] Death is going to take the boundaries away from us, that we should no more be persons. That's what death is about. When that is what life also wants to be about, how can you feel except rebellious? (519)

Augie sees the dehumanising effects of political, religious, and ideological rhetoric, he recognises the hypocrisy of their application during the conflict, and observes a vacuum of meaning in the life of modern man. Consequently, he faces the existential precept that existence precedes essence, and the understanding that man alone his respons-

ible for finding value in this existence.[154] And for Augie, as for Sartre, this realisation is liberating. Sartre argues that this existential realisation leads inevitably to the conclusion that "man is free, man *is* freedom" (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, emphasis in original) – and this is precisely the conclusion to which Augie's narrative leads. Although the narrative engages with its postwar contexts mostly indirectly and relatively late in the narrative, these final pages are crucial for the conclusion, wherein Bellow's satire elaborates a positive existential philosophy.

We encounter a similar conclusion in Ellison's novel, which likewise leads towards an affirmation of freedom in the face of turbulent social circumstances. In the epilogue, Invisible Man reflects on the experiences of his life, and at last retreats from society:

> I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after first being "for" society and then "against" it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the

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154. "The first effect of existentialism," writes Sartre in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (*L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1946), "is that it puts every man in possession of himself, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his shoulders. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men."

> trend of the times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities [...] Step outside the narrow borders of what men call reality and you step into chaos (576).

The irony here is that the social reality experienced by Invisible Man throughout the narrative has been characterised by relentless and arbitrary physical and psychological violence: a life far more chaotic than that he experiences in the private underground lair into which he has retreated. By his retreat, Invisible Man, like Augie, disavows the political and ideological rhetoric he encountered in the social world above, and affirms instead a sense of personal responsibility. The social world, he continues, is

> just as concrete, ornery, vile and sublimely wonderful as before, only now I better understand my relation to it and it to me (ibid).

The picaresque journey of encounters that Invisible Man has undertaken, from his student days under Bledsoe to his participation in the political activities of the Brotherhood, serves to reveal the vacuity of political rhetoric, the equivalence of competing ideologies, and the futility of their conflict. Again, however, the experience has a positive outcome for the protagonist, who discovers these truths, learns to better understand his relationship as an individual within

this society, and discovers the freedom to choose his own path.

The Atavistic Impulse in *Felix Krull* and *Die Blechtrommel*

In Mann's *Bekenntnisse des Hoschstaplers Felix Krull*, much of the irony on which the narrative hinges is derived precisely from the implicit postwar contexts of its publication. The character of Felix himself – the fortuitous Sunday child who breezes through life by playacting at whatever role he wishes to assume, rejoices in the artifice of the social world, and loves all that is beautiful and pleasurable – is himself a parody of the Romantics and Aesthetes of the nineteenth century, whose prioritisation of beauty above all else, of 'art for art's sake,' was an attitude Mann found fascinating but also, in the contexts of the Third Reich and the Second World War, socially irresponsible. For Mann, one of the most famous proponents of German *Exilliteratur*, writers could no longer ignore the social and moral concerns of their time. *Felix Krull* was composed as a parodic response to that earlier tradition of aestheticism which now seemed, at best, quaint, if not immoral. The novel, Mann writes in his Nobel autobiography,

> is based on an idea of parody, that of taking an element of venerable tradition, of the Goethean,

> self-stylizing, autobiographic, and aristocratic confession, and translating it into the sphere of the humorous and the criminal [...] Perhaps it is the most personal thing I have written, for it represents my attitude toward tradition, which is simultaneously loving and destructive and has dominated me as a writer (*Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*).

Felix's vain grandiloquence, his celebration of beauty that he knows to be superficial, and his delight in art as much as artifice are traits intended to parody and deride a pre-war tradition that turned away from the difficult truths of social reality. Its pastiche of the Goethean tradition further suggests the susceptibility of art to misuse, and critically hints at the Third Reich's ideological appropriation of German Romanticism.

Felix's emphatic and unyielding praise of human civilisation and its perceived superiority over the natural (or material) world is deeply ironic in these contexts. His praise of man and his civilisation is, of course, not to be taken at face value: his unwavering adoration of human artfulness and guile, his repeated insistence that man is made of finer matter than the rest of creation, and his veneration of the character of Müller-Rosé for his ability to disguise ugliness behind an illusion of beauty can only be read as sharply

satirical. The fact that Felix recognises the duplicity and deception necessary to achieve the kind of beauty he idolises, and nevertheless continues to commit himself to its pursuit, is deeply cynical. Egon Schwarz, in his analysis of the novel, suggests that Felix's unscrupulous devotion to beauty, and above all his insistence on seeing beauty even in the barbaric (Schwarz points to Felix's enjoyment of the bullfight as an example of this) is "a reflection of the guilt that Mann assigned to the German aesthetes, including himself, for the fascist atrocities" (262). As much as a personal sense of guilt, however, Mann's characterisation of Felix, and his society, seems to indicate a much broader criticism of man and his modern civilisation. The satire of the novel exposes the hypocrisy of the aesthetic ideal upheld as a paradigm of civilisational progress, and censures its tendency to turn away from, or excuse, an underlying grotesque reality.

The society of the narrative world is complicit in this hypocrisy, as willing, for the most part, to be deceived as is the audience of Müller-Rosé. One key counterbalance to Felix's narration, and the voice that ensures this attitude is understood as specious, however, can be found in the character of Professor Kuckuck who, in his tour of the Nat-

ural History Museum, articulates most clearly the obverse position. Kuckuck stresses the material reality of existence, suggesting, to Felix's unease, that there is a lack of any meaningful difference between unicellular organisms, larger animals, and man. Kuckuck admits, with some reluctance, that the evolutionary development of man has been one, overall of progress – "vom Pithecanthropus erectus bis zu Newton und Shakespeare, das sei ein weiter, entschieden aufwärts führender Weg," (318)[155] he concedes – but nevertheless stresses that humanity remains, in accordance with the rest of nature, imperfect, and liable to atavism:

> Wie es sich aber verhalte in der übrigen Natur, so auch in der Menschenwelt: auch hier sei immer alles versammelt, alle Zustände der Kultur und Moral, alles, vom Frühesten bis zum Spätesten, vom Dümmsten bis zum Gescheitesten, vom Urtümlichsten, Dumpfesten, Wildesten bis zum Höchst- und Feinstentwickelten bestehe allezeit nebeneinander in dieser Welt, ja oft werde das Feinste müd' seiner selbst, vergaffe sich in das Urtümliche und sinke trunken ins Wilde zurück (ibid)[156]

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155. "From Pithecanthropus erectus to Newton and Shakespeare had been a long and definitely upward path" (294).

156. "As with the rest of Nature, so too in the world of men everything was always present at the same time, every condition of culture and morality, everything from the earliest to the latest, from

Kuckuck's scientific skepticism hints at a truth that Felix is unwilling to see: that man, for all of his civilisational progress, remains a part of the animal kingdom, and that he is capable of, and even inclined to, returning to his primitive and barbaric instincts at any moment. Through the voice of Felix, Mann satirises the superficiality and wilful ignorance of a society that prioritises image over reality, while that of Kuckuck offers a sombre reminder of the treacherous proximity of civilisation to barbarism. Read in the contexts of the postwar period, Mann's novel presents a caustic satire on the indifference, apathy, and willingness to be deceived that, it is suggested, led modern man into the atrocities of the Third Reich and Second World War.

In Grass' *Die Blechtrommel*, the veil is similarly lifted on the pretence of civilisational progress to reveal not a primordial essence beneath, but a mythic one. By the novel's conclusion, Oskar has come to recognise the duplicitous nature of ideology and rhetoric, and begins to see the corrupting influence of the Black Cook within these. In the final

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the silliest to the wisest, from the most primitive, sodden, barbaric to the highest and most delicately evolved — all this continued to exist side by side in the world, yes, often indeed the finest became tired of itself and infatuated with the primitive and sank drunkenly into barbarism" (294).

pages of the narrative, he perceives her presence in even the most sacred of spaces – “auch hinterm Hochaltar” (778)[157] – and begins to question her role in religion, politics, and the violence he has witnessed under the Nazi regime:

> Was wäre der Katholizismus ohne die Köchin, die alle Beichtstühle schwärzt? Sie warf den Schatten, als des Sigismund Markus Spielzeug zusammenbrach [...] »Ist die Schwarze Köchin da? Jajaja! Du bist schuld und du bist schuld und du am allermeisten. Ist die Schwarze Köchin da...«[158] (ibid).

The Black Cook becomes the symbolic representation of the barbaric impulse man conceals beneath his veneer of civilisation. She represents, for Oskar, that same tendency that Kuckuck describes to Felix: the perennial liability of higher life to regress to its most base and primitive instincts. This, Grass suggests is the impulse that drove Germany into the darkness of the Third Reich, the war, and all of the horrors these involved.

The Black Cook’s song, repeated by Oskar throughout

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157. “behind the high altar too” (563)

158. “what would Catholicism be without the Cook who blackens every confessional? She cast her shadow as the toys of Sigismund Markus shattered [...] ‘Better start running, the Black Cook’s coming! You’re to blame, and you’re to blame, and you are most of all. Better start running...’” (ibid)

the narrative, attributes collective, rather than individual, responsibility for the consequences of this. Man's barbaric impulse towards others, the same idea of *homo homini lupus est* that we have seen in the other novels, is a dominant trope in Grass' text, but notably underpins not only the historically significant atrocities of the Third Reich, Second World War, and its aftermath, but also the everyday personal interactions of characters throughout the narrative. That inescapable impulse towards cruelty and barbarism, represented by the metaphorical figure of the Black Cook, is present not only in the events of Kristallnacht, the defence of the Polish Post Office, and the arrival of the Red Army in Danzig – all of which Oskar bears witness to –, but also in the spiteful play of Susie Kater, the domineering behaviour of Alfred Matzerath that drives Oskar's mother, Agnes, to her death, and the anarchic violence of the Dusters. Each of these events, Oskar suggests in the novel's closing pages, is similarly influenced by the hand of the Black Cook, and hence driven by that same destructive impulse within man. The satire of Grass' novel thus draws a basic equivalence between the petty malice of children to one another, the destructive indifference of an unhappy marriage, and the atrocities of genocide and war. In this way Grass suggests that

the latter events were not induced by some unfathomable evil, but were rather motivated by the extension of that same latent barbaric impulse present in so many of man's interactions. That impulse, the narrative implies, lies within each of us, and consequently we bear a collective, human responsibility for the barbaric events that came to define the midcentury in Europe.

The Calamity Just Passed in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Billy Liar*

The atrocities of fascism and the Second World War, and the threat of further catastrophe from the Cold War, similarly underpins and informs the satire of *A Clockwork Orange*. In Burgess' novel, the uncomfortable proximity of civilisation to barbarism is suggested throughout in the repeated motif of Alex's love for classical music, and above all Beethoven. In the first part of the novel Alex equates the pleasure he feels listening to the Ninth Symphony to the perverse gratification he experiences perpetrating ultra violence. In one early episode, Alex describes how the euphoria of the music fuels his depraved urges. As he prepares to rape and beat two schoolgirls he has brought home, Alex sets a Beethoven record to play:

> I pulled the lovely Ninth out of its sleeve, so that Ludwig van was now nagoy [naked] too, and I set the needle hissing on to the last movement, which was all bliss. There it was then, the bass strings like govoreeting away from under my bed at the rest of the orchestra, and then the male human goloss coming in and telling them all to be joyful, and then the lovely blissful tune all about Joy being a glorious spark like of heaven, and then I felt the old tigers leap in me and then I leapt on these two young ptitsas (52).

The highbrow, elevated nature of the music, and its lyrical celebration of joy, brotherhood, and divinity seems to stand in contrast to the bestial and predatory instincts it awakens in Alex. His appreciation for this highly cultured work of art appears incongruous to the barbaric behaviour he then demonstrates. It is, of course, no accident that Burgess chooses the Ode to Joy as Alex's musical motif. The symphony celebrated as one of the greatest achievements in music, and one of the highest expressions of culture, itself speaks of the coexistence of good and evil within the natural world.[159] The juxtaposition of the music against Alex's be-

159. The lyrics of the the third verse in particular emphasise the duality of creation: "Freude trinken alle Wesen / An den Brüsten der Natur; / Alle Guten, alle Bösen / Folgen ihrer Rosenspur [..] / Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben, / Und der Cherub steht vor Gott." [Every creature drinks in joy / at nature's breast; Good and Evil alike / follow her trail of roses [...] / Even the worm was given desire, / and the

haviour, as well as the lyrical composition of the piece itself, similarly suggest the concurrence of man's capacity for both civilisation and barbarism.

The same idea of a confluence of good and evil within human civilisation is indicated repeatedly throughout the narrative. During his incarceration, Alex begins to take an interest in religion and the Bible – not for higher spiritual reasons, but to vicariously satiate his interest in rape and ultra-violence. The soundtrack to these readings is, once again, taken from the canon of great classical composers:

> They would like lock me in and let me slooshy holy music by J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel, and I would read of these starry yahoodies [old Jews] tolchocking [hitting] each other and then peeting [drinking] their Hebrew vino and getting on to the bed with their wives' like handmaidens, real horrorshow [good].

This motif of classical music set alongside extreme violence reaches its clearest expression in the Ludovico treatment. The films that Alex is forced to watch depict the perpetration of extreme violence, including footage of war crimes, torture, and genocide committed by the Japanese and Germans during the Second World War – and some of this, to

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cherub stands before God."]

his horror, is set to the same classical music that Alex adores:

> What it was now was the starry 1939–45 War again, and it was a very blobby and liny and crackly film you could viddy [see] had been made by the Germans. It opened with German eagles and the Nazi flag with that like crooked cross that all malchicks [boys] at school love to draw, and then there were very haughty and nadmenny [arrogant] like German officers walking through streets that were all dust and bomb-holes and broken buildings. Then you were allowed to viddy lewdies [people] being shot against walls, officers giving the orders, and also horrible nagoy plotts [naked bodies] left lying in gutters, all like cages of bare ribs and white thin nogas [feet]. Then there were lewdies being dragged off creeching [screaming], though not on the sound-track, my brothers, the only sound being music, and being tolchocked [hit] while they were dragged off. Then I noticed, in all my pain and sickness, what music it was that like crackled and boomed on the sound-track, and it was Ludwig van, the last movement of the Fifth Symphony, and I creeched like bezoomny [crazy] at that. 'Stop!' I creeched. 'Stop, you grahzny [dirty] disgusting sods. It's a sin, that's what it is, a filthy unforgivable sin, you bratchnies [bastards]!' They didn't stop right away, because there was only a minute or two more to go – lewdies being beaten up and all blood, then more firing squads, then the old Nazi flag and THE END.

Here the postwar contexts are brought to the fore, and the notion that man is simultaneously capable both of creating beautiful art and of perpetrating abominable violence is stated most clearly. How, Burgess asks, can we reconcile the facts of civilisation's highest achievements in art and culture with the lowest depths of barbarism perpetrated under its guise? This passage contextualises the narrative's focus on the problem of good and evil, and illustrates the urgency of this question in the wake of the war and the horrors it revealed. Though they are mentioned only briefly in the text, these calamitous events of the first half of the twentieth century provide the backdrop against which the narrative plays out. The satire of *A Clockwork Orange* is motivated by questions that arise precisely out of the contexts of the postwar period.

In Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* the background of the war and its horrors is even less conspicuous, but nevertheless underpins the satirical thrust of the novel. The narrative, which takes place over the course of a single day, revolves around a series of relatively unremarkable events: Billy has breakfast with his parents, goes to work, meets his friends and girlfriends, and plans – but fails – to catch a train to London, away from the humdrum life he leads in Strad-

houghton. The drama of each encounter is built around Billy's mischievous capers, but the events themselves are mundane and inconsequential. In a paper on British literature of the 1950s, "Well Beyond Laughter: Directions From Fifties' Comic Fiction" (1971), James Gindin notes that postwar fiction tended to focus on the prosaic dramas of everyday life rather than the calamitous world historical events of the preceding decades. "The novels of the fifties," he writes,

> tonally and thematically, conveyed little sense of cataclysm. Whether or not 1914 really had ended all possibility of order or security, both writers and readers were, by the fifties, so accustomed to worlds without order or logic or safety that each current public or private disaster seemed no more uniquely shattering than the last. The H-bomb was a magnification of threats that had always been evident. Thematically, most of the novels reflected this kind of consciousness, became statements concerning man's limited control over his world and manuals for personal survival without posture, if one kept himself safe and had some amount of luck (359).

Such is the tone of Waterhouse's satire in *Billy Liar*. Billy's banal existence, the insularity of his small-town life, and the stifling pressure to conform to the expectations of his family and wider community jar with our awareness of the preced-

ing contexts. The novel depicts a society fatigued with the anxieties of years of war, which has consigned the shock and grief of that era to the past. Billy's frustration with the dreariness of life is connected to a deeper frustration with the indifference of his society to the horrors of the preceding decades.

Billy responds to this ennui two ways: firstly, with the comic irreverence he displays for ritual, religion, and tradition. Billy's refusal to take his family's "breakfast ceremony" (4) seriously, his disregard for Shadrack's authority, and the farcical exchange of a single engagement ring between his girlfriends (plural) are all examples of his defiant disregard for the traditional social structures of his society. This rebellion indicates Billy's dissatisfaction with the established social codes, and suggests an underlying resentment that, after all of the turmoil of the first half of the century, nothing substantial has changed. Billy resents the postwar apathy that has replaced earlier anxieties, and objects to the indifferent continuation of traditional social life.

Secondly, Billy establishes his fantasy world of Ambrosia: an imaginary postwar society, in which the previous conflict is not-forgotten, and the leadership is now focused on rebuilding with lessons learned. "Lying in bed," the novel

begins, “I abandoned the facts again and was back in Ambrosia” (1). Billy then goes on to describe the return of Ambrosian troops from a battlefield war, the flag of the Ambrosian Federation waving over a stream of regimented soldiers marching, through hushed crowds, to a war memorial decked with blue poppies – a “strange bloom found only in Ambrosia” (ibid). Billy returns to the scene of the parade and the memorial repeatedly during the narrative, especially at moments when the drudgery of his everyday life threatens to overwhelm him. The Ambrosian war memorial serves as a reminder, for Billy as for the reader, of the conflict and turmoil of the previous years that, in the real world, seems to have changed so little. The Ambrosian blue poppy becomes a symbol of that forgotten history, and a missed opportunity to change the old patterns of social life. By the end stages of the narrative, Billy imagines himself the elected ruler of Ambrosia, presiding over its recovery, reconstruction, and new development. He envisions the blue poppies of Ambrosia in full bloom, as he pledges a visionary plan to rebuild better, published in a paper itself named the *Ambrosia Poppy*. Billy’s imagined commemoration of the Ambrosian conflict and Ambrosian society’s hopeful commitment to a better future stand in contrast to

the lethargy of Billy's social reality. Through Billy and his imaginary alternate reality, Waterhouse shines a light on the perceived apathy and amnesia of British postwar society. The novel focuses not on the brutality of the war itself, but on the callous indifference of the later, collective response. The decline of modern civilisation is to be seen not only in the acts of barbarism committed during the years of conflict, but in the later disregard for the enormity of those events.

Conclusion

The satire of the neopicaresque novel is fundamentally concerned with challenging social reality and unveiling a basic elemental or cosmic truth beneath. We have seen in previous chapters how the satirical content of each text works to challenge perceived social hierarchies, undermine traditional seats of power, and scrutinise simplistic moral binaries. In each instance this culminates in the basic proposition that the contemporary civilisation of modern man is not as far removed from its primitive origins as we might like to believe. The satire of the Spanish neopicaresque novels responds to the devastation of the Spanish Civil War and the turbulent early years of the Franco regime by expressing an existential lack of faith in anything beyond the

immediate, material reality, and suggests a nihilistic vision for the future. The American novels, published in the wake of the Second World War, are more positive in their response, focusing instead on a Sartrean existential philosophy that posits man's ultimate freedom. The German novels respond more directly to the horrors of both the war and the Third Reich with the suggestion that man and his civilisation is ever at risk of regression into a primordial or mythic past. Finally the British novels, published latest of all, glance only indirectly at the horrors of the first half of the century, but by their avoidance suggested the continued hypocrisy and cynical indifference of later postwar society. In each case we see clearly that the committed poetic of the narrative arises specifically from particular social and moral concerns connected to the tumultuous contexts of the mid-twentieth century. Just as the picaresque genre developed in the Spanish sixteenth century in response to social and political upheaval, so too does the neopicaresque novel appear in response to exceptionally unsettled social and political contexts. In the *Myth of the Picaro*, Alexander Blackburn proposes that "the feeling expressed in *Lazarillo* might be called anguish or the tragic sense of life" (15). Four centuries later, the neopicaresque novels emerge to

convey the same sense of tragedy in response to the perceived disintegration of contemporary civilisation.

Conclusion

The novelist completes his task when he has
succeeded in representing in concrete form for
us what we already knew in the abstract.
– José Ortega y Gasset, *The Nature of the Novel*

It is clear from the preceding analysis that the significance of the picaresque tradition did not wane in the 400 years between its inception in the mid-sixteenth century and its apparent revitalisation in the mid-twentieth century with the publication of the works we have considered here. A close comparative reading of the eight novels identified as possible examples of neopicaresque writing from Britain, Germany, Spain, and the United States reveals that the authors of these works produced texts that not only emulated the formal features of the earliest picaresque novels, but revisited and reworked significant themes and ideas from these early models as well. Their formal and thematic similarities confirm the existence of a transnational neopicaresque phenomenon that achieved both popular and critical success in these nations within the space of two decades in the midcentury, and suggest the continued relevance of the picaresque tradition to the development of modern western literature.

The historical picaresque genre developed in response

to particular social and political pressures of early modern Spain. Most literary historians connect its emergence to the contexts of that time: a period of political and social upheaval, colonial expansion, widespread poverty, social and economic inequality, and international and domestic conflict. The first picaresque authors were motivated by social and moral questions arising from these contexts. Their works exhibited a committed poetic concerned with the position of the individual in a new, unstable, and unequal modern world. The formal features most closely associated with the genre – the ambiguous morality of the protagonist, his wandering journey of episodic encounters, the verisimilitude of the narrative world, and an engagement with contemporary social issues – provided the ideal canvas for the exploration of these concerns about man, his society, and the direction of civilisational progress.

The same formal generic features proved equally attractive to writers in the twentieth century, and for similar reasons. A close comparative reading of those texts identified as examples of the neopicaresque novel indicates that their affinity with the picaresque tradition goes beyond these formal characteristics, and considers some of the same questions about man and modernity. The committed poetic of the neopicaresque novel displays similar themes and engages with similar concerns as those that came to define the earliest picaresque novels. The character of Laz-

arillo, the first and paradigmatic example of the pícaro is, as Blackburn summarises,

> a being stripped of social identity; dominated by hunger, [...] a wanderer in a world where normal conceptions of good and evil no longer operate (12).

The same could be said of any one of the neopicaresque protagonists. The satire of the neopicaresque novel is underpinned by precisely these basic concerns about identity, morality, and the place of the individual in a modern world gone astray.

The satiric inquiry into these ideas, however, takes on a new form in the neopicaresque novels. The theme of food and hunger, once the principal narrative motor in the earliest picaresque novels, now drives the satire. Through this theme, the neopicaresque authors are able to suggest two levels of reality: an illusory or artificial social reality, and a transcendant absolute material reality. In this respect, the satire of the neopicaresque novel appears, like that of its antecedents, to be founded upon an underlying carnivalesque philosophy. The comic satire of these works often functions to undermine social hierarchies by facetiously lowering positions of power or prestige to a base material level. However, it often lacks the joyous, celebratory spirit of the true carnivalesque, and tends to take a more cynical view of human society.

The socially-marginalised status of the pícaro also continues to be critical to the construction of satire in the neopicaresque novels. As in the earliest picaresque novels, the peripheral social status of the protagonist allows the autobiographical narration to present a more detached and critical perspective on society. It also establishes a commentary on the nature of the individual, and sustains the central quest of the narrative: a struggle to affirm and assert a complex, personal identity in a world hostile to individuality. This the neopícaro finally achieves through the act of narration. The autobiographical form, therefore, as well as the episodic structure of the narrative are highly significant formal features of the picaresque genre that permit this examination of identity, and of the relationship between modern man and the society he has constructed.

The antagonist in this quest for identity is that very society: an impersonal and institutionalised mass society that is unable to accommodate the neopícaro's complex personality. In several of the novels, the conflict between the protagonist and the society of the narrative world is dramatised through a situation of incarceration. This establishes an immediate opposition between the prisoner and the prison, or the individual and the state, offering a microcosm of the antagonistic relationship between man and the institutionalised mass society in which he now lives. Comparable conflicts between the individual and various altern-

ative representations of this form of mass society are evident in the other novels as well. This dramatic conflict contributes to a satire that seeks to expose the impersonality of the modern world, and its failure to support the individuals it represents. At the same time, the strictly-ordered world of the institution is shown, in those novels that utilise the premise of incarceration, to also be a place of refuge from a chaotic outside world. Just as the neopícaro is presented as a complex anti-hero, so too is his hostile society shown to be an equally complex anti-villain. In this way, the neopicaresque novels problematise binary understandings of morality, and suggest that traditional conceptions of good and evil no longer function in the contemporary world.

We see throughout the analysis that the satire of these texts works to challenge clear-cut categories and established binaries. This basic ethos reaches its zenith in the novels' investigations into the state of modern civilisation. Each of the texts offers a commentary on the idea of civilised society, and satirically exposes the hypocrisies perceived to lie at its heart. The texts of each nation deal with this differently, as they respond directly or indirectly to their respective midcentury contexts. The Spanish neopicaresque novels reflect the devastation of the Spanish Civil War and violent early years of the Franco regime through a satire that shows a nihilistic lack of belief in anything beyond the present, material reality. Religious and moral prin-

ciples are shown to be empty and cynical, and the narratives conclude with little hope for a more civilised future. The American novels, by contrast, express a degree of postwar optimism. The protagonists of these narratives likewise discover the vacuity of religious and political rhetoric, but find this realisation liberating. Both conclude with greater hope for the future. The German novels, responding to the history of the Third Reich and the atrocities perpetrated under its name, most clearly emphasise the proximity of civilisation to barbarism, and the latent threat of regression into a primitive or primordial past. Finally, the British novels engage with the preceding conflict and its horrors less directly, and by this very obliqueness suggest the apathy and amnesia of their postwar society. All, however, share the same sense that, beneath his veneer of civility, modern man remains eminently capable of extreme barbarity. The satire of the neopicaresque novel leads readers towards the conclusion that modern civilisation is not all that civilised at all. The distinction between civilisation and barbarism, the neopicaresque novels suggest, is less solid than we may like to believe.

The neopicaresque novel adopts many of the essential formal characteristics of the picaresque genre, and emulates and adapts its themes to a modern context. In terms of both themes and structure, the eight examples of neopicaresque writing studied here demonstrate a remarkable

affinity to one another, as well as to the picaresque tradition into which they write. Their similar satiric orientation suggests that the neopicaresque novel emerged in Spain, the United States, Germany, and Britain at a similar moment in history in response to the comparable postwar contexts of these nations at this time. The neopicaresque novel, it seems, like the first picaresque novels, appears as a literary response to a perceived era of crisis: a time during which the individuality of man appeared to be threatened by ideological rhetoric and an increasingly institutionalised society, and the horrors of wars and genocide made it seem that modern civilisation was at the point of collapse. Through the comparative analysis of the committed poetic in neopicaresque fiction, we see more clearly the connection between the development of this transnational trend and the contexts of postwar Europe and America.

As the first extended piece of analysis to compare examples of neopicaresque writing from such a range of national contexts, this thesis has been able to reveal the breadth and depth of the connections between these eight texts in a way that has not previously been achieved. By reading these novels alongside one another, we are able to perceive more clearly the ways in which picaresque themes, questions, and motifs are reworked in the twentieth century. Furthermore, by engaging with recent theoretical research in Hispanic studies, and recognising the significance of the

committed poetic, or satiric orientation, of the picaresque novel, this thesis demonstrates that the neopicaresque novel emerges specifically in these nations and at this time as a result of their similarly unsettled postwar contexts. The nations in which these neopicaresque novels appeared had each experienced extraordinary social and political turmoil in the preceding decades – a degree of social upheaval and uncertainty comparable to the contexts of sixteenth century Spain in which the picaresque tradition itself is rooted. Their satires revolve around, and arise from, concerns specific to the aftermath of the conflicts experienced. A wide comparative perspective, combined with an engagement with theoretical work published in different languages, allows all of this to finally be brought into focus.

It it is worth noting, as well, that the neopicaresque novel appears to have developed in nations that already had a strong picaresque tradition in their literary histories. The picaresque novel was historically significant in the national literatures of Spain, Germany, Britain, and the United States at various points between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The picaresque tradition is, however, well embedded in other European literatures too. There remains scope, therefore, for valuable further research to be conducted into the idea that writers from other nations with a similarly pronounced picaresque history and comparable midcentury postwar contexts – France, Russia, and Italy, for

example – might also have turned towards the picaresque model at around the same time. Godsland's paper on the neopicaresque downplays the strength of a twentieth century neopicaresque revival in French and Russian literature, but there would be value in investigating further the full extent of the neopicaresque trend we have already identified. This thesis confirms the presence of the neopicaresque in British, German, Spanish, and American fiction, but it remains to be seen whether this trend might perhaps have extended yet further. Likewise, there would be value in investigating whether the neopicaresque novel might have gained some traction in literatures that do not have much of a picaresque tradition in their literary past. It is possible that, in a more globally-connected world than that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the neopicaresque achieved a yet wider influence than the historical tradition ever did. The neopicaresque remains a severely under-researched field. This thesis offers a glimpse into the enduring significance of the tradition for the ongoing development of prose fiction, but there is much work still to be done.

The neopicaresque novel is a revival of the picaresque tradition that began some four centuries earlier with the birth of the modern novel itself. It developed almost simultaneously in Spain, the United States, Britain, and Germany within the space of two decades in the middle of the twenti-

eth century. The novels that we can confidently consider to be examples of this neopicaresque resurgence include some of the most critically and popularly acclaimed works of modern world literature. A comparative investigation into the committed poetic of these texts reveals that the neopicaresque novel emerged at this time in response to the comparable postwar contexts of each of these nations. The confirmation of a transnational neopicaresque trend in the twentieth century testifies to the perennial influence of the picaresque genre on the development of the novel in western literature.

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