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Wayward fictions: A study of the dynamic picaresque novel

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WAYWARD FICTIONS: A STUDY OF THE
DYNAMIC PICARESQUE NOVEL

by

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ABSTRACT

WAYWARD FICTIONS A STUDY OF THE
DYNAMIC PICARESQUE NOVEL

by

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The picaresque has been considered a narrow and historically closed genre, limited to a few examples, as well as a wide and flexible genre inclusive of any number of narratives. As an alternative, I propose that it should be seen as a dynamic form, conserving certain historic characteristics, but also adapting to newly current, mostly social, concerns by reconfiguring form and content. Through its double structure it incorporates inconsistencies and controversies, remaining culturally relevant. In the following chapters I have redefined the picaresque elements of two well-known British picaresque novels, added another picaresque novel to the canon, and qualified two others, taking *siglo-de-oro* Spain for my point of departure. In my final chapter I argue for the continuing relevance of the genre by showing how it reappears in postmodern Germany through Thomas Brussig's Heroes Like Us.

Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe, John le Brun by Richard Cross, and Roderick Random by Tobias Smollett are picaresque on the dynamic view, their picaresque characteristics being modified to express period thought. These works conserve the

historic ambivalent form and the duality of content. While all three novels attempt to resolve status inconsistency, their solutions are variously flawed. In each of them one aspect gives especially interesting insight into cultural developments: in Moll Flanders the relation of signified to signifier, in John le Brun the development towards a class society, and in Roderick Random a change in narrative concepts, all illustrate epistemic shifts. Meanwhile, not all picaresque novels are so rewarding to the critic because some, like the anonymous Frank Hammond, employ picaresque features without adapting them to contemporary conventions and circumstances. Other novels such as Edward Kimber's Joe Thompson follow the picaresque format only in part, either as generic hybrids or lacking cultural import consistent with the picaresque novel.

The picaresque novel reconfigures various social and cultural discourses with traditional as well as emergent elements. As a sub-genre, the picaresque shares elements with the novel, and it is precisely in the adaptation of generic features that it may be understood as a hitherto undervalued stepping stone in the development of the modern novel.

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All thanks must begin and end, however, with my family. My parents taught me to study and to persevere and supported me unfalteringly in my endeavors all those years. I must likewise thank my sister and my parents-in-law for their great understanding and for watching my children. Finally, thank you, Dieter, for understanding my ambition and helping me to make my dream come true.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE DYNAMIC GENRE OF THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

Writ large, my dissertation investigates the subtle transformation of literary genres in their cultural contexts, how they adapt innovative elements to their form and preserve others that might otherwise be lost. Above all, I want to reach beyond the assumption that a genre is merely an assemblage of formal characteristics that apply, or no longer apply, to a group of literary works. Instead my argument throughout will be that a literary genre emerges from its socio-cultural circumstances, and that form and content can only function together, conditioning each other. In general, I would regard the picaresque as a dynamic genre in Claudio Guillén's sense,¹ that is, as a "theoretical genre" which incorporates the "historical genre," to use Tsvetan Todorov's terms.² What I mean is that while the picaresque adapts to new circumstances, it can only be theorized historically. The features of a genre do not constitute an absolute norm but always fluctuate around an imagined one. They change over time, accommodating new cultural and social developments. On the dynamic view, authors who perceive their socio-historical background as similar to that of the historical Spanish genre of the picaresque

¹ See Claudio Guillén, Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 71-106.

² For an extended discussion, see Tsvetan Todorov, Genres in Discourse, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

could therefore use its conventions for their purposes,³ while at the same time working within their own national literary conventions, of course. The picaresque genre is neither so broad that it can appear anywhere at any time, retaining only very few formal elements of the first picaresque novels, nor is it so limited in time and space that it exists in only a few Golden-Age Spanish novels. Novels from various periods and nationalities can agree in enough aspects to be considered representative of the picaresque as a dynamic genre.⁴

These aspects, or characteristics of the picaresque, developed over time. The episodic pseudo-autobiographical narration of a life filled with events that follow like a succession of blows is generally considered one of the most basic features of the picaresque. The narrator relates his life as a *pícaro* retrospectively, and has been supposedly purified by his experience. The distance between the narrator and the protagonist – temporal as well as in attitude – allows the former to analyze his actions. He often does so ironically. The predicament of the *pícaro*, what Spanish critics call his *caso* or case, forms a rationale for the narration of his adventures.⁵ Lazarillo intends to explain his final, dishonorable state, and in order to do so he describes his evolution from childhood to maturity, in single

³ So Franco Moretti, Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History (London: Verso, 2005), writes of “Draculaesque reawakenings” of the oriental tale and the gothic novel “after their original peak” (31).

⁴ Ellen Turner Gutiérrez, The Reception of the Picaresque in the French, English, and German Traditions (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), develops a similar concept of genre as “modal mixture.” In her “synthetic approach (combining myth and history)” a genre is constituted by various features that can take over or be superseded, depending on the context (87).

⁵ Francisco Rico, La novela picaresca y el punto de vista (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1969), establishes the structuring concept of the *caso* in criticism on the picaresque. In contrast, Guillén maintains that the only feature which unifies the novel is the *pícaro*. In this sense he belongs to the referentialist school (*escuela referencialista*). The morphologic school (*escuela morfológica*) puts more emphasis on the literary structure. Robert Alter, Rogue’s Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), does not stress the importance of the case. For Alter, “Golden-Rule Christianity and the predatory individualism of sixteenth-century Spain exist peacefully side by side in Lazarillo’s mind,” and the *pícaro* “juggle[s] contradictory terms without being aware that they are mutually exclusive”(6).

episodes leading up to the case. The fact that Lazarillo feels the need to explain his situation and to justify his behavior shows that he did not follow the established values. His case is an example of the “wrong” behavior of the *pícaro* as representative of the disenfranchised. From the perspective of the dominant class, he only got what he deserved when he is recognized as an outcast cuckold at the end. That way, the picaresque reaffirms the values of the dominant class by punishing deviant behavior.

On the other hand, the *pícaro* also serves various masters and moves in different social classes and travels throughout the country, enabling him to criticize society. Therefore, while the case seems to reassert the established value system, throughout the novel the *pícaro* finds the opportunity to criticize it at the same time.⁶ With its rogueries (supposedly as examples of immorality, yet making most readers laugh heartily) and moralizing narrative intrusions, Mateo Alemán’s Guzmán was clearly a forerunner of many picaresque novels in this respect, including the English Enlightenment novels which the present study discusses, Moll Flanders, John le Brun, and Roderick Random. Through the two-fold structure the noble intentions of warning the reader of moral and ethical transgressions appear hypocritical, since the admonitions by the narrator (*consejos*) and the description of the pranks of the *pícaro* (*consejas*), that is, the education and entertainment the reader enjoys, have equal weight.

⁶ Anne Cruz, Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), explores the double discourse of the picaresque. Peter Dunn, The Spanish Picaresque Novel (Boston: Twayne, 1979), notices a double structure of reassuring and criticizing values in Lazarillo, Buscón, and Guzmán, and yet ascribes it to the *pícaro*’s being at odds with himself and not to intentional social criticism.

The *pícaro* is poor and suffers from his low social status, so he tries to improve his situation, not accepting his assigned state.⁷ There is an external rhythm to the narration of the *pícaro*, namely that he is confronted with an incident, appears to triumph and yet does not, and then has to rise again. No matter how ingenious the hero is, his situation is always worse than before. Typically, the *pícaro* feels excluded from society, and while he wants to be included, he is never accepted; he remains outside, even though he may temporarily appear to be an insider and adopt the ostentation of status symbols typical of his society. As a solitary, he has neither stable relationships nor true affections for anybody. In fact, ruthless competition forces him to fend for himself violently and aggressively against other rogues.⁸ His task as moralizing agent to mete out just punishment frequently turns into – less acceptable – vengeance, as generations of readers of Roderick Random have noticed.

Certain themes recur in the picaresque novel, such as the liberty of the *pícaro* and the opportunities of the city, his constant preoccupation with hunger, his lack of principles, and his complacency about not having traditional honor.⁹ Typical motives are the *pícaro*'s unusual birth (in a river, of unknown parents, and so on), his expulsion from

⁷ José Antonio Maravall, La literatura picaresca desde la historia social (siglos XVI y XVII) (Madrid: Taurus, 1986), treats this attitude of the *pícaro*, what he terms *la aspiración de medro*, exhaustively.

⁸ In precapitalist Spain, as Maravall notes, wealth was not yet thought to be produced but merely transferred from one to another.

⁹ *Pícaros* existed in reality. Scholars like Alexander Parker, Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), as well as Anne Cruz, have proposed many different etymologies for the term *pícaro*. It was at first associated with a neglected and poor appearance and then gained a moral connotation. Contrary to the common values, *pícaros* seemed not to care about their reputation, status, or, most important, honor, mainly because they were too low to be concerned about those values. Cruz emphasizes the danger the *pícaros* posed to society through their negative example of freedom. The *pícaro* in the picaresque novel was a myth in reality and then became a literary style. Certain characteristics of the type did not correspond to reality but determined the narrative structure, plot, and tone.

home, the trap which wakens the *pícaro* to his trickster attitude, his transition from childhood to maturity, his changing roles and identities, and his travels.¹⁰

Not all of these traits can be found in all picaresque novels, of course, not even in the Spanish *siglo-de-oro* prototypes, the novels that critics agree are picaresque. However, many of the typical characteristics of the Spanish Baroque picaresque also appear in Moll Flanders, John le Brun, and Roderick Random, as well as in other, lesser-known English literary works. They mix the typical picaresque characteristics with characteristics of the early eighteenth-century novel in England on such points as individualism, the pursuit of wealth, and modification in character development in slightly differing ways. Using these three examples, I argue that some English novels of the early eighteenth century exhibit a decidedly picaresque configuration of their elements, a configuration that has been well adapted to the particular contemporary circumstances. The picaresque elements were employed consciously because of their ability to express social criticism. The picaresque novel wherever it appears, whether in Spain or England, correlates generic form and content. It expresses unresolved issues in contemporary social discourse, the authorial attitude towards society typically oscillating between approval and disapproval of the *status quo*. The double structure of the genre expresses the ambivalence.

Broadly, then, my dissertation concerns the development of the picaresque genre under varying circumstances, more specifically, not only its transfer from Golden-Age Spain to Modern England but also its transformations *within* the fairly homogenous space

¹⁰ Guillén summarizes most of these features as constituting the “dynamic psycho-sociological situation, or series of situations” of the picaresque (79). Specifically, he mentions the *pícaro*’s familial situation as orphan, his want, and, related with it, dishonor, his solitude, and that he has to fend for himself. The *pícaro* is not yet adapted to social conventions and lives a shock of premature experience, according to Guillén. He calls the *pícaro* a half-outsider since he can neither accept nor reject society.

that is Modern England. The socio-historical contexts of baroque Spain and of eighteenth-century England play an important role since the picaresque offers an affinity for social criticism. The two nations were in several important aspects quite similar, allowing for the production and popularity of the picaresque, which is witnessed in England by the large number of translations and adaptations of the many Spanish picaresque novels, in addition to the original productions.¹¹ Spain in its Golden Age and England during the Enlightenment both suffered social, religious, and economic tensions. The spiritual and ethical bases of the contemporary social order in both countries were questioned, and new epistemologies like empiricism encouraged the production of picaresque works. In Spain society was no longer conceived as fixed and immutable, giving new importance to the individual's responsibility in creating his own fate. Yet, traditional concepts, especially that of purity of blood, excluded some from the possibility of social advancement. In England the position of the individual also changed due to an empiricist emphasis upon the individual. A new credit economy challenged the ideal of property-based autonomy of the individual. Nonetheless, while the new economy facilitated upward mobility, the established classes exhibited a negative attitude towards upstarts, and economic ambition could come into conflict with established values. The *pícaro* was attractive and threatening in Spain as an example of an individual free from

¹¹ See, for instance, Hendrik van Gorp, "Translation and Literary Genre," in The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation, ed. Theo Hermans (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 136-48, and Turner Gutiérrez.

the strict conventions of a complex social order¹² – above all the exclusive concept of honor – and in England as one who overcomes status prescriptions and economic class boundaries. Yet his representation in England changed slightly even during the first half of the eighteenth century, as the epistemic bases underwent a process of transformation. The three novels subsequently discussed modulate the picaresque variously, according to their differing ideological and narrative systems. In fact, it is just such a dynamic conception of genre that makes such modifications possible.

Generally speaking, all three modern English picaresque novels employ and adapt picaresque characteristics for social criticism. The three chapters that follow the introduction analyze the different strategies of dealing with the form to express varying social attitudes in these familiar novels from Daniel Defoe and Tobias Smollett, and also in John le Brun, a relatively unknown example of the picaresque from Richard Cross. A fourth chapter elucidates the ways in which picaresque elements were also employed by other authors apparently without a similar function. The inquiries into the two novels Joe Thompson and Frank Hammond show the limits of the dynamic genre of the picaresque novel.

¹² Cruz deals with the Spanish Golden-Age picaresque novel as one form of contemporary discourse among many, literary as well as non-literary, that illuminate in some way the perception and function of the poor in the Spanish society of that time. William C. Carroll, Fat King. Lean Beggar. Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996), takes a similar approach to English texts of that period. His description of the general sentiment toward beggars as fraudulent parasites on the one hand and as necessary agents for the spiritual well-being of the rich on the other resembles that of Cruz. Craig Dionne, "Playing the Cony: Anonymity in Underworld Literature," Genre 30, no. 1 (1997): 29-50, likewise affirms the function of vagabonds and sturdy beggars as scapegoats for tradesmen who felt under pressure to legitimize their own novel activities. Lawrence Manley, Literature and Culture in Early Modern London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), illumines the literary strategies of the pamphleteers and playwrights who were themselves victim-participants, or in his own terms, secular moralists outside the official institutions of Church and City. One constituting aspect of their works was, according to Manley, the ironized representation of an informer-reporter of the vices, a double perspective grown out of the "earlier alliance between the moralizing observer and political authority" (315).

Many themes and motifs in Moll Flanders are traditionally picaresque, for instance her origin and the initiation incident. The heroine's character development and her character traits of *homo economicus*, on the other hand, are expressions of a new English middle-class attitude. Economic thought of the early eighteenth century in England, that is, the formal economic individualism described by Ian Watt,¹³ modifies several characteristics of the picaresque on such scores as individualism, the pursuit of wealth, and morality. Having no responsibility for anyone else is an advantage to Moll; she conducts her trade diligently, using business skills, and so on. It is mainly through economic concerns that aspects of the eighteenth century enter this novel. In fact, the new economic attitude, as naturalized by Moll, or rather its implications for morality, is largely what Defoe seeks to criticize via the picaresque genre. On the one hand, he seems to support the economic order in which the pursuit of wealth is the principal motive of all actions, and Moll is to be sure financially successful at the novel's end. Although a criminal during part of her life, her activities command admiration as economic endeavors, as both she and the editor emphasize, and she is de-criminalized in retrospect. On the other hand, Defoe appears to fear the implications for morality and traditional values, and Moll is repeatedly punished for her vicious life and repents. The picaresque format lends itself to the expression of those anxieties, not least through its double structure. The *pícaro*'s narrative is an example of his, in some ways, wrong behavior. Lazarillo's deviant behavior as an outcast cuckold is punished, his narrative reaffirming the values of the dominant class. So does Moll's, in a way. On the other hand, just as

¹³ See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960). The terms *economic individualism*, *economic man*, and *homo economicus* as used in this study are originally Watt's.

earlier *pícaros*, Moll works for various “masters” and moves in different social classes and travels through the country, placing her in different vantage points from which to criticize society. In Moll Flanders, as in other picaresque novels, the framing as autobiography and resulting distances in narrative situation contribute to the effect of ambiguity. A repentant narrator relates her former roguish actions, which divert the reader, contrary to the intention stated in the prologue – to show how every evil leads to more evil. On a somewhat more speculative level, Defoe’s ambivalence of opinion carries over to the language employed and even to narrative method, and the picaresque shared in that ambivalence. While there are two discourses present in both, the heroine’s preference at times for one of each pair functions as a guide to her social attitude. In each case, the discursive strategies correspond broadly to distinctive ideologies: the literal rather than the figurative use of language, as well as the concept of individualized narratives rather than a master narrative, correspond to progressive ideology rather than traditional ideology. On this deeper level of discourse the picaresque ambiguity – realized also in the more superficial features of form and content – resounds. By no means, however, do I want to argue for a clean binary opposition. On the contrary, my aim is to explore the points of collision, the narrative transitions, and the shared borders that make the picaresque the resource for such balanced social criticism as Defoe and others were able to articulate in its pages.

Similar usage of the picaresque can be found in other eighteenth-century novels, by renowned as well as lesser known writers of the period. The next chapter will turn to the transformations of the picaresque as seen in an English novel of the eighteenth century that has not yet been the object of much scholarly criticism and has, in fact, not been

viewed as picaresque, John le Brun by Richard Cross. An orphan living with an avaricious relative, the hero of this novel, John, has to employ various stratagems to assuage his hunger, until he extorts an apprenticeship from his master's wife. Yet soon he leaves the household to become a servant of the courtesan Louisa, and then the companion of coffee-house patron Marcella. At her sudden violent death, his old friend Philippo procures him a position as Lorenzo's clerk. There John – now Peter – helps in a dispute and in return receives an annual rent and is discharged. Peter spends his newly gained free time and money in coffee houses in dubious company, among them his new friend Captain Pike, and gambles. After an attempted rape, he moves to Bath, where he has a brief affair with a known prostitute. Just before his secret marriage to another woman, Dorothea, he is tricked out of his possessions. In London to find her, he learns of Lorenzo's death. Without financial support now Peter tries Captain Pike's strategy of inviting himself to dinners. After one such unsuccessful attempt Peter falls in love with a lady he meets at a tavern, yet who turns out to be the mistress of his friend. The first volume ends with Peter leaving for Ireland to escape his creditors, whom he cannot satisfy without the support of his former friend Captain Pike.

During the journey Peter almost sleeps with a maid, is robbed by highwaymen, and falls in love with Leonora, who has come from overseas after her husband's death. In Dublin Peter has an affair with a former co-servant of Lorenzo's, Florella, which ends when he is accidentally discovered. Since neither she nor his friends support him, he establishes himself as writing master. When he has saved enough money, he decides to search for Leonora in Cadiz. Philippo, whom he has accidentally reencountered and who has to flee Dublin after an attempted rape, accompanies him. On the journey Peter

impregnates the wife of a fellow traveller, and then stays in London to find her. Philippo buys him a commission as customs official. On one of his nightly visits to the theater looking for the woman, Peter sees instead Leonora, whom he courts during one year and then marries.

This brief summary already shows that John le Brun exhibits picaresque features of form and content. Similar motives as in Moll Flanders, like the initiation incident, service to various masters, poverty, and so on, appear here. Other typical picaresque features such as disguise are adapted to contemporary circumstances. Its protagonist is rather a picaresque anti-hero who suffers numerous throwbacks during his feats to obtain a higher status. Those are likewise reinterpreted as Fortune's machinations rather than the results of his own actions. On his wanderings he is a solitary who tries to adopt socially accepted traits yet uncovers them as merely outside shells empty of traditional moral substance. He intends to be a libertine, thereby ambiguously criticizing aristocratic conventions of decorum and honor as masks of a dilapidated ideological structure whose real basis is eroding in economic individualism. His erroneous appropriation of these corrupt markers of status fails, until a nominal fusion of them with conservative values is reached in the end through his marriage to a noble and virtuous lady. Double structured, this novel likewise attempts to reconcile emerging philosophical ideas with contemporary social developments. The picaresque's ability to transform itself is again shown on similar topics as in Moll Flanders, namely those of the individual's self-positioning, his valuation of money, and his virtue.

In the third chapter I discuss similar issues in Roderick Random, bringing several surprising aspects to the traditional understanding of this novel as picaresque. The present

analysis shows that the romance elements of Smollett's novel, often thought to contradict the assumption that the novel is picaresque, are part of the picaresque double structure. Such seemingly incongruous aspects as the stable character of the hero, the ending, and the love story are in fact necessary to develop Smollett's ambiguous social argument *within* the picaresque. The residual traditional narrative discourse thereby coincides with the remainder of the aristocratic ideological perspective.

Smollett's novel exhibits many typical characteristics of the picaresque, such as the *pícaro* as a solitary outsider in an adverse world, his precarious situation, his various travels, service to several masters, and so on. Other traits are adapted to the new context, broadly along the same lines found in the other two novels, that is, along the lines of individualism, pursuit of wealth, and morality. Here, too, some characteristics quite clearly address changes in thought structures: the critique of the traditional concept of nobility, the preference of actions over words, and the disbelief in romance conventions. Roderick has a stable identity, which he, however, refuses to admit. He accepts as so-called friend only persons from whom he can gain personal profit, his picaresque solitude resulting from economic individualism. Yet he ostensibly lacks character traits of *homo economicus* such as the ability to plan ahead or to conduct his business cleverly. In Smollett's novel, the pursuit of wealth determines the understanding of internal versus external value. Roderick is obsessed with his goal of rising in society. In order to do so, he ought to accept the new concept of personal merit, which does not correspond to his old-fashioned, albeit erratic concept of honor. Smollett also uses the two-fold structure of the picaresque to voice his uneasiness about the social circumstances. The success of Roderick is as ambiguous as the success of the other two *pícaros*. His life and professed

moral stance often do not correspond, and a narrative distance can be noted at times.

Roderick Random seems morally contradictory: while not only exhibiting fascination with the corruption and ruthlessness of commerce but in fact showing the need to develop a corresponding progressive personality, the novel is at the same time didactic, criticizing the contemporary morality and preferring conservative solutions to status inconsistencies. Similar to the ideological processes in Moll Flanders and John le Brun, in Roderick Random progressive behavior and attitudes are naturalized. In the end, Roderick's nobility is discovered, which justifies his final status.

What do we learn from the application of a twofold interpretive structure about Moll Flanders, Roderick Random, and John le Brun that we did not know before, or might have surmised by other means? For one thing, all three novels construct explanations and solutions for the inconsistent status of the *pícaro* which neither the aristocratic, nor progressive, nor conservative ideology of the day could alone fully supply. All three concern themselves with the competing claims of traditional romance and modern empiricism as they negotiate the shift from pre-classical to modern epistemology, in Foucault's terms.¹⁴ And all three novels respond to the dissolution of romance narrative and the disappearance of aristocratic ideology, by proposing different social solutions.¹⁵ Moll Flanders affirms entrepreneurial zeal, and Roderick Random reaffirms traditional honor, while John le Brun skeptically denies the possibility of satisfactory narrative closure by either of these means. In Moll Flanders a supposed natural virtue expressed

¹⁴ See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge; and, The Discourse on Language, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

¹⁵ The point is worth insisting upon: in contrast to Watt's contention that the novel is realistic and middle class, these picaresque novels all contain older elements of narrative and of ideology as well.

through business success is finally validated by the acquisition of property. In Roderick Random natural virtue confers an added right to property, and is further validated by the adoption of a noble title. And the critique of libertinism of John le Brun justifies the natural right of the *pícaro* to his worldly possessions.

Modern Critical Views of the Picaresque Novel

My point of departure in the pages that follow is to ask what constitutes a literary genre, whether a literary form may be seen to evolve across time and space and yet remain essentially the same, or whether the definition of certain historical forms demands instead a dynamic approach. Critical opinion on the genre of the picaresque novel is surprisingly diverse. While most critics would agree that the picaresque is an important genre, not only for its own sake but also through its influence on the modern novel,¹⁶ others would deny the very existence of the genre.¹⁷ Definitions of the form also vary. At the one end of the spectrum are critics who tend to restrict the historical and national range of the genre to *siglo-de-oro* Spain. At the other extreme are those who seek to offer a comprehensive list of characteristics as a universal category, even to the point that they

¹⁶ Watt does not include the picaresque in his discussion of the origins of the English novel, and more recent scholars, such as Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), Everett Zimmerman, The Boundaries of Fiction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), and John Bender, Imagining the Penitentiary. Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), deliver less than satisfactory accounts of the picaresque in the eighteenth-century English novel. The reason may be that the picaresque, unlike many modern novels, is event-driven rather than character-driven. It was, moreover, traditionally not included in the canon of first-rank classics, perhaps due to its connection with romance. According to Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), the picaresque stems from the fabulous, a category meant to entertain. It was considered of less importance because it did not foremost explain the human condition but was rooted in what we today call realism. In fact, what we call realism was actually considered quite the opposite before the modern period.

¹⁷ See Daniel Eisenberg, "Does the Picaresque Novel Exist?" Kentucky Romance Quarterly 26 (1979): 203-19.

use the “epithet *picaresque* so indiscriminately,” as one commentator has argued, “that it has little definition.”¹⁸ My position is on a middle ground between the two, and I will make the case for the picaresque as a dynamic genre which is neither so narrow nor so broad as these two extreme positions suggest.

Roughly a century ago, these two positions on the picaresque genre were well indicated in the work of Frank Chandler. In his seminal study Romances of Roguery, he traced the origin, rise, and decline of the historical picaresque novel in Spain.¹⁹ In a later book, The Literature of Roguery (1907), Chandler defined the picaresque novel as a type of rogue literature found well beyond Spain and in a wide range of narrative forms.²⁰ Chandler stressed the importance of cultural context, and the way society shaped the attitudes of the *pícaro*, features worth recalling while exploring the interaction of form and content in the picaresque fiction of Richard Cross as well as Defoe and Smollett.

In recent years the issue of genre of the picaresque appeared to be resolved, when an overwhelming majority of critical studies followed a very broad ahistorical approach. These studies applied the label of the picaresque on the basis of very few, selected, and diluted characteristics and disregarded the functions of those characteristics. To my mind, this approach is so lax in its delimitation of genre and includes so many works that the picaresque tag has become meaningless. It also disregards the functions of those characteristics, divorcing form from content. The most common description of the

¹⁸ Dunn, The Spanish Picaresque Novel, 6.

¹⁹ See Frank Chandler, Romances of Roguery. An Episode in the History of the Novel. Part 1, The Picaresque Novel in Spain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1899, rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1961).

²⁰ See Frank Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907, rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1958).

picaresque today, as a work which criticizes the dominant social order through the representation of a marginalized figure, presents too limited a view of the picaresque to be meaningful, since it forecloses any more nuanced meaning in whose service the particular generic features stand. Put differently, it is limited in the sense that it does not adequately account for the complexities of the genre, in form as well as in content.

My own approach will be to develop the rigorously historical turn taken from the 1960s forward, a decade that experienced what Ulrich Wicks has called “a marked upsurge in criticism on the picaresque.”²¹ I propose to combine a rigorous understanding of genre with more recent notions stressing the ideological dimension of the form, in order to show how unresolved dialogues within a social order are expressed through certain generic features.²² And because ideology changes across time, my model will accommodate the formal modification of certain basic features of the picaresque such as the distance between narrator and protagonist, as well as the coherence of the episodic action. First, let’s survey the different conceptions of the picaresque genre, in order to expound the bases of my analysis of Moll Flanders, John le Brun, and Roderick Random as picaresque novels in the following chapters and to situate them in scholarship.²³

In a highly influential book called Rogue’s Progress, Robert Alter takes a threefold perspective on the *pícaro*: with regard to his position in society; with regard to the way

²¹ Ulrich Wicks, Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 27.

²² See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” trans. Caryl Emerson, in Dorothy J. Hale, ed., The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 481-510. Here I understand the term *dialogue* in Bakhtin’s sense as meaning different voices in one subject.

²³ This survey includes all works indexed in the MLA and DAI which were published between 1963 and 2007, and it is not limited to any specific language or place of publication. Journal articles, book-length studies, published conference proceedings, essay collections in book-form, as well as dissertations were taken into consideration.

his morals were formed by contemporary thought; and with regard to what he called the picaresque mode of existence. From these features follow certain formal characteristics of the picaresque novel, such as its peculiar irony and satire. Alter then includes literary works in the picaresque genre or excludes them from it on the basis of their correspondence to his established criteria, not limiting prospective works to a particular time and place of production. While I admire his insight into the functioning of form with content and into the social engagement of the picaresque, his criteria are static. He excludes Moll Flanders, being unable to reconcile its picaresque features with the ones more directly shaped by contemporary circumstances, especially its entrepreneurial features. And while he does include Roderick Random in the genre, he finds its later-eighteenth-century romance and sentimentalism, especially during the last third of the novel, to be irreconcilable with the picaresque.²⁴ In novels of later periods, Alter merely discovers picaresque elements, for he is unwilling to allow for ideological changes that would have some bearing on formal features of the work.

Taking a more historical approach, Parker in Literature and the Delinquent instead stresses the subject matter of the picaresque. He considers the picaresque a historical genre originally from Spain.²⁵ Parker emphasizes the intention of the author to educate the audience on religious matters, an intention faithful to the decision of the Council of Trent, and to entertain the readership at the same time. This double purpose, according to Parker, informs the double structure of the novel. It typically consists of adventures and

²⁴ Alter states that “Roderick Random . . . illustrates several elements that are egregiously incongenial to the picaresque spirit” (76-77). A *pícaro* is not capable of focussing all passion on one object, nor does he have an inner life like in romances. The sentimental passages go against the picaresque nature, since “the picaresque hero is oriented toward action, not feeling” (78).

²⁵ The picaresque genre existed in Spain until Estebanillo (1646), and “after that date the genre had its vogue abroad,” maintains Parker (7).

exhortations spoken in different tones by the author as character and in person respectively. It also illustrates the problem of original sin and individual freedom of the *pícaro*, that is, the use of free will to gain salvation on the part of the delinquent, whose character is determined by society. Parker's is an approach which combines form and content, yet it is connected with the particular philosophical and religious systems of early modern Spain, and centers around the theme of delinquency. The Spanish genre was very popular in Germany, England, and France and led to various picaresque novels modeled after the Spanish originals, each of which emphasizes different features of the Spanish novels and is incomplete, according to this scholar. Although Parker briefly treats Moll Flanders in his study, he regards it mostly in the tradition of the criminal biography. Parker does not consider Roderick Random a picaresque novel, since "the wickedness. . . is not in the hero but in the men he meets."²⁶

In his La novela picaresca Rico notes the way the first Spanish picaresque novel, Lazarillo, reflects doubts about predetermination and the possibility of rising in society through virtuous behavior during the sixteenth century. Rico discusses mainly what he terms the functional elements in the novelistic structure of the Spanish *siglo-de-oro* picaresque. These elements lead up to the "case," that is, the current situation of the *pícaro* the narrator attempts to explain. This purpose determines the point of view, which typically offers a unified perspective, according to Rico. In Guzmán, he goes on to explain, "the various episodic nuclei are subordinated to one main structural thread: the story of *a conversion*,"²⁷ through which the author intends to educate the reader. Rico

²⁶ Parker, 126.

²⁷ Rico, 38.

posits that Lazarillo established the essential elements that Guzmán then took up. In a later phase of the historical Spanish genre, some of those essential elements lost their structural meaning and became “an empty shell,” Rico claims.²⁸ Even though the studies mentioned are exemplary in their interweaving of formal elements with discussions of contemporary socio-cultural conditions, there were other critical studies in the 1960s, especially the ones that search for the characteristics of the genre in American picaresque novels, which consider the characteristics merely as empty shells. In such discussions, the critique that formalism carelessly disregards meaning gains a firm foundation. For instance, Charles Metzger states, “the picaresque tradition derives its name and significance from the character of the *pícaro* himself.”²⁹ He then describes the *pícaro* as an antihero, as one who plays pranks, fails to rise in social status despite his efforts, and so on, yet Metzger does not link the characteristics of the *pícaro* with the structural elements of the picaresque.

The trend to catalogue merely formal elements of the picaresque novel grew in the 1970s and is best documented by a number of motif-indexes published in that decade as well as by works like Peter Dunn’s Spanish Picaresque Fiction. This study is guided by the question “What are the distinctive qualities of Spanish picaresque literature?”³⁰ Through the analysis of Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Buscón Dunn finds several distinct qualities, and then looks for them in later Spanish picaresque novels, where they have been diluted and lost their meaning. Dunn believes that the picaresque “continued to be

²⁸ Rico, 73.

²⁹ Charles Metzger, “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as Picaresque,” Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought 5 (1964): 249.

³⁰ Peter Dunn, Spanish Picaresque Fiction. A New Literary History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 134.

tenaciously affirmed, or simply allowed to stand unexamined, even though the field around it may have changed.” When Dunn claims that “any formulation [of genre], however stable it may appear, is condemned eventually to become historical, detached from the present culture systems when their discourses can no longer lend it explanatory force,”³¹ his argument is highly questionable. And in fact I shall oppose it directly by arguing rather that the dynamic genre of the picaresque actually adapts to changing culture systems by guiding readers through shifting expectations.

As in Dunn’s study, the traditional Spanish *siglo-de-oro* novels were still the preferred objects of most studies during the 1970s, which treat their episodic structure, first-person narrative technique, and so on, deemphasizing and even disregarding the cultural context of the novel. Joseph Ricapito’s new critical article “La estructura temporal del *Buscón*,” is a typical example of this type of seventies criticism.³² It finds patterns within the literary work disconnected from context and author. Ricapito notes changes in the narrative rhythm which bear meaning within the narrative. The narrative time corresponds to the hero’s character development from childhood to adult, he explains, creating the impression of a life lived to the full, which carries a moral message.

The analysis of structural elements of Spanish Golden-Age novels continued as more and more critics also analyzed the picaresque novel in other countries, most notably in America and England. The focus of interest shifted to twentieth-century novels of those countries, whereas earlier research had mainly been interested in their eighteenth and

³¹ Dunn, 27.

³² Joseph Ricapito, “La estructura temporal del *Buscón*: Ensayo en metodología de ciencia literaria; Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre la Picaresca organizado por el Patronato ‘Arcipreste de Hita’,” in *La picaresca: Orígenes, textos y estructuras*, ed. Criado de Val Manuel (Madrid: Fundación Universidad Española, 1979), 736.

nineteenth-century predecessors. Including great numbers of picaresque works eventually dissolved the boundaries of the genre, and led to the questionable discovery of the post-WWII American *pícaro*.³³ It gave rise increasingly to articles about the disintegration of the picaresque and its decline by scholars who feared that too many novels were considered picaresque merely on the grounds of their correspondence to several of the structural features. I share their concerns, certainly. Yet I also acknowledge the merits of a dynamic model that includes more works in the genre, as opposed to the narrow historical conception held mainly in the 1960s. Combining it with Todorov's historic genre, in fact, I shall base my own notion of the picaresque genre on dynamism.

Alexander Blackburn's study The Myth of the Pícaro marked another trend in the criticism of the picaresque, namely to examine the original Spanish novels with regard to the determination of the *pícaro* by society, or rather, the influence of ideology as expressed in those narratives, a focus of study valuable to my own labors.³⁴ Yet Blackburn's analyses also result in the exclusion of Defoe's novel from the genre, since he does not accept modifications in the individual trajectory of the *pícaro*. Blackburn distinguishes between the underlying structure of basic narrative and the structure of the individual work.³⁵ The former is the narrative of the trickster as the archetype of alienated man, according to Blackburn a timeless figure present in everybody's unconscious. The latter is creative mythology based on the personal experience of the *pícaro* in his or her historical context. Blackburn studies the position of the *pícaro* in society and his

³³ See Patrick W. Shaw, "Old Genre, New Breed: The Postwar American Pícaro," Genre 7 (1974): 205-11.

³⁴ See Alexander Blackburn, The Myth of the Pícaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

³⁵ This distinction bears resemblance to the distinction of discourses in Zimmerman, but the latter stresses more the existence of both discourses in the text itself.

relationship with society's values. From this changing relationship result three stages of development of the picaresque. The author concludes that in the English eighteenth-century novel the picaresque myth, established in the Spanish baroque picaresque novels, came into increasing conflict with contemporary thought. For that reason, he also diagnoses the decline of the picaresque genre. He traces it from the classic form of the Spanish novels, to the mixed picaresque novels of France and England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the symbolic form of nineteenth and twentieth-century novels in Germany, Russia, and the United States. One problem of the criticism he exemplifies is the emphasis on the figure of the *pícaro*. Such characterological analysis of narrative disregards the function of other formal features such as plot, their compound effect, as well as their similar determination by the epistemological and cultural conditions.

In the 1980s, the question of genre lost importance insofar as critics of the picaresque at last ceased to mourn the decline of the genre. They seemed to have accepted the open and ahistorical approach, as Wicks had called it. Wicks had advocated a "flexibly descriptive" genre theory that would account for the quality of "literary texts as a process of continual generic readjustment."³⁶ He had elaborated Robert Scholes's proposal of seven fictional modes according to the level of reality of the representation. Wicks' concept of the picaresque as universal category had included a very wide range of novels. He and his followers regarded not only a variety of Spanish, French, German, and English sixteenth and seventeenth-century novels as picaresque but also many later novels of those same countries – for instance, the "Angry Young Novel" of sixties Britain

³⁶ Wicks, 4.

and a number of nineteenth-century American novels. Articles on figures like Huckleberry Finn and Augie March as *pícaros* abounded in the 1980s. In fact, although studies of Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Buscón never abated, analyses of novels other than Spanish Golden-Age dominated; the eighteenth-century English novel, especially, received more attention in picaresque criticism of that period. Despite those changes, however, criticism in the 1980s was still largely concerned with determining the characteristics of the genre, now broadly understood, and applying those to selected novels. Thus Ma Celia Romea Castro analyzes characteristics of the picaresque in Juan Marse's novel Últimas tardes con Teresa (1966), structural elements like the internal time, and the social context.³⁷ In her approach she touches on one topic which enjoyed great popularity in that decade, namely the perspective of the *pícaro*, or of the anti-hero, as critics often referred to the protagonist. Increasingly, they considered not only the male *pícaro* but especially the female *pícaro*, in modern novels as well as in earlier ones. The mere titles of articles such as "Parodia de la retórica y visión crítica del mundo en La Pícaro Justina" (1984),³⁸ or "The Woman Writer as American Pícaro" (1987) illustrate this trend very well.³⁹ Often, these studies selected one or two characteristics of the picaresque and discussed an entire novel on that view alone – this last article mentioned regards the motif of travel and the *pícaro*'s rejection of moral values as distinctive, without mentioning other elements, and ignores the Spanish tradition altogether.

³⁷ See Ma Celia Romea Castro, "Últimas tardes con Teresa, una novela picaresca," in Ensayos de literatura europea e hispanoamericana, ed. Felix Menchacatorre (San Sebastian: University del País Vasco, 1990), 461-67.

³⁸ See Antonio Rey Hazas, "Parodia de la retórica y visión crítica del mundo en La pícaro Justina," Edad de Oro 3 (1984): 201-25.

³⁹ See Robert Butler, "The Woman Writer as American Pícaro: Open Journeying in Erica Jong's Fear of Flying," The Centennial Review 31, no. 3 (1987): 308-29.

The most salient trend in criticism on the picaresque in the 1980s was of course the emergence of deconstruction. Paul Smith criticizes the concept of perspective in picaresque novels and supports the view that individual, world, text, writer, and reader all influence each other, taking the “intentionalist model of literary creation” à la Rico and the previous decades in general *ad absurdum*.⁴⁰ He criticizes the tendency of earlier scholars to concentrate on the object of imitation alone. By contrast, his study “traces this invisible or self-erasing labour in critical approaches” to Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Buscón.⁴¹ He maintains that by ignoring the rhetoric of representation in picaresque narratives, criticism “has transformed not only the way we see the texts but (through editorial work) the very substance of the texts themselves.”⁴² I would agree with him in trying to deconstruct the inner workings of the text in order to discover the ambiguities of the social and economic discussion in which the three authors I discuss participated. Edward H. Friedman’s The Antiheroine’s Voice, another deconstructive study, also analyzes the rhetoric of the picaresque, yet from a more manifestly feminist point of view.⁴³ As important as the discussion of gender issues is in literature and also in the picaresque, I will not focus on it, since embarking into such a large field of analysis would take me beyond the limits of the present study. However, Friedman’s examination of the silencing of the voice of the female protagonist in the picaresque discourse through

⁴⁰ Paul Julian Smith, “The Rhetoric of Representation in Writers and Critics of Picaresque Narrative: Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzmán de Alfarache, El Buscón,” The Modern Language Review 82, no. 1 (1987): 105.

⁴¹ Smith, 89.

⁴² Smith, 108.

⁴³ See Edward Friedman, The Antiheroine’s Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformation of the Picaresque (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

a male voice-over, as he calls it, touches on the issue of double discourse I want to address. What is here an expression of the subjugation of women, the voice-over of deviant discourse. is typical of the picaresque. Similar to picaresque novels, the texts studied by Friedman “represent stages in the ongoing confrontation between society and the individual, as mediated by an author in control of narrative voices,” which he discovers through the analysis of narrator and narratee, the intertext, and so on.⁴⁴

The 1980s also saw a growing number of studies taking a historical approach to the picaresque, as, for instance, Maravall’s very extensive La literatura picaresca desde la historia social, which compares socio-cultural representation in picaresque novels with historical data. “The Historical Function of Picaresque Autobiographies” by Anthony Zahareas tries to combine a formalist and historical analysis of the picaresque genre in a strained comparison of the structure and perspective of criminal autobiographies from the 1600s and today.⁴⁵

The trend of approaching the picaresque from a historical view attracted more followers during the 1990s. According to the historicist Anne Cruz in her study of Discourses of Poverty, the discourse of the picaresque deals primarily with the situation of the poor in Golden-Age Spain. She discusses the *pícaro* as a figure on whom readers could project their inquietudes about social developments and their own places in them.

⁴⁴ Friedman, xiv.

⁴⁵ See Anthony N. Zahareas, “The Historical Function of Picaresque Autobiographies: Toward a History of Social Offenders,” in Autobiography in Early Modern Spain, eds. Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Jalens (Minneapolis: Prisma Institute, 1988), 129-62. James L. Treadway, “Johnson Jones Hooper and the American Picaresque,” Thalia: Studies in Literary Humour 6, no. 2 (1983), follows a more clearly historicist approach. He starts out his article with quotations which describe contemporary frontier life. He then compares elements of Hooper’s novel to European picaresques, mainly Spanish *siglo-de-oro* ones. Yet, the overall conclusion of the author runs simply that the Southwestern humorous writings’ “descriptions of political and religious activities remain a valuable source for the student of history,” thus clearly emphasizing historical insight over any formal insight to be gained (35).

Other developments of the 1980s also continued, for instance the study of formal elements of the Spanish picaresque, usually leading to a reevaluation of the genre, which was, however, mainly relegated to doctoral research. Dissertations on narrative space, authority, autobiography, comic elements, and so on in the standard Spanish works continued to be written, while the majority of journal articles sought new angles on the picaresque. Meanwhile, some critics, especially in France and Italy, continued to examine eighteenth-century English novels as to their inclusion within the genre. In those studies the problem was no longer a matter of defining the genre; in fact, scholars often did not even specify their genre-theoretical basis in the 1990s. They simply applied their choice of existing definition, which more often than not was merely an aggregate of – mostly formal – elements as empty shells and hardly based on the Spanish picaresque. This kind of approach was also adapted to 20th-century Latin-American novels and modern US-American novels, especially those by women, black, and Chicano writers. In his article “The Rogue’s Progress” Enrique Lamadrid regards the *pícaro* as trickster and social outcast who mediates the contradictions which underlie his culture and “exposes the discrepancies between the ideal image society has of itself and the reality of its actions” with sarcasm and humor.⁴⁶ Under this definition fall even the coyote of Native American narratives, according to Lamadrid, and he examines “the sociological roots of New Mexican pícaros [and] considers their mythic and novelesque brethren of traditional oral narratives.”⁴⁷ He mostly analyzes Chicano *poetry* in his article and emphasizes their

⁴⁶ Enrique Lamadrid, “The Rogue’s Progress: Journeys of the Pícaro from Oral Tradition to Contemporary Chicano Literature of New Mexico,” MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 20, no. 2 (1995): 17.

⁴⁷ Lamadrid, 19.

social criticism. If this approach is clearly several steps removed from the type of scholarship only a decade earlier, it presents nevertheless a very common trend in the 1990s.

In that decade the vogue for women's studies, which had begun somewhat timidly in the previous decade, also developed in a similar direction towards social criticism. While earlier scholars had analyzed mainly structural elements from a rather detached position, in the 1990s the studies became more outspokenly feminist, with a view to recover the female voice, criticizing at the same time modern patriarchal society, as the telling title of one study suggested: "Beyond Housekeeping: The American Pícara in Twentieth Century Narrative (Women Characters, Subjectivity, Picaresque)" (1994).⁴⁸ The open or ahistorical approach prevalent in the last decade also allowed critics to transfer the concept of the picaresque to a wide variety of non-Western literatures from countries such as China, Russia, the GDR, India, and Morocco. Often, the approach taken was a lot more open than Wicks and his contemporaries might have imagined. The novels examined corresponded only remotely to the established catalogue of picaresque elements, while in other aspects they often clearly belonged to other genres. Scholars analyzed the appearance of the picaresque in the magic-realist novel, the German modern novel, the Russian short story, and so on. Gordana Yovanovich's Play and the Picaresque is exemplary of these developments. She starts from the position that "the traditional picaresque genre has been replaced by the modern picaresque genre."⁴⁹ As earlier critics

⁴⁸ See Cathy Lynne Ryan, "Beyond Housekeeping: The American Picara in Twentieth Century Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1994).

⁴⁹ Gordana Yovanovich, Play and the Picaresque: Lazarillo de Tormes, Libro de Manuel, and Match Ball (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4.

have done, she considers the picaresque world-view the determining aspect of the genre. Due to this world-view, the picaresque lent itself to expressing particular characteristics of Hispanic cultures, above all their sociopolitical alienation. In particular, the element of unregulated, spontaneous play had the function of temporarily subverting the social norms in order for the *pícaro* to survive. The playful “picaresque mode of seeing the world [functioned] as a way to regain personal awareness and as a means to political empowerment” and can be traced in Antonio Skármenta’s Match Ball (1989) as well as other magic-realist novels.⁵⁰ Here, the form and function of generic features have lost their bearing on each other.

Between 1990 and 2000, scholars transferred the concept of the picaresque not only to other novelistic genres, but also to other forms of discourse altogether, to poetry and drama, as well as to film, musical, and comic. Antonio Gala’s musical “La Truhana” (1992) was even considered picaresque by Hazel Cazorla.⁵¹ It presents a seventeenth-century *pícaro* who travels through Spain, plays tricks to survive, and so on; that is, Cazorla examines formal elements of the picaresque based on the Spanish baroque novels. Geoffrey Guevara-Geer finds those same elements – with slight changes – in Chaplin’s “Little Tramp” (1936).⁵²

⁵⁰ Yoyanovich, 11.

⁵¹ See Hazel Cazorla, “La Truhana: Antonio Gala’s Picaresque Musical; The Sixteenth Louisiana Conference On Hispanic Languages and Literatures,” in La Chispa ’95: Selected Proceedings. New Orleans: Louisiana Conference On Hispanic Languages and Literatures, ed. Claire J. Paolini (Tulane: Tulane University Press, 1995), 91-98.

⁵² See Geoffrey W. Guevara-Geer, “Lazarillo de Tormes and the Little Tramp of Modern Times: Two Modern Pícaros Find Their Ways,” Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée 24, no. 2 (1997): 235-45.

What would probably be the most interesting development in criticism on the picaresque is in part intimately related to some of the developments already discussed. As briefly mentioned in connection with the feminist approach to the picaresque and the treatment of Chicano literature, in the 1990s critics tended to appropriate picaresque criticism for their own political agenda to criticize the dominating structures and to call attention to the plight of marginal and repressed groups like women, natives, and political opponents. This was done on the theoretical basis of the very open approach to the genre, to the point of dissolving the one-time generic boundaries and considering the picaresque only as *elements within* any discourse. The working assumption was that the picaresque is “a narrative . . . that works against the constraints of a repressive socio-political climate,” as April Overstreet claims.⁵³ This new function of criticism on the picaresque in the 1990s for the first time gave rise to several studies concerned with the topic in non-European and non-Anglo-American journals, for instance in South Africa and India. Many critical works on the picaresque in these and other countries had a political and activist objective, like Ismail El-Outmani’s “Prolegomena to the study of the ‘Other’ Moroccan Literature.”⁵⁴ Outmani claims that Moroccan authors employ the picaresque as an antithesis to the official literature for its subversion of dominant values in order to criticize and change the status quo. The author of the article even includes a list of suggestions to the authorities to change the conditions of the poor and marginalized.

⁵³ April A. Overstreet, “Uses of the Past: Variations on the Picaresque in the Spanish Postwar Novel” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 5.

⁵⁴ See Ismail El-Outmani, “Prolegomena to the Study of the ‘other’ Moroccan Literature,” Research in African Literatures 28, no. 3 (1997): 110-21.

This type of criticism on the picaresque, in the service of political agenda and without mention of the Spanish originals, has come a long way from the studies undertaken in the 1960s. In the last few years criticism has again become a little more conservative, so to speak. Yet most critics still worked with a considerably wider definition of the genre than I would want to. Many studies dealt with Golden-Age Spanish picaresque novels. Taking a new-historicist approach they researched such themes as nobility, religious contest, prostitution, and the consumption of literature. Others did formal research, for instance about the typology of the *pícaro*, grotesquerie, and satire in the historic picaresque novel. A number of scholars again took up the task of probing the boundaries of the genre, a few getting lost in sub-genres such as the Sapphic, the oriental, and the female picaresques, and the *picaresca eclesiástica*. As Teresa Ann Sears aptly puts it, modern critics often “yearn to see what the texts themselves do not.”⁵⁵ The common loose definition of the picaresque novel, even among scholars of the *siglo de oro*, which I want to challenge, reaffirmed the classification of Cervantes’ Novelas ejemplares and Don Quixote as picaresque. A recent development in the research of the picaresque novel is the study of the interplay with other genres. Thus, the way the classic picaresque novel took elements from buffoon literature has been analyzed.⁵⁶ Critics also took the opposite stance and in comparative analyses examined influences of the picaresque novel on other genres such as the epic, romance, and the soldier’s tale in baroque Spain.

⁵⁵ Teresa Ann Sears, “Sight Unseen: Blindness, Form, and Reform in the Spanish Picaresque Novel,” Bulletin of Spanish Studies, LXXX, no. 5 (2003): 539.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Victoriano López, “Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Buffoon Literature,” MLN 116, no. 2 (2001): 235-49.

Since the millennium, a majority of studies have again analyzed the picaresque in other literatures, in the twentieth century and earlier. Several showed how the picaresque was instrumentalized in the service of political goals, especially on North-American, Mexican, Cuban, and Argentine models of the nineteenth century such as Don Catrín de la Fachenda (1832) and El mundo alucionante (1977; based on the nineteenth-century Memoria by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier).⁵⁷ Only one noted that the “the picaresque had the ability to capture those conflicts without necessarily favoring one side over the other.”⁵⁸ A considerable number of studies have recently taken the picaresque novel as a theoretical framework in order to understand other literary genres such as the American road story,⁵⁹ *vidas de soldados y monjas*,⁶⁰ the German Holocaust novel like Levi’s La tregua (1960) and Imre Kertész’ Roman eines Schicksalslosen (1975),⁶¹ as well as non-literary texts like Miles Philips’ sixteenth-century autobiography.⁶² On the assumption, which I share, that in the picaresque as “pliable genre”⁶³ “new literary and social situations may cause old generic content and form to be modified to communicate a

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Raúl Morrero-Fente, “Don Catrín de la Fachenda: La ironía como expresión de una normativa vacilante,” Acta Literaria 28 (2003): 107-21.

⁵⁸ Marc V. Donadieu, “American Picaresque: The Early Novels of T. Coraghessan Boyle” (Ph.D. diss., University of Louisiana, Lafayette, 2004), 27.

⁵⁹ See Ilona Shiloh and Paul Auster, “A Place Both Imaginary and Realistic: Paul Auster’s, ‘The Music of Chance,’” Contemporary Literature 43, no. 3 (2002): 488-517.

⁶⁰ See David A. Dabaco, “La autobiografía y la novela picaresca en el siglo de oro: Los ‘géneros’ del marginado” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 2005).

⁶¹ Patricia Ann Kniecziak, “Stories of Chaos: The Picaresque Holocaust Novel” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Dallas, 2004), suggests “seeing Holocaust novels through the picaresque genre” (vii).

⁶² See Barbara Fuchs, “An English Pícaro in New Spain: Miles Philips and the Framing of National Identity,” CR: The New Centennial Review 2, no. 1 (2002): 55-68.

⁶³ Miriam Christine MacCormac, “Resident Aliens: Angela Carter’s Feminist Postmodern Picaresque” (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 2003), 5.

timely message,”⁶⁴ novels were analyzed that are indeed very much modified and can be called picaresque on a very broad view of the genre only. As in the 1990s, most of the works treated were socio-politically involved novels with picaresque characteristics, like those by James Stephen, Fernando Royuela, and Alfonso Grosso.

Rowland A. Sherrill’s Road-Book America stands out among those purposeful studies mentioned as a very convincing analysis of the transformations of picaresque elements in a vast number of postmodern American road narratives.⁶⁵ His genre approach is commensurate with the dynamic approach taken here even if his is considerably more open than the one followed in the present study. Conscious of the “genre dispersion” in recent literature,⁶⁶ Sherrill adverts that the picaresque is not less prone to a blurring of discourses than the next genre, and traces the fictional in supposedly factual – often autobiographical – travelogues and, vice versa, the affinity of fictional narratives of a dominantly picaresque character to other forms of writing, which frequently borrow from non-fictional narrative formations such as descriptions of actual journeys. Based on a thorough examination of the historical genre, Sherrill presents what could be called the generic skeleton of the picaresque and shows how it is hung with new variants of the old forms, satisfying the demand for a representation of discontinuous experiences in the vast

⁶⁴ Gwen H. Stickney, “Gender, Genre, and Pseudoautobiography in Spanish Picaresque Narrative and the Spanish-American Testimonial Novel” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2004), 7.

⁶⁵ See Rowland A. Sherrill, Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁶⁶ Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 21.

and varied place that is contemporary America with its accelerated, incomprehensible pace.⁶⁷

Over the years, the attention of scholars has changed greatly. Spanish *siglo-de-oro* novels, the initial establishment of their picaresque characteristics, and the definition of a picaresque genre were the points of focus at first. The question then became whether or not certain Spanish and other Renaissance and eighteenth-century novels corresponded to this – or the critic’s – definition. Later, the concept of the picaresque was transferred to other narratives. The outlook changed from a structuralist one, for the most part, to one that admitted all critical approaches to literature current during the 1980s and 1990s, in particular a (new) historicist approach. At the same time, there was an attempt to put the criticism on the picaresque in the service of the politics of marginalized groups. This attempt disregarded generic boundaries despite its claim to examine picaresque novels. It overlooked the functions of the structural characteristics of picaresque novels. Many scholars applied the term *picaresque* indiscriminately to any works that represented a member of a marginalized group in order to voice opposition to the current political *status quo*. That is, they regarded it as a characterological trait of the narrative, not necessarily one related to a certain kind of plot and other formal elements. They were led by the preconceived personal ends to which they could employ the works rather than by generic considerations. Their political commitment is admirable, and in public climates of repression these critics put the picaresque to good use as a legitimizing agent. Yet such criticism has little to do with what I would consider the literary value of the genre,

⁶⁷ Sherrill describes the modulations of the picaresque in the American variety: “The new picaresque forges its particular form of cultural response not in satire but in exploration, discovery, and map-making” (5).

whereas attention to generic features has the virtue of illuminating the ways in which picaresque novels express ambiguity about social developments.

Recent criticism likewise has not paid much attention to the interplay of form and content in the picaresque to express ambivalent social comment through its ambiguous discourse. Meanwhile, picaresque novels are interesting especially for the fact that they do *not* unambiguously criticize the dominant ideology, although they might at first glance appear to do just that. As we will see, as a criminal allowed to prosper untouched by the law, Moll, for instance, subverts assumptions of her society about the virtue of status. John likewise flaunts the traditional concept of honor by reducing it to the definition of the sexually lawless noble libertine. Lastly, Roderick meets nobles who are morally not worthy of their titles while he finds the door to social admittance and wealth closed to a virtuous person. Yet in Defoe there is visible an understanding and perhaps even appreciation for the demand for unrelenting, impersonal economic ambition if one wants to realize the possibilities of social mobility in early capitalism. Similarly, Cross is not altogether opposed to the stratification of society despite the waning legitimization of the aristocracy's privileges with which his novel deals. Finally, Smollett does admit virtuous individuals to the wealth and status of the highest, titled, ranks. These picaresque novels do *not* use a double structure merely to mask their criticism for fear of repression or censure. Rather, their generic form correlates with the context, expressing unresolved issues in contemporary social discourse.

The Picaresque Genre

So far, the novels of Defoe, Cross, and Smollett have been called picaresque novels in this study without questioning their inclusion in the genre. Now an elaboration of the genre theory which allows for that categorization is in order. As is evident, the question of the delimitation of the picaresque genre is not a new one at all. It is nonetheless still highly pertinent in my view, since reading a novel as picaresque shapes the perception of the reader to foreground the ambivalent attitude toward contemporary circumstances. Admittedly, the question of whether Daniel Defoe wrote a picaresque novel in Moll Flanders, or Tobias Smollett in Roderick Random, has also been asked before.⁶⁸ Especially since the 1960s scholars have been concerned with establishing the characteristics of the picaresque genre and with forming a canon of picaresque literature based on their definitions. They examined the Spanish Golden-Age novels most commonly considered picaresque, creating a catalogue of typical picaresque elements, and then looked for those elements in other European literatures of other periods. Earlier scholars were often ambivalent in their generic assessment of Moll Flanders. They questioned the assumption that with Moll Flanders Defoe wrote a picaresque novel because characteristics they would consider essential to the genre are missing while

⁶⁸ Richard Cross, The Adventures of John Le Brun, Containing a Surprising Series of entertaining Accidents in his own Life (London, 1739), has not been the subject of criticism to date.

others not pertaining to the genre can be found in it.⁶⁹ The same obtains for Roderick Random. Taking a formalist approach much influenced by New Criticism, Anglo-American scholarship then decided the question of genre of Moll Flanders and Roderick Random in the affirmative. Basing their conceptions of the picaresque genre on several different aspects – themes and motifs, narrative unity, a picaresque worldview – Wicks and others considered these novels picaresque. Recently, scholarship on the picaresque has employed such a loose concept of the picaresque that Moll Flanders falls under that category again, albeit now quite meaninglessly so.

It appears that, generally speaking, two extreme notions of genre are at work here: some scholars argue for a static generic model, which, once constituted, allows for hardly any modifications and therefore is closed to most later additions to the exclusive group of its members. Others expect genres to change continually and markedly, to the point that they cancel themselves out. As practice has shown, the former is more often connected with an analysis of the formal features of a work, while the latter more often takes into consideration its ideological charge. Dunn in fact concluded in 1979 that the inclusion in or exclusion from the picaresque genre of certain works depended largely on the type of criticism. One may either be “committed to the primacy of theme and ideological

⁶⁹ Fernando Lázaro Carreter, “Lazarillo de Tormes” en la *Picaresca* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1972), discerns two steps in the development of a genre, the constituent stage and the stage of elaboration. In the first stage the characteristics of the genre emerge. In the second stage, the characteristics are repeated, modified, degraded, and lost in novels modeled after the first examples of the genre. In the picaresque, in the beginning minor characteristics were changed, then more important ones followed. Lázaro Carreter considers the Buscón the last novel of the *picaresca mayor*. According to him the novels after it belong to the *picaresca menor*, with characteristics so deviating from the originals that he expresses doubts as to whether the works in question are picaresque novels at all. This critic considers the picaresque an historical and *a priori* genre from the constituent stage on. The *picaresca mayor* of baroque Spain forms the basic standard against which he – and authors of picaresque novels – classify works. Lázaro Carreter would not include Moll Flanders in the genre, since it deviates too much from this static standard.

content” like Parker, for instance, or one could proceed as “formalist critic.”⁷⁰ Arguable as such a rigid division naturally is, the basic distinction Dunn makes is quite right, as the reader has seen. Much has happened in criticism in the past two decades to dissolve this division in general, especially the New Historicism coupled with deconstruction in literary theory. Regarding the picaresque, however, it appears that the pendulum merely swung from one extreme – the formalist – to the other – the thematic – as I have shown. I believe that it is possible to combine a rigorous generic approach to the picaresque novel and a sense of its migration from *siglo-de-oro* Spain to eighteenth-century England and beyond, while maintaining at the same time a correlation between form and function. Peter Brooks argues that the view that formal features alone drive narrative is equally incomplete as the view that content is all that matters.⁷¹ It is possible to decide, under that view, whether Moll Flanders, John le Brun, and Roderick Random are picaresque novels.⁷²

Todorov has developed a genre theory that distinguishes between the static and the fluent notions mentioned above. It is very helpful as a general idea, although one would wish for a clearer discussion of the interplay between the two notions. Todorov calls the

⁷⁰ Dunn, Spanish Picaresque Novel, 136.

⁷¹ See Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (London, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁷² Of course, the problem remains which Robert C. Elliott, “The Definition of Satire,” Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature XI (1962): 23, quoted in Guillén, explains for satire: “How does then one know whether x (which perhaps seems a borderline case) is a satire or not? Following Wittgenstein, one looks at a number of satires about which there is no question – which are at the center of the concept, so to speak – and then decides whether work x has resemblances enough to the undoubted examples of the type to be included in it. The point is: this is not a *factual* question to be settled by examining the work for the necessary and sufficient properties which would automatically entitle it to the name *satire*; it is a *decision* question: are the resemblances of this work to various kinds of satire sufficient so that we are warranted in including it in the category – or in extending the category to take it in?” (306).

two the “historical genre” and the “theoretical genre.”⁷³ The latter designates *possible* types and therefore equals general discourse and can be disregarded, according to him. In contrast, “[a] genre is the historically attested codification of discursive properties.”⁷⁴ In other words, the forms, such as, for instance, the first-person narration, are possible in any period, but to be a genre the form has to be institutionalized in a society and at a certain moment in history. Wicks’s concept of the picaresque mode and Bjornson’s concept of the picaresque myth are comparable to the theoretical genre. Yet ahistorical and broad approaches to the picaresque such as these do not consider that a genre has to be perceived as such, as a group of works with common features. The Russian critic, on the other hand, stresses that “individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification” (18).⁷⁵ Evidence of the historical genre can be found in metadiscursive discourse as well as in literary texts. That is, there can be discourse on the genre, which signals its existence historically, and the texts belonging to a genre can have common features that can be established through “comprehension” (17) of their properties, that is, not necessarily conscious, intertextual references. Both obtain in the case of the picaresque, as not only the frontispiece of Ubeda’s *Justina*, on which various other Spanish *pícaros* appear, and the mentioning of Lazarillo and his genre in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* demonstrate.⁷⁶

⁷³ Todorov, 17.

⁷⁴ Todorov, 19.

⁷⁵ Karl Vietor, *Geist und Form: Aufsätze zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (Berne, 1952), 305, recognizes the quandary of writers and critics in the definition of a genre. He wonders how we can describe a genre whose norms are derived from a survey of the models that belong to it, so to speak.

⁷⁶ The galley slave Ginés de Pasamonte, condemned for his previous picaresque life, writes his biography.

A second aspect of Todorov's theory, and one equally important to my argument, is his assertion that "genres communicate indirectly with the society where they are operative through their institutionalization" and reflect its ideological framework.⁷⁷ As examples of that communication, Todorov cites the novel which, with its individual hero, appears in one period, and the epic which, with its collective hero, appears in another period. The formal features are interrelated with the ideological content of the work, and a particular society determines a particular generic constitution.

Based on Todorov's theory, I understand the picaresque as a historical genre of *siglo-de-oro* Spain, that is, the works exhibit features that were codified in, and respond to the ideology of, that society; and the picaresque narratives are perceived as forming a class. However, I would like to add a dynamic dimension to its evolution, in a sense combining the historical and the theoretical genres. Even within the historical genre, a particular work can always only be an approximation to the ideal, and "no work embodies completely the picaresque genre," as Claudio Guillén rightly notes.⁷⁸ The features of the genre do not constitute an absolute norm but always fluctuate around an imagined one. The readers of works – who might become authors, like Defoe, the reader of La pícarra Justina, and Cross, possibly the reader of Guzmán⁷⁹ – establish the properties of the genre

⁷⁷ Todorov, 19. John Richetti, ed., The English Novel in History 1700-1780 (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), holds that "in much eighteenth-century fiction, an awkward adaptation of traditional structures and beliefs is visible, and the novel is well described as various attempts to draw maps of these shifting configurations" (12).

⁷⁸ Guillén, 72.

⁷⁹ See Helmut Heidenreich, The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell: Olive Payne's Sales Catalogue (1731) (Berlin: Selbstverlag, 1970), 16, 10, 13, 61, and 76. Judging from the many historical, fictional, and other works written in Spanish in Defoe's possession, as well as the various Spanish dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks, Defoe definitely read Spanish. Cross actually goes so far as to name one figure of his novel Guzmán.

and so constitute it from these works. Institutionalized, a genre “function[s] as [a] ‘horizon of expectation’ for readers and as [a] ‘model of writing’ for authors,” as Todorov states.⁸⁰ As such, it is not necessarily written but can be tacit knowledge, the “unwritten poetics” of an age.⁸¹

Bjornson regards the picaresque genre in its origins as an *a posteriori* genre. That is, it was established by the critics, who put works in compartments according to the characteristics they found in them. There is ground for challenge of his assessment that “authors of the early picaresque novels did not consciously adhere to formal or compositional rules which together might serve to define a genre.”⁸² For, critics have found many instances of conscious intertextuality in early picaresque novels. The picaresque is, rather, an *a priori* genre as Lázaro Carreter calls it, in which the author is conscious of its existence. In the *a priori* genre the author tries to construct the work according to already fixed characteristics a piece of literature of the genre should have.⁸³ On this view not all the main characteristics a critic would consider as constituent of a genre might actually appear in the work, when the author adapts the conventions of the genre’s format to contemporary influences in order to express his world view. If the features of a genre are not stable at one point in time and in one particular society, why demand near correspondence on all counts from works even of other periods, as Eisenberg does? This in practice excludes such works beforehand, since the ideological

⁸⁰ Todorov, 18.

⁸¹ Claudio Guillén, 61. He calls literary conventions an invitation to the writer.

⁸² Richard Bjornson, The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 4.

⁸³ From their experience as readers, they might also have an intuitive understanding of the genre and apply it more or less consciously.

content, if not formal characteristics with it, historically changes. On the other hand, the picaresque is a historic genre, and hence the very broad approach which does not account for the Spanish *siglo-de-oro* novels is not valid. While a genre has stable features, it necessarily changes, influenced by “the writer, the nation, and the period.”⁸⁴ A genre – even the ideally synchronic historical genre – has to accommodate new cultural and social developments, especially when “the ethical justification – the ideology – for [the pícaro’s] behavior” changes, as Guillén adds.⁸⁵ And Bjornson holds, “if [the word picaresque] is to retain its usefulness it must be defined in such a way that it implicitly subsumes novels from the historical period in which picaresque fiction first achieved a recognizable identity” as well as later novels which share their basic elements.⁸⁶

The *a priori* genre precludes an adaptation of the picaresque to a new socio-historical background where major changes are necessary, since those would not be possible with the *a priori* genre’s fixed characteristics. But where only minor changes are necessary to adapt it to new circumstances, the genre can, on the dynamic view, be used by authors who perceive their socio-cultural background as similar to that of the historical Spanish genre. Such was the case in England in the time of Defoe, Cross, and Smollett, where the picaresque genre was an *a priori* genre. That is, it was sufficiently defined, and the authors could use its conventions for their own purposes and created picaresque novels. While belonging to that particular class, the novels nevertheless share features of the ideological framework of the authors’ own society. This is possible since the

⁸⁴ Lázaro Carreter, 73.

⁸⁵ Guillén, 98.

⁸⁶ Bjornson, 3.

institutionalized discursive properties of the historical genre lent themselves also to reflect the “constitutive features” of their society,⁸⁷ and since the Spain of Alemán and Ubeda was grounded on similar philosophical principles as the England of Defoe, Cross, and Smollett. The historical genre at the same time continues to exist as theoretical genre, as a *possible* form of codified discourse, and can be realized again. Yet in the different ideological circumstances of different periods, the historical genre must adapt new features – often from other, contemporary genres, in fact – and consequently change slightly. Bjornson regards the picaresque as “a sequence of different world views operating within the limitations of a relatively constant formal or thematic structure.”⁸⁸ He argues that “what is needed is not an inductively established list of picaresque elements, but a dynamic model sufficiently flexible to encompass the unique individual works and their historical contexts while clearly identifying the shared elements which justify their inclusion in the same category.”⁸⁹ The generic properties then are essentially still the same yet adapted to a different society. When the differences become paramount, the question arises whether the genre is still able to include the historical genre or whether it constitutes a new genre. This is the case in the two novels discussed in chapter five of the present study. The novels analyzed in the three chapters before that, however, are clearly picaresque novels on the dynamic view. They have many features in common

⁸⁷ Todorov, 19.

⁸⁸ I would add that these world views have to be at the same time quite similar in certain respects, and only this makes it possible to maintain the formal and thematic structures with merely minor modifications. Bjornson himself comes to a similar conclusion, describing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a period in which the feudal order declined and the middle class rose, and despite different ideologies the *pícaro* was presented in both as an “isolated individual in a hostile society” due to these similar social conditions (3-4).

⁸⁹ Bjornson, 5.

with the Spanish originals, although they also deviate from their antecedents in several important aspects. What I would like to show in the following pages, is that the picaresque is by and large committed to social commentary, and that Defoe, Cross, and Smollett used its conventions to express their social criticism while at the same time welcoming the new developments of their times.

CHAPTER 2

MOLL FLANDERS AS MODERN *PICARA*

Certain behavior “may be a Vice in Morals, [which]
may at the same time be a Vertue in Trade”¹

When Daniel Defoe introduced readers to Moll Flanders during the early eighteenth century, he entered an ongoing debate about the social construction of rogues, criminals, and economic practices. Like many sixteenth and seventeenth-century rogues and vagrants in English literature, his heroine demonstrates the ideology of the self-fashioned gentle(wo)man whose social and economic ambitions were still, in the eighteenth century, regarded as inimical to the traditional make-up of society. In the figure of the independent itinerant opportunist, Defoe depicts forms of social life that oppose traditional forms like the family and the local established businessman and – while they prove better adapted to capitalist demands – also arouse fear of new market processes.² Unlike the criminals of Tyburn biographies and cony-catching pamphlets – the indigenous literary works to which Defoe would have had access – however, Moll is a

¹ Defoe, *Review* (1728), 2: 65-66, quoted in Hans H. Andersen, “The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe,” *Modern Philology* 39 (1941): 36; see also *Review*, 8: 739-40, quoted in Andersen, 65.

² See Brooke A. Stafford, “Englishing the Rogue, ‘Translating’ the Irish: Fantasies of Incorporation and Early Modern English National Identity,” in Craig Dionne and Steven Mentz, eds. *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 312-36; Karen Helfand Bix, “‘Masters of Their Occupation’: Labor and Fellowship in the Cony-Catching Pamphlets,” in Dionne and Mentz, *Rogues*, 171-92; and Patricia Fumerton, “Making Vagrancy (In)visible: The Economics of Disguise in Early Modern Rogue Pamphlets,” in Dionne and Mentz, *Rogues*, 193-212, who discuss parallels between early modern commercial practices and the outlaw activities of the cony and the vagrant.

rather unspectacular anti-hero who enjoys her later years in quiet anonymity. As a *pícaro*, this rogue type not only warns readers against common tricks by presenting them with entertaining anecdotes, it also addresses disputed contemporary social issues. Earlier English rogue literature does so, too, more or less consciously. In contrast, the picaresque correlates generic form with content more effectively to that end, as I will show. Perhaps more so than other forms of rogue literature, Moll Flanders is a thoroughly double-voiced and double-structured work.³

In the following pages I would like first to explore Defoe's employment and adaptation of picaresque characteristics in Moll Flanders for his critique of contemporary capitalist practice and also as these modifications result in the creation of a novel in our sense of the word. Secondly, I would like to consider its discursive structures in relation to the picaresque double structure of both form and function. A picaresque novel on the dynamic view, Defoe's novel is nonetheless a product of its own time, exhibiting not only many picaresque elements, but also characteristics typical of English eighteenth-century literature.⁴ Among other picaresque themes and motifs should be counted the birth of Moll and her first introduction into the world through the older son of her first employer. Expressions of a new English middle-class attitude to be found also in many other

³ Hal Gladfelder, Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), holds that "Defoe meant every word of [his writings] literally," even where he argued for contrary positions as in "The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd" (1724) and "Street Robberies Consider'd" (1728) (119).

⁴ Therefore, Bjornson calls Defoe's and Smollett's novel "picaresquelike fiction," a "fusion of existing conventions and an imaginative response to specific historical circumstances" (13). The sixteenth-century English "The Conversion of an English Courtesan" in Robert Greene's The Thirde & Last Part of Conny-Catching (London, 1592, rpt. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1923), is in many ways a blueprint for Defoe's novel. Its Guzmán-style lengthy exhortations are more clearly distinguished from the accounts of vicious behavior, for example in the uncle's "watch-word," and the heroine stresses her good upbringing by wealthy parents.

contemporary English novels are her character development and certain traits of *homo economicus*, as we shall see. These features, constituting Watt's formal economic individualism, modify Defoe's picaresque formally in the sense that they point towards the gestation of the novel, and thematically on such scores as individualism, the pursuit of wealth, and morality. The rogue is presented in retrospect as a middle-class public-minded citizen who demands respect for her efforts, rather than the lowly, static early Spanish *pícaro* or the criminal hero of many English rogue stories who has gained fame through his unlawful and frequently spectacular feats.⁵

In fact, Defoe's criticism via the picaresque genre aims not so much at roguery itself as at the sort of immoral behavior which the new economic individualism encouraged and legitimized. The ending of the novel – Moll's financial success – seems to be an approval of an economy in which an uncompromising and aggressive pursuit of wealth results in personal advancement. The comments of the protagonist as well as the editor indicate a certain admiration even of such behavior. On the other hand, the repeated disappointments Moll experiences – which go so far as to put her life in danger – seem to be acts of poetical justice to censure just that behavior. The ambivalence of opinion described here has been a dominant feature of the picaresque from its beginnings. Like Lazarillo's narrative, Moll's narrative reaffirms traditional values, since she is not allowed to triumph unquestionably throughout the novel. On the other hand, Defoe constantly places Moll in different vantage points from which to criticize society, in her various employments and in her travels. As is true for other rogues and *pícaros*, the

⁵ The latter is the case in Thomas Dangerfield's *Don Tomazo, or the Juvenile Rambles of Thomas Dangerfield* (1680). For a discussion of this seventeenth-century work, which announces itself to be written in the vein of the Spanish picaresque, see Clark Colahan, "Dangerfield's Picaresque *Don Tomazo*: English Novelists as Spanish (Anti)heroes," *Neohelicon* 25, no. 2 (1998): 311-28.

reader cannot be sure about Moll's role in the narrative – as moral instance or as criminal. The *caso* forms a rationale for the narration of her adventures. The *pícaro*'s account is subjective and therefore creates psychological paradoxes. As in Lazarillo, Moll feels the need to explain her situation, exculpating her actions yet at once showing that back in England she is “not so extraordinary a penitent as she was at first,” as the editor intimates (6).⁶ She not only presents her thefts and other criminal misdeeds as poor examples for the reader, but also paradoxically presents the positive benefits of these same actions, actions that are in fact to be imitated by her readers if they want to be similarly successful. Once she has the right economic mindset, it seems, she can seize the favorable occasion. Moll, the apparently repentant sinner, not only remains blind to her own inconsistencies even when relating her life retrospectively, but she believes in the values she superficially condemns. The moral difficulties the heroine experiences serve in Defoe's novel to create a rounder character than was commonplace in the genre to this point.

Apart from the more superficial elements that constitute the double structure of the novel, such as the succession of pranks and morale, the juxtaposition of character and narrator, the alternation of delight and repentance, and so on, the double discourse of the picaresque genre, as the realization of the transition to a new episteme, offered the possibility of ambivalent statement. Thus on a more speculative level it becomes evident that Defoe took advantage of the discursive ambivalence between an early realism and literal language on the one hand, and traditional typological narrative and figurative language on the other, to signal the divided attitude of the heroine to social values and

⁶ My page references are to Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, ed. David Blewett (London: Penguin, 1994).

norms.⁷ The discursive strategies are related to certain ideologies: literal language and micro-narratives correspond to progressive ideology, whereas figurative language and the master-narrative are used in connection with conservative ideology.⁸ Depending on the heroine's attitude towards the social concepts treated, she then chooses the one or the other discourse of language and narrative method.⁹ Moll's use of economic terms, however, demonstrates her membership in the modern world of business desired by the modern economic man. On this deeper level of discourse the picaresque also comments variously on the social acceptability of the rogue. I will return to Defoe's use of this double discourse later.

Picaresque Elements in the Modern Novel

The dynamic picaresque genre allows the adaptation of some eighteenth-century dimensions, especially those regarding contemporary ideas of the individual, economic ambition, and the social order in general, while retaining features unaltered from those of the earliest Spanish models. One typical picaresque characteristic of Defoe's novel – as well as of some English rogue stories – is Moll's origin as a *pícaro*, her birth in prison as the daughter of a convicted felon, and consequently a trajectory already marked out for

⁷ Ellen Pollak, "Moll Flanders, Incest, and the Structure of Exchange," in Critical Essays on Daniel Defoe, ed. Roger D. Lund. (London and Mexico City: Prentice Hall International, 1997), shows Moll's initial "tendency to oversimplify the relationship of signifier to signified" and then to "undertake . . . to manipulate signs herself" (208). Through turning the systems of exchange (economic, linguistic, and sexual) to her own advantage, Pollak argues very convincingly, Moll creates her-self and re-defines her position as woman in a patriarchal society.

⁸ Defoe draws the connection between morals and language explicitly in his Complete English Tradesman, (1727; rpt. Gloucester: Sutton, 1987), 165.

⁹ Moll's show of traditional ideology can be compared to the Englishing of rogue's cant in order to domesticate outsiders that Stafford describes.

her in the lowest strata of society. Moll differs from other *pícaros* and her native predecessors, in that the promise of such a future affects her deeply quite early in her life, and so she rejects this publicly imposed identity. From the beginning, she does not believe that she is naturally poor but considers herself entitled to a more affluent life. Her Spanish predecessors, on the other hand, are basically content with their lot and try to change it not as a psychological imperative in order to realize their true character but merely as an exercise of ingenuity. As long as they do not have to fear going hungry, which is their greatest concern, they are content with their position, adapt to every situation that offers, and make the best of it for the moment. The situation of Moll's English predecessors is presented similarly in early modern pamphlets. Yet in contrast to both *pícaros* and rogues, the eighteenth-century character cannot simply make herself comfortable in whatever circumstances she happens into. While the Spanish *pícaros* acquire a new identity with each disguise and enjoy taking on different roles, Moll does not. She defines her identity through her social position which results from the material effects of her economic activities. An occupation for her is more than simply a temporary bread-winning enterprise. It is a determinant of her self-consciousness. Moll pretends to be a rich widow; at other times she disguises herself as a man, as a beggar, and so on. Ultimately though, her projects fail so that at one point she states, "It was impossible to be so nimble, so ready, so dexterous at these things in a dress so contrary to nature" (235). So Moll disguises herself, and yet she remains the Moll she takes herself to be, never taking on a different identity than the one she wants to assert.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gladfelder takes an opposite stance on the issue of Moll's identity. He considers the autobiography "a strategy of evasion, a way of assaying and multiplying identities" (130).

Contrary to the heroine herself, the people Moll meets in her adventures among different social strata and at roadside inns are often types, just as in the Spanish picaresque novels.¹¹ Only now, instead of a *siglo-de-oro hidalgo* or *estudiante*, an eighteenth-century highwayman, banker, or tradesman appears. Moll leaves each of these types behind as she passes through the various stages of her development, for while she has yet to find her place in society, they belong to established categories and do not have to alter their ways. The Spanish *pícaro*, on the other hand, has the same fixed position in society as these types. He can rise from the lowest rung of society temporarily, yet he will not try to internalize bourgeois values. The Spanish *pícaro* knows his place outside the traditional hierarchy. In contrast, believing in her stable identity, Moll works to acquire the corresponding social status. Earlier English rogues were more clearly deviant, more clearly outside the social pale than Moll. They lived in their own separately organized underworld. They did not have a banker friend like Moll's, and normally did not simulate virtue in their ruses. And while they conventionally repented in the prison ordinary's biographies, criminals were hanged in the end. Moll's position on the margin of the respectable world, regarding her fortune as well as her values, is less clearly determined, and it offers opportunity for development.

In fact, Defoe defines a new space for self-made men, and perhaps also for women. From the beginning his heroine does not believe that she is naturally poor. Quite the contrary, she considers herself entitled to the career she chooses, not through blood lineage but through acquired taste, manners, and female accomplishments. Moll has a

¹¹ Wicks claims that these types reflect the *pícaro*'s own character. "The focus is always on the observer [the *pícaro*] in the picaresque" (62). For myself, I agree with Alter that "it is the world that we are supposed to see, not his [the *pícaro*'s] world" (31).

much greater chance of changing her situation than others have. After all, she strives against contrary circumstances while the *pícaro* strives against fate. Her skills likewise carry her farther in a society which acknowledges the individual possibility of improving one's lot, farther than do the Spanish *pícaro*'s talents in a more static society which has only just recently discovered free will, and farther than do the rogue's in early modern England, which inevitably tried to define his place outside legitimate society. Moll's skills are, moreover, actually skills she has to learn and practice, whereas the skills of the older *pícaro* and the rogue are not much more than ingenuity and daring sharpened through penury.

Since Moll has more opportunity of willed and lasting influence on her life, her problems seem more consequential, and her actions tend to evoke more sympathy and identification in the reader. The consequences of these actions are perhaps described in a more psychological way in Moll Flanders than they would be in later novels. Whereas the Spanish *pícaros* seem immune to pain and death and leap up after each blow like toy tumbling figures, Defoe's heroine stresses the impact of her failures on her mood and on her behavior, as when she falls seriously ill under the pressure of the advances of the two brothers and the distrust of their mother, or, as she says, "the agonies of [her] mind" (45), or when she experiences fear and does not dare to go on thieving excursions for a great while after the first scrape.¹² Her problems are more internalized than those of the *pícaros*.¹³ In the affair with the husband-brother, for instance, laws or conventions are not what would stand in the way of such a union so much as the *pícaro*'s own abhorrence and

¹² Watt finds that to Moll "everything happens and nothing leaves scars" (148).

¹³ See G. A. Starr, Defoe and Casuistry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), for a discussion of Moll's internal struggles.

physical repulsion. Social sanctions are not her main concern, but her peace of mind is in jeopardy, as she admits: "I was not much touched with the crime of it, yet the action had something in it shocking to nature, and made my husband, as he thought himself, even nauseous to me" (97). Many readers could doubtless sympathize with her. They would acknowledge Moll's good moral and ethical intentions and would understand her hardships on the way up the social ladder. In the eyes of other readers, the fact that Moll chooses to rise through immoral means despite her avowed knowledge of the wrongs could have made her the agent of her own sufferings. Those readers might well have read the discourse not as criticism of the traditional norms – the barriers upstarts faced and consequential deviant behavior that resulted from them – but rather as diversion, as the necessarily futile attempts of an undeserving low-class character at rising in hierarchic society.

Like the Spanish *pícaro*, Moll is also wakened to being a *pícaro*, to a life of distrust. She has one decisive experience through which she realizes that she has to be a *pícaro* from that point on. After the death of her nurse Moll is taken in by a family of the upper strata who initiate her into the ways of society. From her experiences there she learns that if she does not first deceive others, they will deceive her; the older son of this family seduces her and then advises her to marry his younger brother. This dishonest behavior introduces her to sin. In the tradition of the Spanish picaresque, it forms perhaps a memory of the moment when his blind master slams Lázaro's head against a statue, initiating him into a life of distrust. Yet, while the protagonists of the earlier picaresque novels are suddenly and irrevocably converted into *pícaros* through the initiation incident, in Moll's case this incident triggers a more novel-like gradual hardening

process, in which her actions become more morally and ethically questionable than before.¹⁴ First, she goes to Bath to find a new husband. Although that resort was known for the presence of not-so-honorable men and women and although the heroine exhibits more active pursuit of an aim than would become a lady, the fact of a second marriage itself would not have been regarded negatively. Only her candid admission that she is looking for financial provision instead of true love is objectionable. Then she allows her friend to disperse false information about her possessions, information that is aimed at deceiving others and that is therefore immoral behavior, even though the heroine herself does not lie. In the second part of her life, her actions are more immoral, for she works as a prostitute and a thief. In the latter trade, as she calls it, she progresses from occasional petty thefts to planned burglary with very valuable booty. For such a psychologically developed character as hers this progressive criminalization should cause sleepless nights, and the fact that it serves only minimally to do so is very disconcerting to the modern reader. As she recapitulates coldly at one point in her career: "This [forging money] and horse-stealing were things quite out of my way, and I might easily resolve I would have no more to say to them; my business seemed to lie another way, and though it [shoplifting] had hazard enough in it too, yet it was more suitable to me, and what had more of art in it, more room to escape, and more chances for a-coming off if a surprise should happen" (280). The actions of the traditional *pícaros* were those of a type and were therefore not expected to have any real impact on the character of the protagonist. In

¹⁴ For Alter the *pícaro* is incorruptible. If he does develop a mean character, crossing the boundary from misdemeanor to crime without qualms, he is no longer a *pícaro*. Pamela Waley, "Lazarillo's Cast of Thousands, or the Ethics of Poverty," *The Modern Language Review* 83, no. 3 (1988): 591-601, also holds that Lazarillo is not morally bad. On the other hand, Roland Grass, "Morality in the Picaresque Novel," *Hispania* 42 (1959): 192-98, analyzes *Buscón*, *Guzmán*, and *Lazarillo* finding ample moral judgement in these picaresque novels.

contrast, in Moll's case her apparent easiness of mind indicates a serious deficiency in her character, namely a lack of ethical and moral understanding.

Unlike the traditional picaresque narratives, in Defoe's novel Moll's own development is central to its structure.¹⁵ Her experiences determine her future actions, which also depend directly on the material outcome of previous incidents. For example, because she is still married to the gentleman-tradesman she cannot remarry, and so must invent another scheme. Likewise, the social conversion of the *pícaro* in the end is only possible through her previous actions, and that conversion facilitates her moral reform. In that sense, there is only one possible causal and temporal order leading up to the ending, which cannot be changed, according to the narrator at least. There are, in fact, moments of decision in which the protagonist could have chosen differently. From the beginning, the novel is concerned with the difficulties of reconciling Moll's "social aspirations and the life of the spirit," as Parker phrases these contradictions.¹⁶ When they are reconciled, it is in an ambiguous way. In earlier picaresque novels, the case lent unity to a narrative consisting of episodes that were not interlocked more than in rudimentary fashion, as Rico, among others, contends. They were separate units following a biographical order but not a causal relation, therefore not leading to any climax in the narration. Moll's *caso*, on the other hand, is more consciously presented as the temporary endpoint of a progress

¹⁵ According to Parker, to Rosamaria Loretelli, Da Picaro a Picaro: le Transformazioni di un Genere Letterario dalla Spagna all'Inghilterra (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984), and to Paula Backscheider, Moll Flanders (Boston: Twayne, 1990) a *process* of hardening forms the basic pattern of Moll's spiritual development.

¹⁶ Parker, 91.

and a matter of her personal development in keeping with the image of a more independent individual, and hence the novelistic conventions, of the eighteenth-century.¹⁷

Picaresque Elements and the Modern Economy

Eighteenth-century authors appropriated many other picaresque features, not so much as steps toward the evolution of the novel, but in response to new socio-economic developments. One such picaresque feature is the solitariness of the *pícaro*. Like her baroque relatives, Moll remains a solitary character throughout her life, frequently “being perfectly alone” and “friendless” (174).¹⁸ Yet her solitude is due to economic individualism, a motive that does not figure in the Spanish picaresque novels. While the Spanish *pícaro* is alone as a function of being an outsider, Moll is alone as a function of her being an insider. As an economic woman of the eighteenth century, Moll has to be active and self-reliant. She pursues her own economic self-interest so single-mindedly that any parental responsibility – or indeed any obligations either of “wedlock or mistress-ship in the world” (138) – would get in her way.¹⁹ Moll fears being left alone and turned loose on the streets not because she would miss a friend or because she dislikes loneliness, but because she needs others to do business with her. She “had taken care all this while to preserve a correspondence with [her] honest friend at the bank . . .

¹⁷ Whether that is positive or negative is the question here, whereas in criminal biographies their deaths conclusively prevent a permanent success.

¹⁸ Unlike that of the *pícaro*, the literary depiction of English rogues commonly stresses their organization in bands, claims Dionne, 40 *passim*.

¹⁹ In contrast to Moll’s attitude, Defoe, *Complete English Tradesman*, considers family to be of great importance to a tradesman: “That tradesman who does not delight in his family, will never long delight in his business; for, as one great end of an honest tradesman’s diligence is the support of his family, so the very sight of, and above all, his tender and affectionate care for his wife and children, is the spur of his diligence” (9).

though [she] had not spent [her] money so fast as to want any from him” (175). Although some recurring figures appear various times in the novel or over an extended period, Moll never establishes genuine relationships with the many people she meets. Instead, she is suspicious of everybody. The fact that on their first try Moll tells her Lancashire husband neither her name nor how much money she possesses, actually saves her when each finds out about the respective situation of the other. Not having admitted her identity to her companion, she cannot be identified by him when he is arrested, which saves her once again. This careful behavior and the fact that she hardly ever tries to reestablish relationships after a move to another place are realistic traits of a criminal. So are the character traits of being self-centered and shutting off all feelings. These traits are, at the same time, essential to business success. Moll seems hard-hearted towards her children, only mentioning them by the by, and disposing of them when they are materially disadvantageous (136). Yet by acting in this way she becomes independent and can pursue her goals without having any of the burdens of human responsibility. She can move to the hubs of (her) trade and appear as a virgin, for instance. Another example of Moll’s calculating attitude to personal relationships is her connection to the person she calls her mother. Her so-called mother tries to get her out of prison, sends her goods in America, and then when she is of no further use to Moll, she simply disappears. As a character imbued with the spirit of personal success and competition in an unstable hierarchy, Moll the business woman has a functional view of the people she meets and is always the beneficiary of a relationship.²⁰

²⁰ See Watt , *passim*, for an analysis of the character traits of economic man.

Meanwhile, the compassion and companionship of the *novela picaresca* is not altogether lost in Moll Flanders. It is merely reserved to those who are in a comfortable and secure position already and do not have to fight their way up the social ladder. The townspeople save the orphan Moll from a worse fate, and the wealthy ladies make her presents, while the heroine herself exhibits purely selfish behavior. Her admission at the capture of a fellow criminal in the crowd at a meeting-house demonstrates her general attitude: “This, though unhappy for the wretch, was very opportunely for my case” (232). In contrast, in Francisco de Quevedo’s Buscón, the *pícaro* Pablos is devastated by the disappointment his aristocratic friend Don Diego causes him when he leaves him for better company, and at one point he gives his clothes to a needy soldier out of compassion. Moll also feels sorry for her Lancashire husband and is attached to him, but this does not move her to give him part of her money. That is, the mutual responsibility and companionship of the *novela picaresca* get lost in the pursuit of wealth in Moll Flanders, and that sets Moll’s picaresque solitude on a very different footing.

Other formal features of the picaresque exist in Defoe’s novel under new ideological auspices. Moll Flanders reflects its continental ancestry in that the *pícaro* often does not determine beforehand where she is going to stay and what she is going to do, but lets chance, or “the diligent devil,” direct her and “prompt [her] to go out and take a walk, that is to say, to see if anything would offer in the old way” (217). Like the Spanish *pícaros*, Moll wanders aimlessly to see what fate might bring her way. This is most evident on her rambles around town, when she is waiting for an occasion to steal. This also in part determines the episodic structure of the novel. Some of her actions, on the other hand, are well-planned. She moves to places, to another part of town (72), or to

Bath (115), where she can attract men, with the aim of improving her financial situation. When she leaves for America with the Lancashire husband, she takes well considered provisions to facilitate a new start there. Even in her unplanned activities, Moll actually works towards the future. For, unlike Guzmán, Pablos, and others, who do not have to take care of their belongings and are not concerned with more than their current position and alleviating immediate hunger, Moll plans for eventualities: she saves money.²¹ She also remains in contact with the London banker when she goes north, just in case. Moll actively attempts to shape her fate, to rise in society through planned activities. Her eighteenth-century economic attitude determines one of her most important motives, that is, her methodical pursuit of wealth, a feature not present in the Spanish picaresque novels or English rogue literature before Defoe. It determines her actions from the very beginning, when she decides to earn money through independent work in order to rise socially through her own merit. Begging is not an option for her, not because it is dishonorable as in *siglo-de-oro* Spain, but because laziness in early eighteenth-century England runs counter to active entrepreneurship. In this sense, at least, Moll's preference for hard work suggests that she shares the values of her contemporaries.

The character traits of the heroine are common middle-class and are desirable in the eighteenth century. They lead to success. As Watt argues, they are not considered bad, and the ambitious, restless, and self-centered Moll is, in fact, the perfect economic

²¹ Lázaro does so once but spends it soon. Alter calls Lazarillo's pursuit of wealth "economic adventurism" (46) while Moll's are to him "rational" endeavors in Max Weber's sense (48).

woman.²² Actions like counting her money, calling her thievery a “trade” (227), planning her enterprises in Virginia, and so on, are all expressions of period ideology, as are her desires for economic security, a husband, and being a respected “gentlewoman.”²³ Even the horror of the risks involved in her criminal activities is a period fear. Her reformation prompted through material success is in keeping with economic individualism in eighteenth-century England.²⁴ In Spain during the *siglo de oro*, economic gain as the sole motive of an action was viewed negatively. Penitence in Defoe’s time, however, does not necessarily have to be supported by religious action but by perseverance and diligence in economic matters. And the character Moll does take her trade seriously; she conducts it with skill and prudence. It is not a crime to her. Her general blindness to her own spiritual and moral dishonesty – claiming to prefer an honest employment yet giving up needlework (217) – could even be seen as an expression of the morals of her society. In continually lying to her husbands about her possessions, giving her son a stolen gold watch, never giving back the robbed goods, and so on, she merely follows her motive of protecting her possessions. She is not punished for her life of vice. Under this view it is not really vicious at all but the natural result of a praiseworthy acceptance of common

²² The irony readers today observe in the message of the novel is unintended, according to Watt, although on the sentence level he does point to instances of intended irony. See also Robert Weimann, Daniel Defoe; eine Einführung in das Romanwerk (Halle: Verlag Sprache und Literatur, 1962), and Alter, 48.

²³ Lois A. Chaber, “Matriarchal Mirror: Women and Capital in Moll Flanders,” in Critical Essays on Daniel Defoe, ed. Roger D. Lund (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), affirms “The social setting of Moll Flanders is a classic instance of one of Marx’s ‘periods of transformation,’ in which ‘the material forms of production in society come in conflict with the existing property relations of production,’ and the heroine, with her bourgeois enterprise on the one hand and her desire for a genteel spouse on the other, embodies historically conflicting classes” (190). Hence, “she is as much a catalyst for her author’s ambivalence about his class as are the characters of Balzac and Tolstoy” (190).

²⁴ Moll repents of her crimes but not of her economic desires and those of status. “There is no reason,” Gladfelder affirms, “to question the authenticity of Moll’s Newgate conversion” (126). Yet it is a conversion different from those in criminal lives: “She is not cripplingly repentant” (126) – nor hanged.

values. Only when she does not stop stealing after having accumulated enough money to live comfortably is she sent to prison, and yet the punishment is commuted. She is transported to Virginia, and is financially very successful there, which allows her to lead an outwardly virtuous life and quit her former criminal life. So, in fact, all in all her life is a success story, contrary to those of the *pícaro* and the rogue. She is rewarded for her behavior and for character traits which correspond to the exigencies of economic individualism.²⁵

The *Pícaro*'s Ambivalent Position

Yet Moll's actions are morally ambiguous.²⁶ They are not always right by the standards of human interaction respectful of each other's needs, even though they might be legal. She transgresses social conventions and is ruthless and selfish in her pursuit of wealth.²⁷ In this respect my analysis revises Watt's old thesis that Moll is the perfect economic woman. The author of Moll Flanders had doubts about the social wholesomeness of economic individualism. One aspect especially is questionable

²⁵ While Defoe's *pícaro* reaffirms the possibility of social rise based on economic merit, "the true crime of the vagabond," according to Dionne, "was to remind everyone of the ephemeral nature of the social order, his presence an unpleasant symbol of these newly 'stalled' men in the legitimate corridors of power that their own identity was also a sham" (47).

²⁶ On Defoe's attitude toward trade and morality see Andersen. Nicholas Spadaccini, "Daniel Defoe and the Spanish Picaresque Tradition: The Case of Moll Flanders," Ideologies & Literature 2, no. 6 (1978): 10-26, demonstrates in Moll Flanders what Andersen shows in Defoe's non-fictional writings, that to Defoe economic purposes justify behavior which in other circumstances would be regarded as morally wrong. Maximilian Novak, Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), discusses Defoe's condoning crime in the case of necessity while not defining the term clearly. He finds differences in Defoe's concept of poverty compared with that of his contemporaries. Upbringing and gender palliate the guilt of his heroes. Novak denies a conflict of ideals in Defoe between Puritan morality and commercial spirit. To him, it is very clear that Defoe championed the latter.

²⁷ Parker, 103, claims that Moll leads a perfectly virtuous life at first. Her "ups and downs are . . . not the results of moral choices on her part" (104).

regarding its moral charge, although in Defoe's society it was gradually accepted as a normal attitude.²⁸ It is Moll's notion of necessity, which distinguishes her from older *pícaros*. She not only wants to have enough food and a place to sleep, like the earlier *pícaros*, but she wants to live handsomely. Although she has enough to eat, she feels "necessity" when she does not have a maid and only one room in Bath (119). This is more comparable, in fact, to some English rogues, who wanted to acquire wealth and fame. While Lázaro's and Pablos's vicissitudes are reflected in a lack of food, Moll's is in the amount of money she has, and she "cast[s] up [her] accounts" (138) after each episode. Moll purposefully enriches herself by cheating, stealing, and taking advantage of the honest feelings of several men, and she hurts others severely who are in similarly bad conditions as she is, for instance, the lady whose house is on fire.²⁹ Her sinful behavior is not justified by the prospect of starvation like Lazarillo's and Pablos'. Rather, it is an expression of the corrupted value system of her society, which she has accepted as necessary for economic success.³⁰ Since Moll's actions are justified within her value system, her repentance can only be superficial, and she does not really have a case to explain, whereas the Spanish *pícaros* are radically alienated from society and do not

²⁸ Preservers of traditional ways had reason to feel threatened by such Otherness as Moll's which was becoming accepted, in a process similar to that in the seventeenth century regarding rogues and Irish described by Stafford (in Dionne and Mentz, *Rogues*, 312-36).

²⁹ Lázaro goes to Toledo in order to gain money, and in church stares at the offertory plate. Other *pícaros* are also obsessed by the thought of money in order to be able to acquire food - not, like Moll, in order to save it and grow rich. Lázaro in *La segunda parte del Lazarillo* (1554), however, is an exception in the Spanish picaresque novel, behaving similar to Moll. Yet he criticizes the one coronal's accumulation of riches as a sign of avarice.

³⁰ See also Bjornson, 13. Defoe, *Complete English Tradesman*, does not apply the same standards to "an honest man" and to "a tradesman": "There are some latitudes, like poetical licences in other cases, which a tradesman is and must be allowed . . . which cannot be allowed in other cases to any men" (159).

accept its ways or morality,³¹ and English con-men do the opposite, namely to exploit its ways consciously for their deviant purposes.³² One is not sure whether the way Defoe seemingly offers to cope with the problems of society – to accept the system – is sincere, or whether he employed the picaresque convention of the *caso* intentionally to raise questions about the morality of his contemporaries.³³

The former solution – to accept the system – is further put into doubt with the play on the word *gentlewoman*, through which the author took part in the controversy about the role of women in the new economic order. Moll's character traits, which are useful in economic individualism, surface only in criminal or morally questionable activities, while most men around her are honest bankers, merchants, and planters. In the first part of the novel, Moll participates in the commercial society only through her body, which is commodified. The older brother of the family she lives with does not recognize her personal value as an individual but treats her as a prostitute, even paying her for her service afterwards. Her position in this relationship is stressed through her later marriage to Robin, the younger brother. Moll herself is also the ware of her economic transactions in the failed marriage scam. Contrary to the men, she does not trade in money or agricultural goods but in her own body, especially in the second part of the novel when

³¹ Alter, 40, expresses a contrary opinion.

³² Dionne, 45.

³³ Bjornson establishes this opposition as the central dilemma of the picaresque: "they [the *pícaros*] are invariably confronted by a choice between social conformity (which is necessary for survival) and adherence to what they have learned to consider true or virtuous" (11).

she works as a prostitute.³⁴ When she does try to invest money as her male contemporaries do, she finds that as a woman she is economically dependent and needs a “friend to commit the management of [the money] to” (142). The banker even suggests she “get a head steward . . . that may take [her] and [her] money together into keeping” (145). The difference between the classic *pícaro*, who rejects the value system of his society, and Moll, who accepts it, does not seem to determine their roles in society in different ways. Moll does not participate in honest economic ventures. In this sense, Moll, the woman, in fact remains an outsider like the other *pícaros*.

Many characteristics of the picaresque appear in Moll Flanders and justify its being called a picaresque novel. In several ways, however, Defoe’s novel adapts those characteristics to the contemporary social circumstances and ideas. Moll’s character is no longer static, a difference which has consequences for the structure of the novel. Although in many ways essentially still a *pícaro*, she has character traits of an economic man when she plans her actions and saves money. The involuntary isolation of the Spanish *pícaro* from society turns into egocentricity and selfishness in Moll Flanders, characteristics in the service of achieving her goal of personal wealth. Moll is a *pícaro* who acts according to the demands of economic individualism of eighteenth-century England. Defoe’s novel is essentially a product of its period, although it also borrows certain traditional conventions of the genre.³⁵

³⁴ The situation of her Lancashire husband appears to be quite similar to hers. Yet while he is able to get back on track and successfully take up his old life, Moll’s chances of going on fortune-hunting are reduced and she is afraid of meeting him again throughout the novel.

³⁵ Whether it matters that Moll is a female *pícaro*, especially with regard to the economic order, remains to be examined. For an admirable analysis of her position and Defoe’s apparent critique of the patriarchal social structure see Pollak.

Double Discourse as Social Critique

As Cruz notes in her Discourses of Poverty, the picaresque reasserts aristocratic values at the same time that it criticizes them. Likewise, Moll Flanders supports the prevalent contemporary economy while criticizing it, questioning its morals and pointing to the danger of corroding values. On the one hand, Defoe appears to fear capitalist implications for morality and traditional values and stresses the vice of his heroine. Her behavior does not conform to the standards of society in that she is guilty of moral and ethical transgressions, her trade is that of fortune-hunting, she makes her way through telling lies, and she is a thief and a prostitute. The so-called blows of fate – two of her husbands turn out to be her brother and a poor criminal, and another dies; she has to go to prison and is transported – are consequences of her violation of basic moral values. She is punished for it. On the other hand, the author seems to support the new market processes and its capitalist desires, and rewards his heroine at the end of the novel. He shows that Moll needs to behave the way she does if she wants to rise, and that she has character traits desirable in the early eighteenth-century economy. Her success reaffirms the prevalent economic attitude, which often contradicts traditional values. The picaresque with its double discourse lent itself to the expression of anxieties about this situation, concerns which Defoe shared with many of his contemporaries.³⁶

³⁶ According to Bjornson – and I would agree – Lazarillo introduced the main theme of the picaresque, namely “the disintegration of traditional value systems, the rise of bourgeois ideology, and the increasing difficulty of reconciling aspirations for upward social mobility with psychological needs for security and self-respect in a hostile, dehumanizing society” (19). Inseparably connected with this, and maybe emphasized over it by Defoe, is the question of moral behavior, that is, behavior in accordance with traditional values and norms of social life in such a society.

The typically picaresque narrative situation of Moll telling of her own life retrospectively facilitates social criticism.³⁷ In this pseudo-autobiography the narrator is supposedly originally Moll, but the editor claims to have modified the text as to expressions and parts that might offend the reader - which suggests that the repentant Moll is still a *pícaro* when relating the story, that she still believes in those values she superficially condemns. The preface, moreover, alerts the reader to possibly too many moral faults by the statement that back in England Moll is “not so extraordinary a penitent as she was at first” (6). Notwithstanding, Moll relates episodes of the bad life she used to lead in order to show her conversion and to serve, in her own terms, as a good example to her readers. The editor claims the noble object of *prodesse et delectare* – to delight, that is, in the virtue presented. Like Guzmán and other Spanish, and also some native, predecessors, Moll offers general advice to be learned from her adventures and sermons to educate the reader.³⁸ However, the story is also intended to provide pleasure in the adventures of roguery themselves, as is stated in the prologue and throughout the novel, and the criminal Moll gives advice on how to be successful in her (former) trade. These are contradictory intentions indeed.

The disparity between the ending of the novel– Moll’s success – and the intention stated in the prologue – to show, how every evil only leads to more evil – is not a real contradiction. The question of just how bad, morally and ethically, it is to strive for material wealth, by illegal means if necessary, had just arisen in the eighteenth century and was not yet resolved, either for women or men. Moll usually knows when to stop,

³⁷ Wicks, 58, notices the two-sided narrative situation, yet he fails to explain the meaning of it.

³⁸ According to Rico, 62, *Moll Flanders* is in this aspect a typical picaresque novel, in which the adventures of the *pícaro* function as sermons either directly or *ex contrario*.

too. Whenever she has enough money to satisfy her demand for a handsome life or is married securely, she leads a relatively virtuous life for a while, even if the virtue remains questionable, since it is based on the riches accumulated through her criminal actions. Although Moll now considers herself virtuous, retrospectively condemning her vanity and former lifestyle, at the same time she exculpates herself as much as possible.³⁹ Moll also always emphasizes the bad characteristics and actions of others in order to justify her own actions, as does the *pícaro* who moralizes about the society he has just beaten with the same means. She “give[s] the parents a just reproof for their negligence in leaving the poor little lamb to come home by itself” (213), after she has stolen the girl’s necklace, issues a warning against leaving silver tankards unattended (218), and judges “the woman whose watch [she] had pulled at was a fool” (232). She presents her thefts and other bad deeds as bad examples for the reader, but she also stresses any positive value her actions might have and, paradoxically, offers them as practical examples of commendable behavior to be imitated by her readers. With the right economic mindset she has seized her occasions.⁴⁰ She says others would have robbed the drunken gentleman if she had not done it, implying that others are not better than she is. In fact, she even helped him get on the right track again, in her opinion. Those incidents show that Moll, the apparently repentant sinner, remains blind to her own inconsistencies even when relating her life retrospectively.

³⁹ Guzmán also justifies his criminal actions as common practice and says that necessity forced him to lead a bad life.

⁴⁰ Unlike Moll, her brother husband tries to commit suicide, and her banker husband gets sick after a failed business deal. They do not have her economic (and criminal) energy. Only her two closest acquaintances, the governess “stood upon her legs” (216), and the Lancashire husband knows he “must try again; a man ought to think like a man. To be discouraged is to yield to the misfortune” (164). Only their stories, of all the stories she hints at, would merit relating fully, Moll maintains.

Daniel Defoe chose the picaresque genre to express the ambivalent attitude of his contemporaries towards the recent and not yet completed development of economic individualism. Moll's fate – in the end she is wealthy, although the means of obtaining that goal are questionable – as well as the way her adventures are related – retrospectively, as pseudo-autobiography, and with diverting pranks and admonishing comments – confirm this ambivalence.

The Picaresque Between Epistemes

Defoe's narrative manner coincides with epistemic developments at the origin of the picaresque genre in Renaissance Spain, and also of developments in English rogue literature fully two centuries before he wrote. These literary forms reflect the problematic relation between signifier and signified that lies at the heart of the transition to the classical age. According to Barry Taylor, for the early modern author Harman the most alarming effect of the acts of the vagrant was his disguising them, to result in "a vagrancy of the signifier – or the surface appearances of social being – from its ground in the signified – the 'natural' hierarchical ordering of rank and status" (5). Similar fears are articulated in the picaresque novel, including Defoe's. Moreover, from its beginnings the picaresque genre reflected the moral need of a literal-minded hero to explain his worldly ambition to an audience better prepared to understand ambition in figurative and otherworldly terms. A residual allegory jostled for meaning alongside a new realism based in materialism – in Spain as well as in England. Retrospectively, the *pícaro* produced a coherent narrative, often with religious explanations, from his individual life. His descriptions of everyday, particular incidents within the broader frame of the allegory

of repentant sinner testified to the insecurities about the nature of narrative. This mixture of discourses facilitated ambivalence of statement in the picaresque. Defoe developed the germinal two-sidedness in the epistemic and linguistic bases of the genre in order to explore the moral dilemma of his era. He equates traditional ideology – that is, criticism of upstarts in general – with the older discourse, and progressive ideology – that is, their praise – with the more recent discourse.⁴¹

Two Discourses: Narrative

In Moll Flanders, as in other picaresque novels, the two discourses are present. The reality of Moll's individual life is related in language belonging to analytico-referential or empirical discourse, whereas the general pattern and overarching spiritual truth which is to be affirmed are often cast in figurative language. "The gust and palate of the reader" and "the real worth of the subject" are juxtaposed (2). The "real worth" is limited to the moralizing, generalizing advice of Moll the narrator, whereas the "gust and palate" refer to the particular events described in detail from the perspective of Moll the character. In referential language the *pícara* gives "an account of all her vicious practices, and even

⁴¹ Regarding the structures that determine thought and accordingly, narrative discourse, Foucault taught that representation replaced resemblance in the classical age. His system has been translated and applied to narrative and language, among others, by McKeon, Zimmerman, Richard H. F. Kroll, The Material Word. Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), and Murray Cohen, Sensible Words. Linguistic Practice in England 1640-1785 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Zimmerman examines the epistemological transformations in narrative discourses. Regarding the delimitation of the concepts of history and fiction, he distinguishes in the early eighteenth century the dominant analytico-referential discourse from a residual figural discourse. McKeon makes a similar distinction between the earlier discourse of romance idealism and the later, literal one, empiricism. He examines not only the novel's position to epistemological changes concerning attitudes toward narrative. He also examines how it represents the relation between internal morals and external status in social categories, and thus McKeon distinguishes aristocratic and progressive ideologies. Kroll notes a Foucauldian shift in the concepts of language and knowledge that occurred between 1640 and 1660. Yet he rejects theories of plain style other scholars have as a particularly eighteenth-century argument. Cohen likewise examines linguistic theories. He describes the development toward a syntactical and logical view of the relationship between language and knowledge.

[descends] to the particular occasions and circumstances by which she first became wicked” (1). In figurative language she talks about the religio-moral perspective of the same incident: “This honest, friendly way of treating me unlocked all the sluices of my passions. He broke into my very soul by it; and I unravelled all the wickedness of my life to him. In a word, I gave him an abridgement of this whole history” (316). In the second part of her life, the contrast between the two discourses is especially pronounced.

Descriptions in exact detail of her booty in measured weight, color, and quality, or of her escape in London streets with their names and position, are followed by moral reflections in figurative language about the devil’s prompting. Moll’s remarks, “but I waive that [moralizing] discourse till I come to the experiment” (260) and later, toward the end of the novel, “but I leave the reader to improve these thoughts . . . and go on to the fact” (370) attest to her awareness of the two different discourses, to the moralizing, figural and the immediate, literal discourses respectively.

To the repentant Moll, the will of God is shown through palpable, immediate signs, such as a reprieve or money. The relation of such incidents as *figurae* reaffirms the predetermined order. Moll creates a causal, ordered relation between the stations of her life, from birth to the present of narrating, in which the individual points function to explain the whole, just as in the *pícaro*’s explanation of the *caso* through his life trajectory. Throughout the entire novel, Moll first tells the individual incidents, considering their impact on her immediate situation, and then integrates them into the overarching narrative, drawing moralizing general conclusions from the incidents. The individual actions lose their singular quality; they are no longer definitive, referential, self-sufficient incidents. The signifier, that is, does not point to the signified – the

description of the crime to the crime itself: the delight in it, the pride of it, the profit from it – as in the referential, literal language of empiricism. These are, presumably, the parts that had to be cut. But through the signified the signifier, the particular incident, points to another signified, namely the moral dimension of it all, the narrative of a converted sinner.

The character Moll, on the other hand, always considers her temporary situation and her current circumstances, being aware that they could rapidly change. She tries to find solutions for immediate problems. When she rids herself of a child, she muses, “and thus my great care was over, after a manner, which . . . was the most convenient for me, *as my affairs then stood*, of any that could be thought of *at the time*” (194; my emphasis). Her goals, as well as her means, are never guided by moral or spiritual considerations at the narrated time but by her material circumstances. Of trying to improve her situation after her Bath-lover has lost interest, she states, “I knew what I aimed at and what I wanted, but knew nothing how to pursue the end by direct means” (140). The end here is not spiritual but material, namely to secure as much money from him as possible before it is too late. Only in retrospect do her actions in general gain a new meaning. Sometimes, the character Moll appears to keep moral considerations in mind, yet it may be doubted whether explanations like “that it was *morally* impossible with a supposition of any reasonable good conduct, but that [they] must thrive there and do very well” (172; my emphasis) are actually moral. On a second view, morals are here superficially related to *material* well-being. Really what the *pícaro* means with “morally impossible” is not at all clear, but it appears that to her in a just society honest behavior has to be financially rewarded. Again, a little later, she argues “how good a method it would be to put an end

to our misfortunes and restore our circumstances in the world” (172), and she must have *material* circumstances and *this* world in mind, as she does also when she moves into the house of the banker. There she comments on the “house well furnished, and a husband in very good circumstances,” and only afterwards “consider[s] the real value” of that life (186). Her concerns are even foremost for her position in this world when she cries to God after the deed, “What am I now? A thief! Why, I shall be taken next time, and be carried to Newgate and be tried for my life!” (211). She does not fear for her soul but instead fears being caught. Despite the figurative language, her fear for her soul is also at most only equal to her fear for her body when she despairs that she “should be driven by the dreadful necessity of [her] circumstances to the gates of destruction, soul and body” (211). The suspicion of the reader that the criminal Moll has not completely turned into a saint even though her language may be religious, is satisfied a little further down when she notes “that Heaven was now beginning to punish [her] on this side the grave” (212).

While the character Moll blames the positive or negative outcomes of her exploits on her or other people’s skill, attention, caution, and so on, and considers the incidents as disconnected episodes in no particular order, in retrospective, the narrator adduces “fate” (8), “hap” (288), “fortune” (300), or “providence” (301) as the ordering force of her life. What at the time of experience is a result of the connections of her landlady and her own financial means, afterwards becomes providential and Moll is “wonderfully pleased and satisfied with what [she] had met with” (183). Likewise, she closes her musing about her indecency toward the banker with the thought of the inevitability of her situation: “Well, if I must be his wife, if it please God to give me grace, I’ll be a true wife to him” (199). Here, too, she conveniently forgets that it was not fate or God but her own scheming that

kept the banker at bay while she was engaged in the North. In similar fashion she presents her downfall as the inevitable consequence of her vicious life, integrating it into the fixed order, and disclaiming individual responsibility: “Oh could this state of life have continued, how had all my past troubles been forgot, and my future sorrows been avoided! But I had a past life of a most wretched kind to account for, some of it in this world as well as in another” (205). At the same time, she vindicates her success with her genteel nature, which she demonstrates at age three with the gypsies and also living with the noble family. There she learns with the daughters of the house, her natural predisposition to genteel education facilitating spontaneous learning. She is handsomer, better shaped, and sings better, and, she tells us, “[these] were all the gifts of nature” (19). With hindsight, she feels entitled to a higher social standing by her inward nobility, which should justify any eventual doubts regarding immoral behavior.

When she interprets her activities long after the fact, that is, at the time of narrating, she often does so in figurative terms. “Now I seemed landed in a safe harbour, after the stormy voyage of life past was at an end, and I began to be thankful for my deliverance” (206), she recapitulates. Her “heart began to look up . . . to the hand of Providence” (370) after her deliverance. As the agency of God is cast in figurative language, so the machinations of the devil are also described in tropes. “An almost invisible hand blasted all [her] happiness” (207) when she meets with bad luck. “The devil carried [her] out and laid his bait for [her]” (209), like the older brother who knew “how to catch a woman in his net as a partridge when he went a-setting” and “baited his hook” (20) to catch his victim Moll.⁴² The description of her conversion experience in Newgate is of course

⁴² See also longer figurative passages on pages 217, 218, 222, 223.

replete with figurative language, corresponding to its importance as the incident that determines her future as repentant sinner. One paragraph illustrates particularly well the juxtaposition of figurative language, when connected with the spiritual import, and referential language, when connected with her immediate life:

On the contrary, like the waters in the cavities and hollows of mountains, which petrify and turn into stone whatever they are suffered to drop upon, so the continual conversing with such a crew of hell-hounds as I was, had the same common operation upon me as upon other people. I degenerated into stone; . . . and, in short, I became naturally pleased and easy with the place, as if indeed I had been born there. (305)⁴³

In Newgate, Moll's use of single terms in figurative and literal ways gets confused, as if she were not sure whether to blame her situation on fate or on her own actions. As a repentant, should she not recognize her own responsibility? That would not correspond to her general procedure. When she gets a reprieve – which she interprets as the doing of God– and sees others on their way to the gallows, she “wishes them a good journey” (320), probably not merely on that last walk but a journey into another life. The latter meaning is in her mind when she says about her Lancashire-husband “that he thought the passage into another state, let it be what it would, much more tolerable at the gallows” (331). The journey on the ship to the New World in fact gathers similar figurative meaning: the repentant Moll speaks of “a real transport . . . or passion of joy and thankfulness” (321) in prison and of “transportation” and being “transported” (322, 323) in its literal sense a few lines further down. The terms “deliverance” (323) and “fortune”

⁴³ See also 306, 309.

(287) both carry spiritual as well as worldly meanings, depending on whether they refer to the *pícaro*'s immediate life or to its spiritualized re-interpretation as exemplary of the master-narrative of the repentant sinner.

Moll's wavering between the discourses, not just during her conversion, illustrates the conflict between the self-made man and traditional hierarchy, a conflict which remained a pressing social issue in the early eighteenth century. Moll, the narrator, reinterprets as *figurae* and determined by a higher force what Moll, the character, treats as traces and determined through her efforts in this world. These two voices employ figurative and literal language respectively. However, the two discourses are not as clearly divided as the editor would wish, and, especially, it is doubtful whether the figural really dominates the literal in the end. This indicates Defoe's ambivalence about the possibility of admitting the traditional narration of the born gentleman who is a successful businessman, as an explanation and justification of the new biographies of his era. And, vice versa, in the novel the individual narrative does not automatically testify to a higher pre-existent truth. Instead, it depends on the selection and interpretation of the incidents, and it may also affirm the opposite. The editor exhibits an uncertainty about the effect of the figural discourse from the beginning on. He feels the need to establish the rules for ideal reading beforehand. Every bad thing is punished, every good thing praised, he announces. The particular incidents have – or receive – a prefigured purpose. He generalizes from Moll's example, adverting, or rather persuading, the reader that the particular can be made into a type, as in Puritan casuistry. Yet he knows that some parts have a religious message and, as he states, real beauty while others are of doubtful value regarding the message. They do not really fit into the preconceived fable, and the plain

story of the sinner-character needs reworking, before it can represent the higher pattern. “Agreeable” or “happy turns” are given to the relation to “atone for all the lively description she gives of her folly and wickedness” (3). The narration could be interpreted differently, we assume, especially if left in the original version, although the editor explicitly attributes to “the fable” a fixed “moral” (2). Readers who read it differently, he supposes, do not “know how to read it” (2). He demands a narrative interpretation of the “delightful incidents” (2), of the *figurae* within a pre-existent master-narrative.⁴⁴

This reworking is a function of Moll’s self-justification and expresses doubt about the admissibility of ill-gained wealth as valid evidence of inner virtue. In order to deflect all responsibility for former crime and to present herself as a repentant sinner deserving of fortune, Moll denies the possibility of independent action. She stresses that all was a design, natural, Providence, that God guided and saved her. In that way she converts her economic success into a spiritual value like in Protestantism. In contrast, Moll the character regards herself as an independent individual responsible for her life. She aims at mere economic rise in this world, while the repentant Moll stresses other values – spiritual and moral. And the character does not hide the fact that she is proud of her accomplishments. She explains her ruses in detail and stresses the skill and rational thought they require. The immediate circumstances are of primary concern, and what counts are the results, largely financial, for her own particular life in this world. In figural discourse, in the exemplary repentant sinner’s narrative, the literal should support the figurative, and material signs testify to the spiritual pattern. Yet, for all her rhetoric, Moll’s individual life does not prove the master-narrative, for the attainable signs – the

⁴⁴ Zimmerman uses the term narrative interpretation throughout his study.

empirically supported incidents in particular time and place – do not correspond to the supposed spiritual truth but rather contradict it. They illustrate that dishonest behavior pays, while the figural professes to show that only inner virtue and moral behavior lead to success.

Two Discourses: Language

Issues of morality, of the agency of the individual, and of upward mobility related to period discussions of business also found expression in the picaresque through its discursive features. With the shift of emphasis from the things themselves to the ideas of things in epistemology; and from words as natural signs of things to relations entirely in the mind in linguistics, the agency of definition shifted from God to individuals in society in the classical age. Meanings were then considered socially negotiated. The question arose not only of the authority of definition, but also, and of more importance to my argument, of the stability of meaning. There appeared the possibility of change if meaning was not inherent in words but words were contractual, arbitrary social counters. Defoe's novel, written at the transition from one (linguistic) concept of knowledge to another in the early eighteenth century and taking place in the previous century, deals with these different concepts through the ways in which the editor, narrator, and character employ language in accordance with their notions of social categories.

Already in the Preface, which announces that the “original [was] put into new words” and “put into a dress fit to be seen” (1), the topic of dressing and disguise is introduced, and, interestingly, in relation to language. The *pícaro* herself, of course, changes her appearance quite often, as do all *pícaros*. We have already seen the complex treatment of

character development versus stable self in Defoe's novel, in which the motif of disguise occupies a different position in the eighteenth century than it does in the Spanish Golden Age. In connection with Moll's disguises, her awareness of the arbitrariness of the signifier – signified relationship, as well as of the possible masking function of words, and in particular of names, has to be stressed here. While in 1688 one contemporary school grammar still emphasized the significatory value of Christian names,⁴⁵ Moll knows that things – and people – can receive new names or appearances without themselves changing. Unlike Walter Shandy, for Moll a name does not reflect an inner value or a signified. Whenever the *pícaro* is not successful in one scheme, she tries a new one, and for the new start she also takes on a new name, moves somewhere else, and pretends to be, or rather, have, more than in reality – all the while staying the same Moll. “Moll Flanders, as she calls herself” (5), is actually not her real name but a cover she takes on in the Mint, supposedly to protect her from persecution. It is also a generic name she later receives from other criminals, long before they know the individual, Moll, and merely based on the class of crime and Moll's reputation. The name denotes a type, namely a mix between prostitute and pickpocket of the cast of a Moll Hackabout (Hogarth) or a Moll Cutpurse (Dekker and Middleton), and thief of contraband Flemish

⁴⁵ See Cohen, 49.

lace.⁴⁶ The particular individual behind “Moll Flanders” is concealed, and the heroine of the unique history of a particular life becomes the generalized exemplary type of the moralizing figural discourse about a repentant sinner. Some doubt about the sincerity of Moll’s repentance is thus raised before the matrix of intertwined contrasting discourses as expressed in the choice of names. For, if the name reflected faithfully the content, the repentant narrator in the year of composition would surely not call herself Moll Flanders, the generic meaning of which does not at all correspond to the image she wants to create of a virtuous and pious reformed criminal.

On the other hand, the narrating instance seems to prefer individual Christian names where possible, that is, where a particular signifier denotes a particular – or real, true – signified. Robin, the plain-talking (32) younger brother, who is “in earnest” (38, 49) and “so honest a gentleman” (62) has a Christian name. So does Jemmy, the plain-dealing highwayman, as well as her Virginia husband/brother and son, who are both plain-speaking, honest, industrious, and do not carry gentleman’s status symbols that lack substance. Even “Mrs. Betty” in the beginning, the innocent and still honest heroine, has a Christian name, Elizabeth.⁴⁷ This is possible since in their cases appearance and content correspond; signifier and signified are in a stable, direct relation. With all other characters

⁴⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, 6th ed., s.v. “Moll” gives the following definition: “A prostitute. Gen., a girl, woman; a girl-friend or sweetheart, esp. of a criminal, the unmarried female companion of a professional thief or vagrant; a female pickpocket or thief.” Alexander Smith included stories of “Moll Hawkins, a Shop-Lift” and “Anne Holland, a Pick-Pocket” in his The History of the Lives of the Most Noted highway-Men, Foot-pads, House-Breakers, Shoplifts, and Cheats of both Sexes (1714). Defoe himself wrote pieces of fiction about “Moll of Rag-Fair” and “Moll Harvey”. See John Robert Moore, “Sources and Innovation in Defoe’s Moll Flanders,” Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 242-44. “Moll King” was a real criminal active around the time of Defoe’s novelistic production, as Gerald Hawson, “Who Was Moll Flanders?” The Times Literary Supplement 18 January 1968, 63-64, quoted in Kelly, ed., Norton Critical Edition, 312-19, notes.

⁴⁷ Kelly states that “some later abridgements and adaptations used ‘Laetitia Atkins’ as Moll’s name” or ‘Elizabeth Atkins’ as in T. Read’s The Life and Actions of Moll Flanders (1723) (306).

only type names are possible, such as midwife, lady, gentleman-tradesman, gentleman, and comrade, because they disguise themselves and cheat, or pretend to a higher station through extrinsic markers whose intrinsic counterparts do not exist. Christian names, and referential language or plainness in general, are clearly related to honesty. However, as Edward Kelly comments, “just as ‘Betty’ is a generic name for maidservants, so ‘Robin’ (short for ‘Robert’) is a common tag-name for country bumpkins or dull-witted, boorish characters.”⁴⁸ Here, then, as well as in other instances, in which the connection plain-honest is most emphasized, it is at the same time most questionable. In the young *pícaro*’s interview with her employer, in which she speaks “with the utmost plainness and sincerity” (48) or when she talks to the older brother “with such an honest plainness” (53) the affirmations of the narrator have to be taken with caution. Since there is reason to doubt the honesty of the character and to regard her naïveté as part of her scheming to obtain what she aims for, we can take these instances actually to demonstrate uncertainty about the possibility of definite denotations and of stable relations between signifier and signified.

Throughout the entire relation of her life, with the exception of the moralizing comments, the narrator exhibits uneasiness about the use of figurative language and prefers clear denotations. Often, she clarifies something just related “in plain English” or repeats it “in other words.”⁴⁹ She calls things by their names, including herself, as toward her lover: “Your dear whore, you would have said if you had gone on, and you might as well have said it” (42). Remarkable is that figures which often hide the unpleasant

⁴⁸ Kelly, 28.

⁴⁹ Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, rejects “dark and ambiguous speakings” and “obscure” language (165).

meaning, as in the many terms for “the private account, or, in plain English, the whoring account” (185), are equally suspect and often rephrased, whether they are employed by the dominant ideological forces or by Moll herself. At the same time, the heroine seems to believe in the existence of stable signifieds independent of their corresponding names. Moll demonstrates geographical knowledge in her description of “the English settlements” although she “did not know what the term geographical signified” (359). In the innocent society of Virginia the permanent mark of the convict loses its meaning. There people can prove their merit, and a convict can become a major or a justice despite contrary appearance. The signifier is of no consequence, and a different signified can exist independent of it. In the New World, not polluted by traditional English society yet, Moll is unsure about naming things, as if the new reality merited new words that establish once again clear references. For several signifieds she offers two terms, as for “a certain house, whether it was to be called a tavern or not I know not,” “a storehouse or warehouse,” and a “small place or village” (352). While demonstrating preference for plain language, in other instances Moll alerts the reader to the modifications, or falsifications, of meaning possible through the choice of polysemous words whose wider or figurative meaning has become the main, accepted meaning. She corrects herself when she says, “good company, that is to say, gay, fine company” (146), aware that “good” might be taken to mean “morally good” company or one that would improve her. Yet, the heroine herself employs metaphors and transfers terms from one semantic field to another, when she employs Protestant vocabulary to denote the “other calling” (176) of her midwife as the proprietor of a brothel, or when she employs business terms to denote her unlawful activities. Appropriating economic and professional language for her

actions, she insists on being an insider, contrary to earlier English rogues, who distinguished themselves from society by way of their special criminals' cant. Moll's own use of language is not as plain and honest as she would like the reader to believe.

The editor speaks in the same voice, uncomfortable about the use of figurative but common language, and expresses his better knowledge of the real meaning behind the linguistic mask with the same qualifications. At other times he, like Moll, unveils the figure, as "thieves' purchase, that is to say of stolen goods" (5). Nevertheless, we do not necessarily meet here with a purposeful disguise of immoral behavior – and its subsequent detection. The question of literal language remains problematic, since the character Moll might actually have the sincere opinion that her exploits are a profession or a trade and that they are pardonable from an economic perspective. Defoe himself expresses a similar view in The Compleat English Tradesman when he admits that some business practices in commerce might not be entirely honest and morally correct but that they are nevertheless acceptable if they are good for the nation, adding to the volume of trade and earning profit.⁵⁰ Contrary to Moll the character, Moll the repentant is supposed to know that the activity of thieves is not the right kind of trade, and that their purchase therefore can only be called so in a figurative twist. After all, her immoral participation in the trade is what she is repenting at the time of narration. It is also the explicit goal of the editor to teach his readers that vice, that is, criminal actions like Moll's, might not be condoned. The linguistic uncertainty expresses an ambiguity towards social values, and Defoe's novel exhibits also on that count the double-sidedness typical of the picaresque.

⁵⁰ See Andersen, 23.

A similar ambiguity towards the official terms for traditional social concepts is evident in the text. As if Moll had adapted to the common linguistic usage – including the use of figurative language – while rejecting it as a false language that is not hers, most of the time, she points out the unstable relation of signifier – signified. In her first years with the “nurse,” “as we called her” (10), Moll remembers that the “magistrates,” “as I think they called them” (10), proposed to put her to “service,” “as they called it (that is, to be a servant)” (10). Official terms for social concepts receive the extension “as they called it” and “in other words” whether she herself employs them or others. Aware that meaning does not inhere in the thing itself but depends on the perspective or experience, she also rejects socially negotiated word choice when it applies to concepts that seldom exist in reality in their ideal definition. Instead, she takes herself as the point of reference and insists on her authority of definition, as when she wonders, “Now all this while [they] did not understand me at all, for they meant one sort of thing by the word gentleman, and I meant quite another” (13). Her concept of marriage is also idiosyncratic throughout the entire narrative from the beginning on, when she considers herself “married already to [the] elder brother” (39), after having had sexual intercourse with him. The deed weighs more with her than appearance, and the term should refer, and does in her practice, to the former and not to the latter. After her affair with the gentleman from Bath, she expresses the opinion, “I was now a single person again, as I may call myself” (138), knowing that the meaning she attributes to the term single woman does not correspond to official definition, since she is by law still married. The case is similar regarding the wife of the gentleman from Bath who is not a true wife in Moll’s eyes since she is demented (131). The “honest” banker (144) also uses plain, referential language when he refers to this

social institution in a way different from the accepted, namely when he muses that he has “a wife and no wife” (147), and Moll makes a similar distinction regarding her brother-husband in Virginia, who is no longer a husband to her. If a term does not correspond to the actual meaning of the concept and instead refers merely to the legal or ideal definition that lacks substance in reality, the narrator rejects this official notion together with the term. On the other hand, Moll attributes new meaning to existent terms, as when she learns in her affair with the older brother that marriage is not about virtue, morality, or love, but about prosperity and profit (61). As a fortune-hunter she reasons: “I had been tricked by that cheat called love, but the game was over; I was resolved now to be married or nothing, and to be well married or not at all” (65). Her new understanding of the concept does not refer to the traditional ideal the term originally denoted, but the immediate, and in a double sense material, reality.

Two Discourses: Social Concepts

Once she has gained an understanding of the dominant figurative use of language, that is, the determination of the relation between signifier and signified by human thought and the resulting arbitrariness and loss of clear denotations, she takes advantage of the epistemological situation. As signifiers denote not what they should, so Moll wears disguises to pass as somebody else. While the Spanish *pícaros* are not round characters and they identify with the new roles, Moll, following her time’s new concept of the individual, has a more developed self that is often at variance with her outside appearances. The contrast between Moll’s supposedly true character of self-made man and her pretended innate gentility that would better justify financial success according to

period thought, is greatest when she goes thieving dressed “as like a lady as other folks” (231), complete with gold watch. As with the disguises, in several adventures Moll switches the signifiers so that they refer to the opposite of what they should in theory refer to. In other words, appearance and the truth change places. When Moll steals, she acts as if she were the one treated ill. She even makes profit from it, getting an attorney and demanding “reparation” for the affront to her supposed honor (276). In order to convince the other party of the honest intentions that are automatically assumed of wealthy people, she dresses up as such, not forgetting jewels, a coach, a maid, and company of high social standing. In another adventure Moll seduces a gentleman and robs him afterwards, yet her governess makes it appear that Moll had been lured into it, and gains money through that reversal of the truth. The Lancashire-husband uses the same trick when he is shot in the arm during a robbery. He pretends to have been the victim of the robbery while he was the highwayman himself. Appearance and meaning are disjoined. Appearances can be exchanged, and when they are, meanings can also be exchanged. At this stage we have quite moved away from the level of single words to the level of social concepts. Extrinsic signifiers do here denote intrinsic value as little as in the previous case, and signifiers as well as signifieds can be exchanged for others since their relation is not stable. On this level, we see how cultural developments respond to the same epistemic conditions as the linguistic and epistemological ones discussed so far. The picaresque, again, mirrors them and puts them in the service of social criticism.

In Moll’s concept of nobility, of who deserves to be called gentleman or gentlewoman, a disjunction of signifier and signified is reflected, and expresses contemporary status inconsistencies. Moll the reformed narrator appears to think noble

virtues innate and aristocratic rank an expression of inner value. True to traditional ideology, the honor of a gentleman should be apparent through external markers, translated by means of money into status symbols. A generous nature, reliability, honesty, civil manners, and a proud attitude constitute noble virtues she lauds in gentlemen. Moll's preferred partner is the Lancashire-husband, one whose pride forbids him to stoop to service when he is desperate for money, who will not suffer the common treatment he receives in prison and refuses to be transported like a mean convict but would prefer to die honorably at the gallows, one who would go hunting instead of managing a plantation. He is also one who gives her, the damsel in distress, all his money and keeps his word. He would be a natural gentleman, except that his example illustrates that noble values and status symbols are not automatically connected, and that instead, ample financial means are necessary to be able to display nobility. He who lacks money cannot appear as a gentleman. Moll calls her admirer and prospective husband "my man" (85) and "fellow" (86), yet in connection with money, she calls the same "a gentleman of £1200 a year" (88). He becomes "man" again when she discovers that "his circumstances were not so good as [she] imagined" (89). In fact, in Jemmy's case, drastically, he who lacks money cannot exist as a gentleman. Moll saves his life twice. Where money is lacking, the noble qualities cannot make up for it, and Moll leaves her Jemmy. Likewise, when new possibilities of making profit open before her on the plantation of her son in Virginia, she regrets that she did not leave him in England. She would most prefer a true gentleman who also looks like one – with sword and wig – and who has enough business acumen to preserve his estate. Consequently, she tries to find a gentleman-tradesman. Her success is mixed, for although she finds one who has noble manners, is honest, proud,

and behaves nobly towards her, leaving his last valuables to support her, his means are not sufficient to maintain a grand appearance with liveried servants, a great coach, and leisurely lifestyle, and he lacks the talent to gain more. Her banker is also a gentleman according to the standards of virtue as well as of estate, and thus of appearance, until he loses his fortune and despairs over it. True nobility is only worth it if it is visible, in other words, if it is demonstrated to the outside through status symbols. These do not, however, come automatically. More often than not, noble virtue is for lack of fortune not accompanied by the corresponding markers.

In contrast, a fortune and thus the appearance of nobility can exist without noble virtue. In the case of the older brother in Moll's teenage years the discordance between intrinsic and extrinsic is most obvious. He is unquestionably corrupt yet has a "wig, hat, and sword" and will inherit an estate (29). He relegates his honest brother, whose financial future as the second-born is not guaranteed, to a far second place in Moll's esteem. For success in society – and not merely with Moll – the *appearance* of a gentleman is really the more important. In order to preserve the appearance, money is necessary. In fact, money is the only thing necessary, and wealth without inner value is possible. Even though Moll emphasizes noble, and moral, inner values in men, in actuality, from her teenage years on she allows money to substitute for them. Thus, although Moll is aware that the concept of honor of the older brother is problematic (45), and his honor without substance, she still considers him a gentleman. His protestations to marry her are the empty promises "of a gentleman" (53), quite ironically, "so [she] expected to hear no more of this gentleman, after all his solemn vows and protestations" (54). To absolve himself from his obligations to his mistress and to prove his sincerity, he

pays her in money (60), and Moll accepts it. His money makes up for his dishonesty, for his lack of honor. Money becomes the “earnest” of the older brother’s love to her as well as proof of his gentility (60). Likewise, everybody naturally believes the baronet who was robbed merely on the basis of his aristocratic rank, even if he is not at all virtuous. When Moll is charged with trying to steal plate, she turns the replacement of virtue through money to her advantage: The money she can show convinces Mr. Alderman that she has been wrongly accused. Money suffices as evidence of virtue, as Moll remarks, “I smiled, and told his worship, that then I owed something of his favour to my money” (298). In contrast, in the disguise of a beggar Moll finds that people automatically distrust her.

In progressive ideology money also replaces virtue, however a different one. While noble intrinsic virtue is rare and not accessible to her, Moll thinks that a different virtue is accessible to herself – business acumen – which can provide the same external markers. Her own career is based on the initial misapprehension of the concept of gentlewoman. As a child, she has the unconventional, ideal notion of a gentlewoman as one who sustains herself through work. She thinks that the term denotes the inner value of diligent application to work, according to the Protestant ethic and the capitalist notion of economic man. To the outsider, this virtue would manifest itself through sufficient means to live independently and as one’s own master. It would translate into noble comportment through education, good manners, and a clean appearance. Moll sees these qualities in the gentle ladies and acquires them herself first in the orphanage and then in the house of her first employer. Yet there she soon learns the common notion of being a gentlewoman, which Defoe criticizes. Moll finds out that the term gentlewoman denotes nothing other

than the *appearance* of a gentlewoman, of higher status, which can be bought with money. It is a signifier whose signified does or does not exist.

In contrast, Moll the penitent narrator insists on the ideal meaning of the concept of *gentlewoman* and wants to show through the relation of her life that only true virtue makes one noble and able to attain the corresponding social status. She not only presents herself retrospectively as naturally noble and entitled to an estate in her providential interpretation of her life. She also naturalizes business acumen into an inner virtue. The ambiguity of the text lies in the fact that Moll the character accepts that internal and external do not form a natural, automatic entity, be it aristocratic innate honor or democratic talent and application in business. When Moll's positive answer to the question "What would you be – a gentlewoman?" makes her nurse laugh "as you may be sure it [Moll's answer] would" (11), the reader learns that at the time of narrating, Moll knows the conventional meaning of the term, one devoid of substance regarding morals and virtue, which money can be used to pretend. The disjunction of external and internal makes possible the substituting of one or both with something else. While the moralist insists on the natural correspondence, the *pícaro* discovers for herself the possibility of acquiring the one – status, the name gentlewoman – even if she does not have the other – innate virtue.

Substituting the intrinsic virtue of noble blood with business acumen would correspond to progressive ideology and would be in accordance with the tenets of protestant religion. Yet the adult protagonist develops a different attitude to business, namely an exaggerated desire for gain that disregards morals, and is only intent on the money necessary to acquire the appearance of nobility. Although Defoe declares gain

“the Tradesman’s Life . . . the Essence of his Being” and affirms that “the Reason and End of the Tradesman is to get money,”⁵¹ he is conscious of the frequent contradiction between unlimited profit and morals, as other parts of his writings show. Defoe does not believe in acquiring a higher status in such a way, for then status (money) fails to reflect greater inner merit, including honest economic abilities. He therefore presents Moll’s repeated attempts to rise socially in a negative light, criticizing her immorality. Once Moll has realized what a gentlewoman really is, she aspires to be this different type of gentlewoman. In doing so she differs little from the Spanish *pícaros*, who also rise to higher social status through immoral means, and their position at the end, like Moll’s, does not reflect inner merit.⁵² Her marriages are attempts to acquire the social status of a gentlewoman by marrying a gentleman. After Robin’s death, Moll seems to have reached her goal of being a gentlewoman, for she has money. In order to preserve it and the social status that accompanies wealth, she marries again. At first she does succeed in achieving status, but when her next husband, the gentleman-tradesman, goes bankrupt, she loses not only most of her accumulated wealth but also the social designation of gentlewoman. Her attempts have to fail because wealth without diligent, honest work is morally objectionable. She then chooses to lead a life of vice in the pursuit of becoming a gentlewoman, based upon her early experience that she has to disregard moral values to gain money. Her procedure in the second half of her life has to fail, too, for the same reason: in order to illustrate the confused relation of economic, social, and moral signifiers in the new class of economic entrepreneurs.

⁵¹ Defoe, *Compleat English Tradesman*, 2: 79-80, quoted in Andersen, 32.

⁵² Only Pablos wants to be a gentleman (*caballero*), at first meaning to go to school and be virtuous, and his social status would therefore be a reflection of his inner merit.

In the end, although Moll has amassed enough money to be the gentlewoman she desired to be, she remains an impostor, finding self-realization only by taking advantage of the people around her, and becoming a gentlewoman only in appearance. Her fortune is built on vice and her repentance questionable. Although Moll thinks her husband and she lead the life they are entitled to by nature as virtuous gentlefolk in America, she tries to “make [her husband] appear, as he really was, a very fine gentleman,” buying him the status symbols of a gentleman (347). The reader wonders why she has to *make* him appear a gentleman if he *is* one. Moll seems not certain herself whether they are gentlefolk according to aristocratic ideology, that is, by natural inner virtue, or according to protestant ideology, that is, by diligent work, yet external signifiers can make up for the lack in both cases. Similar to the development in society, Moll naturalizes the substitution of virtue by business acumen in order to justify her actions. Business acumen, visible through the countable, objectifiable signifier, money, becomes a virtue which she naturally – by fate – possesses. Problematically, her business acumen is realized in immoral actions. It is vindicated through the presence of money, but the narrator and the editor appear to argue that this cannot be.

In contrast, Moll the character has long acknowledged that money weighs more than inner value, be it noble honor or business acumen. Even in the picture she has of herself, the virtues she claims for herself do not matter: “All these would not do without the dross, which was now become more valuable than virtue itself. In short, the widow, they said, had no money” (82-83). To the outside world, her fortune is in fact the only thing that matters, and it is said “that the young widow at Captain – ’s *was* a fortune” (84; my emphasis). At each turning point in her life she creates a balance sheet as in business to

see how much money she has, or rather, how much she is worth.⁵³ Money is no longer the external signifier of internal value through diligent work, but has subsumed its former signified which no longer exists. This is the lesson Moll learns concerning nobility: intrinsic value does not determine status; money does, and, in the last consequence, money replaces inner values. In the poetry exchange her suitor and she do, the verse lines could be read in the two ways exemplary of the traditional concept of corresponding intrinsic value and extrinsic markers, of signified and signifier, and also of the new concept where the natural correspondence is lost and money substitutes for inner value (85). “Virtue alone is an estate” could be translated as “only virtue is a true value.” Yet it could also mean “having an estate is the only virtue.” Likewise, “But money’s virtue” could be understood as “money signifies virtue” as in traditional ideology, or “money substitutes for virtue” as in progressive ideology. “Gold is fate” could mean “having gold is evidence of grace” or “gold determines one’s fate.”

As if these social inconsistencies based on signification were not enough, Defoe introduces an additional twist. In the last consequence, the signified itself, money, becomes uncertain in this novel.⁵⁴ The replacement of inner value by money makes it possible for what people are worth to become an imaginary value, and its amount can vary. Moll can pretend to be worth more than she is (or has) in reality, just as, by contrast, a woman “can be rendered low-prized” (74) if she is too easy to get, according to the law of supply and demand in the market. The gentleman on whom the heroine helps her friend take revenge meets with closed doors once rumors regarding his income

⁵³ See, for example, pages 83, 91.

⁵⁴ Credit does not have to correspond to “real” stock, as Defoe, Complete English Tradesman, is aware (48).

have destroyed his reputation. How wealthy he is in absolute terms does not matter here. And so in many cases the signified retreats, and a slippage of meaning occurs. Appearance completely replaces substance with regard to female chastity, too. Women have “to preserve the character of their virtue, even when perhaps they may have sacrificed the thing itself” (151).⁵⁵ When Moll is pregnant by the gentleman in Bath and wants to keep the man a secret, her landlady makes up a husband. For the desired effect the gentleman himself is not even necessary; the signifier is enough. “Telling them he was a very worthy gentleman This satisfied the parish officers presently, and [she] lay in with as much credit as [she] could have done if [she] had really been [her] Lady Cleave” (128). In prison, the heroine has a similar experience. She “fared worse for being taken in the prison for one Moll Flanders, who was a famous successful thief, that all of them had heard of, but none of them had ever seen; but that, as he knew well, was none of [her] name” (327). Again, the name suffices. It is enough for them to condemn her, and it would not matter if she were the true one behind the name or not. Appearance can consume substance, as Moll also finds in Bath: “Whether [she] was a whore or a wife, [she] was to pass for a whore” in the eyes of the midwife (178). And it can almost create substance, for Moll’s friend in the North Country “almost began to believe that all was true . . . though at the same time she knew that she had been the raiser of all these reports herself” (78). There, the ladies assume Moll is wealthy merely upon her *saying* she *would have* worn richer dresses (155). The problem in the novel lies not so much in the fact that the signified can be substituted. More disturbing is the fact that it retreats behind the

⁵⁵ Defoe, *Complete English Tradesman*, draws the same connection when he states “a tradesman’s credit and a virgin’s virtue ought to be equally sacred from the tongues of men” (133).

signifier, sometimes so far that it even ceases to exist. Money, ever the expression *par excellence* of materialist culture, finally becomes imaginary.

Early modern culture in Britain and Spain alike was influenced by an emergent materialism, while traditional social forces still preserved the God-given order of things. From its beginnings, then, the picaresque genre presented a hero to whom his position in this world – and above all in economic terms – was far more important than his spiritual destiny. Influenced by the traditional concepts, this materialist hero felt the need to explain his current social position and how he achieved it – his *caso*. Therefore, retrospectively he produced a coherent narrative, often with religious explanations, from his individual life, that is, he re-interpreted particular events and circumstances to match a common narrative. The new genre thus displayed a certain international ambiguity about the nature of narrative. An allegorical rendering of a master-narrative stood against a realist treatment of individual narratives in their particular material surroundings. Already the Spanish picaresque works employed a rich language which could be read on various levels, including that of referential and colloquial meaning, and was suitable for depicting reality in detail, alongside figurative language and religious flights. In Moll Flanders the interwoven yet contradictory discourses reflect an ambivalent attitude toward morality in business. Under changing social and economic conditions, what was virtuous and what should be condemned, and who deserved social status, was not entirely clear in the eighteenth century. The entrepreneurial middle class had its own as yet not clearly defined values, as Defoe was painfully aware. In the case of Moll Flanders, it actually also has its own literal language, whereas traditional aristocratic notions are related to figurative language.

Ambiguous Content in the Ambivalent Form of the Picaresque Novel

Defoe's Moll Flanders exhibits many characteristics similar to the Spanish picaresque novels. To my mind, the picaresque novel is a dynamic genre; that is, its main characteristics cannot all be found in all picaresque novels, and they are often modified. They also depend on the social and historic circumstances of the individual novel. Moll Flanders is a picaresque novel. Defoe took the picaresque and adapted it to the new socio-historical setting. His novel connects picaresque, ante-bourgeois contents and motifs with a more typically eighteenth-century psychological character development, economic motives of the middle class, and a bourgeois interpretation of the contents. The two-fold structure of the picaresque allows for a double reading. Moll's immoral behavior is ostensibly criticized, in the prologue and in authorial intrusions, as well as through the fact that she often fails, thus reasserting traditional values. Yet on the other hand, through the description of Moll's ingenuity, the reader finds pleasure in her actions and gains the impression that the author partly approves of her attitude. Moreover, she succeeds economically overall. The novel is at the same time a critique of a strict, old-fashioned morality, which would stand in the way of success in an era of economic individualism, and an affirmation of entrepreneurial zeal.

Due to problems of signification, two discourses function in Moll Flanders that result in an ambiguity of social affirmations which is typical of the picaresque genre. If signs are no longer unitary and the relation between signifier and signified no longer natural but arbitrary in Empiricism, literal meaning becomes uncertain. The figurative nature of words can veil the literal meaning and so stands in opposition to the latter. Defoe's novel reflects this linguistic change in the language of its protagonist, which is typically clear

and functional, its definite denotations corresponding to her pragmatic view of life. Moll is uncomfortable with the figurative use of language and often feels the need to clarify something just related “in plain English” or to repeat it “in other words.” In contrast, in passages in which she refers to the religious and moral import of her narrative, she falls into figurative expressions. The double discourse of Defoe’s novel also exploits the replacement of traditional notions, according to which external markers naturally signified an inner value, by new concepts in which this assumed natural relation no longer existed. In progressive ideology inner value was substituted by the exchange value of money and defined economically. The England of Defoe subordinated moral behavior to business acumen and internal honor to external appearance even more than baroque Spain had done. Moll Flanders adapts herself to modern culture on these counts. And yet a certain generic ambiguity remains central to her narrative. With regard to the nature of narrative, a master-narrative encountered particular individualized narratives in the epistemology of British empiricism. In the former, *figurae* stand in the service of a known end, above all in religious terms. In the latter, concrete everyday circumstances and incidents form unique individual histories of worldly orientation. In Moll’s pseudo-autobiography, the narrator and editor are at pains to re-interpret Moll’s attention to immediate economic ends as religious faith.

Defoe chose picaresque actions and the picaresque point of view to demonstrate Puritan and middle-class attitudes of economics, attitudes that were still not generally accepted by all parts of society or that at least created uneasiness about its possible immorality. In this way, the characteristics of the picaresque novel are modified but are essentially still there. They function, like in the *siglo-de-oro* picaresque, as an expression

of social anxieties, criticizing and reaffirming contemporary developments in a double discourse. The picaresque novel Moll Flanders turns out to be not merely a sensationalist story of a dexterous rogue, geared towards the entertainment-hungry masses. Nor is it a serious volume of Puritan casuistry. It is a much more complex narrative in which the *pícaro* is representative of a whole generation of self-made men who even in late modern England still have to defend their unstable social position and to delimit their practices against those of social deviants.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN LE BRUN, THE PICARESQUE LIBERTINE

Although eighteenth-century fiction contains numerous works with picaresque elements, not many novels fulfill my strict criteria for membership in the genre.¹ Once the genre had become popular, it would seem, many authors merely went through the motions of fulfilling a formula. They might easily satisfy the needs of their readership without developing the form to its full critical potential. The picaresque

¹ It was not easy to find a suitable minor novel to analyze, since the picaresque narratives I was able to unearth are mostly substantially shorter than John le Brun; present fewer characters and scenes; are less original in the events described, using perhaps more ready formulae; and mix conventions from different traditions like history and novel (see McKeon), news and novel (see Lennard J. Davis, Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), or romance and novel (see Frye). See for instance Patty Saunders (1752); Becky Sharp; Jeremiah Grant; Dr. Sponge's Sporting Tour; Memoirs of Vidocq; Jasper Banks (1754); Mr Anderson (1754); The Fortunate Transport, Polly Haycock (1750); Charlotte Summers, the Fortunate Parish Girl (1750); Shelim O'Blunder, Esq., The Irish Beau (1750); The Jamaica Lady; or, the Life of Bavia (1720); The Scotch Rogue; or, the life and actions of Donald Macdonald (1722); The Life of L. Beswick, alias Fenton, alias Polly Peachum (1728); The Freaks of Fortune; or Memoirs of Captain Conyers (1740); Daniel John (1751); The Adventures of a Valet (1752); Dick Hazard (1755). They are valuable in terms of Moretti's distant reading since the large mass of writings only constitutes literature as a collective system. Yet, at least in the face of the forceful criticism of the major authors by the major critics, they do not yield as much in terms of accepted literary value. John Richetti, Popular Fiction Before Richardson. Narrative Patterns: 1700-1739 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969, rpt. 1992), explains the divide between canonized and popular fiction: "the formal and technical achievements of those writers we label the major eighteenth-century novelists are inseparable from their ability to render their unique and strenuous situation in the midst of cultural complexity, as opposed to the ideological simplicities and formulae of what [he at the time of the publication of his dissertation] called popular fiction" (xx). That might serve to explain why there are not more picaresque novels in the canon, as the double structure is intricate and requires insight into and an expression of various levels of society, as well as an involvement in different systems of thought, that is, epistemes. Narratives with picaresque features exist in relatively great numbers, yet there are not many picaresque novels *per se* and even fewer picaresque novels in the canon. Many of the stories with picaresque elements are criminal biographies. They also usually describe unregenerate sinners. They die at Tyburn, and their biographies are moral exempla with a religious meaning or allegories. In contrast, a pícaro survives, and not badly in fact, which is exactly what he feels the need to explain. The allegory is therefore not clearly on one, that is, the traditional, predestined, side. Rather, it describes the possibilities and attractions of the freedom of the individual in the secular market society.

novel had moreover become mixed with other genres, and while some of its elements may seem ubiquitous by mid-century, they rarely convey the charged social message of the early picaresque.² The novel John le Brun by Richard Cross stands out as an exception to these rules. The novel was published in 1739 on the eve of a decade crucial to the history of the British novel, when emergent modernist thought was more or less established, yet when residual traditional ideology still held considerable sway. John le Brun bears an ambiguous message particular to its place in the episteme by taking a critical stance not only towards economic individualism but also towards gentility.³ Its protagonist is an orphan who is roughly dealt with by successive masters, a card-carrying *pícaro* who learns early on that he must trick others to get ahead in life. True to his tradition, he is a good-for-nothing hero, one who falls into calamity as soon as he has temporarily risen in fortune – or rather, as soon as Fortune herself raises him up. For although he devises a number of stratagems to improve his position (without once having to resort to real work), stratagems that appear to bear the marks of intelligence, his cleverness finally remains as doubtful as his industry.

Not only does the novel modify picaresque features inherent to the thought of the period, much as Moll Flanders does – issues of economic individualism, the situation of

² For Moretti, genres are “temporary structures” (14). They are “morphological arrangements that *last* in time, but always only for some time” (14). He explains that “a genre exhausts its potentialities . . . when its inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality” (17). In the second volume of John le Brun there are two very long interpolated narratives that remind one of the traditions of the oriental tale in their actions, figures, and locales. For that reason one might not include this novel in the picaresque genre. However, intertextual relationships are the rule in literature, and as long as the novel as a whole still meets the established criteria of form and content – which are modified by every individual work at the same time – it should be admitted to the genre.

³ The categories of the “Tradesman” and “Lord” are in fact compared regarding their negative characteristics (180). The following page references are to Richard Cross, The Adventures of John Le Brun, Containing a surprising series of entertaining accidents in his own life (London: G. Hawkins and J. James, 1739), 2 vols, and cited further in the text by volume and page number.

the nobility, and the concept of the fictive sign – it also introduces further characteristics to the genre in a process Franco Moretti has called “synchronic shifting apart” of the members of a genre.⁴ John le Brun is another picaresque novel on the dynamic view which voices social criticism through its ambiguity. It also contains competing elements of various discourses and their corresponding social structures. Questions of truth and virtue, in the terms made familiar by Michael McKeon, interact via transformations in the classical episteme. In the following chapter I discuss this minor eighteenth-century work with a view to establishing connections between form and content similar to those in my previous chapter.⁵

John le Brun adapts the picaresque genre to new forms of social critique. Just as Moll wants to be a gentlewoman, John aspires to be a noble libertine. His self-invention is no less flawed than hers, and rather than an independent debauchee who keeps a mistress, John inevitably becomes a dependent character. As *pícaro* he exhibits neither the character traits of economic man nor those of a gentleman, and thus cannot succeed as either. Where the libertine’s behavior is rationalized, even in the field of love, and is guided by an acquisitive self-seeking not unlike that of economic man, John is neither goal-oriented nor self-promoting. Instead, he becomes dissipated and self-demeaning through his many amorous adventures. Unlike the corrupt political actors Delariviere

⁴ Other aspects concern eighteenth-century discourse in general, for instance methods of empiricist authentication and the particularization of incidents. While they appear in this novel as well, they will not be discussed separately.

⁵ Watt selectively analyzes three major authors and their readership. Yet, masses of other authors and a variety of other sorts of literature or reading material in general existed. Why should that not have been at least equally influential for the development of English literature and expressive of people’s consciousness? To my mind non-canonized literature might not show as clearly – or as many facets of – new literary conventions and social concerns. It may be just as meaningful for that, as it, too, signals epistemic insecurities, through its discursive structures.

Manley describes in The New Atalantis, who appropriate their victims for their own goals, pragmatically, John and the prostitutes he presents do not dominate the mechanism of exploitation but constantly fall victims to it themselves. The narrator professes to comprehend the advisability of a more economic and morally upright behavior and demonstrates the dangers of licentious actions in several exemplary histories. Again and again, however, his character falls back into degenerate behavior. The repetitive episodic structure of the picaresque mirrors the directionless and – in contrast to contemporary novelistic conventions – ultimately stagnant development of the *pícaro* during the novel. In this novel John le Brun the *pícaro* marries a wealthy and virtuous lady. This conventional ending of libertine literature retrospectively justifies his behavior within the traditional value system, matching his *caso* to an otherwise incongruous individual history. Even as the noble debauchee of the master-narrative, John Le Brun is hardly a positive representative of the traditional order of society, and the ethical ambiguity of his supposed transformation is at least in part a function of the unstable first-person autobiographical voice that Cross employs.⁶

This chapter will first analyze the typically picaresque means by which a double structure is created. The individual incidents are not self-sufficient but are intended as a signal outside of themselves to fulfil the aim of teaching a moral. In the pseudo-autobiography, the narrator tells of his life retrospectively, frequently demonstrating better judgement than the character, yet his genuine improvement is questionable. In

⁶ Despite similarities John le Brun is not a whore biography in Richetti's sense. As Richetti, Popular Fiction, uses the term, it describes narratives whose disastrous end is seemingly inevitable. They are therefore like myths. In their reassuring simplification they restore the biblical order in a society in which, increasingly, everything, including success of the lawless, was becoming possible. Once ruined, for the women in those stories vice follows inevitably. The "invariable moral pattern of whore biography" is, hence, "the decent into hell" (41), contrary to the moral pattern in Cross's novel, whose hero speaks from an elevated position in the end (if merely temporarily so).

addition, the narrator is aware that he is telling a story to a certain readership, and of course claims to have the intention to educate as well as to amuse them. The vice described is not always unrewarding in an exemplary way, however, nor does the sometimes dubious virtue of the *pícaro* always lead to success.

Following the analysis of the picaresque double structure, a brief enumeration of the stock picaresque features the novel contains will precede the discussion of adaptations of the picaresque novel to the changing times. Like *Moll Flanders*, John portrays the traits of economic man, albeit in a flawed way, by idolizing money and aspiring to more than his social position would allow him. He schemes and pursues wealth selfishly, as is all too apparent in his treatment of his friends. Another theme derived from the historical picaresque novel is the insecure connection between signifier and signified. The slippage is denoted by the picaresque motif of disguise, and also by a suspect nobility where appearance and substance are disjoined. While the narrator regards himself as naturally noble, his assertions are countered by his behavior, and yet in the end his genteel status seems secure. In his retrospective master-narrative he fails to align aristocratic descent with certain values in a satisfactory manner. Nowhere is this more evident than in the feats of the hero to convert himself into an aristocratic libertine befitting his supposed noble nature. The remainder of this chapter deals with features diverging from conventional generic traits in accordance with this social development of libertinism which John le Brun criticizes.

The Picaresque Double Structure

The novel criticizes libertinism obscurely, of course, through its double structure,⁷ one function of which is the pseudoautobiographic set-up creating a gap between the narrator and the character “in his younger Days” (1: x). The former frequently reinterprets the behavior and intentions of the character. This paints a far more positive picture of the character and, hence, also of the narrator, as one who has learned from his mistakes and one who has been converted into a virtuous person. He wants to teach the reader a lesson in virtue and to “expos[e] the Vice” (1: x), he claims, while giving pleasure through the exemplary incidents. The narrator, aware that he is telling a story, sometimes addresses the reader and demonstrates that he can manipulate his story, which makes him even more transparently unreliable.

The perspective of the narrator, from which he sees the event and its later outcome, allows him simultaneously to interpret the event differently, to present himself as cleverer now, as well as to represent the character in another light. For instance, with hindsight the narrator regards his trick to disguise himself as a pregnant woman and to beg for food as a bad idea “which was of bitter Consequence to [him]” (1: 4). Retrospectively he calls the count “Villain” and understands that “from this Time he was diligent for an Opportunity to put his Design in Practice” (1: 43), whereas the naïveté of the character in misjudging the count is demonstrated in his assurance that they “went to bed very good Friends” (1: 43). Similarly, he takes Florella for a “sincere Friend” (2: 101) even after her “Falsehood” (2: 96) has been recounted. The character is wrong in his description of his

⁷ Watt establishes an antithesis between the aristocratic tradition of generalizing literature on the one hand, and modern, popular literature of the particularizing novel on the other. He of course values the latter more for its inaugurating of the novel genre. I would disagree with this division and shall maintain that the picaresque novel combines both of these traditions through its double structure.

position at Lorenzo's as well, when he states that he is loved by the entire household. In retrospect, the narrator adds a qualifying sub-clause to his statement that his mistress "was always, *as [he] then thought*, as ready to promote [his] interest" (1: 65, emphasis added). And indeed, after the demise of her husband, she does not support him. Yet sometimes events are related from the perspective of the agent. For example, John, who at the time calls himself Peter, assumes his mistress has gained from his clumsiness when he is caught under her bed, while the reader learns that she does not profit from it. The different perceptions of the same situation are also apparent when somebody tries to shoot Peter. Contrary to the narrator at the time of relating the incident, the experiencing character thinks it was a robber, "nor did [he] ever think otherwise, 'til an Accident some Time after let [him] into the Sequel of the Story, which [he] shall relate in its Place" (1: 89).

Likewise, from his later vantage point the narrator proves himself wiser and "laughs occasionally at them all [figures and reader]" (1: iv), just as he promises in his introduction. Of his making love to a kept mistress at Louisa's he claims she does not have any faults "or else I cou'd not see 'em" (1: 37). Also with hindsight he correctly concludes that "a gift Dinner" always cost more than a bought dinner would have (1: 179), yet the character continues with this ineffective plan for more than four months. Likewise, although we are assured that his "Heart was so sensibly touch'd" by Philippo's action on behalf of his friends (1: 56), the *pícaro* himself does not follow Philippo's example. He represents himself also as business-savvy and virtuous, "reflect[ing] how weak [he] had been" gambling, and concludes that he "might have found Means to settle [him]self in the World, but the hopes of being able one Day to make a large Fortune,

made [him] neglect all Thoughts of Business” (1: 86). The narrator sounds indeed sober here, with a mind for business, no longer the spendthrift of his youth. But how clever is he really? Even when relating his autobiography, Peter naively assumes “the unhappy Captain got drunk, and forgot the Ceremony of offering to pay the Reckoning” (1: 176). Our hero has to pay, of course, yet does not seem to understand that he might be used by his friend. Also, the questionable improvement of the narrator becomes apparent when he makes slight of Peter deceiving his interlocutor during his interview. For he tells the man “[his] whole Story (except [his] living with Louisa, and [his] intrigue with Marcella)” (1: 62). In another instance he even asserts, “I never did any Thing base” (1: 64), which is certainly not true, as the reader has learned from the tricks related by that time. In addition, not even as virtuous narrator does he express any qualms about living in a brothel at Louisa’s. He also excuses the behavior of Florella to the reader, conveniently forgetting that he is having an affair with her while she is kept by the captain at the same time (2: 102). Since her actions mirror his, the implication is that he has exonerated himself as well his lover.

As another function of the double structure the narrator frequently reinterprets the motives of the character. Sounding ashamed, he says he would not ask Captain Pike to help him again, since he had used the previous support so poorly. This demonstrates greater understanding. Yet then he cites another reason, which, one assumes, would have carried more weight with the *pícaro*, namely, that he had the impression the captain would not want to hear from him again. When he applies to him after all and is duly rejected, it is seen incongruently as a “Shock” to him (1: 182), showing the muddled perspectives. The narrator also claims Peter unknowingly leads Louisa’s lover into the

room where she is with another man. We know he had been wanting to find a way to leave her, and he might just have taken that opportunity on purpose to be thrown out. While he reasons that he “had still a little of [his] primitive Virtue about [him]” (1: 93), due to which he avoids a lawsuit as his friend advises him, it is more likely that he does not pursue the public image of a libertine for fear Lorenzo might learn of it and consequently withdraw his support. The wiser voice of the narrator also dominates the retrospective description of Peter’s coffee house acquaintance, making the character appear knowledgeable contrary to what the incidents being narrated show, and although he states “some of them were of Quality, *which I then thought* coul’d never join in anything beneath its Dignity” (1: 83, emphasis added). The “gentlemen” are called “Coxcombs” and “Blockheads” (1: 80) and “powder’d Strippling” (1: 81), their conversation consisting of “Trifles” and “insipid Discourse” (1: 82), which is prompted by “Spleen and Malice” (1: 26). Irony enters a no less clever description of another acquaintance, Mrs. High-rump, who “took up the more virtuous Trade of Procuring; she was a very civil Woman, and very good to her Family, for she wou’d always serve her daughter first” (1: 28), according to the narrator.

The ambiguity of the double structure carries through the common motif of *prodesse et delectare*, quite confounding the averred true motivation. The narrator, who has supposedly repented his former picaresque and libertine actions, states in the preface, “if the many Examples of Vice and Debauchery I have inserted, shou’d in any ways contribute to their Reformation, I shall think my Book has more Merit than ever I thought it had” (1: iii). The title page likewise advertises “Improvement.” Yet it also proclaims “Entertainment.” In fact, although he cautions against gambling in the preface (1: ii, iix)

as well as several times in the story (1: 85, 1: 152-53), he admits, “my whole Design is to divert an idle Hour” (1: ii). Some of his “Instructions” should indeed not be regarded as serious: “Instructions for our gay Sparks with small Fortunes and high Tastes, how to keep up their Grandeur without Money, and appear Gentlemen in spite of their Pockets” (1: iv-v). Others do seem to be given in good faith, as the description of just that sort of people “that the reader may better judge of these Ladies’ Principles” (1: 26). Other figures frequently “condemn” (1: 57) Peter and his actions. Some of the chapters as well as the entire novel end with conclusions drawn by the narrator from the event related, given to the readers as pieces of advice.

The inserted histories, above all, function as moral advice similar to that given in the Spanish picaresque Guzmán, even if the narrator hopes they will “divert” (1: 186).⁸ Guiding the reader on how to read them, Peter comments on the narration of the captain of his friend’s misfortunes: “I was always fond of hearing the Lives of other People, in order, by their Examples, to regulate my own” (1: 183-84). In contrast, the character seems immune to such advice. Many stories of women seduced, betrayed, and ruined by cruel men mirror his treatment of his victims during the pursuit of his libertine aspirations. The double structure of the novel is apparent here in Peter’s condemnation of such behavior as “Baseness” and of the agents as “villainous Seducers” (1: 130), although he himself commits such villainy. The stories mostly show the results of immoral and

⁸ To Richetti, English Novel in History, the interpolated stories might be “strategies for avoiding synthesis” in the early novel (5). They defer authority from the extradiegetic narrator to diegetic narrators due to an uncertainty about the possibility of a center which would confer meaning. To my mind, these narratives contribute to setting up the case, for as exempla they illustrate the moral precepts with which the narrator and the character deal variously. In similar actions as in the main story deviant protagonists are punished, and repentant heroes experience Fortune’s charity, just as the narrator would want to show. Meanwhile, the character of the main story acts inethically in comparable scrapes without demonstrating better sense, and yet, conspicuously, without suffering from equally devastating results.

irresponsible behavior, of squandering money and not working, whether due to the naïveté or the baseness of the protagonists. As a good moral lesson to the reader, some of the heroes are finally saved in some way, by their reformation when they take on honest work (1: 114 ff), or by an honest friend like the merchant who takes care of the fallen woman in the narration of Captain Pike (1: 129).

Often, what happens to the protagonists of the inserted stories also afflicts Peter in similar ways. Whereas Peter is surprised at his misfortunes, in his words, the reader has been given a number of exemplary histories which all end in the same way and demonstrate their inevitable, morally justified consequentiality. Dorothea deceives Peter in the same way as the so-called lady deceived the dancing master in the story of Captain Pike. The life of that man as gamester who hopes to become wealthy by marriage to the Lady Mary, who turns out to be a prostitute, is similar to the experiences of Peter. Captain Pike lives the life of a libertine off an inheritance and not working. Seeing and hearing of his many disappointments and hardships, the *pícaro* nevertheless does not draw any conclusions for his own life, contrary to his assertions. Peter does not learn from the behavior of Filippo when he is turned away alone and poor, either. During most of the novel Filippo is the counterpart of the *pícaro*. He is a model of the correct way of remaining virtuous and diligent, for which he is duly rewarded with the reinstating of his parental wealth and status. As his financial circumstances improve, he becomes more and more infected by vice. In the end, his loose behavior as a noble rake gaming and pursuing numerous women matches his worth in fortune. In contrast, Peter follows his evil ways and is not continuously successful until his unexpected, quasi *deus-ex-machina* advantageous marriage in the end.

The narrated events as well as their interpretation by the narrator educate the reader in an ambiguous manner. They praise virtue, and the narrator himself is supposedly virtuous. Nevertheless, the character acts independently of those moral lessons, continuing to lead his ethically questionable lifestyle. The unreliable narrator is not entirely believable in his wiser insights either, as the many changes of perspective mentioned above show. As is disclosed at the end of his autobiography, Peter does not suffer from his immoral actions as poetic justice, as well as the intended instruction, would demand. Rather, he rises to the coveted high social position as a wealthy gentleman. Like other picaresque novels, John le Brun evidently does not carry a clear message condemning the picaresque and libertine acts of the hero wholeheartedly and suggesting others without reservation. This ambiguity is the main feature of the picaresque novel, the one that is most important to the ability of the genre to transgress temporal and local space and still carry a message.

Other Picaresque Features of John le Brun

John le Brun contains numerous other picaresque elements besides the double structure of the autobiographic form, and most of them also contribute to its ambiguity. We cannot ask Cross whether he named one figure in his novel Guzmán after the famous Spanish *pícaro*, but we may assume that he knew the picaresque tradition – or else it would be a great coincidence that John le Brun follows the picaresque format so closely.⁹

⁹ We do not know anything about the author, apart from the fact that he died in 1760. See Biography Index. A Cumulative Index to Biographical Material in Books and Magazines, 3rd ed. (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1946 -), s.n. "Le Brun, John." Cross is not listed in the DNB, nor is John Le-Brun found in Samuel Halkett and John Laing, A Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publications, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1980).

Like other picaresque novels, John le Brun is a supposedly true (1: x) (pseudo)autobiography from a manuscript which was “collected from a Gentleman” (1: vii), in that way also creating the typical contemporary fiction of truth, which the title page also emphasizes. It is episodic and incoherent, apart from the reappearance of a few figures who disappear again just as rapidly. However, it becomes clear that the one thread which runs through it is the libertinism of the *pícaro*. His case, then, is his final position as a gentleman although his reformation is more than doubtful.

Before reaching that position, the *pícaro* has to fight his way up from a disadvantageous start. Orphaned at age twelve, he is taken in by a shoemaker relative and works for him. This first master of his – numerous others will follow – is mean to him, not having him learn the trade, punishing him unjustly, and starving him. In order to get some food into his stomach, John devises his first trick. He disguises himself as a pregnant woman and begs for food but then drops the stone baby. He is severely beaten after this incident, and he claims the entire household is against him afterwards, above all his mistress. “This ill Usage of hers made [him] eternally thinking how to be revenged of her” (1: 9), much like Roderick and Lazarillo, whose revenge on their first masters also launches their picaresque careers. In John’s case, this also initiates his itinerant trickster life. Like Roderick’s, his feats take place first in London and then on a journey. In his different occupations and on his travels, he meets types of his time like conceited fops, procuring women, and women in search of wealthy husbands. Some of his acquaintances have names true to type, such as Miss Tantrum and Miss Titter. Some of these types behave according to the stock comical scenes of the time. In the coach to Chester in Volume II, Peter meets the boastful officer, the sour old lady, the witty lawyer, and the

instructor-parson. During an attack by highwaymen, they of course show their true characters for comic effect. The lustful Betty, a servant who comes into Peter's room at night, also appears, as does the confused gallant who ends up in the wrong bed. Peter also gets soaked with urine when the bed of his mistress falls apart in another comic scene.

Modified to Criticize

Other historic picaresque elements appearing in John le Brun are adapted to contemporary thought. I have addressed the motif of disguise in relation to the concept of the individual and the disconnection of the sign in the chapter on Moll Flanders, as well as the modern sense of the ability of man to shape his life and the value put on profitable work. The concomitant character traits are problematized in this novel as well. Lastly, John le Brun also represents the impact of economic individualism on social relations through the issue of friendship.

On the other hand, Cross's novel does not exhibit developments in the novelistic genre as clearly as Moll Flanders. No character development influences the actions of the *pícaro*, nor do the actions stand in causal relation to each other. Rather, in John le Brun influences from the outside, usually a suggestion by another person – to take on a job, come and live with her/him, to travel, or to play a trick – determine his travails. Moreover, Peter's actions do not have an impact on his character. He may shed a tear or be frightened after an incident, yet he repeats the action in the same way, followed by the same reaction, as his many gains and losses at gambling demonstrate. Unlike Moll, Peter does not experience a hardening *process*; he remains the same unconcerned trickster throughout. John le Brun therefore does not represent the experiences of a modern,

autonomous individual to the degree Moll Flanders does. The episodes are disconnected, held together merely by the case, and the individual will is not a determining force in this novel. In this sense Peter is more closely related to the historical *pícaro*.

On the level of social structures, an expression of the eighteenth-century concept of individual personality can be noted, even if the character of the protagonist does not determine the plot that much. The disconnection of signifier and signified is apparent in the motif of disguise in this novel as well, for the hero intends to dress according to his assumed innate nobility, while no accoutrements can deceive the reader as to his ignoble nature. His character is stable throughout and does not change even though, *pícaro*-like, Peter disguises himself with every new occupation or role. As Louisa's waiter he wears a blue apron (1: 25). Then as Marcella's lover he receives new clothes, or "Sword and Ruffles" (1: 39).¹⁰ While John here is presented with new apparel by his woman like a kept mistress by her gallant,¹¹ at other times he buys himself new clothes, in fact an outfit consisting of "Wig, Sword, and all other Necessaries fit to appear in the *Beau Monde* with" (1: 170). Conversely, after Marcella's death John pawns his clothes and once again looks the poor man he actually is. Unlike the historical *pícaro*, throughout his adventures Peter remains the same man and can shed his outside appearance at will. In order that nobody at Lorenzo's should remember him in his former evil ways, he not only dresses differently but also changes his name from John le Brun to Peter de Blois (1: 64). From the relation of his subsequent feats we learn that he soon falls back to those evil ways,

¹⁰ Here as in other instances, appearance and material situation are more important to the economic man John than social relations and love, which he mentions last in praising his new situation.

¹¹ This will be taken up again in the discussion of Peter's libertinism.

and so the book is named after the old identity and called John le Brun, not Peter de Blois.

As that of his literary predecessors, the situation of the *pícaro* is mostly “miserable” (1: 167). He is often without money or friends and very close to starving (1: 44). Like Moll, John is not always as entirely destitute as he claims. Having lost “everything” he still has “twenty Guineas, which [he] ha[s] kept in [his] Pocket” (1: 160). Although this saving for worse times is not typical of the historic *pícaro* but an expression of Cross’s sense of economic behavior, the unconcern after a setback and the hopeful attitude John frequently displays are common picaresque traits. A new situation always gives him “great Hopes of mending [his] Condition” (1: 18). In fact, Fortune constantly works for him. With her help “an Opportunity presents itself” (1: 16) again and again, for instance, for the elopement with Dorothea (1: 157). After he has sailed back to England with Philippo, Fortune also comes to his rescue (2: 210). Conversely, “unaccountable Misfortunes” (1: vii, xi) and “Fate” (1: 154) usually reduce him to a wretchedness. As much as he tries to rise, the *pícaro* cannot escape his fate on the Wheel of Fortune. Or can he?

Eighteenth-century influences can of course be seen in this novel as well. In spite of the intrusions of Fortune, at the same time the hero himself is responsible for his own fate. The picaresque conveys doubts about the justice of success in the modern society by relating two different stories, one in the micro-narratives of the *pícaro*-character, another in the master-narrative of the narrator. Rather like Moll, Peter acts as economic man, and his individuality is presumably dependent on his social context. His position is supposed to depend on his self-determined actions in varying social conditions. The narrator

implies this. Yet, after all, Peter is a *pícaro*, and as such he has fixed characterological traits such as irresponsibility, dishonesty, passivity, and unconcern. He plays tricks rather than resorting to real work, notwithstanding the value set on the latter by the narrative voice. Peter begs for food dressed as a pregnant woman and robs his master and neighbors. He “keep[s] in contact with [a mistress] because [he finds] the good Effects on’t it” (1: 15). “With a View of Interest” he puts up with another “doting Mistress” (1: 24). He tries to marry rich through deception. He gambles and finds friends from whom to get a free dinner (1: 168). His only occupation resembling business is that of self-appointed writing master. In that job, too, he imposes with his invention of the fake Italian style. When his master offers to set him up in business, Peter rejects the offer, not wanting to take the risk. Destitute, Peter begs from his acquaintance or gambles. Unsuccessful, he finally decides to go “to Service again; which however disagreeable, was much better than depending on Friends” (1: 222). Yet he is afraid of meeting someone he knows in such a low position and therefore decides against it. Although the narrator says, “the Bread of Industry is the sweetest Food Mankind can eat of” (1: 181), and “Ease is ever the Mother of Idleness . . . no thoughts of Business” (2: 83) enter his mind. Despite the repeated praise of “Industry” (1: 181) and “earning of [one’s] Bread” (1: 54), Peter is lazy and does not value honest work. He rather uses the terms “Industry” (1: 3) and “diligent” (1: 4) to describe his trickery, loitering in coffee houses, and begging from friends (1: 103), contrary to Filippo, who means work by “Industry” (1: 51). In fact, industry is not necessary for him, it seems, since he is quite a successful gambler, does indeed get dinner through his scheme (1: 177), lives comfortably as a writing master, and receives an annual rent from his former master with which he would be able

to lead a good life even without working. Thus, the events disprove the words of the narrator. In the end Peter's comfortable position and genteel appearance move virtuous Leonora to accept him. This surprising turn of the events is, however, only possible through Filippo's money, and Peter has not had to work for it.

He is a ne'er-do-well who squanders his money and is very generous at his visits to taverns, even paying the fare for the entire group. Whenever he has saved a sizable amount, he leaves off his present occupation and decides to spend the money instead of investing it (1: 128). The contradiction to what the narrator has stated before, namely that people who have worked for it do not spend their money as easily, does not interest the *pícaro*. It might actually be intended to differentiate between real work and Peter's sort of "Industry" (1: 128). With the exception of the ending, like every *pícaro*, Peter always ends up in the same solitary low position as before the latest scheme. Like them, he loses his good position and money through his own stupidity or naïveté, although he usually finds ways to blame somebody or something else. By rejecting responsibility, the narrator proves himself less reformed than he should be. He claims his failed marriage with Dorothea is due to "Love" (1: 156), and "Fate seem'd to repent of her Kindness" (1: 154) after he has gained a lot but loses it all. He also does not seem to think it his fault that his "Scheme of having Money turn'd out so different from what [he] expected" (1: 178-79). He does not take responsibility for continuing his trickery either, but blames Captain Pike for it, who had told him not to give up (1: 179). Early in the narration Peter cites the excuse that any other "young Fellow" would act in the same way to justify his dissimulation (1: 16). The plan to invite himself to dinner he likewise calls "a Scheme which many a smart Fellow in London thrives very well by" (1: 169). His status as "but a

Youngster in these Sort of Broils” (1: 92) excuses his problems as would-be libertine. At other times he describes his position as a dilemma: “shunning one Evil I fell into a greater” (1: 178). Or essentially good qualities work against him, like his “good Manners” and “Complaisance” which force him to play with the ladies, instead of declining the offer and running the risk of being called insensitive (1: 178). The hero makes it sound as if his debt were his friends’ fault, whom he “left . . . curs’d with their own Parsimony, and [his] Creditors Losers by [his] Misfortunes” (1: 222). In the autobiographic set-up of the novel the reader wonders if the *pícaro* has learned from his experiences at all. For even in retrospect his description lacks the insight necessary to get on in life in his capitalist society.

As we will see in the case of Roderick, Peter also displays psychological traits that are neither those of a *pícaro* nor those of the cutthroat world he must survive in. Although he sometimes falls victim to other tricksters, usually he is himself to blame for his failures. He claims not to like the established system of bribery and flattery, and, although contrary to Philipppo he does participate in it, he is indeed quite bad at it. Of course, he blames that on something else, this time on his “Temper” (1: 181). Moreover, he is passive, indecisive, easily disheartened, and not particularly brave. Claiming his possessions were “not worth making any Resistance for” (2: 11), he readily gives the highwayman his money. “Despairing . . . and reflecting on [his] present Misfortunes” (1: 22), as Peter does instead of leaving the family, is not the attitude of a *pícaro*, nor that of a noble rake either. These two would simply cut the engagement with the mistress and look for other employment. Moreover, while his resolution to “bear [his] loss with Patience, and philosophical Moderation” (1: 162) sounds like a recommendable poise of

mind, it merely covers up the fact that he does not actively try to find a solution. Peter gives up easily when his first attempt at freeloading fails (1: 173), too. At other times he is unable to decide what to do, for instance after he has lost money (1: 85); when the wife of the host spoils their dinner (1: 172); and when he wants to leave Ireland. Fortunately for him, however, in such situations others often take the initiative, and his passivity does not hurt him. Louisa asks him to leave his master secretly and live with her (1: 24), and an old servant of Lorenzo's helps him out after the death of the latter. This episode is another example for the passivity of Peter, for he puts up with the excuses of his lady for not receiving him a very long time.

For all that, Peter behaves cleverly in some ways and displays the right attitude sometimes – although not in honest activities, which represents the contemporary critical attitude towards modern economic society as expressed by Defoe. Peter is diligent only as writing master, practicing two hours a day. He does plan a “Stratagem” or a “Design” in order to get ahead but it is always dishonest (1: 158). He is intent on gaining money, his “Idol” (1: 85), the sight of which even keeps him from fainting at one point. Even after his wedding he mentions the “Possession of two Thousand Pounds” first, adding only afterwards that this “is the least part of [his] Happiness” (2: 244). Yet, he claims not to “know where to make [him]self Master of [Money]” (1: 181). Contrary to Philipppo, he prefers “the ill-got Riches Villainy ever purchas'd” to “honest Meanness” (1: 55). The easiest way for him to obtain money is to use his friends, even though the narrator claims to be “diligent to expose the Vice and unsociable Folly” of false friends (1: ix).

Like Moll's, Peter's friendship depends wholly on the profit he might gain from it, although the narrator speaks of “Love or Gratitude to Friends” (1: 164). Peter calls

Captain Pike his friend after he has received money from him but “despise[s] his Friendship” when the well dries (1: 220). Then again he feels “the Loss of the Captain’s Friendship” when his debtors demand their money (1: 221). Peter associates with rapists who are, notwithstanding their morals, his “friends” but quickly quits their company since they will not lend him any money (2: 104). The wealthy Ernesto who invites him to dinner often, is “a particular Friend” (2: 84). Unfortunately, he dies “before [Peter is] intimate enough with him to receive any Benefit from his Acquaintance” (2: 84). Peter befriends a perfect stranger in order to get a free dinner. However, his concern for that gentleman when the others laugh at him lasts only until dinner is served. Peter’s self-serving concept of friendship is proven right when he acts unselfishly to help a friend for once, supporting Saunter despite bad rumors: He is disappointed by that person’s tricking him. Conversely, there are some friends true to him, like the captain, who gives him money out of the Christian motivation to help his neighbour (1: 168); or Philippo, who feels that “the greatest Satisfaction” of his inheritance is “that it has put it in [his] Power to relieve [his] Friends in Necessity” (2: 136). That worthy man helps others with all that is in his power, even before he himself has become wealthy. Peter, however, does not acknowledge such true friendship of others towards himself and therefore remains a solitary *pícaro* throughout his narrative. He never worries about Philippo even during the long interval he has disappeared. Moreover, as a successful gambler he misuses the generosity of Lorenzo, still eating and living at his friend’s for free without telling him of his profits. Ungrateful as he is, he leaves Lorenzo in order not to have to disclose his real fortune. After that, he does not think of his friend until he has lost his possessions and seeks support. Now his friend is dead, which Peter laments only after considering the

disadvantage of the death to himself (1: 163). In this novel then, the picaresque friendlessness of the outsider is represented as a trait of economic man. Through its connection with money it has been adapted to criticize the need to look to one's "own Interest and Pleasure" (1: 180) first, in the same manner as we will see in Roderick Random.

Peter's is partly the mindset of an economic man, yet in its negative expression. Such a modern criminal could be successful, it is clearly shown. This Hobbesian fact was irreconcilable with other contemporary theories such as that of Shaftesbury,¹² and meant an intolerable aberration of the Calvinist work ethic, which did entitle the economically successful individual to his wealth because he was elected, retrospectively adducing the will of God and justifying his materialism.¹³ However, the lack of these selfish and ruthless traits would frequently cause economic failure, as in Peter's case, until his wondrous rise anyway. Here again, the picaresque double structure is at work, expressing the moral dilemma of modern capitalism.

¹² According to John Andrew Bernstein, "Shaftesbury's Optimism and Eighteenth-Century Social Thought," in Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin, eds., Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 86-101, for Shaftesbury a truly good act was disinterested, based on a natural affection, in his terms, defined as an inner motivation to do good to others. A person conscious of doing good – someone, in other words, who applied reason to the moral sense natural in everybody – thus possessed "natural sense."

¹³ The protestant doctrine of election opposed true nobility, substituting it with an aristocracy of grace. The protestant ethic called for diligent service in the calling, which took place in everyday private life. To Calvinists diligent work was the sign of being elected, comparable to the traditional nobility revealed in noble status. Proof for grace was found in the individual conscience and not in external authority. People looked into themselves to discover God working in them. The aristocracy of grace was therefore accessible to all.

A Gentleman *Pícaro*

On the other hand, conservative concepts of one's place in society were equally problematic in those times of social and economic change,¹⁴ and John le Brun responds to these insecurities of conservative ideology. Cross's novel emphasizes the appeal of belonging to the moneyed elite and the positive assumptions about the worth of a noble person, yet it establishes the moral depravity licensed by a title and the waning legitimization of inherited status as well. Most nobles are like the Lord in the interpolated story of Captain Pike's mother. The Lord is without merit, he "gave himself up chiefly to Idleness and Debauchery, which Course of Life, together with bad Company, had so far hurt his Morals, that he had neither Love, Compassion, nor Friendship for any one; the Cause and the Effect the same with many of our young People of Quality" (1: 138). Looking back the narrator presents himself as a born gentleman, contrary to all evidence regarding position and behavior throughout the entire narrative until the final rise of the hero to high status. In this master-narrative he does link gentility to certain values like honor and decorum. Yet above all in John le Brun a title is expressed to the outside through corresponding apparel and lifestyle. The picaresque continual attempt to refashion his life narrative to fit the end – his case – as well as the picaresque motif of disguise are modified to illumine critically the doubtful legitimization of the privileges of the aristocracy in this novel.

For here a title does not justly mirror the qualities of a noble person, and the values still attached to it are no longer the ones aspired to by great parts of the population. In this

¹⁴ See Henry Arthur Francis Kamen, Early Modern European Society (London: Routledge, 2000), 103ff, for an overview of the decline of the landed aristocracy due to economic conditions and changed succession laws.

novel the highest classes are the ones having the most freedom, for as Peter states: “The Word Gentleman is a Passport that admits a Man to be free” (1: 112). They spend their money freely and do not have to work. For those reasons Peter wants to belong to them and not live with Philipppo, as he fears he would have to give up his genteel “liberty” (2: 217). Their liberties are to him natural sign as well as privilege of the nobility. The novel develops the ambiguity of this view, since it raises the question, what kind of liberties the aristocrats enjoy. In the eyes of the *pícaro*, theirs are the immoral excesses of libertinism,¹⁵ which he wants to have but which the narrator and the reader likewise condemn. Peter not merely thinks that he is entitled to licentious behavior as a gentleman but that it is “a Part of Gentility too great to be neglected” (1: 91). He needs to follow it *in order to* assert his noble status. Criticism of this *malentendre* of aristocratic privilege is not only expressed through the failures of the hero as libertine but also through the many figures he meets – as well as indirectly, through the women ruined by libertines in the inserted stories.

Peter’s highest personal goal is being a gentleman to the outside world; in fact, being the noble he supposedly is by birth. Throughout his narrative the reader therefore finds numerous comments that confirm Peter’s nobility. For instance, in the preface already his “honor and innate Propensity to Good” are mentioned (1: x), as well as his high “Inclinations” and “polite Notions of Life” that he has naturally (1: xi), despite his lack of experience in those spheres. He is apparently quite learned and able to notice the refinement of Sir Dingy Glum, contrary to the other “ill-bred Prattlers” present (1: 30). Noble life in the novel does not comprehend work. In order to underline the fact that

¹⁵ The treatment of libertinism in the novel is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Peter is of titled descent, the reader is told that he “was a tender child and not fit for such laborious Work” as the helpmate of a shoemaker (1: 2). As the narrator asserts, Peter’s genteel character has “something so proud within [him] that could not easily submit to servitude” in contrast to Philippo (1: 59), who gratefully accepts the position as usher in a school to pay for the board for his sister. His “Inclinations” make “dirty Work in a nauseous Garret” unbearable (1: 16). For that reason he intends to seek “more genteel Employment” yet for lack of the means does not do it (1: 16). Instead, he “support[s] the Appearance of a Gentleman” by gambling and playing tricks (1: xi). This trickster life does not suit him, since he has naturally good manners, he says, due to which he drops the stone baby curtseying. His exclamation “Pox o’ my Manners” in that event betrays his origin through the coarseness of his language (1: 6). The way of life at Louisa’s, sleeping during the day and being up all night, “did not so well suit my Constitution,” he says reaffirming his more virtuous self. Yet then he concedes, “but a little Use made it agreeable enough” (1: 25). Here again, then, the double structure of the character’s actions and the narrator’s reinterpretation of them can be seen.

The double structure is also at work concerning the treatment of genteel appearance as well. On the one hand, the character thinks he can judge character from appearance. Peter states “there are a Sort of Men whose very Countenances claim Credit, and whose Smiles are the Banners of Honesty” (1: 186). With this naïve belief he is frequently tricked by those who appear “so elegant a Company” (1: 83). He even attaches qualities very similar to character traits to different styles of writing (2: 121). On the other hand, the narrator informs us, “The requisite Qualifications [have to be] annex’d to the Title” (1: 112), and Peter’s own writing style is all of his invention, which turns this theory ad

absurdum. The narrator deplors that a rogue who passes himself for a gentleman is honored, while “one with all the Virtues the Title implies” but without the title “is despis’d and shunn’d” (1: 113). Meanwhile, the character takes advantage of that fact and only complains of it when this assumption works against him (1: 79). Sometimes the *pícaro* does not seem to care, or the perspectives of character and narrator are muddled, when Peter meets a “genteel” lady whose “free behavior” shows him that she is really of quite another calibre (1: 59). Notwithstanding, he gladly accepts her thinly disguised advances. The proprietor of a coffee house, who charges 200 per cent interest, is called an “honest Gentleman” (1: 60). Florella, or Lettice, he also calls “so fine a Lady,” when their relationship “in Bed as at Table” is recounted (2: 82). The term used to describe gentility is applied ironically here to a prostitute, whose appearance is in fact genteel. Notwithstanding Peter’s many exonerations of her biography – which serve as justification of his own very similar vita –, this appearance just does not match any inner virtue.

Not only the hero but a number of other figures in this novel wear a cover of a real or assumed nobility over their unworthy self. In the many brothels like Louisa’s they shed this illusion with their clothes, and the “Lords, Knights, and ‘Squires’” attending are discovered to be no less immoral than the hosts (1: 32). The narrator realizes that some men can be sharpers “tho’ their Appearance seem’d to speak them Men of Worth and honor” (1: 83). The *pícaro* Peter himself wants to “*assume* what Character [he] lik[es] best” and “*appear like* a Gentleman” through new clothes (1: 79, emphases added; also 1: 64). In the preface the narrator ironically announces that he intends to give “Instructions for our gay Sparks with small Fortunes and high Tastes, how to keep up their Grandeur

without Money, and appear Gentlemen in spite of their Pockets” (1: iv-v). Yet Peter fails at this attempt again and again, never being able to keep up his grandeur for long. Evidently, whether he is a worthy person or not, a gentleman does need full pockets, even though Philippo, the model of virtue, prefers “Merit . . . to being flattered for an Estate” (1: 59). Peter usually merely needs the financial means to rig himself out to be “look’d upon . . . as an ingenuous honest Gentleman” by “the best of Company” (2: 123). With the money won gambling he lives in a “genteel Manner” (1: 95). This is not in any way criticized or qualified, even though this lifestyle without work and above his means does not correspond to the sober life nominally preferred by the narrator, who claims “it is ill depending upon Titles and fine Cloaths” (1: 83). The term worth to the *pícaro*’s understanding is defined as money rather than virtue in this discourse. Here the presence of money has to be shown in a title’s stead. With these contested concepts John le Brun participates in the contemporary negotiation of the term gentry that included all nobility, peers as well as yeomen and wealthy merchants based on their financial means.¹⁶

Despite his natural inclinations, as he says, the new noble appearance of the *pícaro* is merely an outside modification and does not express any merit. It can be bought by any person with the means, by tricksters as well as real aristocrats, independent of their blood or honor. The sign seems to be disjoined, and signifier and signified can be attached to each other at will. Not quite this unconditionally though, since the novel does reaffirm an interdependence. Appearance seems to influence character negatively in a way, as the

¹⁶ Being considered “the class that ordinarily drew the larger part of its income from the exploitation of property rights in land,” the gentry shared values, honor, and status with the greater nobility and was distinguished from the middle classes, which were urban merchants and those engaged in the financial markets, McKeon explains (161). Paradoxically, the latter were frequently the wealthier and were often better able to ostentate their status.

women in some of the interpolated stories affirm as well as concerning Peter, for “new cloaths had put more polite Thoughts in [his] Head” (1: 15). Above all, the reader learns that a noble has to be virtuous if the noble appearance is to fit him. This virtue may of course be expressed through affluence in modern capitalism, yet it is no longer automatically connected to a title. When both are missing, the fine clothes disguise Peter instead of suiting him. “Indeed, when I look’d in the Glass, I hardly knew myself again” (1: 15), the base hero therefore confesses. Meanwhile, as gentleman Philippo wears his fine clothes smartly, that is, his outer appearance matches his inner virtues.

Corresponding to modern concepts of the liberty of the individual to determine his position through his inheritance Philippo really has turned into a noble according to his character although not to his origin.¹⁷ In contrast, the figure of the *pícaro* adheres to another concept of one’s liberty connected with conservative ideology. He tries unsuccessfully to match a supposedly given inside and outside, and people always recognize Peter no matter what he is wearing. Fine clothes cannot cover up the trickster underneath. He may try to obtain “the Character of a compleat Rake, and [be] every way as great a Libertine as the Captain” (1: 91), yet without the money he remains merely a man with loose morals.

Indeed, as in Moll Flanders the mere assumption of money would be sufficient, not

¹⁷ Philippo is a noble libertine in the end. He loses his virtue “making Love to ev’ry Woman he saw” after he has gained his fortune (2: 235). Thus, even in the figure of Philippo nobility is morally tainted.

even money itself is necessary.¹⁸ In the credit economy a so-called character, or reputation, is what counts.¹⁹ In contrast to honor, it belongs to progressive ideology as something acquired with an unstable truth. It depends on the perception of oneself by others, as in empiricism generally the sign itself is never sign but an idea of it.²⁰ The word *reputation* is employed morally positively as well as negatively in John le Brun. It may mean the “Reputation of an honest Man’s” (1: 63-64) or of a virtuous woman (1: 72). It may mean the questionable fame as a libertine (1: 92) or a gamester (1: 94). Just like the “lac’d Waist Coat, Bag Wig, Sword, and ruffled Shirt” (1: 110) of Hillaria’s dancing master, the reputation of a gentleman could mean one of many things. Peter favors the negative one and is concerned about his possible honest but low reputation as a

¹⁸ As Locke explains in his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), the greatest part of our knowledge is only probable, its veracity depending on a credible source, or in Locke’s words, a man of credit. His credit is based on the experience of other people of his knowledge. Credit is not anything fixed but established by social consensus. Yet, the community may be mistaken in their judgement of the character of that man and hence in the truth of his assertions. Credit was linked to property and gender since the truth of a person who depended on others was not certain. Hence the common people and women could not have credit. See Michael R. Ayers, “The Foundations of Knowledge and the Logic of Substance: The Structure of Locke’s General Philosophy,” ed. Margaret Atherton, The Empiricists. Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume (Lanham, Boulder, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999). John F. O’Brien, “The Character of Credit: Defoe’s ‘Lady Credit,’ The Fortunate Mistress, and the Resources of Inconsistency in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain,” ELH 63, no. 3 (1996): 603-31, also discusses this paradox.

¹⁹ Leslie Richardson, “‘Who Shall Restore My Lost Credit?’: Rape, Reputation, and the Marriage Market,” Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 32 (2003), points out the discrepancy between inner values and status: “Davys’ repeated use of the term credit, rather than reputation, to articulate her character’s loss – loss of trust, loss of economic security – further threatens the assumption that inner worth is somehow reflected in social standing, bringing to bear upon mundane female existence the financial and political discourse of the day” (26).

²⁰ Locke postulated that signs stand between human beings and the inward nature of things. Classic thought distinguished indicative signs based on experience and reminiscent signs going beyond experience but deduced through analogy. Similarly, Locke held that people perceive primary qualities of things by sight, and derive secondary qualities from those ideas, that is, they cannot know the intrinsic properties of objects. All we perceive are the effects of substances. Locke explained this principle on the example of paper. If the impression is always of white, we know that white indicates paper, and that white is a quality of paper. What we take as a substance is an abstraction of a multiplicity of such ideas. Locke called this the nominal essence. It is based on the real essence, in his terms, which we do not know. Locke admitted that there are so-called simple ideas that do not consist of other ideas. In them nominal and real essences coincide, and the name is literal in such cases. Yet he argued against innate notions of things and held that in general only nominal essences of things can be known and traded in words, since the signs were the only part that could be empirically known by the individual. See Ayers, 21-22.

servant. In either case reputation establishes the position of a person based on a merely supposed inner worth.

John's Libertinism²¹

What does it mean to want to be a libertine? The word libertinism is related to liberty and liberal. It describes conventions of discourse and was not originally understood as connected with freedoms taken exclusively in the sexual field.²² Rather, the term commonly united deviance in sexual terms as well as in philosophical terms.²³ Johnson defines a libertine very generally as “one who lives without restraint or law” and “one who pays no regard to the precepts of religion.”²⁴ Libertinism denoted a generally liberal attitude or “freedom of preconceived ideas” in all areas of culture, that is, in the religious,

²¹ Catherine Cusset, “Libertinage and Modernity,” *Yale French Studies* 94 (1998), differentiates between libertinage, which is “a way of living and thinking that evoked sexual freedom, seduction and frivolity” (2), and libertinism, which is a discourse expressing mimetic desire in art rather than an erotic practice. Since this study can only analyze the discourse, libertinage would be the more apt term. Most other critics use the term libertinism. To avoid confusion I will adopt their terminology. For an analysis of the historic basis (what Cusset calls libertinage) from statistics from the Old Bailey and the City of London Quarter Sessions among other documents, see Anthony E. Simpson, “Vulnerability and the age of female consent: legal innovation and its effect on prosecutors for rape in eighteenth-century London,” in Gabriel S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 181-205. Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell, eds., *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), call “the self-aware, philosophically oriented practice of more or less sexualized freedom” libertinism and employ the term libertinage to describe the “vernacular, dissident freedoms of everyday life” (2).

²² As Harold Weber, “Rakes, Rogues, and the Empire of Misrule,” *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization* 47, no. 1 (1984), explains: “The rakish lust for sexual variety is the most direct and powerful expression of the individual will” (17).

²³ The contributions in the book of Cryle and O’Connell discuss the connection between the liberal philosophical thought of a Kant or Voltaire and the sexual libertinism associated with Sade and Casanova.

²⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755), 2: 4-5.

social, sexual, moral, and political arenas.²⁵ A belief in the calculating behavior of man and his selfish pursuit of his own pleasure marked Enlightenment libertinism. In his painting “John Wilkes, Esq.” (1763) William Hogarth represents a leering aristocratic radical calling for liberty. He thereby confuses the sexual licence of the noble with modern, liberal philosophical thought. His painting shows the perceived threat to the established values of contemporary society, which some also welcomed. Libertinism could not be condemned clearly, since it was an expression of the same thought structure as economic individualism. John le Brun expresses such an ambiguous attitude towards libertinism in its main protagonist, who bears characteristics of both libertine and economic man, yet as a *pícaro* fails in the positive realization of either of them.

The two sides of the coin that is libertinism were indeed noted early on. “Old-style libertinism,” according to Tiffany Potter, promoted atheistical and behavioral extremism.²⁶ At the end of the seventeenth century noble rakes were celebrated in plays as representing a romantic view of the uncontrollable desire of strong men. Yet at the same time the libertine ideal was already subverted, with some authors showing the

²⁵ Cryle and O’Connell, 4. Contrary to the common assumption that libertinism appeared in the court and higher society and mostly in France, Cryle and O’Connell hold that not just the fops were libertines but also adventurers, quacks, and *pícaros*. To my mind, the term should not be applied to so wide a spectrum of figures, although I concur with the statement that a negation of conventional values unites them. The libertine would thus stand for a progressive worldview. In Eliza Haywood’s Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751) the gentleman Mr. Trueworth is juxtaposed to the aristocrat Mr. Munden. The former represents the self-restrained new man guided by reason, who controls his passions. The latter represents the traditional noble with the old values of blood lust (in hunting and sex), pleasure, and passion from a position of power and liberty. Beth Fowkes Tobin in Eliza Haywood, Miss Betsy Thoughtless. Edited with an Introduction by Beth Fowkes Tobin (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), makes this distinction: “The new bourgeois order celebrated what it claimed were its virtues, which were constructed in opposition to a debased aristocratic culture. Middle-class apologists celebrated the bourgeois values of utility, self-discipline, and the ability to regulate time, space, and resources, while they represented the aristocratic culture’s stress on valour and honor in a degraded form by emphasizing gaming, sport, and sexual conquest” (xxviii).

²⁶ See Tiffany Potter, Honest Sins: Georgian Libertinism and the Plays and Novels of Henry Fielding (Montreal, OC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999).

unjust treatment of women of the lower classes, “thinly disguised by overtly polite conduct.”²⁷ In the eighteenth century, then, libertinism changed philosophically as well as regarding the sexual assumptions. It then valued more “the power of the sceptical and self-determining individual.”²⁸ Libertinism was the “name given to the free operation of sexual desire against or in delicate negotiation with conventional moral, religious and civil codes – a freedom available to an educated, often titled elite.”²⁹ Libertinism made its appearance in numerous narrative works of the eighteenth century, not merely in libertine novels *sui generis*, but also in other novels expressing opposite viewpoints. As minor figures libertine men frequently presented trials of the virtue of exemplary heroines.³⁰ In libertine novels innocent, virtuous women are seduced and raped, their naiveté and dependence cruelly exploited by the more powerful – concerning gender and social station – men. The libertine novel offers a forum for otherwise prohibited erotic language and subtle or even very evocative sexual description in mellow *tête-à-têtes* up to violent

²⁷ Anthony Kaufman, “The Perils of Florinda: Aphra Behn, Rape, and the Subversion of Libertinism in *The Rover, Part I*,” Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research 11, no. 2 (1996): 3. He analyzes Aphra Behn’s negative representation of libertinism.

²⁸ Tiffany Potter, “A Certain Sign the He is One of Us: Clarissa’s Other Libertines,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 11, no. 4 (1999): 413. Potter analyzes Lovelace as a model of the older and Belford as a model of the more recent concept of libertinism. The latter was to her morally more ambiguous, since the good-natured Georgian libertine did not seduce virgins or commit adultery on purpose.

²⁹ Cryle and O’Connell, 2.

³⁰ Potter, Honest Sins, gives examples of libertines in contemporary literature. In several of the novels by Eliza Haywood, Delariviere Manley, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Penelope Aubin male libertines tempt the ladies. Mary Davys’ The Accomplished Rake (1727), Eliza Haywood’s The British Recluse, Penelope Aubin’s The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and his Family (1721), and the anonymous The Rake of Taste, or the Elegant Debauchee. A True Story (1760) are counted among the libertine novels.

rape scenes.³¹ In these the noble rake apparently follows his strong impulses. These are more often than not carefully calibrated in order not to compromise himself, for instance by pursuing the wrong woman, that is, a lady socially much above himself. The libertine novel identifies with the male seducer, overtly not condemning his behavior. Rather, it usually wittily displays his nonchalance and celebrates his inventiveness. Overall, the hero does not violate decorum. The novel even shows his good qualities and otherwise honorable behavior, emphasizing the error of the victim in finally letting down her guard. If the libertine has to pay for his transgressions at all, it is to the father of the woman as a sort of restitution of property. In the end, the hero of the libertine novel is frequently reformed, marries a lady of his status, and settles down as a valuable member of (high) society.³² That is, despite the temporary extension of social limitations, order is restored in the end.

That is done ambiguously. In the libertine novel rationality, materialism, lust, and deceit stand against intuitive behavior, platonic love, companionship, and honesty. For the hero plans rationally in order to obtain his goal, that is, to seduce an unwilling woman. In addition, he merely fakes the same values the victim really does esteem, which demonstrates their corruption. To be able to play the mechanisms of society to one's own advantage requires a realistic view of them. Libertinism is, thus, grounded in realism, contrary to irrational love, which takes place in the realm of the imagination. Meanwhile, the usage of metaphors secures the libertine from criticism of his immoral

³¹ Frank Baasner, „Libertinage und Empfindsamkeit: Stationen ihres Verhältnisses im europäischen Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts,“ *Arcadia: Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 23, no. 1 (1988): 14-41, compares the anonymous French libertine novel *Thérèse philosophe* (1748) to pornography.

³² The sentimental novel takes the perspective of the woman. Here, the reader identifies with the victim. Real love is allowed to win over lust and hypocrisy, and the evil perpetrator is punished.

behavior, since figurative language implies the adherence to traditional values. Forming a system of signification apart from reality, metaphors do not clearly denote and are evasive.³³ Libertinism satisfies superficial longings and is often seen as the sister of vanity, as the reputation of the libertine plays an important role. Libertinism, then, has to do with appearance in several ways, whereas the love of the woman – and of the sentimental novel – has to do with the core of a person. In other words, in the figures of the man and the woman, different conceptions of the sign, or of reading reality, collide. The hero's concept of the sign also stems from aristocratic ideology, yet at the same time signals forwards, allowing for conscious manipulation and negating a correlation of both parts.³⁴ The traditional one gains the upper hand in the end only, the adherence of the libertine to it serving his ends.

The reaffirmation of the conventional world view situates the libertine novel apparently on the side of aristocratic ideology. Sexual license is granted only to the privileged men of the higher classes to whom Peter wants to belong. The novel, however, implicitly champions “the new order of bourgeois minds,” in whom nobility and virtue correspond like in Philipppo.³⁵ Yet, libertinism is also connected with rationalism and

³³ Lisa Berglund, “The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in The Man of Mode,” SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 30, no. 3 (1990): 369-85, discusses the libertine's strategy of displacement through metaphors in George Etherege's The Man of Mode (1720), giving examples of dialogues about business, religion, and gambling, which to the knowing are nevertheless about sexual intercourse.

³⁴ Richetti, English Novel in History, juxtaposes the “natural” feeling, which every woman without class distinction can experience, and a “masculine, sexual self-seeking that is structured or licensed by aristocratic privilege and patriarchal custom” (20). He holds that for the “dissolute aristocrats” “amorous conquest is the sole degraded remnant of the heroic ethos of their literary ancestors,” the romances (20). For Richetti libertinism signals backwards rather than backwards and forwards as in Cross's sceptical reinterpretation of it as a new kind of marker, albeit a negative one, which any man could appropriate for his purposes independent of his origin.

³⁵ Rousseau and Porter, 3. See their study for a brief discussion of this antithesis.

liberal ideology, and therefore the attitude of the novel towards it has to be doubtful. In fact, the mindset of the libertine is in many ways quite similar to that of economic man in his selfish pursuit of wealth, for he also challenges the cultural givens and, through his behavior, if not through his origin, the traditional power structures. While working against it, the rake profits from the social order through his status and fortune as a privileged aristocrat. He uses his moneyed station but does not display the corresponding virtues, severing the band between signifier and signified to his own purposes.³⁶ As a progressive spirit the libertine also acts as an individual and determines his own destiny.³⁷ Yet his selfishness and ruthlessness are equally problematic. Comparative to economic man's concept of friendship controlled by the cash nexus, in the corrupt masculine world of the libertine love is no longer necessary in male-female relationships. Rather, liaisons are entered into due to (material) calculation. Even his final reformation is frequently not more than a property marriage. His rational designs for financial gain and power are the antithesis of natural passion and chastity, that is, inner virtues as part of the traditional value system, especially with regard to women. Aggressive economic ambition is linked to sexual pursuits, and deliberate, malign stratagems here stand in the service of acquisitive self-seeking, too. The libertine discourse is an expression of the epistemic insecurities of the first half of the eighteenth century as well. It represents a similar duality as the adapted picaresque novel with its double structure discussed on the example of Moll Flanders.

³⁶ Richetti, English Novel in History, says about the Duke and Countess in Delarivière Manley's The New Atalantis (1709), "they are philosophical materialists who understand the psychological and physiological mechanics of desire. . . . These individuals manage turbulent instincts and urges for their own profit and pleasure" (36).

³⁷ Potter, Honest Sins, 405. She traces the development of libertinism from the Restoration to the middle of the eighteenth century.

It is small wonder that the libertine and the *pícaro* could be fused in John le Brun. In the picaresque format concerns regarding libertinism could be expressed, for certain motifs apply to the *pícaro* as well as to the libertine. In both, disguise is a function of an insecure identity.³⁸ Avoiding a fixed self-definition they can deny their belonging to a determined class and status. This justifies their progressive pursuit of personal improvement, while assimilated citizens protect their identity and station.³⁹ Both attack the conventional hegemonic order.⁴⁰ Like rogues, libertines are outcasts in a way, because they do not accept their place in society. Whereas *pícaros* rebel economically against their determined position in society, rakes rebel sexually, against the social convention of marriage, which confines a man to one woman. Instead of carrying responsibility and marrying to secure the estate and the bloodline, they assert their individual freedom, not accepting the basic social unit that is the family. Their licentious behavior is overcome by a final marriage, just as in the picaresque novel self-determined micro-narratives stand against a providential master-narrative, which justifies the position of the *pícaro* at the time of narrating. In both libertine and *pícaro*, then, the social role and its corresponding behavior are unified at last. In both, their ambiguous fortunate final position deflates the celebration of their former independence from social conventions and the economic order. And yet one could argue that only the *pícaro* has a case, because the temporal position of the libertine outside accepted social norms in a way actually

³⁸ Potter, Honest Sins, for instance, points to the freedoms the masquerade allows libertines.

³⁹ See Harold Weber, 24.

⁴⁰ Weber analyzes the relationship between the aristocratic rake and the criminal rogue in Restoration literature and the early eighteenth century. Citing Novak, who compares the noble with his extravagance with the picaresque “extravagants” (15), Weber points out that both rake and rogue posed a threat to bourgeois society in their different ways.

corresponds to his station in a debauched aristocracy. In fact, his behavior still marks him as an insider. The *pícaro*, meanwhile, is a permanent, not self-determined outcast of society, and in his case his acceptance of the social order is conditional, depending on the advantages he has from it.⁴¹

Peter as *pícaro*-libertine also has a case. John le Brun tells the story of a domesticated libertine. The narrator is an upstart successfully integrated into the upper classes. He comes to value a virtuous woman who respects the precepts of decorum, after he has experienced the fleeting pleasures of his amorous adventures and the insubstantiality of such relationships based on dissimulation and presumption. In the end he enjoys the security and comfort of a traditional marriage in which rational considerations of financial and status desirability come before love, and vulgar lust has no place. At least, this is what the overarching narrative supported by the comments of the narrator and the examples of the inserted stories want to tell. It would be desired in conservative ideology, what McKeon calls the supercession of values. Yet in John le Brun the case stands differently. As a never-do-good, the *pícaro* nevertheless acquires wealth and status in the end. His vita, however, does not show a gradual development towards his final high station. On the contrary, the *pícaro* experiences the ups and downs of Fortune. Be it as a trickster or as a noble rake, despite the assertions of the narrator, the hero is unsuccessful in his micro-narratives, which does not square with the final success in his master-narrative. In fact, Peter always remains merely the parody of a libertine, never obtaining genteel status that way. Firstly, in the *pícaro* and his mistresses the roles are reversed,

⁴¹ Kathleen Wilson, "The Female Rake: Gender, Libertinism, and Enlightenment," in Cryle and O'Connell, Libertine Enlightenment, argues that "male libertinism marked a bourgeois appropriation of aristocratic sexual privilege" (96). The kind of behavior Peter exhibits is hence unacceptable because it is not consistent with his class.

while the protagonists of the inserted stories do act conventionally as male libertine and female victim. Secondly, the libertine attempts of the hero always fall short of their intentions. In Peter's failed attempts to act like a noble rake and build himself a name as one, the misanthropy of such licentious behavior is shown. Yet here the *pícaro* is himself the one suffering from it, always being thrown back into his initial low position, losing money and status. Even in his seemingly more honest relationships with women he has such bad luck.

The roles are reversed in Peter's libertine intents in several ways. Normally the man keeps the woman. The conventional behavior of a Gentleman usually follows a pattern: "after he had cloath'd and maintain'd her for some Time, was so struck with her Beauty, that nothing but her yielding to his Desires cou'd satisfy his unruly Passion" (1: 142). In contrast, our hero is in the position of the mistress of successive prostitutes, Marcella, Louisa, Florella, etc. They provide for him and determine his identity, giving him clothes of their choice. As he has no other way of obtaining money – work is not an option for him – he always gladly accepts notwithstanding his supposed honor. Hence, when a former co-servant offers to keep him, he also consents to it. Although the narrator considers his honor for a moment, in the event Peter neglects it, demonstrating how little of a libertine or noble conscience he really has: "My present Distress made it very agreeable, and I embrac'd it without thinking of the Scandal, or the Injury it did my honor" (2: 82). In contrast, Captain Pike and others defend their honor in duels, and some even die in the challenge of their honor. Peter's dishonorable position is very unstable and wholly depending on others, which is a complete reversal of the situation he would like to command as a libertine. He is nevertheless quite content in it. In his affair with

Florella, too, the hero is again the one suffering “scandalous Dependence” (2: 89), as the narrator recounts. Taking rather the role of the mistress, he is worried she might become tired of him, while a noble rake like those of the inserted stories would himself be the one to decide when to discard a woman or imprison her, if need be. Similarly, in his relationship with the wife of his master the roles are reversed. She demands his services quite often, “which was both hard and disagreeable Employment” (1: 21), he complains. It is hardly “genteel” employment as preferred by the narrator a few lines before, and the man is the one being employed, quite against his will, in fact. Peter is not the one paying for the services of the woman, contrary to the conventions of the libertine novel where the gallant makes “trifling Presents” (1: 139) and is generous like the Spanish count. Here, the woman pays the man, Peter. Dorothea, one of his intended victims, takes her pay driving off with his portmanteau. The one who is supposed to be the clever part here loses all due to his own naïveté. The loss is comparable to the common fate of the woman experienced by all the fallen women in the novel and described by Leonora. She has “given up [her]self a Prey to Scandal’s gathering Tongue, that will report [her] Actions with such malicious Explanations , that will break [her] Father’s Heart and set [her] down a hated Prostitute for ever” (2: 32). In Peter’s case the loss is economic rather than the chastity of the innocent virgin. As is usual, the perpetrator – in this case the woman – is not punished, whereas the victim’s, that is Peter’s, “Loss [is considered] but a Fool’s Deserts” (1: 167). In yet another episode the hero is in the position of the woman with obvious reminiscences to literary conventions. As in the interpolated story of Zaide, the servants facilitate the entrance into his room of a man with evil intentions on his life. The Count, an unrestrained and scheming libertine, and therefore the opposite of the hero,

jealously wants to stab him. Luckily, John's mistress Marcella interposes and saves him. Incidentally, this is quite a convenient way for him of getting rid of her, as she dies from her wounds. Peter can, hence, continue to chase females in his efforts to follow a libertine's call. Yet, as before, he will be the one chosen by women of dubious virtue.

Even in his, at first sight, truly libertine activities the hero is inadequate, not following his intentions all the way through and lacking the self-assertiveness of the seducer. Experiencing the conventional sudden onrush of lust, very unlike a libertine he stops midway, although the woman all but throws herself at him (1: 16-17). She takes the initiative later, asking him to live with her, which he would like to do. Yet his master does not allow it. Instead of following his urges, therefore, the would-be libertine has to obey his master and is even punished for his intentions. In this episode, our hero is clearly not represented as the self-determined, independent rake he would like to be. Another time the *pícaro* makes use of a lucky coincidence when a man confuses the rooms at an inn. Peter has a one-night-stand with his wife but then flees, presumably considering her safety. "As she was [the other man's] Property, and out of [Peter's] Power to wrest from him" (1: 215), he ends the affair although the revenge from the old man could really not be too dangerous. Later he "take[s] possession" (1: 218) of a lady. Peter uses libertine terminology here, yet his assertion is a little premature, for just before he can finish his business, "a very fatal Consequence" (1: 218) happens. Namely, Captain Pike recognizes her as his mistress and claims her. Consequently, Peter's attempt fails. It would be a doubtful success for a libertine at any rate, since in contrast to the women of the interpolated histories, his victim is not an innocent maiden at all.

Once the wooed girl is indeed a virgin. libertine-style, Peter is “more inflam’d” by her virtue (1: 92). He then tries to rape her, when words and money fail. Apart from the fact that the unreliable narrator does not condemn the incident in retrospect, a sign that he just might not be much more virtuous than the character, this incident also shows the inadequacy of the hero. For, unlike his models such as Sir John Galliard, Peter is thrown out before he is able to ravish her. The father of the lady then reports Peter’s attempt to the police. Instead of risking being condemned in order to found a reputation as a libertine, as his friend advises him, Peter settles the matter with the mother of the girl. Rather than committing rape as the sign of indomitable male power, the *pícaro* has to bend before the woman and the law. The unworthiness of his licentious act is shown by the apparently low position of his victim, who is not worth more than £50.⁴² In comparison, Hillaria’s noble gallant pays her £500 at leaving her (1: 117). Even when Peter has successfully seduced the woman – who is the kept mistress of another – the *intermezzo* ends disastrously for him. For he is caught *in flagranti*, gets soaked by urine and punch, has to hide from the mob who take him for a thief, and is laughed at (1: 94). There is yet another comic failed seduction scene, in which Peter attempts to seduce not a lady but a fast girl. At an inn a woman enters the room of our hero at night. He “had not Courage enough to see what it was” (2: 5) and prays instead of savouring the opportunity. The woman turns out to be Betty the servant, whom he had previously asked to come, although “in jest” (2: 6), as he later pretends to excuse his cowardice. This adventure, in which he is the passive part, again ends precociously, since Betty has to hide from her employer. The episode, as all others in which the hero acts the libertine, does not

⁴² For a comparison with the usual rates paid at the time see Simpson.

demonstrate his talent at decorously yet ruthlessly exploiting sexually the lady of his choosing. Rather, they show his incompetence and lack of male power, in other words his failure as a libertine and his confirmation as a *pícaro*.

So do even the few episodes which speak of the love he feels for a woman. In the stories of Francisco the hermit, of Captain Pike's friend, of Zaide, of Theodore, and of others, true love surmounts all obstacles. After rivers of tears have been cried and they have almost despaired in the hardships, these figures finally enjoy deep, lasting love. The men involved are virtuous members of the upper classes who know their responsibilities and are always constant. They are definitely no libertines. Whenever the *pícaro* hears their stories, he is deeply moved, he claims, expresses his empathy, and condemns the bad persons: fathers who stand in the way of happiness, scheming servants, and libertine competitors who took what did not belong to them. Meanwhile, the honesty of Peter's feeling is doubtful. His feelings for Dorothea, for example, are described rather dispassionately, consciously following the conventional pattern: "every Time I saw her, encreas'd my Passion, which was attended with the usual Inquietudes of a dying Lover" (1: 154). Here the woman is equally calculating, as the subsequent robbery proves. Although Peter is in love with Dorothea, he does not want to give up his liberty in marriage. While in amatory fiction the more passionate the protagonist is about a woman, the more likely he is to take her anyway, Peter is torn between the "modern principles" (1: 155) the libertine Pike advocates, that is, pursuing her out of wedlock, and marrying her. Since he loves her too much to dishonor her, he claims, he proposes to her. In truth, her supposedly large fortune might have helped him to make that decision. His love is not to be taken seriously at the inn in Chester either. There, a lady who wants to be left alone

“alarm’d my Curiosity” (2: 14) he claims. Peter invites her to dinner, and immediately falls madly in love with her. To describe his inner turmoil he uses imagery: “my Heart danc’d to the soft Music of her Words” (2: 14-16). Yet he takes this literally and in fact talks about music. Despite the following flood of poetic expressions as well as the libertine conventions of ambition to conquer and sudden hot feelings, the hero does not manage to win her over. While some of the model figures of the interpolated stories search for their loved ones for years, and their love does not diminish even when they are forced to be on the other side of the globe, Peter merely makes one half-hearted attempt to find his adored right after their brief affair. Neither as libertine, who would not care at all, nor as constant lover is he sufficient and believable.

Imagery is commonly employed by libertines to couch their mostly base intentions in nice terms, which usually has the desired effect. Metaphorical language as a form of expressing and understanding ideas in the preclassical episteme is related to the traditional hierarchy. Where it no longer expresses an everlasting truth but can be manipulated as in the libertine’s use of it, the figural partakes of the same negative revaluation in scepticism as noble appearance. Both no longer securely mark unchanging givens and may be affixed to any signified. In other words, a lord may not be naturally noble, his images might lie. A lord in one of the stories, for instance, “with fine Words ... soon persuaded [the woman] to all he wish’d” (1: 140). Fulvia likewise believed the “kind Speeches and generous Promises” (1: 127) of her lover. The actor with whom Valeria was in love also “had a real smooth Tongue” (1: 134). Yet Peter’s words are effective only once, when his song charms a woman so that she gives him “all the Pleasure her Person coul’d bestow” (1: 217). Normally, his language fails during his

advances. He hopes that “conversing with [Leonora] . . . might initiate [him] into farther Favours” (1: 239). Later, “with all the Eloquence [he] was Master of, [he] beg’d her Consent” (2: 156). But she only “half-consents” (2: 156), and he has to court her for over a year. His courtship of the daughter of the coffee house in Ireland is not more successful through his language either (2: 108). His choice of love poetry to teach her to write in his Italian Characters does capture the heart of the girl but cannot fool her father. In this case, the libertine scheming in matters of love is coupled with the picaresque deceiving in matters of business. Both fail. In contrast, when Peter behaves like a common rascal, unceremoniously and without passion taking a woman “to the Heel-cellar, and giving [her] ample Revenge on her perfidious Husband” (1: 21), he succeeds. Never mind that the *pícaro* participates in the general perfidy, not even trying to disguise his intentions in metaphors. When he merely acts and does not pretend anything in language or appearance that is not, he at least, paradoxically, deals honestly or plainly, as Moll would call it.

In some, if in very few, aspects the hero does exhibit character traits of the libertine. Those could also be interpreted as qualities of economic man. In return for his silence he extorts food, clothes, and sex from his master’s wife. He sees the (sexual) relation as one of power, as an economic investment rather than an emotional one. Not only as a writing master does Peter insinuate himself into the confidence of other people, above all through flattery. He thus follows a “lesson of libertinage.”⁴³ Yet the need to compliment a customer may be seen as a basic rule of business as well, flattery of course being the negative expression of it. Lastly, just as his credit is important to a businessman, Peter

⁴³ Simpson explains this lesson: “The best way to manipulate other people and therefore to achieve one’s social ambitions is to flatter or provoke their vanity” (9).

wants to protect his social image, after the attack by the Count, or after the attempted rape.⁴⁴ Yet there is not much to protect, and the *pícaro* is more concerned about his immediate needs and his personal freedom than about his honor.

In John le Brun the narrator condemns the libertinism the character wants to achieve. After hearing Fulvia's story, he has "a very bad Opinion of [his] own Sex, . . . [and their] Baseness. [He has] the greatest Detestation for the villainous Seducers" (1: 130). As such the noble gallants are represented in the interpolated stories, showing *ex negativo* a sort of catalogue of libertine characteristics and behavior, which Peter unsuccessfully imitates.⁴⁵ The other men appearing in the novel are quite the opposite: models of honest, worthy gentlemen, whose final happiness with their wives in comfortable economic circumstances is merited indeed. Peter does obtain such a personal position it seems, but his final good luck is less than merited.

In John le Brun two different developments battle with each other: the pre-determined place of a person in the traditional social hierarchy versus the self-determined position of the individual in an unstable social order. The master-narrative, which relates to the former, ends with Peter's marriage. He no longer intends to be a libertine and finds

⁴⁴ The principle of libertinage, which Simpson mentions, can again be transferred to economic individualism: "Intrinsic merit has nothing to do with success. What counts, really, is the belief of others in one's own superiority" (8-9).

⁴⁵ Mary Davys' accomplished rake Sir John bears these characteristics and behaves in such a libertine manner: He is the "modern man of honor" Teachwell ironically describes, namely a dissipating, unrestrained, undependable, hedonist drunkard (143). Sir John is, moreover, irreligious and derides the service (158-59), does not want to give up his liberty in marriage, nor does he tolerate any "Confinement [as a] free-born Agent" (158). The libertine, as he is called several times (for example 187), plans complicated schemes to seduce the woman who most piques his interest because of her virtue while he has numerous other affairs. After having ruined Mrs. Friendly, her father's disgrace and loss of *esprit* are what eventually bring him to his senses. He marries Bellinda after all, and the reader knows he is not such a bad match, for his witticism, generosity, and other good qualities have been emphasized throughout the narration. Page references are to Mary Davys, The Reform'd Coquet, Familiar Letters Betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady, and The Accomplished Rake, Martha F. Bowden, ed. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

himself in an economically secure position. This ending of the novel is similar to those in libertine novels. Peter however has neither title nor estate. His libertine behavior can therefore not be tolerated as the liberties that come with pedigree. The libertinism of a born noble reassures his position, giving evidence of his power, not only over women but also over male competitors.⁴⁶ The noble libertine with his fixed place in the hierarchy may not respect the norms and still maintain his status. In fact, his liberty to do so is an expression of his exalted position, his misbehavior a convention following accepted ways. It actually reaffirms his privileged position. Unlike him, an outsider from the lower classes is not allowed such behavior. A low-born person may attain status only if he is virtuous. The *pícaro* has obviously forfeited this possibility. His rise is exceptional and demands an explanation. The venue left for him to obtain status would be to prove his natural nobility, which would allow him to practice vice. For that reason the narrator represents him as such. This pattern of justification is clearly troublesome. What is even more troublesome is the fact that Peter never attains the natural proficiency of a libertine yet still ends up in the same high position. This shows that status distinctions are not God-given depending on an inborn nature or on acquired merit. Rather, they are completely gratuitous. In modern capitalism anybody who could manipulate his neighbour and play the social systems to his advantage could succeed. Through the contradictions between its two discourses the novel raises the question: If nobles could be libertines and libertines could have status, why could not all people exhibiting the same traits, including, in the last instance, criminals, have status?

⁴⁶ Ann Marie Stewart, "Rape, Patriarchy, and the Libertine Ethos: The Function of Sexual Violence in Aphra Behn's *The Golden Age* and *The Rover, Part 1*," *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* 12, no. 2 (1997): 26-39, explains the mechanisms of reaffirmation of the patriarchal structure in libertinism.

Allegorical Status Insecurities

Through the similarity of some of the character traits, attitudes, and behavior of the libertine and the *pícaro* to those of economic man the question about the status legitimacy of the libertine may be expanded. Acute readers might have asked themselves, why status was denied to some, to members of the middle classes who may have come by their wealth by sometimes less than honest activities, for instance, while the greater aristocracy maintained its privileges despite its frequently equally deteriorated ethics. Cross's novel is a picaresque novel, although certainly not all possible picaresque features appear in it and some are modified.⁴⁷ It is simultaneously an example of the ability of the picaresque genre to adapt to social influences. It might make use of characteristics of other genres as in the adoption of the features of the libertine novel. Generally speaking, as John le Brun again demonstrates, the picaresque as dynamic genre includes, unconsciously maybe, ideas which preoccupy the people at the time, that is, epistemic factors.⁴⁸ Its double structure thereby facilitates the representation of unresolved social issues. The picaresque does not merely follow Watt's formal realism, which depends on the existence of an experiencing individual who shapes his/her particular truth from sensory perception. On the contrary, in the picaresque tradition of which John le Brun is a part, certain

⁴⁷ Moretti explains, "once a genre is visualized *as a tree*, the continuity between the two [individual work and genre] inevitably disappears: the genre becomes an abstract 'diversity spectrum' . . . whose internal multiplicity no individual text will ever be able to represent" (76).

⁴⁸ Here I must disagree with Moretti, for I cannot call the modifications "crazy blind alleys" (77). He explains the divergence as "totally random attempts at innovation, in the sense in which evolutionary theory uses the term: they show no foreknowledge – no idea really – of what may be good for literary survival" (77).

preconceived notions of a general truth independent of such an individual remain as a shaping factor.⁴⁹

John le Brun thus takes up similar contemporary social issues as Moll Flanders. In this case, the absorption of others into the upper classes through marriage is at issue. The case of this *pícaro* is also his status inconsistency, since the legitimacy of his final position is questioned.⁵⁰ The *pícaro* challenges the patrilineal transmission of status and wealth. While the reformed noble libertine returns to the established order and reassures the patriarchal hierarchy, the outsider Peter insinuates himself into them through marriage. Therefore what McKeon explains for Pamela also holds true for John le Brun: “to inquire into the morality and social justice of Pamela’s [John’s] upward mobility is necessarily to inquire into the truth of her [his] story, and the thread of epistemological reversal that runs through Richardson’s [Cross’s] naïve empiricism is continuous with a subversive strain in his progressive [conservative] ideology.”⁵¹

The picaresque double structure unifies two discourses: through ordering and interpretation, the figural discourse of the narrator intends to integrate the individual traces of the character’s actions into a coherent pattern of explanation. The two discourses compete and contradict each other, and it is not certain, which of them would have been more convincing to the contemporary reader. In the master-narrative Peter

⁴⁹ Richetti, English Novel in History, contends that the notion of subjectivity and individualism was a highly contested one in an era still dominated by traditional social structures of church, class, and customs. To my mind, the presence of these two discourses (of progressive self-fashioning and conservative predetermination) is an aspect of the epistemic shift.

⁵⁰ The novel could be seen as an example of the Whig aristocratic order, which adopted anti-aristocratic elements of class and moneyed interest, according to McKeon. Yet in this case the ascent is unmerited and even the Whig aristocratic order put into doubt.

⁵¹ McKeon, 378.

wants to represent himself as a libertine to establish his natural right to high status and genteel life. He adopts the debased values of the corrupt aristocracy, which form part of the ideology securing the stratification of society through their reaffirmation of power relations. Yet Peter is not a libertine, and his conversion is doubtful, since nothing in the narrative prepares the reader for the end. His settled and married life is not described at all, nor are children mentioned. It is hard to believe that Peter will be constant and maintain his interest in an assimilated lifestyle, when all incidents recounted have shown the opposite, namely his restlessness and inability to form disinterested relationships. The micro-narratives are not evidence of a growing acceptance of traditional norms. On the contrary, they have proven the immunity of the *pícaro* to better morals. Likewise, his individual worth as economic man is questionable. We have seen his picaresque character traits which run counter to those necessary in the modern economy. Peter finds freedom from economic pressures not on his own account through his business abilities but through Philippo's bounty and Leonora's possessions. He enjoys high status as merely a parasite of Leonora's economic abilities.

In summary, Peter is not noble, he is not a libertine, nor is he economic man. In short, he remains an outsider of society, no matter on which set of values his intended inclusion should be based. No satisfactory solution is found for the rise to status of this unworthy upstart. A narrative interpretation of the figural as the narrator intends,⁵² hence does not work. No stable meaning is granted. The voice of the narrator as well as the final position of the *pícaro* should suggest a dominance of the master-narrative over the micro-narratives, yet this dominance is uncertain as the analysis of the double discourse of the

⁵² See Zimmerman, Boudaries, for this terminology, as well as my introduction.

novel has shown. The allegorical content is only unsuccessfully adjusted to new social possibilities. Romancing the unethical progressive biography of Peter does not work. The *pícaro*'s case remains unresolved.

CHAPTER 4

RODERICK RANDOM AS NOBLE *PICARO*

Et genus & virtus, nisi cum re, vilior alga est

-- Horace, Satires Book 2¹

The last author of a socially expressive picaresque novel discussed in this study is Tobias Smollett, who wrote Roderick Random some twenty-five years after Moll Flanders. By that time concepts of thought which were relatively new before had become more habitual.² Empiricism was more widely accepted, and as such it was also challenged in the period. If one credits the theories of Zimmermann, McKeon, Bender, and Davies, as well as the pioneering work of Watt, the need to factualize a novel was less dominant, and, in general, the novel spread from the field of history to forms more cognate with what we today call fiction. It turned back on itself and included – many would say, returned to – other literary conventions, while the earlier novel had grappled more exclusively with overcoming traditional literary discourses in forging its surging empiricist realism. Similarly, the structures of thought further developed in Smollett’s time regarding ideology, as the idea of the individual and his or her place in society

¹ Smollett placed the Latin epigraph on the title-page of the first edition of Roderick Random (1758). It is often translated “High birth as well as merit, if without substance, are worth less than seaweed.”

² For Michael Rosenblum, “Smollett and the Old Conventions,” in Harold Bloom, ed., Tobias Smollett: Modern Critical Essays (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), Smollett is a “suspicious” writer, while Defoe is a “naïve” one (84).

changed markedly. Concepts of economic man and of the stratification of society were still viewed critically, however, since they opened new possibilities to some people and threatened others, who would work to conserve the traditional conditions. The nobility especially had to worry about its status due to the loss of its economic supremacy. In order to express such disputed ideas Smollett chose the picaresque format for his novel Roderick Random, since the dynamic genre could assimilate contemporary influences and adapt its form correspondingly. Its double structure was able to represent them ambiguously, allowing the Scottish author to give voice to his concerns about the state of the aristocracy and possible ways to mend it. The ambivalence of the novel's social statement has not been sufficiently examined in criticism so far. Above all, its interdependence with the picaresque format has not been discussed. The present chapter will undertake these two tasks.

It is pertinent to establish the novel's genre first. This chapter argues for the disputed fact that Roderick Random is also a picaresque novel.³ It responds to the developments

³ Smollett's novels have traditionally been included in discussions of the picaresque as early as in Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (1907). However, critics who have labelled Roderick Random picaresque have done so often under the assumption of a very broad genre (see for instance Robert Donald Spector, Tobias George Smollett [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989]). Others, not quite content with that approach, have nevertheless taken the picaresque novel as point of departure for their criticism. Ronald Paulson, "Satire in the Early Novels of Smollett," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 59 (1960), thus maintains, Smollett "rationalizes certain picaresque conventions in terms of their satiric usefulness and abandons others because they detract from the satiric design" (167). Jerry C. Beasley, "Roderick Random: The Picaresque Transformed," College Literature 6 (1979), claims Roderick Random reveals Smollett's "departure from the tradition of the picaresque" (211), and calls Roderick an anti-*pícaro* because in several ways his characteristics deviate from the genre criteria he establishes. In response to Rousseau's affirmation that Roderick Random meets some of the requirements of the genre, Paul Gabriel Bouce, "Smollett's Pseudo-picaresque; A Response to Rousseau's," Studies in Burke and his Time 14 (1972), states categorically, "Roderick can hardly be assimilated, even remotely, with a *pícaro*" (76). Likewise, Parker, Literature and the Delinquent, does not consider Roderick a *pícaro* for the fact that he is, in the critic's opinion, no delinquent. Neither does Alice G. Fredman, "The Picaresque in Decline: Smollett's First Novel," in John H. Middendorf, ed., English Writers of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), regard him as a *pícaro* and therefore calls Roderick Random a "modified picaresque" (189).

briefly described above and consequently incorporates partly different features of form and content than those discussed with regard to Moll Flanders and John le Brun. Like these novels, Smollett's becomes an example of the dynamic picaresque genre through the preponderance of its picaresque features, although there are, of course, non-picaresque qualities to it as well. In the beginning of the chapter I intend to explore its picaresque features, beginning with formal characteristics which contribute to the typical picaresque double structure of the novel. While the two discourses are less clearly distinguished than in Defoe's novel and bear more resemblance to Cross' work, this design equally allows the reader to judge events variously. The professed intentions often contradict the actual deeds, and there are notable incongruities in the narrative stance. Moreover, the narrator frequently negates his responsibility, by employing the passive voice to describe his actions, and also presents doubtful justifications for the protagonist's unfavourable comportment. The novel's import depends largely on the success of its double discourse, through which other characteristics of the novel are qualified. Let me discuss these aspects with a view to the social interest of Smollett's work.

Apart from the double structure and its attendant characteristics the novel has a number of obvious picaresque features also to be found in the early models, i.e. the historical genre, such as the protagonist's travels and his many masters. Still, as in the other two novels discussed, content and form partly deviate from those of the original Spanish antecedents. The chapter will therefore proceed to a discussion of the motifs which are toned down or in other ways slightly changed in ways sometimes differing from those in Defoe's and Cross' picaresque novels. For instance, the *pícaro*'s criminal

origin here is merely that of a low disinherited noble, and his extreme want consists of a few gold coins. Eighteenth-century influences can often be noted in modifications. Thus, contrary to historic *pícaros*, Roderick exhibits a stable identity, as demonstrated in the treatment of the picaresque motif of disguise in this novel. While John's character does not develop, as we have seen, here the author introduces character development, if only as a sort of retrospective demand by the narrator corresponding to the state of contemporary novelistic conventions.

Following that, most of the chapter will explore Smollett's social perspective and how he deals with related insecurities of signification. Various picaresque characteristics adapt to competing if not contradictory ideological aspects expressed through the double discourse. Thus, Smollett is apparently just as uneasy about the corruption of society in economic individualism as Defoe was. His hero, however, does not satisfy the demands of an "economic man." Instead, he follows bad business practices and cannot handle money. Meanwhile, honest working men like Strap succeed. While Defoe champions progressive values despite the negative aberrations, in his critique of social developments Smollett tends to the conservative. And whereas Cross does not yet offer an acceptable solution for the adjustment of the issue of the aristocracy to the new times, it appears Smollett tried to come to terms with older concepts within the new ones.⁴ Thus, he designed a renovated model of nobility by juxtaposing the status quo of the nobility to progressive plans of life, as will subsequently be shown. In contrast to Moll and John, who were not high-born, Roderick is indeed a noble, if only regarding his pedigree and not his character. The flawed noble qualities to which this *pícaro* aspires are likewise

⁴ Throughout his study McKeon calls such a return to the ideals of aristocracy "conservative ideology."

satirized and the instability of the sign again shown in the relationship of words to actions. For there is a noted correspondence between the impotent outside markers of nobility mocked in this novel and linguistic inefficacy, which cut off the connection to the actions themselves and disable them.

Much as residual elements of social concepts are present in the work, romance conventions and those of the novel are intermingled in Roderick Random. The remainder of the chapter will consider these literary influences. Like Moll and John, the *pícaro* Roderick also has a case, in which he tries to explain his current status from the events in his life. However, similar to their narratives, his narrative remains ambivalent. The romance conventions are quite implausible in their realistic, business-minded context for most of the novel. The romance ending is perfunctory and unmerited, as various critics have noted.⁵ As a narrative solution it is as improbable as the hero's supposed conservation of noble honor in a world of rude commerce, so that form and content together again work to create a product of its time in the transition between epistemes.

Picaresque Elements

The double structure, perhaps the most important formal feature of picaresque novels, Smollett's novel displays as well. Again, there is a narrator who tells of his own deeds from a later perspective. It is his intention, he claims, to educate the reader through the representation of vice, yet like other *pícaros* he also seems to have another objective in telling his life story; namely, his case. Thus, in order to justify his final position he

⁵ See for instance Alter, Rogue's Progress; Robert Giddings, The Tradition of Smollett (London: Methuen, 1967), and G.S. Rousseau, "Smollett and the Picaresque; Some Questions About a Label," Studies in Burke and his Time 12 (1971): 1886-904.

interprets the traces, that is, the incidents he chooses to tell, in a certain manner to fit his intended masternarrative. For, he wants to represent himself as the unlucky hero who eventually finds the place that corresponds to his natural nobility. Although the difference is not as marked as in Guzmán, in which the story is interrupted by lengthy moral advice, in Roderick Random vice and virtue are juxtaposed as well. Yet the representation of them is ambiguous, for the actions themselves and the reporting about them are contradictory, and it is not clear whose virtue and whose vices are spoken of in the preface. Admittedly, in the main the narrator's perspective shows more insight and cleverness than the perspective of the mostly naïve and vicious protagonist. Throughout the novel, however, there are inconsistencies in the narrative stance. Frequently the narrator assures something not warranted by the actions at all. He thus paints a quite different picture of the protagonist's behavior and motivations from what he announced in the preface. Instead of showing remorse, Roderick negates his responsibility for the actions, exculpates himself in several ways, and blames the incidents on Fortune or Nature instead of admitting his agency. The protagonist and the narrator are thus not as far apart as the narrator would have the reader believe. The retrospective intervention of the noble and virtuous Roderick cannot cover up this fact, and the doubts concerning the substance of nobility are not at all dispelled in the end.

The narrator rarely negates his omnipresence and his power to shape the plot. Well aware of telling a story, he tells us that Roderick "expressed himself as above" (44),⁶ and announces he will "illustrate what follows" (26). He guides the reader's reception, judging a piece of information "will not be disagreeable to the reader" (26), or will not be

⁶ My page references are to Tobias Smollett, The Adventures of Roderick Random, Paul Gabriel Bouce, ed. and intro. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

“worth [the reader’s] notice” (43). As he controls the narrative order, he is able to manipulate the narrated time and plotting.⁷ This is problematic. Thus he summarizes longer time periods and sometimes draws conclusions from the events left out, which the reader has to take at face value, like the assurance “I every day improv’d in my knowledge of the town, I shook off my awkward air by degrees” (104). He jumps ahead in the narration of events, for example, “I applauded myself much for this feat, which turned out one of the most unlucky exploits of my life” (166). Looking back, at another point of the narration he says, “But I little dreamed what a storm of mischief was brewing against me” (111). The narrator is also able to give the reader information Roderick the character does not have at the time of the telling, for instance about the new surgeon, “who soon made [them] sensible of the loss” of the old one (156). Hence he creates a distance from the protagonist. Likewise, when Roderick is the victim of a imposture, with statements like “as we afterwards found” the narrator draws the reader’s attention to errors in judgement on the part of the protagonist (49). By the same token, Roderick the narrator illustrates that he now has more insight, for example that he sees through Crab long before the protagonist, calling the apothecary’s generosity “affectation” (27), that he understands Jenny’s trick played on Isaac, stating she “affected to weep” (52), that a “supposed correspondent” wrote him a letter (302), and so on. By stepping away from the relation of minute details to see the big picture and by evaluating correctly what has happened, he manipulates the reader to judge Roderick the character as quite stupid and himself as matured. The scene with the tame raven, whom Strap’s – as well as the hero’s – “fears had magnified” represents both these views (61).

⁷ Brooks’s term is especially fitting here, since in the picaresque novel the micronarratives of the character’s actions are made to fit the masternarrative of the narrator.

On the other hand, the narrator does not always give reasonable explanations in retrospect after having described the protagonist's experiences from the more naïve perspective. To the contrary, quite often the point of view is that of Roderick the character, who represents persons and events in order to mitigate his own faults, for instance when a "very decent sort of man" pretends he has lost a coin (64), and the reader is presumably supposed to understand that such "instance of honesty" could fool anybody (69). In various adventures the narrator conveniently leaves out all opportunities the hero has of quitting his dishonest ways or leaving off a bad business. In fact, in the relation of affairs with women, time and again Roderick's vanity is illustrated with a sort of pride instead of with the condemnation one would expect of a mature narrator (37, 102). Thus Roderick even states proudly "the young Pisanne had no reason to complain of my remembrance" although in one and the same breath he admits to be ashamed of his behavior (240).

The initially constructed distance between the narrator and the character is not that big, and the former is not the wizened gentleman he intends to appear, nor does he dwell on the *pícaro*'s faults either. Whether laying the maid's pregnancy to Crab (29) or sleeping with the latter's wife, frequently the narrator omits criticizing the protagonist's actions. Neither does he always recognize immoral behavior in others, it seems. He thus portrays Morgan as a good man, although a sailor has to die only because the surgeon will not finish his meal in time (149). Likewise, Mrs. Williams is represented as a reformed penitent, although she advises Roderick to manipulate Narcissa (342ff). In several instances the narrator clearly misinterprets the situation in retrospect. Thus when Roderick overturns the toilet bowl and hurts a sick man who then tweaks his nose,

Roderick has to be “hindered . . . from taking revenge on the sick man” (150-151), as he says, making it sound as if he were in the right although he had been the one to blame. In addition, the narrator’s assurances are frequently false, as when he claims Thomson should “take an example from [him] of fortitude and submission” (169), while one page earlier Roderick the protagonist had panicked and misbehaved. Similarly, when Banter suspects Roderick of being a highwayman, the latter laughs, although just before he had himself had the same thought (402).

Moreover, the narrator employs passive expressions in order to deflect responsibility. For instance, on his way to Paris with the capuchin Roderick sleeps with the daughter of the host. His stance as ashamed penitent is, however, dubious, since his excuse, “I suffered myself to be overcome by my passion” (240) constructs his “passion” as a natural force and himself as passive. Likewise, he claims to be bashful, stating he “suffered [him]self to be persuaded” (84) to accept Jackson’s money, while the reader learns of numerous instances in which Roderick does not at all mind receiving monetary presents. Roderick denies his authorship in the initiation incident, where he “was freed from” the wooden fingerboard (5), as well as in the creation of his gang, where “strength of make” – and not he himself – “had subjected almost all [his] contemporaries” (6). Even in his pranks the narrator sometimes does not admit his agency and implies the intention of a more honorable behavior on his part. Thus, once Strap throws a rock, “leaving [Roderick] to follow him as [he] could. – Indeed there was no time for deliberation” (68). Only when something gets awry does he regret his behavior, yet even then he does not take responsibility. Having to appear before the justice, he claims “this

renewed [his] regret, and [he] cursed the hour in which [he] had *yielded* to Jackson's invitation" (91, emphasis added).

Elsewhere the narrator does admit his agency yet exculpates himself in retrospect. In the scene related above, for instance, the *pícaro* points to the capuchin, who has even worse morals than he. Frequently Roderick blames his imbecility on others like Strap (68), Jackson (89), or Banter (317). Moreover, he finds such excuses as his "veneration" for the landlord, when he does not dare not to pay (46), and the "vanity of young men" when he shows off his learning (224). The womanizer has an "amorous complexion" (20), and if one takes lust for revenge as a character trait as the narrator does, then many of Roderick's actions are due to his nature and really not his fault. In addition, quite often his "situation justifie[s]" his misdeeds in the narrator's opinion (225).⁸ In general, it is also a valid excuse for him that others are fooled in similar ways "in the devil's drawing room," that is, London (95), and a "great many stories of people who had been reduced, cheated, pilfered, beat" reconcile him with his fate (73). If everything else fails, the narrator cites Fortune by way of excuse. Already his mother's dream in the very beginning demonstrates a belief in predestination, and Roderick does not hesitate to blame his faults and failures on it. Whether referring to "the inconstant goddess" (70), "the devil" (73), "the power of destiny" (102), or "capricious fate" (166), Roderick's words do not fail him in naming the one culpable for his failures.

To sum up, there is a gap between the wizened narrator of the pseudo-autobiography and the wayward protagonist of the events told in order to differentiate clearly between

⁸ Critics have not considered the unreliability of the narrator, believing his affirmations. Alter, for instance, does not attribute the hero's misdeeds to his bad character. Instead, he talks of the "ubiquity and relentlessness of the conspiracy mankind has shaped against this well-meaning individual" (61).

vice and virtue and to teach the reader the intended moral. Yet frequently that gap is quite closed as the attitudes and expressions of the narrator and the protagonist duplicate one another. Therefore the judgements about good and evil become ambiguous in the novel. The double discourse, which is instituted supposedly in order to present a clear picture, in fact muddles things.

It is not in the double structure alone that Roderick Random follows the format of the first models of the genre. Confusions of plot such as the mix-up of beds and the coarse descriptions of characters and events are of course set pieces of many novels of the time. Scenes like the pee-emptying ones can be found in several other picaresque (Buscón) as well as in period novels. Being a scapegoat for others is another typical, if usually implicit, role of the *pícaro* as a representative of the medieval poor and thus a feature of picaresque novels. On various occasions Roderick is punished unjustly for crimes he did not commit. Also like his Spanish antecedents, Roderick receives wounds in his adventures “the scars of which still remain,” (7), that is, the body is inscribed. Furthermore, Smollett’s novel has the typical episodic structure of picaresque novels. The *pícaro* himself exhibits that lightheartedness in adverse situations and the ability to adapt to different roles typical of the genre. Not least, of the many motifs are his change of masters, his travels, and Roderick’s concern for food. Several times throughout the narration, thus, Roderick complains about being destitute. He also suffers from loneliness (25). Despite his existence as a solitary, Roderick exhibits a picaresque compassion and solidarity towards his adversary (292), towards Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Gawky, and Melopoyne. He lends others money, gives away his clothes, and in general has an open ear for his fellows’ pitiful stories. Such generous behavior is not only typical of the *pícaro*,

but it is also expected of a noble person. Moreover, similar to other *pícaros*, Roderick enters the world as an outcast. His origin is humble and his place of birth transitory as in Lazarillo. For Roderick is not born at home but in a servant's chamber which functions as his temporary abode and demonstrates his insecure standing in society between the classes. The offspring of an unauthorized affair of his father with a poor relation, he very early has to fend for himself. For his mother dies shortly after his birth, and his father is first disinherited and then disappears. Roderick lives his childhood as an unwanted intruder in his grandfather's household, and nobody really cares about his upbringing and education. Notwithstanding his picaresque origin, the narrator constantly reminds the reader of his noble blood. In addition, Roderick experiences an initiation typical for a picaresque vita. For hitting a classmate with his fingerboard he is punished so severely that he never forgets it (6). From then on he is continually involved in adventures, that is, in pranks played by his gang. He enjoys playing tricks on others as well, and he does so not necessarily in order to defend himself or to secure his subsistence, but due to a certain predisposition comparable to that of the *buscón*. However, his basic motivations are also very like those of Moll and John.

As is typical of the genre, throughout the entire novel, the *pícaro* tries to improve his situation. If he is successful in his endeavours, it is usually only for a brief period of time. Then a blow of fate falls on him, such as being recruited by a press gang and being robbed when he is shipwrecked. In fact, many times he is worse off afterwards than he was before putting into practice his latest scheme, as when he finds a new position at Crab's (27) or when he moves into his new room next to Mrs. Williams. The description of this room as an assemblage of broken pieces reflects the hero's descent (97). Like

many of his literary antecedents, Roderick is usually not really affected by the events, but can simply leave the scene and take another course. He exhibits this detachment demonstrating a little developed psyche, for instance when his grandfather dies and he exits the room with his uncle Bowling. Most of the time, Roderick retains a picaresque optimistic attitude and quite often expresses his hopes of recovery and confidence in his fate, even in the most adverse situations. He is quite right about that, for his life is not an ordered, unidirectional trajectory, neither downwards nor upwards. It illustrates, on the contrary, the workings of the baroque wheel of fortune to which the earlier *pícaros* were subjected as well. This wheel of fortune inevitably takes the *pícaro* up and down again. Literally diving into a cellar to get food is therefore very easy for Roderick, who “descended very successfully,” while Strap trips and falls down. Roderick can just as easily stay in the cellar “or walk upwards again” (65). Time and again, Roderick’s position improves, yet then he invariably falls. For example, at one point Roderick feels “no ways comprehended within the scheme or protection of providence” (25-26). However, right after this statement, a new opportunity presents itself when Crab sends for him. At another point in the novel, Roderick has a streak of luck gambling, and his friend Brayle becomes officer. But then his adversary Crampley becomes the new captain after the old one dies (207). So within a very short period of time, Roderick’s luck has changed again without any action on his part. He is, however, not always as innocent of the unfavourable developments as he would have the reader believe. Neither are his actions merely guided by the moment as those of earlier *pícaros*; Roderick sometimes plans his moves, much as Moll does.

Picaresque Elements Adapted: Individuality and Ambition

At the same time, a number of characteristics of Roderick Random are not genuinely picaresque. As long as these are not too many, a picaresque novel may certainly comprehend such features of form and content. Some of those deviations from the theoretical picaresque format may spring from the exigencies of the storyline, or from changes in lifestyle in the author's time. For instance, Roderick meets his uncle several times and has normal occupations as apothecary's apprentice and servant. Or they might be due to changes in narrative design in general. By the time Smollett wrote his fiction, we assume, the novel was an established genre whose fictionality no longer had to be masked,⁹ hence the illusion that the author is also the narrator. These deviations from the theoretical genre are admissible as long as they do not multiply out of proportion.

Many other motifs, however, are modifications of the picaresque, and these are the ones of interest, for they demonstrate the ability of the picaresque as a dynamic genre to accommodate contemporary developments. In addition, they demonstrate its aptitude for transmitting social criticism. Let's examine how they reflect eighteenth-century thought, especially regarding, firstly, the *pícaro*'s individual character and, secondly, his ambitions. For the hero has fixed character traits which constitute this individual person and clearly inform his actions. His stable identity is demonstrated by the employment of the picaresque motif of disguise. On the other hand, Roderick's character does not

⁹ This was certainly the case of Smollett's last novel. See Michael Rosenblum, "Smollett's Humphrey Clinker," in John Richetti, ed., The Cambridge Companion to The Eighteenth-Century Novel (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175-97. In the same volume Richetti in the introduction and Claude Rawson in his chapter on Henry Fielding describe the acceptance of fiction and subsequent changes in the contemporary theory of the novel. When the divide between fictional and factual was finally drawn in the mid-century, Fielding's novels presented an early form of self-reflective writing. To varying degrees they express disillusion about the possibility of easy (moral) explanations through recording specific material circumstances from the author's elevated position.

develop. Such an Aristotelian or static view of character is traditionally found in romances as well as the early picaresque, but rarely in novels of Smollett's time. The persistence of this older conception of character coincides with the conservative critique of the aristocracy made possible by generic ambiguity.

The protagonist's ambitions then are similar to Moll's and an expression of progressive ideology as McKeon calls it or of what Watt calls economic individualism. Roderick does not merely want to save himself from starving or being killed like earlier *pícaros*, but he intends to improve his social standing and acquire the position he feels that he is entitled to by birth. Above all, he wants to make money. The hero's relationship to his friends is informed by these aspirations. Roderick does, however, not have a mind for business although he tries. He lacks other qualities which would make him a successful *homo economicus*, and in this respect his portrayal is a call to the nobility to adopt progressive qualities. Since the hero exhibits many negative ideological traits, and since Roderick suffers from the progressive ideology, the novel is also a critique of the latter.

Roderick Random does not represent a type like the historical *pícaro* did but a developed individual with definite and stable character traits like the heroes of contemporary novels. Even if his character traits are in the main negative, they are nonetheless quite varied: Roderick is selfish, vain, proud, resentful, deceitful, cowardly, and cruel. He manipulates others to his personal advantage, he cheats and lies. He is unprincipled and displays no dignity or honor. Although the narrator wants to convince the reader that Roderick's bad qualities are caused by the circumstances of his life, or rather, that they are a necessity of the moment like the baroque *pícaros'* negative

qualities, there are many instances in the novel which prove otherwise. Roderick acts according to his own intentions and desires. Frequently, his contemptible actions are quite gratuitous and do not serve any clear purpose. His negative qualities are, thus, not those of “economic man,” like they are in Moll’s case.¹⁰ At the same time, his character is out of line with his supposed nobility as well. Cruelty was never a desired characteristic in the age of sentiment, as Hogarth clearly shows. We will see later how Roderick’s deficiencies on both counts serve Smollett to paint the picture of a reformed nobility.

Roderick is cruel to others psychologically as well as physically. This behavior is a constant throughout the novel. On several occasions he toys with his friend Strap for no reason, pretending severe losses before telling him the true outcomes of his adventures (318). Similarly, when Strap is dismayed at his bad fate, Roderick draws pleasure from the barber’s reaction, describing it as a caricature (283). The hero makes others feel miserable on purpose as well. For instance, after having cured himself from a fever, he pretends to be dead just to frighten his friend Morgan, then laughs at him (193). The protagonist often hurts others physically, and without remorse. Only when he severely injures an adversary in a fight in school, does he express “great terror” (6). Afterwards he never mentions such reactions again. Even during the attack on his teacher shortly afterwards, the broken leg of one of his gang concerns him only in so far as it might hurt

¹⁰ Several critics, for instance, Beasley, note an “essential goodness” of Roderick (219). Philip Stevick, “Smollett’s Picaresque Games,” in G. S. Rousseau, ed., Tobias Smollett. Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), likewise states, “in Smollett, however fallible or even sometimes cruel his pícaros may be, they are generally enraged by evil, compassionate toward the oppressed, honest in the long run if not the short, basically decent” (124). Beasley even calls the hero a “moral agent” (219). I would hope to prove the contrary since to my mind, Roderick does not become moral. It is highly problematic that he should remain deviant even after having met his love, Narcissa.

his plan. When he knocks out his cousin's teeth, the injury is not seen to deserve a comment (7), and as the story progresses, Roderick frequently describes awful mutilations taking place on his ship by the bye. To sum up, the hero displays a typically picaresque character trait being cruel, the same which we have diagnosed in Moll and which can also be used to describe John. Yet in this case he neither acts cruelly in order to accomplish picaresque ruses, nor does he treat others in that way in order to achieve an economic goal. Rather, his cruelty, among other character traits, is gratuitous, serving perhaps to establish Roderick as a psychological individual according to the contemporary concept of novelistic figures.

Other bad character traits by which Roderick is defined are his irresponsibility for his actions and his lack of a sense of injustice. Incidentally, these are both diametrically opposed to what one would ideally expect from a member of the nobility. Thus, contrary to Mr. Brayl, he does not stay on board his ship during the nights like a "diligent and excellent officer" (204). As an apprentice he bleeds the captain contrary to his better knowledge merely in order to gain money (39), and as surgeon's mate he distributes ineffective medicine which he himself does not take when he is sick (190). Again, at an inn he observes others cheating at a card game yet does not warn his friend (41). Some of his actions are necessary for him as a *pícaro* to survive. Others, like the last mentioned, appear gratuitous and serve to paint Roderick as a coward, something the reader infers from a number of instances. In one scene the hero overturns a piss pot yet does not admit his guilt even when the steward is punished in his stead (151). In another scene he learns of a highwayman's dangerous presence but does not act. Later he is only too glad not to have to appear as a witness before court against Mr. Rifle (41). And so on. Again, his

lack of courage is yet another facet of his character. It is not what one should expect of a business minded person or of a noble. Nonetheless, Lazarillo already displayed it stating his case only in an oblique fashion. There are a number of additional picaresque qualities that here mainly contribute to designing the individual “Roderick Random:” Roderick is deceptive when he does not admit to his knowledge of French so that he might overhear information advantageous to him (97). He is immoral in sleeping with various women, among other things. His vanity shows, for instance, in descriptions of his person and effects, his lack of honor, principles, or dignity, and not least by his behavior in duels. The latter is naturally quite important to the development of the concept of nobility, and will therefore be discussed separately further on.

With regard to the merging of picaresque genre characteristics with features of the eighteenth-century novel, the picaresque motif of disguise has to be mentioned. Here it stands in the service of the representation of a stable character much as it does in Moll Flanders. In several of his adventures the protagonist dons a new uniform, that is, with a new role he wears a corresponding new appearance. He can shed the clothes and role together and revert to his old self. Sometimes even his true identity appears against his will – or so the narrator maintains. For instance, in service of Narcissa’s aunt “John Brown” inadvertently is gallant, eloquent and discovers his knowledge of French (218 ff). In other words, his true gentle character appears underneath the disguise, he says. Unlike a *pícaro*, thus, Roderick does not take on a new identity with every disguise, because, as already mentioned, he has a fixed identity. An identity, which, however, he does not recognize, for he regards himself a gentleman, whom those character traits described in the last paragraph would obviously not grace. With Strap’s inheritance, therefore, he does

the grand tour, appears with a valet (Strap) and attends the opera, the coffee houses, and so on, feeling very comfortable indeed in this role as a gentleman (256). The complication lies in the fact that others see his supposedly natural noble appearance as a costume while he considers his shabby, *pícaro*-style outward appearance as a wrapping to be changed at will. Outside markers do not correspond to inner values in the case of Roderick either.

In fact, to other people it does not matter what kind of a disguise Roderick wears, whether noble attire or a simple black cape, since they do not recognize him in any case. When he appears as a French marquis to trick Melinda (298), when he wears his new fine clothes to fool Lavement's daughter (99), and when his grandfather does not realize he is talking to his grandson simply because the latter wears new clothes (9), he always goes unrecognized. Morgan likewise does not recognize his colleague in his new splendid clothing (423), and neither does Mrs. Williams a little later (424). On the other hand, Strap's friend the schoolmaster advises Roderick not to appear with his own hair, in other words undisguised, in front of Cringer (64). This piece of advice demonstrates that others do not see in Roderick a gentleman, since the wig was an essential device of the upper classes. Hence, here again a person takes the normal equipment of a noble to be an unnatural feature, or even disguise in Roderick's case. Roderick feels like a gentleman or like himself, *vice versa*, when he is shaved and dressed to state (398, 206). Nevertheless this does not happen frequently and is, to boot, only possible when he receives the financial means to afford such *staffage* from somebody else. Granted, twice in the novel, another person does not recognize him when he is not disguised (397, 91), which might only play to the fact that the relation of signifiers to signifieds is not fixed. Best not to

wear any outside markers at all, like Odonnell after the *pícaro* has attacked him. In this scene Roderick takes the clothes of his adversary and leaves him naked, his true character exposed to the world (106). Jackson likewise cannot fool his examiners with a different appearance (88). Here as elsewhere in the novel it is shown that the internal values of a person do not change despite differing outside appearances. As the hero remarks, “howsoever his externals might be altered, he was at bottom the same individual” (109).

The picaresque double structure allows the representation of the *pícaro* as narrative figure to be modified. More precisely, with the description of the development of the person of the protagonist this novel in part follows eighteenth-century narrative conventions. The novel follows convention only in part, because Roderick the protagonist remains the same as the narration progresses and thus displays the baroque fixity of type of his historical antecedents. On the other hand, Roderick the narrator seems to be aware of the contemporary demands on individuals to learn from experiences and therefore makes it appear in retrospect as if he had in fact learned. Such a moral learning process after misdeeds have been committed can be found in Fielding’s novels, for instance.¹¹ In contrast, Roderick’s immunity to moral lessons is yet another point of criticism in Smollett’s novel.

In a few scenes Roderick does behave quite cleverly. He tricks Narcissa’s brother into drinking too much too fast in order to end the night soon and not participate in an orgy (347). Roderick sometimes studies the behavior of his master and actually gets the better of him (28). He hides some money in his stockings, which actually proves good foresight,

¹¹ Directly contrary to what I want to show, Ewald Mengel, Der englische Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts. Eine Einführung in seine Klassiker (Tübingen: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 1997), 142-43, holds that Smollett’s novel depicts a static character because the didactic-moral is unimportant in the picaresque.

when he is caught as a spy by smugglers (231). He is not tricked into admitting that he knows the one responsible for the attempted murder (105). He also sometimes displays an acquired cleverness, when Strap wants to marry a pregnant woman and Roderick sees through the imposture (279), or when he does not immediately trust a countryman but “desire[s] further acquaintance with him, fully resolved, however, not to be deceived by him” (78). He behaves similarly in the meeting with the priest (236). However, these instances of the cleverness of the hero do not support the narrator’s claim of his having learned, since they do not become more frequent towards the end, and they alternate with scenes in which the *pícaro* is once again the victim of his own stupidity. How often does Roderick lose everything, yet continues gambling with renewed hopes of winning? He tries to bribe supposedly influential persons without success more than once and presents valuables to several nobles to no effect. He continues to visit Strutwell until the ambassador has actually set out with another as his secretary, while it should have been clear to him for quite some time that he was being put off.

Time and again Roderick falls prey to identical or similar impostures, and yet the narrator assures the reader that he has learned. He claims to have learned not to lend Jackson his possessions (80), then on the next page he believes him. Much later he again lends Banter some money despite numerous negative experiences (285). Similarly, when he is introduced to Melinda he believes in the assurances of her wealth (280), although the same trick has just been played on Strap, and Roderick himself has tried his luck as a fortune hunter as well. Frequently, an incident proves the persisting naïveté of the hero just after he has claimed to have become cleverer. He believes a man who gives wrong directions based on “his countenance” despite having just testified to his experience (64).

The word choice of the description of such events is often obviously that of the narrator, as in the scene with Melinda, who “affected a sort of confusion and pretended to wonder” (281). Despite his supposed insight the protagonist continues in the same vein as before and is fooled after all. Again, he expresses his fear of being robbed by the capuchin monk, but when he is in fact robbed the next morning he is shocked (242). When he follows the instructions of the capuchin to meet him, he is surprised not to find him there despite his assurances of having learned not to be so trusting. At other times the narrator misrepresents the situation in order to give the impression of his having learned. He claims, “I was no longer, a pert, unthinking coxcomb My present appearance, therefore, was the least of my care” (29). Meanwhile, the reader realizes that Roderick in fact has no choice in the matter because of his lack of finances.

The assurances of the narrator that his misfortunes “were become habitual to [him]” (136), in other words, that he has learned in that respect, must be taken sceptically as well. Despite claims such as “the prospect of want seldom affected me very much” (315), he sometimes despairs even in the latter chapters of the novel. He does not gradually become hardened like Moll but rather experiences an initiation and after that does not change throughout the novel. Here again Smollett’s hero does not develop and exhibits a trait typical of the *picaro*.

In his economic ambition, however, Smollett’s hero reflects aspects of characterization that actually serve to modify certain picaresque features. He would enter the military not as a last resort but in order to make profit. Even when he has already grown fairly wealthy in the slave trade, Roderick hopes for his uncle to amass still more (410). His picaresque destitution is slightly changed, since it has to be seen in relation to

Roderick's expectations. On board a ship Roderick is merely "destitute of every convenience that could render such a voyage comfortable" (162). Or he is worried about "appear[ing] with decency" (148). Sometimes Roderick complains he does not know how to subsist. Yet in the next scene he lists his possessions (30), or the reader learns that he still has several shirts to pawn (83), or a gold-laced hat to sell (25). He does not appear in real danger of starvation either. Indeed, one could say this picaresque motif is parodied in Roderick Random, when the passengers of the travelling coach fight to receive the same fare as the higher-ranking guests (57).

Another motif found in picaresque novels which here deviates from the historical pattern is the representation of the *pícaro* as a solitary. In Roderick Random, according to the historical genre features, the *pícaro* is portrayed as a "friendless orphan" (XXXV). This is best illustrated in the scene after the ship has hit a bog and Roderick lies down in a barn exhausted. He is taken for a ghost first and then carried from house to house, with nobody giving him shelter (213). In contrast to other *pícaros*, Roderick suffers from this condition. His existence as a solitary is a result of the efforts of everybody to gain advantage over the next person as a means to rise in society. Roderick cannot depend on others and frequently feels like an outcast. How often does he lend money to a friend, only to be disappointed concerning its repayment? He invites his friends to a tavern although they have neither visited him nor helped him when he was in trouble (402). His former friend Gawky actually conspires against him.

On the other hand, like John Roderick himself is not able to establish serious relationships with friends. He neglects to care about them, and he does not have true feelings for them, although sometimes he describes the "agitations of [his] soul" (232).

To illustrate, on several occasions Roderick shows absolute disinterest in the experiences and feelings of his faithful friend Strap. He even reproaches him for describing his experiences instead of mentioning right away in which way he could be useful to Roderick (96) and treats him “in an affected passion” and with “finesse” (296). Whether it be Thomson, Mrs. Sagely, or Strap, Roderick always first inquires after the events concerning himself and only afterwards listens to their stories, if at all (253, 346). When Strap has the opportunity to go abroad, Roderick is glad about this chance of getting rid of his “friend” (108). Outbursts of feeling he mocks, for example when Strap is overwhelmed at seeing Roderick, who complains he “stifled and stunk [him] to death with his embraces” (94). Roderick does not go to meet his friends but finds them by accident (422) or else would forget about them, as is the case when he is about to embark on the slave trading journey without Strap (400). He even remembers Narcissa only after the affair with Melinda has ended.

His friends are normally a mere conduit for money to Roderick.¹² This is manifest when Tomlins dies and Roderick first lists the things he inherits and only then expresses his grief (208). Again, when his uncle Bowling goes to sea, the narrator spends several lines saying that he has been made his heir, never mentioning any concern for the wellbeing of his uncle. When his uncle visits Roderick in prison he does not call him “loved” or “good” uncle but “generous uncle” (398). At his reunion with Strap after a

¹² Roderick is thus a typical son of his times, as Giddings notes: “It is money that opens all the doors in this society, a society for whom there is no other value except money” (96). In Smollett’s last novel *Matthew Bramble* describes degenerated London society in which everybody fends for himself: “All the people I see, are too much engrossed by schemes of interest or ambition, to have any room left for sentiment of friendship. . . . Every person you deal with endeavours to overreach you in the way of business Your tradesmen are without conscience, your friends without affection, and your dependence without fidelity” (Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, Lewis M. Knapp, ed. and intro. [London: Oxford University Press, 1966], 121).

long absence Roderick is overjoyed “for his generous offer” of supporting him (253) – and not for seeing Strap. In another scene they “mingled [their] tears together for some time,” followed right away by “examining the purse” (73). At his chance meeting with his long lost father Roderick also instantly thinks of his “good fortune” and “advantages” for he “never doubted his generosity” (415). Lastly, on occasion of his marriage to Narcissa, Roderick describes his uncle “swearing that he loved her . . . and that he would give two thousand guineas to the first fruit of [their] love” (429).

If Roderick does not hope to gain money from his so-called friends, his relationship is in other ways calculating. He pursues the acquaintance with the Scottish priest in hopes of profiting from it and becomes friends with the other officers in order to get support against Crampley. This attitude of Roderick’s toward friendship is reflected in the use of the term “friend.” Since Potion will not provide for Roderick, this one-time good friend soon becomes a “pretended friend” (24), and the hero leaves “having not one friend in the world capable of relieving [him]” (23). When Roderick is ill he wishes “[his] faithful Strap” were there for “assistance” (114). Again, at sea Roderick thinks of England “where [he] had not one friend to promote [his] interest” (199). Mark the second parts of the utterances. In contrast, Morgan is a “friend,” demonstrated by the present of a few shirts (148). The surgeon, too, is a “valuable friend,” having given him a chest and clothes (155), and “his friend the master’s mate” is mentioned in connection with the present of a silver hilted hanger and pistols (201). Usually, after having received money from somebody, Roderick does not thank the person. Rather, he seems to expect others naturally to support him (95), while Roderick supposedly being a noble in character, it should be the other way around. The narrator appears to know this and sometimes makes

it sound as if Roderick had to fend off the monetary presents from his friends, saying Thomson “forced [money] upon [him]” (204), and a little later, Thomson “pressed upon [him] a purse . . . which [he] refused as long as [he] could” (206).

Even Roderick’s loneliness is doubtful, as the statements of the hero do not coincide with what the reader learns from the events or from the narrator in retrospect. For, although Roderick makes statements such as that his uncle is “the only friend [he] had in the world” (15) or he is “utterly abandoned” (19), he does have several true friends: “[his] trusty friend the serjeant, and honest Jack Rattlin” and Morgan (200), not to forget Strap, his uncle, Thomson, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Sagely, and several lesser characters. It just happens that Roderick often does not recognize true acts of friendship where they do not involve money. For example, during the dance on the lawn a soldier keeps Roderick company “on pretence of friendship, and insulted [him] with his pity and consolation,” as the narrator describes the situation (245). In another instance the serjeant he cured offers Roderick his bed, which is quite generous considering the conditions on board, yet Roderick does not call him friend. Freeman likewise behaves like a true friend to Roderick, believing in him and taking his side in public, yet, again, the narrator does not assign him the term friend. In all, Roderick seems to be too selfish to be truly interested in others, and with that attitude he frees himself for his own progress.

Not only in this respect does Smollett’s hero behave similarly to Defoe’s and Cross’s. In his ambition Roderick is comparable to Moll Flanders and John le Brun. All three characters introduce a decidedly eighteenth-century feature to the developing novel. He pursues his own interest, and he conducts business in order to enrich himself. His profit is always uppermost on his mind. Therefore, he worries about the slaves who die during a

fever first and only then mentions that Strap almost died, too (410). Likewise, he is so intent on growing wealthy that he reports on his progress concerning the recuperation of Narcissa's inheritance first and only then tells the reader of her pregnancy (435), although by that point he is already a wealthy man by most standards. Moreover, Roderick behaves like Moll planning his moves in order to succeed in finding a profitable position or a wealthy wife. In general, women are not important to Roderick other than as commodities, even after his marriage to his beloved Narcissa. There he bursts out, he "found her . . . a feast," and, what is probably more important to him, "those angelic charms . . . were now in my possession" (430). Judging from such behavior as cited above, Roderick in a way rationally pursues economic ends as economic man does according to Watt. The reader learns that Roderick, whether disinherited gentleman or not, could rise to a respectable position through industry as so many of his contemporaries succeeded in doing. Some of his acquaintance are in fact economically successful and thus prove positive examples in the era of economic individualism. Strap is industrious and leads a comfortable middle class life with his wife, the former Mrs. Williams, in the end. She is a reformed prostitute who has proven her merit. For she has followed her plan to regain her respectability in service, if not always completely honestly, and has a mind to business (128). Likewise, Roderick's seafaring uncle works his way up and becomes fairly wealthy, although he remains a working man. His father also makes a fortune. Even the wits and petty nobles are successful after a fashion. For they acquire the means to subsist and afford a pretentious appearance, if rarely by honest means. Yet Roderick himself fails until the *deus-ex-machina* ending.

He tries several venues to rise to a more comfortable position, as an apothecary's apprentice, a surgeon's mate, a servant, or a slave trader. But these occupations merely serve as positions from which to climb the social ladder once he has acquired enough money. With that money he would appear wealthier, to his mind true to his pedigree. This is problematic, because Roderick leaves off whatever honest work he has found when it does not earn him immediate status improvement. In order to satisfy his ambitions, Roderick the would-be nobleman then degrades himself in several ways in less honorable schemes. That is, out of the pair Jenny establishes, gentleman and businessman, or in other words honesty and corruption, Roderick chooses the latter. He prostitutes himself for the nobles to whom he applies; he takes part in the system of corruption connected with the granting of commissions; he drags the names of other people in the mud; he works as a fortune hunter; he even kisses a disgusting hag in order to secure her supposed possessions. In these unsavoury activities Roderick fails, which we assume signifies an implicit evaluation of them by the author. The pursuit of wealth and what I have more generally called ambitions, hence, might not be reprehensible in and of itself when honest, middle class people are intent on it. Yet in a person of Roderick's averred social standing and in the kind of negative aspect the required progressive qualities assumed in him, they are clearly judged negatively.¹³

¹³ In other writings Smollett voices the same criticism. He represents a corrupt society, in which morally compromised social climbers are controlled by self-interest, in his novel Ferdinand Count Fathom (1753), for example. The Count himself, intent on acquiring the wealth corresponding to his pedigree, is a villain throughout most of the novel. His monologue when he realizes this is revealing: "To what purpose (said he to himself) have I deserted the paths of integrity and truth, and exhausted a fruitful imagination, in contriving schemes to betray my fellow creatures; if, instead of acquiring a splendid fortune, which was my aim, I have suffered such a series of mortifications, and at last brought myself to the brink of inevitable destruction?" (Tobias Smollett, The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom, Damian Grant, ed. and intro. [London: Oxford University Press, 1971], 274).

For it is evident that as potential economic man Smollett's hero lacks certain behavioral and character traits, such as endurance, initiative, and diligence. Roderick exhibits a picaresque carelessness about his future unhealthy to any commercial activities or, in general, stratagems to get ahead. He claims to be "not much shocked at [being arrested], which, indeed, rescued [him] from a terrible suspense" (373). One would assume he should instead have taken measures to prevent this from happening. In addition several times he simply gives up and resigns to his fate after negative turns of events, being "amazed to find [him]self so much at ease" when he has lost everything gambling (369). He expresses a similar attitude when he lies down to die, fights a duel, and goes to war. Meeting Jackson in prison, Roderick "congratulate[s] him on his philosophy" to "defy care and anxiety" (374-75), which is a decidedly picaresque philosophy. Curiously, work as a way to solve his financial problems does not enter his mind. Instead, he "resolv[es] to perish for want, rather than apply to [his] companion or any other body for relief" (72), that is to say, he behaves like a noble was supposed to. In another instance, he considers suicide his only option (370). As a true *pícaro*, in yet another scene he simply enjoys his life to the full (300), when he sees debtor's prison or worse looming above him.

Usually, Roderick is passive, although he often manages to express this flaw positively, describing his attitude as a "resolve . . . to submit patiently to [his] fate" (162) or his "old remedy patience" (249). He even feels he receives Narcissa "as a reward for all [his] toils" (254), while the reader wonders to which toils he might be referring. He does work at times and not only the way of work of a gentleman, namely gambling (321). Yet he does so only reluctantly, as his reaction to suggestions regarding occupations

demonstrates (254). And he does so mainly when somebody else procures the job for him (96). Even then, “a bargain [has to be] struck, so that [he can] not retract with honor, should [he] be never so much disposed thereto” (400). Already his way of looking for work, namely depending on introductory letters and loitering in the anterooms of lords, is unsuccessful. Meanwhile, Strap’s proactive way succeeds.

Roderick’s dependence on letters appears to be the other face of the coin we could call passivity. In contrast to the successful middle-class progressive figures around him, the hero prefers words to actions. As he does not belong to this social stratum, his words have no effect. From the very beginning of the narrative, writing plays an important role. An inability to write confines him to his low status. Notwithstanding, he produces a diary, yet what good does it do him? His diary is called “a book in cypher” and made out to be the work of a Catholic spy, which almost costs him his life (173 ff). When he gets the yellow fever onboard ship and asks for permission to lie with the soldiers in written form, he is denied (190). His slanderous publications about his cousins have the desired effect in the beginning yet prove disastrous to their author later. The introductory letters he receives from other nobles do not work to his advantage either. Even letters written by Crab (31) and his uncle (22) on his behalf do not yield the expected positive results for Roderick.

It is the same with spoken words. The schoolmaster does not believe Roderick’s words (114). Moreover Roderick does not have words to appease captain Weazel during an argument either (53). The captain and his wife likewise merely become the laughing stock of their audience, affecting an impossibly educated language as part of their appearance as nobles. In Roderick’s environment only actions count, it seems. To Crab it

is of no account that he has studied surgery “in books” (27). To him, practice is all that matters. Similarly, his uncle does not value the empty words of Roderick’s cousin which are not followed by actions. He replies to the threats of his cousin “none of your jaw” and takes his cudgel, that is, action (9). During their assault on the teacher it is telling that the only true noble, Gawky, assists with shouts while the others act (17). And while the other grandchildren as well as the judge cry alligator tears over the death of Roderick’s grandfather, his uncle tells the truth and then follows that by action (11). Indeed, language spoken or written by new men might ironically have the opposite effect as desired. When on their journey in the coach the passengers are supposedly attacked by a highwayman, only Jenny sort of acts, crying “if I have rhetorick enough, the thief shall not only take your purse, but your skin also” (58). All in all, the aspirational language of the hero is ineffective. Yet at the same time, he does not act as would be necessary for a person of lower rank either.

Roderick does not grab at opportunity when it presents itself. In contrast, frequently he is slow to decide on a course of action and ends by doing nothing, merely “reflecting on the severity of [his] fate” (238) or standing “forlorn and undetermined” (243). Likewise, on his way to London to meet Narcissa he thinks of committing robbery in order to eat, but does not (368). Again, he neither attacks the captain nor engages him in a duel either, because, he says, that would be on too “easy terms” (106). Later he wants to enter the army or navy, “between which [he] hesitated so long” that he becomes the victim of a press gang (139). Or else, when he gets pistols and a horse to retrieve his love, he again exhibits a misguided activity. He is dissuaded from using violence yet then does not take any action at all. Luckily for him, during bad times Roderick can rely on

several friends to support him while he himself does not have to work. Such is the case when Strap finds work, which will “save [Roderick] a considerable expense” as well as “lay up something for [his] subsistence” (377). As Roderick states, “the business was to make ourselves easy for life, by means of *his* [i.e. Strap’s] legacy” (254, emphasis added). This is really what the aristocracy did with *their* legacy and what Roderick would have been supposed to do as a true nobleman.

Roderick’s inability to bring an enterprise to a favourable end according to a previously devised (business) plan constitutes another flaw in his behavior. Admittedly, sometimes he plans ahead. For instance, together with his uncle he plans the attack on his teacher. Moreover, he executes his plan to visit Narcissa while his ship is waiting for favourable winds (403). These are not long-term plans in order to advance economically or in status in socially accepted ways. In contrast, in cases in which a plan would be needed for his progress he proves shiftless. He either has no plan at all (29, 139, 236) or it is a passive plan, namely hoping for somebody else’s – Strap’s, his uncle’s, his father’s, Narcissa’s – fortune. Contrary to him, lesser figures such as Strap or Mrs. Williams do successfully follow their careers once they have devised a way to do it and thus demonstrate that such foresighted behavior is considered good. Of course, earlier *pícaros* did not plan either, which brings Roderick into kinship with them. Yet the episteme in which they were created did not comprehend individual progress.

In order to progress economically and socially, the individual in Smollett’s time had to be business-savvy. Their progress to their final socio-economic positions shows that his uncle and his father as well as Strap are business-savvy. Contrary to them, Roderick lacks that quality, due to which his situation in the end is not convincing, as will be

shown farther down.¹⁴ He sells his belongings for half their worth (25, 321) and quite often squanders away his money buying splendid clothes, instead of lying up stock as Strap would do. In general, he does not have a mind for financial matters, and it is beneath him to haggle over the price of a wig as Strap does (68). It is an apt irony that he tells Strap “he might command [his] purse to the last farthing” (33). His uncle Bowling has the same negative impression of Roderick’s ability to handle money, so only gives him 1,000 pounds, retaining the rest in his care (400). Jenny, Jackson, Banter, and diverse clergy and administration get away with their profit without negative consequences, albeit not rising in status either. Meanwhile, Roderick is usually punished for his – dishonest – attempts to make money.

Much of it is due to failing in his finesse as he calls it. Where Roderick treads on the path of virtue, he succeeds. Thus, while Jackson’s fraudulent attempt to pass the Navy exam fails, Roderick acquires the necessary document by honest means. Acting in good faith, he achieves relief for Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Gawky. Not least, through practice and diligence he becomes a good soldier without resorting to trickery. For the most part, however, he treads on the path of vice, and here finesse is called for, which our hero attempts but fails at. He does not gain insight into the composition of the medicines, that is, the business practices of his master, although he tries (99). In another instance, he is not clever enough to avoid having to pay his debt (315). For although in retrospect the narrator imputes it as a noble quality, to the reader it is evident that other scoundrels would have been able to find a way of not paying, as Roderick has in fact affirmed just

¹⁴ Following Rousseau, John Skinner, “Roderick Random and the Fiction of Autobiography,” Auto/Biography Studies 9, no. 1 (1994): 104-05, reads Roderick’s failure to improve his economic position as well as the recovery of the family seat in Scotland autobiographically rather than generically.

before. The hero's finesse does not work on the occasion of trying to retrieve his ring, and nor does his "fine scheme" to get back his watch (314). As a fortune hunter he himself is the victim of two female representatives of that line of business. Once he is actually fooled with the same ruse as his own, being so credulous as to believe a *billet-doux* although he himself has written one to his victim. His case proves that finesse would be needed in order to succeed, and since this is certainly an ignoble quality, it demeans even social climbing.

To sum up, the hero gives in to his fate, admittedly quite like a *pícaro* but unlike a profit-driven self-made man. He is passive and rejects normal work for dependence. His reliance on words instead of actions additionally marks him as an inept idler. True to the picaresque tradition he does not have a design for his life with long-term goals met through industry. Instead, he puts into effect little schemes, usually work-avoiding measures more than anything else. What Watt calls rational pursuit of economic ends as a defining feature of economic man, does not belong to Roderick, who, in contrast to Robinson Crusoe, lets sex – and even love in Narcissa's case – interfere in his plans. On top of that he is not in any way business-savvy, for he loses money constantly and falls from moderately secure positions to ignominious ones repeatedly due to his own stupidity. When he takes part in business he evidently prefers dishonest ways – and fails. In the novel, then, doubts are raised as to the possibility of acquiring a fortune by honest means in commerce. The possibility of achieving new internal values by men such as Roderick is equally questioned.

A Noble *Pícaro*?

In Roderick Random the narrator finally needs to explain how a *pícaro* ends up in the position of a wealthy landowner. This is his picaresque case, the reason for which he tells us about his life.¹⁵ Like Moll and John, Roderick wants to show his true character, namely that he is really a gentleman, which would justify his final status. In contrast to Defoe's novel, however, this novel expresses scepticism of progressive ideas of individual worth. Roderick is no economic man, we have seen, although he aspires to wealth and status based on a fortune. His position in the end is unmerited from a progressive point of view. But could his success be reconciled with a conservative point of view? Due to the double discourse, the answer the novel gives is ambiguous. The hero wants to be a gentleman of a conservative sort, his status derived from birthright rather than from socioeconomic indicators. In the era of class consciousness this concept was already quite anachronistic,¹⁶ and so it had to be adapted to contemporary social circumstances in order to regain validity. In terms of content then, the dynamic genre of the picaresque illustrates its ability to accommodate residual elements into new social ideologies. It does so, too, in a parallel movement in terms of form, as will be discussed later on.

True to aristocratic ideology, Roderick would like to possess a fortune on the basis of his pedigree and what he considers his natural noble qualities. One essential aspect of nobility has for centuries been honor. In the following pages I hope to show that in

¹⁵ The contrived romance ending is therefore part of the structure of the picaresque novel as will be shown below.

¹⁶ See, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ed. and trans., From Max Weber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 181-87, on the terminology of rank and class.

Smollett's work the chivalric code of honor and a new one are juxtaposed in a double structure of what the protagonist does and what the narrator affirms concerning his nobility. Both are placed in doubt. The historical *pícaros*, by contrast, lacked honor. They used all sorts of ruses and clandestine machinations to keep their heads above water. No activity was so low as to demean their characters, and no amount of lying could destroy their reputation, for they had none to guard. They certainly did not duel to prove anything like the nobles around them did. Roderick's antecedents could therefore portray their earlier vices mercilessly in their autobiographies in order to illustrate their reformation – as well as to delight the reader, of course. While Smollett's narrator claims to do the same, he retrospectively tries to impute dignity of character to the protagonist. In fact, he thinks he is noble by birth, which in his eyes would justify his success despite the chicanery committed on his way to regaining his rightful place in society. Yet the reader will see presently that like all *pícaros*, and despite his claims, Roderick lacks traditional honor after all. He cannot therefore substitute traditional honor for what he lacks in terms of progressive qualities in order to – in his opinion – restore his status. Consequently, on a progressive as well as a conservative viewpoint his final position of honor justifying wealth, or honor matched with wealth, is a case that needs to be explained.

For a reader who believes the narrator, Roderick appears to be of innate nobility, and his descent from a good family confirms this assumption. The narrator represents Roderick as very intelligent: “the boy's ability was more owing to his own genius and application, than to any instruction or encouragement he received” (5). As a child he is the best student, automatically the leader of the group, and his “uncommon genius . . . boldness of temper, and strength of make” mark him as extraordinary (6). He is even

“handsomer and better built” than his cousin (10), and he does Gawky’s school exercises. Roderick surpasses these genuine noblemen. In contrast to Narcissa’s brother, Roderick knows French and Latin and is well-versed in poetry. He has “a great deal of learning” (95) and later completes his aristocratic education on a Grand Tour and learns to dance and to fence. He feels naturally comfortable at plays and masquerades in Paris as well as in coffeehouses in London and is instantly admitted into higher company. Others also attribute noble blood to him. Strap always takes it for granted that Roderick has “less humility to stoop, and more appetites to gratify” (370). The barber even imputes the sensitivity of his friend to the stench of garlic to noble blood (306). Narcissa and Mrs. Sagely likewise see in him the unlucky gentleman from the start, and his fellow servants call him “Gentleman John.”

However, the use of the term gentleman itself is ambiguous in the novel and puts the affirmations of the narrator into doubt. It is employed with a wink of the eye without differentiation to denominate the nobility as well as lower people of honest character.¹⁷ Thus Strap calls himself an “honest gentleman” (73). Equally, it can refer to a *valet de chambre* (334) and in fact to any male person, such as a fellow traveller (43). Several times in the novel, the term is used ironically to describe negative behavior attributed to aristocrats such as aloofness (145), incompetence in the professional world (187), and effeminacy (197). In addition, most of the aspects Roderick cites in order to establish his noble character are refuted in the course of the narrative. The pedigree of the hero should not be considered too weighty, as Morgan’s comical tracing of his own ancestry down to Caractatus shows (147). Likewise, the comments by the narrator regarding Mrs. Williams

¹⁷ The inclusiveness of the term could also be an expression of contemporary status insecurities in general.

(354) and Strap (95, 315) demonstrate his skewed self-assessment. Although they have both proven far cleverer and more honorable in their endeavors to rise themselves, he nevertheless thinks himself better. The supposed noble character traits of the gentleman Roderick are also represented tongue in cheek. For Roderick proves his learning in a ridiculous two-hour Latin duel with a weird doctor who becomes a laughing stock (265), exhibits his noble sensibility by weeping ridiculously at a play (257), and always wears his fine clothes and jewellery with affectation and self-consciousness. Ironically, the hero is drawn to his own kind in prison. There the gentleman Melopoyne gives learned lectures which nobody but Roderick understands (375). This pretended classical author is not accepted by society; only Roderick adheres to his traditional notions. Roderick's baseness is also demonstrated in direct comparison to real nobles, when he disregards decorum and Narcissa maintains it (344). Moreover, in the end he does not relieve his poor relatives, while his father takes pity on them and supports them financially, taking responsibility as befits a genuine nobleman.

Apart from the fact that Roderick is an unreliable narrator, the demeanor of the protagonist also clearly denies an inner nobility. Above all, it shows that Roderick lacks honor, for he neither exhibits the aristocratic code of honor found in classical literature, nor the progressive concept of honor found in novels, which might substitute for the former when that no longer corresponded to period thought. According to progressive thought, internal and spiritual honor was available without class distinction to everybody

who acted morally and true to one's conscience.¹⁸ Credibility, increasingly taken as *economic* credibility, constituted one aspect of the new concept of honor. This concept of honor included the character traits of economic man by which people advanced, and thus proved grace. Yet Roderick lacks such honor and instead tries to affirm his noble honor. The principal aspects of this included, in medieval England as well as in the historical *pícaro's siglo-de-oro* Spain, the inherited noble title, a reputation for and pride in courage and magnanimity, and a chaste wife.¹⁹

Roderick does not have traditional honor. His actions betray his ignominy, as is best shown in the duelling scenes. A *duello* was "'trial by combat' between quarrelling nobles" which with God's help the rightful combatant would win.²⁰ Its outcome was providential justice in a pre-ordained world, a view incompatible with the modern concept of man as agent.²¹ In a warrior caste duelling should prove the courage of a man

¹⁸ Reta A. Terry, "'Vows to the Blackest Devil': *Hamlet* and the Evolving Code of Honor in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1999): 1070-086, traces the transformation of the concept of honor as it became internalized. While still being bound in part to the chivalric concept, honor came to be "a matter of conscience" (1071), men of honor being committed morally to the word of God and politically to the state.

¹⁹ "Honor fundado en mujer" in the words of José Manuel Losada Goya, "Honor a pureza de sange en *El Quijote*," in Giuseppe Grilli, ed., *Actas del II Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Cervantistas* (Naples, Italy: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1995) (395). Additionally, in Spain *limpieza de sangre*, pure blood, was mandatory for nobles and plays a major role in the historical picaresque. There was a "traditional connection between courage and nobility," as John Casey, "The Noble," in A. Phillips Griffiths, ed. *Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), notes (138). According to Casey both Hume and Aristotle consider pride in one's courageous actions a constituent of honor. David Castillo and Ellington William, "All the King's Subjects: Honor in Early Modernity," *Romance Languages Annual* 6 (1994), argue that in Baroque Spain "despite being conceived as patrimony of the soul, honor has little or nothing to do with internal virtue . . . [but] is contingent on public knowledge" (424) – in other words, on reputation.

²⁰ The phrase is Brian Parker's, "A Fair Quarrel (1617), the Duelling Code, and Jacobean Law," in M. L. Friedland, ed., *Rough Justice: Essays on Crime in Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 55. Parker describes the history of duelling and explains God's hand in the duel according to Vincentio Saviola's *Practice* (1595).

²¹ However, this view expressed in Roderick's "noble" comportment in duelling has epistemic connections with the elements of romance found in this novel.

as a pre-eminent ingredient of his honor. Even during the social changes of the seventeenth century, a reputation founded on courage could still secure a man his position within the nobility. By Smollett's time other values had gained ascendance, and the deliberate quarrel in order to rise oneself to a higher rank had become a means for an upstart to enter the aristocracy and had debased the duel.²² By partaking in it and frequently reaffirming the need to defend his honor in that way, Roderick proves his conservative value system yet paradoxically his status as an outsider to that class as well. Additionally, he is a coward, that is, dishonorable, since he usually does not fight a duel through. On one occasion Roderick proposes a duel only because he thinks the other is a coward and will not consent (290). When his rival does appear, they merely converse after a short, apparently pretended volley. On another he is "no ill pleased to find [his enemy] had no mind to meet [him]" (25), instead of being disappointed about not getting the chance to vindicate his honor. Again, when a guest in an alehouse makes fun of the hero, he decides to challenge him only on Strap's prompting, and then he is relieved to hear the other finds an excuse not to duel him (62). In one real duel, Roderick hurts his antagonist when he thinks he has himself been wounded mortally (365). He thus only wins accidentally, playing unfairly. Tellingly, in other instances in which Roderick is challenged to defend his honor, he fights in the style of the lower classes, boxing, and not "like gentlemen" (155) – or not at all. This he does, ironically, on the pretext of his honor (227). Clearly, in contrast to what he affirms, with his zeal for duelling, Roderick does not prove his honor but rather the contrary.

²² See Eugen Weber, "The Ups and Downs of Honor," American Scholar 68, no.1 (1999): 79-91.

While duelling is perhaps the most prominent motif, other incidents also reveal his lack of honor. Again and again Roderick does not mind the damage that his actions could do to his reputation. For instance, it does not matter to him that Crab will attribute his maid's pregnancy to Roderick (30). His financial well-being here seems to exclude any notions of honor he might have. Moreover, Roderick acts without dignity, ignores the bad character of his acquaintances, and makes wrong ethical choices. Motivated by his hopes for her fortune, in his *tête-à-tête* with the old hag the hero manages to overcome his repulsion for a very long time, until the smell of her gases causes him to vomit. Again, although he notices the bad character traits of Lady Snapper, he pursues her anyway for her fortune (331). He is as ready to give up his convictions as his moral standards. Thus he states, "as to the difference of religion, I looked upon it as a thing of too small moment to come in competition with a man's fortune" (239). Contrary to Narcissa, Roderick has no "dignity of pride," since he would renew the acquaintance with "friends" who reappear only after he has grown rich (431). If he displays the constituent of honor, pride, it is in the aberration of vanity, as he himself frequently affirms. Or he is proud of unethical actions, which equally disproves his honor. Roderick has an amorous complexion, as he calls it. While in the case of libertines higher status is ascertained through power over women, Roderick's pursuit of women for their money has no such ennobling effect.²³ And while the old-Spanish Cid avenged his people thus proving his honor, Roderick's lust for revenge appears in petty actions like writing slanderous letters about his relatives.

²³ See Sarah Ellenzeig, "Hitherto Propertied: Rochester's Aristocratic Alienation and the Paradox of Class Formation in Restoration England," *ELH* 69:3 (2002): 703-25, on the noble's relationship to the lower classes and women.

Judged by his character traits and actions then, the *pícaro* deserves a fate similar to that of various other unworthy nobles with like deficiencies. Their pedigree and social standing do not correspond to any merits, and consequently they are demoted in the end. For instance, Roderick's fox-hunting cousin is a degenerate aristocrat "qualified for nothing else" (7) who exhibits similar cowardice, passivity, and immorality as Roderick. As for so many of his contemporaries, the military is his only opportunity to redeem himself in the end. Gawky, who squanders away his money and instead of working gambles, likewise fails as a just punishment for his ignoble behavior. Diverse lords and petty nobles like Straddle and Banter maintain only the appearance of status yet are derided and clearly negative examples of unworthy nobles in the novel, not to mention the effeminate aristocrats who languish on board the navy ships. In contrast, Mrs. Sagely, the old woman of blue blood who is in fact honorable as well as well-educated and noble in her comportment, is not accepted by her neighbors for lack of money and status (215). The same could happen to Narcissa. She is a relic from romance or aristocratic ideology, an example of innate nobility and traditional honor automatically matched by wealth. Some expressions do suggest a less than perfect behavior when she "offer[s] to . . . espouse [Roderick] in private" and "prompt[s him] to indulge [him]self on this occasion" (363). She is only eligible for her inheritance when her degenerate brother acknowledges her virtue proven by her marriage choice. The reader knows that her marriage choice is everything but sound until the very last moment when her lover is miraculously raised to an equal position. The validity of a traditionally defined honor such as hers, hence, is equally questionable. Similarly, individual merit acquired through honorable action and awarded with (modest) economic success to an essentially low person does not confer

nobility and corresponding status to that person either, as various *vitae* such as Strap's, Uncle Bowling's, and Mrs. William's illustrate.²⁴ Strap is "looked upon . . . as the first gentleman of their race" by his family alone (434), and the narrator takes care to stress who is responsible for his final ascent through financial support.

Yet in nobles with progressive inner values these are matched in the end by money and social rank which complete their nobility.²⁵ This is the case with Roderick's father – and also with Roderick, as the narrator intends to show. The former flees the fate which would await a fallen noble. Without financial support he would have been forced to remain inactive had he followed the traditional expectations regarding the behavior of one of his class. By his escape then he steps out of the social confines of his degenerated nobility and becomes a new kind of noble whose economic stature is based on a fortune acquired through exertions in commerce. In the end, he is able to buy the family estate to match his inner worth with corresponding high status after his cousin has gone bankrupt. Remarkably, Roderick's father, as well as Thomson, is only able to equate his inner values with outer status in the New World, which introduces doubt about the concept of nobility Smollett seems to espouse. Further doubt is of course raised through the case of the hero himself. When he returns to the social state he feels he has a right to, ideally he enters a class of economic men who have earned, or rather reassured their nobility with hard work. The riches he possesses in the end should therefore correspond to his inner

²⁴ Roderick's mother is a negative example. She lacks the stamina so highly valued in economic individualism: she dies of grief and desperation over her cruel father-in-law. Economic woman, we assume would take her freedom from the shackles of the social conventions of the upper classes as a chance to develop her talents and survive splendidly. But who got the chance to become free apart from widows?

²⁵ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), explains that "the moral quality which only propertied independence could confer, and which became almost indistinguishable from property itself" was traditionally associated with civic virtue (51).

worth. Since he lacks traditional honor – which is not capable of securing economic wealth, that is, the outer signifier of nobility anyway – he should have character traits of economic man to substitute for it.²⁶ The reader has learned of enough instances, however, that show Roderick's inner values do not match his final status on that progressive view either. His romance master-narrative justifying his position as wealthy landed noble is disproved in the *pícaro*'s micro-narrative, and Roderick's final position remains unjustified.²⁷ The validity of Smollett's conciliatory concept – of nobles of blood enforcing their inherent nobility by obtaining progressive honor – is therefore placed in doubt. Here again, the picaresque novel's double structure expresses ambiguity about the correspondence of inner values to outside markers during a period of changing frames of reference.

In this way Smollett turns backwards from empiricism to scepticism. Contrary to what some critics affirm, Roderick Random illustrates that what the senses observe, namely the outer markers of nobility, does not necessarily correlate with the substance of

²⁶ I disagree with Beasley, who believes in the reformation of the hero in prison. Roderick's self-discipline receives strong support through the timely arrival of his uncle Bowling. It is, furthermore, quite easy for him to stay on the right path henceforth with the assistance of his father's riches.

²⁷ The romance assumption that his character has changed through the purifying agent of his love to Narcissa is, at least by the contemporary standards of narrative verisimilitude as practiced by Henry Fielding and Samuel Johnson.

it. The signifier can exist without the signified and vice versa.²⁸ Not everybody in the novel shares this notion, and especially the protagonist and the narrator disagree on the issue. In order to discuss this aspect of the novel, we have to differentiate between looks meaning facial features, physique, and apparel of a type on the one hand; and appearance meaning clothing and accessories as markers of a class on the other hand. Here as in the picaresque novel in general, the figures that appear in the novel are frequently types and often described in caricatures. Their looks do not reflect individual characters and should be seen as stylistic means. Thus, Uncle Bowling (8), Crab, Captain Weazel, Strap, and many others at some point are caricatured. In contrast, sometimes the figures are depicted in a more realistic mode in today's sense of the word, in which especially certain more or less expensive pieces of their clothing are emphasized. Clothing here could be meant to mark them as belonging to a certain class, for instance the heir's "gingerbread work" (9) and Captain Whiffle's dress (194-95). Hence Strap's looks of chagrin over his friend's bad luck are caricatured (357), while his appearance after he has inherited his master's possessions is that of an aristocrat (250). Roderick as well as Narcissa believe

²⁸ The present investigation, thus, comes to a different conclusion from Thomas R. Preston, "The 'Stage Passions' and Smollett's Characterization," *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974), 105-25. Preston argues for Smollett's belief in a correspondence of the external to the internal as illustrated through his representation of passions through bodily reactions as in drama. Rosenblum, 44, points to symptomatology in the contemporary representation of character. He explains that the appearance of a person was believed to reflect their moral goodness or badness. A disguise was suspicious since only one who had something to hide would carry it. The aspect of disguise has already been discussed in this paper. It has, I hope, conclusively been shown that disguise and what is behind is disjoined in Smollett's novel. Meanwhile, Steven Bruhm, "Roderick Random's Closet," *English Studies in Canada* 25, no. 4 (1993), notes the same "disjuncture" of "the former contingency between performance and identity" (406), albeit regarding sodomites, that I find in the novel. Concerning the distinction between Whiffle and Strutwell, Bruhm finds that "performance is necessary to the solidifying of identity" (411). He thus points to the same epistemic insecurity as I do, but merely in another field of signification.

appearances and assume corresponding inner values in a person of a certain appearance.²⁹ Seeing Strap turned “gentleman” in fine clothes complete with big wig and ring, Roderick is afraid his friend has changed in character accordingly (249). In his opinion it would actually be bad to appear different from what one is. “I could not bear to see a man behave so wide of the character he assumed” (241), he states therefore in another instance. On various occasions his *inamorata* demonstrates a similar attitude, seeing in Roderick “much of the gentleman in . . . appearance and discourse” (223). When he wears fine clothes in Bath, in her opinion he “appear[s] in the character which she always thought [his] due” (339). Again, in response to the rumors about Roderick she firmly believes him to be “the gentleman [he] appeared to be” (360). These two judge people according to appearances, and often arrive at wrong conclusions. For example, like John Roderick draws wrong conclusions from appearances regarding the importance and nobility of the patrons of a coffee house (261). He is duped quite often by people who take advantage of this trust in appearances, for instance by the landlord who, appearing educated and civil, can easily trick Roderick (50). The latter also believes the wrong directions of the man whom he trusts “by his countenance” (64) and is astonished to find that a “gentleman richly dressed” with “a good deal of sweetness and good nature in his countenance” will not help him (243).

While Strap is fooled in the same way, there are several figures who do not trust appearances. Morgan affirms “there was no trusting to appearances” (159-160). Jenny likewise sees through the fake appearance of the captain in the coach (50), and the

²⁹ Bruhm affirms that “Roderick and his compatriots thought they could conclude that such signs [effeminate dress and behavior] transparently signified a certain kind of identity or subject position” (402-03).

attendees in the Long Room in Bath slight Roderick despite his noble appearance (355). This attitude towards appearances seems to be championed in the novel, as the wiser Roderick as narrator no longer trusts appearances either. For example, after his loss at a sword fight against an apparently poor Frenchman whom Roderick at first did not take for a gentleman, the narrator concludes, "I soon found the folly of judging from appearances" (247). He also claims to have learned not to trust the supposed lady's appearance he meets in a playhouse (259), although the events prove the contrary. That the appearance does not have to be inherently connected to what lies underneath is evidenced by the fact that clothing and accessories as outside markers are clearly not fixed to a certain person, that is, to certain inner values in the novel. For they can be pawned, bought on credit, and given away. Roderick himself often receives his clothes from others. In these cases he is therefore clearly mistaken in his assumption of having reached a higher rung of the social ladder. If his clothes depended on any substance – the signifier on the signified – he would not get nor lose them that easily. All in all, the events of the story do not support the master narrative of the hero describing the recovery of his position as an aristocrat being illustrated through his changed appearance. In this aspect then the meaning of the novel again remains ambiguous due to the double structure of the picaresque novel.

Throughout the entire novel Roderick attempts to acquire wealth, which remains an imaginary value, always imagined to be rightfully his yet never securely attained. Only in the end does the imaginary value materialize and the hero appear the noble that he supposedly is all along. In fact, Roderick wants to produce the situation in which external nobility corresponds to inner virtue, yet it becomes clear that status inconsistency such as

in Roderick's case cannot be bridged simply by amassing money. In the novel money cannot substitute for honor or merit, neither in the aristocracy nor in the new men of the middle classes. That way the novel criticizes the rise of dishonorable yet wealthy upstarts to the ranks of the nobility. It also criticizes the outdated concept of chivalric honor and lineage as the justification for noble status and wealth. From that it follows that the aristocracy cannot persist if it does not adapt some of the elements of progressive ideology and redefine its concept of itself. The form of the picaresque novel with its double structure could express these doubts and the resultant conciliatory concept, which was rooted in the past but modified in the present to point to the future.

Romance Conventions in Roderick Random

As is common in picaresque novels, in Smollett's novel there is a gap between the sinner character and the repentant narrator. The narrator imposes a narrative interpretation on his life story in order to justify his final status – or explain his case – although he lacks both inner, progressive merit and aristocratic honor as we have seen. Doing so, he retrospectively assigns his desire to providence as in Moll Flanders, and here the master-narrative takes the form of romance. While the romance with its happy ending, ideal heroine, and noble fortunes apparently contradicts the *pícaro*'s micro-narrative with its low-life vicissitudes, quotidian occupations, and humble characters, it is not out of place as some critics have claimed.³⁰ Rather, the romance is part of the

³⁰ Fredman judges "romance has no place in the picaresque" (206). For her, Smollett "appears to be attempting, most unsuccessfully, to fuse two incompatible modes" (206).

picaresque double discourse, and this juxtaposition has the definite purpose of offering social criticism ambiguously.³¹

Since the term romance is used variously, it is necessary to explain in what sense it is used here. In his preface Smollett describes as romances improbable, extravagant, embellished, and exaggerating stories in poetic language and with stock elements that narrate the making of heroes. He must be referring to the heroic and didactic romances and oriental tales that were so popular in his time. Samuel Johnson mentions some of the stock elements of such romance: it could “employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, [or] knights to bring her back from captivity; it [could] bewilder its personages in deserts, [or] lodge them in imaginary castles.”³² Whilst made topical, frequently referring to current political subjects and contemporary life, romance was not probable, due to which “the prevailing spirit of the time was decidedly anti-romantic,” as Beasley remarks.³³ For Smollett and Fielding, the probability of events and characters distinguished good writing, while it did not have to be realistic in our sense of the term. In his preface he therefore distinguishes from romance the novel, for instance Cervantes’ Don Quixote, which is a reaction to the former and is, contrary to it, “useful and entertaining” (xxxiv). He takes care to present his own work as less fantastical and more serious even than his model, the French Gil Blas. Indeed, there are no supernatural

³¹ Rosenblum argues that Smollett consciously employs the romance form in order to represent satirically contemporary reality *ex negativo* through this anachronism. Beasley champions a similar explanation. T.O. Treadwell, “The Two Worlds of Ferdinand Count Fathom,” in Harold Bloom, ed., Tobias Smollett (New York, New York: Chelsea House Publishers: 1987), 33-50, describes the dualistic structure of what he calls the world of satire and the world of romance in Ferdinand Count Fathom.

³² Johnson, 19.

³³ Jerry C. Beasley, “Romance and the ‘New’ Novels of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett,” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 16 (1976): 438.

elements in Roderick Random. The narrative is mostly circumstantial, about observable experience, but we will see presently that it is also quite romantic as well.

In the present study romance and its adjective romantic do not refer to the fantastic, sensational literary works of Smollett's contemporaries but to the classical form of fiction as described by Frye in his history of the novel Secular Scripture.³⁴ Descended from folktale and therefore "fabulous" and "creative" with the prime function of entertaining, romance in this sense is "the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life."³⁵ It can be either popular or elite. In order to entertain it is sensational and from the beginning included for example violence in adventures and a love story ending in sexual union. These ingredients are what Frye calls archetypes, "the formulaic units of myth and metaphor."³⁶ Although romance according to this critic is non-representational, to become credible in a certain age these units are adjusted or "displaced." This mechanism of "displacement" can be of varying degrees.³⁷ On the one end of the scale are the romances Smollett described, which are little displaced, and giants or medieval knights appear as anachronisms in a generally modern setting. On the other end is the novel.³⁸ As very displaced literature it tries to conceal its design, states Frye, to show probable

³⁴ See Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

³⁵ Frye, 15. On the contrary, myth, the "real" or "true" branch of verbal experiences, wants to explain society, according to Frye. Ben Edwin Perry, The Ancient Romances (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), maintains that the novel's origins lie in the ideal as well as the comical romances, that is, he conflates Frye's two categories in one general term, romance. He explains that in order to be true, serious narrative fiction in prose included a great deal of plasmatic invention. The picaresque, however, was not regarded as serious and thus did not have to be true in that sense.

³⁶ Frye, 37.

³⁷ Frye, 36.

³⁸ Frye notes, "It is clear that the novel was a realistic displacement of romance, and had few structural features peculiar to itself" (38). Frye even calls the novel "parody-romance" (39). Watt treats the novel as opposed to romance.

causation and avoid coincidences. It represents events probable with regard to character and has a horizontal perspective towards a solution – corresponding to the modern world view of progress, one might add. Meanwhile, the classical romance has a vertical perspective in which the ending echoes the beginning on another level of experience – as it were, like the ever-repeating truths of human existence. Romance “is more usually ‘sensational,’ that is, it moves from one discontinuous episode to another, describing things that happen to characters, for the most part externally.”³⁹ From this description the proximity of the historical picaresque novel to romance becomes clear, and maybe therefore Smollett could employ elements of it in his modern picaresque novel meaningfully.

Following Frye we may continue with a description of the elements of romance as defined above. In romance there are two clear poles of good and evil in the idyllic and the demonic worlds, as Frye calls them. Through the loss of identity the hero moves from the idyllic world to the demonic world of alienation, and after the recovery of identity he moves back to the idyllic world again. In this cycle he “goes through a series of adventures and combats in which he always wins.”⁴⁰ Such a description hardly applies to the hapless *pícaro*. The hero of romance has a fixed identity from beginning to end, so that his character never develops. Frye states that the success of the hero is due to inner energy like courage, and outer energy like noble blood or destiny, or what I have called

³⁹ Frye, 47.

⁴⁰ Frye, 67.

traditional honor in the investigation of Roderick's worth.⁴¹ In romance the hero does not know his origin due to an internalized or externalized amnesia motif, and often "a sharp descent in social status" follows this loss of identity.⁴² In each stage of the descent or fall the hero undergoes metamorphoses. In the lower world, marked by (ritual) cruelty, the hero is alienated and alone. He acts through violence (*forza*) or fraud (*froda*). The trials of the romance hero in the demonic world are followed by his ascent, for instance through the discovery of his real identity. After the recognition scene the hero returns to his natural position, his quest completed.

Many critics, for instance David Jeffrey, Harold Gene Moss, and Rosenblum, have conclusively shown that romance elements can be found in Roderick Random,⁴³ so yet another quest to prove that fact is not in order. Rather, I want to argue that Smollett's novel is not thereby a romance. Admittedly, some romance elements coincide with elements of the picaresque novel. Thus, the episodic structure, the status of the hero as an outsider in an adverse society, the travels and adventures, as well as the case as a

⁴¹ Frye: "Sentimental romance gives us patterns of aristocratic courage and courtesy, and much of it adopts a 'blood will tell' convention, the association of moral virtue and social rank implied in the word 'noble'" (161).

⁴² Frye, 104.

⁴³ See David Jeffrey, "Roderick Random; the Form and Structure of a Romance," Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire. Belgisch tijdschrift voor philologie en geschiedenis 58 (1980): 604-14; Harold Gene Moss, "The Surgeon's Mate and the Adventures of Roderick Random," in Peschel Enid Rhodes and Edmund D. Pellegrino, eds., Medicine and Literature (New York: N. Watson Academic Publications, 1980), 35-38; and Rosenblum, "Smollett and the Old Conventions." In fact, the former two consider the novel a romance. Rosenblum, "Smollett and the Old Conventions," finds several "transformed" or "mythologized" romance motifs (86). Beasley, "The New Novels," sees only "rudimentary gestures in the direction of romance" in Roderick Random (449). For an investigation of romance elements in Roderick Random on the basis of Frye's theory see Jeffrey. See also Moss and Skinner. The latter's discussion of the five central episodes that in his opinion structure the novel is, however, quite unconvincing.

development of the quest, are romance as well as picaresque features.⁴⁴ The static character of the *pícaro* is likewise to be found also in romance, as are the two worlds, high and low, with little contact and different values, and especially the low one in which the *pícaro* succeeds through violence or cunning. The *pícaro*'s disguises and different roles even could be related to the metamorphoses of romance. These aspects are very much displaced romance elements within the picaresque novel (I doubt they should be referred to as romantic). At most they are evidence of the origin of the genre in romance, the very broad original genre from which all (novelistic) fiction might stem.⁴⁵ Other features, however, appear mismatched to the narrative.⁴⁶ Those are the ones of importance to my argument since to my mind a special meaning can be attributed to the novel through them.⁴⁷ Above all, the ending has to be mentioned here as part of the "typical romance sequence of disinheritance and exile followed by recognition and restoration."⁴⁸ Alter considers the "comically bad" ending merely a "disastrous failure of imagination."⁴⁹ Others likewise fail to see any meaning to it. Giddings finds, "the moral

⁴⁴ Rosenblum, "Smollett and the Old Conventions," 399, is of a different opinion. For him, in Roderick Random Smollett uses romance as an anachronistic and hyperbolic element to satirize the present. The protagonist reaches a prescribed position like the hero of romance and lacks the freedom of the *pícaro* to become someone else.

⁴⁵ See Frye. Of course, other critics like Davis trace the novel's origin back to the news-discourse. In its relation to reality and truth this discourse is opposed to mythical writing. There is thus a similar dichotomy in Frye's theory of the novel's origin.

⁴⁶ For Beasley "there is a bit too much reliance on easy romance convention to suit this novel" (71).

⁴⁷ I do not want to decide the question whether Smollett *intended* this meaning. It might be with Smollett as Frye explains of Jane Austen in Mansfield Park (1814) that "it is not that Jane Austen is a woman novelist expressing a woman's resistance to social conditions governing the place of women in her time. She accepts those conditions, on the whole: it is the romantic convention she is using that expresses the resistance" (76-77).

⁴⁸ Rosenblum, "Smollett and the Old Conventions," 87.

⁴⁹ Alter, 76.

point of Roderick Random is lost by the rambling form and the too sudden pulling together of the threads at the end of the novel Smollett's grasp of the form was not adequate to his moral intention . . . to expose the corruption of society."⁵⁰ In contrast, the present study intends to show that romance elements within the picaresque are part of the picaresque double discourse and do carry a certain meaning. In the case of Roderick Random they are connected with the aristocratic ideology found in the novel and in a parallel movement on the level of literary conventions point to the same insecurities in the developing new episteme.

One romance element in this picaresque novel is the much discussed ending.⁵¹ So much has been written about it because "the entire thrust of the work . . . does not tend toward the ending that Smollett gives it," as Rousseau concludes.⁵² A romance version of Fortune intervenes and by improbable means – the *deus-ex-machina*-like wealthy father – restores Roderick's patrimony, so that he appears a romantic hero who regains his rightful place in society after a long quest, just as the narrator has intimated all along. In romance, predestination would be the explanation for the implausible ending. In fact, Roderick himself claims that "fortune" and "providence" (425) caused this ending. All occurs according to plan, or rather to Providence, just as in his mother's dream, in which Roderick is depicted as a plaything of fortune within a preordained concept and destined for something great. Like the ending, the dream shows an external, deterministic scheme. Yet the possibility of ascent from below for this hero is not at all natural, since Roderick

⁵⁰ Giddings, 93.

⁵¹ To my knowledge, only Wicks, 301, argues that the ending does not warrant the appellation of romance. Notwithstanding, Wicks also calls Roderick Random a "pseudo-romance" and a "modal mix" of picaresque and romance (239).

⁵² See Rousseau, "Smollett and the Picaresque," 1894.

is neither inherently noble nor does he meet progressive requirements to merit his final success. He is neither rewarded in the end for achievements in knight errantry nor for economic acuity. Instead, his wealth and status come suddenly and unjustifiably. The romantic concept of predestination is disproved by events. Not following the same causal relations as the rest of the story does, the ending seems contrived in the context of picaresque narrative, for the story is driven by the petty actions of the antihero, and they are evidence of man's responsibility for his fate as in progressive thought – as well as of Roderick's failure. The little events have primacy in the picaresque novel. Roderick does not have one grand plan but small, everyday concerns as in formal realism. Hence the knight's quest takes on the form of the *pícaro's* case, of the *pícaro's* retrospective justification of his deficiencies. As part of the picaresque double discourse then, this displaced romance element fits the rest of the story after all.

The ambiguity of the novel regarding character development is another aspect connected with the question of genre and hence has to be mentioned here again under this rubric. The romance ending would affirm the assumption of a romance character whose actions are predestined and whose natural position is in the nobility. The picaresque narrative runs parallel to romance in so far as the historical *pícaro* is indeed a plaything of fortune. However, the fortune of the *pícaro* is usually not directed towards a certain end. Moreover, as has been demonstrated, in this novel progressive thought enters the picaresque to modify the form considerably. On one level the hero is represented as developing and changing under its influences, while on another he is marked as a character fixed from his birth. As part of this discourse, the dream describes the existence of a master-narrative in which the hero has to find his place, as in romance. In other

words, he does not have to develop into a person who has to achieve something according to the merits acquired as in the modern novel and economic individualism, but in romance he simply regains his identity. It is true, throughout the novel Roderick acts in different circumstances according to the nature of his character like in romance and does not develop although the narrator claims he does. Yet his character traits determine the outcomes of the episodes rather than Fortune in the guise of a monarch's demise or a great deluge at the wrong time. The events before the ending are all caused by the hero himself, by his own stupidity, his lust for revenge, and so on. The ending alone is an exception since it happens without rationale. The predestined happy ending for the naturally noble hero of romance stands against a progressive class system, in which each person advances based on merit independent of lineage, and for a conservative system of rank, in which each person had an assigned place in the social hierarchy determined by blood. As both the ending and the hero's character of the romance discourse are improbable in the context of the picaresque novel, any preference for a social order is simultaneously put into doubt.⁵³

Lastly, the familiar romance love-plot of Narcissa within the picaresque also contributes to the ambiguous message of this novel. In romance the constancy of the virtuous woman usually reforms the noble rake so that they are both truly noble in the end. With his identity and his natural position restored, the hero marries. While this interpretation of their relationship and, consequently of Roderick's character would

⁵³ Edwin Williamson, "Challenging the Hierarchies: The Interplay of Romance and the Picaresque in *La ilustre fregona*," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal, and Latin America* 81, no. 4-5 (2004), explains the effect of the conflation of idealistic and realistic aspects is "to sow doubts about the verisimilitude of the romance elements" (669). Williamson states, "the notion of honor as a birthright thus becomes an open question as Cervantes interrogates the relationship between honor and virtue, and by extension, the notion of social hierarchy itself" (657).

clearly suit the narrator of Roderick Random, the behavior of the protagonist speaks another language. His marriage leaves us with a strange taste since the reader knows that Roderick has had various amorous adventures with strictly economic objectives while professing his love for Narcissa. True love is only possible here in a comfortable economic position whose moral legitimacy is questionable. Roderick's marriage is actually a sign of the decline of the aristocracy since, instead of securing the line by marriage as was common in Smollett's time, the marriage to the virtuous lady serves as a means to ennoble the antihero. Instead of corresponding to romance tradition in which both the hero and his lady are worthy, the marriage of the hero is an expression of contemporary status insecurities and in fact a critique of the social hierarchy.

The three most prominent romance elements in Roderick Random, namely the ending, the character of the hero, and the love story, all disprove what they ostensibly express in terms of social attitudes. The ending illustrates that status and wealth no longer came naturally. The hero's character shows that pedigree and honor were not necessarily connected. The love story places in further doubt the legitimacy of inherited titles. To sum up, on second look the romance elements emphasize the main statements of the picaresque narrative modified according to eighteenth-century thought.

Adapted Form With Meaningful Content

In the beginning of the chapter I stated that Roderick Random is a novel that reverts to older ideas and conventions. It is a picaresque novel containing romance elements, which has made some critics doubt its belonging to the picaresque genre. As this chapter has shown, the dynamic concept of genre facilitates the adaptation to other influences,

new and old. Here, the romance elements are in fact part of the picaresque double discourse, that is, they are in a way part of the very qualities which make the novel picaresque. They are an adequate means to convey the ambiguous ideas of the novel, which are similarly ambiguous. While in Moll Flanders the traditional and modern discourses collide to express a preoccupation with capitalist economy, and in John le Brun interact to represent doubts about aristocratic values, in Roderick Random Smollett moves one step farther and integrates romance to deal with the traditional social order. The novel is very critical of the contemporary social developments and discovers, maybe unconsciously, problems of signification which are connected with them. Smollett's hero is a noble *pícaro* who, like all *pícaros*, does not have a secure position within society even though the case seeks to prove the contrary. On the one hand, the novel represents the protagonist as virtuous with reference to some ordering principle of society – aristocratic, progressive, or a combination of these two, conservative. On the other hand, Roderick is insufficient on all counts, since he is neither economic man, nor a traditional noble, nor a noble by merit.

The religious concept of Smollett's time still included Providence, and romance with its God-contrived world and strict poetical justice expressed that view. Yet, as Melvyn New explains, in Roderick Random "the probable and realistic" on the one hand and "control and design" on the other compete.⁵⁴ The kind of realism of a romance does not fit the realism of the picaresque novel. In other words, two different levels of displacement clash. Concerning the representation of reality Smollett's fiction reflects the

⁵⁴ Melvyn New, "'The Grease of God': The Form of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction," PMLA 91 (1976), 236. He argues that the eighteenth-century novel reflects the Protestant faith of the time. Romance elements, then, are evidence of the struggle of religious novelists to come to terms with a God-ordered world in their increasingly secularized times.

transition from one system of explaining man's life to another. His novel wavers between the old explanation of God's ordering of the world with stable social hierarchies founded on the conditions of birth and given qualities, and man's own power to shape the world and to determine his position in it based on his own application. The romance elements answer to the former idea while the picaresque novel as a whole answers to the latter through its ability to adopt contemporary thought. At the same time, Roderick Random illustrates that the novel is able to incorporate residual elements of genre just as an ideology is able to incorporate residual elements of social concepts in hegemony. Thus epistemological and ideological questions intersect as the reappearance of aristocratic ideology in progressive ideology parallels the reappearance of romance elements in the novel.

CHAPTER 5

DELIMITING THE GENRE: TWO EXAMPLES

This chapter discusses two eighteenth-century novels not previously objects of critical analysis and not in the canon. These two examples nonetheless shed important new light on the problem of delimiting the genre. Many critics would probably count both works as picaresque novels, while this study argues for narrower limits. In my chapter on Frank Hammond (1754) I examine a forgotten picaresque novel, worth a second critical look, since its form and content do not display picaresque features meaningfully. Its form seems rather a gesture to the genre than a means to transport ambiguous social commentary. While the narrative preserves the double structure central to the genre, it is not intricately interwoven with the plot and characterization, and so promises a less committed critique.¹

A second novel from mid century, Edward Kimber's Joe Thompson (1750), serves as counterpoint. It cannot be considered picaresque, finally, even if it bears many picaresque features, because throughout it exhibits too many aspects of other genres. Joe Thompson

¹ By means of a hand-written list in the possession of Edward Kimber's great-great-grandson in 1935 as well as other notes and a comparison of the novels attributed to Kimber, Frank Gees Black, "Edward Kimber: Anonymous Novelist of the Mid-Eighteenth-Century," Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature 17 (1935), 27-42, – to my knowledge, Kimber's sole twentieth-century critic – proved Kimber's authorship of seven novels and one adaptation of a French novel. He compares names of figures, motifs, places, and narrative technique of Joe Thompson to those found in Kimber's other novels and summarizes the novel's plot. Although Kimber's novels are forgotten today, Joe Thompson alone went through eight editions between 1750 and 1789 and was translated into French and German. Kimber's novels were reviewed in The Monthly Review X (1754): 147; XVI (1758): 261; and XXXIII (1765): 86. He himself wrote regularly for The London Magazine under the pseudonym of P.V.C. in the 1740s.

might better be seen as representative of those novels that, for whatever reasons, took on picaresque traits while projecting a far more agreeable social world. The narrator lacks those bitter and doubting sentiments of the marginalized protagonist seeking access to the existing social system. Kimber's novel is in fact critical of the contemporary social order, yet neither in form, content, nor in the ideology it proposes is it as deeply ambiguous throughout as are picaresque novels. Rather, it clearly favors a reformed landed gentry as the guarantor of the nation's continued prosperity. Its narrative discourse finally turns into a conservative romance, corresponding to the residual ideology it expresses.

Frank Hammond – Unadapted

Whether coincidentally or intentionally, the anonymous novel The History and Adventures of Frank Hammond borrows many ideas from Spanish Golden-Age picaresque novels. These include the general structure as well as a number of motifs, character traits of the protagonist, and even the central theme of free will versus predestination.² On the other hand, the reader guided by the picaresque horizon of expectations looks in vain for other picaresque characteristics such as an initiation incident, typical pranks, and satirical observations from the fringes of society.³ The setting in time is a bit incongruous and narrative features are far less adapted to eighteenth-century literary conventions and ideas than in other novels discussed so far. For these reasons a possible social import within the contemporary context is not readily

² The narrative betrays no explicit intertextual references to picaresque novels, nor unfortunately do we know anything about the author's background.

³ Many current critics follow Todorov in considering the picaresque genre as a frame through which to receive the narrative. See my comments in the introductory chapter of this study.

apparent, and doubts may arise as to the inclusion of this novel into the picaresque genre overall. The following discussion tentatively unravels the ambiguity of content that comes with the double structure of the novel. It argues for the membership of the novel in the illustrious circle of the picaresque on the grounds that in a genre not every work can exhibit all of the accumulated generic features, and that the overall character of the work is in fact that of a picaresque novel, even if in the terms of an outdated baroque manner. Most of the motifs such as the hero's hunger, his outcast position, his tricks, travels, and shifting roles are not adapted to the social circumstances of the eighteenth century. So reified, or transformed into commodities not signalling outside themselves,⁴ they are no longer capable of transporting cultural meaning.

A Baroque Picaresque

Frank Hammond exhibits a number of picaresque features which can be found as far back as in the peninsular founders of the genre. First of all, it is a pseudo-autobiography. It is also an episodic narrative of self-contained adventures not connected other than through their temporary end in the *pícaro*'s precarious final situation. The narrator feels the need to justify his position at the time of narrating, namely his marriage to a fallen woman. This constitutes his situation, which he stylizes into a "Pilgrimage" (6, 30), implying a progressive development up to a certain end.⁵ In order to explain his case, he relates his life up to that moment, beginning with his childhood. The origin of the hero is conventionally ignominious. Comparable to the *converso* heritage of most of the Spanish

⁴ See Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁵ Rico considers this element as the single most defining characteristic of the picaresque novel.

pícaros, Frank is the offspring of a fervent royalist, whom history has proven to be on the wrong side of the cultural divide. His father fought against Cromwell's Parliamentary forces and "acquitted himself like a true *English Gentleman*" (10),⁶ the narrator states. There can be no doubt about the correctness of Frank's patriotic attitude and his Anglican creed, which he emphasizes perhaps more ardently than is necessary. Instead of receiving the expected preferment upon the restoration of Charles II, however, he finds himself still dispossessed and slighted by the establishment. Moreover, the *pícaro's* pedigree is tainted like Lazarillo's since his father made a rather disreputable escape from prison dressed in woman's clothes, and his mother's conjugal alliance to her man is placed in doubt by her calm and unfazed actions immediately upon his death. Although formerly "of a considerable Fortune and Figure" (9), the family is evicted and reduced to poverty through the enforcement of Commonwealth policies.⁷ Soon after, Frank is orphaned when his mother and two siblings die of smallpox in London, where they have moved from the country. From then on, the *pícaro* is on his own and without lasting personal relationships.

Like any self-respecting *pícaro*, Frank has various masters, occupations, and temporary homes along the way, and he travels the country in picaresque-like fashion. He feels the "Hunger and Necessity" (7) generally suffered by the indigent part of society and like his literary ancestors is frequently "Moneyless, Friendless, and Disconsolate" (134). Only rarely is he sad or despairing, or bereft of ideas as to "what to do in this hard

⁶ Future page references are to The History and Adventures of Frank Hammond (London, 1754).

⁷ For a concise relation of the play of factions and changing alliances, of acts passed and revoked during the three decades following the year 1637 in which the narration begins, see Kenneth O. Morgan, ed., The Oxford History of Britain (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Michael Maurer, Kleine Geschichte Englands (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998).

conjuncture” (27). Rather, he meets new situations head on, demonstrates the typical light-hearted curiosity about the persons he meets and their occupations, and easily adapts to changed circumstances. Like the early *pícaros*, he never makes long-term plans and only sometimes behaves in a somewhat more farsighted manner. These instances include when he goes to London in hopes of the restitution of the family estate, when he devises a strategy in order to find accommodation as a shepherd, and when he deceives the parents of a pregnant woman. Frank does not actively look for means for his provision, but rather, like Lazarillo, he accidentally meets people who suggest he take up a certain occupation, a profession he follows until he finds reasons to quit. The hero learns the profession, as he calls it, changes into “a suitable habit” (151), takes on a new name, and disguises his voice and dialect. Like his Spanish models, this *pícaro* takes up various roles with summary ease. As opposed to his predecessors Moll, John, and Roderick, though, Frank has no great sense of a proper personality, and he is more malleable than those individuals. At most, he is “sufficiently puzzled to get over” thinking up a proper lie to avoid having to tell his real name and situation, and of finding a practical way to “dispose of [his belongings] so that there might be no Discovery” (168). The reader is, in fact, also puzzled, for without a fixed character essence, this *pícaro* has as little to prove or to hide as his baroque models.

Frank exhibits a picaresque mindset, which the contemporary reader would conventionally condemn – as well as delight in, of course. In his ruses this *pícaro* does not exhibit malice *per se*, nor does he particularly enjoy his tricks. Neither has he qualms about deceiving others, however generous and amiable to him they may be. He also does not worry about the possible effects of his dissimulation, imposing on sick people,

preaching impossibly high morals, and palming a bastard grandson off onto his future parents-in-law. While Frank's irresponsibility is picaresque, his pranks are only in part those one would expect of a *pícaro*, and they are few and far between. He participates in the chicanery of the mountebank, he deceives others in disguise and lies to them, but does not seriously harm people. Often his tricks consist of manipulating others and taking advantage of their compassion and generosity, for example when he writes begging epistles. Yet here is a *pícaro* who does not pursue any higher goal, such as Moll amassing money to become a gentlewoman and Roderick proving his merit as a noble. Frank's attitude towards his rogueries resembles rather Lazarillo's towards his actions, that is, necessary and practical ways to extricate himself from an immediate situation. His acts of deception are the means to earn a small hand-to-mouth existence and to obtain temporary shelter from his compatriots, either in cooperation with a more seasoned trickster or, increasingly, on his own.

The *pícaro*'s lack of ambition and initiative in shaping his own life, which the contemporary reader would have noted, is supposedly due to the fact that the inequality between men is part of God's order, as the narrator affirms in the beginning of the novel. Since "Divine Wisdom . . . design'd some for honor and Riches, and others for Contempt and Poverty," only "now-and-then" easing their misery (5), it would not make sense to put much energy into efforts at individual improvement. The narrator therefore presents the several activities of the character as mere responses to Fortune, who inevitably rules his life like that of a *pícaro*. After his aunt dies, and his master and tutor both leave him as well, he resolves "to commit [him]self to the Mercy of [his] cruel Step-mother Fortune" (28), who had "play[ed] the Jilt with [him]" (26). Later, Frank leaves his

teaching position in Leighton, when his “cruel Stepmother Fortune, began again to try her Experiments upon [him]” (122). In a letter he blames the “impetuous Gust of hard Fortune” for his need to move on (126). Similarly, after not having received the expected compensation for his father’s services to the Crown, the hero “resolved once more to commit [him]self to the blind Guidance of [his] hard Stepmother Fortune” (145). Supposedly, his “unlucky Fate pursued [him]” as a shepherd, too (194). This *pícaro* at first sight appears not to be able to escape his preordained life.

On second glance, these instances of Providence interfering or Fortune cutting him down to his predestined size seem to be a comfortable way to shift the blame for his setbacks away from his own inadequate, free-will decision making. For from his childhood on there are numerous charitable people who very readily support a person in need: The woman who takes care of him and his brother, his aunt who provides for him and sends him to university well equipped, his tutor who takes special pains to teach him, the various generous nobles, the justice, the shepherds, and so on. Frank could lead a comfortable life, it seems. Instead of being satisfied with his God-given situation as the narrator advises the reader and later admonishes his brother in a letter to be, however, the hero is always discontent with his lot and breaks free of his position apparently without substantial outside pressure. This pattern is similar to that of Guzmán, who cannot bear to be married and to lead a reputable, assimilated life and therefore flees. Like the older *pícaro*, Frank primarily follows his own intrinsic motivations, aims that fail to conform to expected bourgeois ideals. He could try to find a new employer instead of selling his books and leaving university as soon as his master goes on a Grand Tour. His decision not to break his promise to the mountebank to accompany him even after learning about

his dishonesty, is wrong by common ethical standards. Later, he admits to a “rambling Itch and Inclination to see the Country” (114) and even considers a career as a mendicant priest. Characteristically, he is not prevented from it by worries about the dishonesty and immorality of making his countrymen’s beliefs his tools, but rather by fear of imprisonment. He also suddenly quits his teaching post, presenting his decision as the only option if he wants to avoid harming the daughter of his master. Meanwhile, his concession that “neither [his] Circumstances nor [his] Temper would in any Respect agree with such a state of Life” is probably closer to the mark (124). Likewise, he gives up his comfortable life as a shepherd for other reasons than he openly admits, his excuse of not wanting to give scandal to some relations of his seeming like an afterthought (200). Like Guzmán, that is, Frank repeatedly opts to leave the regular, socially accepted trajectory open to him for the chance of a far less secure, unsettled, and ethically questionable picaresque existence. The narrator’s frequent mention of Fortune is a thinly disguised attempt to divert censure of his mis-applied free will.

The Picaresque Double Structure

The controversial treatment of the question of predestination versus free will is possible in this novel as in the Golden-Age Spanish models through the picaresque double structure. The narrator retells his *vita* from a temporal as well as moral distance, representing some of the character flaws of his younger self which he has overcome. In that undertaking he attempts to appear trustworthy according to contemporary literary conventions, giving detailed lists of his possessions and of prices, mentioning exact times (109) and dates (146) and reporting “to the best of [his] Remembrance” (105). Even

where he “faithfully” recounts his letters, for instance, he “cannot tell” what his excuse for the delay in coming to Leighton was (118). Like the other *pícaros* we have met, the narrator is evidently unreliable. He not only reinterprets the motivation of the hero, as we have seen, but his representation of events is also frequently not consistent with the way they really happened. His conversion into a morally upright, assimilated citizen is questionable, and the *pícaro*’s case is not satisfactorily accounted for.

The narrator gives the impression that he is wiser now than he was as the protagonist of the story. For instance, he sees the necessity of the arrest of the mountebank and himself and calls the justice “a Gentleman of an extraordinary Temper and Compassion” (110-11). He also knows that his own vanity caused some of his troubles, admitting that he was “but too easy to be persuaded in that Particular,” meaning his “Parts” and “Qualifications” (25, 94). In contrast, Frank the character is very naive, a quality the narrator represents unvarnished. His attitude towards the “unfortunate Gentleman,” the mountebank, demonstrates his naïveté after that man’s supposedly “ingenious and candid” explanations (51). The decision of the *pícaro* to tell the landlady the truth about his empty pockets, right after his last experience had proved that honesty does not pay, is also too naive.

The distance between the narrator and the character is constantly emphasized, as in the description of Frank’s journey to Cambridge, “as [he] then thought” (31), during which he hears the story of his travelling companion, which “*at first* looked very near a-kin” his own (35, emphasis added). The other man’s “Fortitude . . . under his *pretended* Distress” actually cheers him up (37, emphasis added). Unsuspectingly, Frank notices that his friend “sent his satchel with the Carrier, which, of a sudden was grown too heavy

for him” and “could not suspect that he could have any Design to betray [him]” (55). The naïve protagonist has again “no Grounds to suspect to the contrary” of the appearance of the supposed clergyman (81), yet the narrator knows that the trickster “ingratiat[e]s” himself to him, “pretend[s]” to learning (83), and with “hypocritical Compassion” listens to Frank’s story (83-84). As happened with the mountebank, since “there was not the least Ground to suspect him” (84), the hero is frank when his honesty only gets him into trouble, as he later finds out. Repeatedly, the temporal distance in the retrospective narration is stressed as well. With hindsight the narrator sees that his decision to make a detour before following the lord’s advice “was the worst” (29). He could have prevented his arrest with the highwayman had he slept in the hay-mow which, “as it happened afterwards, had been the better Choice” (131). Sometimes he “learn[s] afterwards” (52) what was really going on and finds out “from the Sequel of the Matter” what he did not understand at the time (92). In these instances the narrator appears wiser at least, yet whether he is also more principled than the character, as he pretends to be, remains doubtful.

The narrator has undergone the sort of moral improvement, the reader assumes, which would qualify him to relate his case. However, the term *morality* and its cognates are employed in a strange way, the false clergyman “morally propos[ing]” a scheme (96). While the narrator affirms one thing, the protagonist really does another. Frank’s actions are reinterpreted and his motivations for his mischievous acts glossed over. In the relation of events no censure is articulated. Rather, the dubious morals of the narrator become apparent and his explanation of the case is hence not credible.

Throughout the narration the narrator belies his own words, and there is a discrepancy between his assertions and what the events themselves show. Right after he has complained about the avarice of the wealthy, the narrator says he will not complain. Likewise, when he has just praised his experience working as a shepherd as the best of his life, he mentions “melancholy Reflections” (173) about his “former and present Condition” (174) and deplores being “sunk to the lowest Ebb of Life” (175). He speaks of his long leisure hours during which he reads, then complains about not being able to read, and so on. His letter to his brother in London gives advice against fighting one’s destiny, being proud, falling in with immoral persons, and being dishonest in pursuit of one’s goals, which is entirely the opposite of how Frank the character acts. Contrary to his own advice not only there but also in a letter to the captain and through several other figures, Frank is not careful in choosing his friends, believes appearances, and does stay in London for a long time hoping for tangible signs of the king’s gratitude. While in the beginning he preaches a stoical acceptance of fate, later on, he cannot understand how a person can tolerate being tossed about by Fortune “like Tennis-Balls” (147).⁸ He argues against the possibility of being a virtuous mendicant, yet at the trickster’s arrest Frank’s innocence is emphasized though he participated in the deceptions. A truly virtuous narrator should then be glad to have been rid of a criminal, rather than expressing sorrow about “being divided from [his] Companion” (113), as this deceptive narrator does. Lastly, he deplores in verse the fact that dishonest men rise while the virtuous fall, while his own case demonstrates to the contrary that someone with a dishonorable past and

⁸ The same image appears in Roderick Random.

resolutely ambiguous principles may unexpectedly inherit a very large fortune. The aged narrator continues to be a *pícaro* whose words the reader cannot trust.

In order to represent himself as a sensible man, and to justify his meriting the staggering wealth inherited from his uncle in Bengal, the narrator reinterprets his former actions and motives. For instance, his literary begging career appears to have taken off contrary to his “Modesty” (61), “Dissatisfaction and Uneasiness” (107). Although Frank “had much ado to reconcile [him]self to this ungrateful Expedient” (100), and it takes “a great many Intreaties from [his companion]” to persuade him to it (100), a number of letters and poems are then quoted in full, and the pride of the hero in his talent is mentioned several times. The affirmation that he supposedly wanted to make “an honest Livelihood” likewise contradicts the actual decision of the character to accompany the beggar instead of working as a teacher (95). Young Frank’s ignorance of the beggar’s tricks, cited to excuse his unethical activities, is hardly credible after a month of cooperation. Frank the character does not abstain from drinking out of prudence, as the narrator implies by mentioning, “The whole duty of man” (79-80). Rather, his “Constitution utterly unqualified [him] for a hard Drinker” (80). His deception of the pregnant woman’s parents, where he presents himself as the husband of their daughter, in fact helps the *pícaro* to obtain accommodation for a few days. It is retrospectively made to appear as a charitable and honest act which “qualified the young lady to shine in the honorable Condition of a Widow” when the supposed husband simulates his death at sea shortly afterwards (247). Hence, although the narrator would like to ascribe honorable motives to his actions, his behavior remains committedly roguish.

Nor does it help that in some instances the activities are paraphrased to sound better. In fact, this actually highlights the persistent questionable morals of the narrator at the time of narrating. The repeated use of the terms *doctor* and *profession* for the description of the cheats of the mountebank obscures the fact that he commits actual crimes. The frauds of the so-called clergyman, in which Frank actively takes part, are likewise euphemistically called “mendicant Conveniences” (108). “The innocent Imposture [Frank] had . . . put upon [the pregnant woman’s parents]” is hardly that (265), but a serious act of disrupting the legal line of succession through the secret introduction of a bastard. The narrator not only covers up his own moral lapses, but also those of his wife. He is in a moral bind here, because as a virtuous person he has to acknowledge her error. At the same time, he cannot admit having married a fallen woman, since it would negatively reflect on his own honor. The narrator therefore represents her in a better light by stating that at the time of losing her virginity out of wedlock she was younger (but only two years younger) that she gave in just once (but it only takes one time to lose one’s chastity) and that the lord was subtle, violent and artful (although her relation of the events and her Pamela-esque part in them might imply something else). He concludes, “I could not think but she must now be reckoned a most virtuous woman” (255). Even this affirmation is ambiguous because what really seems to matter is not her actual virtue but the reputation of it. The lady herself, who has “feigned” sorrow towards her parents and is now staying in London (258), that is, exposed on the marriage market, calls herself guilty and contemptible, yet penitent and virtuous. This notwithstanding, in the same breath she deflects the responsibility for her sin “which, indeed, ought rather to be charged on [her] Deluder, who, practiced in the Arts of dissimulation, took Advantage of

[her] Youth and Experience to undo [her]" (261-62). Never mind that it was she who went into his room in order to read there, when he assaulted her. In some, they are both quite hypocritical.

The ending of the novel contributes nothing to clarify the case either, though the narrator seems to think otherwise. In fact, the verse he offers the reader as a last powerful rhetorical device expresses quite the opposite of what is intended. Comparing her to a spring, the water of which is not less refreshing merely because others have drunk from it before, he makes her appear a prostitute. Noticing that his argument is rather less convincing than he intended, he tries again, adding another verse which speaks of a conscience "untainted by Vice" (267). He is clearly wrong again, as we have seen. Having reached the end of his narration, like Lazarillo, the narrator has not achieved his aim of explaining the case and clearing his name. Corresponding to the episodic structure of the events which could be continued *ad infinitum*, the case of the *pícaro* itself could also be opened up again, this picaresque novel typically lacking a definitive conclusion.

Form and Content

Yet what is the ideological import of this and other picaresque features present in the novel? One wonders whether the picaresque elements of the novel were employed with a certain objective, that is, whether the form has a particular function here as it does in Defoe, Cross, and Smollett, namely to express ambiguous social criticism. Or was the form employed merely to follow literary conventions in order to profit from a popular literary vogue, an aim that might also create a kind of undirected ambiguity not easily

brought together with a particular ideology?⁹ The dynamic concept of the genre posits that historic Spanish picaresque features adapt to new epistemological circumstances. Following Jameson, genres are institutional contracts about the perception of signs, that is, conventions which carry a certain cultural meaning in their form. As long as they are living, able to take on new meanings, they are ideologically valuable. Traditional conventions, which Jameson calls residual generic elements, can vitiate a genre if they are carried over to the next stage. Thus in economic individualism the solitude of the *pícaro* is turned into an expression of self-sufficiency, while the episodic structure is transformed into an expression of the individualized, contingent decisions, rather than the unified story of a predestined life. The picaresque hunger, which turned into modern ambition, and the traditional honor motif, which turned into a person's credit, are also residual generic elements that have been shown to carry new cultural meaning in the other three picaresque novels discussed. In Frank Hammond the conventions either have not been adapted, or have only insufficiently been adapted, and are consequently drained of meaning. The royalist origin of the *pícaro* is an anachronistic in its eighteenth-century context. The *pícaro*'s travels, apprenticeships, and disguises, and other picaresque elements lack particular functions. They are meaninglessly repeated as commodities merely to please the consumers of the mass product the genre has become.

Frank follows prior *pícaros* in traversing several sectors of society in his itinerant life, without criticizing them. The *pícaro* moves outside a society which does not offer that much material for criticism, and he apparently does so of his own accord. Although he

⁹ Of course, every text when read against the grain has some ideological import other than that which it ostensibly says or does not say on the surface. However, my point is that the picaresque is revived throughout history whenever the social circumstances remain unresolved, and the genre with its two-sided form contains the ambivalences especially well.

does meet and team up with dishonest impostors, on the whole he looks favorably on his society, including the social positions and professions of his inoffensive companions, who are good company and provide food. Teachers and tutors instruct well, and students are admirably studious; the higher strata comply with their role as God's stewards, dispensing some of their wealth hospitably; justice and law enforcement officers are just and efficient; the clergy follow their task piously and diligently; the shepherds lead the modest, quiet life that is expected of them. Displaced figures like petty criminals, dissenting priests, and seduced women live fairly well, forming part of an interdependent social network. The credulous masses are entertained by them; the nobles exercise their charity to benefit them. In all, society is represented as well-ordered, if not entirely virtuous. Nobody really falls out of that society with its elastic moral boundaries, and yet the *pícaro* attempts to marginalize himself. However, in every new situation he is immediately comfortably installed among nice, well-meaning people. After a while, then, Fortune or his own actions gratuitously alter the situation. The ensuing changes of place, of occupation, of master, and of role appear forced. The reader gets the impression that they are due to the conventional self-restlessness of the *pícaro* rather than contemporary social demands. Moreover, Frank changes into the baroque types of a quack and a beggar rather than the then culturally relevant types of a corrupt businessman or a Grub Street writer. Unadapted like this, the picaresque change of roles does not contain social criticism. In the case of Frank Hammond the *pícaro*'s lack of conformity also fails to teach virtue *ex negativo* as in the other picaresque novels discussed. His acts of deception do not threaten the social order. In fact, the ethical inoffensiveness of the existence of the

pícaro seen in its historical and cultural context expresses moral complacency. Why else employ the double structure if censure is not in order? one wonders.

Joe Thompson – A Hybrid Novel

Like Henry Fielding's Tom Jones (1749), which it resembles in many ways,¹⁰ Joe Thompson has elements of the *Bildungsroman*,¹¹ the novel of sensibility, as well as the picaresque novel. Perhaps even more clearly than the well-known classic, Kimber's novel is in part a romance with strong religious overtones. Over all, it expresses a positive attitude toward society and the cultural developments of its era, such as the role of the moneyed classes in the forging of the nation.¹² Differences between London and the country are mentioned frequently, and the latter is favored as regards the style of its edifices, its pastimes, and the education and health of its population. It voices clearly Whig patriotic sentiments about reformed religion and commerce. With regard to the ancients-moderns debate amongst scholars of the Enlightenment era, the novel emerges on the moderns' side in its representation of controversial aspects of British culture and

¹⁰ Not only do several figures' names like Joe Thompson and Sir Walter remind one of Fielding's novel. The portrait of the useless titled nephew, Mr. Rich, is similar to that of Blifil in Fielding's novel, which was published one year before Kimber's. The work's dramatic organization is likewise very similar, as are certain character traits of the protagonist and certain social and cultural assumptions. The arguments posited here against Joe Thompson's inclusion in the genre could therefore also be adduced to deny Tom Jones membership in it. In his preface Kimber develops a similar theory of the probable in narration as Fielding does. He distinguishes history and biography "gilted" with "Fables and little Tales" to make them more tasteful from "fictitious Lives and Histories" and Romances, which "corrupt unwary Youth" (xi). Romances, according to the author, are known to be invented and therefore do not impress, that is teach, the reader as history and biography do. The latter two represent "Real Life founded on Facts ... where everything may be depended upon, and goes upon the Standard of Truth ... you see nothing either impossible or improbable in the Narration" (xii).

¹¹ Some critics date the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* to the late eighteenth century and see Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795-1796) as progenitor.

¹² Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) uses the term to describe the processes of the British nation-building. She discusses the Whig social order, in which the moneyed gentry had a special interest in the nationalist project.

society as diverse as poetry, architecture, the military, and love marriages. It can be said to lack the picaresque dilemma of seeing all too clearly the negative aspects of available discourses and ideologies and its failure to arrive at a satisfactory cure for society's ills. In the horizontal plot development the figures have to reach certain points, such as a state of maturity, and a certain position, a true love-marriage, and wealth to maintain an estate. Joe Thompson has a decidedly happy ending, in which all problems, including those of the hero, are resolved. Joe himself is not a *pícaro*, on this view, and no case remains to be reopened by compatriots who might try to question the rightful position and status of the protagonist.

Elements of the *Bildungsroman*

As a sort of *Bildungsroman* – a novel of education – this narrative accompanies several young men on the way to maturity. They have to find their own natural identities in society.¹³ Joe's comrades Archer and Sharpley as well as Prig and young Mr. Diaper, apart from the protagonist himself, belong to the lesser gentry. Their parents are well-established in business and yet are not too wealthy. All of the boys are essentially good and well-educated and are expected to enter commerce and to become worthy citizens. However, what nature has granted has to be turned in the right direction, since they all exhibit the follies of youth and are given to what Joe calls at the end of the novel *peccadillos*. In the first part, their *vitae* do not look very promising, as they are all about

¹³ Franco Moretti, The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture (London: Verso, 1987), states, the *Bildungsroman* solves the “conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification” (16). P. Dahl, “The Bildungsroman,” in Annick Benoit-Dusauroy and Guy Fontaine, eds., Michael Wooff, trans., History of European Literature (London: Routledge, 2000), holds, “far from being the education of a *pícaro*, that of the hero of a *Bildungsroman* is a social education the purpose of which is to make it possible for him to live in harmony with society” (422).

to become lazy libertines or fops and to accumulate debt, when, fortunately, love or lack of financial means force them onto the right path again. These basically good people learn in time to resist the temptations of the city, and through adventures and misfortunes become responsible and virtuous persons. Joe learns “to be less violent in [his] Desires” and to act in a circumspect, rational, and dependable way (250 vol.ii).¹⁴ In the military and in businesses in foreign countries they all experience hardships but soon make great fortunes that allow them to become eligible for upwardly mobile marriages. Since they have proven their constancy, upon returning home they can marry their titled, or at least wealthy, loved ones and finally settle in the country while still pursuing businesses that contribute to the wealth of their community and nation. According to the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, and contrary to the picaresque, they accept the order of society and establish a place for themselves within it. The novel reaches its “precise aim and describe[s] the very achievement of the hero himself in his relationship to this end.”¹⁵

Elements of the Novel of Sensibility

The various courtships and multiple marriages that conclude the maturing processes also play an important role in solidifying elements of sensibility. The honor and virtue of sincere love are constantly emphasized, and all except Sir Walter decide in favor of true love and understand the suffering of the passionate lover. A number of heart-wrenching good-byes, illnesses of the protagonists, broken hearts, sighs, tears, and embraces in

¹⁴ Future page references are to Edward Kimber, *The Life and Adventures of Joe Thompson, A Narrative Founded on Fact. Written By Himself. In Two Volumes* (London, 1750).

¹⁵ Dahl, 425. Moretti holds that “events acquire meaning when they lead to one ending, and only one” (7).

lonely walks, moving letters and speeches by kind fathers ask for the empathy of the sensible reader. The emotional state of the hero as well as his spontaneous feelings of virtue are ever on display.¹⁶ Joe's friends "run into [his] Arms, and almost devoured [him] with Embraces" at their meeting in England, for instance (2: 313). Frequently, the narrator describes his overpowering feelings of brotherly love and friendship – as well as love for a woman, of course – in such hyperbolic terms as "all Madness of Extasy" (2: 313). The reencounter with his friend Diaper is exemplary of his passionate descriptions: "I returned their Caresses with Interest and shed a Flood of Tears, which my full Heart could not restrain; But, as to my Friend and myself, it was all Delight and Transport that seized us, and we were near a quarter of an hour in one another's Embraces, saying all the tender and affectionate Things that inspired our Bosoms" (2: 319; there are earlier "Flood[s] of Tears" at 1:174, 2:99, 2:261, 2: 295, while tears gather at flood stage later on without quite overflowing at 2: 329 and 2: 333). Joe and his comrades are sometimes so moved that they faint, become sick, are speechless, and cry tears of joy and sorrow. In the eighteenth century this "gushing somatic eloquence," as it has been called, was associated with the righteousness of simple expression and stood as a mark of the hero's virtue.¹⁷ As Markman Ellis shows in his discussion of contemporary magazines, sensibility was frequently combined with morality, and, as the title of one magazine proclaimed, "the

¹⁶ See Brian Vickers, ed., Henry Mackenzie The Man of Feeling (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), for his definition of sentimentalism.

¹⁷ Paul Goring, The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150. He shows that physical responses were codified and signified moral status. He describes the emergence of polite reading through the construction of strategies of bodily reactions.

Tears of Sensibility from the Eye, shall inspire the Heart with the Love of Virtue.”¹⁸

The love between a man and a woman may be very important, but the “natural affections” towards all people also play a significant role in Joe Thompson. An active feeling for the plight of others is advocated, and the hero must develop the quality before he can reach his ultimate station in life.¹⁹ Unlike such sentimental heroes as David Simple, who “are ultimately destroyed by their acute sensibility, which leaves them vulnerable to the challenges of a typically unsentimental, commercial world,”²⁰ Joe’s emotional susceptibility does not compromise his commercial prowess. However, he has to tame his emotions with reason before he can become benevolent. This is the essence of moral goodness, according to the eighteenth-century philosopher Francis Hutcheson.²¹ The protagonist and other figures finally settle in the country, where they may realize their full goodness without being negatively influenced by the vices of the city, by frivolous pleasure, selfishness and economic greed.²²

¹⁸ Markman Ellis, The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.

¹⁹ As R. L. Brett, ed., Shaftesbury Characteristics of Men, Manners, and Morals (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), explains, “humans are not in their natural condition, according to Shaftesbury’s definition, until they become social beings” (4). Similar to Joe’s errors in the first part of the novel, “sometimes, however, people are hurried into a social state before they have developed the affections upon which a civilized life must depend; in this case, their existence is as unnatural as that of the least altruistic savages” (4).

²⁰ Goring, 152.

²¹ See Mark Philip Strasser, Francis Hutcheson’s Moral Theory (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1990), for Hutcheson’s concept of sensibility. Hutcheson introduced the desire for moral perfection as a determinant of human nature but realized that it depended on the circumstances.

²² Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), notes: “The average sentimental novel opposing vice and virtue took the virtuous hero to the horrors of London; it then allowed him to escape into the rural provinces to find a happy ending” (14). She gives a concise definition of the literature of sensibility, its methods and conventions. Her distinction among the terms *sentiment*, *sensibility*, *sentimentality*, and *sentimentalism* might also prove useful for the present study, but for the moment remains beyond my scope.

The picaresque functions as backdrop, as the evil world of deceptive appearances, against which the virtuous hero of sensibility “articulate[s] a sincere language of the passions.”²³ Conforming to that codified lachrymosity, Joe becomes integrated into bourgeois society, and the conventions of the novel of sensibility intersect with those of the *Bildungsroman* and romance. All three tend towards the conclusive ending of a progressive plot development, standing in juxtaposition to the episodic conventions of the picaresque novel.

Picaresque Novel or Allegory?

While picaresque traits abound, especially in the first part of the novel,²⁴ several aspects of form and content are not picaresque, though they might appear so at first. According to the editor’s preface, the language is “applicable to the Subject he treats of; common Events are related in familiar Words; but when it is required, no one can rise into more apt and proper Strains” (viii). The first part of the novel is written primarily using plain, denotative language, just as picaresque novels are. Heightened imagery is found in relation to the un-picaresque elements of later chapters, namely the development of the several courtships and the descriptions of the lovely ladies as well as agreeable country life (very rarely, we also find it in conjunction with mundane events such as a coach ride [162] and a comment on schoolmasters [9]). In the romantic sequences one finds invocations such as “Come ye balmy Influences” (291), comparisons like that of Louisa’s voice to “the thrilling Notes breathed ... of the inimitable Handel” (179),

²³ Goring, 143.

²⁴ Black affirms “the plot of Joe Thompson is of a rambling, picaresque kind” (29).

metaphors about her as the “angelic Comforter” (206), and the personifications of the wind as “every fanning Breeze that murmurs” (206). Maxims in Latin also appear there, as well as numerous citations from contemporary authors like Addison (210), Rowe (221), and Pope (221). In Kimber’s novel, there is no notable division of discourses within a single double-structured narrative as in Moll Flanders but rather a significant difference in expression in what appear to be two sequential parts of a narration.

The general structure of Joe Thompson follows that of the picaresque novel merely superficially.²⁵ Joe does not have a case to explain other than perhaps the taking of the precious stone his servant Truman acquires illegally for him (165), and on which his wealth is partly founded. While the novel is a pseudo-autobiography in which episodes of adventures, travels, changing occupations and masters are recounted, replete with fortunate coincidences and also misfortunes, it is also highly organized to create a unified whole reminiscent of drama. Several subplots mirror the main plot, and figures constantly reappear. The spatial movement of the hero describes a full circle initially from the country and then finally back to the family seat in the country, after much to- and fro-ing between the city, England, and abroad. Similarly, the *dramatis personae* all start out from the country, experience various adventures and misfortunes like Mr. Diaper and Mrs. Modish, only to be united finally in a well-ordered community in the country again. The organization of the novel is actually very similar to a five-act drama: the hero’s picaresque troubles in the first part, the exposition; his setting out into the world and

²⁵ The carnal and scatological slapstick scenes common in the time, as well as in the Golden-Age Spanish predecessors, parallel those already observed in the other novels discussed in this study. So do the types appearing in Joe Thompson. For instance, they end up in the wrong bed in an inn, highwaymen are overheard conspiring, an illicit affair with a servant is disturbed to comical effect, and a pointless discussion between a curate, a physician and an exciseman takes place.

growing love for Louisa as the rising action; the climax when she supposedly dies; the falling action recounting Joe's adventures and business activities overseas; and finally the denouement introduced through the reencounter with the disguised Louisa back home, with the tying up of loose ends and the conclusive happy ending. This presents all the figures again in the last scene before the curtain falls and all the spectators/readers may go home satisfied with the performance. Contrary to the messy closure of the picaresque, in this work the narrator may be sure of an immaculate closure, certain that his dishonorable past will never catch up with him, and then he will never have to restart a round of adventurous wanderings.

The structure of the novel as pseudo-autobiography with the adventures and travels of the protagonist is not necessarily picaresque, nor is Joe's so-called necessity. In the first part of the novel the protagonist frequently does suffer hunger like the *pícaro*. Under his first master he therefore steals fruit in order to fill his stomach. Joe also suffers the picaresque "Misery and Distress" which he ameliorates by selling everything he owns (112). Yet his necessity appears rather artificial, since the hero merely chooses to suffer out of false pride, while he might simply ask his parents or Mr. Deacon for money instead. His friends and family all assume the best of him and are more than willing to pardon his follies, emphasizing his virtuous and honorable character whenever they can. This results in the impression that Joe's path into adulthood and beyond is lined with cotton pillows instead of the barbed wire through which the *pícaro* manoeuvres. There is no need for him to trick others while looking out only for himself. Although an initiation incident takes place which earns him a severe beating and eventually sets him onto the street, the picaresque element is due to the unnecessary stupidity of the attacker and

appears gratuitous. Where the *pícaro* struggles to survive in adverse surroundings, Joe steals pears to harm his master and then throws one at him without any other motivation than malice. This is wrong, and when the branch on which he sits breaks, it is poetic justice rather than Fortune, which would be employed to send the *pícaro* back to his low beginnings time and again. The hero's dependence on the Wheel of Fortune is another picaresque trait largely absent here. It is far less threatening than in the case of the *pícaro*, since in this novel a fairly prosperous family is always present in the background to rely on in bad times. Moreover, the hero is rarely the victim of bad people or tricksters. Overall, Joe fares much better in his adventures than do John le Brun or Roderick Random.

Like these *pícaros*, Joe has varying occupations under changing masters. These consist in leisure activities in different locations at the invitation of his friends, and are merely at first sight picaresque. In any case, they allow him to observe his society and to criticize it. Joe's imprisonment in a sponging house and then the Fleet after a careless financial deal with an acquaintance similarly offer the narrator ample opportunity to comment on the unethical attempts at enrichment by his compatriots facilitated through ubiquitous corruption in the justice system as well as the inefficiency of public administration. The personal stories of other inmates – noble gentlemen with character flaws – contain social and moral criticism and thus constitute typical *consejos*. They move Joe to a response of picaresque compassion.

Yet Joe is an insider only temporarily in the position of the marginalized. He is not an outsider like the *pícaro*. Rather, he has loving parents and true friends who accompany him throughout his hardships and are always ready to support him. In the first part of the

novel, friendship and love are sometimes linked to personal advantage as in the picaresque novel of the time. For instance, “this lovely Mother put into my Hand a Purse with an Hundred Guineas” (174), Joe reports. Furthermore, he is calculating, renewing the acquaintance with Mr. Deacon in order to receive more money, and calls Mr. Goodwill’s offer of friendship an “interesting Proposal” due to that man’s large estate and clout in county politics (272). Yet all his friends, even those who are rakish rogues like himself in the beginning, turn out to be genuine, honest friends who always try to help Joe. In fact, while the hero repudiates young Mr. Diaper, or merely thinks in terms of his own gain with Mr. Deacon, these two are not the only ones to worry about him and remain with him through his adventures.

Joe is not turned out into the cold world like a *pícaro* either. He has a home to which he can and does return, is welcomed in his village, and finds the comfortable, friendly country mansions of new and old friends always open to him. Even in London, that symbol of anonymity and adversity of the picaresque novel, Joe has several houses to go to and lives well under the protective care of his friends. He is well integrated into the secure web moneyed gentry span across the country and in fact all the way to the colonies. Persons close to him may be far away for a while like his old schoolmates Sharpley and Archer, yet even then the ties are preserved via letters, and a happy reunion is sure to take place in the end. Joe’s professional career is not limited to the most menial jobs and despicable activities on the fringes of legality as is the typical case for the *pícaro*. Rather, Joe has friends and family who offer him positions in their various businesses and even buy him a commission, plan to make him a partner, and give him great amounts of money quite readily. Joe has to begin from the (relative) bottom as

apprentice or clerk and work his way up, but this is a function of the *Bildungsroman* rather than an expression of the picaresque lack of perspective. Indeed, in the firmly established mercantile order of his society, Joe's starting point offers him a wide range of opportunities.

Certainly Joe's character is in some ways that of a *pícaro*, exhibiting a lack of concern regarding petty crimes and the risk of detection and punishment. This picaresque mindset will not change until his love for Louisa draws all that is naturally good in him to the surface. Until then, it seems, every occurrence and dire warning by his friends and family only inspire his vice. Although his friends never tire of emphasizing his good character even in the first part of the novel, Joe is rascal enough to play several pranks, which he mentions quite proudly. He mounts a great show of firecrackers and disguised cats to scare his masters by imitating supposed ghosts. Picaresque bad luck has it that the daughter of the house, frustrated in her advances on him, divulges the secret of his culpability, and our hero is caught and punished. In addition, during his escape he breaks through the roof and manages to run away, but not before taking picaresque revenge on his master by throwing him into a large copper pot. Another time he fools his landlord and "hugely delight[s] with [the] Manner of Revenge" (163). This attitude resembles that of Quevedo's Pablos as well as Roderick's. As a young adult Joe behaves rather like a *pícaro*, being a man about town, falling into gambling, chasing women, and spending more than he should. He enjoys the company of foolish rakes and participates in many activities which are unethical or at the very least questionable. These are not fully described and Joe has time to mature without becoming hardened in the process. In fact, he is quite often a sensitive man.

The protagonist has also a number of undeniably stable, good qualities such as generosity, compassion, constancy to Louisa, and courage. These positive character traits might be considered aspects of the picaresque double structure of a reformed narrator looking back on his formerly vicious life. Yet in Kimber's novel other factors lead us to think otherwise.

The Picaresque Double Structure

The retrospective narration of Joe Thompson's life combines the *prodesse et delectare* of the picaresque novel, though in the second part of the novel the reader is entertained through adventures in exotic locales and several courtship stories rather than tricks and immoral activities. In the beginning, however, the narrative exhibits the double structure, which "might be of [Benefit] to Mankind . . . getting the better of Vice, and adding to the Triumphs of Virtue, and the Virtuous" (iv), "whilst the Entertaining and the Amusing captures the Reader" (3; see also vii). The narrator therefore intersperses episodes with "a good Tendency" (vi) and "scattered thro' every Page" "Reflections, Maxims, and instructive Lessons" after the manner we have seen in the picaresque novel (vii). The interpolated stories of reformed women and of Joe's friends underline aspects of the main plot and stress certain character flaws of the hero such as his over-passionate reactions and lack of self-discipline. In some instances, a moral is deduced from these stories, for instance after the story of Prim's life in Madagascar, where the narrator affirms that many rakes eventually come to their senses. (After another interpolated narrative he advises women to spend their time wisely [218].) In addition, advice is voiced sometimes through other figures: Joe's father writes a letter about being a good

Christian and being moderate in one's sentiments, when Joe leaves to take up his post in the East India Company; Mr. Diaper gives a speech on how to treat boys at the beginning of Joe's instruction; and Speculist admonishes Joe about giving in to "the Gratification of those Appetites and Passions, which should constantly be governed by Religion and Reason" (60, vol. ii).

The double structure of the novel is achieved not least through the ambiguous representation of Joe the protagonist and narrator in the first part, creating a distance between the naïve character and the wiser narrator. The editor introduces Joe in the preface as a "Gentleman of excellent Endowments" (iv). "Perhaps the Kingdom cannot boast a Man of more Worth, or more honor" (iv), he states. This judgment is driven home by continual emphasis via not only the narrator but other figures as well. Mr. Diaper stresses his "Decency" (197), Louisa his "Rectitude of Mind, and Purity of Sentiment" (206), Mrs. Modish his basic virtue. His good qualities are highlighted, such as his great appearance and healthy, elegant physique (176). In his few positions as clerk he is diligent and dependable and apparently has a good grasp of business matters. He is also very courageous, which he proves repeatedly by responding quickly to the cry of "thieves!" (91) and defending his friend against robbers (124), among other instances. Above all, Joe feels true love for Louisa, and is constant to her even after her supposed death. In a twist of argumentation, this "polite and intelligent young Gentleman" reassures the reader that he would have recognized his bad actions had he not been lost to them (39). The narrator repeatedly affirms that he is naturally good and attempts to portray himself as basically virtuous not only in the second, romantic part of the novel, but even in his roguish younger years, at which point he is supposedly already "full of

Reflections upon the odd Humours, and habitual Villainy” of the people he meets (168) and “conceive[s] the pernicious Effects of his Vice [gambling]” (113). His innocent youth is juxtaposed with his maturity several times (37-38, 249). His early tricks are called mere “puerile Temptations” and “boyish Inattention and Folly” (33).

These attempts at attributing natural goodness to the hero are ambiguous, because instances of his bad behavior predominate. Moreover, the narrator appears highly unreliable. In the first part of Kimber’s work, on the whole the protagonist behaves like a *pícaro*, drinking, gambling, visiting brothels, accumulating great debt, and shunning real work. He is not able to control his passions; instead, he is motivated by love, lust for revenge, and, too often, despair. He takes foolhardy risks, for instance hunting tigers in the jungle, he is very credulous and naïve, especially in financial matters, and has an unhealthy pride which almost kills him in prison. Unlike Mr. Deacon and Diaper, Joe does not take responsibility for others, but rather takes advantage of his friends (115). He even lies to his closest friend over a prolonged interval without once showing a bad conscience about it. When his son by his secret mistress dies soon after birth, he even expresses relief about it. The duel with his fellow prisoner about swearing, dramatically described in images (53, vol. ii), is merely a parody of the gentlemanly defence of honor. All in all, Joe the character in the first part is truly “a most notorious Rake and Debauchee” (71), despite all affirmations to the contrary.

The narrator is not what he appears either. He is supposedly fully reformed at the time of writing (80, 101, 142) and “silently accused by [his] own Conscience” for having been a rogue (2). With hindsight the narrator judges, “these Ills have been brought upon him, principally by his own bad Conduct, his prevailing Vices, and repeated Crimes” (1). He

notices “the beginning Depravity of [his] Mind” (66), although at the time he continues the routs with his friends. Eventually, the narrator learns from his own biography that his “Sallies of Rage and Passion” were responsible for his misfortunes (271; see also his dream, 249), whereas the character does not moderate his actions accordingly. In retrospect the narrator realizes that he “was too good a Bait” for his “friends” (67), and while Joe the character expresses great respect for Speculist, the narrator concludes “it would have been happy for me, had I never known him” (69). With hindsight the narrator talks of the “false Pleasures” he enjoyed in his youth (77). His rendezvous with the false lady, for instance, is full of hints as to the narrator’s better insight, who describes her “pretending” (105), “Pretence” (106), and her “seeming Reluctance” (106), judges her actions as “either by Design or Accident” (106), realizes that she “counterfeited Tears” (108), and that her husband, “as she called him,” was “one of the Gang” (108). Recounting the episode, the narrator calls himself “foolish” (106). Meanwhile, the character frequently appears naïve, finding out “to [his] utter Surprise” that the lady he admires is a prostitute (106); being “astonished at the Roguery of this Sett of Men” who bribe justices, for example (38); and being “far from understanding the Motives of” his feelings after his first meeting Louisa (43). In sum, Joe the character is an unthinking rogue, whereas the narrator is a self-reflective convert.

This supposedly great distance is smaller than the narrator wants the reader to believe, since the virtue of the older Joe, that is, the narrator, is repeatedly called into question in the first part of the story. Towards the end of the novel, character and narrator will in fact coincide in virtue. At first the assumed distance between them is approached from the side of vice, as commonly observed in the picaresque novel, and which normally

constitutes the case. First, the narrator is not at all completely reformed, as is claimed; and second, the narrator reinterprets events while recounting them. Joe complains about the injustice and inhumanity of imprisoning debtors when they could be useful to society (58, vol. ii). However, as a fop he himself was not useful to society. When he tells his father of the “numerous Follies” and “unfortunate Mishaps,” he “conceal[s] only such Particulars as would have been offensive to the Purity of his Ears” (172). In other words, he is not wholly honest yet tries to gloss over the fact in hindsight. In a similar way he embellishes the actions of his friends, affirming for instance Prim’s “every good Quality to recommend him” immediately after that youth’s shady business transactions have been uncovered (111). Likewise, the narrator still insists on Mr. Deacon’s “Good-nature and Gratitude” and honesty, after having found out at the attempt of cashing it that the I.O.U. he gave him was unsecured (33). He also states that Mrs. Modish “was not addicted to any one bad Property” except being unfaithful (99). He blames that on her parents. When he cuckolds her husband, he couches his immoral behavior as a “service to a fine Woman in Distress” (97), her distress being that she suffers from a boring husband. The supposedly reformed narrator realizes that an immoral act is being justified here, yet he claims that lying to oneself that way is really a sign of the good nature and “praiseworthy Motions” of all men (98).

In like manner the narrator frequently fails to take responsibility for his unethical actions and base vice, mostly pointing to similar faults in other people and generalizing the narration. It is stated in the preface that it is “the Condition of unhappy Mortals, who are subject to Misfortune, and the Assaults of Vice” and thus, implicitly, that it is not the fault of the narrator if he behaved viciously (vi). He admits his “Errors and Slips of

Youth” (142, emphasis added). He maintains that he is not the only debased person, emphasizing “the senseless Herd” at the theatre (85). He blames his character “being naturally of a high Mettle, and given much to Unluckiness and Wagery of all Sorts” for some mean actions (14). While the narrator persists in calling Joe virtuous, he admits that “too much Pleasure has softened and enervated” his mind (77). Supposedly, “temptations and Opportunity were such forceable Batteries against [the] better Resolutions” of that naturally good man (62). At other times he cites the unavoidably vicious circle of one crime leading to another against the intentions of the protagonist (70), cautioning the reader to “beware how ye yield to the first Attack, of Vice” (63), and that “the Returns of Vice . . . are not to be resisted” (77). The “inspiring Juice of the Vine” may be the culprit (85), and “these Places of Harmony [which] conspire to the Destruction of that Regularity of Conduct” (107), as well as his friends who “overpersuade” him to participate (120; see also 48, vol. ii). In prison, he feels the “Obligation to comply with . . . all the Incentives to Luxury and Extravagance” (40, vol. ii). As we see, even in retrospect the narrator is not willing to admit his faults completely. It seems he himself has not taken all his lessons to heart, all the while pretending to have turned virtuous, of course.

Joe’s failings and misconduct are also excused and his responsibility for them diminished through the reinterpretation of the events narrated in the first part. He terminates his relationship with the unfaithful Nanny out of “Rage and Fury” (79), rather than out of having come to his senses. Yet one page later he states he is “pleased with [him]self for having exercised so much Temper and Prudence” (80). On another occasion the narrator claims he does not want to return to the path of virtue merely because his vice causes him too much pain (128), though just before he had complained that the

negative consequences of his unethical actions were too much to bear. The narrator also criticizes the “remorseless Creditor, who . . . became the Torturer of some unhappy, honest Family; whose Misfortunes have rendered them insolvent” (47), conveniently forgetting that his own debt was incurred through drinking and wasting money. Sometimes, the sins of the protagonist are simply left without comment, as on his initial visits to a brothel. His endearing terms for the occupants, “Dulcinea’s,” “Filles de Joye,” “bashful Goddess” (87), “Bona Roba’s” (88), and so on, should be corrected by a truly virtuous narrator but are not. His own condemnable actions are forgotten when the watch strikes down the vandalizing Prim. Here we hear only a very partial sentence about “the Injury done to my Friend” (93). Lastly, the night-long rounds of the group through bars and their following encounters with the forces of order are euphemistically called “Midnight Excursions” (95), without any piece of advice by the narrator regarding the imprudence of such behavior, due to which his honest intentions are again called into question.

In a similar vein, the inevitable Wheel of Fortune so cruel to the original *pícaro* comes in handy when the narrator seeks to deny full agency and thus liability. As in the picaresque novel, “Accidents” frequently befall Joe, and “unlucky Opportunities” present themselves (61). He is represented as a plaything of Fortune at first, yet increasingly his luck depends on “the Hand of Providence” (16, vol. ii). Hence, when Joe and Louisa carelessly embrace in Sir Walter’s mansion and are found out, the casting out which ensues is called a punishment by Heaven by way of an excuse. Meanwhile, in the second part, the wiser narrator’s trust in God’s plan becomes credible (228, 290, 293), for the virtuous protagonist no longer has anything to cover up. The statement that “our Desires

and Counsels are far from being able to produce the effects we desire, unless Providence at the same Time superintends and approves our Plans of Action” is then no longer an expression of any double structure, since the distance between Joe the character and Joe the narrator is finally approximated (270-71).

As with several picaresque themes and motives as well as with the narrative structure, the picaresque qualities of the novel as regards the representation of character likewise fail in the last third of the novel. Joe’s positive character traits predominate in the second part. There, the distance between the younger character and the older narrator is closed, Joe being not merely in words but also in action the good person the editor earlier proclaimed him to be. The protagonist behaves with increasing self-control. Informed about Mr. Rich’s attempts on his life, for example, he understands the imprudence of fighting him immediately and desists. Similarly, when he learns that Louisa is taken somewhere else, he cautiously follows the coach instead of opening fire on her cousin right away. This time, his resolution to challenge the latter is based on the traditional concept of honor and the intended duel a sign of Joe’s noble character. By the end the actions of Joe the protagonist have become flawless, and he is no longer an example of bad behavior but a model of virtue. It is no longer possible then to teach morals *ex negativo* nor to uphold the double structure as earlier in the narration through the typically ambiguous representation of the hero. There the reader witnessed his base actions and bad character traits yet the natural goodness of the hero was constantly affirmed by an unreliable narrator who was himself evidently far less virtuous than he presumed.

In the latter part of the novel, the narration becomes more and more a tale of Christian benevolence. With “real Pleasure” and “secret Satisfaction” the hero distributes money freely to the many people in need he accidentally meets again (215), like Mrs. Tripsey of Packer’s gang,²⁶ and eases their consciences by listening to their confessions and forgiving them, as he does Nanny and Speculist. That way the hero resembles an angel sent by God, who makes such a forceful impression of goodness on them that they become virtuous and consider him a sign of Providence (305). The tying up of the loose ends of the episodic picaresque adventures as religious parable is a far cry from the techniques of the picaresque novel. The character development of the protagonist from a sort of a *pícaro* to a good Christian is thus closely linked to the modulation of narrative structure from picaresque narrative in the beginning to romance towards the end of the novel. Corresponding to the latter conservative narrative discourse, the representation of the individual also emerges on the side of conservative ideology.

A Conservative Modern Romance

In this “new-fangled Tale . . . of Merit and Gratitude” (280, vol. ii), as Sir Walter calls it, the progressive belief in man shaping his own life based on his own efforts and social circumstances and the conservative belief in a fixed character essence and a predestined life do battle. It is very clear which of the two emerges as champion in the end. Although in the first part of the novel the behavior of the hero is temporarily altered, supposedly from good to bad, his underlying natural goodness is always still present according to the narrator. Unfavourable influences such as unethical surroundings and

²⁶ He does not do good in a Shaftesburian way for its own sake, but to become a “truly good Man, who may be said to be a Christian at large” (221).

debased company in gay London may subdue original virtuous intentions for a while, yet the God-given good core of the hero will eventually resurface and allow him to lead the life predestined by Providence.

The personalities of the young people develop along the lines of progressive ideology regarding their independence from traditional thought, only to veer back towards the acceptance of merely slightly modified conservative ideology as mature gentlemen.²⁷ Joe, of course, returns home a self-controlled, rational, and responsible husband to supervise a valuable estate, after having lived without restraint and spent nearly all the money he had. Louisa gets her own way, not marrying Mr. Rich but returning home a chaste and dutiful wife and daughter. She also practices charity, which is seen as repayment for the wealth and status God has granted the upper classes. Far from being an ostentatious aristocrat like some others in the story, she is busy all day and gets tired of doing her toilet (212). Mrs. Modish repents of her former life and becomes a competent country wife – after having secured a sizeable fortune. Susanna Bellair offers Mr. Diaper her fortune before their marriage, thus actively trying to advance their relationship contrary to all rules of female decorum without being punished for it. Joe's formerly rakish, unreliable friends Prim and Prig reach their home country as wealthy, prudent businessmen who soon marry and settle permanently. Even poor people support the established hierarchies, bearing their lot with patience as part of the God-given order (217).

The advice of the narrator to avoid “Vice and Folly” and to “pursue a constant Course of Benevolence and Kindness to our Fellow-creatures” (2: 348) is augmented by the

²⁷ Ellis considers “the negotiation between the classical aristocratic concept of virtue and the modern conception of behavior based on trust and benevolence associated with the new commercial society nascent in eighteenth-century Britain” a central aspect of the discourse of sentimentalism (137).

demand that the gentry be useful citizens in business, “for nothing can become a true Englishman more than to assist the Government, which is at present supported . . . by the Influence of the monied People, to whom the present Establishment is a Security for their Fortunes” (2: 223). That is, they should not comport themselves like Mr. Rich, living off the rents of their estates, slowly using up their means without reinvesting. That unprincipled aristocrat is presented as the antidote to Joe the reformed gentleman, conversing badly, “Drinking and Carousing with his Companions” (1: 193), hunting and scheming. He is slow of thought, coarse, and cowardly. Sir Walter is another traditional aristocrat criticized for outdated ideas, leading to acts which pivot around his wrong marriage choice for Louisa. Instead of finding new venues actively to maintain and enlarge the estate, he simply attempts to marry his daughter off to the highest bidder.

Joe the good hero acts in a narration of resolved status inconsistency. Having the traditional merits of the landed gentry and leisure classes, he finds the appropriate wealth and estate as well as the chaste and virtuous lady in order to obtain his natural position. “Fate . . . had denied [him] a Situation, and the Goods of Fortune” (1: 186), as he complains, yet his family is “one of the best in the Country” (1: 186), and he himself is worthy, as we are assured. In order to prove himself meritorious, the hero has to gain a fortune himself but it would not suffice to be handed money or an estate, as Mr. Bellair generously offers with the aim of turning Joe into an acceptable son-in-law for Sir Walter. Louisa’s statement that one who is clever enough to “improve an Estate like him [Joe], is a far better Match than one who has not wit enough to keep what he has” (2: 281), could therefore be regarded as the maxim of Joe’s biography. There is implied criticism in this quite straightforwardly expressed conservative tale, since the young

people all have to go abroad to make their fortunes in business. Having acquired riches according to their merit, they return to their family seats or found new ones and support their country. It appears, meanwhile, that they could not have become wealthy or proven their virtue in England. The solution presented in the novel, to find a position overseas in order to circumvent the inflexible, inhibiting establishment simultaneously allows for maintaining the traditional order, as successful returning emigrants are integrated into it, rejuvenating the aristocracy in creating companionate connections by marriage with, one may assume, viable offspring as well as financial injections.

While this novel unambiguously champions this social order, the risks inherent in the project due to the character of contemporary trade are noted as well. Moreover, some episodes demonstrate that the good of commerce highly depends on the virtue of the agent. For both points of criticism the novel offers solutions. Like Joe, one might lose one's entire possessions in one bad business deal, and not always is the loss the result of imprudent or illegal activities. Storms at sea and attacks by pirates severely reduce the wealth of several figures in the novel. However, while in Mr. Diaper's case the unreliable narrator blames his bankruptcy on "unavoidable Misfortunes" (1: 225), Prim's story shows that a clever businessman could indeed avoid such a fate through cautiousness, that is, by insuring his goods. That way the downward spiral through bad credit could be prevented (1: 287), and the event need not hit dependents as in Mr. Diaper's case when his son suddenly has to fear for his welfare. Similarly, Mrs. Bellair's marriage to young Mr. Diaper is in jeopardy due to his altered financial position, and Joe's chances for a partnership are likewise destroyed. This scenario demonstrates on the level of the individual how trade done irresponsibly could affect the entire nation negatively.

Meanwhile, good merchants “diffuse the Blessings of Commerce and Traffic to every Individual, and are the Upholders and Supports of the Interest and Independency of this Nation” (1: 45), says the narrator. The businessman is presented as “the industrious Citizen, whose Endeavors to benefit himself necessarily produce Employment for, and conduce to the Emolument of Artificers in every Branch of Work” (1: 50). Trade makes a lot of demands on the personal integrity of the individual according to the narrator of Joe Thompson. Here he does not have in mind any unethical or downright criminal activities to enrich oneself, like those Defoe criticizes in Moll Flanders, but considers the probability of good returns. If “the Principles of honor, Justice, Uprightness, and Punctuality” are lacking (1: 56), business transactions may come to no good, as both Speculist’s death in prison and the young rakes’ temporary poverty show. In contrast, with “Perseverance and absolute Industry” a sizable gain could be made (2: 147). However, the merchant should know beforehand that the “Pains, and Care, and Industry in the Profession” would bring “Miseries” upon wife and children (1: 185). For that reason, in this novel the businessmen who take on high risk are either bachelors or have other possessions – and positions – to which they could return in the case of a disaster. In fact, Joe sends his servant Truman to do the grunt work, while he himself remains safe and only rakes in the profits. Ideally, in Kimber’s world of the landed gentry, commerce should be brought on to enlarge the possessions of the aristocracy; then the gentleman-businessman should leave off. By no means should he be greedy or fail to put his riches to good use like the *beaumonde* of London and Defoe’s *pícara*.

Despite these points of criticism regarding the elasticity of the social hierarchies and the risks of trade, Kimber argues for bringing the positive aspects of both businessman-

gentleman and landed aristocrat together in a new form of forward-looking, stable, virtuous, yet largely conservative gentry. He does so via narration which is almost divided into two parts, one quasi picaresque and the other romantic. Yet these generic elements are not intertwined as in Roderick Random. Instead, the former is all but cancelled out through the resolution of the story. Thus, the loose episodic structure is unified and the picaresque elements are qualified, or rather, put into the service of the creation of romance. The character of the hero likewise develops from a questionable rogue who rebels against social expectations, to an assimilated gentleman who strives to conform in all aspects of personal and public being. Joe Thompson is not a picaresque novel which incorporates another discourse to create an ambiguity in form expressed in content, but another type of novel altogether, starting out from a negative, chaotic premise and ending in a clearly ordered narrative and ideological universe. In this case, the picaresque is merely a means of developing a horizontal narrative to the point where a dramatic conclusion is authorized.

The Function of Form

Picaresque elements appear in numerous narratives of the first half of the eighteenth century. These literary works are not all picaresque novels, since frequently various popular generic features, among them picaresque, are combined in one work for the simple reason that they make for an entertaining narrative. In the hands of authors like Kimber and Fielding, picaresque elements enhance another genre and actually serve a particular function. In their comic epics in prose, these elements form a negative from

which a completely different narration is developed. Their presence alone clearly does not make these novels picaresque.

If a novel is indeed picaresque, its form and content need not be consistent to transport a certain ambiguous ideology, as this chapter has demonstrated via Frank Hammond. Its author follows the picaresque format, but whether he considered the genre merely a formula that sold, or whether he realized its potential to voice criticism through its form, I would not venture to decide. But its failure to take up social circumstances and to adapt the narrative discourse correspondingly is, to say the least, conspicuously disqualifying.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: ADAPTING THE PICARESQUE NOVEL TO CHANGING EPISTEMES

In these pages I have argued that the novel developed in a period of rupture between two epistemes. Until the rise of the novel, knowledge had been thought to be always the same and to be inscribed in nature, so that one had only to read the signs. People could not create knowledge or find new knowledge, and books could merely express the unchanging truth in new ways. An author was not a creator but a translator of the eternal truth set down in the Bible as the masternarrative and transmitted in allegorical works which represented man's life trajectory in prescribed and often religious terms. That perception of the world order changed. With the discovery of new continents where people lived radically different lives, where the realities were vastly different, and where suddenly the old explanations and the old terms were insufficient, people found that there were different truths, and that knowledge could be augmented. They found that events were contingent, that one decision influenced the next, and that the state of things was not fixed. Instead, realities could be assigned particular meanings for each individual. In early capitalism non-noble persons could achieve success, that is, status became disconnected from inner value, and socially the appearance of things no longer automatically signalled their meaning. In the changing social and economic structures, people could more and more influence their own destinies. The Church, the guild, and

other structures which assigned each person their place almost inevitably lost power or changed, opening up a space for individuals to decide for themselves, as the authors of their own fates as well as of their own inner virtue.

For Lockean liberalism, virtue and taste were not based on birth but were determined by material circumstances. Implicitly individuals could only be as virtuous as their situation – status, financial means, surroundings – allowed them to be. In contrast, according to civic humanists like Shaftesbury, virtue was measured against a fixed standard, being absolute and not contingent. The virtuous person had to be disinterested, while virtuous behavior which resulted in personal advantage was not truly virtuous, in their opinion. Therefore, true virtue was a privilege of the wealthy. As in the traditional notion of a concordance of interior with exterior values, the concept of virtue had shifted from a necessary connection with the God-given privilege of noble birth to an association with the material status of the individual.

Empiricism contributed to the shattering of the traditional concordance. Instead of looking for the grand scheme, people observed their particular material environments, where they could find individual truth and knowledge through sense perception. Locke postulated that things and words did not denote directly, but rather that people formed ideas of things. While assigning each individual the same authority and acknowledging that everybody could find truth and acquire new knowledge, Locke also introduced doubt. For knowledge relied on the senses, and the senses could deceive. The prior knowledge and experiences of each individual influenced their way of seeing, and not everybody was equally capable of neutral observation. Language, as a pre-existing system subject to transmission, which static such as translation and the material text

could disrupt, could also misrepresent. In that relative insecurity, people looked for ways that would reassure them in their knowledge of the world and in the shifting notions of good and evil that came with it.

Various eighteenth-century texts dealt variously with these changing epistemological suppositions. Hogarth believed in the empiricist notion of individual experience and individual truths. He broke apart traditional images and formed new ones from the everyday life with which his audience was familiar and in which each reader could read his or her own personal truth. Meaning, for Hogarth, rests in those common objects, that determine individual decisions. He never presents an unchanging human nature. Rather, every life and individual is different to Hogarth; every situation is novel and requires new decisions and actions. The various authors discussed in this study lean to varying degrees towards similarly empiricist notions, while more or less still adhering to traditional concepts of a predestined world order. With the progress of time, the influence of the older discourse in fact became stronger, as the authors became increasingly discontent with the inconsistencies inherent in the early empirical patterns available to comprehend the position of the individual in this world. Hence the long afterlife of the picaresque, which as a genre adapted well to epistemological changes through its discursive modulations, and reflected individual ambiguous positions in the forms of the particular works.

Let's take a brisk backward glance at these works as seen in terms of cultural rupture, before drawing some preliminary conclusions. In Defoe's version of the picaresque empiricist thought predominates, yet at times an earlier discourse can be seen to influence his narrative. While Moll reinterprets the events to fit a pre-existing truth and rather

unconvincingly shows that her actions are predetermined, in the main she is clearly guided in her actions by the moment and by individual, and in her case, largely economic decisions. In Moll Flanders one almost gets the impression that Defoe scorned traditional allegorical interpretations for their potential to excuse wrongheaded individual decisions. Cross's novel challenges the assumption that individual experiences can be trusted to lead to particular truths. He represents a self-made noble as the inadequate hero of the analytical narrative, introducing a figurative narrative into it to rectify the flawed system of ideas.¹ The latter simultaneously questions the traditional assumptions of a concordance of inner values and outer markers, and fails to explain the final success of the low-born libertine. That is, contrary to Defoe's novel, Cross's work denies empiricist ideas yet likewise draws only an instable connection between birth and status. Smollett's novel attempts to arrive at a more positive evaluation of one system of ideas, which is, however, not empiricism. He reverts to embedding the experiences of the individual in a grand scheme, attributing meaning to everyday events that lie outside themselves. The hero presupposes a correlation of nobility with inner values. He therefore emphasizes his high birth retrospectively. Yet while virtue used to be fixed, here the narrator creates it in the reinterpretation of the independent, particular events in order to justify his wealth. The romance discourse thus modulates the narrative, taking issue with the empiricist concept and transforming it into scepticism.

Frank Hammond also perambulates between the discourses. A figurative masternarrative envelopes the micronarratives, trying to override their contingent meaning. However, what these micronarratives imply is not entirely clear, especially in

¹ See Zimmerman for the terminology used here as well as in my introductory remarks.

juxtaposition to the retrospective reinterpretation. Unlike the other three, in this picaresque novel the middle is an opaque negation of ideas, which cannot be correlated with the respective discourses. With Kimber, finally, a more settled view finds expression in the novel which can no longer be represented in the ambivalent discursive structures of the picaresque, although Kimber borrows from the genre. He depicts characters who live according to a preordained reality. There is an underlying structure that leads to a conventional ending. The author is a substitute God who determines their actions as in a puppet show. Unlike in the earlier figural discourse, his protagonists lead particular lives and are more individualized. They represent the probable, in which the individual truths are distilled to show again a set scheme.

Challenging Cultural Assumptions

During the eighteenth century people experienced rapid and profound changes in their cultural imperatives. With the development of capitalism, wealth and status were no longer determined by birth. Social mobility was possible, that is, people could fashion their own lives and develop their talents in ways impossible in the earlier fixed social hierarchy. The modifications regarding the place of the individual and, in fact, regarding the concept of individualism, took place above all in religion and economics, as Watt shows. In Calvinism every person was responsible for his or her own spiritual well-being, having direct access to the Bible and no longer needing the mediation of authorized clergy to examine his or her consciences. The notion of stewardship of what God had given man on earth changed. Individual faith was then thought to issue in rewards – in earthly rewards, that is. Economic success thus became a sign of inner virtue,

independent of birth or status. In economics, with the dissolution of the guilds, the development of new professions, and the opening of new venues to earn money, a new type of individual developed. Success depended on individual striving, diligence, talents, and so on. Upward, but also downward, social mobility was possible in economic individualism. The pursuit of wealth guided the actions of many people. New men based their new-found social status on wealth acquired through trade and the stock market, rather than inherited property. The new possibilities for individuals to improve their position resulted in a troublesome disconnection between status and virtue, as men could seemingly be the more successful economically the more ruthless they were.

Authors trying to come to terms with the status inconsistency found their attitude somewhere in between praising the new flexible order and wishing for the reestablishment of the traditional fixed hierarchies. The picaresque novel was able to express the ambiguity through its double discourse. As a dynamic genre it is cogent for approaching new social and cultural circumstances and remaining significant. Thus, the picaresque solitude was modified to function as the demand for self-reliance in economic individualism; the picaresque hunger was redefined as economic ambition; the role changes were taken to express the social mobility of economic man; and so on. All three picaresque novels discussed in full modify the picaresque along similar lines, yet they advocate the new order to varying degrees. Defoe championed progressive designs of life, although in his work he addresses the ethical problems that concept brought with it as well. Moll decides early on that she will be economically successful, at least able to maintain herself, through diligent work, expressing the Puritan work ethic of her day. Yet early on she learns from the lack of morals in her superiors that she has to disregard any

moral or ethical qualms on her way up. In her view traditional values impede economic success. Contrary to the narrator, who accepts the fact that in economic individualism compromises have to be made regarding honesty, Moll frequently stretches the common moral assumptions too much and is punished for it. Being successful in the end, her wealth nevertheless retrospectively proves her behavior right. It comes as a reward for her diligence in her various trades. She was a good economic (wo)man.

Cross is less positive about the opportunities of the individual in capitalism. His hero apes the questionable privileges of the upper stratum as their supposed defining characteristics, which are sanctioned through the law of time. He does not doubt the traditional connection between birth and status. Instead of attempting to break that order, which excluded most people, like Moll does, John reaffirms its firm hold on society. He tries to steal into the establishment, pretending to the same rights as the aristocracy on the grounds of a feigned and misunderstood nobility. In doing that, he completely disregards the possibilities open to him in economic individualism to advance based on his own diligence. He also proves the concept of nobility unfounded. The fact that he is nonetheless successful in the end shows the insufficiency of both the traditional aristocratic and the modern capitalist social orders.

As opposed to John, Roderick is not completely without a right, in the traditional way, to high status and wealth. His *vita* integrates the possibilities for new men in the modern society with the advantage of the stability of the traditional social order. The hero represents a person from the upper classes who has to prove himself worthy of his eventual status. Given a correction of the lack of correspondence of honor and wealth in that social stratum, Roderick affirms their privilege. He stands for a renewed upper class

based on the assumption of virtue only intended for some, which would effectively rule out the clawing and back-biting of those who, unlicensed, try to rise in capitalism. Whether this solution to status inconsistency is possible, however, remains doubtful due to Roderick's disreputable character as a *pícaro*.

Frank Hammond stands out from the line of developing ideas traced here. The novel does not appear to represent and discuss the social conditions present at the time, since it fails to adapt its picaresque features to contemporary circumstances. Granted, the case of the *pícaro* has some relevance to eighteenth-century moral concepts, but all in all the hero acts within an outdated baroque environment. Whether this implies complacency about the social hierarchies then in place is more than doubtful. More likely, the work was simply little involved in the contemporary social discussions. As has been shown with the first three picaresque novels, and Frank Hammond is the exception here, in times of cultural change in which social ideas were formed and disputed, authors would write within the picaresque genre to represent ambivalent attitudes. The narrative features of the individual works of the dynamic genre were then adapted to their respective social circumstances for a continuing relevance.

A Postmodern Picaresque?

The dynamic picaresque novel offered a container flexible enough to transport relevant meaning in Golden-Age Spain as well as in Enlightenment England. On the dynamic view maintained in the present study, the genre survives as long as it modulates its features in conforming to the cultural context. A recent German novel, Thomas Brussig's Heroes Like Us (1995), may now be discussed to show that the picaresque

genre can also develop its elements to respond to postmodernism and still maintain its significance,² since several traditional generic features such as the episodic structure, the disguises of the *pícaro*, and his questionable value system are especially amenable to postmodern ideas. Once again, themes and motifs are modified along the lines of individuality, the pursuit of wealth, and morality, except that in Brussig's Heroes Like Us they are adapted to the postmodern ideas of fragmentation, the breakdown of hierarchies,

² The East-German author Thomas Brussig became popular in the 1990s in the German genre of the *Nachwende-Roman* – novel after the reunification – with largely satirical works such as Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee (1999), a novel and a screenplay for the film Sonnenallee. The novel Heroes Like Us appeared as a film that same year, and both films were awarded national prizes. Brussig lives in Berlin and is now a much sought-after critic of current cultural commentary. In an interview Brussig suggests that the theme of totalitarianism treated in his novel Heroes Like Us demanded a certain literary answer, and while he acknowledges many similarities with the much earlier example of Günter Grass in his Blechtrommel (1956; published in English as The Tin Drum in 1959), he refers the question of his unconscious adaptation of these stylistic means to postmodern theoretical tenets to literary critics. See Brussig, interview by Timothy Straubel, Angela Szabo, and Dirk Wendtorf, Focus on Literatur 5, no. 1 (1998), 51-59.

Following Moretti, Graphs, Maps, Trees, my argument here is that such developments in the publication of the novel, which are comparable to Braudel's *longue duree* of history, that is, temporary repetitive structures within the flow of history. Their cyclical reappearance in different societies is possible on the assumption that cultures are "interconnected *and* branching" (79). In contrast to biological evolution, which is continuous and irreversible, the development of culture – and literature as a part of it – is deliberate, according to Moretti, authors having access to known successful models and combining them. Arguably, picaresque novels appeared, hence, in former colonies in the nineteenth century and in Europe after World War II, among other times and places.

Sherrill likewise very convincingly explains ways in which picaresque attributes may shift to conform to new social and other environments in the American variant of the genre. Thus, types are impossible in the increasingly polyphonic American society that he describes. Likewise, the picaresque exposing of pretense becomes the task of creating coherence, in part to replace "the certitudes of long-standing codifications and hierarchies" that have become lost (42). Sherrill claims that "the new American picaresque utilizes the old formative structures of narrative mobility, episodic engagement, the social gallery, and the like" (51), in order to return to a new innocence "that can replace the self's alienated wariness" (51). He considers the genre's representational work, recovering the self within the pluriform, rapid-fire American culture, in which the voices of others, according to Kenneth Gergen, overpopulate the authentic self, and in which experience is mediated, as Walker Percy explains. See Kenneth Gergen, The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 49-53; and Walker Percy, The Message in the Bottle (New York: Farrow, Straus Giroux, 1975).

an ironic knowingness, and so on.³ It is my position that the generic approach expostulated here and applied to the eighteenth-century models could not only shed light on other English picaresque novels of the 1700s but also open new perspectives on current novels as a critical tool to read their inherently ambiguous understanding of their cultural environs.

Postmodern Seeds in the Picaresque Novel

The early Spanish models offer many possibilities for postmodern appropriation. They are replete with puns and can be read on various levels. The stable meaning of language is thus already shown as subject to interpretation, and the allegorical reading of narrative is questioned. It is not far from there to the slippage and madness of language in deconstruction.⁴ The ground is also already laid in the historical picaresque for a rejection

³ See Steven Connor, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Connor traces the development of the concept of postmodernism through the four stages of accumulation, synthesis, autonomy, and dissipation. In the first stage scholars discovered developments away from modernist assumptions in their separate cultural fields such as consumer society (Jean Baudrillard), architecture (Charles Jencks), and writing (Ihab Hassan). Later, their arguments were synthesized to articulate a theory of the changes of Western culture, for whose parallel movements a common denominator could be found, for instance late capitalism (Fredric Jameson). In this second stage, postmodernism was rather a horizon for a certain type of analysis, namely that of “critical distraction” (Connor, 3). When the existence of postmodernism itself was no longer questioned, the term evolved into the description of the characteristic discourse of postmodern writers. While it expressed a certain philosophy in academe, in the popular mind postmodernism designated an often relativist style. Eventually, the earlier view of postmodernism as a project somehow in response to modernism dissipated, being now “a general and popular sensibility” (Connor, 10), whose affiliates no longer need to be aware of their state of mind. Connor’s hypothesis about the development of particular cultural phenomena such as a “sex culture” in the last stage of postmodernism, which autonomously override the more totalizing postmodernism, might offer a valuable approach for another analysis of Heroes Like Us, an admittedly phallogocentric novel (or one, in the slang of the narrator, “a trifle dick-heavy”; 5).

⁴ With these terms Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes respectively referred to the breakdown of the relation of sign and signified. According to them, signs do not refer to an objective reality but merely to other signs imbued with numerous (relative) meanings from other texts.

of a masternarrative.⁵ In the traditional picaresque rendering of events the narrator imposes an order after the fact, corresponding to the available narratives that explain life. In the postmodern novel the hero's reading of events does, in turn, prominently not have to fit an expected masternarrative. The reinterpreted, sometimes incredible feats of the traditional *pícaro* already point to the practice of blending fantasy with reality.⁶ As another generic element open to postmodern interpretation, the case of the *pícaro* does not usually lead to complete narrative closure. The end is rather a mere result of the autobiographic conceit, and this structure thus neatly fits postmodern insecurities about finality and linearity. Also comparable in a way to the experiences of the traditional *pícaro* is the postmodern frustration of the hero's intentions, frequently resulting in unintended events. The workings of historical Fortune here precede the postmodern denial of a pre-established ending. Whereas in the historical picaresque novel the progress of the individual is thwarted by Predestination as well as a rigid social order, postmodernism rejects the modern assumption of directed progress altogether. As in the case of the *pícaro*, then, a nobody can suddenly become a somebody, without logical and conventional cause. In postmodern works the system is thus shown to function on its

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), diagnosed the notion of human progress mirrored in scientific progress as one of the grand narratives of our culture. The other is the narrative of the emancipation of the individual based on knowledge acquisition. These narratives are founded on narrative conventions for their legitimation. According to Lyotard, narratives which replace these universal metanarratives are not extrinsically motivated, explaining something on the outside. Rather, they constitute their own situation of communication and, hence, their own realities.

⁶ The pragmatist Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), realizes that narrative discourse need not be a problem so much as a possibility for philosophy to act upon its edifying nature.

own, and the modern intentional subject is deleted.⁷

This last aspect touches on the picaresque's treatment of the notion of individuality, which also facilitates postmodern seizure. The motif of disguise in the historical picaresque highlights the contemporary humanistic concept of the unified, essential individual. In contrast, in postmodernism this motif can be taken to represent scepticism about any essential unity, now lost to a collection of contingent, relational social roles and identities.⁸ Lastly, in the early picaresque novels bodies are reduced to their constituent parts, and scatological descriptions abound. In postmodernism such grotesque representations of the human body problematize the fragmented self, which is interpellated as the situation demands.

The traditional picaresque novels also offer a basis for a postmodern appropriation regarding the concept of knowledge. They are essentially material in their representation of the physical environment and grounded in the local. It is but a small step to the negation of foundational knowledge⁹ and to the socially related perspectives of

⁷ Louis Althusser considers people's false consciousness, that is, the way people cooperate in their own oppression, mainly in ideology. See Stuart Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates," Critical Studies in Mass Communication 2, no. 2 (1985): 91-114. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1979), and The History of Sexuality, vol. i (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1980), expands Marxist views of the individual shaped by and dependent from the economic and political hegemony. His approach no longer situates power in one political caste, economic leaders, or social class, but postulates that everybody is subject to numerous power structures.

⁸ The idea of a decentered, relational subject threatens to deny the possibility of autonomous and intentional action. On another view, it may also result in new self-awareness and hence social action by the knowing contingent self, who may play out its changing roles in its relations with others.

⁹ Foundational knowledge began to be questioned when scientists realized that their ideas were not based entirely on empirical findings but also on definitional perspectives. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), posited that people do not increase knowledge so much as alter their perspectives on the world in what he termed *paradigm shifts*.

postmodernism.¹⁰ The grotesque of the historical picaresque here emphasizes the lack of a unifying perspective.¹¹ The honor theme of the Spanish models, adapted to modern questions about pedigree and inner virtue in the English picaresque novels discussed, paves the way for the discussion of the hyperreality of self-referential signs today.¹² A suspicion of the legitimation of the official order is already inherent in the early picaresque novel, where the main role of the *pícaro* is to criticize society, reaffirming the dominant values at the same time. He is punished for deviant behavior but is nonetheless somewhat successful. The postmodern hero meanwhile uncovers the concept of deviance itself as produced in social interchange.¹³ In a postmodern version, the position of the individual within the established value system becomes the aphorism of power is knowledge. That is, knowledge is determined by economic possibilities,¹⁴ in other words power, which is not graspable since it is anonymous and dispersed in discourses and

¹⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason," Social Science Information 14, no. 19-47 (1975), for a theory of the dependence of knowledge on the social conditions.

¹¹ The grotesque also causes humor, which alleviates the biting satire. Assuming that in satire we laugh with the character and not at him, where does the reader stand, when the postmodern *pícaro* is no longer outside one particular referential frame, but rather negotiating various indefinite orientations which include the reader? It would be interesting to analyze in more detail how narrative features of the picaresque genre have adapted to postmodernist conventions regarding their satiric potential.

¹² Mark Poster, ed., Jean Baudrillard, Selected Works (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), analyzes the strategies of seduction and the media, in which signs refer to other signs, and where appearance never points to any fixed essence. The world of simulacra that replace reality expands into the areas of language, economics, and religion.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975), questions the legitimation of values through tradition and authority. He deconstructs the supposition that pre-existent values can be examined and argues that values are rather produced by the terminology, methods, and interpretation of scientists.

¹⁴ See Lyotard for the theory that the financial means determine what is examined and thus becomes knowledge.

power relations.¹⁵ Regarding issues of power/knowledge, self, progress, narrative, and language, it appears from this brief enumeration of generic elements that the historical picaresque novel is especially suitable for a postmodern rendering. The following pages will analyze the ways in which the historical picaresque novel has been modulated to create a postmodern picaresque novel in Thomas Brussig's Heroes Like Us.

Transformations of the Generic Structure in Heroes Like Us

In the German late twentieth-century picaresque novel Helden wie wir (1995; translated 1997 Heroes Like Us)¹⁶ certain generic elements retain their relevance, being adapted to the postmodern condition. Above all, the problematic postmodern concept of the subject influences the novel's modulation of picaresque features. The structure of the work resembles that of the Spanish and English picaresque novels discussed in the earlier chapters of this study. It is a sequence of episodes, related by a first-person narrator to explain a picaresque *caso*. The justification of the narrator remains quite doubtful, however, since the double structure of the narration allows for a different reading than the one he overtly intends.

The episodes out of the hero's life are not tales of realistic events like those of the earlier picaresque. Here the episodes consist of questions that the narrator poses to himself and then takes in fantastic directions, of thought processes traced in absurd directions, and of daydreams related as if they were possible. This premise allows

¹⁵ According to Foucault political, economic, and religious power structures dominate the individual through the ways they produce, categorize, distribute, and utilize knowledge. Power and knowledge thus presuppose and constitute each other.

¹⁶ All page references will be to Thomas Brussig, Heroes Like Us, trans. John Brownjohn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux: 1997).

Brussig, like other postmodern authors, to mingle the factual with the fictional. Between the imaginary characters he intersperses real persons, albeit with fictional qualities. Real historical events are fictionalized by spinning imaginary occurrences around them. Real dates and times are given, and videotapes are cited as evidence to the truth of the story, yet this story is merely imagination embedded in real historical events. The fantastic and realistic modes are intermingled to the result that the reader uncomfortably does not know whether to respond to the momentousness of the real historic events or to the fantastical exaggerations of the actions of the character. That way, the expectations of the reader are continually jolted and he is emotionally disoriented, forced to come to terms with the historical events related.

While self-reflexive references to the adherence to narrative conventions abound, such as the admission by the narrator that some aspects of the plot are “a trifle dick-heavy” for a serious autobiography (5), the traditional narrative convention that “everything was following a logical course and had *had* to end this way” is obviously not true (238).¹⁷ The novel is not metafictional in that no figure steps out of the novel, no character talks directly to the reader like in Philip Roth’s The Counterlife (1986). Brussig’s work nevertheless calls attention to its artifice, through our now familiar picaresque double structure. With its distance between character and narrator, and the self-reflective intrusions of the latter in his reinterpretation, which take the form of rhetorical questions, addresses to Mr. Kitzelstein, what-if questions, and self-conscious

¹⁷ Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), theorizes about the lack of objectivity of history writing if history must be told as a story conforming to narrative conventions. That is, he takes Lyotard’s argument about grand narratives into the local domain.

following of the events into the avowedly absurd. The historic generic device of the double structure is also coherent with postmodernist literary conventions.

The narrative is a pseudo-autobiography written by a mature narrator, Klaus, to a Reader, Mr. Kitzelstein of The New York Times, who is a representative of the dominant order.¹⁸ The narrator writes to explain an absurd case, namely how he brought down the Wall while working for the *Stasi*.¹⁹ In a practical application of Lyotard's theory of the process of postmodernist art,²⁰ here the case can be seen as a way of comprehending that which is incomprehensible in its outsized dimensions. Klaus tries to narrate the becoming of the Fall of the Wall, while its origins are too complex to master. In order to do that, he devises the narrative of the intercession of his unnaturally enlarged penis. His actions – his entire life, in fact – have meaning as “recent German history's missing link” (262), the narrator states. This is a modern way of reducing the experience and is shown to ultimately fail.

The case also fails to offer a satisfying explanation on the personal level. The novel proclaims the postmodern death of the subject who reasons and acts autonomously. In its stead it posits the subject who depends on the systems of signification, existing only in relation and not of itself.²¹ On the one hand, this offers an easy explanation for the

¹⁸ Brad Prager, “The Erection of the Berlin Wall: Thomas Brussig's Helden wie wir and the End of East Germany,” Modern Language Review 99, no., 4 (2004): 983-98, reads the novel allegorically, stating that Klaus's confession equals “Brussig's own desire to distance himself from [the] tradition [of GDR literature]” (995).

¹⁹ Stasi is the acronym for Staatssicherheit, the secret police of the former GDR. It conducted espionage and counter-espionage and controlled its citizens to protect the state. A network of agents reported opposition to the Stasi, the state, and the party, and the Stasi was in turn responsible to the ruling party and the government.

²⁰ See Lyotard, 1984.

²¹ The novel's treatment of subject formation is discussed further along.

behaviour of the character. On the other hand, such an other-directed subject can hardly be a hero, and thus at the same time its reaffirmation contradicts the intention of the narrator. Contrary to the narrator's interpretation of the climax of his perversions, that is, his act of exhibition, as a rebellion against the GDR, throughout his narration his unethical acts are justified by his intentions to support the socialist regime. In other words, by finding a common denominator for the actions of the character in the result of his last action, the traces are made to fit the much more laudable master-narrative, which creates a hero. Meanwhile, the events told show Klaus as a passive conformist. Like Moll he follows the moral practices not so much through unrelenting ambition as contingent circumstance, and like her seeks not to be blamed. Brussig's hero supports the socialist regime, because he has been indoctrinated and is not really responsible as an autonomous agent. Where Defoe weaves the concept of predestination through the master-narrative as legitimating discourse, already on the decline in the historic moment, Brussig reverts to an equally suspect Marxist conception of the subject, but his real concern is with structures of a similarly invalid Western (modern) ideal of individuality. As we will see, in Brussig's novel Western culture does not offer a solution either, since its subjects are also "dead," even if they are so through the structures of consumer capitalism rather than the political system.

The complex constitution of the *pícaro*'s case in Heroes Like Us depends for its effect on the typical picaresque double structure. As in other picaresque novels, there is a distance between the two voices of the young protagonist who wants to succeed in the old order and is proud of his achievements, and of the narrator who retrospectively sounds as

if he had not known, or had tried to rebel, or had been forced to his actions.²² As a child Klaus appears naïve. The knowing older narrator humorously reports numerous occurrences in which the character learns that his own ideas about things like foreign trade and the production of sperm are mistaken. His behavior is wrong, as the wiser narrator knows. Thus the latter no longer “stubbornly suppress[es his] carnal urges” (99). The narrator also knows that he was so naïve as to consider himself “better, superior” in comparison with the other cadets (95), while he also “collaborated ... in total innocence” (243). For the narrator socialist propaganda “seems so transparent now” (80). He is also able to see behind the official stance concerning the arrests of political opponents, detecting it as a way of “swelling our foreign exchange reserves” (197). On a personal level, the narrator has additional insight, recognizing his motivations for his actions as angst, shame, a desire for greatness, and his own “ambition to be one of the winners” (84).

Although the narrator claims, not to be making any “excuses” (152), his former naïveté clearly does serve as a welcome excuse for his follies, for instance for his adventure with a prostitute. Involuntarily ensnared, as the narrator implies, the youth is greatly surprised at her forward behavior. Klaus supposedly does not know that he is in the *Stasi*, since nobody ever mentions the term. He does not know what Human Rights are either. Detecting ignorance as a strategy to keep a clean conscience, the narrator nevertheless represents his younger self as clueless in that way. The character naively believes the story of the wild beast capitalism threatening world peace and therefore becomes politically active, but that would not explain why he acted “often as leader of

²² Within the postmodern frame, all of these explanations are actually all partly true.

the chorus" (81). Retrospectively, Klaus belittles his acts as "ludicrous, megalomaniac romanticism [and] naïveté" (213), never mentioning the terrible effects they had for his victims. The knowing narrator criticizes the "docile, diffident way" of "the people" who did not stand up against a few boarder guards (256), conveniently forgetting that his own more heroic action was based on wrong assumptions and lacked real intentions. His impression that "no one will admit to having conformed, everyone was in some way 'anti,'" may at the same time serve as an excuse for his own participation. Yet while others make "deplorable excuses" for supporting the system, he claims not to justify himself (152). Meanwhile, the postmodern concept of subject position, which his narrative constructs, does offer a forceful excuse for Klaus's former behavior, similar to the historical *pícaro*'s dependence on Fortune. Frequently the narrator relates his impression of being shoved towards a certain behavior. He speaks of "powerful operators" who had great plans for him (88), and of someone who "must have taken charge of" his destiny (89). Like Enlightenment Providence, all-pervasive systems of power "shield, guide, direct" Klaus imperceptibly (89). As "master of [his] fate" they push him into his "allotted role" to enact their plans for him (136). This implies that the character is not consciously responsible for his actions, much like his literary ancestors, whose deviant behavior could also be explained as a reaction to Fortune's selective injustice.

The wiser narrator, who "can – today at least – read some meaning into everything that has ever happened to [him]" (40), reinterprets the events. He claims he wanted to be detected as a Stasi agent during the demonstration, when in fact he had ended up at Alexanderplatz by accident, and where "there were so many demonstrators ... that [he]

had little chance of bumping into any of [his] victims” (228). His “repentance” (238) – right after surgery, with his Stasi identity card found – is just as dubious as that of the historical *pícaro*. Similarly, the aloof stance of the narrator, reasoning that the people’s “experience of freedom, dignity, and self-assertion may prove infectious and strike a lasting chord” (260), is not credible, especially in light of his subsequent inability to articulate. After his unintelligible utterance of “Germany” has been misinterpreted, the narrator wrongly prides himself on his supposed insight, being “so far and so perceptively ahead of his time” (262). Although the narrator affirms that “all the threads of [his] story come together” (14), it is clear that an acceptable, ethical explanation of his actions can only be produced through the assimilation of his *vita* to the new (value) system – Western capitalism – in his reinterpretation.

Another aspect of the ambivalent picaresque discourse, namely the intention of *prodesse et delectare*, evolves into a comic incongruity in the postmodern context, as grave and trivial issues are mixed, such as the opening of the Wall with Klaus’s obsession with his penis, and the disdain of human rights with the humorous description of a war scene played in reverse. The usually trivial advice given, against leaving the door unlocked and forgetting to wash one’s hands, for instance, comes mostly from his mother’s mouth, who is retrospectively discredited as a naïve socialist. The advice by Klaus’s fellow Stasi spies is likewise not to be taken seriously. Moreover, one cannot be sure about the value of the counsel the hero receives at summer camp, since the children there turn out to be the brainwashed offspring of associates. In other words, the secure moral authority against which the earlier *pícaros* measured their actions has turned into manifold, decentered *loci*, through which the ineptitude of all advice is parodied.

The picaresque double structure facilitates social criticism in this postmodern work as well. The *pícaro* has various occupations under different masters who teach him negative yet often meaningless lessons. He spends endless hours in observation for the Stasi without knowing what to observe. Even the narrator retrospectively is not able to make out what he was supposed to learn from that experience. Although Klaus does not travel like his literary predecessors, he pokes fun at the various institutions he attends such as school, the Young Pioneers, summer camps, after-school clubs, military training, the Stasi, the Ministry of Sanitation, and so on. West-German capitalism is likewise criticized, for instance its sexuality, sensationalism, and belief in market forces. Yet all the while Klaus the character attempts to assimilate to the systems with which the narrator takes issue. In Brussig's postmodern version, hence, the adapted structure of the picaresque novel also functions as in tradition to voice social and political criticism ambiguously, just as it does in the historical and Enlightenment predecessors.

Modulations of Picaresque Elements

Apart from the structure of the picaresque novel, many motifs and themes of Heroes Like Us are adapted to the current socio-historical and cultural circumstances: The types appearing here are those of the turn of the millennium such as the self-important politician, the sensation-hungry journalist, the unsuspecting socialist youth, the consumption-oriented and hedonistic West-German, the officialese-speaking party functional, the people like a nurse, and the – rare – intellectually independent person, who is, incidentally, a fan of the Netherlands instead of the FRG. The origin of the traditional *pícaro* is also modulated to correspond to the new context. Klaus is the son of

staunch socialists, which is a suspicious *Manko* from today's West-German perspective. Klaus's picaresque necessity is his need for recognition in a time when people vie for stardom in Guinness Records competitions, Big Brother shows, and the like. The outcast position of the *pícaro* is a result of his socialist conformity to this postmodern picaresque farrago. In tune with the information age, his poverty is modified as his lack of knowledge here. The pranks of the hero are comparable to those of earlier *pícaros* as well, in that they are deviant and petty, the results of unethical decisions, which lead to an ambivalent improvement of the protagonist's position. The historic *pícaro*'s constant failures in a forbidding world are translated into the postmodern incongruity between an ideal theory and the real practices, between people's megalomaniac ambitions, as Klaus terms them, and the baseness of their capacities. The actions of Brussig's hero, however, differ from the tricks of the earlier *pícaro* regarding motivation. Klaus's actions are perverted by indoctrination, and the dispersed power of state institutions is all-embracing. Klaus is not an individual with a stable core like the baroque Spanish *pícaro* or one who can develop like the Enlightenment English *pícaro*, but a body with overwhelming physical demands who lacks an essential self. Even as a liberated pan-German who can employ emancipated language at last, Klaus at best sheds his socialist corset for a Western cape.

The disreputable position of the hero, the West-German perspective from which the pseudo-autobiography is retrospectively told, begins with his typically ignominious origin. He is born in-between and outside the stable order like his literary ancestors, on a hotel table. Tanks are rolling past and into Czechoslovakia, which prefigures the

momentous events ahead.²³ Similar to the *converso pícaro* of old, Klaus is born of parents whose attitudes and behavior have always been a little too correct. Mother and father are both conforming socialists who might be naïve or indeed opportunistic, since their ideological correctness has conspicuously made them eligible for an apartment in a comparably modern *Plattenbau* and for a Wartburg car. While his parents are flawless in their professional lives, they fail at their familial responsibilities. The father, as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, is always impersonal, or in the words of the author “upright, authoritarian” at home (6). His mother, who is a sanitary inspector, takes her professional concerns home, displaying an obsession with cleaning. The two key experiences that define Klaus’s relationship with them, meant to show their genuine selves, in fact uncover a void. His mother overreacts when Klaus has an allergic reaction; his father is covered with sand when he almost stands up to the father of another child on the playground. These two, ridiculed with their inappropriate, helpless reactions and their one-dimensional consciousnesses, determine Klaus’s misfit start into an alienating world comparable to that of his literary predecessors.²⁴

The necessity of the *pícaro* is another motif translated from the historic models to the postmodern rendering. Here it is removed from the material domain of hunger and the accumulation of wealth and transposed to the realm of the ideal as an addiction to making one’s mark, an ideal not warranted in egalitarian socialism. It is a suspect objective from

²³ Klaus’s life from 1968 until the narration of his case thus equals a distinct phase of socialism. This fact supports a reading of the novel as an allegory about socialism. See for instance Prager, Mirjam Gebauer, “Milieuschilderungen zweier verrückter Monologen. Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* als ein Vorbild für Thomas Brussig’s *Helden wie wir*,” *Orbis Litterarum* 57 (2002): 222-40.

²⁴ On the allegorical level mentioned the hero’s parents represent two sides of the GDR dictatorship: the authoritative-repressive side (father), and the softer side, which was able to suppress conflicts (mother). See the interview with Brussig cited above, in which he offers this interpretation.

the perspective of the dominant order, just as Lazarillo's subversive cheating of his masters and Moll's rise in status both are. It is all the same to the character whether he "go[es] down in history" as a magazine cover (135), a famous scientist, a top spy, a great pervert, or, lastly, the hero of the re-unification. What is important is that his goal "to make a name for [him]self" results in political involvement (124), for instance when Klaus tries to curb the production of political leaflets as a means to become famous. In sum, the necessity of the *pícaro* has been transformed from the original demand of the body (hunger) and later of mind (status), both of which are situated in the individual, to the narrative demand of becoming a hero (a mental state independent of reality).

The picaresque motif of poverty is likewise adapted in Brussig's work. Klaus's postmodern poverty is the lack of information, a theme that relates to the power/knowledge issue. While in the modern epoch birth and possessions determined one's place in society, today knowledge, or lack thereof, divides the classes. Klaus the character is always the uninitiated, be it at summer camp or regarding his father's work. His attempts to obtain information usually fail. As a member of the Stasi, which will not surrender its identity, Klaus is repeatedly reminded of the kind of institution he works for in place of an explanation. The power structures resist being pinned down, remaining anonymous throughout, even if they are symbolically, yet ineffectively, centered on the Head of State, on the absurd, puppet-like figure of the ailing Erich Honecker towards the end. This modern focussing is proven an illusion in Klaus's wordless non-communication with the party leader in the subterranean bomb-shelter hospital. At the time of narrating, however, Klaus seems to know, to "understand everything that happened" (224). At that time, as the narrator makes believe, he is no longer the ignorant subject of his youth but

the emancipated agent who can relate his actions from the comfortable perspective of the insider. As the Spanish *pícaro* breaks the stable order by refusing to starve without alms, and the English *pícaro* creates a place for himself above his rank, so the supposedly full-blooded socialist dares not remain ignorant. Of course, his emancipation cannot succeed, as Klaus steps from one system into another that is just as determining.

Before that ending, the ignorance of the character contributes to his role of solitary outsider. Klaus is not merely “different” (38), since he does not attend kindergarten and does not speak the Berlin dialect of those around him, thus not understanding the other children at summer camp. He also has a name which nobody can pronounce, Uhltscht. In addition, he is always “the last of the dog-paddlers” (32) and cannot cope with normal events like a peeing contest among children. He is therefore an outsider due to his personal difference in a system which champions egalitarianism.

The traditional picaresque motif of the outsider is further adapted to the current context, Klaus being represented as objectified, in contrast to his compatriots, who retain notions of their independent individuality. The political suspect tellingly called Individualist, whom the Stasi observes, is an adherent of different beliefs. Klaus’s Stasi colleague Raymond likewise preserves a sense of self, emphasizing the special spelling of his name. Unlike the hero, he exhibits an idiosyncratic writing style and questions the tasks he has to perform for the Stasi. Klaus, meanwhile, cannot or does not want to break through the tight frame within which the socialist doctrine allows him to move.²⁵ Whenever he tries to participate in harmless infringements of the officially set limits, he fails. On a cruise in Berlin in search for sexual adventure, he is the only one of 600 Stasi

²⁵ Significantly, Klaus’s father, a convinced socialist, dies shortly before the Fall of the Wall. His mother lives, yet she is a naïve conformist.

cadets to catch a venereal disease. Unlike his comrades, his long vigils in front of the ball room hoping to pick up a girl are unsuccessful. He cannot even masturbate without falling down the stairs and breaking both arms. Feeling like “the accused on trial for his life” (27), his reaction is to overcompensate in order to belong, directing all his actions towards socialism. That makes him, paradoxically, too well-behaved, too prudent – too conforming, in short – to belong to the community. Only when the narrator is talking about the stereotypical East-German does he say “we” and “us” (82). Only in relation with the socialist project does he feel “part of” something and not separated through the “lone-wolfish and individualistic” behavior of the kind of a Nobel laureate (83). Speaking of his involvement with the socialist state and his belief in the public doctrine, he says proudly, “I’m one of their number” (84), suggesting that he is “one of us” by dint of his mind having been infiltrated as well (86). Having been “captured” by a Stasi head hunter, he relates that he rejoices in the official’s accepting him as “one of us” (88). Not only does the narrator set the character apart from the masses of East-Germans through his absolute political commitment. His attempt at inclusion also results in complete failure since the society he aims at turns out to have been an imaginary construct separate from the whole of the people. In the eyes of the narrator’s intended readership – the former imperialist enemy – he must also remain the despised Other as socialist.

The Problem of the Postmodern Subject

At issue in Brussig’s postmodern picaresque novel is a new and different concept of identity. His narrator embarks on the same difficult project of representing himself in a better light through retrospective narration. Yet while earlier *pícaros* justify their

questionable character traits as necessary to succeed in their adverse surroundings, the legitimization of the postmodern novel seems to be that the protagonist does not have a whole self at all. He cannot therefore be held responsible for his earlier actions, as the narrator states “nothing I did at this time was the product of deliberate intent on my part. It wasn’t *I* that burglarized, abducted, hunted, harassed, and intimidated” (136).²⁶ This pattern of explanation would also depreciate his last act, which is actually meant to show him as a hero, if it cannot be attributed to an intentional self. A third possibility of considering the self, then, is suggested by the novel, which rehabilitates some modern philosophical tenets within the postmodern conception.²⁷ It motions towards a new ethics allowing for meritorious action which does not originate in an essential self. Rather, action is regarded as a conditional response of one perceived social role, intentional and yet not defining.

The single most striking attribute of Klaus the character is that he is very impressionable. He exists as a foil for party ideology rather than as an individual with proper emotions and desires. This is best demonstrated when he is asked to find another identity for himself as Stasi official. The task is impossible for him, since his socialist identity is the only one possible, the one all state indoctrination had as its superior end.

²⁶ In his 1998 interview Brussig emphasizes Klaus’s lack of a critical consciousness. The author wanted to create a figure who accepts everything as it is presented without reflection [“Klaus nimmt alles so, wie man es ihm gibt. Er hat kein kritisches Bewußtsein oder Distanz zu dem, was man ihm präsentiert” (57-58)].

²⁷ Several contributors to the collection *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007), ed. Neil Brooks and Josh Toth, discuss ways in which current literary works (Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*, 2005), works of architecture (the exhibit *Dark Places* by the collective servo, 2006), and of cultural theory (Klaus Stierstorfer, ed. *Beyond Postmodernism*, 2003) rediscover the humanist ideals of agency and autonomy, reconfiguring postmodernist assumptions away from the danger of passive relativism to find a new *raison d’etre* in a post-9/11, post-digitalized world.

This is also evident in the way he disciplines himself, suppressing his sexual urges. As Prager describes the process, “domestic regulations become internalized in his super-ego” (988). In a Foucauldian move, the private and the public are intermingled here through the social regulation which parallels state surveillance. If Klaus has desires, they are never independent of his political outlook, as, for instance, his desire for sexual contact, which is, consequently, represented as a scientific project for the good of socialism. He is, moreover, not able to cherish love and human fellowship – as opposed to professional and party camaraderie – thus leaving Yvonne before they can come close. Even his opinions about others – if he has any – are mere prejudices, about people with tattoos, teachers, and politicians, for example. Thus he cannot fathom the sight of the deranged Honecker and continues expectant during an incredibly long time span. In short, the identity of the character is socialist.

With the breakdown of socialism, that is, of his determinate world, his socialist self is devalued. What is more, at the time of narrating, it has become an impossibility.²⁸ After the reunification, then, the narrator tries to find a new identity. With hindsight he constructs a self which would conform to the new values without denying his old self. The narrator represents himself as a naïve and pathologic protagonist whose acts fortuitously conform to the post-reunification value system in their accidental effect. He reinterprets his actions as his erroneous youthful attempts to overcome other-determination in intentional self-formation. Klaus supposedly wants to model himself after the protagonists of the popular myth about the courageous people of Eisleben, who

²⁸ It is commonly acknowledged that East-Germans lost their history and personal *vitae* through the sudden reinterpretation of what used to be firm assumptions about their culture and society when West-Germany conquered the interpretive authority as the hegemonic power. Brussig’s hero is trying to reassert authority over his biography, that is, the part he and heroes like him played in history.

hid the communist flag from the Nazis. Yet this objective is unattainable because he aims at a self that is imaginary, removed from the level of the real through its qualities of simulation and grandeur. Alternately, Klaus wants to be “the Terminator of history” (6), a Nobel Prize laureate, and the greatest pervert in history, all of which are one-dimensional reductions of his imagination. Of course, all these attempts at defining himself fail, because his exaggerated desire to make his mark perverts them. The result is that his actions go over and above those automatic reactions of subjects caught in the system and become imaginary, being simultaneously too naïve and too perverse to be taken for real. For instance, instead of being a regular Stasi official, the hero decides to become a “Great Pervert” (199) “in order to promote the triumph of socialism” (200). Pursuing what Foucault terms technologies of the self as a type of agency, Klaus centers on his sexual organ for the greater part of the narration. His practices of subjectivity are very limited as an expression of the hero’s dependence on the structures of domination. While Yvonne’s practices range from decorating her room and dreaming of Holland to buying a kaleidoscope, and while Raymond follows various practices such as refining his writing style and considering clothing, Klaus’s one attempt at ramifying forms of subjectivity in

his letter to Yvonne is immediately stopped. Klaus is not able to conceive of himself independently.²⁹

The kind of behavior the narrator reports in part consists of harmless, automatic acts whose political motivation he denies. Their results are frequently unintended. For instance, the first time Klaus appears in the party organ is by accident: his innocent question about the functioning of baffles in the physics club of the school leads to his hosting of a stand at a regional exhibition. Government members come to congratulate him, and he is made a model of socialist education. Writing letters to the editor of the Young Pioneers' newspaper Trommel, among others, Klaus also appears a convinced socialist while he does so out of his need for recognition. Moreover, the narrator claims having joined the "Ernst Thälmann" Young Pioneer organization merely because everybody else did. Retrospectively, however, he recognizes his indoctrination, admitting that "at eight years of age [he] considered it only right that someone should have flung himself at the path of a bullet fired at a superior being" (78). His reason for becoming a Stasi agent is likewise only unconsciously political, because he does so from a wish to please his father rather than from sincere conviction. According to him, even the less harmless activities of the hero are merely part of his job description at the time, such as

²⁹ Jane Flax describes Foucault's technologies of the self as ways available within cultures for individuals to shape themselves. They are mutable depending on their context and interrelated with power structures. In power structures individuals maintain a certain degree of freedom, following their own practices and wanting the other to adopt them. On the contrary, in structures of domination, one party prevents the other from exercising their practices. It institutes rules that fix the asymmetrical power relations. See Jane Flax, "Soul Service: Foucault's 'Care of the Self' as Politics and Ethics," in Brooks and Toth, eds., The Mourning After. Asked about the relationship between Klaus's unnatural sexuality and repression in the GDR, Brussig in the interview by Straubel, Szabo, and Wendtorf, stated that he looked for sexual metaphors which could be employed politically in his novel. He took the commonplace saying about the perverted socialism ("pervertierter Sozialismus") quite literally (56). The perversions of his hero express certain qualities of the political system. At the same time, they illustrate his psychological determination ("Und die Art, wie Klaus zu den Perversionen geführt wird, ist Freud für Erstsemester") (56).

breaking into homes in search of subversive material and intentionally breaking things, kidnapping an eight-year-old in order to scare her mother and then cheating her intentionally at a game (185), and arresting the demonstrators at Alexanderplatz subway station after the nightly demonstrations. Despite the narrator's disavowal of conscious political goals, his socialist identity still lingers on through the activities described. The failed attempt of the narrator at finding another identity is symbolized through his participation in a demonstration against the regime. Driven by his bad conscience, Klaus attends the demonstration on Alexanderplatz, hoping to be detected, as the narrator later supposes. In other words, instead of being hailed as a subject by the police as in Althusser's example,³⁰ Klaus hails himself, as "the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of a recognition," as Judith Butler claims.³¹ Yet, although he symbolically stumbles over a placard reading "self-determination for all!" (235) and tells the bystanders that he works for the Stasi, Klaus's socialist identity is not recognized and can therefore not be overcome.³² To the contrary, he is mistaken for a pro-emancipation activist.

This other Westernized identity is ascribed to the hero precisely in the events of November 9th. Coincidentally, he flees the hospital to protect his oversized penis exactly on that day. With the intent to settle a personal score, he ploughs through the crowd,

³⁰ See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in 'Lenin and Philosophy' and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), trans. Ben Brewster, 127-86, esp. 174. This paragraph draws heavily on the hypotheses Prager offers in his article.

³¹ Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 113.

³² Prager argues that Klaus liberates himself from parental and State authority, that is, repression, at the end. To support this view he cites several instances from the text in which the narrator puts his parents at the same level with State institutions regarding his policing of desires in his secret, forbidden masturbation.

when he finds himself in front of a contested checkpoint. There he exhibits his parts, stunning the boarder guards into inaction, which results in the toppling of the Wall.

Mistaking his intentions to the last, the gathered multitudes attribute to Klaus an intentional selfhood capable of reorienting itself within brave new discourses. In fact, this supposedly momentous act cannot be attributed to any belief system at all. It becomes conspicuously distasteful and unheroic even in the retrospective representation by the narrator. He acts to end the stalemate between demonstrators and border guards out of impatience rather than sudden emancipation. When asked for a statement after the fall of the Wall, at a loss for words Klaus can only utter the word *Germany*, which is immediately misconstrued as a victorious cry of glory to the Federal Republic.

Meanwhile, his action, as well as the others related, is merely the result of the character's confused perception of reality and his erroneous reactions. In the end, the wiser narrator still asks: "Who was I?" (14). His attempt at self-determination is also countermanded by the very fact of confessing to Mr. Kitzelstein. For Klaus has already sold his history – himself – to Western capitalism. East-Germans and West-Germans alike are reduced in their subjectivity in this postmodern novel. The former are interpellated as collective beings who suppress their desires for the common good in socialism. The latter are interpellated as individuals who fulfil their desires selfishly in capitalism. Westerners sell sex, like the businessman who gives Klaus his card, and Easterners inhibit it. In the Western system even a momentous historical event can be reduced to sex; in the Eastern system even a harmless love affair between two youths turns into perversion.

The Picaresque Novel As Interpretative Frame:

Ambiguity As Social Critique

Brussig's postmodern hero has to negotiate two sets of discourses, much like the earlier representatives of the genre. While both are shown to be equally flawed, the double structure of the picaresque novel motions towards ways of coming to terms with them. Read against the grain, the novel may offer a way out of the dilemma of the subject. It would allow Klaus to re-orient himself at the fall of the Wall as his case demands, without assuming his actions to be the expression of his – any – identity. The novel implies a subject no longer defined via identity based practices, that is, seeking truth in a particular quality such as race or political affiliation in socialism. Rather, the hero has situational desires, still remains fragmented, and knows about – gives in to – his conditional self.³³ Unlike Christa Wolf, whom the narrator regards as a socialist stalled on unrealistic ideals or “campfire emotions” (234), Klaus is thoroughly disillusioned and has turned into a cynical enemy of all such “socialist hocus pocus” (233). He laments that “people speak of socialism and not of our need for unrestricted access to the world at large” (234). He is defined neither by socialism nor by capitalism, but pursues situational, changing desires. He acts just like most other people, in fact, whose characteristic sudden change of orientation does not mark them as despicable turncoats but merely signals the realization of other sides to themselves. The subversive, emancipatory potential of this thesis lies in the fact that the narrator's retrospective formation as a knowing and

³³ Jane Flax argues against subject centered politics, whose identity based practices “launch us into investigations of the worth and character of the subject as measured by preordained standard and a search for the commonalities of a subject position that is simultaneously a disciplining of its objects into conformity” (91). She puts forth a theory of “object centered political strategies” (91): “Instead of depending on a unitary or redemptive subject as the agent of change, we can develop practices of politics based on a mutual desire for particular objects or outcomes” (92).

contingent self allows for conditional responses which may resist the pervasive authority of the (political and economic) system. Klaus's behavior therefore threatens the dominant order and is similarly ambivalent as the tricks of the earlier *pícaros*. The unlawful and immoral activities of the traditional *pícaro* are not downright wrong through their adherence to emerging, not yet fully defined ideologies. The actions of Brussig's postmodern *pícaro* are likewise excusable to some extent, since on the one hand as subject he is no longer the agent of his actions. At the same time, the narrator seems to be wishing for emancipation, and yet being subject himself to postmodern knowingness, he cannot help doubting its possibility.

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