

Biography

picaresque, *adj.*

2. Of a lifestyle, etc.: wandering, drifting; transitory, impermanent.

precarious, *adj.*

2.c. Subject to or fraught with physical danger or insecurity; at risk of falling, collapse, or similar accident; unsound, unsafe

INTRODUCTION

At a critical juncture in his adolescence, young Wilhelm Meister, hero of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's seminal novel of formation *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796) receives the following advice on how to actively lead a life truly worth living. It is a piece of advice that is mainly concerned with the relation between human will and rationality to necessity and fortune:

The web of life is woven of necessity and chance. Man's reason stands between them and governs both, treating necessity as the foundation of its being and at the same time guiding the operation of chance to its own advantage, for man only deserves to be called a god of this earth, as long as in the exercise of reason he stands *firm and immovable*. Woe then to him who has been accustomed from youth to confound necessity with arbitrary will, and to ascribe to chance a sort of reason, which it seems a kind of religious duty to obey! What is this but to renounce our own judgment and to allow unopposed sway to our inclinations. We deceive ourselves with the

belief that this is an act of piety to pursue our course without reflection, to submit to the guidance of agreeable accidents, and finally to dignify the result of such a fluctuating life with the appellation of heavenly guidance.¹

‘Guiding’, ‘exercising reason’, and firmness are the autonomous, metaphysical, and linear principles that should determine the protagonist’s comportment, especially in order to oppose the excessive vivacity of personal predispositions and inclinations, but also to counter external influences and pressures, such as chance, accident, or material need.

When the first picaresque related his life story more than 200 years earlier, his self-projection ran counter to this highly programmatic plea for reason, autonomy, consistency, and necessity. As a matured narrator, Lázaro de Tormes projects himself as a character that has clearly not been ‘firm and immovable’, furthering metaphysical ‘necessity’, but instead claims to have been fully determined by accident and material necessity. He clearly ‘obeys’ chance, though the results have been mostly highly ‘disagreeable’ and adverse rather than ‘agreeable’, as stated by the subtitle of the novel: ‘de sus fortunas y adversidades’, of his fortunes and adversities. The *OED* defines fortune as heteronomy—quite in opposition to the above advice on autonomy and rationality given to Wilhelm Meister—, describing it as ‘chance, hap, or luck, regarded as a cause of events and changes in men’s affairs’.² Lázaro thus tries to make the *vuestra merced*—the high-ranking member of nobility who has requested a written statement of him—understand his present situation by projecting it as the result of a life shaped entirely by fortune and unlucky circumstance. He lets his interlocutor ‘know that there is a man alive who has seen so much disaster, danger and bad luck’ [‘vean que vive un hombre con tantas fortunas, peligros a adversidades’],³ that these have clearly made it difficult for him to stand *firm*. At the same time, however, he also insists that by ‘dint of hard work and ability’ (4) [‘fuerza y maña remando’ (11)] his fluctuating life has ultimately arrived at a safe haven [‘salieron a buen Puerto’ (11)].

Aravind Adiga’s postcolonial picaresque novel *The White Tiger* (2008) in many ways replicates Lazarillo’s heteronomous narrative of adversity in order to project the life story of a successful Bangalore businessman who has overcome the obstacle of low birth to also arrive at a safe haven and succeed as an entrepreneur. This entrepreneurial success story explores the postcolonial picaresque’s tenuous relation to global capitalism and the discourses and values, such as freedom and human rights, which that capitalism purports to co-articulate. In order to express all the

ambivalences of this relation, without simply offering allegorical fodder to indignant Western readers, the novel departs from the critical linear protocols and autonomous aspirations of *Wilhelm Meister* and the various, albeit much less idealistic, forms of novelistic self-actualization and critique that followed in its wake and resorts to the atypical and heteronomous structure of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Before turning in more detail to this concrete cross-historical case to ask what it tells us about the possibilities of conceiving and narrating social emergence at the beginning and the end of modernity, the chapter will provide a discussion of the often-misrepresented narrative dynamics of the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque, without which such a reading does not make much sense. It will contextualize these dynamics in the history of postcolonial literature and relate them to the political, economic, and cultural modes of emergence that they distinctively emplot. After discussing the atypical and materialist forms of critique of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *The White Tiger* it will end by considering *The White Tiger* and the postcolonial picaresque in the context of human rights narratives and the reading positions that they tend to offer to metropolitan and cosmopolitan readers.

One of the recurring problems of scholarship on the picaresque is that *Lazarillo de Tormes* has been read—mostly by Spanish scholars—as participating in or at least strongly foreshadowing the idea of modern subjectivity. The way of the picaresque protagonist is seen as isomorphic to the transformation of a medieval into an early modern age, a medieval into an early modern subjectivity, making him into ‘a made, educated, matured, and disillusioned man’ [‘hombre hecho, formado, maduro, desengañado’]⁴ provided with a detached and rationalist ‘point of view’ [‘punto de vista’].⁵ Therefore, Lazarillo has been misread as an embryonic *Bildungsroman* [‘un *Bildungsroman* en germen’],⁶ which ‘exemplifies [...] a process of learning and development’.⁷ However, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, especially when opposed to the ideas of subjectivity, rationality, development, and agency assumed or aspired in a *Bildungsroman*, is in fact not a story that anthropogenetically and biogenetically equates the formation of the modern subject; and neither should the pre-industrial mid-sixteenth-century Spain of the Counter-Reformation be prematurely mistaken for an era of modern subjectivity, despite some temporary influxes of Erasmist humanism.⁸ In the concrete Spanish context, the development of the modern subject was in fact long contained by a resilient aristocracy and powerful Catholic dogma until well into the nineteenth century, wherefore—at least for the Spanish context—the

picaresque cannot even be assumed to be a direct early modern precursor for the emergence of modern individualism. The picaresque was certainly an important precursor for the rise of the novel elsewhere, but on the Iberian peninsula itself, its emergence was (merely) part of the 'short and happy life of the novel in Spain'.⁹

The distinction between works such as *Wilhelm Meister* and the picaresque is not merely a question of historical progression between the early modern and the Enlightenment period, in which the *Bildungsroman* increasingly replaces the picaresque as the dominant form of fictional biography, and supposedly renders it fully superfluous once the *Bildungsroman* increases its purview towards more ostensibly material concerns. It is also not only a question of cultural difference between Germany and Spain. Rather, the difference between the forms pertains to competing modes of figuring the relation between the world and the subject in (early) modernity. This distinctness merits an ongoing differentiation between the two genres, as it relates explicitly to the interpretative and ethical stakes that they put forth in the present.

To understand the proliferation of the picaresque in the postcolony and its emphasis on subversion and complicity, we need to first understand this relation between both the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque, and the social climates they repeatedly emplot. Subversion is certainly not the better or more radical political strategy against which the conservative *Bildungsroman* somehow falls short. Quite the opposite: the *Bildungsroman* is, in its most radical form 'as the full assimilations of historical time',¹⁰ suited like no other genre for the articulation of struggle, transformation, and revolution. This potential remains, even when the form often projects the containment of these struggles and eventual resignation and disconsolation. Picaresque subversion, on the other hand, is merely what is left when the material and imaginary resources for struggle are unavailable and struggle is seen to lead nowhere, when a system is experienced as radically untransformable and any external position is rendered impossible not only by containment and annihilation, but also by absorption. At the same time the form also only appears in climates in which change, self-transformation, and autonomy are emerging as dominant ideologies of the self.

Early in *Lazarillo de Tormes* the emerging logic of self-assertion that conflicted heavily with feudal and cosmological tendencies is paraphrased in Lazarillo's initiation into the parvenu picaresque world. He leaves the old social order and ventures into one that is explicitly invested with self-responsibility:

At that moment I felt as if I had woken up and my eyes were opened, I said to myself: "What he says is true; I must keep awake because *I'm on my own and I've got to look after myself*." (8; emphasis added)

Parescióme que en aquel instante desperté de la simpleza en que, como niño dormido estaba. Dije entre mí: "Verdad dice esté, que me cumple avivar el ojo y avisar, pues solo soy, y pensar cómo me sepa valer". (21)

While the form of social emergence that is tied to this self-responsible logic remains perpetually contained by principles of feudalism and its underpinning cosmology, the demands associated with it are irreversible. This tension continues to this very day when the ideology of self-reliance—which itself is problematic enough—is counteracted by principles of accumulation based in ownership and capital, if not, as in the industrial recesses of the postcolony, by explicit coercion, exploitation, and precarity. It is this paradoxical pressure that the postcolonial picaresque emplots and to which the ambivalent protagonist of *The White Tiger* will ultimately respond with uncontained entrepreneurial energy.

PICAESQUE AND *BILDUNGSROMAN*

The suspicion that the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque may have Moebius-strip-like inverted literary-historical trajectories and conditions of possibility is of course a much too general and schematic assumption. Both are potentially responses to the same historical conditions, though some conditions—and their dominant ideologies—may favour one form more than the other. Therefore, dominance of one form is not fully refutable for certain historical contexts, such as the 'serious' nineteenth century,¹¹ when a discourse prevailed in which the developmental temporalities of the nation and the self were conflated and contained in a progressive 'soul-nation allegory'¹² leading to 'the relative silence of other narrative forms, in particular the picaresque novel'.¹³ Similarly, the post-independence era in many former British colonies was marked by national projects and an idea of social, economic, and technological progress that likewise tended to become articulated in the semantics of a progressive 'soul-nation allegory' and, therefore, corresponded with a lack of attention for picaresque forms.

The distinction between the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman* is also not necessarily one of economic status, even as Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* asserts that bourgeois novels in the *Wilhelm Meister* tradition

rely on ‘a certain calm based on security’ [‘eine gewisse Ruhe des Gesichtseins’] and an ‘atmosphere of ultimate security’ [‘Atmosphäre des letzten Gefährlosigkeit’].¹⁴ This ‘atmosphere’ clearly does not necessarily imply material security, a bourgeois lifestyle, or lack of social strife. It does however, as the appropriation of the form for the postcolonial and anti-colonial project implies, connote the privileging of a certain sense of agency and identitary security, if only as a heuristic projection or a perceived lack to be mitigated. This ‘security’ may stem from a clear political telos, from the closed temporality of the nation, or from the mere possibility of having any social place—including resistance—in the world from which to operate, aspire, and critique. Hence, the nineteenth-century predominance of the *Bildungsroman* form has not only been linked to ‘rationalism and Enlightenment’ but explicitly also to ‘revolutionary politics’, pointing towards the transformative potential of the *Bildungsroman* and its capacity to mobilize political action.¹⁵

Transformation, however, is only one of the dynamics of the *Bildungsroman* and of development. They may also follow repetitive and cyclical patterns and thus propose being governed by supposedly timeless social laws of being formed by the world. At the very least, personal emergence is narrowed by the array of social possibilities of a given period, similar to the sobering trajectory of ‘accommodation’ foregrounded in Jerome Buckley’s influential definition of the genre.¹⁶ The *Bildungsroman* is a form that always oscillates between transformation and classification.¹⁷ It cyclically and tautologically (re)affirms, reproduces, and narrows developmental patterns and social convention and also always has to do with (productive) resignation and compromise. Its emergence at the onset of European nationalism thus served to articulate *and* contain the transformative power of change and modernization. In this regard the *Bildungsroman* is, in fact, an ‘unfulfilled genre’ [‘unerfüllte Gattung’]¹⁸ or even a ‘phantom formation’ that has only ever existed as a genre ideal exerting a spectral creativity on novelistic temporality and writerly practice, by offering comparable developmentalist responses to isomorphic experiences, regardless of the investment in an ‘original impulse’.¹⁹ Due to its relation to such bounded forms of temporality the *Bildungsroman* is often also used as a denigrating foil—as the conservative other, as it were—for more experimental and, strangely enough, ‘progressive’ and radical literary forms, muting completely its revolutionary potential.

Aside from its propensity to articulate historical change, the *Bildungsroman* is also more adaptable to the climates of insecurity than has often been admitted.²⁰ In fact, it may even be said to have thrived in these climates. In this vein Jed Esty's important study on the modernist *Bildungsroman* is not concerned with a replacement of the *Bildungsroman* by the picaresque but posits for the Anglophone literatures of the age of empire (1880–1920), that is for aestheticism, naturalism, and early modernism, the prominence of a *Bildungsroman* of arrested development. Rather than assuming the full-scale abolishment of notions of *Bildung*, self-formation, and understanding, usually associated with modernism and the historical avant-garde, Esty focusses on the transformation of the idea of *Bildung* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglophone literatures that resulted in '*Metabildungsromane*' of stunted growth or arrested development: he condenses these topoi into the eponymous notion of unseasonable youth, a term that explicitly draws on Buckley's classic study *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974). *Unseasonable Youth* describes a *Bildungsroman*, in which a progressivist notion of development and the allegorical relation between the nation and the soul are problematized by an inside-out critique of, rather than frontal attack on, developmental historicism under the auspices of imperialism and modernization. Imperialism is seen to have continued development's notion of progress but also to have disturbed it in an open temporality of global capitalism that had no internal checks and balances: 'the modernist novel encodes the objective conditions of a world-system based on endless capitalist innovation yet still informed and legitimated by a now-fragile ideology of developmental historicism'.²¹

While the *Bildungsroman* is adaptable to modernist climates of insecurity, it differs from the picaresque in that it continues to depict, also in these climates, characters that—increasingly without any success—'firmly' challenge the realities, conventions, and values of the dominant order, or are destroyed by it. The picaresque on the other hand would not oppose these realities, but would portray their vulgarity and paradoxicality by showing the ways of life that are only possible within them. The picaresque neither acts in accordance with the official protocols nor strategically critiques them to gesture at a place outside, but always relies on his traditional role as a half-outsider 'who can neither join nor actually reject his fellow men'.²² In, especially German, modernism the form, therefore, adapted to and highlighted modern capitalist demands by

embracing and hypertrophying the official ideologies of constant change, adaptation, and complicity. Rather than dignifying the role of the struggling and suffering social ‘underdog’, the pícaro thrived by embracing the at-times roguish and illegal, though officially endorsed practice of ‘shapeshifting’.²³

Joseph Slaughter has described the *Bildungsroman*’s twin tendency of classification and transformation with the helpful term ‘enabling fiction’.²⁴ Accordingly, the picaresque will here be discussed in terms of disenabling or even disabling fictions that eventually lead to the abandonment of the ideals, codes, and values of humanism and modernity, but also to an abandonment of their (postcolonial) critique. Instead the picaresque depicts what happens when one takes the last resort and actually embraces the vulgar realities that produce precarity. The postcolonial picaresque, specifically, is a form that exposes global relations of inequality, depicts them naturalistically, and seriously insists on their disenabling precarity. It also deconstructs and subverts the supposedly enabling notions of self-empowerment and freedom, by taking literally the official neoliberal—and implicit postmodern—agenda of abandoning social struggle in favour of individual subversion, social mobility, and progress. It, therefore, exposes the shortfalls and selective mechanisms of development but, perhaps more importantly, also the violent dissociation that results from completely abandoning the social goods of *Bildung*, struggle, and development in landscapes of precarity, at the expense of promoting self-interest and the fiction of an ensuing sociality engendered by an invisible hand.

THE POSTCOLONIAL *BILDUNGSROMAN*

Despite their complicity with imperialism, teleology, and evolutionary ideas, based in European nationalism, developmental temporalities have nevertheless had a strong appeal in anti-colonial contexts because they offered the image of a projected end of the ‘denial of coevalness’ between colony and metropolis.²⁵ The understanding of a colonial situation, the forming of an anti-colonial perspective, the conceptualization of resistant action, and the ultimate achievement of postcolonial national independence required a stadial, evolutionary, and even teleological imaginary. These developmental notions also reanimated the soul-nation allegory, even if at times haunted by the colonial entanglements and the violence that were at the heart of European nation- and empire-building.

Hence, colonial and early postcolonial novels especially before the late 1960s have often been considered as nationalist realist epics and fictions of development that were ‘intended to imagine national communities and to recover repressed historical experiences’²⁶ and were able to capitalize on the *Bildungsroman*’s established relation to rationalism, nationalism, and revolutionary politics. These novels of the colonial period and the immediate decolonization era were not necessarily about childhood or youth, but they did betray a concern with nation. The closed temporalities of the nation, which came under threat with the globalized capitalism of the age of empire and resulted in *Bildungsromane* of arrested development in modernism, were reimagined, precisely to evoke the notion of a national community and achieve a realigning of individual, community, and nation. Sometimes ‘uneducated’ colonial characters explicitly went through the process of education ‘inextricably linked with the emergence of a new nation’.²⁷ This novelistic prominence of the soul-nation allegory was backed by non-fiction, in the highly popular form of autobiography in which ‘many of the nationalist leaders offer their own life stories as emblematic of their nation’s birth’.²⁸ Despite these examples, the dominance of national emergence plots in fictional literature feels slightly overstated, or at least needs to be qualified, as the novels of this period rarely have a closed plot that ‘comes to a halt [...] as soon as insurrectionists are victorious’, but are aware of the pitfalls of nationalism and the fragility of historical change.²⁹ Nevertheless, even when this concern is less explicit or fails—as in Achebe’s African trilogy—the novels still clearly point towards the inadequacy of colonialism as a form of social organization and towards a standpoint external to it. While not always thematically probing nationhood, their ostensible realism meant at least a ‘search for diachrony’, which was (and is) historically naturalized as an emancipation towards sovereign nationalism.³⁰ Similarly, ‘in India the narration of the nation gave the Anglophone novel [...] its earliest and most persistent thematic preoccupation’.³¹ It is in this context in which we must also place Fredric Jameson’s heavily contested and almost strategically misunderstood assertion that ‘all third world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical’,³² with which he certainly did not want to declare derivative the aesthetic capacities of postcolonial literature, but to render a certain postcolonial nationalism ‘unforgoable as a site of liberation struggle’.³³ Despite the many pitfalls of nationalism when deployed as a discourse of exclusion and purity, it has perhaps

not fully lost its potential as a heuristic site of struggle for sovereignty, especially in the face of transnational capital and neoliberal globalization.

By their disposition to thus fuse historical transformation and personal realization, decolonization novels are among the rare instances of what Bakhtin has termed the ‘full height’ of the *Bildungsroman*, in which ‘emerging man [...] enters into [a] completely new [...] sphere of historical existence’.³⁴ Therefore, despite the teleological trajectories of classification and the closed temporalities of nation-building that decolonization is also implicated in, the narrative of *Bildung* clearly has enormous potential for all forms of political struggle. Regardless of its problematic relation to imperialism, decolonization texts perform a similar ‘socio-cultural work’ as the *Bildungsroman* in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, by ‘conventionalising and naturalising the convoluted temporality of incorporation as the normal process by which historically marginalised subjects are to become national citizens’.³⁵ *Bildung* in its relation to historical time and human self-actualization is thus fundamental to the project of colonialism, as well as to its end.³⁶

After post-independence euphoria had ebbed away the form also increasingly lost its shaping power and was soon considered to have been exhausted.³⁷ The reign of autocratic political leaders in many countries and the Indian state of emergency certainly weakened many authors’ optimistic perspectives regarding positive and stable postcolonial futures, and questioned the idea of progression inherent in the temporalities of the *Bildungsroman*. A focus on abjection—in authors such as Rushdie or Armah—that critiqued the excesses of the postcolonial state is emblematic of the fictions of this era, which, consequently, are also marked by a sustained shift in genre preference towards satire, the grotesque, and also the picaresque.³⁸

It is this form of developmental critique that has prompted the development of postcolonial studies in its narrow sense, as a largely post-modern constellation, concerned with critiquing the temporalities of development, humanism, nationalism, and liberationism as inadequate and naively entrapped in Western epistemology. Instead, postcolonial literatures embraced a more radical epistemological critique that exalted in a celebration of hybridity, dysteleology, impurity, and difference.³⁹ In many respects important and contextually legitimate, this anti-developmental tendency also marked a narrowing of the literary canon for post-colonial literatures and a depoliticization of the academic field in terms of a persistent anti-Marxism that occasionally helped to mystify the relation between Western capitalism and postcolonial disenfranchisement.⁴⁰

The *Bildungsroman* of course persisted in this critical climate, but in an allegorical form that emplots an increasing insight into the fictionality of the premises of nationalism or that foregrounds its propensity to articulate resignation and compromise and to emplot maturity as cosmopolitan detachment—as seen recently in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* for example; this form refrains from the illusions of development, the pitfalls of affiliating with emancipatory politics, and the allegedly homogenizing single storylines of social emergence.

While the excesses of the postcolonial state were highly problematic and featured prominently in narratives of the end of postcolonial *Bildung*, probably even more detrimental to the living conditions in and social imaginaries of the postcolony have been the disastrous effects of postcolonial ‘readjustment’, which ended the Bandung era of national emergence and thwarted the, albeit hierarchical and underfinanced, welfare states of the postcolony.⁴¹ Countries were forced to deregulate their economies, by tying the granting of credit, interest rates, and developmental aid to the fulfilment of the required deregulation, and older apparatuses of allocation quickly disintegrated. Even where those developments did not result in existential scarcity it was obvious that the isolated closed temporality of the nation imagined at the onset of independence could no longer be maintained as the open temporalities of capitalism impacted ever more heavily and explicitly on the former colonies and now ‘had no organic checks and balances’.⁴² The World Bank and the IMF exerted more and more influence over national economies to facilitate the heightened influx of companies and capital to and from the postcolonial world, which ultimately manifested the sense that the (postcolonial) nation cannot detach itself from the endless temporalities of global capitalism.

This structure may be critiqued through representations of continuous struggle, as a plot of arrested youth, or as resignation through critical versions of the *Bildungsroman*, displaying how these processes have hampered human progress. These versions may or may not demonstrate how human dignity persists within and outside these processes of global disenfranchisement. It may, however, also be *performed* in a structure of precarious growth as befits the postcolonial picaresque. Unlike the resigned *Bildungsroman* protagonists, picaresque subjects, even when they are successful, are pulled in by the social and economic logics of growth and self-interest and lose the possibility of retreating outside those systems. It is the argument of this book that picaresque postcolonial novel subjects

reflect temporalities of emergence that no longer explicitly exclude postcolonial subjects from the world economy, as the narrator of *The White Tiger* reminds us: ‘it didn’t matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up’ (64). The picaresque, however, also delineates how in neoliberal capitalism this proposed ‘rising up’ was not governed by struggle or disillusionment, nor even by an advocated (neo)liberal logic of social mobility through education, but through more thoroughly protean forms of tactical adaptation and complicity, in which the temporalities of personal and national—or societal—development were fully out of synch: a phenomenon sometimes euphemized by the term alternative modernities.⁴³ Rather than allegorically projecting societal emergence, or failure thereof, or timeless poverty, the precarious postcolonial picaresque performs the undignified and subversive—at times roguish—individualist options left within these disenabling global relations. While the picaresque is said to have originally emerged from the scarce landscapes of early modern Spain, ‘the contemporary pícaro emerges [...] from the neoliberal shantytown’.⁴⁴

PICARESQUE ATOPY

The developmental precarity of the picaresque is founded not only upon poverty, but also, since its beginnings with *Lazarillo de Tormes*, upon a strong sense of placelessness (atopy). This registers geographically in the representation of multidirectional meandering and the form’s focus on the road,⁴⁵ but also in a social placelessness through its featuring of narrator-protagonists that are not securely rooted in a class, family, or other structures that would imply a social place from which to articulate oneself and towards or against which to project one’s aspirations or critique—a security, which even the protagonists of the failed versions of the *Bildungsroman* achieve. Picaresque atopy thus resonates strongly—though less affirmatively—with the topological limitations of what Michel de Certeau termed short-term context-bound tacticality, which denotes a precarious inability to critically isolate and disentangle oneself from a social environment and project aspirations and critique at a stable ‘exterior distinct from it’.⁴⁶

While more durable than elsewhere in Western Europe, the authority of the medieval system of estates in Spain did not remain completely unaffected by the transformative auspices of capitalism and historical time.⁴⁷ This permeability, however, affected only very specific aspects of

its charitable economy; for the most part the Spanish cosmological order was infamously resilient. When this system collided with early forms of capitalism, the most pervasive effect was that of a re-evaluation of poverty. Previously, poverty had been seen as an ontological fact, an expression of an assigned place in the cosmological order reproduced and represented in society. The poor were not deemed responsible for their material situation and were usually provided with alms.⁴⁸ Poverty now became increasingly invested with responsibility, morality, and self-reliance, without the existence of the means and structures to self-reliantly make a living in a large-scale pre-industrial or agricultural economy.⁴⁹ This clash is not only paradigmatic of what I have called cosmological capitalism but is also central to early modern picaresque poetics as a structure of ‘mutually excluding demands’⁵⁰—demands that structurally resemble neoliberal imperatives of perpetual growth and self-responsible improvement within radically disabling initial positions. A fixed position in a social hierarchy that included a degree of top-down social responsibility and often at least provided nutritional necessities as well as a stable, though economically meagre, social place in the world was replaced with the imperative to make it in life.⁵¹

Even though it is generally assumed that one principally ‘could achieve social ascent, however modest’ [‘puede lograr el ascenso social, por modesto que sea’],⁵² economic progress remained almost as implausible as it had been previously, at least for the lowest classes, the only difference being that now even basic survival had been additionally invested with self-reliability, insecurity, and effort. The proposed social mobility resulted in social atopy that displaced the guaranteed positions within the cosmological order, without making this order effectively permeable or transforming it as a whole. While this idea of independence from feudal forms of subservience was highly desirable, social mobility remained for many a chimera that now enlisted effort and energy but did not usually result in economic progress and equalled, at best, a zero-sum game, that turned all self-responsible aspirations to survive into the picaresque ‘Sisyphus-rhythm’.⁵³ Lazarillo’s trajectory through the desolate landscapes of early modern Spain is indicative of this economic context, in which ultimately self-realization is replaced by a continued reliance on feudal forms of allocation that now come with a hefty price tag.

Lazarillo de Tormes’ famous prologue opens the trajectory for the ‘tension and instability’⁵⁴ that will remain emblematic for the picaresque sense of social placelessness. This atopy originally encodes the competing

pressures between capitalism and cosmology, self-realization and feudalism, meritocracy and honour. The Spanish context is a special case, because here we cannot really speak of an emergence of capitalism, as the priority of Catholic dogma and aristocratic privilege were ultimately successful in rejecting humanism and also, though to a lesser extent, capitalism. Therefore, the text is not about a nascent capitalism and humanism that would point to a sustainable disruption of the cosmological order of the system of estates. Instead it shows how feudal principles are ultimately restituted, in a context in which capitalism denotes nothing but the re-evaluation of poverty and the responsibility to 'make it', while its underpinning humanist aspects of social mobility and self-realization are fully rejected.

The novel opens with the grown-up Lázaro, who has to answer the request of a so-called *vuestra merced* ['your honour'], a high-ranking noble asking him to explain a *caso*; presumably, the case is concerned with the fact that an archpriest has married off his mistress to Lazarillo in exchange for paid employment, in order to both uphold and conceal his affair. Lázaro is confronted with a double bind in which he has to incriminate an order that has failed him badly without offending the representative of this order. Lázaro replies to 'your honour' and provides an aetiology by telling his whole life story: 'Your honour has written to me asking me to tell him the case in some detail [...] so I think it is better to start at the beginning, so that you may know everything about me' (7) ['Y pues vuestra merced escribe se le escriba y relate el caso muy por extenso, parescióme no tomalle por el medio, sino del principio, porque se tenga entera noticia de mi persona' (11)]. He continues with a critique of the static nature of what Bakhtin termed the 'vulgar conventionality' that is 'manifest [...] as a feudal structure'⁵⁵ and doubts the merits of nobility and gentility assumed at birth, while seeming to propose self-reliance and social mobility as an alternative: 'I'd also like people who are proud of being high born to realize how little this really means, as Fortune has smiled on them, and how much more worthy are those who have endured misfortune but have triumphed by dint of hard work and ability' (4) ['Consideren los que heredaron nobles estados cuán poco se les debe, pues Fortuna fue con ellos parcial, y cuánto más hicieron los que, siéndoles contraria, con fuerza y maña remando salieron a buen puerto.' (11)].

Lazarillo critiques this social manifestation of cosmology, in which 'status was inseparable from identity'⁵⁶ and wants to assert how, in

comparison, he has actively shaped his life by ‘dint of hard work and ability’. Thereby, he ultimately claims to present his reality in a modern sense as a ‘result of an actualisation’.⁵⁷ By insisting on the difficulties of his own life and by proving unable to occupy a position that is not complicit with the order he criticizes, the text, however, also ultimately connotes ‘reality as that which cannot be mastered by the self, i.e., which resists it not merely as an experience of contact with an inert mass, but also—most radically—in the logical form of the paradox’.⁵⁸ The ongoing need to express such paradoxical tension between humanity’s self-actualization and the containing brute facts of a naturalized social imaginary is what will later seem to pull the picaresque towards modernism and postmodernism, which are shaped by precisely such a concept of reality. The precarious picaresque’s specific brand of modernism, however, does not translate this paradox into a disenchantment of modernity’s imaginaries, but into an indignation with the precarity that results from the contained aspirations of modernity in the face of cosmological capitalism. In *Lazarillo* this tension includes not only a material reality that provides hardships for the individual and requires ‘hard work and ability’, as Lazarillo constantly emphasizes, but also the (onto)logical paradox that he is unable to occupy a position outside of those vulgar conventions that he aims to unmask. For example, he basically revokes his initial propositions of a work ethic *en grano* by later in the novel giving up a fairly lucrative position as a wage-earning water carrier, only to invest his modest savings in order to deceptively ‘dress myself very decently’ (57) [‘me vestir muy honradamente’ (127)], which clearly suggests an ongoing subscription to the codes and deceptive strategies of Spanish low nobility and the system of feudalism.

While the interpellation of *vuestra merced* inevitably attaches action and agency to a human subject that is held responsible and has to defend himself as an individual, Lázaro, despite his insistence on ‘hard work and ability’ is no self-identical and detached reflexive subject performing a critique of his previous life from the end of a closed process of maturation. Hence, at the end of the story Lázaro, unlike his biblical precursor, is not reborn, but remains a paradoxical critic of a society of ‘vulgar conventions’, in which he nevertheless participates and which he ‘cannot actually reject’.⁵⁹ Even though he violates their official morality by enabling adultery, Lázaro is still implicated in these structures socially and economically by receiving money from the archpriest.

Lázaro’s atopy is not only one of conflicting concepts of reality and of a paradoxical implication with the structures he criticizes. His aetiology

is already problematized in his motifs of writing, which suggest competing textual forms (novel and explanatory letter) and locutionary goals (informing the reader about oneself and being entertaining). His story, which is stylized as an explanation for *vuestra merced* is not only a letter but is also asserted to have been written as a publishable text, for the virtue of entertainment, education and, not the least gaining honour, or in sociological terms ‘cultural capital’. Authors, he claims, including himself ‘want to be rewarded, not financially, but with the knowledge that their work is praised if it deserves praise’ (3) [‘quieren [...] ser recompensados, no con dineros, mas con que vean y lean sus obras y, si hay de qué, se las alaben’ (6)]. An important concept in his stylization as a writer is honour, which remained also the predominant—at least aesthetically felt—value for the Spanish nobility, even in the face of rising mercantilist culture all over Europe.⁶⁰ Lázaro quotes Cicero’s ‘honour encourages the arts’ (3) [‘La honra cría las artes’ (3)] followed by increasingly dubious examples of honourable and praiseworthy behaviour:

Who thinks that the soldier who reaches the top of the scaling-ladder first hates life the most? No, of course he doesn’t; it’s desire for praise that makes him expose himself to danger and it’s the same in the case of arts and in literature. The new doctor of theology preaches very well and he’s a man who only wants to help the immortal soul of his audience; but ask his Grace if it upsets if people say to him: “Oh how well Your Reverence spoke!” So-and-so jousted very badly but gave the banner bearing his arms to the jester because he praised the way he used his lance. What would he have done if the praise had been justified? (3)

¿Quién piensa que el soldado que es primero de la escala tiene más aborrecido el vivir? No, por cierto; mas el deseo de alabanza le hace ponerse al peligro; y, así, en las artes y letras es lo mismo. Predica muy bien el presentando y es hombre que desea mucho el provecho de las ánimas; mas pregunten a su merced se le pesa cuando le dicen: “¡Oh qué maravillosamente lo ha hecho Vuestra Reverencia!” Justó muy ruinmente el señor don Fulano y dio el sayete de armas al truhán proque le loaba de haber llevado muy buenas lanzas: ¿que hiciera si fuera verdad? (6–8)

Obviously, these examples show how, from bravery via vanity to confidence trickery, honour, which is a concept that is intimately tied to the nobility and to feudalism, is increasingly exposed as (self-)deception and becomes increasingly atypical as a gesture that does not have to cohere

with interior convictions or motifs. This passage not only exposes the concept of honour as performative and atypical, but places Lázaro's own motivation for writing into a tradition of vanity and *honra de bien* that is heavily critiqued throughout the text. Thereby, Lázaro not only implicates himself but answers the 'double bind by doubling his responses or rather multiplying his personality'.⁶¹ By attaching his very act of narrative so explicitly to honour he even manages to answer the double bind he is confronted with by himself creating a paradoxical double bind for his addressee: on the one hand, *vuestra merced*, who is a representative of a social system based entirely on honour, accepts honour as a mode of deceptive self-representation that values performativity over substance, in which case he must accept Lázaro's text as a sincere—if not authentic—expression, without caring for his convictions, motifs or even truth. If, on the other hand, he does not accept the performance of honour as the dominant social and aesthetic principle he must inevitably incriminate himself as a representative of this mode of cultural identity, and question the social order which it is built on.

By critiquing the medieval Spanish concept of honour, which still shapes subjects externally, the novel may have helped to create 'a gap in the social texture which can later be filled out by the modern subject': much later, I would add.⁶² It may thus offer an 'experimental plot' that tests forms of capitalist emergence, but the old order is—if precariously—restituted⁶³: resources do flow again from the higher clergy to the lower classes, but the fact that now one has to sell one's wife in order to be eligible for these alms not only signifies Lazarillo's implication, but also discloses a divergence of lived reality from the doctrines of Christian morality and noble honour that officially stabilize Spanish society. Lazarillo's life narrative does not—as Bakhtin would have wished of the *Bildungsroman*—perform the emergence of an individual that leaves the social totality, but instead Lazarillo precariously accommodates himself with the bad conventions of that precarious system; conventions that conflict with its officially advocated moral codes. His critique remains insurmountably paradoxical because it cannot avoid directing critique at himself and thereby 'in every sense of the word lacks foundation'.⁶⁴ Such a critique is radically atypical as it has no stable and detached place from which to be uttered, no foundations on which it rests.

POSTCOLONIAL PRECARITY AND PICARESQUE ENTREPRENEURISM

Writing from his office in Bangalore, the epitome of neoliberal entrepreneurial India, the narrator of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* replicates the narrative situation of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, its paradoxical double bind, its atopy, and the precarious landscapes in which he needs to assert himself as a protagonist. Balram Halwai's life narrative is told in a letter to the prime minister of China, who is due to visit and 'wants to know the truth about Bangalore' (4). What the prime minister is supposedly most interested in is Indian entrepreneurship. Despite having 'no drinking water, electricity, sewage systems', India, according to Balram, has an overabundance of entrepreneurs, among which he counts himself. Balram, who wants to impress the prime minister of booming China, proceeds to tell the truth about Bangalore, very much like Lázaro, by 'telling you my life's story' (6), linking the story of the Indian economic miracle—China's significant other in the Asian economic emergence of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—to his own biography, explicitly evoking the allegorical structure of nation and soul, fundamental to the *Bildungsroman*. In distinction to the contained linearity of this form, he does, however, project himself, the profession he represents, and the state of India in terms of a multiple personality: 'My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time' (11). Now that self-reliance and entrepreneurship have become the globally dominant social ideologies, unlike Lazarillo, he is not required to deny his affiliation to their moral flexibility and self-interested pragmatics. Instead, the spirit of entrepreneurship often congratulates itself for pragmatically exhausting all the ethical possibilities that legal frameworks allow for and for being unaffected by ideology and 'dogmatic moralizing'.

Nonetheless, the narrator initially plays with the expectation of a developmental plot, when he claims that 'India is two countries in one', and posits a radical rupture between the 'India of Light' and the 'India of Darkness'. Bangalore, the place that hosts thousands of international call centres and is also the primary hub of the subcontinent's information and aviation technology industries, is posited as emblematic for the shining New India. The passage from the darkness to the light is, however, explicitly de-temporalized, as this darkness 'is not a time of day' but 'a *place* in India, at least a third of the country' (14, emphasis added).

The distance between the rural parts of India and its urban centres like Bangalore is the distance one has to individually traverse in order to reach even the basic precondition to become a successful entrepreneur. Under these conditions the dominant logic of development in time, emblematic of the *Bildungsroman* is clearly replaced by the meandering through space emblematic of the picaresque. Social emergence is thus not governed by a collective developmental temporality, but is shifted towards the individual and his capacity at social and geographic mobility.

This initial medievalization of the India of the darkness, the projection of historical and temporal difference onto, or as, spatial distance—or proximity—that has been prominent in European, including philanthropic, discourse on the ‘third world’ is obvious in the iconography of light and darkness.⁶⁵ This transition from the (medieval) India of Darkness to the India of Light reverberates the supposed historical transition that has often been prematurely assumed for *Lazarillo de Tormes* at the threshold of early modernity. In *The White Tiger*, this radical difference, explicitly posed in topographical terms, also provides the social motivation for the topological personal-emergence plot of the protagonist, who aims to cross the border between two distinct social fields.⁶⁶

Developmental discourse, which was to conversely ‘transform a spatialized global hierarchy into a temporalized (putative) historical sequence’,⁶⁷ is no longer operative in Balram’s social topography, which poses not a sequential development but a radical rupture between light and darkness. This radical rupture is also transposed onto his attempt to deny the personal identity between the protagonist ‘I’ of the story and the narrator ‘I’ of the frame narrative, through which Balram is explicitly denying responsibility for previous action, as if the narrative situation, as in any autodiegetic narrative, were not the existential continuity of the life story, but a radical rupture; he repeatedly claims ‘Don’t blame me!’ (23, 267) and ‘I am in the light now!’ (14, 313). Such a complete rupture or discontinuity of responsibility—often dubiously performed—between the experiencing self and the narrating self, is central to any narrative of self-assertion, but is especially vital for the picaresque act of narrative, and will be the central concern of Chap. 4 of this book. This rupture also critically mirrors the pathetic unwillingness to take actual responsibility for the barbarity that has been the historical foundation of most civilizational progress, from which the Global North continues to benefit to this very day.

Like Lázaro, Balram claims that his life narrative is not only about himself, but is also a panorama that is highly instructive of the social types and economic practices of India:

When you have heard my story of how I got to Bangalore and became one of its most successful (though probably least known) businessmen, you will know everything there is to know about how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this the twenty-first century of man. (6–7)

At the same time, similar to the explanation of the *caso*, the narrative situation is also individually existential. Balram also applies the narrative form of an apologia, as he is concerned about explaining the ‘police poster with my face on it’ (11); about legitimating and contextualizing how he came to murder his employer, on whose stolen cash his business success has been directly built. Like Lazarillo, Balram justifies himself by portraying and incriminating the ‘vulgar conventionality’ of a society that, despite his hard labour, has denied him every means of social ascension and economic security, while enabling excessive wealth for amoral individuals on the other side of the social scale; who are often, as already stated in Lazarillo’s prologue, merely there by the luck of their birth. This motif is strengthened by the fact that his employer, the son of a rich landlord, is minutely portrayed as an entrepreneurial failure. As in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the position Balram has assumed as a supposedly detached, mature, and economically successful narrator is claimed to be the result of an actualization, the result of a closed temporality of self-assertion. On the other hand, he also evokes his life as a process of resistance, where social and material obstacles cannot be overcome through constant compliance with the official doctrines. Economic possibilities that are offered by the protocols of an allegedly meritocratic and non-genealogical—‘it didn’t matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable’ (64)—order have proven insufficient to achieve any transposition or promotion from the lower to the higher realm of the binary structure of ‘light and dark’ or ‘big belly and small belly’. This rigid social topology can only be transformed by recourse to the means of that very vulgar conventionality that Balram criticizes. These conventions may diverge from the official tenets and values of the system of law of the Republic of India, but they nonetheless permeate its everyday practice, according to Balram. The abrupt change from darkness to light is only possible through his application and extension of those despicable

and illegal practices for which he had previously scolded his former masters, and which he comes to consider the backbone of entrepreneurship. He stylizes his behaviour as a direct—causally connected and thereby fully heteronomous and indissociable—consequence of the behaviour of his masters, who stand as emblematic of the irresponsible sell-out comprador elites of the postcolony and who have directly informed his comportment.

The rest of today's narrative will deal mainly with the sorrowful tale of how I was corrupted from a sweet, innocent village fool into a citified fellow full of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. [...] All these changes happened in me because they first happened in Mr. Ashok. (197)

The mono-causality that the narrator projects here is certainly to be read ironically and unreliably and serves as a reminder that the picaresque cannot propose to redeem all acts of violence simply by ascribing them thus simplistically to their context. At the same time it would be at least as absurd to assume individual pathology and moral deficiency as the sole cause of social transgression. Balram Halwai is a victim of, or at least a witness to, a series of mishandlings by his masters and other representatives of the upper class and ultimately he decides to reverse positions and take their place. The process whereby he has formed this—supposedly inevitable—resolution must resemble a legal expiation and has to be narrated somewhat more plausibly and coherently than in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. It must take into account the social transgressions he witnesses and the moral resolutions he forms from them. To convey this corrupted world that eventually forces him into violence, Balram also stays true to the picaresque indebtedness to satire as 'a kind of negative jurisprudence' that conveys violations 'of the spirit of the law rather than its letter'.⁶⁸ Falling short of the self-assured critical place of satire, the socially placeless picaresque not only legally equates that which is ethically equal, but renders the observed violations into the legitimate principles of its own actions. Balram, therefore, resorts to actions that are morally and legally unacceptable, but that, at the same time, are merely in accordance with those transgressions that he has continuously encountered. These witnessed conventions—like politically sanctioned violence, corruption, human-trafficking, bribery, or the valuing of money over human life—that *The White Tiger* constantly reminds us of, may not always have violated the letter of the law, or were at least not registered by it, but they

have certainly violated its spirit. Consequently, Balram equates his crime with those that ‘society’s over-lords commit and from which they are structurally exonerated’.⁶⁹

In *The White Tiger*, the crossing over into the light, thus, does not happen consistently, coherently and on pre-established educational paths, but only within the logic of the ‘vulgar conventionality’ of the existing order, whereby the light is always ‘polluted’ by the darkness. Balram’s transition is not emblematic of a larger historical emergence of the lower social classes from destitution and marginality, even though success stories such as his are certainly read allegorically as emblematic of the astonishing possibilities of social improvement. To what extent Balram Halwai’s penetration of the social boundary is thus an *event* that by definition transgresses norms, or whether it is a predictable part of a socially mobile and ethically schizophrenic system is one of the central questions that Balram poses to the interlocutor and the text poses to its readers. Balram’s violent emergence story is clearly part of the official mythology of social mobility and entrepreneurship in capitalism, which has always promoted self-interest and blind passions as the unwilling motors and origin of social order. Whether his modes of achieving success are merely in ethical continuity with these—already dubious—basic principles of entrepreneurship or whether they offer a further unethical violation, however, is a dilemma that his interlocutor is confronted with and that unsettles liberal readings of the novel.

Concerning his master and eventual victim, Mr. Ashok, Balram’s motivation remains highly contradictory and his report oscillates between portraying his master as a fair and amiable fellow and portraying him as ‘no better than the others’, who mistreat Balram and bribe officials. Balram turns paranoid and suspects Mr. Ashok of looking for his replacement behind his back, an unfounded—and probably insincere—suspicion as it turns out, and which Balram claims has further sparked his plans. Also the motivation for killing—instead of just taking the money bag and leaving Mr. Ashok alive—is anything but morally sound:

The first possible reply is that he could always recover, break out of his gag, and call the police. So I had to kill him. The second possible reply is that his family was going to do such terrible things to my family: I was just getting my revenge in advance. I like the second reply better. (285)

Evoking his family's possible death as a context for his action could indeed have mitigating effects for Balram and in many legal systems may, for example, have served to reduce his crime from murder to manslaughter. However, by making this merely anticipated consequence the principle of his action, he both exposes the ethical aporia of the contextual suspension of primary goods of modernity, but also replicates the even more paradoxical and potentially escalating neo-imperial logic of pre-emptive strikes.

Balram Halwai's long letter clearly invokes a testimonial tradition and may be thus scrutinized, as he tries to give an account of his actions to himself, to the addressee of his text, but also by extension to an implied cosmopolitan reader. He justifies his criminal act (to) himself beforehand: *'And even if you were to steal it, Balram, it wouldn't be stealing. [...] See Mr Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country – you?'* (244; emphasis retained). Balram turns a complex economic, legal, and social relationality into a bilateral theft and takes this as the basis for his retaliation. This legitimating strategy points to a complex dilemma: while neoliberalism often depoliticizes the present behind a veil of complexity, populist sentiments of theft from the people, as appropriate as they may sometimes appear, are here likewise exposed as fostering problematic results, especially when they do not aim to instil social critique, but instead individual sentiments of disenfranchisement. Interestingly, neoliberal politics are now also increasingly articulated in tandem with such populist sentiments. The thieves and enemies of the people that these ideas project, however, are typically not the economic elites or the anonymous holders of capital, but degenerate political, intellectual, and cultural leaders that allegedly rob the citizens of the fruits of their hard work.

Balram not only tries to invest his deeds with social justification, but also with a providential destiny that explicitly violates the principles of firmness set forth for Wilhelm Meister, who was not to render 'agreeable accidents' into 'heavenly guidance'. Balram on the other hand places the grounds of success of his action outside his own plotting and into the favourable circumstances for that action: 'you've never seen the road this empty. You'd swear it's been arranged just for you' (281). Moments later this almost passivity-inducing providence is contradicted when he

needs three attempts to actively persuade his master to come out of the car where he will kill him: ‘his body was moving as far from me as it could. I’m losing him, I thought, and this forced me to do something’ (282). Beforehand, he also links his murder to epiphany. When premeditating the crime, it is the city, its buildings and animals that supposedly talk to him, like apparitions of an epiphany and that eventually convince him to take the money (253–256). Various encounters throughout this passage make him realize the fear-based and submissive, but ultimately symbolic logic of the ‘rooster coop’ of Indian society and convince him to understand his inactivity and submission as complicity. While he plans his escape, the logic of the ‘rooster coop’ that resigns ‘99.9% [...] to exist in perpetual servitude’ (175–176) becomes everywhere manifest for him, and he decides to be ‘the one in a generation’ to break out (276), making him into the exceptional hero that breaks the confines of a social space. Despite his previous attempts at renouncing the plotting aspects of his action, this ambition strongly connotes Jurij Lotman’s understanding of plot, which relies precisely on the exceptional and transgressive hero, who will not be contained by the social forces of a hierarchically and topologically structured world.⁷⁰

Balam’s elaborate act of social self-exemption, however, starts much earlier in his narrative address, first by rooting his action in his lack of education and by attributing this lack to ongoing external forces and pressures. This also relates back to Lázaro’s demonstration to *vuestra merced* that ‘there is a man alive who has seen so much disaster, danger and bad luck’, and his eventual renunciation of nobility and their lack of merit and effort. Like Lazarillo, Balam starts his prologue by describing the misconceptions that he developed at home. Balam familiarizes his reader with his childhood, which he posits as emblematic of his caste and class:

Me and thousands of others in this country like me, are half baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling [...] all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and *this is what you act on and live* with. The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced; (10–11; emphasis added)

Beyond this explicit lack of comprehensive education (*Bildung*), he further constructs himself as personally atopic. While Lazarillo is born in an—inherently atopic—river, Balam has not even been named by

his parents until school age and does not know his exact age, which is only—unrealistically—set at eighteen when it suits a potential employer; an instance of de-sequentialization that even severs the aging of the protagonist from chronometrically registered time and the temporalities of legal emergence tied to it, and places it in the realm of circumstance, opportunism, and exploitation.

This, however, does not, he claims, condemn him to social atopy, but eventually roots himself within an economic class, the half-baked Indians; and they are, so we learn, prone to entrepreneurship (see 15). Like Lazarillo he mourns his lack of education and his unfortunate birth, but takes pride in how he autonomously managed to get along. His lack of institutional learning does not contradict his previous assertion of being an agent of change. Clearly, for him, change does not signify gradual development and transformative action is not dependent on reflection and learning. Hence, he imbues his half-bakedness positively, as the only system of education that truly breeds entrepreneurs. This is not only a farewell to humanist discourses of *Bildung* as enlightenment and development, but also a radical entrepreneurial side blow at the neoliberal reduction of social change to education (as training) that ultimately animated the socially mobile and entrepreneurial individual to isolate itself from communal struggle and that effectively replaced and demoralized ambitions to other forms of social welfare through its related—but unrealized—proclamation of equal opportunity.

Thereby, Balram propagates half-bakedness as the source and prerequisite of entrepreneurship, which is precisely the subject the Chinese prime minister is interested in. A contradictory relation persists between stylizing himself a victim of social structures that produce half-bakedness, on which he blames his actions, and a certain sense of pride in the transformative powers with which this half-bakedness has ultimately equipped him. He even states to prefer this mode of formation to formal education, which almost makes it sound like a lifestyle choice, as he explicitly downgrades even white-collar wage labour: ‘But pay attention Mr. Premier! Fully formed fellows after 12 years of school and 3 years of university, wear nice suits, join companies, and take orders from other men for the rest of their lives. Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay’ (11). By his typically entrepreneurial denigration of traditional education and his leapfrogging success, he quite explicitly denounces the progressive temporalities of the nation, the *Bildungsroman*, and developmental discourse. The incompleteness that is literally inherent in the notion of

half-bakedness further rebukes the isotropy of ‘package’ theories of modernization, as his alternative, half-baked path into modernity—from a rickshaw puller to a dispatcher of SUVs—clearly bypasses the ‘eurochronology’ of traditional modernization theory, but it also remains exceptional rather than exemplary.⁷¹

Unlike the hybrid dignity and creativity which postcolonial studies have found to reside in the symbolic and material practices of postcolonial cultural reappropriation, this process of half-baked emancipation from modernization is projected as one that enables economic success, but does not provide dignity or social value. Balram’s life trajectory is not only reminiscent of the (post-)developmental theory of leapfrogging, but is highly allegorical of a broad post-, or rather, anti-developmental and anti-educationalist sentiment in the postcolony, which claims ‘developmentalist patience has little to recommend [...] on the contrary, today’s success stories are more likely to be seen as proving the power not of education and developmental uplift, but of luck, ruthlessness, or even criminality’.⁷² Clearly, this impatience is not at all confined to the postcolony, but is explicitly legitimated by the anti-idealism and alleged anti-ideology of entrepreneurship. Balram’s apologia, therefore, proceeds to explicitly imbue his murder—which is of course what he implicitly defends himself against legally and tries to justify to himself ethically—with the spirit of entrepreneurship itself, making it his *rite of passage* into entrepreneurship and his primal act of entrepreneurship:

I *confess*. About three years ago, when I became briefly, a person of national importance *owing to an act of entrepreneurship*, a poster with my face on it found its way to every post office, railway station, and police station in this country. (11; emphasis added)

As a result of that, he not only links his life story and his foundational crime to a lack of education and to moral structures that are exotic to the prime minister, but also very directly to those aspects of Indian society and economy the prime minister so admires. Social ascension is shown as possible, but the transition from the darkness to the light requires a leapfrogging of social classes and implies a rupture that can hardly be achieved without moral flexibility and a principal willingness to commit violence and transgress or suspend morality and/or the law. This propensity of his entrepreneurship and social success likens it to the perpetual

states of exception politically created for the agents of global capitalism and hyperbolizes the unleashing of ‘blind passions’, which allegedly are best suited to create social order, according to the long-standing liberal capitalist anthropology that is now radically endorsed by neoliberalism. The radical difference in standards of living asserted between the two Indias makes this entrepreneurial model of ascension, despite its illegality, immorality, and the risk attached to it, attractive enough. Unlike Lázaro’s, Balram’s defence does not even run the risk of incriminating the social order his addressee himself represents, but offers the chance of rooting his crime in a socio-economic logic his addressee finds interesting, but does not participate in. It might even be supposed that as the premier of a nominally communist country with a strongly controlled economy, the prime minister is even ideologically opposed to or at least still sceptical about this system, and so Balram creates a perlocutionary win-win situation: either the prime minister will condemn the social ideology of entrepreneurship and see Balram as one of its ill-educated victims and deem him—at least partly—blameless, or he has no moral quarrels with that system, in which case Balram is simply one of its successful and admirable representatives, if not its archetype.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE WORLD-LITERARY MARKET

Balram Halwai, like all picaros, clearly and explicitly resists ideas, political and otherwise, from the moment that he disavows traditional education and intellectual formation. This rejection of political ideas and his prioritizing of the practical over the ethical ventriloquizes the anti-metaphysical logic of entrepreneurship and capitalism: ‘If I were making a country, I’d get the sewage pipes first, then the democracy’ (96). While a functioning democracy must certainly be amended by an infrastructure that profits health and secures dignity, such a materialistic appeal also points ultimately towards a problematic suspension of social goods and basic rights in favour of materialist priorities. Considering his interlocutor, this at first glance seems to cater towards a Stalinist tradition of a priority of infrastructural modernization over liberal democracy. The assertion also, however, clearly gestures towards a neoliberal belief that ‘democracy is viewed as a luxury, only possible under conditions of relative affluence’ and thus towards the perpetually increasing suspension of human rights and democracy under the priorities of capitalist accumulation and governance.⁷³

In distinction to this conditional picaresque administration of democracy and the entrepreneurial suspensions of human inviolacy that Balram Halwai pursues, Joseph Slaughter in his *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*, takes up the relation of the *Bildungsroman* plot to the (national) time of development and the ultimate 'security' ['Gesichertsein'] of its legalized protagonist, and extends this relation into the arena of human rights law:

The *Bildungsroman* is the novelistic genre that most fully corresponds to—and indeed, is implicitly invoked by—the norms and narrative assumptions that underwrite the visions of full human personality development projected in international human rights law [...] the dominant international legal construction of human rights and [...] the predominant literary genre in which individual claims to those rights are novelized.⁷⁴

An isotropic relation between human rights law and the *Bildungsroman* is here made explicit, confirming the *Bildungsroman*'s established role in terms of guaranteed personality development. With regard to their plotting they both make 'common-sense commonsensical [and] what is already known effective'.⁷⁵ This vision of the *Bildungsroman* obviously focusses less on its domestication of egotistic and idealist drives and more on the empowering and transformative potential of the form. This transformative potential, however, also assumes a movement that is simultaneously articulated along the lines of classification by an existing and guaranteed system and falls short of what Bakhtin saw as the *Bildungsroman*'s capacity to fully assimilate historical time: but it does so consciously. The system of rights and personality to which these narratives ought to progress is already in place and the desirable trajectory to actualize this position need 'only' be narratively secured. Therefore, development, in fact, ought to be somewhat cyclical, or in Slaughter's terms 'tautological' and follow precisely the temporality of development. Its classificatory and its transformative dynamics equally contribute to the *Bildungsroman*'s continued status as a viable narrative form for marginalized groups, as the 'predominant formal literary technology in which social outsiders narrate affirmative claims for inclusion in a regime of rights'.⁷⁶ In this classificatory and empowering trajectory 'the social work of literature and the cultural work of law are interrelated.'⁷⁷ In fact, the two declarations of human rights in 1789 and in 1948 coincide with, or shortly precede, two very productive periods of the *Bildungsroman* in

Europe and the postcolony respectively, which confirms at least a phenomenal correlation.

This does not mean that the *Bildungsroman* is in any way reserved for situations of unproblematic inclusion and emancipation. Instead, Slaughter argues, it ‘corresponds to periods of social crises over the terms and mechanics of disenfranchisement’.⁷⁸ The function of the contemporary global *Bildungsroman*, he argues, may lie not so much in narrativizing a successful incorporation of an individual into a system of human rights, but may also lie *ex negativo* in the narrative demand to fulfil these as yet unrealized promises of the contemporary world order. As long as these demands are aimed at an exterior, the ultimate security and teleology that human rights (plots) imply remain operative and transcend the placeless tacticality of the picaresque. Consequently, the novel of human rights is equally the novel of human rights abuse. Ultimately, even the postmodern postcolonial critiques of humanism and modernity follow this secure structure of critique, as they seek to abort principles of integration and development that undermine dignity and difference. Postmodern postcolonialism, thus, offers a critical perspective that aims outside of the epistemologies and ontologies that permeate the present towards new modes of thinking globality, connectivity, and hybridity.

This relationship to human rights claims is clearly one of the reasons for the immense global success of ‘third-world literatures’, as Western readers were diagnosed as having an ‘insatiable appetite for the stories of third worlders coming of age’.⁷⁹ Capitalizing on this appetite, which Graham Huggan has termed *The Postcolonial Exotic*, has become a successful marketing strategy that not only markets dedicated literature but also politicized humans.⁸⁰ Interestingly, Slaughter mostly discusses as postcolonial *Bildungsromane* such texts that have emerged from and clearly thematize contexts of human rights violations by political regimes, such as apartheid South Africa, Sri Lanka, or Argentina during the rule of the military junta. These are contexts in which the demanding of those rights could be addressed to discernible political agents, and where the inoperativeness of certain rights could be attached to the presence of such oppressive regimes. These violations have been widely condemned in the West, and more importantly have been seen as isolatable problems, to be fully solved by *political* convergence to liberal democracy.

This is where the ‘extroverted’ postcolonial *Bildungsroman*’s relation to human rights comes into play as a specific exoticist and developmental

reading formation of the contemporary world-literary market. The contexts of explicit human rights abuses and political struggles—such as anti-apartheid or anti-authoritarian movements—have a great appeal to metropolitan readers, who can project from their own place and reality onto an exotic other a developmental logic according to which politicized lives ought to develop, usually in analogy to how a certain political situation should and could be changed or resisted by means of cultural and political struggle towards the freedoms that ‘we’ already possess. By teleologically projecting what is a self-evident tautology, ‘human-rights plots’ dynamically articulate the values of Western modernity; they perform their dignifying potential to their cosmopolitan readers and therefore allow for a secure reading position. This propensity certainly feeds into the global success of exotic literatures.⁸¹ Even where these teleological projections fail and their worlds are projected naturalistically as uninhabitable, they can still be read along the same lines, as Western modernity is partly defined by its propensity to look with self-confirming indignation at those social constellations which seem defective and obstructive with regard to the social goods of modernity.⁸² While many of these goods in themselves are of course desirable and certain practices are clearly deserving of this indignation, this gaze also has a dangerous tendency to depoliticize the neoliberal capitalist into a liberal and cosmopolitan present, thus offering what Timothy Brennan has—in a slightly different context—termed ‘an ideological image function of the periphery’.⁸³ Such an ultimately diachronizing perspective risks severing the synchronic political and economic relation of the democratic and allegedly ‘post-industrial’ West to the landscapes of otherness and indignity narrated in those human rights narratives, instead of prompting readers to conceive of an ethics in relation to the ‘dispersed suffering’ that is left in the wake of the global neoliberal ‘economies of abandonment’.⁸⁴

On the surface, *The White Tiger* and other extroverted picaresque narratives also share the *Bildungsroman*’s ‘movement from pure subjection to self-regulation’.⁸⁵ Balram’s atypical and explicitly anti-developmental life trajectory, however, does not emplot the ‘dominant transition narrative of modernisation, which both the *Bildungsroman* and human rights law take for granted’.⁸⁶ They elude or even explicitly foreclose this secure positioning and affirmative narrativization of values by turning the tables on these exoticist projections. For example, in most of the texts discussed in this study, the projected postcolonial narrator/protagonists are very difficult to side with: an entrepreneur who became successful through murder (*The White Tiger*), a corrupt politician and businessman who now wants

to turn his experience into cultural capital as a postcolonial writer (*The Mimic Men*), and an alleged terrorist who has previously worked for an American consultancy agency (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*). While these roles clearly point to the postcolonial picaresque's unbroken implication in exoticism, these novels and their morally ambivalent protagonists clearly deflect the metropolitan readers' desire 'to cultivate themselves through absorption in their own pity at the spectacle of someone else's suffering'.⁸⁷ Instead, these protagonists all turn out to be corrupt and complicit agents of capitalism that exploit and expose its paradoxes, but they do not seek to overcome its systemic defects and the horrific human costs it exacts on a daily basis. The relatively stable critical topologies of world literature, thus, become somewhat unsettled when they have to cope with picaresque atopy.

This is not a critique of the *Bildungsroman* form per se, and not even of the concrete texts that are actually being written. In fact their liberationist and emancipatory direction is what has been conspicuously absent from a range of recent postcolonial novels and theory. The *Bildungsroman* clearly can also complicate agency and complicity by embedding it in economic incentives and in systemic pressures. Neither is the form simplistic about agency, nor is its focus on agency something to be frowned upon. Nonetheless, its strategically critical framing usually allows for a critical reading position that inadvertently posits a developmental or absolute alterity between the liberal present of the West and the oppressive spaces of the postcolony onto which humanitarian energy can be projected. The picaresque is not the superior form ethically or politically, but in its lack of critique and external isolatable standpoints, it tends to foreclose certain appropriative reading positions. In its satiric dimension it potentially risks being highly exoticist and speaking to a continued moral superiority of the West, but by making the worlds in which negative action takes place so unviable it also continuously raises the question of why someone acts a certain way and, thus, makes it difficult to resort to satiric judgement or humanitarian indignation. The picaresque's landscapes of precarity certainly also ask for the reader's indignation, but through its corrupted protagonists also makes absolutely clear that the object of indignation should definitely not be conceived to be mitigated by a conjunction with liberal capitalism.

As Balram Halwai projects his own life narrative, it becomes clear, therefore, that in the case of *The White Tiger* learning from the social realities of postcolonial neoliberal India actually turns out to be a miseducation in terms of human rights. Only when Balram considers it consistent with current social practice to dismiss the most basic human right

to physical inviolacy, a right which he has learned to suspend and de-universalize by observing his masters, does he achieve the means to social ascension. From a Delhi bookseller he learns the phrase '*I was looking for the key for years but the door was always open*', taken from an Urdu poem (253, emphasis retained). This phrase is repeated in free indirect discourse, and goes around in his head until it finally becomes his motto for seeking independence by the most radical means: murder and subsequent robbery (see 253–267). This phrase not only implies an assumed continuity or at least adjacency of his murder with all the social practices and exonerated violations of rights and morals he has previously witnessed. It is also a reminder of the principally precarious life and the 'vulnerability of the Other'⁸⁸ in the face of violence; that other is only protected by restraint, civility, and/or law, but is always ontologically *open* to violation. Human life is, therefore, performed as only precariously protected by a series of revocable intersubjective agreements. In this regard, Balram turns into an agent who recognizes the discursive and social imaginary nature of this agreement and exploits the immanent precariousness of his master's physical existence. He dissociates from these agreements and the—for him obstructive—values they encode and acts simply for his own good, as instructed by the dominant discourse of self-interest. By explicitly terming his murder an act of entrepreneurship, he articulates a radical gap between the ethics and logics of entrepreneurship, where what counts is exclusively the 'size of your belly' (64), and the metaphysical ethics of human rights. While the protagonist exploits the contemporary priority the former takes over the latter, at least outside of official political discourse, the novel clearly criticizes the unviability of human rights within environments of radical inequality and points to a certain incommensurability between human rights and capitalism, or at least the cosmological version of the latter that permeates Balram Halwai's India.

The protagonists of recent postcolonial picaresque novels operate in juridico-political contexts in which human rights and the principles of equality attached to them have officially entered the letter of the law. However, they experience these systems of law as contradicted by global and local economic forces, and by ideologies that impede their full realization and (re)turn the actualization of these rights into a bilateral and annulable negotiation, rather than a guaranteed structure. The picaresque, then, is certainly neither the novel of human rights nor of human rights abuse, but of the (economic) precarity that constantly threatens

human rights, which it may simply consider an inconvenient obstacle. Seen from this perspective, the suspension of the primary goods of modernity on which the postcolonial picaresque often hinges is also an appropriate 'writing back' towards a global political and economic system that will only be able to 'afford' to install the minimum propagated standards of humaneness, when the supposedly overwhelming facts of economic rationality allow for it.

The economic disenfranchisement and precarity of the picaresque, therefore, imply a larger degree of complicity not only for its roguish and ambivalent protagonist, but also transpose some of the picaresque lack of an isolated exterior position onto a global reading formation. Read from the perspective of de Certeau's conception of strategy and tactics, the picaro clearly is not a strategic 'subject of will and power' who can 'isolate itself from an exterior' and autonomously project visions of an 'exterior distinct from it'.⁸⁹ Such a stable critical viewpoint can usually not be assumed by the atypical picaresque protagonist, who has to resort to short-term context-bound tactics. This lack of an exterior standpoint also translates into the novels' system of communication, that is, their relations to metropolitan audiences and their function in a world-literary system. It is still relatively easy to assume without residues of complicity—which is not to say always without involving suppression as to one's own and one's nation's involvement—a safe critical position that is external to ostensibly *political* human rights abuses and the indignity that they foster, and to identify with movements and protagonists that seek to overcome this indignity. It is much more difficult to assume such an isolated position towards those economic and social realities that can be considered the downside—and are in any case part—of globalized capitalism, from which most Euro-Atlantic readers of novels profit, if often diffusely. The cosmopolitan/metropolitan reader, who should by definition be sensible to such long-distance effects, must engage from a much more atypical and unsecure location with those narratives that offer their violence as a direct effect of the precarity of neoliberal disenfranchisement. In a context of economic inequality, the liberal disengagement that is implied in humanitarian indignation stands on shakier ground, as the economic and ecological consequences that enable Western lifestyles become increasingly difficult to disconnect from the vulgar conventions and landscapes of destitution that persist in the postcolonial picaresque.

Picaros, like Balram Halwai, do not even attempt to overcome the disabling structures of exploitation and global inequality. They take

literally and exploit for their own use the constant states of exception and the inhumane and exploitative logics of capitalism, thus also highlighting the vulgarity of the narrow options available in a system that thrives on endless growth through perpetuating inequality and that has successfully declared all social alternatives to be dubious. While the picaresque's comic idiom may ostensibly clash with these serious issues it in no way contradicts them, but is emblematic of the restitutive tendencies of comedy that it emplots aesthetically and the satirical exposure of social practice that it seeks to emplot ethically.

By relating the 'vulgar conventions' in which the picaresque protagonists have to assert themselves, at times violently, to the effects of economic exploitation, and by partly legitimating those characters' own responses by means of the neoliberal ideologies of entrepreneurship, the postcolonial picaresque radically distorts the allegorical potential of fictional autobiographical texts: it turns allegory into irresolvable enigma, as it reproduces the atopy of the form itself onto its metropolitan readers, who can neither identify with the progress of the protagonist nor disengage from the realities in which he operates without also incriminating the systems within which they live. Rather than securely decoding the text from the position of 'distant suffering' and humanitarian outrage that versions of the failed *Bildungsroman* would provoke in liberal readers, these enigmatic readings must be haunted by the 'slow violence' that translates from metropolitan daily material practice into the precarious landscapes of the postcolonial picaresque and the actions of the picaro.⁹⁰ The postcolonial picaresque exposes the continuities, temporalities, and responsibilities that define (cosmological) capitalism without offering to disentangle itself from it in an act of emancipation or dignifying the system through performing a full-scale inclusion. While the extroverted postcolonial *Bildungsroman* may be the novel of global politics, the extroverted postcolonial picaresque may be the novel of the complexly and complicitly entangled global economy and the widespread precarity and complicity it produces.

CONCLUSION: *PRECARIUM*

The legal figure that seems to have most affinities with the picaresque is not modern human rights law, but the *precarium*, which derives from Roman law. It is nowadays still operative in some property laws and is also the etymological root of the current word stem precarious: the

Latin *precarium* signified a right ‘obtained by entreaty’ or a ‘right, tenancy, etc.: held or enjoyed by the favour of and at the pleasure of another person’.⁹¹ *Precairum* signified the loan of a thing or a right, with the possibility of a haphazard revocation at a moment’s notice, and since its earliest formation in Roman property law, was explicitly *not* considered to be a contractual legal obligation or guarantee.⁹² This is, to be precise, not an order of law that only positivizes a right that is always already there, but is the legal foundation of a hierarchy in which rights may be granted and taken back at will. It signifies an order of law in which the human must not merely recognize her or his inalienable status as a human right’s person but in which she or he must appeal to superiors in order to have certain rights granted temporarily and bilaterally: an arrangement that is always likely to collapse, should the occasion require it, or simply at random. Later chapters will show that not only are the social positions and economic privileges granted to the picaro of such a bilateral, revocable nature, but that even the narrative configuration of the picaresque usually aims—in the tradition of Lazarillo’s pleading to *vuestra merced*—at receiving an exemption. There is a strong affinity between the existentially motivated narrative situation of the picaresque, its unsteady ‘Sisyphus-rhythm’, the picaro’s means of attaining social success, and this order of law that is at the etymological root of precarity. While the *Bildungsroman* in its unfolding or obstructed human-rights plot usually narrates aspirations of escaping from despotic forms of law into the realm of tautological human rights, the picaresque projects demoralizing economies in which the *precarium* is still hauntingly operative.

NOTES

1. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. R. Dillon Boylan (London: George Bell & Sons, 1875); 59/*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1980), 71.
2. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73751?rskey=nEsObH&result=1#eid>.
3. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, in *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*, trans. Michael Alpert (London: Penguin, 2003), 4; *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes: y de sus fortunas y adversidades*, ed. Francisco Rico (Madrid: Catedra, 1990), 9.
4. Claudio Guillén, “La disposición temporal del *Lazarillo de Tormes*,” *Hispanic Review* 25, no. 4 (1957): 246–279. Here: 271.

5. Francisco Rico, *La Novela Picaresca y el Punto de Vista* (Barcelona: Ed. Seix Barral, 2000); *The Spanish Picaresque Novel and the Point of View*, trans. Charles Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
6. Guillén, "La disposición temporal," 271.
7. Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554–1954* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 37.
8. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 199–210.
9. See Joan Ramon Resina, "The Short, Happy Life of the Novel in Spain," in *The Novel. Volume I: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 301–312.
10. See Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 10–59. Here: 24.
11. See Franco Moretti, "Serious Century," in *The Novel*. vol. 1, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
12. See Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6, 25.
13. Bernhard Malkmus, *The German Pícaro and Modernity: Between Underdog and Shape-Shifter* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
14. Georg Lukács, *Theorie des Romans. Eine geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die großen Formen der Epik* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1983), 120; *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Boston: MIT Press, 1971), 135.
15. Malkmus, *The German Pícaro and Modernity*, 34.
16. See Jerome Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 17–18.
17. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 8.
18. Jürgen Jacobs, *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder. Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman* (Munich: Fink, 1972), 271.
19. See Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). The continued relevance of the form outside of strictly German and Germanist academia and beyond German literary history has been repeatedly emphasized, especially since Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987) and *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García-Márquez* (London: Verso, 1996). The form's ongoing importance for Anglophone literatures

- specifically, including colonial and postcolonial literatures, is evinced by a range of recent monographs, especially Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Joseph Slaughter, *Human Right's Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). The question of how the "fiction of development" may have been transformed, but is still accommodated in contexts of problematic or foreclosed "development" and maturation, has recently been lucidly discussed in Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth*.
20. See for example Jürgen Jacobs and Markus Krause, *Der deutsche Bildungsroman: Gattungsgeschichte vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989), 22.
 21. Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 37.
 22. Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays towards the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 80.
 23. See Malkmus' title *The German Picaro and Modernity*.
 24. See Joseph Slaughter, "Enabling Fictions and Novel Subjects: The *Bildungsroman* and International Human Rights," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1405–1423.
 25. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 25.
 26. Simon Gikandi, "Arrow of God Chinua Achebe, 1964," in *The Novel. Volume II: Forms and Themes*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 489–97. Here: 490; see also Joshua D. Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism," *Contemporary Literature* 40, no. 1 (1999): 22–59. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991): 336–357.
 27. Richard Lane, *The Postcolonial Novel* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 47.
 28. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 165.
 29. See Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 1977), 241.
 30. Simon Gikandi, "Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 309–328. Here: 328.
 31. Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.
 32. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88. Here: 69.

33. Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106.
34. Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman," 24.
35. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 26–27.
36. Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 51.
37. See Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism"; see also Appiah, "Is the Post"; Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 182–191.
38. See Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism," 25.
39. See Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 22–23.
40. See Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 17–20.
41. See Achille Mbembe, "On Private Indirect Government," in *On the Postcolony*, trans. A.M. Berrett (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 66–101; see also Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).
42. Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 6.
43. See James Ferguson, "De-moralizing Economies: African Socialism, Scientific Capitalism, and the Moral Politics of Structural Adjustment," in *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 69–88.
44. Robert Nixon, "Neoliberalism, Slow Violence, and the Environmental Picaresque," *Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 3 (2009): 443–467.
45. See Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1999), 49–50.
46. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), xviii.
47. See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Cosmological Time and the Impossibility of Closure. A Structural Element in Spanish Golden Age Narratives," in *Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee and Gumbrecht (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 304–321; see Jochen Mecke, "Die Atopie des Pícaro: Paradoxe Kritik und dezentrierte Subjektivität im *Lazarillo de Tormes*," in *Welterfahrung-Selbsterfahrung. Konstitution und Verhandlung von Subjektivität in der spanischen Literatur der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Wolfgang Matzat and Bernd Teuber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 67–94.
48. See Giancarlo Maiorino, *At the Margins of the Renaissance: "Lazarillo de Tormes" and the Picaresque Art of Survival* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003), Chap. 1.
49. See José Antonio Maravall, *La literatura picaresca desde la historia social: siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Taunus, 1986).
50. Mecke, "Atopie des Pícaro," 93.

51. See Anne J. Cruz, *Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 5.
52. Robert Folger, “‘Tened ... que no soy *Ecce Homo*’: *El Buscón*, el inconsciente político y la nuda vita,” in *Narrar la pluralidad cultural: Crisis de la modernidad y funciones de lo popular en la novela en lengua española*, ed. Wolfgang Matzat and Max Grosse (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012), 67–96. Here: 75.
53. Ulrich Wicks, “The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach,” *PMLA* 89, no. 2 (1974): 240–249.
54. Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro*, 11.
55. Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 84–258.
56. Peter N. Dunn, *Spanish Picaresque Fiction: A New Literary History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 15.
57. Hans Blumenberg, “The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel,” in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, ed. Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 29–48. Here: 33; “Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Möglichkeit des Romans,” in: *Nachahmung und Illusion* (Poetik und Hermeneutik I), ed. Hans Robert Jauß (München: Fink, 1964), 9–27.
58. Blumenberg, “Concept of Reality,” 34; “Wirklichkeitsbegriff,” 13–14.
59. Guillen, *Literature as System*, 80.
60. See Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
61. Mecke, “Atopie des Pikaro,” 88–89.
62. *Ibid.*, 71.
63. See Andreas Mahler, “Weltmodell Theater: Sujetbildung und Sujetwandel im englischen Drama der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Poetica* 30 (1998): 1–45. Here: 17–33.
64. Mecke, “Atopie des Pikaro,” 94.
65. See for example Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27–116.
66. See Lotman, *Structure*, 231–239.
67. James Ferguson, “Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development,” in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 166–181.

68. Walter Reed, *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 48.
69. Rob Nixon, "Neoliberalism," 452.
70. See Lotman, *Structure*, 231–239.
71. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 30.
72. James Ferguson, "Decomposing Modernity," 177.
73. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66.
74. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 40; emphasis added.
75. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 7.
76. *Ibid.*, 27.
77. *Ibid.*, 11.
78. *Ibid.*, 27.
79. *Ibid.*, 38.
80. See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2000), 35, 102, 136.
81. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 43–45.
82. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 25–27.
83. See Timothy Brennan, "The Ideological Image Function of the Periphery," in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 101–122.
84. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economics of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.
85. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 9.
86. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 9.
87. Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, Politics*, trans. Graham D. Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xiv.
88. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 135.
89. de Certeau, *The Practice*, xviii.
90. See Nixon, "Neoliberalism, Slow Violence, and the Environmental Picaresque".
91. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/149548?redirectedFrom=precarious#eid>.
92. See Carl Bulling, *Das Precarium: Eine römischrechtliche Abhandlung* (Leipzig: Friedrich Fleischer, 1846), 5.

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