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**THE PICARESQUE WOMAN:
GENDER-BENDING, GENRE-BENDING, AND THE EPISODIC SELF
IN
*MOLL FLANDERS, THE RUNAGATE COURAGE,
MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN, AND FEAR OF FLYING***

by

ELLEN LANESE SPALDO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Nancy K. Miller

This dissertation focuses on the figure of the picaresque woman as it appears in selected works from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth centuries. It posits the viability and flexibility of picaresque literature by examining the narrative strategies and energies that are engaged when picaresque elements interact with feminocentric concerns. The study explores the ways in which the picaresque shapes the construction of the feminine self and either supports or resists the assertion of a feminist stance. Questions about the feasibility of a female novel of development are raised, and the relationship of the feminine picaresque to the female *Bildungsroman* is discussed.

Major twentieth-century critical statements on the picaresque reveal considerable disagreement over the picaresque canon and increasing frustration with the apparent malleability of the term *picaresque*. A modal approach is offered as an alternative methodology. Picaresque structure is seen as contributing to the construction of an appropriate and cohesive personality - the "episodic self" - especially when enacted in a female character.

Lazarillo de Tormes is discussed as an early model of a representative picaresque text. *Moll Flanders* reveals a structure of narrative retrospection within which Moll rewrites episodes of her past, thereby revising her early dreams of becoming a gentlewoman toward a new goal of adopting the role of a gentleman-tradesman and, in the process, accomplishing a “vicious” parody of the process of becoming a man. A comparison of *The Runagate Courage* and *Mother Courage and Her Children* reveals a significant emancipatory gesture (gender-bending) in the seventeenth-century work and highlights Brecht’s adaptation of the picaresque mode to dramatic form (genre-bending) in his twentieth-century play. Finally, the picaresque mode in Jong’s Isadora Wing trilogy creates a vital and attractive pícara but produces a narrative that severely limits the protagonist’s capacity for personal autonomy.

This dissertation suggests that we are turning, in cyclical fashion, to a sense of the world as a postmodern picaresque in which development is undefined, genre is deconstructed, and gender is flexible. The pícara opportunistically takes over that space that has been contended for so long - the junction of gender, genre, and structure – and flourishes there.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation grew out of two seminars I took at the Graduate Center of The City University of New York: “The Picaresque” and “Master and Servant,” a course in literary thematics. Professor Robert Day, who led both seminars, was a stimulating and challenging teacher, a fine critic and editor, and a supportive advisor. His encouragement led to my first presentation on the picaresque at a major conference. I felt his loss most keenly as I returned to this topic (and to the dissertation) after a long hiatus. Imagining his voice and his vision at each step of this project, however, I came to a fuller understanding of the strength of his scholarship and the depth of his wisdom. I profoundly appreciate his early guidance.

When Nancy K. Miller assumed the role of dissertation advisor, she adopted me, much as if I were an abandoned *pícara*, helping me to persevere despite the many obstacles that can get in the way of writing a dissertation. While introducing me to new texts and methodologies, she nonetheless encouraged me to assert my own voice and tell the story that was taking shape in my mind. I am deeply grateful for the challenging insights she offered, for her support, and for her relentless exhortations to *keep going*.

As a reader, Burton Pike provided a calming influence and contributed many valuable comments, particularly at the defense, that will be fruitful to my further explorations in the picaresque. He has also helped me to maintain a sense of continuity in my studies and an awareness of my own development as a scholar and writer. Daniel Gerould, pressed into service on my committee at the eleventh hour, offered important critiques of my work and suggested interesting applications of the picaresque in popular

media. I must note that handing the final draft of this dissertation to Professor Gerould, the one member of my committee whose classes I have taken, was a moment of exquisite pleasure and pride.

As I struggled to balance the work of my dissertation with a demanding career in higher education and the responsibilities of family, Professor David Kleinbard, former Executive Officer and Professor of Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center, was indefatigable in his support. Professor Polina Klimovitskaya, Lecturer in Theater Studies at Yale University, provided down-to-earth advice as well as living validation of the role of creativity in scholarly endeavor. Peter Howland was an especially perceptive mentor during the most intense periods of this work. Many friends, colleagues, and family members encouraged me in my efforts, and I am sincerely grateful to all of them.

Finally, each time I look at my husband, Anthony, and our son, Derek, I remember and am thankful for their immeasurable love and incalculable assistance. Together they learned to run a household so that I could be free to write. More importantly, they have kept faith with me and with my goals. Their spirit of joyful celebration at the completion of this dissertation and the achievement of the doctoral degree will always be with me, even as their love sustains me.

Dedication

To my mother, Mary Burkard Lanese, who survived fire and flood
and would have understood.

To my father, Michael Charles Lanese, who would have been proud.

To my original dissertation advisor, Robert Adams Day, whose untimely death orphaned
me, pícara-like, but whose teaching and example continue to inspire and to challenge.

In Memoriam

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Prologue: Channel Markers

"If its original meaning were restored in the wider context of the European novel as a whole, the term [*picaresque*] could again become useful in comparative literature, which it has ceased to be."

(Alexander Parker: *Literature and the Delinquent*, 1967)

" . . . for every new novel, there is a critic waiting to find something picaresque in it."

(W. M. Frohock: "The Falling Center: Recent Fiction and the Picaresque Tradition," 1969)

"The discovery of the picaresque as a mode of fiction is a failing enterprise in itself . . . "

(Harry Sieber: *The Picaresque*, 1977)

"While our knowledge about the picaresque in Spain has never been more extensive or comprehensive, our sense of a definable picaresque genre seems to have become more and more elusive."

(Ulrich Wicks: *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions*, 1989)

"I do not know if we can ever answer satisfactorily all of the questions raised by this literature."

(Peter N. Dunn: *Spanish Picaresque Fiction*, 1993)

I had once anticipated that I might begin this study without the phrase “fraught with difficulty.” That has turned out to be a deluded hope, especially as I am concerned not only with the viability and flexibility of picaresque literature but also with the energies that are released when the picaresque interacts with feminocentric concerns. I intend to explore the ways in which the picaresque *mode* shapes the construction of the feminine self and either supports or resists the assertion of a feminist stance in selected texts.

Some very rough waters threaten us as we begin to make our way toward these two destinations, the picaresque and the feminine. We shall start by addressing the first area of turmoil, that is, the definition of the term *picaresque*. This word, when uttered in almost any conversation, literary or not, evokes such a wide range of interpretations and assumptions that it becomes necessary, at the outset, to attempt to establish as precise a definition as possible of what I shall mean when I use the term. Let my channel markers, selected from major critical statements on the picaresque over approximately thirty years, serve as beacons, fair warning of the contradictory signals we can anticipate as we begin our journey! Channel signs alert river captains to the presence of dangerous conditions lurking beneath the surface. In this study, they not only provide evidence of the considerable disagreement among critics about what constitutes the picaresque canon, but they also intimate an intense level of critical frustration with the apparent malleability of the term *picaresque*, offense at its frequently indiscriminate application, and finally, a scholarly throwing up of hands, a disowning of the picaresque itself as a viable genre.

I invite you to join me on a voyage that will gradually uncover the *contours* of the picaresque, if not a fixed and fast definition. My purpose is to help to rebuild a reputation

for the picaresque, through applying a modal approach, as a very useful way of looking not only at literary texts but at the world, and to suggest that some of the central quarrels about and difficulties with the picaresque are themselves reflective of its deepest strengths. Early on in this journey, we will travel to the source, to the River Tormes, birthplace of the pícaro Lazarillo. I will spend some time there with you, exploring the story of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a foundational text from the early history of the literature. Despite the fact that even this text has been resisted by some scholars in its struggle for a place in the canon, *Lazarillo de Tormes* will serve quite well as our chart, or model. In subsequent chapters, we will follow some major currents streaming from that source, as I turn to the texts that are of central concern to me - Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Grimmelshausen's *The Runagate Courage*, Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*, and Jong's *Fear of Flying*. Near these shores, we will find out what happens when the picaresque contours we have surveyed arrange themselves quite strikingly in the shapes of women. There we shall address the second area of contention, the impact of the picaresque mode on feminocentric narrative (and dramatic) projects, and, soon enough, we will chart our own course, as we test the waters around Defoe, Grimmelshausen, Brecht, and Jong.

In the beginning of our travels, however, we shall need the help of pilots. And so, like pícaras and pícaros, we will first apprentice ourselves to the masters, a cohort of critics, writing from the beginnings of the twentieth century to our present day. We will scan the horizon through their scholarly arguments and critical debates as they struggle to establish a definition of the picaresque.

Chapter I

From the River Tormes, Part 1:

Critical Perspectives on the Picaresque - Toward a Modal Approach

Frank Wadleigh Chandler was the first important twentieth-century commentator to outline a genealogy of the picaresque form, to attempt a comprehensive review of picaresque literature, and to suggest the significance of picaresque fiction in the development of the novel. The title and sub-titles of his 1899 book give us, in capsule, a prescient outline of the critical debate about the picaresque that is to come in the new century. First, the title, *Romances of Roguery*, presents us with two apparently conflicting assertions about the picaresque figure and about picaresque narrative: the pícaro is both hero and anti-hero; or, to put it another way, the picaresque is both romance and anti-romance. This is a bifurcation that will permeate critical discourse through the 1960's. Second, one of Chandler's two sub-titles, *An Episode in the History of the Novel*, suggests the durable historicity that will characterize critical perspectives right up to our present day: the picaresque is a bridge between romance and realism, and it represents a mutational shift in the evolution of fiction. At the same time, the appearance of the word "episode" in the sub-title hints at that feature of the picaresque itself - its paratactic rather than syntactic structure and physiology - that will significantly limit critical appreciation of the achievements of picaresque literature. Finally, Chandler's second sub-title, *The Picaresque Novel in Spain*, grounds his discussion of the picaresque in a specific national and cultural context. Some commentators who follow him will never be able to cross that border. We shall be able to trace Chandler's original emphases - the picaresque as anti-

romance, the picaresque as precursor to the novel, the picaresque as sequential story rather than consequential plot, and the picaresque as national/cultural phenomenon - throughout more than a century of critical discourse. We shall see, as the discussion moves into the latter part of the twentieth century, that a helpful resolution of the debate is attempted by Claudio Guillén, Robert Scholes, and Ulrich Wicks who propose a modal approach to the picaresque and to questions of genre overall.

Chandler is very useful to this study because his work represents an early example of attempts to chronicle the origins of the picaresque. A by-product of this endeavor turns out to be the generation of a rather helpful sketch of the “essential elements” of the picaresque, a proposed set of components without which a work cannot be called picaresque. These components will, of course, be examined and re-examined throughout the twentieth century dialogue on the subject. For this reason, the Chandler definitions can serve as an appropriate starting point for an understanding of what people have meant when they have used the term *picaresque*. I intend to review these two specific themes from Chandler: a sense of literary forerunners and a proposed set of defining characteristics of picaresque fiction.

Although he will focus mainly on Spanish examples, Chandler acknowledges the international roots of the picaresque as he considers texts that emerged before the appearance of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* in 1554. Chandler points to the rogues and pirates who appear regularly in Greek “novels,” but gives more concentrated attention to Roman examples. Plautine servants and parasites seem apt prototypes for the pícaro who lives by his wits. The episodic structure of Petronius’ *Satyricon* and the changes of masters endured by Lucius in Apuleius’ *Metamorphosis*, or *The Golden Ass*,

provide models for future writers in Spain, where Petronius and, says Chandler, especially Apuleius, were widely read and imitated (RR 4 - 5). Apuleius, in particular, furnishes what Chandler identifies as a characteristic feature of the picaresque: the idea of describing society through the first-person narrative of an individual in servitude, whose apprenticeship to a series of masters provides opportunities for observation and satire.

The content and point of view of picaresque fiction, Chandler says, derived in part from the catalogues of social classes and types which were produced in the Middle Ages. He proffers the *Dance of Death* as an example of literary forms that purported to describe and chastize every rank and condition of human life, from Pope, Emperor and King down in succession “to the meanest thrall” (RR 5). Evolving fictions of observation followed suit, reviewing and commenting on the traits of each profession through the eyes of the servant. In another example, the rascal hero of *Roman de Renart* also prepares the way for the pícaro. The bold parody of this work lays the groundwork for a way of looking at the world in which a mirror is held up to the follies of all classes, and the mirror is firmly in the grip of a thorough rogue. Out of this irony comes what Chandler calls the picaresque’s “sympathy with the anti-hero” (RR 6).

The deeds of the rogue and associates are of much more interest in these fictions than their characters. Actions, largely cheats, tricks and frauds, rather than character or nature, are seen as what makes the central figure a rogue. This focus derives, Chandler says, from a tradition that echoes back to the *fabliaux* and to Italian *novelle*. *Three Thieves* by Jean de Boves, *Blind Men of Compeigne* by Courte-Barbe, many of the *Gesta Romanorum* and some of the *Cento novelle antiche*, as well as the eighth and ninth days of the *Decameron* supply lists of deeds perpetrated by and upon rogue figures (RR 7). In

addition to these rich fictional manifestations of interest in roguery, the “Beggar Books,” such as the *Liber Vagatorum* which appeared in Germany in 1510, supplied detailed observations of actual criminals which served as potent adjuncts to and vivid raw material for picaresque fictions (RR 11).

In time, the disparate accounts of cleverness and roguery applied to the detriment of others began to be “strung as anecdotal beads along the thread of a single name” (RR 8). From here, the doer begins to emerge from the mere chronology of the deeds, although Chandler insists that it is not until *Lazarillo de Tormes* in Spain in 1554 that we begin to have a clear sense of the pícaro as a distinct character. In 1519, the closest thing to it appears in Germany in Thomas Murner’s *Til Eulenspiegel*, which Chandler calls a picaresque “in embryo” (RR 8). Chandler claims that Til, Murner’s central character, is more than a souvenir of the defunct fourteenth-century Teutonic tradition of the rogue. In the attribution of collected cheats and misdeeds to this one figure, Chandler sees a clear precursor of the *Lazarillo*, in which the central character will evidence a distinct persona within a “real and interesting environment” (RR 10).

Having “unfolded,” as Chandler might say, from such works as *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, medieval catalogues of the estates, tales of outlaws, and reports of actual criminals, picaresque fiction can also, he says, be considered to have evolved as a riposte to heroic literature. Chandler’s eloquently framed observations assume a dialectical relationship between romance and picaresque, and between the figure of the hero of romance and epic and the anti-hero of the rogue stories and picaresques. In this view, the anti-heroic pícaro is seen as parodying the figure of the hero. In contrast to the hero, the pícaro is concerned with (and limited to) the world of the real, the lowly things of

everyday existence. Scatology, the grossly real, the material elements of life are his domain. The romance and epic ideals of nobility of character and courage in action are supplanted by the gracelessness of the sharper-coward who makes his way by cleverness, evading, not monsters and enchantments, but hunger, thirst, and destitution. These conditions he will observe and describe in sharp detail in his first-person narrative. He is a rogue recounting his adventures in survival.

Chandler proposes a list of characteristics for this rogue/pícaro which will help to shape critical views of the figure throughout the century. The pícaro is born of poor and usually dishonest parents who may or may not have been married and are usually distressed at his arrival because he represents another mouth to feed. At an early age, the child is let loose in the world, orphaned either by the deaths of the parents or by their abandonment of their offspring or neglect of his basic needs. Once he is alone, the pícaro makes his way through the world, and by taking a series of harsh raps, discovers that no one will care for him but himself. He must be ever-vigilant in order to preserve his very existence. The pícaro is sometimes presented as an innocent at the start, to be corrupted by the immoral individuals and mores he encounters on his journeys. At other times, he is portrayed as possessing from childhood a seemingly innate desire to take from others, to steal if necessary, to appropriate to himself the money, goods, and whatever other useful resources may belong to others. In many cases, the pícaro is obliged to go into service to a series of masters from whom he learns various tricks of roguery which he uses to outwit each master in turn. In describing his masters, who frequently represent various social castes, occupations, or estates, he produces satire. Finally, the pícaro's story is brought to

a relatively abrupt close. He has either attained a modest degree of success, or he simply promises to relate more adventures once he has lived them (*RR* 45 - 46).

In his poetic but lucid style, Chandler places these picaresque characteristics, as well as his vision of the pícaro as anti-hero, in the historical/cultural context of Spain in the sixteenth century. Chandler paints a compelling but broadly brushed picture of the declining power and vitality of Spain during this period. He starts with the stunning successes of the *conquistadores* whose adventures poured unprecedented wealth into the country, with the result that militarism and heroism, rather than industry, were encouraged. Meanwhile, feudalism was experiencing a late demise in Spain, as compared with the rest of Europe, and in its wake left a populace which was generally dependent upon employment in the royal service, at court and in the civil administration, or in the military. The appeal of and availability of productive labor declined. Men returned from the army unwilling or unable to seek work in farming or in the trades. Various initiatives suppressed or expelled Jews and Moors who had previously comprised markedly productive sectors of the domestic economy. Governmental, royal thriftlessness and lack of management of the enormous riches which had been torn from the Americas resulted in an unstable economy with growing numbers of poor people, recurring shortages of goods, and widespread hunger (*RR* 19 - 40).

The oppressive tax and market legislation of Philip the Second, spawned by the pressures of his overwhelming debts, squeezed out the farmers, merchants and manufacturers. Surveillance and espionage insinuated themselves into the lives of ordinary citizens. The advent of firearms endowed individuals with the capacity to defend themselves, and the oppressive and invasive political climate may have made it necessary

to do so. The increase in the numbers of the homeless, the pervasive presence of beggars, the common practice of abandoning children and infants, and the persistence of an outlaw class of gypsies, despite increasingly furious legislation against their continuance on Spanish soil, contributed to an endemic social disorder. The climate of “every man for himself” that resulted, Chandler says, provided fertile soil for the appearance and the appeal of the picaresque figure (*RR* 19 - 40).

The social and cultural developments in sixteenth-century Spain, characterized by Chandler as “the decadence” (*RR* 42), provided ample material for a corrective response, at least in fiction.¹ The pícaro exposes the hypocrisies and brutalities of the environment by comically inverting expectations: “He was sure to be amusing, every nook and cranny of society was open to his exploration, and, best of all, his point of view was precisely the opposite of the ordinary observer’s. What he praised was infallibly blameworthy; what he blamed was the really meritorious perspective” (*RR* 43). It can be said that the pícaro is both effigy and artist of the milieu he inhabits. As knave and rascal, by virtue of his direct engagement with the scene he is describing, he inverts the picture. Since the world he depicts is chaotic and already “turned upside down,” it is more clearly rendered when re-inverted.

Chandler’s association of the pícaro with the rogue tradition turns out to be key here, as the pícaro is certainly part of the (societal) problem. But he can be found guilty of only minor offenses. The requisite skills for executing these misdemeanors, learned at

¹Of course, later critics, notably Alexander Parker, will point out that the social, political, and economic conditions, which Chandler mines for the purpose of explaining the emergence of picaresque literature in Spain, also existed in England, France, and Germany. Parker is particularly delighted to relate the information that surplus English rogues were transported to Spain in the early 1600’s (12).

the feet of his masters, allow him to get by in the upside-down world into which he is thrust at an early age. The pícaro is never profoundly evil, nor does he ever adopt a tragic tone or outlook. He is, above all, a survivor of a cruel series of circumstances and conditions which he delineates in episodic fashion, roughly chronologically, with no particular conclusion, only an ending. In Chandler's view, as we have seen, picaresque narrative germinated within the traditions of romance and epic, but opposes these positions with an anti-heroic stance, neatly bundled with a particular set of picaresque characteristics.

Chandler's importance lies in his being the first to propose, at the start of the twentieth century, a set of basic characteristics for the picaresque, as well as a history of the form and a context in which to place the picaresque figure and his narrative stance. Chandler's observations, articulated in the poetic style of the nineteenth century in which he received his literary training, are alternatively detailed and sweeping. Although they will be scanned and cropped by subsequent commentators, they will frame, nonetheless, the discourse of the century to come.

Building on Chandler's description of the pícaro as rogue, R.W.B. Lewis proposes the paradoxical yet, for the purposes of this study, compelling notion of the rogue as saint. In his 1959 work, *The Picaresque Saint*, he examines a group of writers whom he labels the "second generation," that is, novelists following in the tradition of Joyce, Proust, and Mann. He chooses Alberto Moravia, Albert Camus, Ignazio Silone, William Faulkner, and Graham Greene. Lewis places selected works of these authors in the picaresque tradition. In so doing, he implies a sense of the picaresque that lies at the heart of this study: that is, that the picaresque constitutes a vital and powerful way of

looking at the world, a kind of literature that is very much alive, that has been and continues to be honed and adapted to support a variety of narrative purposes. Lewis links his selection of writers, and thus the picaresque, to what he calls the “note of death,” sounded at the start of the twentieth century by Joyce in *The Dubliners* (17.) In brief, Lewis suggests that the second generation writers represent a transition from the primacy of art, as seen in the first generation, to the primacy of man as the central preoccupation of art in particular and of human thought in general. The second generation bespeaks an attempt to revivify, to come alive in the face of death, with each author representing, for Lewis, a particular sphere of human energy: Moravia, the erotic; Camus, reason in compassion; Silone, the transformation of the political ambition into the charitable; Faulkner, the conversion of darkness into light and the old into the new; and Greene, the interplay of the transcendent with the less than human (*PS* 276 - 277).

The picaresque note sounded by the works Lewis discusses can in fact be heard as a response to the question posed by the first and second generation novelists: What can we do in the face of death, moreover, in the face of the nihilism that robs life of its meaning? The answer given by the picaresque works of the second generation examined by Lewis, and by the picaresque examples I shall cover in this work, is: “Live!” In other words, survival itself, life itself supplies its own meaning. In this response there is, of course, tension. This is a desperate strategy, asserts Lewis, and its desperation is especially evocative of motifs that resound most poignantly in the picaresque. Without God, and with aesthetics diminished in its capacity to explain our human predicament, authors struggle to find an answer in life itself. Like the pícaro, they have been forced to center themselves upon the act of living. And in the material context, the everyday stuff

of life, solace is sought against the abysmal sense of loss and isolation that permeates their fictional worlds.

The pícaro asserts energy toward survival and focuses on the material of life. The central figures of the second generation novels described by Lewis, and of the picaresque works I shall be discussing, exhibit an “agonizing dedication to life” (*PS* 27). Given the threat of death that is imminent in picaresque novels, and pervasive in the literary heritage of the first and second generations explored by Lewis, the miserable and frightening business of living is transformed, quite unexpectedly, into a passion for life. In the pícaro’s loneliness and wanderings, we can read Camus’ sense of cosmic homelessness. The push toward human companionship in the picaresque examples can be seen, Lewis says, as a saintly call to union that could, if heeded, renew our sense of life and its meaning. The bread and wine of Silone, according to Lewis (*PS* 29), can be read as sacramental signs of the potential of human relationships one to another. So can the food and drink endlessly craved by the pícaro.

The fact that this potential for human connection is rarely fulfilled in the picaresque world makes the impulse no less saintly, perhaps even more so, to the extent that it may elevate the pícaro to the condition of martyrdom. “They are outsiders who share; they are outcasts who enter in. It is just by taking on some of the wretchedness of the sinful, the persecuted and the dispossessed that they can experience what Henry James once called a ‘tragic fellowship’ with suffering humanity” (*PS* 33).

The drive toward human fellowship is played out in picaresque novels through a series of encounters between the pícaro and the individuals who are to be either served or tricked, or both, as is often the case. If read as continually frustrated attempts to forge

human relationships, the pícaro's exertions evolve not only as horizontal journeys through geographical space but also as vertical treks, so to speak, up and down, up again and back down, through various social strata. The episodic structure and jerky rhythms of the picaresque form support the journey motif.

When seen in the context of a struggle to connect to the human community, the pícaro's travels, although comic in overtone, have tragic undertones. This texture is central to Lewis' notion of a picaresque saint *manqué*, a fitting representative of a paradoxical age, whether that era be the sixteenth century or the twentieth (*PS* 31). Notions of sainthood vary, of course, in the novels that serve as Lewis' examples. The notions share, however, a fundamental openness to the sense that the saint participates not only in the woes of humanity but in its deficiencies and its sins. "It is exactly in their impurity - whether it is reckoned by official morality or by any other kind - that the saintly characters achieve, and in fact incarnate, that trust in life and that companionship that the contemporary novel so emphasizes" (*PS* 35).

Robert Alter refines Lewis' notion of the picaresque saint in his 1965 book *The Rogue's Progress*. Taking issue with that part of Lewis's vision that ascribes Christ-like nuances to the pícaro, Alter objects to the notion of a "ne'er-do-well Christ" (*RP* 12). He foregrounds instead the aspect of the picaresque figure which had been proposed earlier by Chandler: that is, the pícaro as rogue. He also turns inside out Lewis' notion of the sacramental, insisting that the picaresque novel evokes a thoroughly *de*-sacramentalized world in which bread becomes God, rather than the reverse. The pícaro finds that he is totally alone in a world which is completely indifferent to his existence. He is entirely dependent upon his own resourcefulness. Yet he stands on a middle ground between faith

and skepticism: he does not question his situation nor probe into the order of the universe that restricts him. He accepts the position of half-outsider. The pícaro is not a rebel against society nor against the body of faith that sustains the *status quo* of that society (RP 4 - 5).

Despite his caution around Lewis' view of the pícaro as saint, Alter nonetheless extracts from Lewis the idea of the "incorruptibility" of the picaresque figure, and this is a considerable concession (RP 12). The pícaro is never a complete scoundrel, since that stance would place him completely outside the social system. This view, for one thing, cracks open the satiric capabilities of the form. In order to observe what is foolish or deplorable in the behaviors of people, the satirist must remain connected with the subjects to be observed. In Alter's view, if the first person narrator of the picaresque story becomes thoroughly enmeshed with what is being observed, however, the result would be a kind of "emotional density," as can be sensed in instances from works by Dos Passos or Samuel Butler II. If, on the other hand, the narrator withdraws to a great distance, the overall effect is a neatly imposed intellectual pattern, as in Swift or Voltaire (RP 14). Instead, the pícaro negotiates a precisely calibrated detachment from other human beings: "If the picaro rejected society or rebelled against it, if he took to the hills instead of to the road, he would not be interested in society's workings or in its corruptions. If, on the other hand, he had a fixed place in society and made its goals identical with his own, he would no longer have the perspective to see what is wrong in and with society" (RP 15). Alter argues that this satirical perspective is not an absolute characteristic of works that are considered picaresque. Nevertheless, most commentators following him have emphasized the satiric potential of the picaresque novel.

For the purposes of this study, however, Alter's notion of a meticulously calculated distance - not too close, not too far - between the pícaro and the society which is inhabited is important for a related but different reason. His discussion of notions of distance represents a significant advance in the thinking about the picaresque in that it introduces an examination of the pattern of servitude that permeates examples of the form. In the sixteenth-century examples of male pícaros, the central character is a servant of many masters. In later examples, and interestingly, in examples of female pícaras, the paradigm is not restricted to a literal servant/master relationship, but is expanded to include the analogous pattern of apprenticeship. Alter points out that this submission to servitude does not generally appeal to the contemporary reader (*RP* 15). Indeed, as we will see in my consideration of female picaresque figures, the distaste may be intensified by modern feminist views on empowerment and on the construction of femininity. Still, the pattern persists, even in modern feminist authors such as Erica Jong. We will have to come to terms with it and, rather than be offended, try to understand the usefulness of the motif and its effects.

Alter reminds us that the picaresque novel was born in the sixteenth century and flourished through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, eras that maintained a keen sense of discrete societal levels, as well as the limitations inherent in each tier. Launching a socio/historical inquiry, however, is not as productive for the purposes of this study as considering how and why this pattern endures, even in twentieth-century examples. Alter posits that the servant/apprentice model affords the pícaro a marked degree of motility even as it restricts the character to a position of subordination (*RP* 16).

Both mobility and subservience are necessary to produce the peculiar timbre that we call picaresque. On the negative side, at least to the contemporary mind, the pícaro accepts his servility because he simply cannot imagine the possibility of radically changing his place, and consequently, the position of others, in the scheme of things. On the positive side, the servant's or apprentice's position allows him to learn the skills he needs to get along in a decidedly hostile world and provides him with a unique perspective from which to observe all classes of society and many types of individuals. It also frees him from the burden of taking on the obligations and accountabilities with which society burdens its full members. Servitude gives the pícaro the advantage of "irresponsibility," thus making him, in a sense, his own master "in fact, though not in form" (*RP* 16). Accepting the lowness of servitude removes the pícaro from the common human effort toward self-importance and respect, but equips him with a certain amount of flexibility, both in the roles he may play and in the points of view he may adopt. Just as he is able to stand apart from his fellow human beings, so he is able to scrutinize himself as well as his betters. Thus, the pícaro is part of the "fellowship of fools" that populate the earth (*RP* 23). While Alter will not acknowledge here any echo of Lewis' theme of communion, he does acquiesce to a note of compassion that reverberates in the heart of the pícaro. This is not sentiment, however, but rather a skillful balance between a satirical perception of human folly and a sense of kinship, or at least a longing for kinship, with the rest of the human race (*RP* 23 - 24).

This precarious balance leads Alter back to yet another offering by Lewis, that is, an appreciation of the incorruptibility and basic innocence of the pícaro. He uses

Lesage's *Gil Blas* as an example of the pícaro's exemption from the Seven Deadly Sins, those vices that stem from, or actuate, a deep meanness of the soul:

As a man of many talents who has chosen the humbleness of the servant's place in order to get along in the world, the pícaro is innocent of the sins of Pride and Envy. Though he is always on the lookout for new means - whether honorable or not - to replenish his personal stock, the amassing of riches never becomes an end in itself for him, and we could hardly accuse him of Avarice. A subtle manipulator of men who must ingratiate himself with them, he could not permit himself the luxury of Anger. While he has hearty natural appetites that he is not embarrassed to satisfy, he cannot, as a man who lives by his agility, get entangled in the snares of sensualism: Gluttony and Lust have no place in a picaresque career. And it goes without saying that a figure who embodies protean enterprise and quick-witted opportunism will in no way be guilty of the sin of Sloth (*RP* 28 - 29).

At the same time, a character who is devoid of the capacity for serious sin may also be seen as incapable of spiritual growth. This lack of development in the picaresque character is another important observation of Alter's. The pícaro is a fixed personality who never substantially changes. Although he undergoes some manner of *déniaissement*, the pícaro wises up, learns all the rules and pitfalls of the game, but then proceeds to play that game without any thought to changing it and without any development within himself. This shifts the picaresque novel away from the serious inner development that is typical of the *Bildungsroman* toward a focus on the external world and the struggle to wrest an existence from it (*RP* 31).

It was inevitable that authors would sooner or later relax the static attributes of the pícaro and begin to create a central character who is pliable and capable of profound spiritual change and psychological development (*RP* 32). When this happens, Alter says, the pícaro is no longer a pícaro: he has metamorphosed into something quite different. Indeed, after completing the initial chapters of his *Rogue's Progress* which have been reviewed here, Alter is quick to point out that the works he will consider, in what will be the bulk of his book, are not really picaresque novels after all. He devotes his attention first to Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, LeSage's *Gil Blas*, Smollet's *Roderick Random*, and Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and then to Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Thackeray's *Barry Linden*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*, and Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*. He nominates these texts as examples of works in which the picaresque thrust has been redirected away from the picaresque program, toward other agendas. Alter asserts that while owing a great deal to the tradition, each of these novels has become something "other than a picaresque novel" (*RP* 30).

Thus, ironically, Alter's most important contribution to the dialogue on the picaresque is made quite in spite of himself. That contribution is his affirmation that the potential for transformation is discernible within the picaresque novel itself (*RP* 31). He declares this to be so, but eschews the opportunity to focus on the protean quality of the picaresque as a value in itself. It will take approximately seven years of further debate before another critic, Claudio Guillén, will fully embrace the transformational potential of the picaresque.

In the meantime, a critical divide opens up in the wake of Lewis' and Alter's work. The issue to be contended emerges in Alter as an implied query: Is the flexibility, the protean quality of the picaresque novel a blessing or a curse? In subsequent commentary, what was in Alter an implicit question becomes explicit and takes center stage as the focus of debate. In other words, critics split over how to handle the seeds of character transformation (and thence the conversions from episodic to causal plots, and from picaresque to *bildung*) which they discover in the "picaresque" novels themselves and in works which follow in the picaresque tradition: Is the potential for metamorphosis which can be found within a picaresque work a force to be reckoned with, a signal feature of the picaresque form? Or is it a sign that the novel being studied is, in fact, not a picaresque at all? This critical challenge is played out, immediately following Alter, as a crisis of genre definition, a conflict over whether and how to delineate a genre. What is really in question is how we shall look at the picaresque, whether as a closed, defined form or as something else, something that is open and flexible.

In 1967, two critics, Stuart Miller and Alexander Parker, attempt to negotiate this critical chasm. In his book, *The Picaresque Novel*, Miller attempts to identify an ideal genre type for the picaresque novel, even as he espouses the view that genres "do not really exist" (PN 3). Miller cites the two hundred years from 1550 - 1750 as the classic period of the picaresque (PN 5). He draws primarily on Spanish, French, German, and English novels from that period: *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, *El Buscón*, *Gil Blas*, *Simplicissimus*, *The Unfortunate Traveler*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roderick Random*. He chooses not to consider in detail works that were written after 1750, since, he says, there is general disagreement about whether more recent texts can be called

picaresque. Miller attempts to demonstrate how a consistent set of recurring devices in the classic examples affiliate, with the result that they engender a specific picaresque content and emotional timbre (PN 4).

His approach to questions of genre is systematic: the picaresque novel, he asserts, is a distinct genre (PN 132). Having made this assertion, it is then not only possible but necessary, he concludes, to articulate a uniform set of qualities common to all novels that are called picaresque (PN 5). Miller's work endeavors to simplify the task at hand, eliminating from consideration works which may have been categorized or at least theorized as picaresque, but which incorporate only some of the qualities he nominates, and not others. The only novel written after 1750 which Miller unequivocally admits into the canon is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which appeared in 1952.

Alexander Parker, in *Literature and the Delinquent*, is by far the grouchiest critic, one who has lost all patience with his fellow scholars and with what has become, for him, their cacophony of disparate interpretations, born of taking too much license with terminology. The term "picaresque" has ceased to be useful in comparative literature, he argues. Our nomenclature has become hopelessly confused and "must be straightened out" (LD 3). The only valid way to establish clarity in our definitions, Parker asserts, is to return to the roots of the picaresque which can be found in its Spanish prototypes. His chosen models, therefore, are exclusively Spanish works. (LD 9 - 10). All subsequent works are to be compared to these, and those that pass certain tests of authenticity will meet the criteria and be accepted as picaresque novels.

First among Parker's tests is the expectation that a picaresque novel will maintain a focus on the pícaro as delinquent. The world the pícaro inhabits is not merely corrupt in

the social, economic, or political sense of the expression; the evil of human beings and of the world is seen as an outcome of the original sin which is inherent in human nature itself (*LD* 38). The “distinguishing feature of the *genre* is the atmosphere of delinquency” (*LD* 6). Parker appreciates the appellation “juvenile,” as well, in relation to the picaresque (*LD* 4 - 5). The combined terms denote, for Parker, a figure who is not a vicious criminal, but who is a dishonorable, unscrupulous and unattached outsider who learns to make it in the world by cheats and stealing because such behaviors are what the world models for him (*LD* 6).

Miller and Parker can certainly be read as retrenchment, an understandable response to the confusion which characterizes both critical and popular discourse on the picaresque after Alter’s 1965 book. Both view the picaresque as a closed, self-contained genre, and both object to more flexible applications of the term. Both urge the adoption of discretely circumscribed perspectives on the picaresque - Miller, the historical view, assigning the picaresque to a particular period; Parker, the Hispanist view, focusing on Spanish examples and calling us back to the origins of the picaresque in Spain. Both seem compelled to conclude that the picaresque, as a circumscribed genre, has enjoyed its zenith and reached its nadir (Parker 53 - 74). Still, even as this study points to Guillén and more open readings, both Miller and Parker expand our understanding of the picaresque. Almost in spite of their efforts to simplify the topic, set limits on the acceptable terminology, and clarify the discourse, each adds to the rich complexity of our conceptions of the picaresque.

Of particular usefulness are Miller’s extrapolations from that feature of the picaresque novel which is generally accepted as typical, that is, its episodic plot. Miller

notes that the picaresque novel is “episodic with a vengeance” (*PN* 13). He highlights the “dance pattern” by virtue of which characters disappear and then reappear inexplicably, as the pícaro moves blindly through an elaborate dance of life (*PN* 13). He emphasizes the importance of rhythm, the rapid piling of event on top of event in quick succession (*PN* 21 -24). His view foregrounds the effects of fortune, whereby the pícaro is assaulted by circumstance and accident (*PN* 28 - 29). Miller calls upon all these plot features - episodic structure, dance pattern, rhythm, fortune, and accident - to support his central thesis that a picaresque novel must possess a specific philosophical point of view about the world, in effect, that the world is without order of any kind:

The discrete fragments into which its events are broken express anything but order. The infinite possibilities of the picaresque plot express total openness.

Since there are no limitations of probability, the door is left open to the fantastic, the improbable, and even the weird. The picaresque plot expresses the intuition that the world is without order, is chaotic (*PN* 10).

These plot features contribute to the sense that any expectation of moral order has disintegrated in the picaresque novel. The force of events and circumstance is metaphysically chaotic, according to Miller (*PN* 22). Every event in the novel is an accident waiting to happen not just to the pícaro, but to anyone at any time, including the reader (*PN* 37). This sense of metaphysical chaos explains why the pícaro is assaulted by violent, disgusting, and meaningless reality, more than any other literary figure. It is also consistent with the pícaro’s adoption of trickery as a norm of existence, as a response to a confused and disordered world. His roguery represents his submission to chaos:

By becoming a trickster, the hero makes the only choice other than suicide that the world offers him. If the world is tricky, peopled by tricksters, the picaresque must either give up his personality to join the trickery or else perish. The picaresque always joins. But, and this must be underscored, the pattern of education into roguery by the world reflects on the world more than on the picaresque. It is the world that is picaresque; the picaresque only typifies that world in his dramatic change from innocent to trickster. In affirming the world's outer chaos by becoming a picaresque, the hero gives up hope of personality and order. Having become a manipulator of appearances, the picaresque character settles into the non-reality of becoming an appearance himself (*PN* 56 - 57).

Thus, the idea of utter disorder leads Miller to another point which is very fruitful for the study at hand. The picaresque is protean: he will play any role which the world forces upon him. Miller calls this variability an "abdication of self-determination," a quality of other-directedness (*PN* 71) that will come into play most dramatically in the feminocentric examples I shall discuss later. In this context, the picaresque novel presents new possibilities of human degradation: "the picaresque is every man he has to be, and therefore no man" (*PN* 72). Out of this character disintegration and "a-personality" arise not only the internal instability of the picaresque, but also his deep loneliness or, to be more precise, his aloneness. His is an unanchored self (*PN* 78), acting and acted upon, in a world that is characterized by a total lack of order (*PN* 131).

Miller canonizes this sense of metaphysical chaos, or lack of structure within the fictional world brought to life in a given text, as the requisite point of view of the picaresque genre. It is curious, then, that he fails to see the irony in his insistence on fixed

identify a certain set of characteristics which derive from Spanish *Siglo de Oro* works, ranging from *Lazarillo* in 1554 and *Guzmán de Alfarache* in 1599 to *Estebanillo Gonzales* in 1646, and from such works as Le Sage's *Gil Blas* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, and modern works like Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*. Guillén's approach is empirical and tentative: he seeks to make some distinctions that will organize the way we think about certain works, but his goal is not to establish a definition, which is, in his view, always a confined and confining stance (LS 74).

While he cautions that the act of classification, the attempt to establish firmly fixed traits, is arbitrary, Guillén culls eight characteristics from the works just previously listed. These he distinguishes as essential features of the picaresque, when conceptualized as genre:

1) The pícaro is an orphan. The orphan needs to be conceptualized, first, not simply as a type that is distinguishable from such related types as jester or wanderer, whom the pícaro both inculcates and transcends, but second, as a character who is actively engaging with his environment. It is appropriate to recall the *vidas* of the early Spanish texts because the word *vida* stresses a process of interaction with the world. Thus, the pícaro-orphan exists within a "dynamic psycho-sociological situation, or series of situations," a plot (LS 79). Bereft of parents, ejected from his native town, he fends for himself as an insulated and isolated being for whom, like a "godless Adam," the world is experienced as a completely and continually new and unknown territory (LS 79). Through a series of harsh lessons, the orphan is hardened. He is never fully assimilated by the society of hostile adults into which he is thrust. The orphan walks the fine line between drifter and delinquent if he is to survive. As a "half-outsider," he can never

totally affiliate with his fellow men nor disavow them (*LS* 80). It is this condition which inspires the ambivalence of the narrative, as well as the many variants which that ambivalence can stimulate.

2) The picaresque novel is a pseudo-autobiography. A life is simultaneously presented and remembered. Everything that is revealed is presented from the perspective of the half-outsider. What results is a narrative point of view that is substantially bifurcated and questionable. The narrator is estranged from the people around him yet, outwardly, seems to conform. Which voice tells the story? What results is an ironic dissimulation, a dual perspective that suggests both self-concealment and self-exposure (*LS* 82).

3) The story-teller's point of view is incomplete and biased. No synthesis of lessons or observations is offered (*LS* 82).

4) The view of the pícaro is reflective and hence philosophical, but drawing only the broadest conclusions, colored by his experience and arrived at from his particular orientation. He is always learning. Everyone and everything the pícaro encounters is a potential *exemplum* (*LS* 82).

5) The material level of existence is emphasized. A focus on food and money, a proliferation of detail, and an abundance of scatology are often found to consume the narrator's attention (*LS* 83).

6) The pícaro has the opportunity to observe an assortment of collective conditions, such as professions or social castes. Although this presents an opportunity for comedy, Guillén insists that the overall effect may not necessarily be satiric, and in this he disagrees with Chandler and others. As half-outsider, and as a rogue, the pícaro's

moral credentials are doubtful. He is nevertheless skillful in detecting fraud and hypocrisy. In some works, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes*, he has been dehumanized by rejection to the extent that he exhibits the emotional and psychological “distance” from his subjects that seems to be characteristic of the satirist (LS 84).

7) The pícaro, in his journeys, moves horizontally through space and vertically through society. A narrative of travel and adventure is the result (LS 84).

8) The novel is loosely episodic, but other devices such as recurrent motifs, the dance pattern (as Miller suggests), and patterns of progressivity, may be superimposed upon the structure (LS 84 - 85). Guillén notes the picaresque novel’s capacity for story-within-story. He also highlights the duality of perspective which results from the simultaneous occurrence of two trajectories: the act of first-person narration and the “linear sequence of events” which is going on, as it were, above or beneath the narrative act.³

These eight features, we recall, are important within Guillén’s *first* delineation, that of the picaresque as *genre*. The first two of these features - the theme of orphanhood and the effects of pseudo-autobiography - are particularly significant in Guillén’s proposed *second* approach to the picaresque, that is, in his discussion of that group of novels which might be called picaresque in a *strict sense* that links them to some early Spanish patterns.

The theme of orphanhood was a significant discovery which suggests the pícáro's segregation from the historical past and from God (LS 85). It implies the self-reliance, the

³The polyphonic effect of picaresque narrative, Guillén notes, can be compared to the double meanings and “anamorphoses” to be found in sixteenth-century music, painting and religious writings. He recommends Edward E. Lowinsky’s research, which can be found in *Secret Chromatic Art in the Netherlands Motet*, 1946.

vagabondage, the fatherlessness of the hero, and stresses the lack of affection that permeates his life from an early age.⁴ As in Rousseau, the pícaro's orphanhood emphasizes a passage from innocence to corruption. His life is a constant process of learning; however, it is not learning toward improvement. In this, Guillén sees the picaresque novel as evidence of a shift from a medieval toward an Enlightenment point of view (*LS* 87). The pícaro learns that the way to improve his condition is to take advantage of others. He learns this from the community itself, Guillén asserts, though the lessons may come, perhaps, at the hands of individuals or groups who represent the worst of that community (*LS* 88). The pícaro's education begins abruptly with a crisis or rite of initiation. As a result of many such shocks of degradation, the protagonist gradually ceases to exist as an individual and disintegrates into "a role, a social status, a mask," and the original innocence of the orphan gives way to dissimulation (*LS* 89).

The resultant duality, or duplicity - the apparent distinction between the inner person, or at least the potential emergence of an inner person, and the role-playing of the outer person - is especially pertinent to the picaresque and to its innovative deployment of autobiography. As the pícaro is becoming acclimated to society, as he takes on the various positions, or plays the different roles required of him, an interior person is attesting, through the mechanism of pseudo-autobiography, to a split from that outer self, to his independence from the one who accomplishes the impersonations, who plays the expected parts (*LS* 89). Guillén posits that this acute partitioning of the hero is one of the most significant achievements of the picaresque and is very likely its most durable legacy

⁴What Guillén calls the "asexual character" of the pícaro will be dramatically transformed in the examples of pícaras, the female figures I shall be discussing in later chapters. The "antifeminism" of the early Spanish novels will appear in *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

to the thematics of the modern novel (*LS* 89). “The picaresque novel is, quite simply, the confession of a liar” (*LS* 92).

In delineating this second, strict, sense of the picaresque, Guillén designates *Lazarillo de Tormes* the masterpiece of the genre, by virtue of its explorations into and development of these two features, the theme of the orphan and the uses of autobiography. But Guillén does not definitively identify the group of works that, he claims, carry the legacy of this anonymous book and from which he draws his observations. However, we can glean from his references (*LS* 86 - 88), that, as examples of a group of novels that can be considered picaresque in the strict sense of the Spanish models, with *Lazarillo* as chief exemplar, he is referring to at least the following works: Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Smollett’s *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, and Mann’s *Felix Krull*.

Guillén’s *third* approach to conceptualizing the picaresque is the grouping of novels that can be considered picaresque *in a wider sense of the term*. Here a more specific list is given, and it includes Salas Barbadillo’s *La hija de Celestina* (1612), Castillo Solórzano’s *Bachiller Trapaza* (1637), Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus*, Eichendorff’s *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (1826), and Kafka’s *Amerika*. In working out the ways in which a text can be considered picaresque *sensu lato*, Guillén suggests that the eight features listed earlier might be wholly absent in such works. Rather, the elements that might be considered indispensable to this group *are derived from* the very first of the eight features of the picaresque, that is, the radical solitude of the orphan and his durable but ambiguous disenfranchisement from society (or from accepted creeds and norms), along with the roguish behavior that usually results from

such estrangement (*LS* 95). Thus, the absence of the first-person narrator might disqualify a work from being considered picaresque in the strict sense, but might lead us to include its consideration in a wider sense. The presence of a soulmate, as in Simplicissimus's friend Herzbruder, would also tend toward the exclusion of the work from the picaresque in the strict sense. The incorporation of picaresque elements into a modern pastoral, as in Eichendorff, while qualifying his work as a picaresque in the wider sense, reminds us that the picaresque and the pastoral have been seen as representing oppositional attitudes, particularly, Guillén says, toward the evils of the city and ways of reacting to those ills: in the pastoral, there is flight from the city and an attempt to replace it with nature; in the picaresque, there is a choice to remain in the city but neither to fight nor to embrace it (*LS* 97).

Guillén himself characterizes the approaches which we have examined thus far as clearly *a posteriori* and so, lacking in historical perspective. He avers that no history of a form can begin without a pre-existing notion of what that form might be. Guillén's descriptions belong to the phase of study that attempts to draw as accurate an outline as possible of the object which is under examination (*LS* 98). His perspective seems flexible enough to accommodate the changes undergone by the picaresque as it traveled across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as it persists to the present day.

In considering the *fourth* sense of the picaresque, that is, *the picaresque as myth*, Guillén shifts focus from the writer to the reader. In using the term *myth*, he refers to a special appreciation of a simple theme, plot, or story that is recognized and enjoyed when read or seen "*once more*" by a reader or an audience who "remembers and is in 'the know'" (*LS* 99). Myth, in its persistence through centuries and in its suggestion of

meanings beyond the merely literal, constitutes a “permanent temptation to the human mind” (*LS* 99). Literary myth is based upon something that is continuous in a culture, and it depends upon the engagement of the reader with this continuity. In this sense, the picaresque myth involves structure only minimally and has almost nothing to do with questions of genre (*LS* 100). According to Guillén, the notion of the half-outsider, the outsider who fails to oppose or escape the *status quo*, is the most powerful evocation of the mythic dimensions of the picaresque.

The figure of the half-outsider who embodies duality and ambiguousness may have a counterpart in history in the *converso* (*LS* 101). Some scholars believe that the anonymous author of *Lazarillo* was a Spanish New Christian, and that a Jewish ancestor of Mateo Alemán, author of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, was burned at the stake by the Inquisition. A number of early Spanish pícaros have Jewish origins, while we see that the picaresque resonates not only in Kafka but in several modern Jewish-American authors, such as Saul Bellow (*LS* 102). Guillén suggests that the sensitivity of these authors to the challenges of living out a pact with an alienating, rejecting society surfaces in the duality and ambiguousness of their works. Pain and attraction commingle in the picaresque, perhaps best expressed by Gulley Jimson’s exclamation in *The Horse’s Mouth*, ““I was stabbed alive!”” (*LS* 104).

This combination of rejection and capitulation, the half-outsider’s failure to either accept or resist the forces that oppress him, reverberates, says Guillén, in many art forms and in modern real life (*LS* 104). Guillén alleges that the nineteenth century did not embrace the figure of the ambiguous half-outsider. With the exception of some elements in Dickens and a few brief appearances in Stendhal and Galdós, the pícaro in the

nineteenth century yields to the “full outsider,” the rebel (*LS* 104). Speaking from the mythic perspective, the picaresque has re-emerged, says Guillén, during the twentieth century, in times of uncertainty, irony and disappointment.

Ulrich Wicks’ book *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide* reiterates and expands upon a number of his earlier articles in which he had attempted to draw order out of the chaos of critical commentary eddying around the picaresque. In his 1989 study, Wicks brings together the work of Guillén, Andre Jolles, and Robert Scholes to propose a modal approach to conceptualizing the picaresque.

Although he limits his examples to works from the seventeenth century, Jolles suggests that three dominant types will constitute the “permanent inventory of literature”: the pastoral, the picaresque, and the heroic romance. A conceptualization of the picaresque as one of several major universals of narrative is broad enough to include both the idea of a historically defined picaresque and a more open, flexible sense of the picaresque.

Building on Jolles in “Towards a Poetics of Fiction” (1969) and later in *Structuralism in Literature* (1974), Robert Scholes proposes a spectrum of ideal types of narrative fiction, which he calls *modes*. These modes are conceptualized within the context of Scholes’ notion that there are three possible relationships between any fictional world and the world of actual experience. According to Scholes, a fictional world can be 1) better than the world of experience; 2) worse than it; or 3) more or less equal to it. To Scholes, these perspectives correspond to “romance,” “satire,” and what he calls “realistic” literature, but labels as “history.” These three modes are the middle and end points of a spectrum of fictional options. The spectrum encompasses seven modes in all:



Romance, for example, presents superhuman types in an ideal world. Satire portrays subhuman types entangled in chaos. In this continuum, picaresque literature gives us a central character encountering a world that is, as in satire, chaotic beyond human toleration, but it is a world closer to our own experiential one, or "history," than are the worlds of romance or satire (*SL* 133).

Scholes further develops the spectrum to show how it can address such complex, amalgamating works as *Don Quixote*. His spectrum also accommodates diachronic shifts that will help account for the evolution of narrative genres such as the novel. He differentiates modal theory from genre criticism by proposing that the term *genre* be expressly applied to the study of individual works in their relationships to historically identifiable traditions. The study of genre, begins, as Scholes says, "in the thick of the phenomena" (*SL* 138). Genre study attempts to group texts around and within an ideal type, and simultaneously, to place the work within a historical timeline of literary tradition. At the same time, the individuality of the work that is being examined ought not to be demeaned. Ideally, Scholes suggests, reading a work of literature carries the reader through a modal to a generic sensibility, and finally to an appreciation of the work's unique qualities (*SL* 138 - 39).

The modal perspective that Scholes proposes resonates strongly for Wicks, who perceives it to be the broadest and most comprehensive way to look at narrative, which, he notes, has itself been described by Wellek as one of the "ultimate kinds" of literature (*PNPF* 42). For Wicks, a modal perspective positions us to see the entire narrative

continuum, with its inexhaustible range of possibilities along the scale from satire to romance. He compares the scale to the spectrum of light with its imperceptible blending of one color into the next. With this analogy, he asserts that the spectrum does not intractably classify works of literature. Instead, its accommodation of shades and blends allows us to see how a number of the ideal types may have been mixed together in a particular work. Assembling works in a continuum, Wicks says, also helps us to observe which mode or aggregate of modes may have exerted a more influential role than others in a given era of literary history (*PNPF* 42).

A modal perspective helps to frame our aesthetic response to the specific work we are considering. It can align for us the context of that work in terms of all the fictional opportunities that are available along the spectrum. Once we perceive that a given work is characterized by a particular mode, or, perhaps is dominated by it, our responses to, as well as our expectations of, that work and that mode (for example, romance) are affected. As with the generic approach, modal recognition allows us to group the particular work with other works from the total body of fiction that function in a similar way. A modal awareness re-aligns our expectations of the individual modes themselves by helping us to understand how a particular work utilizes, and even alters, those very expectations. (*PNPF* 42).

This larger perspective offers a different approach to the problem of the picaresque. The modal approach urges us to begin our perusal of a work from a vantage point that is located “above and beyond” historical concerns and then to gradually work our way toward the more specific problems of historical context, tradition, and influence (*PNPF* 42). Since the picaresque is proposed here as one of the seven modes, one of the

ideal fictional types, or irreducible narrative types, we may now expect to find the picaresque *mode* in varying “degrees” in many works that could not be considered picaresque fictions by even the most generous of generic criteria (*PNPF* 44).

Recognizing the picaresque as one of the basic modes of fiction is an exceedingly productive step toward bridging the critical chasm that has divided critics almost since the beginning of the twentieth century:

A mode concept of the picaresque reconciles the extremes of generic purity and generic plenitude; it accounts both for a specific kind of narrative whose exclusive preoccupation is an exploration of the fictional world posited by the picaresque and for a primitive fictional possibility that may be present in all sorts of varying degrees of mixture in many other works of fiction. The picaresque mode is the dimly recognized and unarticulated common denominator underlying all those assessments that genre purists find so irritating . . . (*PNPF* 42 – 43).

Guillén, Jolles, and Scholes “map out the limits of the fictional grid on which any investigation into the picaresque must take place; they provide the modal and structural coordinates that govern our investigations into individual texts and groupings of texts” (*PNPF* 44). Considered together, through Wicks, they synthesize the critical extremes that have beset the long history of scholarship on the picaresque.

After considering Guillén, Jolles, and Scholes in relationship to each other and to the emergence of the modal perspective, Wicks concentrates on Guillén. He responds to Guillén’s eight features of the picaresque by posing, by way of augmentation, several questions that might be considered in the light of a modal view. Three of these are of particular interest:

“Is not the essential picaresque pattern a quest for ‘home’ - home in the sense of material and social success (Lazarillo), or in the spiritual sense of union with God (as in Guzmán and Simplicissimus), or even in the mythic sense of a return to Paradise?”

(*PNPF* 48). Wicks points out that the exploration of the idea of exile from and search for home is very noticeable in contemporary examples of picaresque fictions. He suggests that the modern interest in the picaresque may actually bespeak the twentieth century’s attachment to the picaresque’s implicit romance desire more than its explicit depiction of the relationship between order and chaos. (*PNPF* 48)

“Isn’t the pícáro’s impulse to tell the story itself a yearning for order?” (*PNPF* 49). Telling one’s *vida* answers the desire to impose aesthetic and moral order on the chaotic past, which is now given a structure. “The re-membling ‘I’ tries to piece together again the dis-membered” (*PNPF* 49). There is an attempt to balance the chaos of life as lived with the moral order being contemplated. *Guzmán* and *Simplicissimus* are suspended between two modes, romance and picaresque, Wicks says. The pícáro as narrator accomplishes what Wicks calls a kind of “double exposure” which superimposes the composing artist over the erratic succession of roles he has played. This double exposure can itself be doubly exposed within the figure of the narrator-pícáro, as when there is a dichotomy between the longings of the artist who may desire chaos, and the vagabond who yearns for order. The protean figure may exhibit two seemingly contradictory patterns, the need to unsettle things and create them anew, and the need to recapture an imagined state of coherence and absolute harmony (*PNPF* 49).

“ . . . exactly how has the picaresque merged with other narrative types in the evolution of narrative forms?” The picaresque is both parodied and contrasted with

romance, and romance is parodied and contrasted with the picaresque. Romance seems to mock the picaresque, Wicks suggests, when it turns about-face a world that seemed to be suffused with chance, fortune, circumstance, and disorder. At the same time, the romance plot seems very much akin to the “predicted plot” in *Lazarillo de Tormes*: the blind man whom Lazarillo serves is able to foresee the denouement of the boy’s life. Wicks cites as additional examples the shift from picaresque plots to romance endings in Smollett’s *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand, Count Fathom*. Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus* adjoins the two traditions so fully that they cannot be separated, he says. The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German *Bildungsroman* supplies Wicks with his final example of modal blending: here the world appears, at the start, to be a disconnected picaresque world, but its order and morality are gradually revealed (PNPF 50).

Wicks’ efforts to recapitulate the work of Guillén, Jolles, and Scholes toward a new understanding of the picaresque are especially important to this study. Application of a modal perspective to the examination of picaresque fiction accomplishes three things. First, it makes it possible to invite for consideration, as will be seen here, a variety of works which may or may not be considered picaresque in the strict sense of the word. Second, it enables and justifies readings of non-narrative texts, such as Brecht’s *Mother Courage*, since contemplation from a modal perspective transcends, although it does not exclude, questions of form. Third, it helps us to enact a stance toward literary works that is sufficiently flexible to allow for the notion that modes are not static, and that they can blend in a given work, in seemingly illimitable ways.

Indeed, the possibility of modal blending suggests an openness that is crucial to my study, not only procedurally, in the flexibility it affords me to choose from among

many different kinds of works, but also thematically. In this sense, it allows for the adoption of a view of the picaresque that taps into those energies within a text that charge up a kind of double vision. Wicks speaks of a double exposure which can, in turn, be doubly exposed, resulting in two patterns within a picaresque work - the transforming impulse, the need to disrupt and begin afresh; and the restoring impulse, the need for harmony. One pattern can engender the other, so that there is “transformationism in restoration and restoration in transformation” (*PNPF* 49). This capacity for superimposition of exposures, the ability of the picaresque to simultaneously support narrative impulses toward transformation and narrative impulses toward restoration, or preservation, has allowed the picaresque to merge with other modes, other narrative traditions.

In a modal view, many picaresques can be seen as syntheses of the picaresque world (fragmented, deceptive, random) and the romance world (ordered, harmonized, divine). It has frequently been pointed out that picaresque and romance both parody and contrast with each other, and Wicks is only one of several commentators to note this connection (*PNPF* 49). He is apparently the first to attribute this association to the modal relationship of the two “genres” along Scholes’ spectrum of narrative types. Proceeding from an assumption of this modal relationship, this study suggests that a similar interconnectedness characterizes the relationship of picaresque and *Bildungsroman*. (Of course, *Bildungsroman* is itself a rather problematic term. For this study, we shall take it to mean “novel of development.”) My purpose is to show how the picaresque can be an agent of either support or subversion of the program of female *Bildung*. My intentions are two-fold: first, to work toward a clearer understanding of the effects produced by the

double exposure that is active within picaresque works, that is, by the potential for both transformation and conservation as it is enacted in picaresque works; and second, to contribute to a deeper appreciation of the flexibility and viability of the picaresque mode.

The feminist underpinnings of my work can be found in critics who, although they rarely, if ever, mention the term *picaresque*, seem to be sensitive to the ways in which processes of marginalization and accommodation (typical of the picaresque world) obstruct the female's coming to a sense of personhood and fulfillment. In her 1993 book *Unbecoming Women: British Writers and the Novel of Development*, Susan Fraiman argues that a heroine's progress toward selfhood is by no means assured. She decides that a woman's experience inevitably involves de-formation, disorientation, and the loss of authority. Fraiman concludes that when aspects of *Bildung* interact with views of feminine experience that demand "self-effacement," the result may be a "splintered" narrative, such as the one she examines in *The Mill on the Floss*. Fraiman points to the formal tendency of novels in general to "establish character interactively" rather than by having characters "enter the story of self-culture." The structuring of many works, she observes, gives us "a girl hedged in, defined at every point, by a certain cultural discourse" (*UW* 140). Arguing that progressive development and coherent identity in the *Bildungsroman* are "enabling fictions" which have excluded women, Fraiman seeks to uncover "how partial and basically shoddy the construction of femininity is" (*UW* xi).

While my focus is on the picaresque, not on the construction of femininity, I shall attempt to show that the disintegrative pressures surveyed by Fraiman parallel the hostile pressures of the picaresque world and demand the kinds of coping strategies that have always defined the pícaro's interactions with that world. This study will most definitely

suggest the question, “If *Bildungsroman* excludes women, what includes them?” The answer to this disturbing query, however, is not our final destination. The question will follow us constantly, peering out at us from the riverbanks as we make our way along the River Tormes and its estuaries, and we shall meet it face to face at the end of our journey. In the meantime, I want to examine what happens when the picaresque mode interacts with feminocentric material. I also want to explore the ways in which picaresque structure, often undervalued as loose and insufficiently developmental, is able to construct a distinctively appropriate and uniquely cohesive personality, especially when enacted in a female character. I call this personality the “episodic self.” Feminists who examine the relationship of gender, genre, and narrative structure are certainly traveling along the same river as I am, but, clearly, we are propelled by different currents. I am attempting to do something with the *picaresque* that has not been tried before.

Chapter II

From the River Tormes, Part 2: Lazarillo and the Abjected

In considering which early text would be representative of the major characteristics of the picaresque, I was struck by *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Clearly this work amply demonstrates several of Guillén's descriptors, namely the pícaro's lowly status as an orphan, the moment of rude awakening, the motif of hunger and its modulation into the theme of cosmic loneliness, and the pícaro as an apprentice who accommodates and imitates the hypocrisy of his masters. In addition, *Lazarillo* provides an even better starting place than the early feminocentric picaresque texts, essentially because the protagonist is male, and I want to show that there is a notable similarity between the (male) pícaro's way of coping with the world and a woman's way of coping with the world. As I remark that the pícaro is an outsider, or half-outsider, I am reminded of Margaret Atwood's comment in *Surfacing*: "To be a woman is to be an outsider" (83). In pursuing that comparison, however, I am quite surprised to discover that Lazarillo, the central character and narrator, can be read as a feminized male by virtue of his association with what has been called the abjected feminine in the text. I want to build on that notion, originally explicated by Anne J. Cruz, to examine the ways that Lazarillo might have been rendered feminized, or more accurately, genderless, by virtue of his apprenticeship to male masters who are seemingly all-powerful, at least in relation to the defenseless boy, but who nevertheless are themselves rendered genderless by virtue of their marked segregation from women and abstention or restriction from sexual activity. Guillén (86), Monteser (17), Babcock (104) and others have addressed the a-sexual

nature of the male picaresque figure, but have not examined the pervasive a-sexuality of many picaresque works, that is, the extent to which a picaresque *world itself* may be sexless, and what functions this may serve. I suggest that the pícaro is orphaned, experiences his moment of awakening, and moves through his series of apprenticeships within an all-encompassing milieu that is overwhelmingly masculinist yet, for the most part, rigorously sexless. This point is important to my study in that it helps us to see that the picaresque figure exists in an empty sexual space, open to the inscription of male and female gender markings, or both simultaneously. It also foregrounds the isolation and cosmic loneliness of the picaresque protagonist.

In developing my view of the formidably sexless world of the *Lazarillo*, I have found Anne J. Cruz's article, "The Abjected Feminine in *the Lazarillo de Tormes*," to be particularly useful. Cruz's work is stimulated by a remark by Jacques Derrida that "the repressed element in any given situation in fact embodies its structuring principle."⁵ In examining the female figures in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Cruz shows that, while several women in the text provide the only solace and human compassion in the young Lazarillo's life, they each recede "into the narrative folds of the episodic plot" (100) and are abandoned by the text. The repressed females of the *Lazarillo* fit, according to Cruz, Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection: "It is something rejected from which one does not part" (4), as well as Derrida's vision of the locus of structure in a given work. Cruz examines in particular the figure of Lazarillo's mother who, herself abandoned by her husband and then by her lover, abandons Lazarillo early in the text and is thenceforth

⁵Cruz cites "Gayatri Spivak and Jacques Derrida: A Public Conversation" which took place on April 5, 1995, at the University of California, Irvine. (99 and 107, n. 3).

excluded from the pseudo-autobiographical narrative consciousness. Cruz asserts that Lazarillo's ongoing but suppressed connection to the feminine in the figure of his mother commingles with his continual fear of the repetition of the loss that she represents, having abandoned him to the blind beggar. Lazarillo repeatedly and compulsively attaches himself to a series of male masters, says Cruz, in an attempt to overshadow the pervasive image of his mother through association with available but unreliable father figures. Thus, says Cruz, the abjection of the feminine in the figure of his mother (and other women in the text who occasionally succor him but fail to sustain him) shapes Lazarillo's own abjection and drives the story of his apprenticeships and servitude (106 - 107).

I would like to extend some of these notions of abjection to the male figures in *Lazarillo de Tormes* and suggest that their gender and their sexuality are in some cases punished and in all cases abandoned in the text. In certain instances, the male characters themselves disappear from the narrative. I will begin with Tomé Gonzáles, Lazarillo's father; Zaide, his step-father; and the archpriest of the final *Tractado*. These three are the only males whose sexual intercourse with a woman is referenced in the text, and they are the only fathers in the narrative. Lázaro tells us that he was born on the banks of the River Tormes, to the miller Gonzáles and his wife. Lazarillo's original family unit, the first of only two marriages presented in the *Lazarillo*, is remarkable in that it fails to connote familial identity. Lazarillo takes his name not from his father but from the river on which (or even *in* which, in some translations) he was born. Although Lazarillo's parents, Tomé Gonzáles and Antona Pérez (and later his step-father Zaide), are the only characters in the narrative, besides Lazarillo himself, to have names, they are commonplace names as Gilman points out (152), and as such are essentially pointless.

Lazarillo's father is a thief, even a stereotypical one, thus reinforcing the notion that Lazarillo's parentage, and hence the boy's identity, is a cipher.⁶ The thinly drawn figure of the father nonetheless plays a critical role in Lazarillo's orphanhood in that he represents the boy's first abandonment. When Lazarillo is about eight years old, his father is arrested and punished for cheating his customers at the mill. He is banished, sent to work as a mule driver in an expedition "against the Moors" (*LT* 25) where he dies with his master. According to Lazarillo's mother, the father has bestowed his dubious character upon the son: "She said that . . . as I was the son of a good man, who had been killed for the greater glory of his faith at the Battle of Gelves, I wouldn't turn out worse than my father" (*LT* 27). Lazarillo's father is the first of the three males to be engaged in a sexual relationship in Lazarillo's narrative, and he is the first to be censured and abandoned by the text.

Lazarillo's widowed mother struggles to support herself and her young son as a cook and laundress for stable boys on an estate. She takes up with one of them, a black man named Zaide (also a non-distinguishing, commonplace name) who fathers Lazarillo's half-brother. Like his predecessor in the family, Zaide is a thief, stealing goods from the estate and sharing them with Lazarillo's mother. He is brutally whipped for his crime. The mother too receives a hundred lashes and is dismissed from the estate. Their sentences can be read as a censure of their illicit sexual relationship as much as of their criminal activity, as the mother is ordered "never . . . to have Zaide in her house"

⁶Dunn notes that millers are stereotypical thieves in Spanish picaresque texts (56). This further supports my point that the figure of the father in Lazarillo, though critical to Lazarillo's trajectory, is shadowy, incomplete, on the borders of the narrative, thus fitting Kristeva's association of the abject with that which lies "in between" and "disturbs identity" (4).

(LT 26). Zaide, the second male to abandon Lazarillo, also disappears from the narrative. He is the second male whose sexual liaison with a woman, Lazarillo's mother, is iterated. As in the case of Lazarillo's father, the relations of Zaide and Lazarillo's mother bear fruit: both Gonzáles and Zaide sire sons.

The third member of this triumvirate is the archpriest of the final chapter. Lázaro, now a man, becomes a front for the corrupt cleric who marries Lázaro to his own mistress, in order to mask their relationship from the eyes of the public. Lázaro reveals to his wife, in the presence of the archpriest, that he knows that she had three children before this marriage. Her violent reaction - "Then my wife began to swear such fearful oaths that I was sure the house was about to fall down about our ears" (LT 78) - implies that the children were illegitimate (there is no reference to her being previously married) and strongly suggests that they are the offspring of the archpriest - "She began to cry and curse the man responsible for bringing us together" LT 78) - although this paternity cannot be proven from the evidence of the text. It can be said that the figure of the archpriest is also abandoned, as the narrative comes to an end with this episode. The illicit arrangement that the archpriest engineered is the *caso* which Lázaro is trying to explain and justify through the telling of his story to *vuestra merced*.⁷ Just as Lazarillo's status remains ambiguous at the end of his story, the question of whether or not the archpriest will be punished like Lazarillo's father and step-father remains unanswered. As

⁷This theory is proposed by Rico (277 - 296) and other critics. Although not all commentators agree, Rico suggests that the *Lazarillo* has the unity of an *apologia*. Rico's view seems to support as well my point about the uncertain fate of the archpriest: if Lázaro is called to account for his behavior, so the archpriest may also be expected to explain himself. However, this remains a conjecture as the archpriest's status vis á vis *vuestra merced* is not fully articulated in the text.

long as *vuestra merced's* reception of Lazarillo's apologia remains unarticulated, the disposition of the archpriest's (and Lazarillo's) fate is inconclusive.

So two of the three males who couple with women are punished, and the third is in danger of punishment, and all three disappear from the narrative of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The disappearances of the first two, Lazarillo's father and step-father, have the direct effect of orphaning the little boy since they put Lazarillo's mother in such dire economic circumstances that she too must abandon him. Lazarillo is orphaned, then, not only by the death of his father, but the separation from the gruff stepfather and the abandonment by his put-upon mother who hands him over as a servant to the blind beggar. In addition, Lazarillo's next master, the miserly priest, will throw him out into the street to fend for himself at the end of *Tractado Segundo*, and the next, the *hidalgo*, will disappear to go off on his own at the conclusion of *Tractado Tercero*. The fact that these losses occur sequentially, one after the other, and repeatedly, over time, configures a structural pattern of gradual but relentless bereavement, the young boy's being bereft, little by little, of whatever comfort and protection he might have enjoyed under the supervision, or at least the roofs, of his parents, stepfather, and masters. In all, Lazarillo is orphaned five times, at very tender ages, by figures who in turn disappear from the text. This process leaves the young Lazarillo completely alone in a bewilderingly chaotic world: "Now I . . . saw that everything was against me. All I did was upside-down, because masters are usually left by their servants but with me it was the opposite: he left me, in fact he deserted me" (*LT* 65). In the final *Tractado*, the archpriest exploits Lázaro's desire for familial stability in order to facilitate his own lasciviousness. As we read this chapter, we note that the voice of the archpriest recedes as Lázaro alone is called

to account by *vuestra merced* for their arrangement. We realize that Lázaro the narrator, like Lazarillo the narrated, is also isolated and bewildered. He is faced with defending his collusion in the reprehensible behavior of his master - a collusion which involves accommodation of his wife's adultery and of the archpriest's violation of his vow of celibacy - without the support of the archpriest who instigated the illicit *ménage á trois* in the first place.

Let us look more closely at each of Lazarillo's masters and their relationships with and to women, or their lack thereof. Lazarillo's first master, and the only one he calls *maestro*, is the blind beggar who takes the young boy off his mother's hands after the affair with Zaide. One of the old man's ploys is to recite prayers for women:

. . . prayers for women who couldn't have children, prayers for women who were pregnant, and prayers for women who were unhappily married to make their husbands love them; he would also tell pregnant women if they were going to have a boy or a girl . . . he said that Galen didn't know half as much as he did about . . . fainting fits and morning sickness (*LT* 28).

Lazarillo says that the old man "said prayers for innkeeper's [sic] wives, wine-cellar women, nougat sellers and prostitutes and all women of that type" (*LT* 33). The beggar recites the "prayer of the walled-up nun" every day at the request of an inn-keeper's wife. The old man is constantly followed about by women seeking such prayers and cures related to their sexuality and their fecundity; indeed, Lazarillo remarks that he "never saw him say a prayer for a man" (*LT* 33). But the old man remains separate from the women, never entering into a relationship with any of them, and never even speaking directly to any female: all of the old man's discourse toward and about women is

channeled through Lazarillo. The old beggar has sooth-saying powers as well. When they stop at the inn of a man who has installed horns at his door for the mule-drivers to tie up their animals, he prophecies there that one day the horns of cuckoldry will provide Lazarillo “an ill-deserved meal” (*LT* 33). The old man is a type of Teiresias with his blindness, his supposed insight into the causes of physical ailments, his prophetic abilities, and his young page at his side to guide his steps.⁸ The beggar can also be affiliated with the mythic Teiresias’ hermaphroditic associations, or more precisely, the Greek seer’s alternating lives as male and female.⁹ In one scene, the blind master attempts to prevent Lazarillo from gaining access to the jug of wine that he vigilantly guards for himself. The clever Lazarillo pokes a small hole in the jug and stops it with wax. When the old man drinks, Lazarillo creeps into the old man’s lap as if to warm himself. His breath and body heat melt the wax, and the thirsty boy drinks from the thin stream of wine that shoots out of the hole (*LT* 29 - 31). Critics have noted the maternal imagery of this scene as Lazarillo seems to be nursing at his mother’s breast and himself refers to that stream as “mother’s milk” in a later episode (*LT* 55). However, the posture of Lazarillo and the old man can also be read as phallic, with Lazarillo crawling, as he says, “between the blind man’s legs”(*LT* 30), the jug of wine now representing the penis, along with the collateral images of the blind man’s nose, the rotten turnip, and the purloined sausage. Both the maternal and phallic associations are converted into sadistic

⁸See John Incledon’s article for a discussion of the blind man as Teiresias figure (460).

⁹Several ancient Greek authors report that Teiresias has the ill fortune to witness two snakes coupling. When attacked by both, he kills the female and is turned into a woman. Years later, he again sees snakes in the act of mating, and kills the male. He is then returned to his male form. Thenceforth, he is consulted for his insight into male and female attitudes and feelings (Graves #105 h, p. 11).

brutalization of the boy as the old man realizes his servant's trick and violently smashes the jug into Lazarillo's face (*LT* 30 - 31). The conflation of male and female in the person of the blind man effectively renders him neutral or genderless as well as androgynous. Since he is a border figure, neither male nor female, his genderlessness fits Kristeva's designation of the abjected as that which does not respect borders, rules, or order, and is ambiguous (4 - 5).

The old man configures the conversion of sexuality and gender into commodities of exchange, as the women purge their preoccupation with sexuality and fecundity through the purchase of a prayer, and Lazarillo learns that he will pay for his food and sustenance with bruises and lacerations, or lose his bread entirely, unless he abandons all hope of recovering his maternal protections and learns to outsmart his adversary masculinist master. Thus, in the picaresque poetic, gender is unstable and unreliable. By the example of the blind man, gender is protean, and is useful to the pícaro only as a means to an end. "I'd sucked this trade in with my mother's milk, I mean I'd learnt it with the blind man" (*LT* 55). The blind beggar becomes the pícaro's most important tutor in the economics of survival. The incident of the stone bull can be read as the moment of awakening, or "wising up," that Lazarillo must undergo. The old man and his young companion come to a bridge where there is a stone statue of a bull. The old man tells Lazarillo to put his ear close to the bull, and he will hear a loud noise. When the boy follows these directions, the master strikes a powerful blow, slamming Lazarillo's head into the side of the stone animal. He laughs and tells the boy that he'd better sharpen up and pay attention if he is to take care of a blind man. Lazarillo's injury causes him pain for days, but the impact is more than physical: "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’” (*LT* 27 - 28).¹⁰ The patriarchal image of the huge bull betokens the overwhelming imperviousness of the masculinist world in relation to the little pícaro. Yet the pícaro will continue to attempt to penetrate and to ingratiate that world. Indeed, Lazarillo admires the old man for teaching him to be alert and flexible, even as he returns his master’s brutality in no small measure.

The rebirth motif is repeated and, in a sense, brought full circle, at the end of the first chapter. After a day of begging in torrential rain, Lazarillo leads the blind man to a large open sewer which must be crossed in order to return to the inn where they have been staying. Lazarillo guides the old man out from under the arcades of the local streets. He positions him at the edge of the sewer, directly opposite a huge stone pillar which supports the projected roofs of the surrounding buildings. Lazarillo lies to the old man, telling him that they have come to the narrowest part of the ditch. He instructs him to jump as far as he can, to avoid the filthy water. Lazarillo conjectures that his ruse will work because the old man is already soaking wet and tired. His guard is down, and, the boy supposes, this moment was chosen by God for Lazarillo’s revenge (*LT* 36). The blind man hurls himself as hard as he can, and slams into the stone pillar. He falls back into the foul water of the open sewer with his head bleeding. Lazarillo, himself soaked in

¹⁰Mancing has written thoughtfully about the pícaro’s awakening from a state of innocence. He correctly point out that the incident sets the tone for the rest of the story. He also reminds us, however, that this scene and the subsequent evidence of the blind man’s sadism (the smashing of a wine jug on the boy’s mouth, the vomiting scene, the many beatings, the continual withholding of food and drink) must be understood in the context of the valuable, though cruel, lessons they impart (427). In Nowak’s view, the placement of the episode of the stone bull at a bridge over the river in Salamanca is critical. The image of a bridge over water emphasizes a second rite of passage or rebirth, echoing Lazarillo’s earlier recollection of the place of his birth (904).

rainwater, runs off through the city gates, finally abandoning his *maestro*. The moment, rich in water imagery that recalls both Lazarillo's birth on the River Tormes and his moment of awakening at the stone bull which is located next to the bridge at Salamanca, is yet another rebirth for the pícaro, who is now "wise" to the ways of the world, and much better prepared than before to cope with its harshness. At the same time, this rebirth is accomplished through the medium of a genderless totem. The featureless pillar counters the stone bull of the previous scene, positing a petrified, emasculated, and de-sexualized world which no manly effort will perforate, and no feminine enterprise will soften. The old blind man comes up hard against this mass, just as Lazarillo's head bore the brunt of the collision with the stone bull. Thus, Lazarillo practices the lessons he has learned from the blind man, but his achievement comes at a terrible price. In giving his teacher a taste of his own medicine, Lazarillo becomes the very thing he despised. He has internalized the brutality that had cost him so much suffering at the hands of the old man. The pícaro learns his lessons well, but at a cost.¹¹ Lazarillo's vengeance accomplishes a rebirth for himself out of the body of his genderless father/mother master. But it also effects a kind of reverse rebirth, or regression, for the old man, re-affiliating him with his own abjection, sending him back into the foul sewer.

The scatological content of this episode alerts us to another facet of the picaresque world which relates both to the pícaro's focus on the material level of existence (a common feature of this literature) and to what we have observed about the abjection of the sexual aspects of picaresque life. Cruz suggests that the scatology of picaresque

¹¹ As Parker has pointed out, each time the pícaro practices the tricks and cruelties he observes, and imitates what is served up to him, he experiences a diminution of self, a deterioration of integrity (135).

narratives identifies the picaresque world with that aspect of the abjected that Kristeva calls “the remainder,” that is, that which usually escapes textual representation (105). Similarly, Cruz points out that in consistently bringing defilement into consciousness, picaresque narrative brings into contact with each other the two universes of filth and prohibition (108 n.11). Kristeva associates filth with the realm of the maternal and nature, and prohibition with the phallic realm of guilt and shame (74). This analysis is very useful in connection with what I have been saying about the abjection of both the feminine and the masculine in the picaresque text. The brushing together in the picaresque text of the two realms of filth and prohibition, bifurcated by gender, suggests that there can be a sexual component to the scatological in picaresque narrative, and a scatological component to the sexual. The scatological can be said to mark the porous boundary between the genders, a dangerous yet attractive frontier. As we shall see, this frontier is assayed not only in *Lazarillo de Tormes* but in Grimmelshausen’s *The Runagate Courage* and in Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* as well.

Lazarillo’s next master, the miserly priest, has exchanged his sexuality for the maintenance provided him by his congregation. By his vow of celibacy, he abstains from sexual engagement in order to be fed by heavenly food and the more earthly offerings of the faithful. But it is an uneasy bargain which can be sustained only by fanatical effort on the part of the priest. Lazarillo finds himself being starved to death. “Out of the frying pan” of the blind man “into the fire!” he says (*LT* 38) when he realizes the full extent of the cleric’s meanness, which can be read as the priest’s obsessive compulsion to protect his victuals and thus keep his sexuality in check. Lazarillo’s rations amount to one small onion every four days, a piece of bread with a dip of gravy, and perhaps on Saturdays the

leftover scraps of a sheep's head, already thoroughly gnawed by the priest (*LT* 38 - 39). The master will not allow Lazarillo access to a small box where the communion bread and other morsels of food are kept. In a state of near starvation, Lazarillo acquires a key and thereafter makes daily, if modest, raids on the chest.¹² When the priest discovers that bread is missing, he begins to focus maniacal attention on the box. He compulsively calculates the precise amount of bread that disappears each day. He furiously closes up each fissure with scraps of wood, fastened with nails pulled from his floors and walls. Lazarillo begins to poke small openings in the box, simulating the chewing of rodents. The priest then sets traps in the box, baited with crusts of cheese that he has begged from his neighbors. Lazarillo is delighted to have the cheese, which he surreptitiously snatches and eats before he secretly resets the traps. Upon further consultation with his neighbors, the cleric believes that the culprit must be a snake, an animal that can escape the traps unscathed. He begins to hunt the snake with a heavy cudgel. On the verge of hysteria, he is startled by every sound in the night, leaps at the box, and then overturns Lazarillo's bedding, assuming that the snake is invading the box and then hiding in the wretched straw where the boy sleeps (*LT* 43 - 46). Since the priest is searching his bedding every night, Lazarillo decides to sleep with the key in his mouth so that it will not be discovered (*LT* 46). One night, the key works itself into such a position that the boy's breath emits a whistle as it passes over the tube-like barrel of the key. Thinking that he is attacking a

¹²In *Tractado Segundo*, the series of events that take place while Lazarillo is serving the cleric are especially rich when considered in the light of Robert Alter's observations about the de-sacramentalization of the world of the picaresque novel. As Alter suggests, bread has become God in the pícaro's world. All of the pícaro's energies are mustered toward basic survival. Alter's points support my sense that the pícaro's hunger bespeaks a deeper level of emptiness which is directly related to that genderlessness, a point to which I shall return at the end of this chapter.

snake hissing in Lazarillo's bed, the priest strikes a violent blow to the boy's head that leaves him unconscious for three days. Neighbor women nurse and feed Lazarillo during his recovery. As soon as he is able to walk, however, the priest throws him out into the street, slamming the door behind him (*LT 46 - 48*). With the exception of the kindly neighbor who interacts briefly with Lazarillo and the priest, not a single woman appears in this chapter. While their absence supports Cruz's notion of the abjected feminine in the text, it also supports - along with the priest's extreme miserliness and fear of the imagined snake (an obvious phallic figure) - my notion of the abjected masculine. When the starving Lazarillo makes repeated incursions into the carefully locked box of bread, he disrupts the delicate balance that perpetually holds in check (and renders abject) the priest's sexuality. This represents too great a threat to the master, and Lazarillo must be ejected.

Lazarillo's expulsion at the end of *Tractado Segundo* marks yet another important turning point for the pícaro. Critics have noted a change in Lazarillo that becomes apparent beginning in *Tractado Tercero* and is evident in subsequent chapters. They first point to the fact that Lazarillo is suddenly capable of feeling compassion for his next master, the *hidalgo*, and actually feeds him when the master's foolishly inflated sense of honor prevents him from working, begging or stealing for his bread. Secondly, commentators have observed a shift, beginning in the fourth chapter and extending through the end of the book, in terms of the pícaro's involvement in the story, revealing a transition from the position of agent to that of observer. As we shall see, in the final four *tractados*, Lazarillo assumes the perspective of bystander and reporter rather than dynamic participant in the action. Critics have struggled to account for these

transformations. For example, Mancing says that Lazarillo fades and becomes “merely” the observer, until suddenly, according to Mancing, he is re-instated in the final chapter, but as a grown man who is radically different from the boy he used to be (429). While I agree that an important transformation has taken place in the Lázaro of the final chapter, I see that change as having evolved in a consistent and coherent way out of the apprenticeships of the earlier episodes. In addition, while it is true that Lazarillo’s main function in the later chapters involves the activities of observing and reporting, these projects have special and active significance specifically in the light of his relationship with his masters. What we have been saying about the abjectness of the masters in the early *tractados* may help to explain the changes in Lazarillo and in the narrative that have puzzled critics over the years. As the pícaro practices the skills of his apprenticeship, he internalizes the attitudes and behaviors of his masters. As constant companion and consummate mimic, he has access to the thoughts, acts, and motivations of the masters. He even has access, as we see most clearly in the case of the miserly priest, to that which is abjected in the masters, their repressed sexual identity. This access endows the pícaro with a certain amount of insight and power in his servitude, power that is, paradoxically, dependent upon his servility. Therefore, he cannily sizes up not only the *hidalgo*’s poverty and ridiculous imposture but also the absurdity of his master’s solicitations of the local prostitutes:

. . . I saw my master in a field talking very animatedly to two veiled women. They looked as though they belonged to the profession that isn’t in short supply round there. In fact many of those women have the habit of going down in the mornings to the riverside to relax and have an early lunch without taking provisions. The

riverbank is very cool and they're always sure of finding someone to give them lunch as the worthy gentlemen of the city are well aware of this custom.

Anyhow, as I said, he was acting like a real lover-boy, chatting them up better than Ovid. When they saw he was a soft touch they were brazen enough to ask him for the price of lunch on the usual terms. As his purse was as empty as his desires were full, he started to go hot and cold and went as white as a sheet. He began to stammer and make all sorts of excuses. They were pretty experienced and saw what the matter was with him, so they left him for what he was (*LT 55*).

Immediately after Lazarillo witnesses the *hidalgo*'s constriction from sexual intercourse by virtue of his economic destitution, the boy's better nature is released. He not only feeds his master by his own volition but in his sympathy finds a way to protect his master's pride at the same time. While Lazarillo's compassion for the *hidalgo* is genuine, it nonetheless arises out of the newly honed survival strategy of observation. This new role of observer is thrust upon the pícaro as the truth about the *hidalgo* comes upon him quite unexpectedly: "I'd escaped from two previous cruel masters to try and find something better" (*LT 57 - 58*). At first impressed by the *hidalgo*'s elegant though worn clothes, costly sword, and refined bearing, Lazarillo has every reason to expect that the master enjoys a degree of financial security. He searches the *hidalgo*'s clothing and bedding, expecting that this master, like the blind beggar and the miserly priest, is hoarding food or hiding money. The depth of the *hidalgo*'s poverty astonishes the boy and initiates him into an awareness of the possibility of a master's vulnerability: "'This man,' I said, 'is poor and nobody can give what he hasn't got'" (*LT 58*). The pícaro accrues power through gaining access to that which makes his master vulnerable. Hence,

he learns to keenly study his master and carefully inspect the interactions of those points of vulnerability. Observation becomes an active strategy. Lazarillo learns how to wait for the proper moment to ask the *hidalgo* what propelled him from his ancestral home and comfortable life. When the *hidalgo* explains “that the only reason he had left his home was so as not to have to raise his hat to a gentleman who was his neighbor” (LT 61), the boy actively challenges the dynamics of the *hidalgo*’s exaggerated sense of honor.

Hypothesizing that he himself would make a fine valet to a titled lord, the *hidalgo* offers an important lesson in how to be a good servant:

‘Well, by God, if I could find one I’d be indispensable to him and he’d have to tell me all his secrets. I could tell him lies as well as anyone else and flatter him all the time. I’d laugh at his jokes and his little habits even if they weren’t the best in the world. I’d never say anything that might annoy him even though it would be for his good. I’d be very diligent in whatever I said or did regarding him. I wouldn’t kill myself to do things well unless he was going to see them and I’d tell the servants off, where he could see me, so I’d seem to be very concerned about anything to do with his comfort. If he was arguing with a servant, I’d know how to slip in some malicious remarks to annoy my employer and show the servant up. I could speak pleasantly if he liked that and make inquiries and find out about other people. I could give him a full account of them, and lots of other fine things that go on in rich men’s houses these days. Rich men like this and they don’t want honest men in their houses; in fact they hate and despise them and call them stupid and say they’re not men of the world and that a gentleman can’t relax when he’s in their company. So, as I’ve told you, clever men these days make the best

out of their employers and that's what I would do if I could find somebody; but it's just my bad luck that I can't' (*LT* 63).

Critics have overlooked the important instructions to the pícaro contained in this speech. The *hidalgo* emphasizes the necessity of the servant's *gaining access to the master's secrets*, even to that which is reprehensible (and abjected, I would add), flattering the master's vanity and covering up his misdeeds and his mistakes, lying for him, accommodating and facilitating his hypocrisy, and finally, *making the best out of the employer*.

Immediately after delivering this lecture, the *hidalgo* abandons the boy, leaving Lazarillo to lament the topsy-turvy state of the world where servants support their masters and masters run away from their servants. On one level of narrative logic, the *hidalgo* is fleeing the creditors who show up at his door just one sentence after he completes his lecture. On another level, it can be said that the *hidalgo* has exposed his own abjectness and laid bare his own vulnerability to his servant Lazarillo, and so must escape the continued scrutiny of the pícaro and of the text. The lessons conveyed by the *hidalgo* and the insights into the master's abjectness are not lost on the impressionable apprentice, however. He will put the instruction to good use in the subsequent chapters, deploying observation of his masters as an active strategy toward the attainment of power over them.

The chapter involving Lazarillo's fourth master is pivotal though cryptic and extraordinarily brief. In the space of approximately eleven lines, Lazarillo relates how his new master, a friar of the Order of Mercy, "loved going out and worldly affairs and visiting people" (*LT* 66). As some critics have pointed out, this master may have sexually

molested the boy. Such violent homoeroticism fits within the outlines of sexual abjection that I have been delineating, as this master is abruptly abandoned in Lázaro's narrative while his sexuality is un-inscribed except by innuendo: ". . . I couldn't take the running around any more. I left him because of that and also because of one or two other things that I'd rather not mention" (*LT* 66). Positioned in the physical center of Lázaro's text, this episode imprints a portal through which the new Lázaro will pass, even as it erases the master who effects the construction of that portal.

In the fifth chapter, *Tractado Quinto*, Lazarillo takes up with a fraudulent seller of indulgences who, though not exactly an ordained cleric, preaches from the pulpit and lives a life that is segregated from females and the practice of sexuality. It is striking that only one question is iterated with regard to the literally thousands of indulgences sold in the course of Lazarillo's service to this master, and that single query has to do with the applicability of the indulgences to fetuses: "You won't believe it, but before we left, he was even asked by the assistant priest and the town councillors if the indulgence was valid for children still in their mothers' wombs. The pardoner replied that, according to the books he had studied, the answer was no" (*LT* 73). The pardoner's withdrawal from what would appear to be an easy sale can be explained by his efforts to appear learned and to sustain the impression that the indulgences are valid and not lightly invoked. Nevertheless, given his desperation and greed, it is remarkable that he would not take advantage of the opportunity to prey on the solicitousness of pregnant women for the children they carry. The illogic of the pardoner's abrupt refusal suggests the degree to which gendered material is suppressed in the text (especially when it involves fertility, as we saw in the banishment and death of Lazarillo's father and the brutal punishment of his

step-father) and bespeaks the extremely strenuous effort that the pardoner must exert to keep his own sexuality in check.

Further, Lazarillo's service to the seller of indulgences functions as a coordinating conjunction linking the hidalgo's lesson about gaining access to the master's secrets to the final chapter, *Tractado Séptimo*, in which Lázaro puts that precept into practice. While Lazarillo fetches and carries the pardoner's sacks of indulgences and other documents in *Tractado Quinto*, he actively observes the fine line between servant and ally. He watches as the pardoner engages the services of a local constable in order to enact an elaborate little melodrama: first, an adversarial confrontation, then a sensational affliction allegedly wrought by God on the constable for his apparent lack of faith, and finally a thorough cure and change of heart seemingly induced by the pardoner's prayer and merciful forgiveness (*LT* 67 - 72). Lazarillo observes several more ruses and staged "miracles." He is taken into the master's confidence: "When the pardoner saw me there, he put his finger to his lips to tell me to keep my mouth shut. I did so because it suited me." (*LT* 74). And Lazarillo begins to understand that he himself can straddle the fine line that separates servant from accomplice, to his own profit: ". . . I was only a boy then, but his trick impressed me very much and I said to myself, 'I wonder how many others there are like him swindling innocent people'" (*LT* 74 - 75).

Lázaro practices that delicate balance in the final chapter. Having married a woman in order to accommodate the archpriest's affair with her, he secures for himself both a comfortable living and a position of some power that is nonetheless dependent upon his dual status as the archpriest's subordinate and accomplice. He has intimate access to his master's guilt. With each "load of corn" and portion of "meat at Christmas

and Easter,” with each Sunday dinner in the archpriest’s residence, Lazarillo renews his unspoken contract to conceal his master’s guilt (his adultery and lustful violation of his vow of celibacy) from public scrutiny. In addition, Lázaro has now assumed the added responsibility, as narrator, of shielding the archpriest from exposure in the text. Lázaro’s narrative has allegedly been composed in response to a letter from *vuestra merced*: “Your Honour has written to me to ask me to tell him my story in some detail” (LT 24). This letter is never reproduced in the text, nor are any further details of its content mentioned in Lázaro’s story. It is unknown whether *vuestra merced* has inquired about the archpriest himself, or only Lázaro, so the priest’s actions remain suppressed. Lázaro alludes to a friendship between the archpriest and *vuestra merced*: “I saw that only advantages and good could come from being associated with the reverend gentleman, my lord, and Your Honour’s servant and friend . . .” (LT 77 - 78). This allusion can be read as a clever ploy to affiliate *vuestra merced* with the archpriest and his transgression, in effect, blackmailing *vuestra merced*, thereby blocking potential legal or ecclesiastical sanctions. Thus, Lázaro has arguably surpassed his masters not only in manipulating circumstances to his benefit but in manipulating language as well. The fates of both the archpriest and *vuestra merced* rest in Lázaro hands, or more precisely, in his pen. The language of the last chapter is a virtuoso performance of the idiom of deceit that the pícáro has been practicing throughout his apprenticeship, as when he misdirects the blind man, deflects the miserly cleric’s suspicions, or finds a way, through language, to preserve the *hidalgo*’s honor. Having gained access to his master’s guilt, he keeps the secret, both in his neighborhood and in his text: “We got married and I’ve never been sorry because, besides being a good and attentive girl, the priest is always very kind to me . . . Mind you,

at the time, I always had a nagging little suspicion and had a few bad suppers because some nights I waited for her until lauds or even later” (*LT* 78): in these statements, Lázaro acknowledges that, based upon his wife’s habits and the benefits he has enjoyed since they moved next door to the archpriest, people’s suspicions may be plausible. “I remembered what the blind man said to me in Escalona when he was holding the horn. Mind you, I think the Devil brought that to my mind deliberately to upset my marriage” (*LT* 78): here Lázaro even admits that it was prophesied that he would be a cuckold, but suggests that the blind man offends God by pretending to know the future and that Lázaro’s recollection of the prophecy is a sign that Satan is tempting him, threatening to disrupt his sanctioned marriage. “. . . she wasn’t the sort of woman who thought that sort of thing was a joke” (*LT* 78): here Lázaro smoothly circumvents the question of his wife’s guilt and even suggests that she takes her reputation very seriously. “. . . my lord Archpriest made me a promise one day and I know that he will keep it . . . This is what he said: ‘ . . . Neither of you need be ashamed of what she does; this I can promise you. So, don’t pay any attention to what anybody says; just think about your own affairs, I mean, what’s best for you” (*LT* 78): here Lázaro suggests that he has the authority and even the benediction of the Church to justify his actions and those of his wife and master. At last, he says, “I swear on the Sacred Host itself that she is as good a woman as any in Toledo” (*LT* 78 - 79), putting that final ironic twist on the affair by calling into question the morals of all women and suggesting that they are all guilty, male and female, clergy and laity. M.J. Woods likens the success of Lázaro’s stratagem to that of the criminal who leads his investigators to the clear knowledge that he is guilty, but then laughingly dares them to prove it with hard evidence when he has seen to it that such evidence cannot be

obtained (594). Lázaro's hypocrisy is not appalling so much as it is amusing: he has successfully imitated his teachers, and in completing his apprenticeship, has even surpassed them. The pícaro relies upon his arts, clever speech being one of them, to support his attempts to assert authority over his masters. In the end, verbal subterfuge is the last weapon open to him. As Douglas Carey has said, Lázaro uses his testimony about his *caso* to "persecute the persecutors" (459).

As we have seen, the suppression of gender, by the rigorous abstention or preclusion from contact with the opposite sex, functions in the text as a means whereby the masters (the persecutors) sustain their own power. This posits the pícaro as both the victim of that power and its greatest threat by virtue of the pícaro's capacity to contact, evoke, and expose that which is most deeply abjected in his masters, their sexuality and their gender. The simultaneous dejection and self-empowerment of the pícaro is accomplished through his artful (and necessary) exploitation of this advantage. This exploitation demands the pícaro's collusion with the masters' guilt and abjection, and this in turn exploits and abjects the pícaro. There is no room in the text for the pícaro to inscribe a sexual identity or gendered partnership for himself either. Although Lázaro marries, he is denied sexual union by his master's prerogative. Iterated sexual unions, especially if they generate families by producing offspring, are swiftly and brutally ended and the partners exiled from the text. The result is a picaresque protagonist and a picaresque world that are virtually stripped of sexuality and rendered genderless or gender neutral. This blank space bespeaks the painful isolation and profound loneliness of the picaresque figure. With few exceptions, the pícaro declines to fill up that void. As we shall see, the pícara does fill it up, but we may be surprised to discover how.

Chapter III

Untold Story: Moll Flanders' Vicious Parody

Following in the wake of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, my work in this chapter is an attempt to forge a clearer link between Defoe and the picaresque tradition, a connection that has heretofore been insufficiently addressed in the critical literature. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which Defoe calibrates the picaresque motif of apprenticeship and manipulates the picaresque episode to support what I see as a proto-feminist stance. In *Moll Flanders* we can observe a structure of retrospection within which Moll rewrites important episodes of her past thereby moving toward a coherent construction of self. These revisions involve such close imitation of sometimes reprehensible male behaviors and careful incorporation of hard lessons learned at the hands of men, that Moll's retrospective narrative can be read as a parody of the process of becoming a man. Thus, Moll fills in much of the sexual blank space that describes the picaresque protagonist with material gleaned from her apprenticeship to maleness.

The main strands of critical commentary on *Moll Flanders* seem to have under-articulated the picaresque aspects of Defoe's work. Richard Bjornson is one of the few commentators to directly address Defoe's place in the picaresque tradition (188). Bjornson points out that while Defoe adopts the pseudo-autobiographical stance encountered in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, he allows for a degree of conformity between Moll's ideas and the ideology of the society which judges her that is not present in the earlier text (206). This notion of the alignment of Moll and society recalls the eagerness of the pícaro/pícaro to "make it," to fit into society, and it is one component of my own view of

Moll. In many analyses, Defoe is read in terms of the importance of his work to the development of narrative fiction. This approach focuses on Defoe as antecedent of the modern novel, a view that is analogous to critical investigations of the picaresque that see it mainly as a precursor genre, paving the way for, but lacking the superior development of, its descendants.¹³ In another strand of critical discourse, Defoe's control of his material is suspect. In this arena, questions are raised about Defoe's fastidiousness with detail and his apparent lack of attention to issues of structure and order. Vividness of detail is admired but also lamented as contributing to what is perceived to be a disorganized narrative, in what Langford refers to as "back-handed compliments" (17 n.6). The hyper-proliferation of episode too is sometimes seen as evidence of artistic limitation and authorial slackness.¹⁴

With regard to *Moll Flanders* in particular, critics have focused on the social, economic, and religious dimensions of the work, analyzing Moll as criminal, Moll as capitalist, and Moll as penitent. There is also a substantial amount of critical debate over the source, extent, and function of irony in the text. A number of critics, in response to those who see a disordered quality in Defoe's episodic narrative technique, have made a case for the structural coherence of *Moll Flanders*, citing as evidence recurring motifs in the narrative as well as the similarities between early and later events in the story. Many

¹³Ian Watt (60 - 92, 94) and Joseph Leighton are representative of the developmental perspective. Leighton sees in Defoe a shift from interest in the pícaro as moral exemplar to Moll as an individual. Because of this transition, he considers *MF* to be the "final landmark in the development of the picaresque novel" (310).

¹⁴Forster (88), Sutherland (241), and Schorer (xii) are representative of critics who focus on the episodic structure of Defoe's narratives.

order to assert their freedom and elude the various snares that lie in the path of the solitary woman, Defoe's females must themselves become predators (103). Mason's and Backscheider's views are not altogether contradictory to Rogers' or to my own thesis, in that they point to the necessity, in Defoe, of a woman's acting within the confines of a male construct, no matter how strong her impulses toward independence. This is precisely what I have proposed Moll is doing, establishing a degree of sovereignty for herself by subsuming the role of a man, and it is close to the picaresque project as well, stressing the picaresque protagonist's struggle toward a position of security and some agency *within* the all-encompassing power structure that is dominated by the master and enacted by society in general.

In my study I also align myself with those critics who tend to see more narrative control in Defoe rather than less. This work builds specifically upon examinations of structure that affirm the coherence of *Moll Flanders*. I offer a different perspective, however, on the nature of Moll's central motivation. While Moll, early on, avows that she seeks the life of a gentlewoman, her subsequent narrative reveals an adjustment of that initial goal and suggests that what Moll really wants is the life of a gentleman-tradesman, not a gentlewoman. My gender-bending perspective also seeks to reconcile aspects of the arguments of both those critics who note Defoe's capacity for intimate identification with the concerns of his female subjects, like Susanna Bartmann whose poetic essay explores the possibility that Moll, as the "undercover agent of Defoe's desire," is a disguise for Defoe's secret "daydreams" (295), and those who, like Kibbie (1024) and Alter, on the other hand, suggest that Defoe created in Moll a mouthpiece for his own protocapitalism, thereby neglecting to develop her femininity. Bringing together issues of genre and

gender, I suggest that the uses of picaresque structure and picaresque motif in the text contribute to a coherent if ironic view of the construction of female identity that implies a potentially subversive critique of the behaviors, attitudes and powers of men.

The preface to *Moll Flanders*, curiously under-analyzed in the critical literature, is the necessary starting point of my approach to the text. Following a frontispiece declaring that the story of Moll Flanders has been “written from her own memorandums” (MF 27), the preface repeatedly refers to alterations of Moll’s original text. This naturally raises questions about how much of the original has been revised or even omitted in the edition that readers hold before them. At first, the anonymous voice that introduces itself as “the pen” appears to claim that only Moll’s discourse has been changed, and only slightly, simply because the roughness of her natural vocabulary was inappropriate:

It is true that the original of this story is put into new words, and the style of the famous lady we here speak of is a little altered; particularly she is made to tell her own tale in modester words than she told it at first, the copy which first came to hand having been written in language more like one still in Newgate than one grown penitent and humble, as she afterwards pretends to be (MF 28).

If we note the concluding phrase of this paragraph, however, we discover evidence that the editing process has been far more extensive than initially described. The editor’s comment that Moll might be “pretending” penitence and humility is startling in that it implies that Moll does not genuinely recant or reform her ways despite evidence to the contrary both in the preface and in her “own” story. Larry L. Langford’s analysis has been particularly helpful to my reading of this part of the preface. In Langford’s interpretation, the editor who speaks in the preface is clearly hostile to Moll not only

because she has violated moral and legal boundaries, but because she “continues to do so even after her repentance” (166). Langford suggests that Moll the penitent is a creation of the anonymous editor: without his censoring pen, he says, Moll’s text would have remained “the story of how crime, deceit, and immorality not only helped a woman to survive, but enabled her to flourish in a world where greed, acquisitiveness, and self-concern were the norms rather than the exception” (168) ¹⁶ In fact, the editor firmly implies in the next paragraph that he has performed a far more rigorous revision of Moll’s original story than simply improving upon her choice of words:

The pen employed in finishing her story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak language fit to be read. When a woman debauched from her youth, nay, even being the offspring of debauchery and vice, comes to give an account of all her vicious practices, and even to descend to the particular occasions and circumstances by which she first became wicked, and of all the progression of crime which she ran through in threescore years, an author must be hard put to it to wrap it up so clean as not to give room, especially for vicious readers, to turn it to his disadvantage (*MF* 28).

In this section, the editor now seems to refer to himself as author, although his first use of the word clearly referred to Moll. This suggests that he has dropped his initial pose in favor of a position that implies even greater “author”-ity over the text. This shift is also noted by Langford who sees it as added emphasis that the story composed by this second

¹⁶Michie also alludes to a dichotomy between Moll’s success and the moralizing of the preface (91), while Bjornson (189) and Zimmerman (76) are representative of the common assumption that the views expressed in the preface are those of Defoe who, they suggest, intended to impose a moralizing judgment on Moll and her story.

“author,” the editor, is the one that the reader is meant to remember (171 - 172). The anonymous editor’s indication that he has not merely dressed up Moll’s story but actually finished it and made it “what you now see it to be” intensifies our sense of how problematic the original manuscript might have been and how drastically altered must be the version now presented to the reader.

In the next paragraph, the editor expresses his concern for the potentially damaging effect that Moll’s text would have exerted upon the reader if it had been allowed to be published in its uncensored form. He stresses that much care has been taken “to give no lewd ideas, no immodest turns in the new dressing up of this story” (*MF* 28). He hints that something very threatening has been suppressed in the hope of protecting the reader: “To this purpose, some of the vicious part of her life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other parts are very much shortened” (*MF* 29). He even goes so far as to signal us that Moll’s story, even in its bowdlerized version, resists his editorial efforts to control it. The editor clearly is hard put to shield the reader from being unduly influenced by the defiant story: “. . . as the best use is made even of the worst story, the moral ‘tis hoped will keep the reader serious where the story might incline him to be otherwise” (*MF* 29). Thus, even with deletions, Moll’s story is dangerous.

What is the nature of the potentially hazardous material that has been omitted? The editor says that it is “some of the vicious part of her life” (*MF* 29). The untold tale, then, is a story not just of transgressions and “immodesties” but of *viciousness*. It is a story that threatens not only to counteract the “abundance of delightful incidents” (*MF* 29) which survive the editing process, but also to undermine the moral precepts that

underlie the editor's work. The anxiety communicated in the preface alerts us to the possibility that deeply subversive material has been suppressed. The uneasy stance of the editor also forewarns us - inadvertently, it seems - that we ought not to trust the very content that he himself presents to us. In other words, the material that survived the editor's cuts is also suspect. We might particularly question the authenticity of those scenes in which Moll purports to have reformed and recanted. As Langford has suggested:

Whatever Moll may seem to say in condemnation of herself, the fact remains that her life is a salient example of how to prosper in the pursuit of vice, and, perhaps even more importantly, how an adherence to certain virtuous principles can endanger one's well-being, especially that of an unmarried woman (173).

My work in this chapter builds upon Langford's observations. I suggest that the content of the unspoken testimony can be read as the history of Moll's apprenticeship to maleness. In her earliest days, Moll entertained dreams of becoming a gentlewoman. She sets out to achieve that goal, and according to many critics, she attains it. I am not contending this analysis insofar as it acknowledges that Moll does eventually attain financial independence and the comfortable lifestyle of the gentry. Critics are correct to point out that Moll quite aggressively pursues such a lifestyle throughout her story. However, I am suggesting that the role Moll develops for herself turns out to be more characteristic of a male than a female. She does not become a gentlewoman, nor, in a sense, a woman at all.¹⁷ She instead assumes the role of a "gentleman-tradesman" (*MF*

¹⁷Moll's femininity has been problematic for a number of critics. Ian Watt, for example, admits to a personal impression that Moll's character seems to him to be "essentially masculine," but he does not elaborate. He assumes that Virginia Woolf's admiration for

78). Although she will occasionally study at the feet of female tutors, she will continually internalize and copy the attitudes, behaviors, and strategies of the men whom she encounters in her immediate experience. Moll's act of imitation reveals the hollow morality of these men, even as it exposes the ways in which their unscrupulousness contributes to their economic success. In this sense, Moll's mimesis can be read as a parody of the process of becoming a man.¹⁸

Let us first examine Moll's central goal in life, and look at the adjustments to that goal that are made even before she begins her apprenticeship. In her early childhood, while she is still under the protection of the parish, Moll resists being put out to service, the usual fate of orphans.¹⁹ She insists that she will become a "gentlewoman" which, to her eight-year-old mind, means "to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible bugbear going to service . . ." (*MF* 38). The respectable ladies who hear of her dreams are amused when they discover that the example upon which little Moll has based her definition is actually a woman of ill repute who resides in the neighborhood. From their amusement Moll concludes that they think being a

Moll may indicate that Woolf shared this impression to the degree that, according to Watt, Moll evades some of the limitations of gender evident in eighteenth-century fiction (113). Richetti too asserts that Moll is essentially a male character, a "female impersonator" ("Women" 88), while Bartmann implies that Defoe is a would-be female impersonator.

¹⁸Novak mentions that picaresque narrative masquerades as spiritual autobiography to the extent that the pícaro or pícaro's sincerity is always in question ("Sincerity" 109). This observation supports my own view of the capacity of picaresque narrative to sustain parody.

¹⁹Dorothy Georges describes in detail the severe abuse to which parish children were often subjected (229 - 230). Moll's fears of servitude are thus justified, and contribute to her desperate search for an alternative means of sustaining herself.

gentlewoman also means to live “great and rich and high, and I know not what” (*MF* 38), and she incorporates this possibility into her definition as well.²⁰

When she has the opportunity to spend considerable time at the home of a lady in the town, Moll adopts “quite other notions of a gentlewoman,” now appreciating the “taste of genteel living” (*MF* 40) that differentiates the ladies of the town from the humble, homely nurse, and Moll’s original exemplar, the woman of ill repute. When a more mature but still very innocent Moll is forced by the nurse’s death to go into service at the age of fourteen, she further adjusts her conception of what it means to be a gentlewoman. She is taken in by a respected family as a companion to their young daughters, and she quickly learns that being a gentlewoman involves learning to write, to speak French, to dance, and to play the harpsichord and the spinet. Such an education and its attendant lifestyle require money, and Moll soon learns from one of the daughters of the house the consequences of a woman’s poverty:

‘Betty [Moll] wants but one thing, but she had as good want everything, for the market is against our sex just now; and if a young woman have beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, and all these to extreme, yet if she has not money, she’s nobody, she had as good want them all, for nothing but money now recommends a woman; the men play the game all into their own hands’ (*MF* 44).

She also hears a contradictory view from the young lady’s younger brother who remarks, “. . . beauty will steal a husband sometimes in spite of money” (*MF* 44). The comments of the two siblings, considered together, lead the impressionable Moll to significantly

²⁰Michie discusses Moll’s interrogations of language in the early sections of the text, and points out her growing awareness of the unreliability and flexibility of linguistic meaning (81).

adjust her goals and to broaden the scope of the definition of “gentlewoman” that she had first articulated at eight years of age. She now knows that becoming a gentlewoman requires the acquisition of a husband who has money. She also realizes that if a poor girl possesses beauty and all the other attributes listed by the sister (and Moll believes that she does possess these), it is possible to attract an honorable proposal of marriage from a gentleman. This assumption, gleaned from the male’s view of courtship which she first overhears in conversation and later observes in the actions of the younger brother, turns out to be accurate in Moll’s case, but, in fact, positions Moll for her first rude awakening and her initiation into her apprenticeship, an episode that we will examine shortly.

Moll’s dream of becoming a gentlewoman undergoes yet another transformation once her first husband dies. Now a widow of some means, Moll finds herself courted by many elegant gentlemen who offer themselves as lovers, but, because of Moll’s inferior social position, fail to propose marriage. In response, Moll re-examines her original goal of marrying a gentleman and considers the attractions of tradesmen who are more likely prospects:

I loved the company, indeed, of men of mirth and wit, men of gallantry and figure, and was often entertained with such, as I was also with others; but I found by just observation, that the brightest men came upon the dullest errand - that is to say, the dullest as to what I aimed at. On the other hand, those who came with the best proposals were the dullest and most disagreeable part of the world. I was not averse to a tradesman, but then I would have a tradesman, forsooth, that was something of a gentleman too; that when my husband had a mind to carry me to

the court, or to the play, he might become a sword, and look as like a gentleman as another man . . . (*MF* 78).

Moll now sets her sights on finding and marrying “this amphibious creature, this land-water thing called a gentleman-tradesman” (*MF* 78). She succeeds, but the high-living linen draper soon runs into bankruptcy and deserts her. As a result, she comes to realize that marrying a gentleman-tradesman puts her at the mercy of his business acumen, or lack of it. In addition, Moll notes how the linen draper has not only lost his own funds, he has also run through much of her own inheritance from her deceased first husband (*MF* 78). Moll quickly learns that marrying a gentleman-tradesman threatens her own resources since they now come under the husband’s control.

This loss stimulates the final revision of Moll’s goal. Having retreated into the Mint, Moll reflects very seriously and at some length on the unreliability of marriage as a means to achieving her objective (*MF* 83 - 84). She takes stock of what she has learned in the past and supplements it with new information:

that the state of things was altered as to matrimony, and . . . I was not to expect at London what I had found in the country: that marriages were here the consequences of politic schemes for forming interests, and carrying on business and that Love had no share, or but very little, in the matter (*MF* 83).

She concludes that attachment, though pleasurable, will not bring her the security she wants and needs. Moll no longer sees marriage, either to a gentleman or to a gentleman-tradesman, as an efficient means of attaining the status of gentlewoman. Indeed, her orientation shifts in a significant way, from “I would have a tradesman that was something of a gentleman too” (*MF* 78) to “the money was the thing” (*MF* 84).

At this point, the fundamental shift in Moll's thinking reclaims her childhood desire to be fiscally independent without going into service as a household drudge. That original impulse toward independence had been displaced for a time while Moll entertained the belief that she needed to rely upon males, marriage and money to secure for her the role of gentlewoman. Finally, however, Moll focuses on the money itself as a means to the desired end, gradually preempts the role of the gentleman-tradesman, and begins to build for herself the independent lifestyle that she desires. This revised trajectory will launch Moll into the apprenticeship to maleness that underlies her plot.

It is significant to note that Defoe, in *The Complete English Tradesman*, endorses the idea of women going into trade and conducting business, especially after the death of their husbands. He urges women to become familiar with the details of their husbands' business enterprises and to actively participate in the conduct of their trade. This, he says, will protect the wife from unscrupulous or incompetent apprentices or lawyers who might take advantage of a widow's ignorance to defraud the family. Defoe relates the story of a widow who, having already learned to manage the staff employed in the business during her husband's lifetime, takes over after his sudden death, substantially increases profits through her intelligence and diligence, and eventually shares the business with her son and a trusted employee. Defoe comments that women " . . . when once they . . . think fit to rouse up themselves to their own relief, are not so helpless and shiftless creatures as some would make them appear" (*Tradesman* 221 - 223, 226). Katherine Rogers reminds us that Defoe's heroines "never sit passively under their misfortunes" and that his heroines exhibit the same "active enterprise" as his heroes; indeed, they have sufficient skill, resourcefulness, and even "unscrupulousness" to create the lives they desire (14).

Such resourcefulness is reflected in Moll's increasing attentiveness to the business of accumulating money and safeguarding her economic security, and in the apprenticeship to maleness through which she will assume the role of gentleman-tradesman. Before elaborating on the apprenticeship motif, however, it will be helpful to establish an overall sense of the pattern the motif formulates as it is played out within the structure of the novel. I have said that there is a suppressed deposition at the core of Moll's story. This testimony emerges through Moll's increasingly skillful though not impeccable manipulation of the episodes of her life. The image of a double helix aptly conveys a complex dialogic relationship between episodes in which each event is recreated in Moll's memory in and through the telling of her story. The meaning of each episode is only half-exposed until the episode is seen to reflect back or forward to another. The image of the double helix is useful not only because it aptly describes the inter-relatedness that Moll establishes among the events of her life, but also because it recalls the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the material in the nuclei of living cells that contains the genetic code and transmits the patterns that will largely determine individual identity. Like a strand of genetic material then, the double helix organizes points of reference within the iterated narrative, illuminating the heroine's steady progress toward a kind of self-reconstitution, finally resulting in the attainment of a transmuted version of the social position she has envisioned for herself from childhood.

These points of reference are actually *paired* moments from the course of Moll's life, opportunities whereby she simultaneously creates, recreates, and reveals herself. The points along the two strands of the helix are not in perfect alignment; instead, they might seem to be in constant motion, like two threads of lights with portions that flash in

sequence: now one segment lines up with an exact parallel on the opposite string, now another gleams in tandem with some more oblique section of the opposing strand. In the process of telling her life, Moll revisits and revises four themes that run through her story: 1) her infancy and childhood; 2) her incests; 3) the abandonment of her children; and 4) her life of crime. In the process, she calls forth specific sets of doubled episodes and twinned characters: 1) Moll's affair with the elder brother is revised in the episode of the scrupulous lady and the young Captain; 2) The "incestuous" marriage to the younger brother is corrected in Moll's handling of the marriage to her half-brother; 3) The courtship scene with the husband-brother is emended in the revelation/separation scene in Virginia; 4) The damage done in Moll's union with her half-brother is redressed in the marriage to Jemmy, the Lancashire husband; and finally 5) The resistance of the "little gentlewoman" to being put to service is recast in Moll's response to her husband Jemmy's loathing of the notion of being transported from Newgate to hard labor in Virginia and his subsequent aversion to the obligations of being a landowner.

Some parallels between the earlier and the later episodes of *Moll Flanders* have been discussed by commentators.²¹ But none have closely studied these parallels, nor noted their connection to the untold story that is unfolding at the core of the double helix. In the telling of her life as in the living of it, Moll learns that if she is to be self-sufficient, her female self is not sufficient to her purpose. She replays and retells each of these episodes until she gets them right, that is, until she recasts each of them as victories in her struggle toward personal coherence, independence, and financial security. To the editor,

²¹See, for example, Lovitt, who compares Jemmy to Moll's other lovers (4) and McMaster who sees a parallel between the elder brother and Jemmy (138).

these re-workings indeed advance a dangerous agenda to the degree that they suggest that Moll achieves her success by imitating the hypocrisies of men.²²

Moll learns at each step how to act like a man. In addition, like Lazarillo, she learns how to be an author through the process of writing her life story. Defoe, in the process of writing Moll writing her story, seems to have orchestrated the picaresque episode and called the picaresque motif of apprenticeship into the service of a complex irony that has eluded many critics just as it seems to have evaded the editor of the preface. Such an achievement would argue for a higher level of artistic skill than has heretofore been universally acknowledged in Defoe. Similarly, if I am correct in asserting that both Moll and Defoe are successful, and the editor's nervous preface suggests that they are, then we are poised to acknowledge a new appreciation of the potential of the picaresque episode to establish character.

Let us now place the double helix, our conceptual model for the story of Moll's apprenticeship, within the context of the narrative that has survived the censorious editor.

It needs to be noted at the outset that it is nearly impossible to discuss a picaresque

²²Richetti points out that Defoe's novels about women are "inevitably anti-institutional" in that they engage in the "subversive examination of those institutions that are supposed to contain them" ("Family" 24). Richetti indicates that Moll develops the ability to analyze institutions such as marriage, thus allowing her to live within her marriages as well as her illegal relationships without being completely suppressed by them. "Sexual coldness and marital opportunism are part of her equipment," says Richetti, and this gives Moll a narrative and psychological stance, he says, wherein she is "both in her experience and outside of it" ("Family" 26). These points support my notion of Moll's challenging male roles by absorbing them, and also suggest Defoe's sensitivity to the peculiar stance of the picaresque protagonist who is always the half-outsider, able to interact with society but never fully belonging to that society. Novak's appreciation of Defoe as satirist also supports my view that an extended criticism of male behaviors could be embedded in *Moll Flanders*, in that, as Novak points out, Defoe delighted in shocking the middle-class society of his time, both in his fictional and non-fictional works, with such examinations as the relationship of sexuality and lust to the institution of marriage ("Unmentionable" 89 - 90).

narrative without recounting elements of the plot, in some places in rather substantial detail. As I shall demonstrate throughout this study, it is in and through the piling on of episode and detail that the picaresque tends to construct character and meaning. The narrative stress in the picaresque is on the “and then . . .” (the episodic and sequential story) rather than on the “and so . . .” (the causal and consequential plot).²³ The picaresque episodic structure functions additively and cumulatively to produce the distinctive effects that we shall be discussing in the coming pages. As Nancy K. Miller has pointed out, the episodes of *Moll Flanders* “add up,” bringing about an ending that is both complete and “consequential” (19). In order to understand the physiology of the picaresque structure, specifically its contribution to the formation of what I call the episodic self, we shall have to foreground the episodic quality of Moll’s narrative and rehearse episodic sequences with some frequency. We shall also have to accustom ourselves to an asynchronous approach as we overrule, in certain places, the chronology of Moll’s story. We will consider together episodes that are separated in the narrative by many years or by intervening episodes. Still, we shall soon observe the emergence of a clear and coherent pattern that suggests that Moll learns from the behaviors of men and applies those lessons to the process of achieving her goals.

Moll’s story begins in the blank space of the narrator’s origins. Her real name is kept secret because she still needs to protect herself and her family from potential liabilities related to her former life of crime. Born a bastard to a convicted felon in Newgate prison, Moll can hardly speak of the circumstances of her birth because she knows so little of them. What she does know and tell begins as the story of a miserable,

²³See E.M. Forster’s definition of plot in *Aspects of the Novel* (86) and novelist Frederic Tuten’s *New York Times* essay “Still Replying to Grandma’s Persistent ‘And Then?’”

fatherless creature abandoned by her soon-to-be-transported mother into “bad hands, you may be sure” (*MF* 34). Moll has scarce information about “the first hours of my life.” She doesn’t know how she was kept alive. What she knows is only hearsay: “. . .as I have been told, some relation of my mother’s took me away for a while as a nurse, but at whose expense, or by whose direction, I know nothing at all of it” (*MF* 34). Soon enough, however, Moll has a “first account that I can recollect”: she was not *taken* by gypsies but all on her own “wandered among a crew of those people” (*MF* 34) and, it seems, left them of her own accord not long after at Colchester in Essex. Moll says that she hid herself and “would not go any farther with them” (*MF* 34). It is notable that here, so early in her young life (she is a little over three years old), she sees herself as the agent of her own destiny as well as of the memorialization of her identity.

Moll is taken into the care of the parish and sent to the home of a respectable woman, the poor but kindly nurse under whose care and tutelage she thrives. Here she contributes to the income of the household by sewing and mending and serving as a companion and handmaid to the mayor’s daughters. She learns reading and writing and fine manners, and comes to delight the ladies of the town. Thus, early on, Moll shows a sense of independence and a belief that she can earn her own keep. She displays an openness, even a predisposition to the notion of supporting herself. She so ingratiates herself to the important matrons of the parish that they vie for her company after her nurse’s death:

I was no sooner carried away, as I have said, by this good gentlewoman, but the first lady, that is to say, the Mayoress that was, sent her two daughters to take care of me; and another family which had taken notice of me when I was the little

gentlewoman, and had given me work to do, sent for me after her, so that I was mightily made of, as we say; nay, and they were not a little angry, especially madam the Mayoress, that her friend had taken me away from her, as she called it; for, as she said, I was hers by right, she having been the first that took any notice of me. But they that had me would not part with me (*MF* 41 - 42).

Cognizant of the shabbiness of her former life at the old nurse's home, she eagerly absorbs an education in singing, dancing and French "by imitation and inquiry" of her new benefactors (*MF* 42). Mary Butler has pointed out how crucial this period is to Moll's sense of personal identity: "Having experienced the discomfort of being one of an ill-defined 'such,' Moll, as a child, becomes positively obsessed with assuming a definite and admirable (in her eyes) social role" (378 - 379). Butler emphasizes that Moll struggles to assume a clearly definable role in order to relieve her discomfort at being, for all intents and purposes, a non-entity, in that she lacks "an exact designation for her ill-defined role" (377). Butler analyzes Moll's habit of identifying individuals whom she encounters by their roles rather than by their proper names. While this pattern can logically be associated with the criminal's need to conceal identities, Butler suggests that the device gives Defoe a subtle way of uncovering Moll's perceptions about herself and the world and suggests that Defoe gives Moll a degree of uncertainty about the "continuity through time of personal identity" (377). If Butler is correct, we can think of Moll as actively seizing upon the project of self-creation at a very early age. Indeed, although she remains anonymous throughout her narrative, in the telling of the story of her first fourteen years of life, Moll has already redressed the blank that was the helpless infant, wanted by its mother only so long as it could secure a reprieve from hanging. The

bastard of Newgate, who was suckled by a faceless wet-nurse, has become an orphan prodigy, a darling, a prized possession at the home of the wealthy Colchester family.

It is important to note at this juncture that the next episode, involving Moll's tenure at the house in Colchester, constitutes the primary reference point for a number of future episodes. The impact of this sequence of events upon Moll and her trajectory will be fully understood only later, when the narrative replays this episode not once but several times, in tandem with its multiple coordinates on the double helix. So some patience is required as we read through the events and take them first, as it were, at face value, remembering that they will later be re-collected by Moll and transformed in the recollection.

Just as Moll, blossoming now at seventeen years of age, has settled into the life of the family, the young men of the house soon begin to take notice of her. She finds herself at the mercy of the elder brother and his five guineas, then his handful of gold, his hundred guineas, his promises of marriage, and his earnest pledge to provide for a child should there be one.²⁴ Moll falls in love with him, an understandable response both because this is her first romantic relationship and because she is beguiled by the money and the promises of security that the young gentleman offers (*MF* 62). It seems likely to Moll that the elder brother will be the means to achieving her aim of becoming a gentlewoman. To Moll's dismay, however, the younger brother also "falls to work" (*MF* 51), but Moll resists being transferred to Robin. Not only is she genuinely attracted to his brother, but she also holds out the hope of a marriage that will enable her to enjoy the

²⁴ As Michie points out, the amount of money offered to Moll rises incrementally as the elder brother's passions and personal needs mount. (81).

larger fortune and higher social standing that the elder son will inherit. Thus, Moll at this point is actively pursuing her original dream of becoming a gentlewoman.

In her youthful innocence Moll assumes that her lover the elder brother, once apprized of the rival ardor of his sibling, will claim her as his bride, fulfilling his promise to marry her “when he came into his estate” (*MF* 47). When this does not happen, Moll threatens to announce to the family that she is already married, a strategy intended to put off the younger brother and literalize her figurative marriage to the elder brother:

‘ . . . I desire you to remember the long discourses you have had with me, and the many hours’ pains you have taken to persuade me to believe myself an honest woman; that I was your wife intentionally, though not in the eyes of the world, and that it was as effectual a marriage that had passed between us as if we had been publicly wedded by the parson of the parish. You know and cannot but remember that these have been your own words to me’ (*MF* 60).

Deeply concerned that Moll will expose their relationship to the family, the elder brother persuades Moll that this tactic will fail. When Moll can no longer withstand the manipulations of the elder brother as he uses the fervor of the younger to extricate himself from what has become an inconvenient affair, she consents to marry Robin. Persuaded that she is in danger of being “dropped by both of them and left alone in the world to shift for myself” (*MF* 75) and paid off with five hundred pounds from the elder brother, Moll wins the begrudging approval of her mistress, the young men’s mother, and becomes a wife for the first time. She realizes that she has achieved a limited triumph in attaching herself to a respectable gentleman with comfortable income, if not the fortune

and status of the primary heir. Prompted by the elder brother, Moll considers the alternatives:

‘what it will be to marry a gentleman of a good family, in good circumstances, and with the consent of the whole house, and to enjoy all that the world can give you; and what, on the other hand, to be sunk into the dark circumstances of a woman that has lost her reputation’ (*MF* 73).

Still, Moll is bitterly disappointed, and the long illness that strikes her has been interpreted as her response to the trauma of this rejection.²⁵ She deeply resents the elder brother’s “shifting off his whore into his brother’s arms for a wife” (*MF* 75). The episode of the elder brother and the younger brother, resulting in Moll’s marriage to Robin, is the moment of rude awakening for Moll which can be compared to Lazarillo’s having his head smashed against the stone bull. In this episode, Moll observes for the first time how successful gentlemen may behave, how “certainly does interest banish all manner of affection, and so naturally do men give up honour and justice, humanity, and even Christianity, to secure themselves” (*MF* 75). The example of the elder brother is a model that Moll internalizes and soon enough puts into practice after her young husband dies.

In the affair of the young lady and the captain, Moll has an opportunity, as a surrogate, to revise her defeat at the hands of the elder brother. After Robin’s death, Moll befriends a woman with “near £2000 to her fortune” (*MF* 84) who is being courted by a young sea captain. Deeply insulted by the lady’s discreet inquiries among his neighbors about his character, the captain abruptly drops her and transfers his attentions to another

²⁵Moll’s periodic bouts of psychosomatic illness mark the major crises in her life, moments of transition when she is overwhelmed with a seemingly insoluble problem, is temporarily immobilized, and then recovers her energies to face the challenge (Lerenbaum 102).

woman. Moll leaps at the chance to “bring the man to her door again, and make him beg to be let in” (*MF* 85). The swiftness with which Moll plunges into this matter, her off-stage stance as the unmoved mover in the calculated execution of an elaborate plan, her devotion of over a half dozen obsessively paced pages to this episode all reinforce a sense that here Moll is vehemently engrossed in the act of purging herself of a past victimization while girding herself for full participation in the domain of men. She will beat them at their own game. This is the first extended example of Moll’s practicing the skills of her apprenticeship. As Moll counsels the lady through a manipulation of the young captain into a proposal of marriage, she is rewriting her own affair with the elder brother.

Moll’s humiliation at being passed from the elder brother to Robin the younger had been a private affront: having assumed all along that Moll’s resistance to Robin derived from an appropriate sense of her unworthiness of such a match, the family never learned of the affair between Moll and the elder brother. Thus the elder brother had successfully covered up his activities and moved on to a socially and financially advantageous marriage, having enjoyed Moll’s favors for months, and paid for them with nothing more valuable or incriminating than coin. In the case of the young woman and the captain, however, Moll seeks the satisfaction of a thoroughly public, though vicarious, revenge.

First, Moll instructs the young woman to spread rumors that it was she herself who had terminated her engagement, having discovered that the captain’s estate was not what he claimed it to be, and that he was ill-tempered and morally debauched, that he had “used the women ill upon many occasions,” and that she had thought it best not “to

meddle with him” (MF 85). In similar fashion, in the episode of the two brothers, the mother and sisters had assumed that Moll had been receptive to the misplaced attentions of young Robin. Moll’s fellow servants and even the elder brother himself and his sisters had intimated that she should soon be put out of the house for her immorality (MF 64). Now Moll has the pleasure of putting the captain at the mercy of such scandal and assumption.

As a result, respectable ladies - the very “fortunes” he is hunting - turn him out of their circles when his character and his wallet appear to be too thin (MF 86). When consulted, Moll herself oils the rumor machine: she asserts that the captain has not paid for his share of the ship he claims to have invested in. Moll’s fabricated story about a shipmate taking over the share that the captain could not support parallels Robin’s taking Moll off the hands of his brother:

. . . I added, as what the other gossips knew nothing of, viz. that I had heard he was in very bad circumstances; that he was under a necessity of a fortune to support his interest with the owners of the ship he commanded; that his own part was not paid for, and if it was not paid quickly, his owners would put him out of the ship, and *his chief mate was likely to command it, who offered to buy that part which the captain had promised to take* [Emphasis added] (MF 86).

Moll’s wild report - she confesses that she was “heartily piqued at the rogue” (MF 86) - that the captain has “a wife alive at Plymouth, and another in the West Indies” (MF 86) replays her thwarted attempt to win back the elder brother by threatening to suggest to the family that she is already married to him. In the case of the captain and the lady, Moll’s strategy is successful.

With relish, Moll rehabilitates her own history, accomplishing for her friend what she could not effect for herself. She wreaks upon the captain the very fate with which the elder brother had threatened her. The captain is barred from all the most attractive prospects for marriage:

This worked as we both desired it, for presently the young lady next door, who had a father and mother that governed her and her fortune, was shut up, and her father forbid him the house. Also in one place more where he went, the woman had the courage, however strange it was, to say No; and he could try nowhere but he was reproached with his pride . . .

Well, by this time he began to be sensible of his mistake; and having alarmed all the women on that side of the water, he went over to Ratcliff, and got access to some of the ladies there . . . yet such was his ill-luck, that his character followed him over the water . . . so that though he might have had wives enough, yet it did not happen among the women that had good fortunes, which was what he wanted (*MF* 86).

The captain is finally made desperate at the (fabricated) news that the lady has another suitor:

The captain was laughed at in all companies, and was ready to hang himself. He tried all the possible ways to come at her again, and wrote the most passionate letters to her in the world, excusing his former rashness; and in short, by great application, obtained leave to wait on her again as he said, to clear his reputation (*MF* 87).

Not only does the captain return to the lady; he becomes from that moment “the most humble, the most modest, and most importunate man alive in his courtship” (*MF* 87). He reveals all his financial assets and provides the lady with assurances concerning the integrity of his character. Indeed, a transformation has occurred, as Moll observes: “in short, he was quite the reverse of what he was before” (*MF* 88). As Moll congratulates herself, she recognizes that in recapturing the captain for the lady, she has successfully imitated the duplicity of men: “. . . it was but just to deal with [men] in their own way and, if possible, to deceive the deceiver” (*MF* 92). Moll allows herself a bit of gloating at the thoroughness of her vengeance by proxy:

Thus I convinced her, that if the men made their advantage of our sex in the affair of marriage, upon the supposition of there being such choice to be had, and of the women being so easy, it was only owing to this, that the women wanted courage to maintain their ground, and to play their part; and that, according to my Lord Rochester,

A woman’s ne’er so ruined but she can
Revenge herself on her undoer, Man (*MF* 88).

Let us now return to the double helix. The next issue that Moll will re-address moves us backward in terms of the chronology of the narrative, so that we can take another look at the affair of the two brothers, while simultaneously propelling us forward to the episode of Moll’s marriage to her half-brother.

Another of the defenses that Moll attempts to mount in her efforts to compel the elder brother to honor his promise of marriage is concentrated in her insistence that her marriage to Robin is a form of incest. She pleads with the elder brother: ““Are the

sacrifices I have made of honour and modesty to you no proof of my being tied to you in bonds too strong to be broken?" (MF 59). She reminds him of the arguments he himself raised to convince her of his lasting affection and loyalty. We recall here the lines quoted earlier:

'I desire you to remember the long discourses you have had with me, and the many hours' pains you have taken to persuade me to believe myself an honest woman; that I was your wife intentionally, though not in the eyes of the world, and that it was as effectual a marriage that had passed between us as if we had been publicly wedded by the parson of the parish. You know and cannot but remember that these have been your own words to me' (MF 60).

Moll's objection to the arrangement on the grounds of incest is somewhat contrived, particularly in light of the fact that the elder brother never again approaches her once she is engaged to Robin (MF 73). Still, in her eyes, she became Robin's sister once she entered into a union with his brother. She also perceives the substitution of one sibling for another to be incestuous. She tells her lover, the elder brother, that she abhors the prospect of "lying with two brothers" (MF 60), by which she means becoming the wife of one brother *having been* a whore to the other. At the same time, while her disgust is genuine, Moll nevertheless admits that her statement to her lover, "I could never be persuaded to love one brother and marry another" is framed to "oblige the person [the elder brother] to me the more" (MF 69). This strategy fails, however, and she eventually consents to being "managed" into the scheme (MF 75).

Immediately after the wedding, however, and for the duration of the marriage, she becomes preoccupied with the tension between her acquiescence to the brothers'

demands and her resistance to incest. What had formerly been, at least in part, a ploy designed to bind her first lover to her becomes a deep and genuine obsession for Moll: “I never was in bed with my husband but I wished myself in the arms of his brother” (*MF* 76). The tender kindness of her new husband effectively blotted out by the visage of the elder brother, Moll commits “adultery and incest with him every day in my desires” (*MF* 77). The incest of Moll’s desire remains a chronic infirmity which afflicts her until Robin’s death. She will not entirely recover from this obsession until she purges it in a later episode of her life.

The incest is replayed in the marriage, years later, to her own half-brother. Moll learns that her kindly new mother-in-law at the plantation in Virginia is none other than her own mother, transported so long ago through Newgate prison to the new world. Moll has borne two children, and is carrying a third, fathered by this woman’s son, Moll’s half-brother. Once she has discovered their relationship, Moll is distraught. Understandably, she finds that her husband is “nauseous” to her (*MF* 102). Yet Moll at first chooses to conceal her knowledge of the relationship. She goes on for three years bearing the pressure of this secret. Trapped in her fear of being set loose in the world again, Moll avows a determination to “not make the least discovery of it,” and though she “loathed the thoughts of bedding with him” (*MF* 103), she needs time to plan for her inevitable ejection, once again, from the economic security supplied by husband and home.

In response to Moll’s silences and her withdrawal from sexual intercourse, the husband-brother deteriorates, grows “strangely altered, frowned, jealous, and unkind” (*MF* 103), in much the same way that Moll withdraws into illness when the elder brother begins the process of transferring her to his sibling. In this new instance of incest, Moll,

on the other hand, responds quite differently. After the initial shock of realizing that she has married her half-brother and had children by him, Moll is fired up.²⁶ She brings to bear the full force of her suppressed rage at the earlier “incest” with the two brothers:

I was really alienated from him in the consequence of these things; indeed, I mortally hated him as a husband, and it was impossible to remove that riveted aversion I had to him . . . and I think verily it was come to such a height, that I could almost as willingly embraced a dog as have let him offer anything of that kind to me, for which reason I could not bear the thoughts of coming between the sheets with him (*MF* 110).

Since she has entered this union ignorant of her blood relation to her husband, Moll feels no guilt, “I was not much touched with the crime of it, yet the action had something in it shocking to nature, and made my husband, as he thought himself, even nauseous to me” (*MF* 102). She is not particularly upset over the sinfulness or supposed criminality of incest, yet she feels deeply disturbed: “At the same time, it being an unlawful, incestuous living, added to that aversion, and though I had no great concern about it in point of

²⁶Evaluations of Moll’s reaction to the discovery of incest and her treatment of her husband-brother have failed to take into account the evidence of the many pages (101 - 114) that Moll spends in preparing to reveal the incest to her husband. Critics have mainly focused on what seems to be Moll’s cursory dismissal of her husband’s dramatic reaction to her news: “I saw him turn pale and look wild; and I said, ‘Now remember your promise, and receive it with presence of mind; for who could have said more to prepare you for it than I have done?’ However, I called a servant, and got him a little glass of rum (which is the usual dram of the country), for he was just fainting away” (114). Pollak, however, notes that Moll’s incest negatively marks her withdrawal from circulation on the “exchange” of bourgeois relations in which females are circulated as objects among males. As Moll recovers the mother who had abandoned her, she also unwittingly recovers a brother in her husband. When Moll refuses to knowingly participate in the incest, the only alternative available to her, according to Pollak, is to return to circulation as an object of sexual exchange (3 - 8). Ian Bell suggests that Moll’s reaction to incest is more singular than representative, and that this points to the function of the incest episode as a means of individuation for Moll (161 - 161).

conscience, yet everything added to make cohabiting with him the most nauseous thing to me in the world” (*MF* 110).

In addition to the loathing that attends the transgression of a serious societal taboo, Moll’s revulsion is fed, I suggest, by the sudden re-emergence and actualization of the earlier incest threat that presented itself in the episode of the two brothers. In coping with this painful memory, Moll chooses to empower herself, positioning herself to redress the earlier defeat by extracting a victory out of the current incident. It takes Moll several years (and many pages) to confront her husband with the fact of their blood relation (*MF* 101 - 115). During this time, she plans with her mother for an eventual inheritance directly from her, unencumbered by connection with the husband/brother, and makes detailed arrangements so that when she leaves her husband, she will have considerable money and goods with which to support herself (*MF* 108 - 109). This period parallels the elder brother’s lengthy and elaborate machinations, as he patiently breaks down the resistance of his mother, sisters, and Moll to the suit of the younger brother (*MF* 54 - 75). For Moll it is time well-spent in self-education, reflection upon her circumstances, and calculation of the consequences of the options which will present themselves to her, once her identity is revealed.

When Moll has provided for herself sufficiently, she is ready to confront her husband. The strategy she adopts as she approaches her husband recalls the tactics of the elder brother when he first broaches the idea that Moll might accept Robin’s proposal. First, he patiently and cunningly outlines the benefits of her marrying Robin, when of

course he has his own advantage firmly in mind.²⁷ Then he applies a kind of rogue reasoning when he answers her accusations that he had violated his promises to her: “‘I did tell you I would marry you when I was come to my estate; but you see my father is a hale, healthy man, and may live these thirty years still . . . and you never proposed my marrying you sooner, because you know it might be my ruin; and as to all the rest, I have not failed you in anything, you have wanted for nothing’” (*MF* 59).

Similarly, Moll prepares her husband for their inevitable separation by carefully reminding him of the terms of their pre-nuptial agreement, “‘which he entered willingly into with me when I consented to come from England with him, viz. that if I found the country not to agree with me, or that I did not like to live there, I should come away to England again when I pleased, giving him a year’s warning to settle his affairs” (*MF* 103). Next, adopting an attitude of patronizing indulgence and a duplicity that is reminiscent of the elder brother, Moll plans her approach to breaking the shocking news to her half-brother, calculating that her hypocrisy will secure her an advantageous financial arrangement:

‘ . . . I would do it gradually and softly, and with all the art and good humour I was mistress of, and time it also as well as I could, taking him in good humour. I told [my mother] I did not question but, if I could be hypocrite enough to feign more affection to him than I really had, I should succeed in all my design, and we might part with consent, and with a good agreement, for I might love him well enough for a brother, though I could not for a husband’ (*MF* 111).

²⁷Lou Caton discusses the situational ethics exemplified in the elder brother’s arguments and in Moll’s later adoption of such roguish knavery to configure her theft of a child’s necklace as a beneficial lesson for neglectful parents (511 - 512).

Moll lets her husband know that there is more to their situation than he can understand. But she leaves him to suffer in suspense, as she herself once waited in silence while the elder brother plotted her fate, as she parcels out information to him as she sees fit. She first extorts from him a promise to let her escape to England. She then works out the terms of their separation, assuring herself that she will be provided for in the near and distant future. Significantly, she demands written assurances of protection - a contract - from her husband/brother, firmly securing from her husband the protections to which the elder brother had merely alluded:

‘Well,’ said I, ‘come, give it me under your hand, that if you do not find I am in any fault, or that I am willingly concerned in the causes of the misfortune that is to follow, you will not blame me, use me the worse, do me any injury, or make me be the sufferer for that which is not my fault.’

‘That,’ says he, ‘is the most reasonable demand in the world . . . Give me a pen and ink,’ says he . . . (*MF* 113).

She then elicits from her husband additional written promises, specifically, that she will be held harmless for the conditions she is about to disclose, that he will not discuss the matter with anyone except their own mother, and that he will do nothing “to my prejudice or to your mother’s prejudice, without my knowledge and consent” (*MF* 113). Once he is finally told of their incestuous relationship, the husband becomes “distempered in his head” (*MF* 114), attempts suicide, and gradually becomes depressed, eventually enfeebled and, like Oedipus, blind (*MF* 300).

In managing the incest of her marriage to her half-brother, Moll addresses the issue that haunted her first marriage. Her delayed revenge upon the male is total, and she

leaves the marriage with sufficient resources to sustain her. She has successfully mobilized strategies gleaned from the elder brother to protect herself from a repetition of the debacle she had suffered at his hands. Yet Moll does not celebrate a triumph in this recapitulated affair, as she does in the episode of the captain and the lady. She confesses that her “mind was restless too, and uneasy” (*MF* 115). She is cognizant of the strangeness of this episode: “it was so oddly managed that I felt the disappointments very sensibly afterwards” (*MF* 115).

The similarities to the earlier episode, while they are never articulated by Moll, come very close to the surface of her consciousness and cause both the militant zeal with which she plans her escape from the marriage and the strange uneasiness and discomfort she experiences afterwards. Indeed, Moll’s description of her husband-brother’s promises to her before she leaves for England sound astonishingly similar to those made by the elder brother as he pressures her to become his sister-in-law. The husband-brother “. . . promised, and engaged to me to correspond with me as a sister, and to assist and support me as long as I lived; and that if he died before me, he would leave sufficient to his mother to take care of me still, in the name of a sister . . .” (*MF* 115). The elder brother says: “. . . the remembrance of what we have done may be wrapt up in an eternal silence, as if it never happened; you shall always have my respect, and my sincere affection, only then it shall be honest . . . you shall be my dear sister . . .” (*MF* 60). Given such close parallels, it is easy to understand that the connections very nearly break through to Moll’s consciousness and produce the intense uneasiness that she feels.

Suffice it to say that the subliminality of these parallels loads them with psychic energy ready to be tapped, as Moll does.²⁸

In addition to the resonances it evokes with reference to the episode of the two brothers, the incest revelation sequence also reprises a curious episode in Moll's early relationship with her husband-brother. Ignorant of their blood relation, Moll and her doting suitor share a moment in which they communicate without speaking. Scratching with a diamond ring on the surface of the windowpane, they exchange clever verses alluding to their love for one another, to Moll's fortune, or rather lack of one, and to her lover's promise to be faithful regardless of her portion. Each believes the other to have a considerable fortune, and their lines of poetry begin to broach the topic of money: "Virtue alone is an estate / But Money's virtue, gold is fate / I scorn your gold, and yet I love / I'm poor: let's see how kind you prove" (*MF* 93 - 4). Moll's suitor, still declining to speak, continues the dialogue in the medium of pen and ink:

- Be mine with all your poverty.

I took his pen, and followed him immediately, thus -

- Yet secretly you hope I lie.

He told me [still in writing] that was unkind, because it was not just, and that I put him upon contradicting me, which did not consist with good manners, any more than with his affection; and therefore, since I had insensibly drawn him into this poetic scrabble, he begged I would not oblige him to break it off; so he writes again -

²⁸Drawing on Mary Butler's insights into the subliminality of Moll's suppression of proper names in her narrative, I suggest an atmosphere in Defoe's fiction that is psychologically dense but remains just under the surface of consciousness.

- Let love alone be our debate.

I wrote again -

-She loves enough that does not hate.

This he took for a favour, and so laid down the cudgels, that is to say, the pen . . .

(*MF* 94).

After this written exchange, the couple finally begins an ongoing, open, and frank conversation about love and money and the expectations each has brought to their courtship. This discourse continues throughout the courtship period and the first several weeks of their marriage, as Moll literally parcels out to her husband, item by item over a period of several weeks, her small portion of worldly goods and money (*MF* 96 - 98).

A number of parallels organized around communicational modalities operate simultaneously in the two scenes with the half-brother. In the first parallel, when Moll metes out hints to her husband, bit by bit, about the source of her recent coldness to him and finally the truth of their incestuous relationship, she is reenacting the sequences from their courtship and early marriage in which she, little by little, reveals the truth of her scarce financial resources and relinquishes her small portion to her husband's control. In both episodes, these are tactics calculated by Moll to maximize her chances of emerging from the discourse fiscally secure. The second parallel marks a notable shift in Moll's ability to obtain the financial security that she wants and needs. In the earlier scene, Moll has guessed correctly that her new husband will take care of her and provide for her the life of a gentlewoman if she is completely forthcoming with him about her relative poverty: her lover's scribblings serve as testimony of his love, but certainly do not guarantee his faithfulness or monetary support. In the later episode, Moll reinvokes the

writing act, this time to extract firm, documented, legally binding assurances that she will be protected and provided for once they have separated. Significantly, the later episode reverses the gender roles, in that it is the male who must relinquish financial resources to the female. In the third parallel, we are presented with speech as an emblem of dominance. In the earlier episode, the husband initiates both the silence and the written communications, and it is he who decides when writing will end and speech will begin. In the later episode, Moll controls the modes of communication, dictating what her husband writes and when he is to write it, and likewise deciding how much will be divulged, in speech, about their problem at each given moment and when the whole truth will be iterated. When he finally hears Moll say that she is his sister, the husband who was once voluntarily and charmingly silent in his romantic scribbling on glass and paper, gradually descends into actual aphasia, while Moll, on the other hand, has found her voice.

It is not merely the shocking news that destroys the husband-brother; rather, Moll's steady ascendancy unnerves him, beginning with her avoidance of the marriage bed and continuing through her prolonged muteness to him regarding the cause of this apparent rebellion. The later episode transposes the positions of the couple relative to their power within the relationship, with Moll now taking clear control of the communicational modes of speech and writing formerly dominated by her husband in the courtship scene.

Let us further examine the relationship of Moll and this husband-brother, placing it again on the double helix, but this time assessing its connections to a different episode in Moll's life, her union with Jemmy, the Lancashire highwayman. The marriage to

Jemmy affords Moll the opportunity to reverse roles with her lover as she herself becomes the ideal mate she has been seeking unsuccessfully for much of her adult life. This role reversal can best be understood if we first analyze the effects of Moll's apprenticeship in the earlier marriage, that is, what Moll learns in the marriage to her half-brother.

The relationship with the Virginia husband is a literal match, a coupling of Moll with her virtual twin brother. They meet through the Captain and his wife, and Moll, "blessed with admirers enough," had picked out one who courted her with "protestations and oaths that he loved me above all the world" (*MF* 93). Like an old married couple, or like intimate siblings, they seem to be able to complete each other's sentences - in rhyme! - in the odd little scene in which they etch their affections and fears on a pane of glass in Moll's chamber (*MF* 93 - 94). The suitor is so deferential, so tender to Moll that he begs her never to put him into the position of contradicting her, and Moll declares him to be "the best-humoured, merry sort of a fellow that I ever met with" (*MF* 94). On his part, he declares, "I am satisfied that I have got the wife I love" (*MF* 97). At first, they each forbear to inquire into each other's fortunes. In time, they confer candidly on the issues of money and love, as we have seen.

Moll surrenders to him her "little stock" (*MF* 96), and he, ever compliant and considerate, patiently waits for Moll to freely choose to travel across the sea with him to live on his Virginia plantation (*MF* 98). There she discovers that her new husband, like Moll herself, is "no fool" (*MF* 98). Like Moll, he is enterprising, hard-working, and practical, "a diligent, careful man in the main work of laying up an estate" (*MF* 104). He seems sufficiently attached to Moll so that her avoidance of sexual intercourse with him

when she learns that they have the same mother is genuinely disturbing to him. Her hint that they are not legally husband and wife plunges him into an “apoplex” and “violent fever” (*MF* 106), as if separation from Moll is potentially fatal, like the splitting of conjoined twins.

Upon recovery, he will make himself agreeable to Moll at almost any cost. During a period of truce recommended by the mother, he is determined to renew his love for Moll so that they “might live together in a good understanding as we used to do” (*MF* 111):

He then told me he was resolved not to differ with me in anything, and that therefore he would importune me no more about it, resolving to acquiesce in whatever I did or said; only begged I should then agree, that whatever it was, it should no more interrupt our quiet and our mutual kindness (*MF* 112).

In every way, ever since their first meeting, the husband-brother has pursued synonymity with the person of Moll. He seeks and cultivates union with her until the time comes when she must finally tell him the truth about their blood relation. And even then, with the incest fully acknowledged by mother/mother-in-law, brother/husband, and sister/wife, he is willing to sacrifice himself to put an end to Moll’s difficulties: “I’ll make it easy; there’s nobody in the way of it all but myself” (*MF* 114). The literalization of their oneness has severed him forever from the woman with whom he sought synchronicity: he is rescued from two suicide attempts (one for each of them?) and declines into a “long, lingering consumption” (*MF* 115).

Prior to her shocking discovery, Moll describes her feelings for her husband-brother as felicitous, agreeable, pleasant, affectionate, and friendly (*MF* 112). Quite

simply, they get along. They are content with each other. Moll says that she “thought herself the happiest creature alive” while she was living this quiet life as well-supported wife and dutiful daughter-in-law (*MF* 99). It is striking, however, that Moll devotes so little attention to describing her life in Virginia, which is after all the life of a gentlewoman, the goal toward which she has been striving, the life that most critics say she has craved since her childhood.²⁹ Yet we hear almost nothing of this life until it is shattered by the discovery of incest. What does Moll tell us? She tells us that her husband has an ample income of over twelve hundred pounds from three plantations (*MF* 95). She tells us that her husband’s mother greets her with “all the demonstrations of tenderness and affection . . . that were possible to be expressed” (*MF* 99), and that her mother-in-law continues to reside with the couple at Moll’s request (*MF* 99). She tells us that she thought herself “the happiest creature alive” (*MF* 99). The life of a gentlewoman is described in little over one paragraph. Why? An obvious answer is that Defoe simply had more story to tell, and that he uses incest as an opportunity to disrupt a premature pastoral ending and return to more exciting events. Another answer might be that Moll’s first sojourn (as a gentlewoman) in Virginia is unsatisfying in terms of the narrative logic of the text, in that it insufficiently represents Moll’s real goal, which is to achieve such a lifestyle in her own right.

To probe this possibility, let us now turn to Moll’s marriage to Jemmy, which will lead to her second sojourn in Virginia. Through Jemmy, Moll attains that other goal which is at the core of her story: she herself takes on the role of a gentleman-tradesman.

Whereas Moll and her brother were a perfect match, Moll and Jemmy, the Lancashire

²⁹See Boardman on the neglect of the quieter episodes of Moll’s life as pointing to Defoe’s control of the narrative, rather than Moll’s (121).

highwayman, are the ideal *mates*. In contrast to the warm comfort she had enjoyed early on with the assiduous husband-brother, the relationship with Jemmy uncovers Moll's own passion, panache, and preternatural power. In addition to his extravagant equipage (*MF* 149), Jemmy's "true, gallant spirit" (*MF* 154) attracts Moll. He is a "lovely person indeed, of generous principles, good sense, and of abundance of good humour" (*MF* 155). In Jemmy Moll has finally found someone who is a genuine gentleman: ". . . he was really a gentleman, unfortunate and low, but had lived well" (*MF* 154). For Moll, Jemmy is "great even to magnificence" (*MF* 149).

Moll and Jemmy are at first drawn together in mutual deception, as was the case in the half-brother's courtship, each thinking the other is a fortune. They discover the truth about each other's finances only after they are married. However, Jemmy, like the husband-brother, accepts Moll's poverty and vows that he would never have abused her fortune, if she had had one:

'You would have indeed been cheated, my dear,' says he, 'but you would not have been undone, for fifteen thousand pounds would have maintained us both very handsomely in this country; and I assure you,' added he, 'I had resolved to have dedicated every groat of it to you; I would not have wronged you of a shilling, and the rest I would have made up in my affection to you, and tenderness of you, as long as I lived' (*MF* 152).

Jemmy's sincerity touches Moll: "This was very honest indeed, and I really believed he spoke as he intended, and that he was a man that was as well qualified to make me happy, as to his temper and behavior, as any man ever was" (*MF* 152). Moll is deeply attracted to Jemmy's refined character: "'Tis something of a relief even to be undone by a man of

honour, rather than by a scoundrel . . . He was really a gentleman . . .” (*MF* 154 - 155). Moll and Jemmy reconcile with each other, confessing that despite their initial attempts to delude each other, they have fallen in love (*MF* 155). They come to realize that they have forged an insoluble connection. Miles from the inn where Moll calls out his name as she laments his unbearable departure, Jemmy is mysteriously summoned to her side (*MF* 157).³⁰ Moll later saves him from certain execution by preventing a detachment of deputies from following him (*MF* 185). Jemmy, as we shall see, remains forever in her debt.

Let us take a closer look at Jemmy so as to better understand why Moll is so attracted to him and how she attains her goal through him. In contrast to the hard-working husband-brother who has diligently conserved and expanded his mother’s estates in Virginia, Jemmy, the epitome of gentility, is incapable of work. He is truly at a loss to rally himself to the task of supporting Moll, the new wife who has just disclosed her poverty to him: “Come, be easy as you can; I will endeavor to find out some way or other to live . . . I must try the world again; a man ought to think like a man . . .” (*MF* 154). Although he is solicitous of Moll, Jemmy knows that he cannot provide for her. Only a few weeks into their marriage, he turns over to her the little money and few valuables he possesses and leaves, claiming that his staying would only serve to further deplete their funds and put her at greater risk:

³⁰ Lovitt points out that this occurrence is the only metaphysical event in the text, and it sets Jemmy apart from all of Moll’s lovers: he is the only one who comes back. Lovitt says that it also underscores some parallels among Moll’s relationships. Jemmy’s untimely departure and his letter absolving Moll from her marital obligation to him repeats the pattern of the gentleman-tradesman, Moll’s second husband (4). Such parallels support my view of Defoe’s careful structuring.

‘ . . . I am a dog; I have abused you . . . Forgive me, my dear! I ask your pardon with the greatest sincerity. I am the most miserable of men in having deluded you. I have been so happy to possess you, and am so wretched as to be forced to fly from you . . . I am not able to see you ruined by me, and myself unable to support you’ (*MF* 156).

When Jemmy mysteriously returns, he tells Moll how he had dismissed three servants and sent the fellows away to seek their fortunes. “‘And,’ says he, ‘it cost me some tears all alone by myself to think how much happier they were than their master, for they could go to the next gentleman’s house to see for a service, whereas,’ said he, ‘I knew not whither to go or what to do with myself’” (*MF* 158). His helplessness mobilizes into actuation the spirit of Moll’s earlier reflection that “a fortune would not have been ill-bestowed on him” (*MF* 155). She attempts to assume the dominant role in the task of their maintenance as a couple, and insists, as a husband might, that their support should come from her funds alone: “Here I told him I would live with him now till all my money was spent, but would not let him spend a shilling of his own” (*MF* 160). Moll proposes to Jemmy the same plan that her husband-brother had earlier offered to her, that is, to go over to Virginia. There Moll feels they can claim her inheritance and make a new start. She suggests how “a man of application would presently lay a foundation for a family, and, in a very few years, be certain to raise an estate” (*MF* 160). She indicates that they will be able to return to England and live comfortably by the profits of their land. She even lays out a plan for obtaining the three hundred pounds that they will need in order to acquire servants and tools and enough English goods to trade in Virginia to get them started (*MF* 160 - 161). This then is Moll’s first attempt to directly assume the role of

gentleman-tradesman. She proposes that she take control of the couple's finances. She initiates a viable business plan and outlines a sensible strategy for launching and maintaining their new enterprise in Virginia. Her plan is rebuffed, however, as Jemmy proposes an alternate scheme to set up a farm in Ireland and send for Moll when his affairs are settled. He subsequently leaves her for a second time, ostensibly to obtain the funding they will need to take up residence in Ireland (*MF* 161 - 162).

Not long after their separation, however, both Moll and Jemmy turn to a life of crime. Jemmy resumes his former predations as a highwayman. Moll becomes a thief after she is widowed by a banker whose imprudent business dealings have ruined both her own funds and his.³¹ Moll repeatedly refers to her thievery as her "trade" (*MF* 188 - 258), a term which links her criminal activities to her goal of becoming a gentleman-tradesman.³² She asserts that she experienced "success unparalleled" (*MF* 254) that "made my name as famous as any thief of my sort" (*MF* 249). Years later, Jemmy and Moll end their criminal careers when each is captured and sent to Newgate. When her death sentence is commuted to transportation to Virginia, Moll reveals herself to Jemmy and relates how she had once diverted a troop of deputies from pursuing him. He exclaims that he owes his life to her and gallantly promises to deliver her from her present misery in Newgate (*MF* 280). He never attempts to fulfil this promise, however,

³¹It ought to be noted that Moll is a bigamist, marrying several times after her second husband, the linen-draper, deserts her, leaving her, as she says, with "a husband and no husband" (*MF* 81). Similarly, Moll marries Jemmy while she has a husband still alive in Virginia, and weds the banker when her husband Jemmy leaves her. Considering the young Moll's insistence that a marital bond exists with the elder brother, it is tempting to suggest that she learns from him how to overlook such commitments.

³²According to Chaber, Moll's use of the term "trade" suggests that her career of thievery mimics the corruption of capitalist society (213). This supports my point that Moll's trajectory toward independence sustains both a story of self-culture and a parody.

and, in any case, Moll rejects it: “I told him, by no means; it was a risk too great, not worth his running the hazard of it” (*MF* 280). Like a protective husband, Moll assumes full responsibility for Jemmy’s waywardness:

This gentleman’s misfortunes I placed all to my account. He had told me at Chester he was ruined by that match, and that his fortunes were made desperate on my account; for that thinking that I had been a fortune, he was run into debt more than he was able to pay, and that he knew not what course to take; that he would go into the army and carry a musket, or buy a horse and take a tour, as he called it; and though I never told him that I was a fortune, and so did not actually deceive him myself, yet I did encourage the having it thought that I was so, and by that means I was the occasion originally of his mischief (*MF* 264).

Moll blames herself for Jemmy’s desperate situation: “I was overwhelmed with grief for him; my own case gave me no disturbance compared to this, and I loaded myself with reproaches on his account. I bewailed his misfortunes, and the ruin he was now come to . . .” (*MF* 264 -265). Miriam Lerenbaum has suggested that Moll’s concern for Jemmy in Newgate is the catalyst both for her repentance, and for her increased capacity for love and compassion (116). In my view, their Newgate encounter catalyzes as well Moll’s agency in her own success story, propelling both her and Jemmy toward their happy life in the new world.

Thus, in Newgate, Moll’s apprenticeship draws to an end as she masterfully marshals the skills she has been honing for so long toward the practical actions that are needed for the final achievement of the status of gentleman-tradesman. A transformed

Moll assumes traditional masculine roles.³³ It is Moll who plans and executes all of the steps that are necessary to secure the couple's timely release from Newgate. It is Moll who prevails upon Jemmy, against his wishes, to effect what we would call a plea bargain: he admits his guilt and accepts transportation to Virginia rather than stand trial: "I lay at him night and day to delay it no longer" (*MF* 285). It is Moll, not Jemmy, who makes the elaborate arrangements that bring them both into the same ship; conducts the necessary bank business through the agency of her "governess" to assure that they will leave England with money in their pockets and stock laid up in London against the day that they will send for it; assembles an impressive array of tools, goods, and supplies (purchased with the profits of their criminal careers) to make their fresh start; sees to it that they are able to ship these goods without arousing undue suspicion; manages the officers and crew so as to obtain decent living quarters and special treatment; even secures assurances that they will be set free upon arrival in Virginia rather than be sold into service (*MF* 286 - 298).

Jemmy, in contrast, is terrified of being sent to Virginia, especially when it appears for a while that he may have to be carried there alone. He frets: "he began to be in despair of seeing me till he came to Virginia, which made him almost desperate; seeing that, on the other hand, if I should not be there, if any accident of the sea or of mortality should take me away, he should be the most undone creature there in the world" (*MF*

³³It is useful here to consider Chaber's point that Moll's alignment with the patriarchally designated "masculine" qualities of "competence, autonomy, risk-taking, independence, rationality" suggest that "her criminality is in many respects a step forward in her development" as a female. Chaber argues that associating femininity with "incompetence, helplessness, irrationality, passivity, noncompetitiveness, being nice" is as unacceptable to Defoe as it is to feminists (221). Similarly, Lerenbaum, referring solely to Moll's life as a thief, attests to Moll as a successful career woman and "mastercraftsman"(115).

289). When, thanks to the efforts of Moll and her governess, Jemmy is finally brought to the ship where Moll awaits him, he is completely dependent upon Moll: “. . . he was as much at a loss as a child what to do with himself, or with what he had, but by directions” (*MF* 290). When Moll explains the arrangements she has made, however, he cheerfully puts himself in her hands: “‘My dear,’ says he, ‘thou hast twice saved my life; from henceforward it shall be all employed for you, and I’ll always take your advice’” (*MF* 292).

Once the ship sails, the delicate Jemmy, “who bore the sea very ill, and was very sick, especially when it blew so hard” (*MF* 297), publicly plays the role of a husband while privately living the life of a wife: “I gave my husband a purse, in which was eighty guineas, and he put it into the captain’s hand” (*MF* 296). Having already purchased their freedom in Virginia, Moll is more powerful and Jemmy more vulnerable than ever. Again following the example of the elder brother, she shares with her spouse only enough information about her past life and their future prospects in the colony to stop his “importuning me continually” (*MF* 301 - 303). Anxious lest her Virginia husband-brother or their son discover “that I had such a thing as a husband” (*MF* 304), Moll suggests that Jemmy be sent to Carolina until she can resolve her family affairs and join him there. Jemmy, like an obedient wife, is at first compliant: “he told me he would be willing to remove to any other part of the country, or even to any other country, if I thought fit” (*MF* 301). When they have settled in their new home in Virginia, however, Jemmy refuses to be separated from Moll:

. . . he would never stir without me, being himself perfectly unacquainted with the country, and with the methods of settling there or anywhere else. Then I

thought we would both go [to Carolina] first with part of our goods, and that when we were settled I should come back to Virginia and fetch the remainder; but even then I knew he would never part with me, and be left there to go on alone (*MF* 304).

In time, Moll, the long lost parent, reveals herself to her son. Having endured the virtual absence of his demented father, Humphrey, very much his mother's son, welcomes her with gifts of gold and goods. Though she kisses the ground where her offspring walks, Moll, ever the entrepreneur, obtains from him written deeds to all that property to which she is entitled. Though she offers her child the "hundred kisses" of a mother (*MF* 313), Moll the business partner engages the services of her son as manager of her plantation, the legacy bestowed upon her by her own industrious mother, now long dead (*MF* 311). The son seems to revel not only in the restoration of a tender mother but in the recovery of a shrewd surrogate father and business colleague with whom he can share and expand the family enterprise: ". . . he told me, that as I came to demand it before the crop was off, I had a right to the produce of the current year, and so he paid me £100 in Spanish pieces of eight, and desired me to give him a receipt for it . . ." (*MF* 313).

In all of Moll's business dealings, Jemmy has no role. He pursues in Virginia a manner of living that actualizes the lifestyle he performed but never realized in England, that of a gentleman:

The case was plain; he was bred a gentleman, and by consequence was not only unacquainted [with work], but indolent, and when we did settle, would much rather go out into the woods with his gun, which they call there hunting, and

which is the ordinary work of the Indians, and which they do as servants; I say he would much rather do that than attend the natural business of his plantation” (*MF* 304).

In the occupation of shooting, Jemmy is more (or less) than feminized. He is associated with the lowest order in this new society. His leisure activity coincides with the work of non-white servants.³⁴ Hunting with guns is not what free Indians do. It is what they do when they have been pressed into service to the Europeans. So Jemmy, too proud to go into service in England, now does the “work” of the most menial and marginalized class of servants in the new world, even as Moll’s position is ascendent. Through Jemmy’s *sub-servience* Moll fashions him into the equivalent of a wife.³⁵ Indeed, only two years after their arrival in Virginia, Moll is able to take care of Jemmy in fine style, as he was never able to do for her. She takes pleasure in indulging his infinite leisure and in furnishing the equipage for his dashing and glamorous appearance:

. . . and I took especial care to buy for him all those things that I knew he delighted to have; as two good long wigs, two silver-hilted swords, three or four fine fowling pieces, a fine saddle with holsters and pistols very handsome, with a scarlet cloak; and, in a word, everything I could think of to oblige him (*MF* 315).³⁶

³⁴Mitchell points out that just as Moll in her childhood had admired the “‘madam’ who is both lady and prostitute, the irony is that Jemmy’s gentlemanly habits are likewise those of the lowest possible social group” (22).

³⁵Jemmy’s role reversal “merely illuminates the pathos of a situation considered perfectly normal for women under the bourgeois form of patriarchy,” that is, the relegation of female energy to “waste and perversion” (Chaber 222).

³⁶Miriam Lerenbaum points out that Moll is “positively uxorious” in her solicitousness toward Jemmy (117).

Moll's other litany, the list of goods ordered from England or sent by Humphrey from the plenty of their Virginia homesteads, with its abundance of livestock, tools, harnesses, and cloth for servants' apparel, far exceeds in length, detail, and general enthusiasm the description of Jemmy's finery or her own, confirming the masculinized stance Moll prefers for herself as the prosperous land owner and manager of a substantial estate: "As for myself, I wanted very little of clothes or linen . . ." (*MF* 315). In the considerable property she has accumulated, she earns a success that recalls the prosperity of her husband-brother to whom she had once alluded as a "man of application" (*MF* 160). Like her husband-brother, Moll has successfully assumed the role of gentleman-tradesman.

Moll's particular attention to the condition of the women-servants, "lusty wenches . . . one of which happened to come double, having been got with child by one of the seamen in the ship" (*MF* 315), reinforces her masculine posture. In a sense, this servant girl, sent by Moll's old mid-wife and governess Mother Midnight, restores to Moll and Jemmy the child - "a stout boy" - whom Moll had left in England, and replays, in safety now and with a different ending, the nightmares of the little gentlewoman and the gentleman-highwayman who had resisted being put to service so many years before. "Telling upon his fingers" the extent of the wealth Moll has accumulated, Jemmy is amazed: "' . . . who says I was deceived when I married a wife in Lancashire?'" (*MF* 315). Jemmy says he has married a fortune after all. In many ways, he has married a husband.

It should be noted here that when *Moll* marries husbands, on the other hand, she is not as lucky as Jemmy. Although she always chooses husbands who seem to be suitably

rich, she soon discovers that the hoped for protection of a prosperous spouse is not to be relied upon. She learns, as Mona Scheuermann points out, that “marriage itself is not as good a safeguard as money” (225). She witnesses a series of spectacular failures. Wrecked by extravagance, bankrupted by incompetence in business, dead leaving scant resources, deranged by incest, or merely masquerading as a man of means, all of Moll’s husbands demonstrate that the only reliable asset for a woman is money. It has been argued that Moll deserves what she doesn’t get in these marriages because she has misused the institution of marriage for financial gain.³⁷ If she has done so, she has merely been imitating her masters, men like the elder brother who disposes of her for a more financially and socially advantageous marriage, and all those husbands who come after, marrying Moll for the fortune that they think she possesses, or careless of their own responsibility to provide for her. Moll learns through her marriages that she must procure her own money if she is to secure her own survival.³⁸ The chronicle of Moll’s accumulation of wealth is in large part the journal of a criminal woman, that most “outside” of outsiders.³⁹ At the same time, however, Moll’s story, as she tells it, exposes the roguery of her male tutors whom she has beaten at their own game. Her incremental successes document the progress of the pupil who has surpassed her masters. She

³⁷Paraphrasing Defoe, Blewett accuses Moll of being a “matrimonial whore” (87).

³⁸According to Chaber, Moll’s struggles reveal “the essential classlessness of wives - always only one man away from . . . poverty” (218).

³⁹See Zemon Davis on the deviant woman in early modern Europe, and studies of criminality (Jackson) and the criminality of women (Flowers, Rietz, Adler).

achieves prosperity and autonomy by co-opting the heretofore exclusive domain of men.⁴⁰

There is yet another arena in which Moll asserts a kind of sovereignty even as she imitates her masters. Readers and critics alike have deemed it to be a most uncomfortable feature of Moll's story: the repeated "abandonment" of her children. The fact that Moll always leaves them in the care of others is often overlooked. At the end of her first marriage, to Robin the younger brother, Moll hands over her two children, albeit with alarming sauciness, to the family of her deceased husband: "My two children were, indeed, taken happily off my hands by my husband's father and mother, and that, by the way, was all they got by Mrs. Betty" (*MF* 76). Later, as her incestuous marriage to her husband-brother becomes intolerable, Moll prepares to leave the children she has borne him in the care of their relatives in Virginia. Her husband (and critics through the years) call Moll "an unnatural mother" (*MF* 104). Moll expresses considerable concern for her offspring, however, fearing that the revelation of her "unnatural" relation to their father will put the children at risk: "the children would be ruined too, having no legal claim to any of his effects" (*MF* 109). She obliges her mother to work to moderate her son's potentially recriminatory reactions, to "concern herself to prevent his slighting the children . . ." (*MF* 110). Next, when the gentleman at Bath repents of his affair with Moll, she leaves their son behind in London, but in strict compliance with her lover's advice: "I will take due care of the child; leave him where he is, or take him with you, as you please." (*MF* 132). Some time thereafter, although "it touched my heart so forcibly to

⁴⁰Chaber argues that Moll transforms the "eternal feminine cycle of reproduction into the historical social cycle of production," thus closely linking Defoe's criticism of sexism with his criticism of capitalism (213).

think of parting with the child [by her Lancashire husband Jemmy]" (*MF* 173), Moll gives the infant over to Mother Midnight who finds a decent home for him for five pounds a year. Finally, she will make the same kind of arrangements for her son by the kindly banker (*MF* 195).

The disposition of these children has weighed more heavily on the conscience of Moll's audience than on Moll herself. Except for the apparently genuine affection for her son by Jemmy, and the astute assessment of the financial complications of separation from her Virginia family, Moll seems to show little or no attachment to her children. In this, Moll again follows the model of the men to whom she is apprenticing. She is imitating the males in her various circles who rely on others to perform the domestic duties associated with child rearing, and for whom it is apparently not only acceptable but admirable to do so. Throughout the affair of the two brothers, for example, during a series of events which threatens to disrupt the prospects of the two brothers as well as the peace of the entire household, the head of the family, the father, is conspicuously absent: ". . . he was a man in a hurry of public affairs and getting money, seldom at home, thoughtful of the main chance, but left all those things to his wife" (*MF* 72). Moll too concentrates her energies on trade but lacks such a wife.⁴¹ We might note that the governess Mother Midnight, in carrying out all of Moll's instructions relating to her transportation with Jemmy to America, fulfills the role of surrogate wife to Moll.

Moll holds before her the recurring models of men who concern themselves with the getting of money, not the raising of children. For these men, domestic order, which requires the appropriate disposition of offspring, is purchased along with the acquisition

⁴¹In her essay Judy Syfers playfully wishes for a wife to manage all the minutiae as well as the hard work of relationships and domestic life (165).

of a capable wife, mid-wife, wet-nurse, maid, or governess. We cannot blame Moll if she has few female models of motherliness to rely upon. Moll's own mother never raises her child, but gives her over in infancy to a succession of keepers who would in time include family relations, wandering gypsies, and strangers. Only one of these keepers actually turns out to be a caregiver, the kindly nurse, Moll's affectionate foster-mother. Moll, the virtually discarded bastard, has at least made sure that her own children are cared for. When she brings her own illegitimate son to join his father, the "gentleman at Bath," she takes special note of the way her lover sweeps her into his own chariot, leaving "the servant and the child in the hired coach" (*MF* 127). She is again observing and internalizing, as she has all through her child-bearing years, how enterprising tradesmen and fine gentlemen fulfill their parental obligations.

Finally, she learns to provide for her child by Jemmy as these men do: she describes at considerable length (*MF* 172 - 177) how she actively participates in the adoption of the boy, through the mediation of Mother Midnight, by ". . . a very wholesome-looking, likely woman, a cottager's wife, but she had very good clothes and linen, and everything well about her" to whom she promises "great things if she would be kind to the child" (*MF* 177). Free now to attend to her advancement in the world through marriage to the banker, Moll reflects: "And thus my great care was over, after a manner, which though it did not at all satisfy my mind, yet was the most convenient for me, as my affairs then stood, of any that could be thought of at the time" (*MF* 177). The disposition of her child by Jemmy is the culmination of a long process whereby Moll Flanders, "working mother" and "unnatural mother," has learned how to be a father.

We have seen how Moll's apprenticeship to maleness contributes to the attainment of wealth and comfort in Virginia where she lives the life of a gentleman-tradesman, diligently managing the business of her estate while supporting the indolence of her lovely and beloved Lancashire husband. Her success exposes the hypocrisy of the male behaviors she has imitated. The design of this parody supports a view of Defoe as a thorough ironist. It also argues in favor of a proto-feminist stance in *Moll Flanders* that is substantive enough, in terms of its implicit criticism of patriarchy and its foregrounding of alternative feminine programs to authority (gender-bending), to require the imposition of editorial control in the preface. Moll's success also suggests that Defoe is working from a creative and daring sensitivity to the potency of the deviant female as a construct that effectively renders a powerful view of the inconstancies of what is accepted as the conventional world and the fluidity of identity that is requisite for a woman set adrift in that world.

I do not mean to suggest that Defoe's technique is impeccable, nor that his construct is entirely successful. Indeed, Defoe struggles to sustain a pattern of narrative revision that will link picaresque episodes together without benefit of the causality that we have come to expect in the modern novel. This has been read by many as a weakness. My study, instead, asks what the picaresque structure *does*, rather than what it fails to do. Defoe's disposition of picaresque episode emblemizes Moll's struggle toward a coherent sense of self that is initiated by interior impulses toward independence and actuated through the recapitulation of seemingly disparate episodes of her history. The structure of the picaresque episodic narrative is itself an emblem of the picaresque self that is both the subject and the agent of that narrative. The distinct self that emerges is -

like the narrative - fragmented, paratactic, and protean yet continuous in its energetic trajectory toward the goal of synthesis.

A Word about Chapters IV and V

In the final two chapters of this study, we shall examine the picaresque mode in mutation. In Chapter IV, we will consider several treatments of a single pícara as they appear in the same author, Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, and then in Chapter V, we will look at the reincarnation of this character in a dramatic work by Bertolt Brecht. (For the sake of clarity, we shall refer to Grimmelshausen's character as "Courasche," and to Brecht's as "Courage" or "Mother Courage.") My aim in Chapter IV is to suggest that the gender-bending figure of Courasche emerges ultimately as a successful one, notwithstanding counter-pressures within the Grimmelshausen works themselves that would cast her as a failure and would condemn her for her immorality and for transgressing the boundaries of her gender. Next, in Chapter V, I will delineate some major influences of Courasche upon the twentieth-century dramatic character of Mother Courage. At that point, the focus will shift from a discussion of the ways in which the figure of the pícara moves from one literary work to another, to an examination of what happens when the picaresque mode itself is transferred from one genre to another. From this exercise, I shall extract the genre-bending experiment that is intended as the capstone to this study: a consideration of Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children* as a picaresque.

The relationship of *Mother Courage* to *The Runagate Courage* has been understated in the critical literature. One approach, typified in Hiller and Osborne's introduction to their translation of Grimmelshausen's novel, is to point out the differences rather than the similarities between the central characters of the two works (RC 22). In other analyses, *The Runagate Courage* is relatively neglected in favor of an association of

Brecht's play with Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus*. In these studies, the stress has generally been on the Thirty Years War as an arena for the two authors' views of the world and society. Thus, comparisons tend to give short shrift to the specific connections between the two pícaras. Similarly, the influence of the picaresque on Brecht's theory and practice of theatre has been insufficiently addressed. Peter Thomson makes this point in his detailed study of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. He mentions the similarity of Brecht's play to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and urges that *Mother Courage* be examined as a "rare masterpiece of picaresque drama" (6 - 7). My work in these final chapters is intended to begin to fill these gaps. My aim is not only to uncover those links to the picaresque that will elucidate aspects of Brecht's dramaturgy, but also to see in new light the inter-relatedness of episodic structure and the picaresque construction of character.

Chapter IV

Retold Stories, Part 1: Gender-bending and Literary Revision -

Grimmelshausen's *The Runagate Courage*

Courasche appears or is referred to in several sections of the works by Grimmelshausen that have come to be known as the Simplician writings. These volumes are endowed with notoriously long titles that have been abbreviated in various ways by different translators and critics. We shall refer to the first as *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, or *Simplicissimus*. In this text, we find the first reference to Courasche although she is not mentioned by name. She then reappears in *The Runagate Courage*, Grimmelshausen's first full treatment of the pícara, a pseudo-autobiographical narrative supposed to have been written by Courasche herself. Further references to Courasche appear in the editorial comments that are appended at the beginning and at the end of Courasche's text. A final set of references appears in the text by Grimmelshausen which we shall call *Heedless Hopalong*, or *Hopalong*.⁴² I shall consider each of these texts, including the two editorial pieces appended to Courasche's pseudo-autobiography, as a separate stage in the treatment of the Courasche figure, so that we shall trace Courasche beginning with *Simplicissimus*, moving on to the revised versions that appear in the prefatory comments, main text, and postscript of *The Runagate Courage*, and ending with *Heedless Hopalong*. J. M. Ritchie urges that the Simplician writings be considered together as one cohesive work, as he claims Grimmelshausen himself intended (48). If we follow Ritchie's

⁴²*The Runagate Courage* is the title given by Hiller and Osborne to their 1965 translation. The long and exuberant titles of all three of these works are provided in my list of works cited.

suggestion, analyzing separately the several appearances of a single character in a single work may seem unorthodox. However, *Simplicissimus*, *The Runagate Courage*, and *Heedless Hopalong* have been published (and analyzed) separately over the years. Furthermore, this methodology is appropriate to my purpose since I intend to show that the figure of Courasche as presented in the main part of *The Runagate Courage*, that is, in “her own” text, contests and overcomes the treatment she receives in the other pieces, including the appendices to her own story. Grimmelshausen creates the figure of Courasche through the voice of Simplicissimus in the text that bears this character’s name. She is then permitted to respond to Simplicissimus in her own voice in *The Runagate Courage*. Subsequent re-visitations (in the addenda and in *Hopalong*) attempt to mitigate and control that voice, but they fail to do so. What results is a diametrical poetic of literary revision: a pícara who rewrites herself and then, by the sheer force of that revision, resists and frustrates all further revisions. This chapter will show that the application of picaresque techniques and themes - the relentless piling on and piling up of episode upon fast-moving episode built upon the triad of orphaned outcast, apprenticeship to masters, and the paradox of gender - is powerfully summative in its function and effect, producing the stunning asymmetry of Courasche and her rival revisions.

The revisiting of any character in a narrative told from the perspective of that particular character is unprecedented and unique in the Simplician writings. J. M. Ritchie compares this phenomenon to the seventeenth-century equivalent of a television series spin-off (49). Equally unusual is the fact that the re-visitation gives a character who was minor, slighted, debased - and female - the opportunity to tell her own story. Also striking

is the fact that Grimmelshausen allows Courasche to lash back at her detractor.

Completely unexpected, however, and still debated by scholars, is the possibility that Grimmelshausen's re-visitation of Courasche in *The Runagate Courage* constitutes an emancipatory gesture toward women. This is the position that I take. My approach differs from other femino-sympathetic analyses in that my interpretation proceeds from an understanding of the picaresque mode and its capacity either to support or to de-stabilize a feminist project.

Let us begin with the first appearance of our picara in *Simplicissimus*, which was first published around 1668 or 1669. Generally recognized as an impressive literary document of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), *Simplicissimus* has itself been read as a picaresque narrative purporting to be the autobiography of the title character. Never mentioned by name, Courasche appears in a single incident narrated in Book Five, Chapter Six. Simplicissimus tells of making love, in the course of his travels, to a beautiful woman who claims to be of noble birth (SS 278). The narrator asserts that he was disgusted by her wantonness:

At the resort there was a very beautiful lady who let it be known that she was of nobility, but as I figured it she was more *mobilis* than *nobilis*. I busily paid court to this man-trap, for she seemed to be a good dish. After a short time I received free access not only to her house, but also to any other privilege I might have wished and hoped for. But from the beginning I was disgusted with her easy ways and wondered how to get rid of her without trouble, for she seemed to be more interested in fleecing my purse than in marrying. Whenever I was with her she

showered me with loving, ardent glances and other manifestations of her fiery affection, so that I was ashamed for both myself and her (SS 278 - 279).

As it turns out, Simplicissimus finds a way to rid himself of this embarrassing liaison. He exposes the woman to public shame by playing a cruel trick. Using blanks, he pretends to shoot her and arranges, at the same time, to have her clothing spattered with blood from a syringe. Hysterical with fear and wildly seeking aid, she exhibits what she thinks are genuine wounds not only to her doctor but also to the people who are taking their holiday in the resort town. They, of course, respond by laughing at her and later they even make up a song about her and miss no opportunity to jeer at her whenever she passes. (This incident does not actually appear in *Simplicissimus*. Courasche herself recounts it in her own narrative [RC 162]).

By including the story of their liaison and its conclusion in his published autobiography, Simplicissimus basks in the pleasure of exposing this woman's degradation. The view of Courasche available to the reader of *Simplicissimus* is devastatingly partial. We are given only the passage directly quoted. Simplicissimus admits no share of guilt in their licentious relationship and certainly expresses no regret at his despicable treatment of her. In this initial script, Courasche has no name and no voice of her own. However, the image of Courasche's disgrace and the sense of her wantonness conveyed in this scene need to be tempered by an understanding of Grimmelshausen's views on the relationship of the sexes as expressed in the body of his work. John W. Jacobson's analysis has been very helpful in pointing out ample evidence in the Simplician writings that Grimmelshausen repeatedly raises the issue of male culpability for the immorality of females (*Defense* 50 - 51) and for the ill treatment of both virtuous

and immoral women (*Culpable Male* 151). Rapes perpetrated by plundering soldiers early in the Simplician series, for example, are punctuated by the pitiful screams of the victims, which the young Simplicissimus hears. Jacobson asserts that the single humane note in this episode is struck by the violated maid-servant who attempts to protect the youthful Simplicissimus by warning him to run away. Later, Jacobson suggests, Simplicissimus' first marriage reveals his own moral flaws and indiscriminate drives while emphasizing the honorable behavior of his spouse. When he follows his lusts, and not true love, into a second marriage, it is clear that he himself, and neither his wife nor the nature of woman, is the cause of his disappointment. It is most significant, Jacobson argues, that Grimmelshausen decidedly judges his own sex more harshly than the opposite in his last works, *Vogelnest I* and *II*. In the incident of the merchant, he gives us a picture of a good woman victimized by a man's schemes, but, importantly, foregrounds the defeat and despair of the scheming male. Jacobson argues that the schemes and deceits of Grimmelshausen's male characters far outstrip the culpability of the females (*Culpable Male* 150 - 161).

The Runagate Courage, believed to have been published by 1670, is the first work to be derived from *Simplicissimus*.⁴³ Grimmelshausen provides the beautiful, passionate woman described by Simplicissimus with the opportunity to avenge herself for the public scene in which she was mocked and disgraced, and for the humiliation of having been exposed in Simplicissimus' book. In this text, Courasche will "spite Simplicissimo" (RC 34) by telling her own life story in such a way that it shames Simplicissimus by revealing her true nature and thus his gullibility and vulnerability to her duplicitous charms. Her

⁴³See Schulz-Behrend and Hiller and Osborne (*HH*) on the dating of the Simplician texts.

attack on her detractor is full of irony: she constructs the history of an “honorable minx” (RC 34) in order to reveal just what sort of woman Simplex had fallen for - a powerful, clever, and manipulative charlatan who knew exactly what she was doing all the while. Building on Jacobson’s analysis, I suggest that when Courasche is given a text of her own, she takes her revenge not only on Simplicissimus, but upon all men.

Courasche’s vibrant voice, inscribed in her autobiographical narrative, is framed by brief introductory and concluding remarks which are quite problematic. As we saw in the preface to *Moll Flanders*, the tone, vocabulary and sentiments of the collateral editorial material of *The Runagate Courage* stand in sharp contrast to the text they enclose. Feminist critics and others suggest that the preface and the addendum represent Grimmelshausen’s misogyny, a view of women as weak, licentious, and dangerous creatures that would be fairly conventional in an author of the period (Becker-Cantarino 36). This analysis, however, seems to overlook the obvious contrast between the two framing pieces themselves. Alan Menhennet notes the discrepancies. He suggests that the “Addendum of the Author,” purportedly penned by the fictitious scribe Philarchus Grossus von Trommerheim, is “too little too late,” in terms of its attempt to criticize the immorality of the transgressive Courasche. Further, he indicates that the opening comments, in contrast to the “Addendum,” reflect the ambiguous point of view that emerges from the pseudo-autobiographical text itself (138). Both framing pieces give evidence of a vehement humor and an exaggerated pomposity that are not only markedly different from Courasche’s tone in her own narrative, but also seem to undermine the moralizing sentiment of the framing remarks themselves. Their comic tonality, especially

when combined with their notable brevity, undercuts the warnings they themselves issue against the moral uncleanness represented by the narrative which they envelope.

The opening remarks, entitled “True Case and Briefly Told Contents of This Little Text,” manifest a notable degree of ambivalence about the moral culpability of the central figure, criticizing the spited Simplicissimus as amply as they censure the spiteful Courasche, and acknowledging her skill in giving Simplicissimus a taste of his own medicine:

. . . she brings to light her whole lewdly led career, in order to ruin the aforesaid Simplicissimus in the eyes of the world . . . from which must be concluded that neither horse nor nag, neither knave nor whore, is one hair better than the other; in the bargain she nicely rubs in how masterfully she cheated him and paid him back in return (*RC* 30).

The postscript is called an “Addendum of the Author,” a title which is sufficiently ambiguous as to raise questions about whose voice we are supposed to be hearing. Is this meant to be Courasche speaking, or the scribe hired by Courasche to record her story, or Grimmelshausen himself? The piece may even be taken wholly from another source.⁴⁴ Given the ambiguity of the opening remarks, and the energy, warmth, irony, and humor of Courasche’s lively narrative, the graphic admonitions of the Addendum sound a note of desperation. It is almost as if their author recognizes that the warnings issued in the Addendum are, in retrospect, inadequate to the task of counteracting the powerful text to which they are attached:

⁴⁴Garzonis, *Allgemeiner Schauplatz* (1599), as identified by Hiller and Osborne in their translation of *RC*. For a fuller discussion of Grimmelshausen’s appropriation of his sources, see Weydt.

Now, for this reason then, you chaste youths, you honorable widowers, and even you married men who have hitherto avoided these dangerous *chimeris*, eluded these terrible medusas, stopped your ears against these cursed sirens and forsworn these unfathomable and bottomless *belidibus*, or at least withstood them by fleeing, let these *Lupas* not henceforth enchant you in the future; for one thing is certain: That there is nought else to be expected from loving whores than all manner of uncleanness, shame, ridicule, poverty, and misery, and worst of all a bad conscience too. Only when it is too late does one realize what one had in them, how nasty they are, how vile, how lice-ridden, scabby, unclean, stinking both of breath and of their whole body, how full of French disease within and full of pustulent sores without; so that in the end one must, in his own heart, be ashamed of it and, oftentimes too late, despise it (*RC* 183).

This irony may pre-dispose some readers and critics to suspect that something like an endorsement of immorality, or even a clandestine infatuation with the shameless *pícaro*, lurks in the heart of Grimmelshausen. Feldges, Meid, Streller, Schweitzer, and Arnold have all addressed the possibility of multiple perspectives and dichotomies in *The Runagate Courage*. Ritchie comes closest to sorting out the issues when he notes Grimmelshausen's capacity to accomplish a rich double vision which emerges as much out of the tradition of Baroque dualism as it does from Grimmelshausen's particular skill in rendering a fictional world that itself embodies both *Schein*, that is, deceptive appearance or surface reality, and *Sein*, reality or real being (60). If, as I suggest, the voice or voices heard in the framing comments are restrained from adequately offsetting the other voice that is heard throughout the narrative, that of Courasche herself, then the

rituals, ecclesiastical policies, and clerical practices. Lázaro regularly subverts this litany in order to invoke the deity in support of his misdeeds.⁴⁵ One central metaphor consists of a deliberate misinterpretation of one of the Beatitudes: “*Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*,” or “Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Stephen Gilman suggests that a pregnant misreading was common among *conversos*, and was embedded in some literary works (he cites *La Celestina* as one example). This misreading involved a play on the double meaning of *justicia* in Castilian, in which the word could mean either “righteousness” or “the forces of law and order” (154). I would say that this pun functions as an extended joke running throughout *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The joke organizes all of Lázaro’s rationalizations of his bad behavior as it renders them as religious invocations or allusions. At those several places in the narrative where Lázaro has profited by his own reprehensible conduct, he repeatedly characterizes his “good” fortune as a blessing from heaven. Perhaps the most striking example appears in *Tractado Séptimo* when Lázaro says of his new employment as town crier and the archpriest’s cuckold: “God was gracious enough to lighten my way and guide my steps along a fruitful path” (LT 27). The sly jest is made all the more shocking by the use of the verb *alumbrar*.⁴⁶ This verb, as Gilman points out, was used to describe the grace given to the *conversos* as they underwent spiritual metamorphosis in order to be received into the Catholic Church and, it was believed, so be saved (156). The

⁴⁵Gilman rehearses some of the considerable work that Guillén has done on religious commonplaces in the *Lazarillo* (153 - 158).

⁴⁶The relevant phrase in Spanish is “*quiso Dios alumbrarme y ponerme en buen camino y manera prouechosa*. ”

Lazarillo of the earlier chapters has indeed been transformed into the spiritually blind Lázaro who accommodates the hypocrisy of the archpriest and even incorporates it into his own character. Moll, on the other hand, purports to have had her eyes opened, spiritually speaking, and to have repented in Newgate. However, she regrets her crimes and is apparently consumed with remorse only after she sees that Jemmy has been incarcerated as well and she is filled with guilt at having been the cause of his return to a life of crime (*MF* 264), and only after she is actually convicted of felony and burglary and comes close to being sentenced to death (*MF* 269).⁴⁷ As we have seen, Moll, who performs repentance in Newgate and gives up the sins of thievery and prostitution, lives bigamously (her husband the linen-draper may still be alive) and prosperously from the fruits of her crimes, making no attempt at or even mention of possible restitution.

In contrast to Lazarillo and Moll, Courasche has almost no linguistic relationship with God whatsoever. Repentance is simply irrelevant. She relies on and takes pride in her own agency, rather than thanking a deity, for her good fortune. If Courasche aligns herself with the supernatural at all, it is with the occult and the satanic rather than with the divine, as can be seen in the episode of the *spiritus familiaris*, the sprite in the bottle that brings good luck in this world but threatens damnation in the next (*RC* 127 – 128, 154 - 155). Courasche admits with pride that she enjoys her lump of gold, scraped together at the risk of life and limb. She will not give it up, will not lose the chance of increasing it, is too consumed with avarice toward and envy of her neighbors to

⁴⁷See Heidi Faletti (178) for further comments on Courasche's lack of genuine remorse.

relinquish that little pile of money.⁴⁸ She is telling her story merely to spite Simplex, to reveal the fool for what he is - and was - when they made love in Sauerbrunnen. If there is a divine plan in action at all, she asserts, it is embedded in the vicious cycle of sinners punishing sinners (*RC* 34). (This view is also suggested in the preface to Courasche's text.) Seen from this thoroughly amoral perspective, her story is an exertion of individual power in a text that has abandoned God, or perhaps has been abandoned *by* God.

Attempted from the nowhere-land of the gypsies, Courasche's gesture is aimed at the conventional world and the men who control it.⁴⁹ As we examine *The Runagate Courage*, we will look closely at how the motifs of orphanhood and apprenticeship, combined with Courasche's transvestism, gender-bending, and infertility, function within an episodic structure of projectile energy. We shall see that these picaresque elements produce a narrative that enables a pícara who is not merely allowed to survive, but is accorded a considerable degree of success, albeit in a world that clearly remains a man's world. By unleashing Courasche's considerable vocal powers, this text allows for an intimate and enthusiastic engagement with the possibilities of the alternate, feminocentric world that the pícara represents. Furthermore, the figure of Courasche moves to a kind of victory by sheer vitality: she manages to achieve what she considers important goals,

⁴⁸Robert Hiller discusses the significance of Courasche's "lump of gold." He sees it and, later, Mother Courage's sutler's cart as important symbols of both success and failure for each character.

⁴⁹Some critics dismiss Courasche's exertion of power precisely because it comes from the realm of the gypsies who exist completely outside the acceptable norms and structures of society. See Babcock and Faletti. Ritchie, on the other hand, views Courasche as a "Renaissance virago" and "an Amazon" and, in a view that parallels my own, is unwilling to underplay the overall effect of her magnificent tenacity and the outright vigor of her attack (70).

persevere in the face of extraordinary challenges, and assert authority and a sense of personal achievement in a decidedly hostile and chaotic world.

Libushka, the central character, was born the illegitimate daughter of a count and a woman of honorable but poor family, but she does not learn of her origins until she is in her twenties. Although her noble birth is atypical of the picaresque model, her ejection into the harsh world of the war at the age of thirteen resonates as a traditional picaresque theme. When the fighting threatens their town, Libushka's nurse dresses her as a boy and shaves her golden hair. As Jacobson points out, Libushka is here forced by the impending war to deny her sex and "become" a male ("Defense" 43). Despite her apparent thrill at being dressed as a boy, this disguise is not something that Libushka has brazenly chosen. She is obliged to hide her gender in order to protect herself from being raped by the marauding soldiers who are about to enter her town. The soldiers are, as Jacobson suggests, emissaries of war, the male construct into which the female is thrust against her will. However, in contrast to her nurse who is terrified of the imminent conflict and chaos, Libushka is extremely excited at the prospect of having a part to play in the fray: "for from childhood on it was my nature to like things best when they were all topsy-turvy" (RC 36). This sense of everything upside-down, the "uncommon carnival" (RC 36), is also a traditional component of picaresque narrative.⁵⁰

Disguised as a Bohemian lad named Janco, the young girl is forced into service by a trooper. Her first apprenticeship begins when a Captain of Horse takes the boy as his

⁵⁰ Ann Leblans discusses the carnivalesque elements in *Grimmelshausen*. Natalie Zemon Davis explores the notion of *inversion* as referring to textual allusions to changes in sexual roles which are usually met with strong counter-responses from males in order to control the perceived threat from the rebellious female. Her essay, "Woman on Top," deals with a specific set of graphical images and textual references in works produced in early modern Europe.

personal *valet-de-chambre*, assuming that Janco is too gentle for the work of tending horses, plundering and thieving. Janco surprises the master. She soon learns not only to keep the master supplied with impeccably clean linen and reasonably clean women, she also becomes skilled at taking care of the horses and the weapons. She soon has a mount of her own and is allowed to carry a sword. She learns to guard her Captain's back in battle, shares in the rich booty that her master captures, drinks and swears like a man, so that "no one might remark wherein I had fallen short at birth or what, for that matter, I had not brought along into the world with me at all" (RC 38). The girl beneath the breeches is thrilled by the field of battle: "I had not yet had my fill of the drums and pipes, the cannon and trumpets, sounds that made my heart leap for joy" (RC 37) and longs to become a man so that she can go to war all her life (RC 39). It is during this period that Libushka spends disguised as a boy that her sense of pride, self-confidence, and self-worth increase dramatically. The scope of this *pícaro's* activity thus extends far beyond that of Moll or even of Lazarillo. She finds the constant upheaval of war to be exhilarating. This contrasts sharply with Moll and Lazarillo who experience severe anxiety with every change of locale and role, but links Libushka to Brecht's Mother Courage and her perennial determination to remain engaged with the war. While Libushka's disguise is initiated out of a need for self-protection, it is a mask that she enthusiastically embraces, and, unlike Lazarillo and Moll, she experiences success and a sense of personal satisfaction remarkably early in her career.

When her masquerade is about to be revealed by a trooper who inadvertently discovers what Janco lacks, she feels that she must reveal her true identity to her master. The Captain enters into her secret and gives her the name "Courasche" which means guts,

or more precisely, “balls.”⁵¹ She continues to live outwardly as a male by day, while the Captain shares the plunder she takes and enjoys her very feminine charms at night.⁵² Since Courasche has fallen in love with both the war and her master, this arrangement suits her immensely. It is important to note, however, that Courasche agrees to this transaction only after obtaining a promise of marriage from her Captain, as this is the only way to secure legal and financial protections. She stresses her desire to avoid becoming the Captain’s mistress, as she sees this as a step toward prostitution, which she is loath to take. Jacobson’s case for Courasche’s basic decency and her early and persistent wish to live as a married woman would answer critics who emphasize her lustful nature as the motivator for her actions throughout (44 - 45). The liaison with the Captain of Horse represents Courasche’s first sexual relationship with a man. Their union comfortably negotiates the Captain’s lust for Courasche and greed for the spoils she takes and Courasche’s affection for her Captain and enthusiasm for her life as a man. This

⁵¹Grimmelshausen’s use of the term is of course ironic. Hiller suggests that Grimmelshausen chooses this term in order to cleverly invalidate the prevalent image of the “he-man”(139). Brecht’s use of the name also incorporates a sly, though not specifically sexual, joke, as Bentley and others have pointed out.

⁵²In discussing their research on historical female transvestites in early modern Europe, Dekker and van de Pol point out that the exigencies of wartime seem to have made it acceptable for women to dress as men and even to fight on the battlefield. They cite examples from the Dutch revolt against Spain, 1568 - 1648, when conventional rules about women’s roles were set aside, and there were few if any negative consequences for a woman who joined in the war as a man (32 - 35). Similarly, Van Ornam argues that the chaotic nature of the fictional world which Courasche inhabits - a world dominated by war and destruction - *demands* that females dress as males in order to conceal and thereby protect their value as women. Dekker and van de Pol find parallels in the cases of the actual women they studied. For many of these, masquerading as a man was linked to the maintenance of virginity, and, in such a context, was at least temporarily tolerated and not punished, as most other cases were (44 - 46). Thus, Courasche’s cross-dressing can be read as implying an additional dimension in Grimmelshausen’s criticism of war, in that it demands at least an apparent, if not a genuine, reversal of gender power structures. Ritchie would agree.

represents an important moment of success for the *pícaro*. Although she accommodates the demands of the conventional world by acquiescing to the Captain without benefit of marriage and by agreeing to live a double life rather than live openly as a man, she nonetheless achieves what she seeks: security, the gratification of her sexual and affectional desires, and the opportunity to explore talents not permitted to ordinary women, *i.e.*, on the battlefield.

When her Captain is mortally wounded, she tells him that she is pregnant (a falsehood), and he agrees to a deathbed marriage. This wedding confirms her gender to the regiment, but gives Courasche the chance to live openly now as a Captain's widow, with a considerable amount of money, arms, clothing and horses which she has inherited from his estate. This is another triumph for the *pícaro*. Although Courasche has tricked the Captain into marriage through a lie, this act of deceit is merely an imitation of her master. After all, it was the Captain who falsely promised marriage and even purchased a wedding dress to placate Courasche while he continually postponed the ceremony.⁵³ Her success is all the more valid because of the unlikelihood of Courasche's ever attaining the longed-for status of respectably married woman: First, her ejection out of the safe cocoon of her well-bred childhood into the cruel reality of war would have pre-empted any attempts by her guardians to find a suitable marriage for her. Second, even in the chaos of her current situation, she would be not be considered a proper wife for a Captain of Horse, based upon the difference in their social class. She is fully cognizant of the precariousness and the irony of her situation: "Other men take wives to live with them till

⁵³ Jacobson also reminds us that the *pícaro*'s duping of her Captain is psychologically if not morally justifiable when we notice her humiliation at his insistence upon calling her by the name of Courasche and not by her given name of Libushka nor even her male name of Janco (44).

death do them part, but he took me to wife because he knew that death would soon us part!" (*RC* 48).

When her husband dies, Courasche leaves camp, intending to eschew the battlefield and return to her hometown to live securely on her inheritance with her old nurse. However, she finds herself stuck in Vienna where she takes lodging with a landlady who turns out to be a procuress and mother of two prostitute daughters. Courasche's sexual urges have been awakened by her relationship with the Captain, but she now lacks the security and protection of marriage. After a period of quiet, chaste living, she sells herself to men of wealth and substance. This transition initiates a long series of marriages and sexual relationships. Courasche becomes a mistress to a count, an ambassador, and many other rich and prominent men. She then returns to the war and marries a Captain of Infantry, a Lieutenant, and a second Captain of Infantry. She is raped by a Lieutenant Colonel and his officers and servants, is rescued and nearly wedded by a Captain of Horse, marries a trooper, takes up with the musketeer Hopalong, and then goes off with the leader of a band of gypsies. Faletti as well as Hiller and Osborne suggest that the hierarchical ranking of the various officers and soldiers with whom Courasche has relationships indicates a pattern of decline in that Courasche joins herself to progressively lower orders of military men. This feature is often cited by scholars to support the notion that Courasche's fortunes continuously degenerate as her story draws to an end. I suggest an alternate, or parallel, pattern based upon the notion that Courasche seeks parity in her relationships with men, not dominance. Thus, Courasche's first love affair (and marriage) is the mutually satisfying partnership with the Captain of Horse. After his death, she attempts to recreate that parity in her subsequent

unions. Courasche asserts dominance only when the possibility of partnership is completely foreclosed. She finally recovers a parity that is akin to her first marriage in the liaison with the gypsy leader.

Let us look more closely at the marriages and unions that follow the death of Courasche's first husband, the Captain of Horse. Courasche finds that she is once again free to participate in the war when she and a Captain of Infantry contract a marriage arrangement that satisfies them both. Her new husband is pleased with his wife's successes on the battlefield, and, for the first time, Courasche is able to fight openly as a woman, in a dress with trousers underneath:

I took more booty than many a sworn soldier, which indeed angered many; but I paid little heed to that, for it was butter on my bread. The trust placed in me by my husband, who (compared to me, at least) was not very well equipped, caused me to remain true to his colors, even though higher ranks than captains reported to me to take his place as his *lieu-tenant*; for he allowed me great freedom in many respects . . . I was merry in company, brazen in conversation, but also heroic as any man against the enemy, in the field as thrifty and frugal as any housewife, in the care of the horses better than any equerry, and in garrison of such prosperity that my captain of infantry could not have wished for better . . . And so I lived in great happiness and joy . . . (RC 60)

Courasche has the opportunity to contradict her Captain of Infantry and to act on her own judgment, and he seems to respect her and treat her as a mate. Although she wishes that he were a more satisfying lover - "if only my husband had been a little bit better in the saddle" (RC 60) - she resists the attentions of higher-ranking officers in order to remain

faithful to their partnership. Courasche sacrifices sexual satisfaction for the freedom to fight and plunder as a man might do. This negotiation calls to mind Lazarillo's covert compromise with the archpriest in which the p caro suppresses his own sexual desires in order to secure for himself a comfortable life. When this spouse dies in battle, Courasche experiences a similarly happy partnership in a marriage to a second Captain of Infantry. Her later love affair with a Lieutenant at first promises the same kind of parity, but once they are married, her husband tries to subdue her. He challenges her to a fight with cudgels, claiming that he would never tolerate her "wearing his trousers." Courasche replies:

' . . . it never entered my mind to pretend to your trousers; rather, just as I well know that woman was taken not from man's head but indeed from his side, I had hoped likewise that this was known to my heart's dearest as well and that he would therefore remember my origin and regard me as his mate and not his doormat, as if I had been scraped off the soles of his feet, particularly since I for my part did not presume to sit on his head, but would be content to sit at his side . . . ' (RC 63)

This speech provides evidence of the expectations Courasche brings to marriage, and her vision is based, of course, upon Christian tradition drawn from Biblical stories of Adam and Eve. Her expectations are also influenced by the experience of her previous marriages in which she enjoyed both protection and partnership with her husbands. In Becker-Cantarino's reading, however, the seventeenth-century interpretation of the story of Eve's creation does not coincide with Courasche's view that women are to be seen as mates and partners rather than subjects of their husbands. Becker-Cantarino allows that

gender anxiety in early modern German texts does at least flare up in images of women who disrupt the system of regulation of females by males, and suggests that Courasche's person threatens but does not thoroughly subvert the accepted order (42 - 44). It seems to me that Becker-Cantarino has overlooked both the restraint expressed in Courasche's appeal to the Lieutenant - she would be content to sit at his side - and the classic stance of the picaresque figure who never intends to overthrow the *status quo*, only to make her or his way within it. Thus, whether or not Courasche's interpretation of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve coincides with orthodox readings of the time, it is clear from what she says in her own text that Courasche does not consciously seek to dominate men, only to be treated as a partner. The Lieutenant, however, refuses to believe that Courasche seeks equity and not domination. It is his stubbornness and Courasche's need to defend herself that compel Courasche to take up the weapons first: "I should be a fool indeed if I let slip through my fingers an opportunity to gain something which I should otherwise not have dared think of" (RC 64). While Heidi Faletti blames Courasche for "blighting" this marriage by beating her husband, Jacobson makes more sense when he points out that it is the husband who initiates the challenge, insisting that she pick up the weapon first, and Courasche who merely follows his lead ("Defense" 46). In other words, up to this point, Courasche has been content with the partnership arrangements to which her other husbands (and this new one as well) so willingly agreed. When the new husband reneges, she tries to reinstate their agreement, but he forces a confrontation. When Courasche pommels him, the Lieutenant is ridiculed by his fellow officers who have witnessed his sound defeat by a woman. In disgrace, he steals all her money and defects to the enemy side with three of her best horses, and is later caught and hanged as a traitor.

Jacobson reminds us that Courasche is unjustly blamed by many in the camp for the traitor's death ("Defense" 46). We might remind critics of this as well!

The successful partnerships with the two Captains of Infantry and the failed attempt at partnership with the Lieutenant represent a significant turning point, the end of Courasche's apprenticeship period, when these husbands die. Even as a widow now, she continues to fight openly as a woman, something she has formerly done only under the protection of her husbands. She still requires and acquiesces to a protector, sharing her booty now only with the Colonel of the regiment who does not, however, become sexually involved with her. Thus, she becomes a more independent agent than before and accumulates stunning victories. She hacks off an opponent's head, carries off a Major as a captive, takes a carriage with fine horses and much booty, rescues the Lieutenant Colonel of her regiment, and even takes an enemy Cornet together with his standard.⁵⁴ During the lulls in the fighting, she wishes that the opposing sides would clash just to please her, she misses the fighting so much. As Heidi Faletti points out, Courasche is in harmony with herself only when she is fighting. Her attempts to transcend the restrictions of gender through active engagement with the war can be seen as a search for personal fulfillment. During her periods of widowhood, when she is free from both spousal connections and protections, Courasche herself expresses an intense desire to be able to live as a man:

... just at that time it was my most fervent wish not to be a woman; but what help was that? It had been bungled from the start. I often thought of pretending to be a

⁵⁴Wedgewood explains that the capture of standards was extremely difficult and highly significant since the banners represented not only rallying symbols for the troops but important communications tools in the warfare of this period.

hermaphrodite, to see whether this way I might gain the right to wear trousers in public and pass for a fellow; but on the other hand, because of my incontinent lusts I had made so many men sensible of my sex that I did not have the gall to do what I should have liked to do (*RC* 67).⁵⁵

This speech reflects another important shift in Courasche's thinking and in her text. She moves now toward the realization that it is highly unlikely that she will any longer be able to find a partner and protector, and she adopts the tone of voice of one who no longer needs a master. Her discourse, from this point forward increasingly commingles admissions of intense lust with avowals of considerable avarice for booty. Her desire for the material benefits that fall to her as a result of her warrior skills is understandable: after all, she is without a husband and, except for the Colonel who has begun to feel embarrassed by Courasche's triumphs and will not long endure her, she is without protection. She could lose all her possessions and her security at any given moment. She says that she is now free to compensate herself for the "good nights" she missed with her kind but sexually bland husband and for the "fasting" she endured during her periods of mourning (*RC* 63). Jacobson reminds us that sexual and military aggression provides the "only effective weapons available to her" (45). Sex and war become, in *The Runagate Courage*, picaresque survival strategies. In the gratification of her sexual drives as well as

⁵⁵Faletti reminds us that hermaphrodites were usually associated during this period with the antithetical view of reality embodied in illustrations of monsters. Ritchie, on the other hand, contends that the figures of Simplicissimus and Courasche might be seen as the antipodes in Grimmelshausen's particular brand of thesis-antithesis play, that is, as complementary halves: the simple male and the clever female. He reminds us of the interest in the Baroque period in the interplay of opposites, and suggests that Grimmelshausen was also original and clever enough to incorporate opposites within a single character. This supports my view that Courasche represents both sexes simultaneously. The same is suggested, Ritchie speculates, by the image of Simplicissimus as depicted in the frontispiece to the Simplician texts.

her aggressions on the battlefield, Courasche also beats men at their own game. Lynne Tatlock concurs, adding that Courasche calls into question the maleness of the men around her, and, by extension, of Simplicissimus himself, to whom her autobiography is addressed (397). I agree with Jacobson and Tatlock that Courasche's stunning successes on the battlefield and in the bed constitute another victory for the pícara who imitates and exceeds the violence, lust, and avarice of men. At the same time, however, a notable psychological transition is taking place. Courasche's victories lay waste the psychic as well as the physical landscape and position the pícara in a lonely, inhospitable land, devoid of human intimacy. Thus Courasche inscribes her increasing alienation from her fellow human beings:

The Colonel did not like to hear it told how his beautiful carriage had been taken from the enemy and presented to him by [Courasche]. That I had saved the wounded Lieutenant Colonel from the battle and the danger of death and led him safely to our side, he considered such slight honor to himself that he not only thanked me for my trouble by wishing the plague on me, but blushed with a hangdog look when he saw me and, as is easy to imagine, wished me nothing less than health and good fortune. The ladies, or officer's wives, hated me because I was far more beautiful than any other in the entire regiment, and particularly because I pleased some of the husbands better than they did themselves; and both noncommissioned officers and soldiers were hostile toward me because more than any one of them I had the heart to undertake and accomplish things which demanded the utmost bravery and boldest daring, things which would have given anyone else goose pimples (*RC* 70).

In the face of this overt hostility, the narrator responds to her distress with defiance. She addresses herself as “Courasche” for the first time in her narrative, appropriating that which has previously been used against her (*RC* 71).

During this period, Courasche takes up with a musketeer. Their relationship is of particular importance in the pattern of Courasche’s marriages in that it is the first and only instance of the *pícara*’s deliberately asserting dominance over the man. She asserts this domination only when she has exhausted all efforts to re-establish equitable partnerships with men. Courasche calls the musketeer “Springinsfeld,” which is often translated “Hopalong,” a nickname that echoes her first command to him. Her arrangement with Hopalong coincides with her decision to become a sutler, a supplier of goods to the traveling armies. This choice is quite free-willed since, until late in the novel, Courasche always has the option of drawing on the considerable funds she has been able to send away for safekeeping in Prague and other cities. However, she cannot bring herself to leave the *fracas*. Envious of the apparently easy money others have acquired selling supplies to the troops, she decides to become a tradeswoman.⁵⁶ She takes on Hopalong, but they never marry. She firmly dictates the rules of their relationship:

First of all, he was to obtain a discharge from his regiment, for otherwise he could not be my servant, since I did not wish to be the wife of a musketeer.

⁵⁶Karl H. Schoeps reminds us that soldiers in the Thirty Years’ War were not paid or provisioned. They were expected to find their own food, clothing, weaponry, and horses (251).

Then, secondly, he was to live with me and show toward me all the love and faithfulness that a husband is wont to show toward his wife, as I should toward him in return.

However, thirdly, this union was not to be confirmed in the Christian church till I first found myself with child by him.

Till then, fourthly, I was to have and hold authority in every way and form, not only over the provisions but also over my own body, indeed even over my serviteur himself, in just the way a husband usually has jurisdiction over his wife.

In consequence, fifthly, he was not to have the power to hinder or prevent it, much less look askance at it, if I should converse with other men or do anything of the sort that commonly causes husbands to wax wroth.

And because, sixthly, I was of a mind to play the role of a sutler woman, he was of course to be the head of this enterprise and direct it like a faithful and diligent householder, by day and by night, but let me have the last word, particularly about the money and himself, and obey patiently, and even change his ways and improve himself if I were to reprimand him for his laziness. In summa, he was to be considered and looked upon by one and all as the master and was to have this title and honor too, but toward me observe every one of the above-mentioned duties in every respect. And all this we both signed and sealed (*RC* 108-9).

The terms of Courasche's arrangement with Hopalong, interestingly, make explicit the implicit relationship between Moll Flanders and her Lancashire husband Jemmy.

Although Moll's treatment of Jemmy is solicitous to the point of being uxorious, and Courasche is abusive of Hopalong from the very start, Courasche's contract inscribes a

literal inversion of roles, as does Moll's tacit agreement with Jemmy. Taking a step beyond Moll, Courasche usurps the role of the male within a male/female union with the conscious and free consent of the male. (Jemmy's acquiescence, and even Moll's assertiveness, are more subliminal.) Although she has dressed as a man on the battlefield, Courasche now accomplishes that which her Lieutenant husband had feared but which she had never heretofore actually attempted: she "wears the pants" in a conjugal relationship. It is important to note that Courasche's treatment of Hopalong is the direct result of the brutal betrayal perpetrated upon her by the Lieutenant, and that if it were not for her new mistrust of men, Courasche would now still prefer to partner with a man rather than dominate him: she says that she would marry Hopalong, if it were possible to do so without the usual imposition of male control. She suspects that, once married, Hopalong would surely repeat the pattern of the Lieutenant who attempted to subdue her. She also fears, with reason, that Hopalong will avenge himself for her scurrilous treatment of him. Her fear becomes reality when he attacks her twice (RC 143 - 153).

This pre-"nuptial" agreement represents yet another strategy of negotiation that advances the *pícaro's* success. She surrenders her daylight dignity in order to acquire a slave and protector. With Hopalong as her front, Courasche is able to indulge all her desires and utilize all her talents. These stunning demands establish for Courasche an environment in which she can practice her newly chosen sutlery business and ply her accustomed trade as a prostitute. She and Hopalong do not formally marry, but Courasche in effect becomes the husband, as she implies in her fourth regulation, holding sovereignty over the body and the material possessions of her spouse. Hopalong is to submit to Courasche's authority not only in fiscal matters, but also in matters relating to

his own behavior. In contrast, Courasche, like the men she has observed, exercises total freedom with regard to her own person and relationships. In this arrangement, Courasche, like Moll, wreaks revenge on the entire male sex not only by imitating but also by exaggerating the traditional male roles within marriage. Courasche even renames her slave, in much the same way that her first husband insisted upon calling her by the name of Courasche even in private. When Hopalong eventually rebels and physically attacks Courasche, this altercation too is decided in Courasche's favor. She hands over to Hopalong very little of value and sells him, for a single crown, the *spiritus familiaris* which will damn him to eternal flames unless he can sell it for less than he paid.

Once she has rejected Hopalong, Courasche fails to find in the camps a suitable male to serve as her protector. She draws the attentions of the "lieutenant" of a gang of gypsies whom she encounters in the field. They are married in a gypsy ceremony. She blackens her skin so as to fit in with her new people, and the new couple and their gang endure and prosper by the fruits of their tricks and deceptions. There is some discussion among critics of Courasche's gradually disappearing among the gypsies, losing her identity, so to speak, after her adventures dwindle from sensational successes on the battlefield to trite escapades involving trickery and petty theft among the gypsies (See Hiller and Osborne.) Indeed, the pattern of gradual diminution or disintegration of the pícaro has been identified as a common picaresque motif (Dunn 169). However, Courasche remains vital among the gypsies and even attains a level of authority in the gypsy community that she never realized in the conventional world. The student who assists in the writing of her autobiography observes that Courasche is in charge of all the raids that he witnesses. He notes that her band refer to her as "The Countess." Her mate,

the gypsy “lieutenant,” is apparently not in evidence (*HH* 14 - 25). Thus, Courasche finds in gypsy life a substitute for the life of war which she has been forced to eschew: “I could have passed for the generalissimo of all gypsy hags” (*RC* 175). She also establishes the spousal partnership she has sought from the beginning, finding in the gypsy leader a mate who allows her to assert complete independence and freely exercise her leadership skills. It is from this marginal world of the gypsies that Courasche launches her manifesto. In exposing herself to the world, she feels that she has succeeded in trumping Simplicissimus. Her story abruptly ends with a declaration of triumph, albeit from the netherworld:

. . . I think I have revealed sufficiently . . . what breed of cat he shared a bed with in Sauerbrunnen and so magnificently bragged about to the whole world; indeed, I believe too that more than once when he thought he was enjoying a beautiful lady, he was being deceived by French whores like me and probably even by broomstick riders, thereby even becoming the devil’s own kinsman (*RC* 182).

Two additional patterns related to Courasche’s marriages and unions emerge in her narrative: the serial deaths of Courasche’s husbands and Courasche’s infertility. Courasche herself acknowledges the widespread rumor in the camp that she brings death to her husbands. The camp followers, she says, now recognize the “unlucky faculty which was supposed to be harmful to anyone who was my husband” (*RC* 70). Her first husband, the Captain of Horse, dies in battle, as do her two Captains of Infantry. Her Lieutenant is executed as a traitor, and a trooper she marries is hanged when he fights over Courasche with his Corporal. In contrast, Courasche has learned from her landlady, the procuress who is also schooled in witchcraft, how to make herself “shotfree,” that is,

impervious to anything but bruises and scrapes. This magical charm parallels Courasche's invulnerability to pregnancy throughout her story. Critics have debated the underlying meaning of these patterns. With regard to the deaths of the husbands, Linda Ellen Feldman suggests that in the traditional masculinist view (which she claims is espoused by Grimmelshausen), Courasche's husbands must die in order to expiate their failure to control her within the norms of conventional marriage ("Rape" 68), while other commentators point to the ravages of the war as an obvious explanation of the high mortality rate among officers and soldiers. With regard to Courasche's infertility, Vanessa Van Ornam has suggested that Grimmelshausen was deliberately if subtly countering the often savage literary and graphical images of barren women in the seventeenth century in order to express his criticism of war.⁵⁷ While I do not disagree with these views, I propose an additional interpretation that connects the spousal death pattern to the infertility pattern and, in turn, takes into account picaresque motifs of asexuality and "anti-fecundity." The deaths of the husbands and Courasche's childlessness call us back to the barren and genderless landscape of *Lazarillo de Tormes* in which men who father children are punished and banished, and where the text tolerates no sexual union whatsoever. Thus, although Courasche is rampantly sexual, she is infertile, and her husbands (potential fathers) are killed, ejected from the text. Support for my interpretation can be found in some points raised by Ailene Goodman and Vanessa Van Ornam, although they do not acknowledge the picaresque elements that are central to

⁵⁷ Van Ornam associates Courasche with sorcery, as does Schade in his analysis of the Courasche frontispiece and its allusions to witchcraft (207). The attribution of the spousal deaths to witchcraft in Courasche has little narrative logic, however, in that Courasche sincerely loves at least her first husband and deeply appreciates all but one of the others. That she would seek to destroy them by witchcraft or any other means is untenable.

my analysis. Goodman links the frontispiece to *Simplicissimus* and the underwater episodes in the Simplician texts to the image of the mermaid, common in Baroque literature, and reminds us of the association of the mermaid to death and destruction for humans who consort with them. An interesting parallel with Courasche can be drawn if we attend to Goodman's assertion that the mermaid figure was originally derived from that of the mer-man. She suggests that both mer-man and mermaid, despite their allure, are actually *sexless*, since they lack the genitals that would allow sexual intercourse to take place. Thus, neither is fully male nor female, suggesting that the danger they carry is due, Goodman says, not to the sexual excess with which they later came to be associated, but rather to their sexual ambiguity and gender incompleteness. Van Ornam explains that seventeenth-century medical experts would associate gender transience with infertility. Thus, in my view, Courasche's transvestism, her would-be hermaphroditism, her longing to be a man, her gender-bending performances on the battlefield, her attempts to partner with and later to dominate men combine with her outright lasciviousness to produce a figure of profound sexual ambiguity and gender disorder. Simultaneously, as Heidi Faletti suggests, Courasche's sterility is the key component of her independence: she has no reproductive function, and therefore no obligation to either offspring or spouse. In my view, Courasche's textual abandonment of spouses and potential offspring and Moll's consignment of her children to caretakers (in imitation of her male masters) effect the freedom from reproductive responsibility that generates the considerable mobility that is essential to the picaresque scenario. At the same time, the patterns of sterility and spousal death or disappearance connect them to the poetics of "anti-fecundity" in the *Lazarillo*, a

narrative pattern that inscribes a barren landscape of loneliness, isolation, and gender-incompleteness, or gender-blankness, for the picaresque figure.

One final issue connected to Courasche's gender must be addressed, and that is the brutal rapes she endures, first at the hands of enemy troopers, and then by an enemy Colonel whom she had once captured. He and his officers and common soldiers and servants rape and obscenely torture Courasche. Becker-Cantarino and Solbach claim that Grimmelshausen intended these scenes to pre-figure the eternal punishment which Courasche will suffer in hell. This interpretation would support the notion that Grimmelshausen upholds male-dominated structures, and that he intended the Courasche figure to be taken as a negative exemplar, a pariah to be feared, shunned, and punished. On the other hand, Jacobson sees the rapes and torture, as well as the miserable treatment Courasche receives at the hands of men in general, as evidence of Grimmelshausen's indictment of males for their brutal abuse of women, again placing squarely on their shoulders the responsibility for Courasche's promiscuity (45 - 47). While Becker-Cantarino and Solbach may be correct about Grimmelshausen's intentions, their views fail to take into account the picaresque components embedded in these scenes. And while I agree with Jacobson's point that the rapes psychologically justify Courasche's successes in beating men at their own game, especially when I recall that her demands of Hopalong are positioned after these dehumanizing traumas, I would add that Courasche's narrative exhibits a curiously dismissive attitude toward the rapes. When the Colonel, her former captive, attacks her, she says, "I did not resist too earnestly." When the officers take their turn, she comments, ". . . my otherwise insatiable carnal lusts were sufficiently satisfied." When the servants are permitted to rape and torture her while their masters

watch, however, she complains: “Up till then I had suffered everything with patience and thought that I had deserved such because of my earlier misdeeds; but when it came to this, it was such a horrible abomination to me that I began to lament and bawl and appeal to God for help and revenge” (RC 85). Courasche’s variable reactions to her various attackers reveal the valuation of social class and military rank that she has retained from her girlhood (she is after all the daughter of a nobleman.) In addition, notwithstanding her outrage at her attackers’ bestiality, and despite her cries to God for help and vengeance, one of the very few invocations of the deity in her text, her retrospective nonchalance may be at least partially explained by the accustomed resignation of the picaresque protagonist to the brutal facts of life: she fully expects that a Colonel who has been captured by a woman will wreak his revenge upon her body if he gets the chance (“I had deserved such because of my earlier misdeeds”). This is simply the way of the world. Another factor needs to be taken into account, and that is her surprise rescue from this gang rape by a Captain of Horse who identifies her as the daughter of a brave and highly respected Count. (We might say that Courasche’s caste-sensitive outrage foreshadows this revelation.) Her attackers beg Courasche’s forgiveness on bended knee and plead with the Captain to overlook their abominable actions, promising to serve his every need in return for their exculpation (RC 87). Equally intriguing is the fact that Courasche recovers from the rapes rather quickly, wises up, and becomes stronger than before. Courasche, the *pícara* apprentice, has learned from the rapes what to expect from men and how to adapt to such threats in the future. The *pícara* is also accustomed to the unpredictable fluctuations of fortune: one minute she is about to be turned over to the rabble; the next, she is acknowledged as the daughter of a Count. Further, Courasche’s

minimizing of the impact of the rapes (and of many of her other misfortunes as well) places her firmly in the picaresque tradition of comedy. The pícaro's (or the pícaro's) story, while it may have tragic undertones, is never a tragedy. Ian Watt has pointed out that most picaresque figures are immune from deep pain (95). Frederick Montaser suggests that "even death is not allowed to be solemn, and is either brutalized or laughed at" (17). I would add that Montaser's point is amply demonstrated in the comic funeral episode in *Lazarillo de Tormes* and in the grotesque scene in *The Runagate Courage* in which a musketeer severs the lower half of a corpse in order to carry off its pants and boots (RC 167). And of course there is the phenomenon of the picaresque protagonists' invulnerability to mortality: they survive to tell their stories and possibly to accumulate more stories. This immunity to death and tragedy confers a remarkable degree of resilience in the face of overwhelming obstacles even as it produces what Gary MacEoin has called a "psychology without entrails" (65). It also contributes to the peripatetic quality of most picaresque narratives, bespeaking the narrator's drive to keep on the move, in the life and in the text, in order to sustain hope. Courasche and both Lazarillo and Moll, for example, traverse broad geographical areas. Harry Sieber has suggested that their almost incessant travel is an attempt to "escape from despair" (9). This strategic urgency, in my view, also explains why the episodes of Courasche's life are rendered at so furious a pace. The rapid succession of episodes in her text foregrounds her resiliency as she repeatedly confronts and quickly absorbs the horrific events, and then moves on. Much the same thing can be said of Lazarillo whose overall text and specific chapters are brief in the extreme, and of Moll whose text, though long, relentlessly presses onward without pause and without the interruption of chapter divisions. Courasche's text is

unmatched in its projectile energy, figuring repetitive attempts to evade the brutality of the world and inscribing an enormously resilient personality that has accumulated and accommodated the extraordinary episodes of an extraordinary life.

Once Courasche's version of that life comes to an end, we encounter her again only through the voice of a young student whom we meet in an episode of *Hopalong*. We shall have to review this episode in some detail if we are going to evaluate its efficacy as a revision of Courasche's text. When the young man happens to meet up with both Simplicissimus and Hopalong, he tells them how he was captured by a band of gypsies led by a charismatic woman of faded but striking beauty. He explains how this astonishing woman offered to pay him to copy her life story as she dictates it to him. She, of course, turns out to be Courasche herself. (Her book will be published as *The Runagate Courage*.) The student realizes that he is dining and drinking with two intimate acquaintances of this soon-to-be-infamous woman. On the eve of the publication of her autobiography, he cannot resist the temptation to share with them the story of his encounter with Courasche and to provoke Simplicissimus and Hopalong into divulging salacious and heretofore unpublished details of their relationships with her. The success of his ploy is significant, for our own study as well as for the student's prurient curiosity. The statements made by Hopalong and Simplicissimus in response to the young man's tale are of particular importance because they suggest that these texts attempt - but fail - to revise the generous and exhilarating view of Courasche that had emerged in *The Runagate Courage*.

The student recounts his first encounter with Courasche:

. . . there came riding up on a mule a magnificent gypsy woman, the likes of whom I had never seen or heard of in all my days, for which reason I could not but take her to be at least a distinguished princess, over all the other gypsy women, if not the queen of the gypsies herself! She appeared to be a woman of about sixty years, but as I have since reckoned she was one or six years older than that; she did not even have pitch-black hair like the others, but rather it was somewhat yellowish and gathered together with a string of gold and precious stones like a crown, not with a simple band like other gypsy women wear (*HH* 15).

The young man goes on to furnish a rich description of the woman's luxurious attire and her magnificent bearing. He confesses that she looked "extremely good," and asserts that her extraordinary appearance continues to blaze in his imagination (*HH* 15). He later learns that she is not a gypsy by birth. Referred to as "the countess" by the other gypsies, she appears to be the revered and respected leader of the gang. The student relates how he is soon engaged in the daily routine of recording the gypsy woman's story. He immediately recognizes that she has excellent speech, a strong intellect, and the manner of a person of considerable quality.

Courasche explains to the young man that her motivation for telling the story of her life is to spite Simplicissimus and reveal how easily she duped him. She tells her scribe that she has, in fact, already wreaked vengeance upon Simplicissimus for abandoning her and for disgracing her in his own book:

My chambermaid had been left with an illegitimate child at the very time when this fine fellow was keeping company with me in Sauerbrunnen. When I heard

that he had gotten married I had this child baptized in his name and left on his doorstep with a note that I myself had conceived and borne this fruit by him, which caused him to believe that he was obliged to accept and bring up this child as his own, to his own great dishonor; and on top of that he was severely punished by his magistrate; this deceit came off so well that I would not take a thousand sovereigns for it, particularly since I learned to my great joy only recently that this bastard is to be the sole heir of the deceived deceiver (*HH 17*).

When he hears this story, Simplicissimus counters with his own version. He claims that, unknown to Courasche, he had in fact been having an affair with her chambermaid. He brags that he had slept more often with the maid than with the mistress. He asserts that the son resembles him both in temperament and appearance. He says that Courasche has done him a favor in revealing her attempt to trick him, as he would much rather have the maid as his son's mother than a gypsy harlot. He claims to be amused that she has been deceiving herself with "vain dreams" of having carried off a successful revenge (*HH 17 - 18*). Simplicissimus' pompous airs are contrasted with Hopalong's boorish fury at the mention of his own relationship with Courasche. When the young student suggests that Hopalong had been, to all appearances, Courasche's slave, and that it was she who gave him his nickname, Hopalong explodes with rage. Threatening to attack the student, Hopalong has to be restrained by Simplicissimus and the innkeeper. At the conclusion of the conversation about Courasche, Simplicissimus exhorts everyone to pray for her while Hopalong wishes that lightening would strike her dead (*HH 25 -26*).

The exchange among Simplicissimus, Hopalong and the young student suggests an effort to overthrow, or at the very least, to counterbalance the effect of Courasche's

story. We witness an outburst of rage from Hopalong and a call to moral rectitude, forgiveness, and piety from Simplicissimus. It is significant that Courasche's voice is heard only through the mediation of the scribe, and that the three men have the last word. Still, it is a tribute to the power of her speech, even delivered at second hand, that it is provocative enough to set off the violent response of one member of her remote audience, Hopalong, and intriguing enough to pique the curiosity of the other, Simplicissimus. Despite his attempt to strike a dispassionate pose, he keeps prompting the scribe to tell more and more of Courasche's story. Courasche's voice and her story are powerful enough to override the effect of the responses of both men. Simplicissimus claims paternity of the illegitimate child that Courasche had placed at his doorstep. This declaration is offered as a trump to Courasche's final trick. It is a rather weak retort, however, given the seriousness of the original charge of fathering an illegitimate child and the appropriately grave reaction of Simplicissimus' family and the law to this and other indiscretions. His rebuttal notwithstanding, Courasche has succeeded in calling into question not only Simplicissimus' morality, his taste and his judgment, but his masculinity. In her analysis of the relationship between class and gender in seventeenth-century pseudo-autobiographical novels, Tatlock rehearses the entire list of Simplicissimus' possible heirs. Because Simplicissimus is in reality a child of privilege, Tatlock concludes that by failing to "husband his resources," he has put his pedigree in jeopardy (397). Although he may deflate the desired effect of Courasche's trick, he is in no condition to boast about his position as a parent or as a man, having, by his own misdeeds and failures, put at risk the social order into which he was born. Thus, while by no means championing Courasche's cause, Tatlock helps us to put Simplicissimus'

comments in proper perspective: Simplicissimus himself has been a rogue. Consequently, his admonition that all should pray for the salvation of Courasche's soul reads like the preface and the postscript that we discussed earlier: it is "too little too late." The young scholar's depiction of the vibrant, compelling Courasche, ardent and dynamic among her gypsy clan, simply overwhelms Simplicissimus' simple prayer.

Thus, *The Runagate Courage* leaves us with a satisfying sense of a vital, powerful and clever woman who is, at the very least, an estimable counterpoint to her male "counterpart" Simplicissimus, and may even represent both sexes simultaneously. Let us heed, for a moment, the suggestion that Grimmelshausen was adeptly rendering Baroque notions of duality⁵⁸ and recall as well the motto that he arranged to have inscribed in all editions of his later works: "Der Wahn betrügt" ("Delusion deceives").⁵⁹ Let us take the example of Courasche's planting her maid's illegitimate child at Simplicissimus' doorstep. In this scene and Simplicissimus' retort to it, we see Grimmelshausen's nuanced view. In their attempts to deceive each other, Simplicissimus and Courasche may be deceiving themselves. Given Simplicissimus' history of love affairs and irresponsible neglect of his own wife, and Courasche's passionate and errant ways, we cannot tell for sure who is telling the truth in this matter, nor who is tricked in the end. Similarly, when Courasche takes her revenge upon Simplicissimus by revising his narrative about her, it is true that she reveals herself to be much more morally

⁵⁸In addition to the critics already mentioned, Bjornson also attests to Grimmelshausen's ability to integrate contending moral and philosophical stances in a single work and in a single figure (167).

⁵⁹Bjornson 173.

reprehensible than he had depicted her in his version.⁶⁰ At the same time, however, Courasche exposes Simplicissimus' own self-deception and corruption, and calls into question his very masculinity, to the degree that she unmasks his failure to protect the integrity of his lineage. She also calls into question the hallmarks of courage and achievement that seem to define what it means to be a man in the chaotic world she inhabits: sexual excess, violence, and avarice. Finally, although Courasche receives brutal treatment in the rapes which have been read by some critics as just punishment for her defiance, she recovers from these tortures and perseveres.

Considered together, the works we have read fail to mete out the final punishments that might be expected to be invoked against such a transgressor: death and/or eternal damnation. In contrast to the husbands who die in quick succession, Courasche lives on. The fate of her eternal soul remains ambiguous: she is "close to" being condemned to hell, but not definitively damned: "Rather say a few reverent *pater nosters* for her sake, that the kindness of God may illuminate her heart and bring her to repentance!" (*Hop.* 25).

Courasche, then, may be seen as an experiment that disrupts the surface contours of gender. This disruption is propelled by the infusion of picaresque elements. In Courasche's gender flexibility we see the protean nature of the *pícaro*: she learns how to survive in a man's world by her "feminine" charms and her "masculine" skills. In her several marriages and sexual unions, we see an adaptation of the apprenticeship motif: Courasche continually seeks partnerships with husband/masters who can protect her.

⁶⁰Bjornson makes this point when discussing Grimmelshausen's interest in conveying the protagonist's ability to transcend the reversed world in which he is deceived by appearances (174).

Particularly through those marriages that afford her the opportunity to live a double life, her sense of independence and feelings of self-worth increase dramatically. With each abusive relationship, she is forced to learn incrementally how to protect and how to assert herself, to the point where she can, when necessary, play the role of the oppressive husband and master, which she has learned, after all, from the exemplars around her. When the conventional world can no longer contain her, she retreats, in true picaresque fashion, to the marginalized world of the gypsies. In this arena, she figuratively surpasses all of her spouses: she has risen to the rank of “generalissimo!” From this realm, she instigates an emphatic revolutionary gesture in the form of her exuberant autobiography, aimed at her antonym and nemesis, in response to which he, and the world of men, have very little indeed to say.

Chapter V

Retold Stories, Part 2: Genre-bending and Literary Revision -

Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Courasche's story offsets, indeed, opposes, its predecessor in *Simplicissimus*, its framing comments in *The Runagate Courage*, and its sequel in *Hopalong*. It will be sufficient to bear this phenomenon in mind as I turn to Brecht *without* rehearsing the many years of critical head-shaking over the apparent contradictions that can be found among his theoretical statements and the apparent conflict between Brecht's theories and the impact of his most artistically successful plays.⁶¹ The final revision of Courasche that I shall be considering appears in one of those plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children: A Chronicle of the Thirty Year's War*. In his creation of the character Mother Courage, Brecht was more profoundly affected by his picaresque source than has previously been recognized. Further, several of Brecht's theatrical innovations can be connected to narrative features in the picaresque novel. I may indeed be reading "against the grain," to borrow a phrase from Toril Moi (24 - 25), in that my investigation will not directly address issues of authorial intention. Nor will it seek to assign primacy for the picaresque in the constellation of influences that stimulated and inspired Brecht.⁶² My focus is not so much on establishing lines of literary reception, but rather on understanding the embedded potential of the picaresque. I will begin by highlighting the similarities of

⁶¹For a discussion of the contradictions in Brecht and the contentions in Brecht scholarship, see Haas. For an exercise in closely aligning aspects of *Mother Courage* with Brecht's critical statements on *Gestus*, see Gleitman.

⁶² Weisstein emphasizes Brecht's interest in the idea of mixed genres. He reviews a number of early works that influenced Brecht but focuses on contemporary influences, such as the novels of Brecht's collaborator, Lion Feuchtwanger (257 - 266).

Mother Courage to her picaresque ancestor Courasche, a comparison that has been underdeveloped in the critical literature. I will then examine instances of picaresque structure in *Mother Courage*, also previously underappreciated, and will provide parallel statements by Brecht on the dramaturgical theory that informs those examples.

Brecht takes full advantage of the innovation that Grimmelshausen achieved in allowing his picaresque figures to participate in historical events. The Thirty Years War provides him with a powerful analogue to the conflict that was just on the horizon in 1939, when he wrote *Mother Courage* while in exile in Sweden.⁶³ Brecht further condenses his material, narrowing the span of years that he chooses to present from nearly seventy in Grimmelshausen to just twelve. Of Grimmelshausen's two major participants in the Thirty Years War, it has been suggested that Brecht owes more to the story of Simplicissimus than Courasche. (See Horwich's comparison of *Mother Courage* and *Simplicissimus*, for example.) That he chooses a female figure rather than a male from the Simplician works allows Brecht to mine the potential of gender inversion to criticize conventional notions of courage, as Grimmelshausen did in *The Runagate Courage*. Brecht also follows the picaresque model in maintaining the nomadic quality of his character's travels. Gleitman, for example, reminds us of the "Jew's harp" which is heard at the first entrance of Courage's wagon, announcing that its occupants are wandering outcasts (153). As in the case of Courasche, some commentators see Courage's story as a downward spiral, as she loses each of her children in turn and is alone and bereft at the end of the play. The movement of the play is also circular,

⁶³ John Fuegi discusses Brecht's mining of Grimmelshausen's representation of the Thirty Year's War (82 - 83) and studies Brecht's *Schweyk in the Second World War* as an example of how Brecht adapted his seventeenth-century source (99 - 119).

In the play, the figure of Courasche is transformed into Anna Fierling, known as Courage, who lacks Libushka's good looks and noble if illegitimate genealogy. Critics have been quick to point out that Courage is not the prostitute that Courasche is. However, Courage's three children have been fathered by different men. We are not supplied the lusty, seemingly endless litany of amorous adventures that spans almost the entire length of Courasche's text. Instead, Courage provides a compact catalog of her sexual relationships in the dialogue about her children that rapidly unfolds in response to the recruiting officer's query in Scene One:

MOTHER COURAGE. Must they all have the same name? (Pointing to the elder son) This fellow, for instance, I call him Eilif Noyocki. Why? He got the name from his father who told me he was called Koyocki. Or was it Moyocki? Anyhow, the lad remembers him to this day. Only the man he remembers is someone else, a Frenchman, with a pointed beard. But he certainly has his father's brains - that man could whip the breeches off a farmer's backside before he could turn around. So we all have our own names.

SERGEANT. You're all called something different?

MOTHER COURAGE. Are you pretending you don't understand?

SERGEANT. (pointing at the younger son) He's Chinese, I suppose.

MOTHER COURAGE. Wrong again. Swiss.

SERGEANT. After the Frenchman?

MOTHER COURAGE. Frenchman? What Frenchman? Don't confuse the issue, Sergeant, or we'll be here all day. He's Swiss, but he happens to be called Feyos, a name that has nothing to do with his father, who was called something

else - a military engineer, if you please, and a drunkard.

SERGEANT. Then how come his name's Feyos?

MOTHER COURAGE. Oh, Sergeant, you have no imagination. *Of course*, he's called Feyos: when he came, I was with a Hungarian. He didn't mind. He had a floating kidney, though he never touched a drop. He was a very *honest* man. The boy takes after him.

SERGEANT. But that wasn't his father!

MOTHER COURAGE. I said he took after him. I call him Swiss Cheese. Why? Because he's good at pulling wagons. (Pointing to her daughter) And that is Katttrin Haupt, she's half German (*MC 1*).⁶⁴

The customary briskness of Courasche's narrative delivery is rendered in Courage as the dizzying speed and mesmerizing power of a fast-talking traveling salesman. The placement of this vignette is significant as well. It occurs immediately after Mother Courage has introduced her clan as tradespeople, has sung a song about the boots and meat she has to sell, and has described the lengths to which she has gone to prevent her stock of bread from molding, so as to protect her profits. Thus, the children themselves are introduced as if they too are so much inventory: "And we've seen the whole wide world - this wagonload and me."

Anna Fierling's alias, of course, alerts us to the connections with the sexual and gender innuendos in Grimmelshausen's joke. However, the irony of the nickname is expanded in Brecht. Like Courasche, Courage herself explains the origin of her alias:

⁶⁴Citations are given by scene number.

They call me Mother Courage 'cause I was afraid I'd be ruined, so I drove through the bombardment of Riga like a madwoman with fifty loaves of bread in my cart. They were going moldy, what else could I do? (*MC* 1).

As in *Grimmelshausen*, Courage's name is ambiguous, but the meaning of the word is turned inside out. Noting once in a conversation that parachutists "are dropped like bombs, and bombs do not need courage," Brecht said, "The thing that would take courage would be to refuse to climb into the plane in the first place" (Völker 141 - 142). If we consider the term "courage" in the sense in which soldiers might use it, that is, to mean roughly "guts," or "balls" (Hiller, in "The Sutler's Cart and the Lump of Gold" details the literal and euphemistic meanings of the term), then both *Courasche* and *Courage* possess it in abundance and are more than aptly nicknamed. If we take the word to suggest the conventional notions of selfless heroism that might come to mind particularly in times of oppression and war, then each is named after a quality that she does not possess. Two of *Courage's* three children, however, possess this quality in abundance. *Swiss Cheese* is executed because he refuses to hand over the regimental cash box to the enemy. *Katrin* is shot to death while alerting a village of an imminent attack. *Eilif's* death, on the other hand, uncovers the radical instability of the meaning of courage. Early in his career as a soldier, he is rewarded for killing peasants and plundering their farm, and his deeds are hailed as acts of courage. Later, he is executed for the same actions because, unbeknownst to *Eilif*, peace has just been declared, and now what he has done is considered murderous and savage. Just moments after his execution, however, the fighting resumes, underscoring the brutality and chaos of the war, the meaninglessness of

language, the instability of values, and the absurdity of attempting to survive and prosper within the system of war (*MC* 8).

The ambiguity of Courage's nickname is elaborated by the appellation *Mutter*. Whereas Courasche is barren, Mother Courage has three adult children. In Brecht's revision, Courage's offspring take the place of Courasche's husbands. Courage's relationship with her children repeats several of the patterns we have observed in the picaresque original: a partnership brokered around the satisfaction of reciprocal needs; the nexus of sexuality, sterility, and gender-neutrality; and the motif of serial deaths. Each of these patterns complicates the meaning of *Mutter* and helps to indict *Mother Courage* within Brecht's overall criticism of war.

Courasche bargains with her Captain of Horse and other spouses for partnership, a way of life that allows her the male protection she needs in order to pursue her career as warrior and plunderer. In the bargain, she satisfies her husbands' sexual desires and economic greed, as well as her own. Courage has brokered a deal with her children in which sexuality, familial loyalty, and sustenance are the commodities of exchange. In return for bread and safety, the children (and even Courage to a certain extent) are denied sexual activity and even fantasy. Thus, in Scene One, Courage vehemently objects even to sexual innuendo in the presence of her grown children: "Show a little respect for a lady and don't go telling these grown children of mine I'm pulling anything of yours," she quips in response to an officer's off-color remark. John Fuegi points out that Brecht gives to the character of Yvette, the camp prostitute, most of Courasche's sexuality. In Scene Three, Mother Courage interrupts Yvette just as she is about to describe how she contracted venereal disease. Courage does not want her daughter Kattrin to hear it. The

mute and homely Katrin prances about in Yvette's boots, silently bearing witness to her being denied the opportunity for sexual love because of her looks and her disabilities (MC 3). Bryant-Bertail suggests that Katrin's inability to speak is the result of sexual abuse, as evidenced by Courage's cryptic comment that her daughter has been silent ever since a soldier "[stuck] something in her mouth." When Katrin struts about in the red boots, Courage rubs ashes into her daughter's face lest she draw the attention of marauding soldiers: "Well, one must hide one's light under a bushel, as they say. When a soldier sees a clean face, there's one more whore in the world." With this remark Courage may be denouncing sexuality because it invariably results in victimization of the woman. A few moments later, however, she chides Katrin: "Stealing Yvette's boots! But she disgraces herself for money, *you* do it for nothing - for pleasure!" This scolding implies a willingness to accept Katrin's behavior if it were profitable, but quite a different concern seems to be in evidence when Courage next insists: "I told you, no soldiers! Save your proud peacock ways for peacetime!" Her anger here seems to arise not from determination to protect Katrin's virginity but from Courage's unwillingness to release her daughter to the distractions of prostitution. Katrin and her brothers, young adults who are also denied the opportunity for sexual intercourse, are needed, after all, to help run the business and to pull the wagon.

Courage's attempts to contain and to control her children also recall and revise Courasche's attempts to dominate her common-law husband Hopalong. The terms of their agreement stipulate that Courasche is to have total sexual freedom while her partner must remain monogamous, the arrangement implying a parallel to the male's position vis à vis the wife in a conventional marriage of the time. Departing from Grimmelshausen,

Brecht gives us a Courage who is willing to sacrifice her *own* sexual gratification in order to keep her children with her *in the war*. In Scene Nine, she turns down the Cook's offer to leave the battlefield and run an inn because he refuses to include Katrin in their plan. Still, Courage denies that love for Katrin is the reason for her decision: "And don't think I've sent him packing on your account. It was the wagon." Courage's attachment to the children parallels Courasche's lust, while the acquisitiveness represented by Courage's wagon and its contents aligns with Courasche's avarice. These impulses - attachment, lust, acquisitiveness, avarice - function not only in tandem but contrapuntally, loading on, one against each other, conflicting yet complementary drives. In his construction of character and, as we shall see later, in his production of story, Brecht emphasizes the presentation of alternatives in a system to which he alluded as "NOT . . . BUT" (BT 137, 144, 197). In this system, character emerges through a dialectical process in which contradictory drives are seen to co-exist and interact. Thus, Courage's motherly desire to keep her children is genuine, but so is her mercenary drive to keep the wagon and to maintain her trade. She claims to be in the business of sutlery for the sake of her offspring, in order to make a living to support their continued survival. Indeed, Bernard Dukore makes a case for the genuine struggle of Courage to provide for her children and not simply to profit by the war (644), while Eric Bentley similarly emphasizes the point that she has little choice but to haggle and bargain and remain focused on her business, as it is all she has to assure their survival (14). Claire Gleitman, on the other hand, focuses on Family as one of three "ideologemes" that Brecht explores in *Mother Courage*. She defines ideologemes, along the lines of Fredric Jameson's work, as a unit of a belief system that perniciously supports a structure that is predatory in its oppression of the

faithful (149), suggesting that Mother Courage's tyrannical insistence upon the integrity of the family ultimately oppresses the children she hopes to protect. Her subordination of the children to their wagon, their trade, comes at the expense of libidinous gratification, thus inscribing a landscape that abandons desire, sensuality, and sexuality, such as we have seen in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Sue-Ellen Case's analysis of mothers in Brecht's plays is helpful here. Case points out that only Brecht's early homosexual plays, despite their sexism toward procreative females, presented the possibility of new roles for women in their revolutionary discourse on desire and the body. She describes the effects of Brecht's desertion of this discourse in his later plays: "With the suppression of sexuality and the dynamics of desire, comes the rise of the asexual mother figure and the Epic style, with its material cleanliness, ascetic streamlining of thought and action, extreme assiduity of language and the promise of concrete recompense for the absence of sexuality" (72). This description aptly characterizes as well the picaresque asexuality that functions in *Mother Courage* (and *Lazarillo*) as a necessary cost of doing business with the world.

The imposition of asexuality also pre-figures the barrenness of Courage's family. Mother Courage's children all die violently in the course of the play. However, Courage herself is immune from physical harm, like the "shotfree" Courasche. The "curse" that brought death to all of Courasche's husbands is borne by Mother Courage's children. Their imminent deaths are foretold in Scene One when Courage assumes the role of gypsy fortune teller formerly played by Courasche.⁶⁵ In Grimmelshausen, Courasche contrives to steal the jewels of a young lady. She distracts her attention by pretending to work a charm that will assure the return of the lady's lover. Courasche is discovered,

⁶⁵Fuegi likens this moment to Oedipus announcing his relentless determination to seek out the murderer of Laius, a comparison that Brecht might not have appreciated (88).

forced to return the jewels, and punished with a severe beating (*RC* 174 - 176). In Brecht's play, Courage tries to distract and frighten a recruiting officer and his sergeant in the hope of preventing them from taking her son Eilif into service. She has the sergeant draw from pieces of paper that she has folded into his helmet. When her boys seem attracted to military life, she has them too draw lots that she herself has prepared. Each son, like the sergeant, draws a black cross, the sign of death. When even Katrin draws a black cross, her mother warns her: "Don't be too kind . . . there's a cross in your path too" (*MC* 1).⁶⁶ As Courage attempts to distract the sergeant, so she is herself distracted by the opportunity to sell a belt. As the sergeant draws her around the wagon to haggle over the price and condition of the goods, the recruiting officer takes Eilif off to join the army, plying him with false promises of glory and glamor. As in *Grimmelshausen*, Courage's trickery fails, and her attempt to hold on to her prize (her son) is defeated. The corresponding trick of the recruiting officer and the sergeant is successful, but it is a hollow victory. Eilif, so willing to be duped into the army, is later executed, disgraced as a criminal. Courage loses her other children as well, and almost all of her goods, in part due to her preoccupation with making business deals while her offspring are in danger. Swiss Cheese dies because Courage is haggling too long over a deal that would yield her the cash she needs to ransom him. Katrin is killed while her mother is off in town buying goods that the merchants are selling on the cheap because they are about to evacuate the town. Franz Mennemeier explores the degree to which Courage can be held morally responsible for the deaths of her children. His conclusion is that, given the difficulties of

⁶⁶Hamburger attributes Brecht's notion that "'no one can be good in a social and economic order that has no place for goodness'" to Brecht's reading of Kästner's novel *Fabian*, although this questionable moral is understated in Kästner.

her situation, Courage was doing what she had to do in order to survive, and he points out the irony of her inducing the destruction of her children while attempting to secure their livelihood. While this analysis is sound, it does not account for the picaresque elements of asexuality, barrenness, avarice, and serial death, nor does it show how these features combine with the picaresque theme of exigency to produce the profound isolation and sterility that we see at the end of *Mother Courage*.

This dialectic of mutual deceit observed in the scene with the recruiting officers can also be traced to the seventeenth-century *pícara*. It recalls the mutual duplicity of Courasche and Simplicissimus, each thinking that the other has been deceived, both of them deceiving themselves. The resultant cynicism about the world and the people in it finds expression in the *pícara*'s astringent but abbreviated complaints. Laments are cut short with a shrug as the *pícara* gets on with the business of survival, lustily joining in the corruption to secure her own livelihood and property and to satisfy her appetites. Hence, Courasche vaunts, in a spasm of a text, against Simplicissimus and then gamely returns to her gypsy life. Similarly, Courage emits terse, darkly humorous lines and abrupt physical gestures to vent her cynicism and anger. In Scene Two, for example, Eilif has suddenly reappeared after being at the war for two years. Courage overhears him describing how he slaughtered some peasants and took a herd of their oxen as booty: "Tires you out, skinning peasants. Gives you an appetite." When Courage has the opportunity to provide a chicken for Eilif's commanding officer, she is grateful that the delivery of the cattle will be delayed. She remarks in an aside: "Now that's considerate of Eilif - to bring the oxen tomorrow - otherwise my capon wouldn't have been so welcome today." When she overhears the Commander saying that he will need brave soldiers for the coming fight,

formerly enraged young soldier stumbling off, slurring a nasty “Kiss my ass” to Mother Courage. The soldier’s comment is left hanging in the air, a fitting tribute to the world’s posture toward the pícara, and a harbinger of the pícara’s reciprocal compliance.

In *The Runagate Courage*, Courasche loses all her husbands, several of whom she seems genuinely to have loved. As a widow, she is alone and unprotected except for the goods she may have inherited by marriage. After each death, she quickly adjusts and energetically re-mobilizes her resources toward self-preservation:

But in Pressburg, I not only lost this, my beloved; I was also besieged by Bethel Gabor in that same city. But when ten companies of horse and two regiments of foot succoured the city by a stratagem and Bethel despaired of victory and lifted the siege, I seized the first opportunity and betook myself to Vienna with my horses, servants, and all my baggage . . . (RC 49).

Mother Courage too shows picaresque resilience after the deaths of Swiss Cheese and Kattrin, but her strength is more stubborn durability than supple toughness. After each loss, she re-assembles the balance of her possessions, as if her children had been so much inventory, and stumbles on to resume her commercial interactions with the war. Her re-engagement is imbued with a deeper and more harrowing irony than is found in *Grimmelshausen*. Whereas Courasche’s barrenness circumvents the narrative complications inherent in dealing with a mother’s love of her children, Courage’s mercantile attitude toward her children does not preclude her capacity for deep attachment to them. The silent scream after she has denied and lost and again denied Swiss Cheese speaks better than words her complicity in his death. The determined “I must get back into business,” uttered in Scene Twelve as she harnesses herself to the

wagon to drag it alone after Katrin's death, is likewise full of bitter irony, preceded as it is by Courage's sly retrieval of one of the coins she had proffered to pay for her daughter's burial. This bit of stage business, like the silent scream, was added by the actress Helene Weigel and later cited by Brecht as a consummate gesture for Mother Courage's mercantile avarice (*Collected Plays* 383). Likewise, Brecht added the line "I must get back into business" in one of several script changes that were intended to emphasize Courage's stubborn refusal to learn from her losses but instead represented for most audiences her indomitable resilience (Fuegi 238 n. 3 and 242 n. 37).

In Brecht's linking of the motifs of survival and business, we call to mind the pícaras, both Courasche and Moll, who engage in commerce. But it is perhaps in the deeper plates of that nexus, where we catch sight of the consequences of survival by collaboration and accommodation, that Brecht seems particularly close to the picaresque mode. Here we can view the war as the deep structure of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. War is the "abidingly present absence" (Gleitman 151) that is absorbed and accommodated by Courage. War is not an extraordinary event: it is a way of life. In the same sense, the hypocritical world itself is the abiding presence with which the pícaro/pícara must cope. The hostility and chaos of the world are not an anomaly: they are the norm. As we have seen, the pícaro/pícara engages with the world "as is" without seeking to change it. The act of entering the fray on its own terms, doing dirty business with the world, is the hallmark of the picaresque coping strategy. Thus, Courage goes back into business, unconscious of the damage it has done to her. Courasche spites Simplicissimus (and herself) without remorse or repentance. Lazarillo beats his blind master at his own game. Then, having learned much about how to deal with a brutal

world, but nothing about his own brutalization, he moves gamely on. In that moment of moving on, repeated again and again throughout the picaresque story, the pícaro/pícaro engages and re-engages, seemingly endlessly, with the world.

This pattern of re-engagement brings us to the issue of structure, the second area of picaresque influence on Brecht's play. With regard to structure, before looking specifically at the picaresque, one should say first that Brecht owes much to the novel. In Brecht's theoretical statements we see his stress on the "literarization" of the theatrical experience as a kind of re-textualizing of the dramatic script.⁶⁷ For Brecht, "literarization of the theatre needs to be developed to the utmost degree" ("Literarization" in *BT* 43). Through literarization Brecht saw the possibility of discovering a new function for the theatre, one that would incorporate didactic purposes and allow for the integration of the science of psychology. This would empower the theatre to analyze the individual in the ways that novels do, rather than simply as parts for actors to perform (*BT* 45 - 46). Literarization of the theatre would enable spectators to engage in "complex seeing" (*BT* 44), in re-viewing the theatrical material as if they were reading a book: "Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too" (*BT* 44).⁶⁸

⁶⁷Della Pollock, in a discussion of Brecht's *Drums in the Night*, connects Bakhtin's theory of the novel with Brecht's praxis as she works toward developing a "rhetoric of performed narrative." Christa Hasche notes Brecht's desire to "narrate the fable of the play" (190).

⁶⁸In his essay on literarization, Brecht himself links this innovation to the "epic style" (*BT* 44). "Epic" is a term that acquired many layers of meaning through Brecht's career, according to Fuegi who suggests that epic theatre, in its purest sense, implies simply the integration of narrative technique into a politicized drama (187). Brecht seems to have de-emphasized the specific term "epic theatre" in statements given fairly late in his life (Willett 276 and 281 - 282). For scholars and critics, a precise definition of the term "epic theatre" is extremely difficult to extract. Because of the association of "epic" with many

Two examples of literarization, the conscious employment on the stage of narrative elements, can be found in *Mother Courage*. One is the incorporation of narrative technique into the performance of songs, and the other is the presentation of actual text written on placards and projected on screens. Songs, or more precisely, as Brecht himself emphasized, “the singing of the songs” (BT 44) provide ample opportunity for the subtle infusion of narrative strategies. For Brecht, when an actor breaks into song, both the actor and the audience must perceive that a substantial alteration of functionality has occurred (BT 44). This sudden switch from actor to singer immediately imposes a new relationship between the actor and the material, between the actor and the character, and finally, between the audience and the material. The actor is no longer simply the character but has taken on the additional role of commentator. She must also assume the responsibility of displaying an individual who has suddenly burst into song, so as to heighten the effect of “speaking-against-the-music” (BT 45). This in turn increases the “readability” of the performance by encouraging the audience, while observing the interesting phenomenon of an individual singing, to play back and re-examine the content of the song.

A sturdy example can be seen in the Cook’s “Song of the Great Souls of this Earth” in Scene 9. The song interrupts a scene in which the Cook and Courage argue over whether Kattrin can accompany them when they take over an inn in Utrecht. The Cook literally announces the song, breaking with the operatic tradition of pretending not to notice that one is suddenly singing, a practice that Brecht found “revolting” (BT 44):

features unrelated to picaresque technique, “literarization” is a more useful term for the purposes of this study. Its close association with epic theatre, however, is to be noted.

Worthy Sir, menials, and all within! We now present the song of Solomon, Julius Caesar, and other great souls who came to no good, so you can see we're law-abiding folk too and have a hard time getting by, especially in winter (*MC 9*).

The verses of the song speak of the virtues traditionally associated with historical figures, and show how these virtues bring destruction to each. For example:

Old Julius Caesar, he was brave.
 His fame shall never cease.
 He sat like a god on an altar piece.
 Yet they tore him limb from valiant limb
 And Brutus helped to slaughter him . . . (*MC 9*)

Between the verses, the Cook delivers spoken asides that counter the image of the historical figure with descriptions of the lot of ordinary souls:

For the virtues are dangerous in this world, as our fine song tells. You're better off without, you have a nice life, breakfast included - some good hot soup maybe . . . I'm an example of a man who's not had any, and I'd like some, I'm a soldier, but what good did my bravery do me in all those battles? None at all. I might just as well have wet my pants like a poltroon and stayed at home . . . (*MC 9*)

The gist of the Cook's insertions between the verses is that the common people have either all or none of the virtues represented by the great souls, and still they suffer. The cumulative effect of the song, the spoken asides, and the overall presentation is to remind the audience of the fact that the Cook possesses neither bravery nor soup. In other words, the stories of great souls may be read as examples of wisdom, bravery, honesty, and charity, but at the same time these stories record the meaninglessness, indeed the danger,

of these virtues. In turn, the real life of the ordinary human being inscribes over the text of history the document of an ongoing struggle for survival in a world where “there’s no soup going” (*MC* 9).

The idea of a world without soup might serve as an apt metaphor for picaresque as well as Brechtian socialist issues. At the same time, the question “What is to be done about it?” provides a clue to the effect of the other transformation that can be seen to be taking place within the performance of *Mother Courage*, the introduction of actual text on the stage through the display of scene titles, placards and signs positioned above, behind, and around the performance space. Robert Leach compares the scene titles in Brecht’s play with the chapter headings in *The Runagate Courage*. In Grimmelshausen, he points out, Chapter 27 carries the following heading:

‘Courage’s husband is killed in battle. She herself escapes on her mule, meets a troop of gipsies and is taken by their Lieutenant for his wife. She foretells the future to a young lady in love, robbing her of her jewels the while. But her success is short-lived. She is soundly beaten and made to give them back’ (137).

Brecht’s Scene 8 has the following heading:

‘Before the city of Ingolstadt in Bavaria Mother Courage is present at the funeral of the fallen commander, Tilly. Conversations take place about war and heroes and the duration of the war. The Chaplain complains that his talents are lying fallow and Katrin gets the red boots. The year is 1632’ (137).

Brecht’s adaptation of the original headings indicates his interest in borrowing the “tone and method” of his source to create a parallel but distinct story line, as Leach observes (137). When Brecht appropriates the novelistic text, he revises the original material for

the stage, in effect, “dramatizing” it, arranging for the text to be enacted rather than read. Then, by means of narrative accents, he invites the theatre audience to read the performance as text, thereby revising it yet again, in a sense turning what has become theatre back into narrative form, in a metamorphosed fusion that marries drama and narrative. For Brecht, the transmutation will not be complete, however, until, the audience, having read and reflected upon Brecht’s and their own re-visitations of the material, act upon what they observe and mobilize to change the corrupt system that has been exposed: “We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself” (“Organum” in *BT* 190). While Brecht’s audience is expected to become activist, however, clearly Mother Courage is not. Kattrin takes up the equipment of the war (a regimental drum) in order to thwart, even if minutely, the progress and impact of the war. Courage, on the other hand, takes up the yoke of her wagon and returns to business as usual. In the transformation of Courasche into Mother Courage, Brecht seems to have deeply understood the picaresque predicament:

A child, living in a world of old men, learns how things work there . . . Even if he realizes that the arrangements made for him by ‘Providence’ are only what has been provided by society he is bound to see society . . . as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and therefore not in any way to be influenced (“Organum” in *BT* 192).

While Brecht clearly discerned the retrospective opportunities of a drama that assimilated narrative accents, his attempts at the reverse, the conversion of dramatic

material into narrative form, were unsuccessful. *Threepenny Novel*, Brecht's novelistic adaptation of his play *The Threepenny Opera* (itself a reworking of another play, *The Beggar's Opera*) failed largely because Brecht did not know how to weave the episodes of the original dramatic materials into a coherent plot.⁶⁹ This failure is instructive because it suggests that Brecht's strength lies in his ability to mine the potential of the episode itself. Brecht's unqualified endorsement of the episodic in his plays helps us to re-authenticate the uses of the episodic in picaresque narrative. Ironically, the structural (picaresque) features that contribute to the innovative narrative perspective of Brecht's epic theatre and set it in opposition to traditional "dramatic" theatre are the same features that have set picaresque narrative in opposition to its "more advanced" descendent, the novel. The episodic quality of picaresque narrative has led many scholars, privileging the manipulation of event and episode toward character development, congruous plot, and coherent meaning that we expect in the novel, to view the picaresque as merely a precursor genre. Looking at *Mother Courage* and *The Runagate Courage* through the eager, appreciative eyes of Brecht, we are given new insight into Brecht's dramatic technique and new access to the potential of picaresque episode.

The picaresque accentuation of episodic structure resonates in the case Brecht makes for the deliberate modularity of his plays. Setting his epic theatre in opposition to traditional "dramatic" theatre, he identifies the two structural components of epic theatre as episode and montage, with each scene standing "for its own" and the action moving along in "curves" and "jumps" ("Modern Theatre" in *BT* 37). Meaning resides in the

⁶⁹Bruce Cook discusses *Threepenny Novel* as well as *The Tui-Novel* and *The Business Deals of Julius Caesar* as well as Brecht's short stories which were more successful (18 - 21).

episode itself. “Each single episode has its basic gest” (“Organum” in *BT* 200). Indeed, each episode might be read as a complete play in itself, in much the same way that a single chapter of a picaresque narrative might be appreciated as a coherent whole. This episodic accent becomes a centerpiece of Brecht’s revolt against conventional dramatic theatre. For Brecht, the tendency of traditional drama to link episodes by means of a linear, causal plot forces each scene to grow out of the previous one in a process that he calls “evolutionary determinism” (“Modern/Epic” in *BT* 37). In his alternative epic and literarized theatre, Brecht seeks both to expose the “inconsistencies” within each episode (“Organum” in *BT* 200) and to maximize the discontinuity of the whole. He asserts that individual episodes ought to be “knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed” (“Organum” in *BT* 201). Brecht’s sensitivity to the power of the episode is reflected in the warning he issues to his actors to guard against “playing one thing out of another instead of one thing after another” (“Theaterarbeit” in *BT* 245) and to search for the “nodal points” of the story (“Street Scene” in *BT* 129).⁷⁰

In other statements, Brecht emphasizes the episodic almost to the point of seeming to advocate the arbitrary placement of scenes, even suggesting that they could be “shuffled around” without in the least altering the overall effect of the play (Schoeps 259). Brecht still maintains the primacy of the story, however, claiming that “everything hangs on the ‘story’; it is the heart of the theatrical performance” (“Organum” in *BT* 200).

⁷⁰Clearly, Brecht observed other examples of episodic structure besides those found in picaresque narratives. Fuegi cites Expressionist plays, Chinese theatre and Elizabethan drama, paying special attention to Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare whose history plays were influenced by medieval chronicles. Fuegi claims that Brecht is less innovative than creative when he adapts the ancient form of the chronicle play to the seventeenth-century materials found in Grimmelshausen and brings the resultant form to the twentieth-century stage (20 and 95 - 97).

His sense of how the story emanates from the episodes echoes the narrative approach that we have found to be typical of the picaresque mode:

For a genuine story to emerge it is most important that the scenes should to start with be played quite simply one after another, using the experience of real life, without taking account of what follows or even of the play's overall sense. The story then unreels in a contradictory manner; the individual scenes retain their own meaning; they yield (and stimulate) a wealth of ideas; and their sum, the story, unfolds authentically without any cheap all-pervading idealization (one word leading to another) or directing of subordinate, purely functional component parts to an ending in which everything is resolved ("Appendices to the 'Short Organum'" in *BT* 279).

Thus, episodic structure resonates with Brecht because it reflects his vision of Mother Courage and the world she inhabits. The episodic is both component and agent of a fragmentary, fluid, and open-ended construction of character. I suggest that this view of character (non)development is as critical to the notions of picaresque mode that inform this study as it is to Brecht's dramaturgy. If the balance of our discussion of Brecht and the picaresque were to carry a Brechtian placard, it might read: "The Episodic Potential."

In Scene One, under a title that announces the imminent loss of her son, a woman and her grown children enter, the boys pulling the sutler's wagon with their mother and sister astride it. The group is stopped by a sergeant and a recruiting officer. The scene title gives the audience both the woman's given name and her nickname and indicates that she will lose a son. The soldiers demand identification papers. In response, Courage tells how she got her nickname and reveals that each child is born of a different father,

each is misnamed, remembering only the men who did not father them. Before the scene is over, the little family is reduced by one as Eilif goes off to join the army.

To see the first scene as an episode *per se* would entail the analysis of the next and subsequent scenes, as well as the transitions between scenes, in order to determine how scenes operate in relation to each other. This has been the approach of critics who have put Brecht's statements about modularity to the test, seeking to determine whether or not the sequence of the scenes is interchangeable. Fuegi, in this vein, ponders whether or not Scenes Five, Seven and Ten might be omitted or shifted (90, 242). We can point to the paratactic quality of the scenes, with the loss of the elder son being followed by his sudden, unexplained reappearance in Scene Two, which in turn is followed by the loss of the younger son and the rescue of the daughter in Scene Three. We could show how the short scene in which Mother Courage is "at the height of her business career" (*MC* 7) is followed by the death of the elder son, etc. This would be our methodology if we were analyzing conventional notions of episode, emphasizing their sequential rather than consequential, or causal, inter-relatedness.

In considering the episodic potential, however, we can instead choose to examine elements within a given scene. First, there is the ironic disparity between what the audience sees written in the scene titles and what we see enacted on the stage. In the first scene, the audience has read the scene title and already knows Courage's name, yet we watch the soldiers unravel this information and in addition the names of the offspring. The displayed text and the enacted scene function separately, as parallel episodes. The exchange about the names is itself an episode that establishes the fragmented (episodic) life of the family and bespeaks their splintered identities. Likewise, the audience knows

in advance that Mother Courage will lose a son, yet we watch that event unfold in a series of contrapuntal episodes as well (the mutual tricks of Courage and the officers who are out recruiting soldiers). The loss of a son functions in much the same way as the rude awakening to the harsh world suffered by Lazarillo when his head is bashed against the stone bull, and by Libushka who must cut her hair and disguise her gender in order to survive. The blow is completely unexpected; it comes out of nowhere, just as Courage's wagon does: "Hey, look, here's a canteen wagon. Two women and a couple of fellows" (MC 1).

The lesson Courage learns at the very start of her life on the stage before us is "When a war gives you all you earn / One day it may claim something in return!" (MC 1). The same message is transmitted over and over again, repetitively and reiteratively rather than elaboratively or developmentally, up to the last episodes of the play, when Katrin is killed while Courage is off making a deal. The audience learns too. We too have our heads bashed: just as we settle into our seats to see a play about a mother and her children, we learn that one will be lost. Just as we are drawn to the wily energy of Courage and the homely irony of her children's predicament, we see the extent to which Courage will go to make a deal, putting at risk the very children she is driven to protect. The co-existence of contradictory pressures is conveyed by the rolling out of individual moments, of episodes within episodes that follow one after the other and that interrupt and offset each other in quick succession:

. . . peace is interrupted by war; direct address is interrupted by conversation; song by speech, and the method of singing, *Sprechstimme*, is a method of interrupting singing with speaking and vice versa; Mother Courage's failure is

interrupted by her success as a businesswoman, her mother's pride by her grief; even the melodrama of the shooting of Kattrin as she drums to awaken Halle is interrupted by comedy . . . (Leach 135).

At the same time, we observe how episodes are presented as if they are all of equal significance. A selection of scene titles reads: "Of the successful sale of a capon and great days for the brave son" (*MC* 2); "Her daughter is saved, her wagon likewise" (*MC* 2); "Mother Courage is present at the funeral of the fallen commander Tilly . . . and Kattrin gets the red boots" (*MC* 6); "The great war of religion has lasted sixteen years and Germany has lost half its inhabitants . . . The cook receives a letter from Utrecht and is sent packing" (*MC* 9). We can read in the dialectal relationship of the episodes (or nodal points), in the placement of episode within episode within scene, and in the piling up of scene after scene, many of the features of Brecht's alienation effect as well as his notions of dialectical theatre ("Organum" and "Appendices" in *BT* 179 - 205 and 281 - 282). We can also understand more clearly that the picaresque tends to establish character by episode, by the loading on of sometimes unrelated, often contradictory details, and by the resisting of linear development. In Brecht, a distinct kind of character emerges, a fragmented and discontinuous self rather than the unified personality visualized by Lukács and others (Leach 132). This is also the picaresque self. Even as Brecht calls for greater understanding of the psychological dimensions of the individual, he remarks that the individual is "now in a state of complete dissolution, completely collapsed" (*BT* 45). By this he means that the concept of "man as a fixed point" has given way to a concept of the human being as "process" (*BT* 37), and that "the continuity of the ego is a myth" (*BT* 15). Brecht's intention is to knot together all the episodes and the nodal points within each

episode in such a way that they “do not altogether add up to a single unchangeable character but to one who changes all the time” (*BT* 56).

In *Courage*, an “inner reshuffling” (*BT* 15) occurs in response to shifts in the exterior world. The story of picaresque self-culture is an additive rather than summative self-construction. The reshuffling that occurs is an adjustment, an adaptation, a re-orientation to the altered and altering exterior world, rather than integration, leaving open the possibility of incessant change within the human personality. Through Brecht, we can see more clearly the protean quality of the picaresque figure. The personality of the *picara* is fluid and open-ended. Still, *Courage* is the only character in the play who has a multi-dimensional, if fluid, personality. The central quality represented by each child is easily and aptly summarized in the implied allegorical appellations of each: Eilif is brave Julius Caesar, Swiss Cheese is honest Socrates, and Katrin is unselfish Martin (*MC* 9). The other characters are relatively unidimensional as well. The Cook is a parasite. The Chaplain, although he makes a case for human decency and order, is a coward. Yvette is the camp whore. As in picaresque narrative, there are no heroes. *Courage* does not retreat, but neither does she stand and fight. She returns to her master. Brecht insists that *Courage* does not “learn from the futility of the war” and stresses her “keenness to get her cut” (*BT* 221). In Brecht as in Grimmelshausen, Defoe, and in the *Lazarillo*, the *picara/pícaro* is endowed with inexhaustible vitality, vigorous activity, and agency, limited agency, that is focused on the self and its preservation.

Just as the rules of the game continuously change for the *picara*, so in Brecht, the rules of a given society are “imperfect and provisional” (*BT* 205). As in *The Runagate Courage*, the piling up of searing detail within each episode and the rapid succession of

episodes and scenes whose connections are tenuous at best reflect the impermanence and unreliability of the world. Echoing the extreme brevity of Chapters Four and Six in *Lazarillo*, mutability in Brecht's play is iconized by Scene Eight in which peace is announced and war is declared in the space of a few minutes. Recalling the silliness of Chapter 20 in *The Runagate Courage*, which relates in a mere two pages how Hopalong and Courage rob two Italians, Eilif's execution can itself be read as an icon of the senseless, topsy-turvy world. His death, framed by the ridiculous raising and lowering of the flags of the two opposing faiths, formulates the hideous absurdity and impermanence of that world.

Yet, at the end of the play, Mother Courage proves to be a survivor by virtue of her formidable persistence. With her family gone and her goods decimated, she goes back into trade, dragging her wagon offstage as her boys had dragged it on in the first scene of the play. She is off to haggle with the world on its own terms, much as Courasche is off with her gypsy band to cheat the world "whose game we eat" (RC 182). Courage's endurance is a kind of success in itself, and, as such, it is of course another mark of her picaresque heritage. Her perseverance and resilience are impressive and admirable. Her success, however, is circumscribed by the degree to which she willingly participates in the business of war as the merchant "hyena of the battlefield" (MC 8) and consequently collaborates in the annihilation of her children.

While Grimmelshausen's narrative constitutes an emancipatory gesture on behalf of his female protagonist, Brecht's play seems to deflect attention away from questions of gender toward what he considers the larger issues of war and resistance. In *Courage*, Brecht has suppressed the sexuality of his picaresque original. Despite the checkered

sexual history presented in Scene One, Courage finally eschews sex, rejecting the Chaplain (MC 6) and turning down the offer from the Cook (MC 9) in favor of concentrating on her combined role of businesswoman and *Mutter*. Brecht does not simply layer the role of mother over the picaresque original. Instead, he complicates and challenges Courage's motherly instincts by associating them, indeed conflating them, with her role as businesswoman. Trading with the war feeds her children, strengthens her power over them, and at the same time ultimately destroys them. Brecht further interrogates his pícara's motherliness through the actions of Katrin, who is clearly the more successful mother although she has no children of her own. Katrin puts herself at risk to rescue an infant from a bombarded cottage (MC 5) and sacrifices her life to save the children of a village (MC 11). She is even ready to be a mother to her own mother, setting Courage free to go off with the Cook to enjoy a better life (MC 9). Katrin's "children" (her own mother being one of them) survive while she herself perishes. Courage's children all die while she lives on.

Finally, as difficult as it is to parse notions of femininity and feminine identity out of Brecht's play, it is through the figure of a woman that he is able to launch his own manifesto on the need to refrain from collaborating in the all-consuming system that is war. And it is through the figure of a woman that he is able to build a convincing matrix that associates sexuality, maternity, and trade as interactive mechanisms of complicity. He does not explore gender inversion as a possible locus of female emancipatory gesture as Defoe and Grimmelshausen do. By banishing sexuality and fertility from Courage's purview, he produces the figure of an almost genderless mother, yet this in itself is a kind of gender-bending. Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* regenerates the episodic

potential of the picaresque as it creates a new dramaturgy. His revision of the seventeenth-century pícaro illuminates the viability and flexibility of the picaresque mode.

Epilogue: The Episodic Self –

Jong's *Fear of Flying*

As this study draws to a close, I find that I must return to the two questions that launched my travels in the picaresque: First, is there a sense in which we can say that, in the fictions we have examined, the feminocentric *is* the picaresque? And, second, looking forward, will a woman's story always be a picaresque one? There is yet another question, an "untold" interrogative, if you will, that has been lurking between the lines and in the empty interstices of these pages: Is the picaresque the feminine? That is, to what extent is the pícaro a feminized male?

We have seen that gender can be a blank space in the picaresque. We have observed that the entire landscape may be rendered sterile and sexless, as in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. In other works, such as *Moll Flanders* and *The Runagate Courage*, gender is a *tabula rasa* upon which the narrative can inscribe gender-protean roles, layering, blending, and melding male and female, master and apprentice, husband and wife, while challenging or inverting expectations as to who is agent and who is object. In these stories, the pícaras produce significant gestures of emancipation (though not full liberation), crafted through their narrative imitation of the exemplars of patriarchy to which they are restricted (and subjected). In *Mother Courage*, maternity conspires with the male constructs of war and mercantilism to obliterate not only the possibility of femininity but also gender itself and the very space that gender might occupy in the human personality and on the stage. The twentieth-century pícara manages to hang on and to survive but captures no enemy banners, as her seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

predecessors do. They threaten subversion even if they do not thoroughly accomplish it, while *Mother Courage* thoroughly capitulates.

Which brings me to the case of Erica Jong. The interaction of the picaresque mode with feminocentric concerns in the Isadora Wing trilogy, while it gives us a vital and attractive pícara, produces a narrative that severely limits the protagonist's opportunities for personal autonomy. In *Fear of Flying*, *How to Save Your Own Life*, and *Parachutes and Kisses*, the episodic narrative structure is so driven by the "other-directedness" of the pícara that it yields a radically servile stance vis-à-vis the world. This other-directedness is set against the protagonist's articulated aspirations to self-determination. The Isadora Wing trilogy interests me because it is an example of textual role-playing: it is a twentieth-century picaresque masquerading as a twentieth-century *Bildungsroman*. But personal growth stalls in these would-be novels of female development. The intersection of the feminist with the picaresque in the Wing trilogy generates an erotic energy that in turn drives a plot that brings the pícara closer to self-annihilation than to self-creation. This is the more remarkable because of the generally counter-sexual constitution of the male picaresque in the *Lazarillo* and the protean, opportunistic manipulations of gender and sexuality in *Moll* and *Courasche* toward assertions of independence. In Jong's novels, it is most instructive, to our understanding of both the female picaresque and the female *Bildungsroman*, to observe how the picaresque mode exerts pressure against an author's avowal of a feminist project. The Wing trilogy crystallizes the question I have raised about the feasibility of a female novel of development. I share with the critics Gayle Greene and Susan Rubin Suleiman a measure of generalized disappointment in these texts. I must caution that these critics'

awareness of the picaresque is not in evidence at all in their statements; nevertheless, I want to place their discontents, as well as some points from Noelle Caskey's theorizing of *anorexia nervosa*, within the context of my notions of the picaresque mode.

A quick summary of the plots of the three Isadora Wing novels is in order here. In *Fear of Flying*, Isadora leaves her inscrutable, ungiving husband for a sexual fling, zigzagging across Europe with Adrian Goodlove, who proves to be impotent except in public. When Adrian abandons her to keep a long-scheduled appointment with his wife and children in Cherbourg, Isadora returns to her husband Bennett Wing. In *How to Save Your Own Life*, we find that Isadora is now a famous author, having chronicled her adventures with Adrian Goodlove in a best-selling novel. She discovers that Bennett had carried on an affair with a neighbor during Isadora's hospitalization with a fractured leg. She realizes that Bennett has been allowing her to torment herself with years of guilt over her own dalliance. She proceeds to have sex with numerous partners and to seek the counsel of several mentors in order to decide what to do about her crumbling marriage. Once Isadora meets Josh Ace, a younger man, she leaves her husband. In *Parachutes and Kisses*, now separated from Josh, Isadora continues her restless sex with so many partners that she has "practically lost track" (PK 13). She falls in love with a still younger man called Bean, visits Russia as a guest artist in search of her grandfather's roots. (Born near Odessa, he had been a painter.) Eventually, Isadora takes off with Bean for Venice. There the novel and the trilogy end in a simple, monotone utterance that recapitulates the pícara's struggle to survive: "And she was still alive" (PK 478).

Noelle Caskey's work on eating disorders has awakened me to some striking parallels between the anorexic and the pícara that transcend the obvious association of

hunger with the picaresque protagonist. Isadora turns to psychoanalysis as a teenager because of anorexia. Even as an adult, Isadora laments the fullness and curvature of her body frequently enough to suggest a serio-comic sense of dissatisfaction with herself, a loathing of the ample proportions of her belly, hips, and thighs. Ample anatomical measurements add up, in the eyes of anorexics, to a self that does not measure up. The anorexic's inadequate sense of self-confidence stems from the enmeshment of the anorexic's personal desire and will with the desires of others. The anorexic may experience "image dependence," or what Caskey calls "inside/outside confusion," as well as fears of "psychic incest" with her father ("Anorexia" 175 - 181). These issues all reverberate in Isadora's relationships with men and recall the classical picaresque dilemma, the necessity of conforming to and pleasing masters. Anorexics, Caskey says, train themselves to desire the things their parents and others want to give them. The derivation and the orientation of impulses are conflated. The body becomes the site of the conflict ("Anorexia" 179). Anorexics are peculiarly oversensitive to the expectations of the people around them. Daughters may develop a "helpless hyperobedience to the wishes of others" ("Anorexia" 180 - 181). The anorexic's body is perceived as synonymous with her "self" and, simultaneously, as a "funnel" for such alien desires and influences ("Anorexia" 184). The "alien something" perceived by the anorexic to be existing somehow within her is almost always experienced as male ("Anorexia" 184). Beginning in her infancy, that other is the father, and the anorexic grows up entangled with him in a dynamic that can be called "psychic incest" ("Anorexia" 185). Caskey asserts that this relationship also fosters intellectual dependence as the "life of the mind" is commandeered ("Anorexia" 185).

The phenomena that Caskey observes in anorexics align with a constellation of picaresque characteristics that can be observed in the Isadora Wing trilogy: 1) A lack of personal autonomy evolves as a pattern of radical obedience to the wishes of others, particularly men; 2) This dependence spawns an episodic narrative structure that puts the pícara at the mercy of the random movements and arbitrary whims of a prodigiously lengthy series of masters; 3) In this eternal, uncertain “now,” the pícara is engaged in a struggle for subsistence: hence the stress on the material level of existence, and the recurrent fixation of the pícara’s gaze on the physical and the scatological. These forces push back against the possibility of personal development in the Wing novels and anchor the pícara in the urgencies of the moment.

For the picaresque figures I have considered in earlier chapters, the struggle is for bread and for shelter. For Isadora, born into an affluent family living on the upper west side of Manhattan, the fight is for psychological and emotional survival. She must first struggle for acceptance within her own family: “From the moment my father saw me in the hospital and asked my mother ‘Do we have to take it home? . . .’ my life had been a constant struggle to get attention, not to be ignored . . .” (*SYOL* 10). Isadora’s relationships with her parents and her sisters remain problematic throughout her childhood and adulthood. She experiences gender confusion as her parents instruct her to be “‘the daughter you are and the son we never had’” (*PK* 33). She is an insignificant alien in her own family, so easily overlooked that she gets lost at the age of ten in the FBI Building while on a family trip to Washington: “Bureau of Missing persons. Send out alarm” (*FF* 82).

husbands, lovers, and psychoanalysts. Throughout most of the trilogy, Isadora is too terrified to make the attempt to have a life of her own: “I was never good at leaving people, no matter how badly they treated me” (*FF* 284). This sense of resignation reminds us of how quickly Lazarillo must find a new master when he loses the old one, and how swiftly Moll and Courasche attach themselves to new men as the former husband or lover is lost. Moll and Courasche, however, recycle their interactions with men to achieve goals related to their own dreams and visions of themselves. Isadora’s admission that being alone is terrible “because if no man loves me I have no identity” (*FF* 277) is shocking, coming, as it does so many centuries later, and from a narrator who claims to be a feminist: “I had been a feminist all my life . . . but the big problem was how to make your feminism jibe with your unappeasable hunger for male bodies.” As lovers and analysts disappoint and abandon Isadora, she feels more and more isolated and disoriented: “‘In the mornings,’ Adrian finally said, ‘I never can remember your name.’ So that was my answer. It went through me like a knife. And there I was lying awake every night next to him trembling and saying my own name over and over to myself to try to remember who I was” (*FF* 251).

The extreme dependence of the *pícaro* on the master helps to explain the emphasis on the theme of survival in picaresque works. The picaresque figures whom I discussed in my previous chapters live with the constant risk of imminent extinction, either by starvation or the hangman’s rope. With or without a protector, they must be incessantly vigilant, alert like animals, always aware of the potential threats to their very existence. The modern *pícaro*, whose basic necessities of life are not endangered, must be as fiercely attentive to her *psychic* survival, and Jong introduces this theme early in *Fear of Flying*.

As the novel opens, Isadora is on a flight to Vienna, “convinced that only my own concentration . . . keeps this bird aloft” (*FF* 3). Her description of the state of continual watchfulness in which she endures the flight can be read as her manifesto for living: “Constant vigilance, that’s my motto. A mood of cautious optimism should prevail. But actually my mood is better described as cautious pessimism” (*FF* 3). She sees herself as barely managing to survive, getting by night by night (*FF* 280). The quotation from Henry Miller which opens the first chapter of *Parachutes and Kisses* further underscores this notion of the life and death struggle of the pícara: “I am delirious because I am dying so fast” (*PK* 11). The phrase also hints at the manic energies which the pícara must apply to her constant search for a new master, when she has lost or been turned out by her previous protector and guide. “‘Your needs are no longer my problem,’ he said. ‘Your needs are your own problem now. We are no longer a couple’ . . . ‘Better get used to it, girl,’ she muttered to herself as she lay on the floor. But the fact was that she no longer wanted to live” (*PK* 161).

The resilient pícara, however, never gives in to her suicidal impulses. Brought to the brink of death, she always draws back, always resumes the search for a master who will direct and shelter her. Thus, Isadora Wing apprentices herself, throughout the trilogy, to a succession of masters. She seeks the advice, security, and authority of a long queue of analysts, friends, husbands, and lovers. However, unlike Moll Flanders who re-works the past, graduates from her apprenticeships, and appropriates to herself the roles of her various masters, Isadora fails to redeem her history and turns again and again to new masters for explications of past events and finally of herself. The pícara’s obsessive dependence upon a series of masters emerges as a characterological defect and a

something called 'Cross-Country Group Ski-Therapy.' There's Dr. Arnold Aaronson pretending to play chess on a magnetic board with his new wife (who was his patient until last year), the singer Judy Rose (*FF* 4 - 5).

Isadora's encounter with Adrian Goodlove at the Vienna conference prompts a reflection on her string of lovers: "When I look back on my not yet thirty-year-old life, I see all my lovers sitting alternately back to back as if in a game of musical chairs. Each one an antidote to the one that went before. Each one a reaction, an about-face, a rebound" (*FF* 31). She is conscious of the struggle between the impulse toward independence and the need to attach herself to a man: "I was like a boat that always had to have a port of call. I simply couldn't imagine myself without a man. Without one, I felt lost as a dog without a master; rootless, faceless, undefined" (*FF* 79 - 80). "Without a master" is, of course, conspicuous in its allusion (intended or unintended on Jong's part) to the picaresque characteristic on which I am focusing. Isadora continues her extensive inventory of lovers:

Right before Bennett, there had been that conductor who loved his baton (but never wiped his behind), a Florentine philanderer (Alessandro the Gross), an incestuous Arab brother-in-law (later, later), a professor of philosophy (U. of Cal.), and any number of miscellaneous lays in the night . . . So I had been wounded by music, madness, and miscellaneousness. And silent Bennett was my healer" (*FF* 33).

And there are others: an Irish poet, a cowboy novelist, a book reviewer, a painter, a United Nations interpreter, and a biochemist (*FF* 93). And of course, there are her husbands in *Fear of Flying*: Brian who in his madness never stops talking, and Bennett

who makes love in silence. And finally, there is Isadora's great fling: Adrian Goodlove, the British shrink with whom she traverses Europe only to discover that he is just killing time before a long-planned rendezvous with his wife and family. Adrian tells her: "'You look like you want to be saved, ducks. You ask for it. You turn those big myopic eyes up at me as if I were a Bid Daddy Psychoanalyst. You go through life looking for a teacher and then when you find him, you become so dependent on him that you grow to hate him.'" (FF 86).

In *How to Save Your Own Life*, the list of masters grows as Isadora, in shock over her husband's revelation of his adultery, consults and/or copulates with friends and business associates, her "healers, gurus, shamans" (SYOL 58). These include one tutor after another: Gretchen Kendall, the feminist lawyer; Michael Cosman, her "best friend and almost-lover" (SYOL 58); Jeffrey Rudner, the shrink; Jeffrey Roberts, the adman-poet; Hope Lowell, her "fairy godmother" (SYOL 58); Holly, her painter friend; Britt Goldstein, the Hollywood producer who swindles an option on Isadora's first novel; Rosanna Howard, a former student with whom Isadora carries on her first lesbian affair; Kurt Hammer, a venerable old American man of letters; Hans and Kirsten, sex therapists who share an orgy with Isadora. And then Isadora meets Josh Ace, six years her junior, "the only man who'd made her feel totally womaned, totally entered, opened, vulnerable. Womb, woman, ovum, open, vulva, vulnerable" (SYOL 284).

With the opening of *Parachutes and Kisses*, Josh has left Isadora. Bankrupt in love, she is nearly bankrupt in her finances as well. She learns that her business manager has died on the cusp of revealing that she is in grave trouble with the IRS. She subsequently whizzes through a dizzying line-up of business advisors, financial experts,

and literary agents (*PK* 360). She tries to “outrun her despair” with a “drugged out” disc jockey, a New York banker, a southern writer, a real-estate developer, a lapsed rabbi, an antiques dealer, a medical student with access to drugs, a plastic surgeon, her high school sweetheart Kevin, and numerous others (*PK* 13). She finally meets Berkeley Sproul III, called Bean, to whom she becomes “cock-bound, cock-mastered, cock-unsure” (*PK* 340). Isadora frequently admits to her addiction to men and occasionally chides herself for it: “I felt I belonged with him. I felt I *deserved* to lose my life that way” (*FF* 284). More often, however, she simply submits: “She could not lead with this dancing partner” (*PK* 337). If a picaresque plot is, as Stuart Miller says, “episodic with a vengeance,” then, putting a twist to Miller’s phrase, Isadora’s plot is obsessively, compulsively episodic but *without* a vengeance, that is, without the revenge on the male masters that Moll and Courasche attempt.

The Wing plots also foreground the pícara’s restless travels. *Fear of Flying* features a wild trip across Europe with a lover who is as unpredictable in his affections as he is in his sexual performances. Isadora’s movements in *How to Save Your Own Life* are horizontal: coast-to-coast flights in pursuit of movie deals and love in the Beverly Hills Hotel; and vertical: a journey up and down Madison Avenue on the hunt for old lovers, divorce counsel, and psychotherapy. In *Parachute and Kisses*, Isadora traipses to and fro between her Connecticut home and her many appointments in Manhattan and rambles back and forth from lover to lover, before flying off to Russia and finally to Venice with Bean.

Amplifying the pervasive ambience of vagabondage, of “hitting the open road” (which diminishes only slightly when there is a child to care for in *Parachutes and*

Kisses), but setting her apart from her picaresque predecessors, are Isadora's moments of meta-textual awareness. She recognizes that she is "living an inner picaresque - episodic, farcical, with overtones of great melancholy, if not true tragedy" (*PK* 243). She describes her mental state as "a dozen movies being run simultaneously on the same screen," each movie representing an incident or series of incidents in her love life, in her family saga, or in her artistic enterprise (*PK* 244). The problem is that all three of the Wing narratives are overlaid with avowals of the quest for self-discovery, yet, as a character (and as pseudo-autobiographical narrator in two of the three Wing novels), Isadora never attempts to construct a coherent sense of herself out of the disparate and cacophonous frames. The resulting hollowness has disappointed critics who expect to read *Fear of Flying* as a significant work of feminist poetics but instead must see it as an important document of feminist politics. The protagonist's contrapuntal assertion that women's lives "come down to a long succession of sad songs about men" (*FF* 100) seems to accurately represent what is really going on in the texts. While several commentators notice the failure to create an independent, coherent self, none of these readers (nor Jong herself) seems to have recognized the consequences of Jong's having adopted the picaresque mode without struggling, as our earlier authors did, to harness the power of picaresque episodic structure.

Herbert Mitgang, in his 1984 review of *Parachutes and Kisses* for the *New York Times*, considers Isadora Wing a "borderline nymphomaniac," while Gayle Greene has called *How to Save Your Own Life* "perhaps the most embarrassing novel written in recent decades by a woman with literary pretensions" (*Changing* 90). Yet it is Greene who comes closest to providing helpful explanations of the failures of Jong's feminist

project. Although she does not mention the picaresque at all, Greene urges me toward an interpretation of the Isadora Wing trilogy as a picaresque in spite of itself. Green asserts that Jong's work is an important and unprecedented literary expression of the female experience. According to Greene, however, Jong's novels do not "challenge the situations they depict" (*Changing* 60). The character re-enacts, almost ritualistically, what Greene calls an "old story" (*Changing* 86). It is the *same old* story of a woman on the hunt for the perfect man, the female in thrall to the penis. Jong is a particularly frustrating case for Greene because of the potential redemption of the past hinted at in Isadora Wing's re-searching of the lives of her foremothers - literary figures, historical personages, and Isadora's own relatives. Jong's work announces an intention to "to fill the gap between the fiction of the past and women's experience in the present" (*Changing* 88) and attempts what Greene calls "narrative as liberation" (*Changing* ix), the making of "new plots and new endings" (*Changing* 87). But Jong disappoints all the more acutely because of the promise. Finally, says Greene, she is writing love stories, the kind of plot that "allows woman one end: her 'end,' both in the sense of 'goal' and 'conclusion,' is a man " (*Changing* 12). Despite her alleged examination of the past, including the flashbacks of Isadora's life which Greene does not address, Jong does not free her protagonist from this old plot (*Changing* 13), and she fails to depict a woman who changes in any substantial way (*Changing* 87). Greene claims that Isadora's "search for the impossible man" (*FF* 101) turns into a search for the self (*Changing* 87), which itself fails. Isadora declines to "examine anything too closely; her recounting of her past has no bearing on her present; it is merely episodic, merely there. So too is the structure of the

novel, which, in its alternation of episodes set in the past with episodes set in the present, might provide a vehicle for plumbing the past, but does not . . .” (*Changing* 88).

Episodic structure is, of course, the most readily acknowledged aspect of picaresque fiction. Greene’s highlighting of Jong’s missing the hidden opportunities of episodic structure demonstrates its problematic implications for the author who intends to write a novel of development. Yet we have seen how Defoe, Grimmelshausen, Brecht and even the anonymous author of the *Lazarillo* allow for the re-examination and revision of the events of the past in order to reclaim the present and shape the future (in Brecht, the audience, not Courage, will own the future). I propose the reverse of Greene’s comment: the search for the self in Jong’s work turns into the search for the perfect man, through whom she hopes to perfect her feminine self, and this is precisely why her feminism fails. Moll and Courasche use their female experience in order to gain access to the materials of maleness, so to speak, which they then utilize in order to usurp male roles and to transcend conventional female roles. Each of these pícaras moves into an ambiguous sexual space, as does Lázaro, wherein they can achieve a satisfying, albeit limited, degree of independence. Mother Courage, on the other hand, colludes with male systems while abandoning her female roles, thereby assuring her own physical survival but compromising her psychic self. Like Mother Courage, Isadora is a collaborator. Her complicity is actualized in her continual search for, and perpetual openness to, the master. This is why Isadora always craves a new lover. This is why Courage yokes herself to her wagon and goes back into business.

Sooner or later, when the master rejects her or the sex fails to fill her up, Isadora claims to recognize that “if we haven’t the power to complete ourselves, the search for

love becomes a search for self-annihilation” (FF 299 - 300). But Isadora is all talk. For Greene, Erica Jong confuses liberation with sexual liberation. “The novel [*Fear of Flying*] does not, finally, challenge ‘the old story’ at the level of plot, language, or meaning,” as the protagonist goes round in the same old “hackneyed” circles (*Changing* 91). I tend to agree with Green on this point. Isadora returns to Bennett at the end of *Fear of Flying* and will not leave him until she has another lover to take his place in the next book of the series. As Greene points out, the ending of the second Isadora novel is foreshadowed in the ending of the first: “It was no good. All her feminism, all her independence, all her fame had come to this, this helplessness, this need. She needed him. She needed this man. When he entered her, when his hot cock slid into her, she was moaning something about that, about surrender” (SYOL 285).

The total dependence of the anorexic on others reverberates here in the hunger and helplessness, in the neediness of the pícara for her master. The pícara enacts an almost endless repertoire of roles for the benefit of her masters. “Eventually we came to accept the lying and the role-playing and the compromises so completely that they were invisible - even to ourselves,” says Isadora of the earliest liaisons that she and her friend Pia experience with men (FF 100). Isadora is a “born performer” (FF 15). She has her act ready to go at all times. She has her lines down: “‘I’m the only man you’ve ever met you can’t categorize,’ he said triumphantly. And then he waited for me to categorize the others. And I obliged. Oh, I knew I was making my life into a song-and-dance routine, a production number, a shaggy dog story, a sick joke, a *bit . . .*” (FF 184). She switches from one role to the other with alacrity but, like Moll in her reflective moments, not without pangs of self-criticism: “How hypocritical to go upstairs with a man you don’t

want to fuck, leave the one you *do* sitting there alone, and then, in a state of great excitement, fuck the one you *don't* want to fuck while pretending he's the one you do" (*FF* 77). The most pervasive role for the pícara is that of the servant. "When the chips are down and I'm alone with a man for days on end, then I realize more than ever how unliberated I am. My natural impulse is to toady. All my high-falutin' rebelliousness is only a reaction to my deep-down servility" (*FF* 177 - 8). While her lover Adrian Goodlove clearly "makes the rules" (*FF* 178), Isadora's servility comes into even sharper relief in her relationship with her second husband, Bennett Wing, the psychiatrist antidote to her psychotic first husband. Bennett turns out to be an indefatigable but cold lover and a demanding taskmaster: "... he'd blasted me about my little failures: my failure to make him coffee on time in the morning, my failure to do some errand, my failure to point out some road sign when we were lost in a foreign city" (*FF* 106). From the beginning of their marriage, Isadora needs to see Bennett as her "daddy and protector" (*SYOL* 62). There is hardly a point in Isadora's marriage to Bennett when she is not "on the bottom," psychologically degraded if sexually satisfied:

I had wanted to leave my marriage for years, had saved it up like a sweet before bedtime, like a piece of bubble gum put on a childhood bedpost, like the evening out you promise yourself after a day of writing. It was never any good - not from the beginning. But I deformed my mind to believing that it was. I told myself nothing better was possible. I convinced myself that sadness and compromise were the ways of the world (*SYOL* 9).

"I'm prepared to forgive you," Bennett replies to Isadora's vengeful litany of her lovers (*SYOL* 52), blurted out in desperation at the recitation of his. And it's her own fault, her

friends tell her, that she is unable to leave him: “. . . whenever Bennett enters the room, you start *accommodating* him. It’s sickening” (*SYOL* 62). Yet the *picara* picks up the master’s scraps, the leavings of her betters: “When I am utterly dissolved in my own tears, Bennett opens his arms to me and wants me to crawl in. All the way back to the womb. And I crawl. But I am raging within. I let him embrace me like a crab embracing its dinner - but inside I am furious” (*SYOL* 53). And then, after throwing him out of their bed, threatening to castrate him if he stays, Isadora, “degraded past all degradation, gets up out of bed, tiptoes down the carpeted hall, and slides into the narrow guest bed occupied by that stranger, her lawful wedded husband . . . She feels tainted, ashamed, slightly necrophiliac” (*SYOL* 120 - 122).

Isadora, like Courasche, can be said to be raped certainly once, perhaps twice, both times by her husbands. The first rape is at the hands of Brian Stollerman on the night of his crack-up. The assault is followed by another violation, Brian’s tearing up of Isadora’s thesis notes which he “scattered on the floor beneath the desk like confetti” (*FF* 202). The second incident occurs when Isadora is just beginning her affair with Adrian Goodlove:

Bennett [her husband] . . . fucked me violently right there on the cot adjoining Adrian’s. In the midst of this bizarre performance, Adrian awoke and watched, his eyes gleaming like a boxing fan’s, at a particularly sadistic fight. When Bennett had come and was lying on top of me, Adrian leaned over and began stroking his back. Bennett made no protestation. Entwined and sweating, the three of us finally fell asleep (*FF* 143).

Both passages are themselves bizarre performances. The rapes suggest the ultimate nightmare of the inside/outside confusion, that other-dependency which I nominated as one of my central concerns in the consideration of Isadora as a picaresque figure. The rapes are either a metaphor for the use of the woman's body as a register upon which to inscribe a statement about the psyches of the men, or they are an opportunity for gratuitous titillation, or they are both.

Of course, that observation - with its concomitant association with pornography - has been leveled at Erica Jong's work throughout her career. Susan Rubin Suleiman sees this as cause to praise Jong, not to bury her, at least in connection to Isadora's impressive sexual lexicography. She asserts that women have a right to "speak of their fantasies obscenely, and to view men as sexual objects . . ." (*Body* 10), and she reads Jong's flaunting of obscenities as a significant gesture in sexual politics as well as in sexual poetics (*Body* 9). Suleiman suggests that a phrase like

'how to make peace between the raging hunger in my cunt and the hunger in my head' is shocking, not only because it implies that a woman feels hunger in both places (indeed, that she possesses both places), but perhaps above all because of the coupling of the first person possessive pronoun with the obscene noun, a combination that did not exist in serious fiction in English before Jong's book (*Body* 10).

Suleiman sees Jong's work in *Fear of Flying* as the fictional equivalent of Shere Hite's *Sexual Honesty, By Women for Women* (1974) and *Hite Report on Female Sexuality* (1981). An important exemplar of the early phase of the American women's movement, Jong is significant in her appropriation, according to Suleiman, of male language. Jong

does more than engage in a new kind of discourse that is fresh and vivid and unmistakably female; she is undeniably ironic in her parody of writers like Henry Miller and Norman Mailer (*Body* 9). Suleiman rehearses Claudine Hermann's exploration of the meaning of *voler*, referring to the "flying" of Jong's title as well as to its alternate meaning in French – "to steal." Suleiman herself accomplishes an adroit theft, usurping an anonymous review in the *London Observer* which characterizes Jong's language as filching "narrative tricks" from the men and "brandishing" them in their faces, with relish (*Body* 10). For Suleiman, Jong's is a "significant" and necessary "filching," a manifestation of "the contemporary attempt, by women, to rewrite and rethink the female body and female sexuality" (*Body* 8). Suleiman, however, worries that the success of *Fear of Flying* may imply that it has not been seen as a "genuine threat to existing ways of seeing and being between the sexes." (*Body* 11). I would argue that the picaresque protagonist is *never meant* to be taken as a serious threat. That is what makes his or her story a comedy. As Isadora herself admits, "When other writers suffer, it's epic or cosmic or avant-garde, but when I suffer, it's slapstick" (*FF* 294) and "I fumble, therefore I am" (*PK* 244). I agree, however, with Suleiman's admiration of Jong's appropriation of the heretofore male pornographic prerogative, but I am disappointed that the Wing novels do not fully exploit the opportunity of deliberate parody that would posit a more powerful position for the female, as does Moll's parody of the process of becoming a man. And so it is within the picaresque practice of comedy and slapstick that I choose to place Jong's notoriously explicit sexual grammar. I see her sexual linguistics as an extension and development of the picaresque technique of scatology. *Webster's New World Dictionary* offers two definitions of scatology: "1. The study of feces or of

fossil excrement; 2. Obscenity or obsession with the obscene, especially with excrement or excretion, in literature.” There is plenty of both (excrement and obscenity) to be found in the pages of the Isadora Wing novels. If we consider Jong’s other fiction as well, we can say without exaggeration that she describes menstruation, ovulation, copulation, masturbation, urination, defecation, mutilation, and evisceration, and she describes them in detail and with gusto - not to mention enough instances of oral sex that one book reviewer’s article is entitled “Oral History.”⁷¹ Moll and Courasche are generally mute when it comes to describing sexual acts. One exception is Courasche’s depiction of the assault at the hands of the captured Colonel’s entourage:

. . . after all these stallions had rammed me till they were tired out (fie! I should be almost ashamed to tell it, if I were not doing so to honor and please you, Simplicissimus!), then I was forced to engage the servants while their masters watched . . . I found no mercy in these inhuman beasts, who forgetful of all modesty and Christian propriety, first stripped me as naked as the day I was born and forced me to pick up a few handfuls of peas which they had strewn on the ground, which work they forced me to do by beating me with switches; indeed, they seasoned me with salt and pepper so that I was obliged to jump and flash like a donkey with a handful of thorns or nettles tied under his tail . . . (RC 85)

Courasche allows her humiliation to be so vividly exposed, she says, because it will advance the central project of her text, which is to shame Simplicissimus who, after all, courted her for a time with proposals of marriage. “See what history your bride would have brought you,” she seems to be saying. Thus, Courasche harnesses this explicit

⁷¹ Lance Morrow in *Time*, May 6, 1977.

language in order to strike her target. Similarly, the bravura sexual discourse of the Wing novels allows the pícara to subsume a male linguistic domain into the feminist agenda of claiming the body and the acts of sex as a textual possibility for women by women. At the same time, however, the combination of hyper-proliferated sexual description with Isadora's servile attitude toward men precludes any serious insult to the male. Thus, her sexual discourse is more closely linked to the functions associated with scatology in the picaresque novel. Scatology emphasizes the comic side of the pícaro/pícaras degradation. In *The Runagate Courage*, Chapter 17 details a trick played on Courasche by an Italian prostitute:

Once I was invited to supper by a distinguished gentleman who had formerly been attached to the most famous *puttana*, but had forsaken her for me. Of this meat she in turn thought to deprive me and to that end had a furrier's wife put something in the food I ate during said meal which made my belly swell up as if it were about to burst; indeed, the belly vapors so oppressed me that in the end they forced the gate, causing such lovely music to be heard during the meal that I was sore ashamed; and once they had found the gate, they passed through it one after the other with such enthusiasm that it kept thundering on as if several regiments at once were firing off a salvo . . . I believe that if I had been able to keep them in good order and properly spaced I could have beaten for two whole hours by the clock a better tattoo than the best drummer (*RC* 117 - 118).

Courasche takes her revenge upon the perpetrator by arranging to have "a bull's bladder filled with the worst kind of ordure which can be found in the upside-down chimneys by Master Arsehole's sweeps." This bag is flung at the *puttana* while she is being courted at

her window, “and the muck bespattered her nose, eyes, mouth, and bosom, together with all her ornaments and jewelry . . .” (*RC* 121). Such scenes enforce the material world and enclose the protagonist and her/his peers (masters are never bespattered) within the limits of the physical. In both *The Runagate Courage* and the Wing trilogy, scatology designates the boundaries of the picaresque protagonist’s domain, much as an animal marks its territory. A voluminous catalog of the scatological references in the Isadora books is possible, but a few examples from *Fear of Flying* will suffice: “The History of the World through Toilets” (*FF* 22-23); the conductor who “always left shit stripes on my sheets” (*FF* 30); “Lalah’s dysentery and the color and consistency of the shit” (*FF* 234); “Peeing by the side of the road . . . leaves your crotch sticky” (*FF* 265); “‘Typical tight-ass English middle class - trying to keep their bowels open in the name of the Queen. A losing battle too. Their assholes are permanently plugged.’ And he farted loudly to punctuate” (*FF* 29). Scatological references support the emancipatory gesture of *The Runagate Courage* by virtue of their insinuations about the impaired judgment and flawed discernment of Simplicissimus. Sexual linguistics in the Wing texts, particularly in *Fear of Flying*, produce the trilogy’s most successful liberational *effect* but fail to function as a liberational *strategy*, as the speaker at the close of her story remains at the mercy of the masters’ vocabulary, even if her body now has appropriated his text as its own.

Fear of Flying constitutes a vibrant reiteration of the picaresque in the twentieth century, but its failure as a *Bildungsroman* is most intriguing. Read in tandem with the other feminocentric works we have discussed, *Fear of Flying* surprises because it is less liberational than the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century picaresques. In this, it

accentuates the volatility of the picaresque mode, suggesting that picaresque elements can serve many masters and mistresses, many projects. *Fear of Flying* attests, by its lack, to the notion that both retrospection and reclamation of the past are necessary in order for a picaresque protagonist to move toward self-creation: “The re-membering ‘I’ tries to piece together again the dis-membered,” as Wicks has said (*PNPF* 49). This calls us back to our contemplations of structure and the potential of the picaresque episode, wherein, if we think of *Lazarillo*, *Moll*, *Courasche*, and *Mother Courage*, we see that the emphasis in Wicks’ statement ought to be on the word *tries*. In these works, the affiliation of discrete and seemingly disparate episodes is attempted. Emancipatory gestures emerge, although success is circumscribed within the regional purview of the masters from whose leavings a life has been salvaged: Lázaro fronts for his master; Moll performs the role of that “amphibious land-water thing,” the gentleman-tradesman; Courasche forages on as a gypsy generalissimo; and Mother Courage plods back into trade. All of these picaresques can be said to allow for an extraction of self out of what could have been, still threatens to be, the masters’ texts. They are not trajectories of “self-propelled perfectibility” (Hoffmeister’s definition 302), such as we see in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the hero hears his destiny ringing in his ears. The picaresque protagonists *piece themselves together*, assemble for themselves a modular, compartmentalized, flexible, and responsive *episodic self*, from the discontinuous episodes of a story that is driven by the hostile actions of others and by the vicissitudes of circumstance.

Feminist critics are pessimistic about the possibility of self-realization in fictions about women. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that a woman’s story is never

self-directed; it is always a story of “enclosure and escape” (*Madwoman* 338). Bonnie Hoover Braendlin speaks of the female’s awakening to “the stultification and fragmentation of a personality devoted not to self-fulfillment and awareness, but to a certain culturally determined, self-sacrificing, and self-effacing existence” (“Alther” 18). Maureen Ryan sees “a tale of compromise and disillusionment” (“Innocence” 14), while Elaine Hoffman Baruch states that the project of feminine *bildung* is impossible as long as the heroine’s development remains yoked to marriage. Nancy K. Miller has written:

It would be comforting for a feminist critic to say that the literature of the twentieth century in its feminocentric novels has rewritten the fictions of the eighteenth century; that the heroine’s text is dead; that women’s experience has been redefined in literature and the shape of a female life radically redesigned. It would not, however, be true (*HT* 157).

In the twenty-first century, we are still asking whether a female *Bildungsroman*, or female novel of development, is possible. It may be time, however, to stop asking that question and to wonder instead if *Bildungsroman* itself is any longer possible or relevant. Appropriating for a different purpose a phrase that Susan Fraiman uses to locate the texts she analyzes, I suggest that it may be that we have all lived long and read and written much “during that extended period in the course of which development as a notion, the novel as a genre, and gender as a ruling social category were all being defined” (*UW* xi). It may be the case that, in some sense, that era is over, and we are turning in cyclical fashion to a sense of the world as a postmodern picaresque in which development is undefined, genre is deconstructed, and gender is flexible. It may be that the uncertainties of the time will generate fictions that formulate a diminution of the self and sharply

limited possibilities of self-creation. Perhaps, with the collapse of *Bildungsroman*, fictions will inscribe a story of complicity and compliance with disintegrative pressures. On the other hand, with a recession of *Bildungsroman*, we may be poised for a new era of openness to gender equity in fictional worlds. Perhaps new plots will foreground the interactive construction of diversified personalities for both males and females, emphasizing the cultivation of relationships rather than the culture of the self. In these fictional worlds, structural inconclusiveness may be a virtue, and open-endedness for the personality may be, to filch a phrase from Leo Braudy, “a thematic ideal” (“Form” 6). The pícaro has fascinated because she opportunistically takes over that space that we have contended for so long - the junction of gender, genre, and structure - and flourishes there. Perhaps her story offers the twenty-first century new possibilities of empowerment enabled through a transformed picaresque poetic.

And the pícaro points us toward yet another shore where we may engage in some new adventures: If the disintegrative pressures of the world demand of the pícaro the kind of coping strategies that have always been demanded of women, then might the pícaro be said to be a feminized male? To what extent do genderless pícaros and gender-bending pícaras hide an untold homoerotic story? What can we learn about the picaresque mode from an openly homosexual pícaro, such as we find in Genet’s *The Thief’s Journal*, one of the few narrative landscapes that is not devoid of sexuality for the male picaresque protagonist?

But those travels are for another day.

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