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# The cultural and rhetorical elements of American picaresque

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THE CULTURAL AND RHETORICAL ELEMENTS OF AMERICAN PICARESQUE

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Cory James Dahlström  
University of Northern Iowa  
July 2016

## ABSTRACT

The picaresque is a literary genre with a long and rich history. Although protean in nature, it is essentially the fictional autobiography of a likeable delinquent or rogue, who survives a series of adventures and a life of hardships by his or her wits and affinity for trickery. Stemming from a long line of tropes dating back to Greek mythology, the picaresque comes into its own fruition towards the end of the Spanish Golden Age with the anonymous publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). Since then, the antihero of the picaresque, the picaro, has become a literary figure across a vast geography; however, there has been relatively little scholarly work devoted to the study of the strictly American picaro. The earliest contributions to the American picaresque tradition are highly rhetorical and sociopolitical. American authors such as Stephen Burroughs, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain have employed the picaresque in newly political and hermeneutical ways that expand the genre into new territory. I pay particular interest to how each author responds to previous texts and how each employs aspects of American culture and ideology to create something entirely new. Thus, this thesis is a close reading of the *Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs*, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, and *Huckleberry Finn* by the aforementioned American authors. In what ways do American concepts of freedom, patriotism, and equality conflict with criminality, capitalism, and culture?

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This Study by: Cory James Dahlström

Entitled: The Cultural and Rhetorical Elements of American Picaresque

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Christina M. Dahlstrom, who has been my greatest support and motivation. Without her love, patience, creativity, and inspiration this thesis would not exist and I would not be where I am today. Although she is to blame for some of my procrastination, her countless hours of helping me evaluate my research, reviewing my revisions, listening to my complaints and ideas, and more have been the means of my success. I am eternally grateful for everything she has done and put aside so that I might continue my education. She is my muse and my everything.

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## INTRODUCTION

*I am sure that the intending author of American fiction would do well to study the Spanish picaresque novels; for in their simplicity of design he will find one of the best forms for an American story.*

--William Dean Howells

*Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses. . . .*

--Ian Watt

*I must keep awake because I'm on my own and I've got to look after myself.*

--Lazarillo, *Lazarillo de Tormes*

Scholars have written extensively about the protean nature of the early Spanish and European picaresque, but with less attention to the American contribution to the genre. Many consider Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605) and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) as the first modern novels, and coincidentally they are both picaresque fiction. The modern novel owes much to the realism, perspective, and didacticism that originated in the sixteenth-century Spanish picaresque novel, a foil and parody to the idealistic romantic tradition of earlier texts. The picaresque encapsulated a rich history of rogue adventures and trickery long before we came to call the protagonist a "picaro." Traces of picaresque origin arise in various Greek mythologies including Odysseus, Sisyphus, and Hermes, but it is the refractions of the Spanish rogue that have

had the greatest influence modern culture. Over the course of its history, the genre has developed into an epistemological, satirical foolery, often presented in a paradoxical manner that entertains and offers an “outsider” perspective in coming to understand the nature of our society. Of all the places the picaresque has journeyed, perhaps his journey has been most successful and most profound in the “New World” of the American landscape. The history, people, and politics have given a vast enrichment to the genre for creating new heuristic opportunities to rethinking this land of patriots, rebels, freemen, capitalists, immigrants, and the whole lot of the democratic populace. The picaresque is more than an anachronism to a crumbling Spanish empire; instead, we find the birth of a nation just as likely of a place to find him. Moreover, a nation that even to this day relies heavily upon hypocrisy and falsehoods is likely to give authors plenty of new roads to travel within the picaresque.

I look at the picaresque through the theoretical lens of Mikhail Bakhtin and Kenneth Burke. The picaresque genre has evolved in a self-conscious manner, unlike its European antecedents, and has become a rhetorical enterprise between author and reader.<sup>1</sup> Just as our vocabularies develop relationally, the picaresque (or rather, how the reader interprets him) exposes the dangers of too strict adherence to a singular concept of meaning; such semantics are the focus of Herman Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* (1857). The picaresque’s continual confrontation with falsifications emerges in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), while Mark Twain and Thomas Berger’s satirical narratives redefine our perspective of nineteenth-century America.

The critical theories of Bakhtin and Burke are useful for examining the rhetorical strategies in which picaresque authors engage. Through a Bakhtinian lens, we can see allusions to former picaros and we think about the author's purpose. Bakhtin focuses on how language influences and is influenced by language. He imagines each utterance influencing every other utterance, and the interplay of influences as a dialogue between authors past and present. There are also the dialogues between fictional characters and between the narrator and the reader. Bakhtin sees this all incorporated into an extended dialogue, which he calls "dialogism." Moreover, satire and parody in the picaresque (old and new) are hermeneutical in function. Parodic rhetoric in the picaresque is equivalent to what Bakhtin gestures toward the Renaissance concept of laughter (i.e. the carnival and the fool) as essential for discovering truth. Bakhtin says there is the fictional world versus our world, yet it is because of the fictional world that we see the real world anew (*Rabelais and His World* 66-67, 88).

Bakhtin believes the role of the carnival also had a hierarchal effect in that it exposed problems existing within social structures and inverts them as a means of preventing disaster: lest the proverbial kettle boil over. The effect was extremely liberating. The freedom to voice one's opposition to traditions, mores, and authority found in the masquerading quality of the carnival is likewise prevalent in the picaresque in what Bakhtin terms "carnavalesque." The conception of freedom is both central to America democracy and the American picaro. While the picaro masquerades as an outsider, he yearns for inclusion and understanding.

In consideration of the carnivalesque, I come to Bakhtin's dilemma of fully interpreting the rogue, clown, and fool. While there is some variance between these terms, in that the rogue has a connection to the real world, but the fool and clown do not, I will refer to the picaro in this section only as "rogue" given the historical and definitional similarity between "rogue" and "picaro" and because it is the term preferred by Bakhtin. The problems seen by Bakhtin include the rogue's chronotope (which I will discuss later) and the reliance upon special metaphors and allegories, which Bakhtin calls "prosaic allegorization". The figures of speech used by the rogue are different than the traditional, poetic metaphor, for which Bakhtin admits there isn't an adequate term to describe the rhetorical use: "'parody,' 'joke,' 'humor,' 'irony,' 'grotesque,' 'whimsy,' etc., are but narrowly restrictive labels for the heterogeneity and subtlety of the idea" ("Forms of Time" 166). The problem arises in the fact that the rogue plays a role; therefore, literal, direct, and unmediated interpretation of the rogue's appearance, actions, and the dialogue is not suitable in such context. Bakhtin notes that the existence of this trickster figure is a reflection of some other mode of being, but because of the very nature of the trickster, even then, the reflection is masked. At last, we must understand that the rogue/picaro is "a portrayal of the existence of man who is in life, but not of it, life's perpetual spy and reflector . . . [one who makes the private life a public spectacle]" ("Forms of Time" 161). A much longer and more in-depth discussion would be required thoroughly to discuss the problems and complexities of the picaro vis-à-vis trickster rogue, about which there are numerous scholarly works, and even Bakhtin was hesitant in figuratively unmasking the rogue.

Unlike the original Spanish picaros, the American picaro does not face the same dangers such as starvation; instead, his identity becomes threatened along with his freedom. In Burkean terms, the picaro's relation with his society is both consubstantial and serving as a marginal scapegoat which society dismisses with its usual falsehoods. The dramatization of the picaresque world is reflective of the taboos of the real culture in which the novel derives. The dramatism and hierarchical perspective of Burke is an exercise of sociolinguistics and hermeneutics that I suspect make the American picaresque a genre of sincere importance for coming to terms with modern American philosophy.

The philosophy typical of the American picaresque is that it exposes the inconsistencies between actions, rhetoric, and ideology. The picaro and picara either discover for themselves, or reveal to the reader, ways in which society relies upon a variety of deceptions, misrepresentations, lying, and falsifications. Whether for good or for ill, the picaro's search for truth is one of defying boundaries and hinting at the corruptions of our sociopolitical hierarchies. In his book *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide* (1989), Ulrich Wicks calls this tension "discursively philosophical and meditative and fictionally antiphilosophical" (62). He points to Ellison's protagonist, in *Invisible man* (1952), who becomes devastated upon discovering the extent of manipulation his superiors have callously engaged in an effort to keep him down. Wicks continues his point with Franz Kafka's *Amerika* (1927). Kafka's novel challenges the ideals of American culture, which we hold

in high regard. In his book the Statue of Liberty, for example, holds a sword in place of a torch, symbolizing America's dependency on military might and imperialism, which is not the popular perspective of a free nation. Likewise, when Kafka's picaro, Karl, is told he is free, replies as follows: "'Yes, I'm free,' said Karl, and nothing seemed more worthless than his freedom" (133). The picaro accepts falsifications as natural and despicable, yet the picaro comes to believe even his own deceptions, which the reader must carefully navigate in an effort to decipher truth.

Unlike his Spanish predecessors, the picaro's role in America, like that of his European counterparts, leans more to criminal deviancy. Yet, although they are arguably more criminal, American picaros like the rhetorical Stephen Burroughs and his use of sentimentalism, or Huck Finn's moral convictions, give the reader a sense of trustworthiness to an otherwise unreliable narrator. The reader's interpretation of the picaro and his world is further complicated in America because of the ideologies that pervade civil liberty. Freedom, fair trade, democracy, and individuality are central to American patriotism, but they are not without contention given the polemical history of America's falsifications. The haunted past of the American Civil War, slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, the abuses to the Native American tribes, and the corruption of Wall Street and politics go against the founding principles of American exceptionalism. Because of the strong revolutionary spirit of America, there is at the same time a fascination with dissent (polarized as criminal mischief), which is often represented in

American fictions; consequently, readers gravitate toward the underdog, the anti-hero, the trickster, and the con man.

The structure of several American picaresque novels is a sort of confidence game in a discursive format. It provides the reader an entertaining story while the narrator is free to voice certain criticisms or observations in an individual and personal way. In the case of Herman Melville's, *The Confidence-Man* (1857), semantics and a chaotic narrative expose problems seen by Melville regarding a host of political, economic, and philosophical paradigms existing before the Civil War. Stephen Burroughs's masquerading autobiography *Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs of New Hampshire* (1798) and Mark Twain's stalled *bildungsroman* in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) leave the reader uncertain of purpose and intent but allude to an American society in the midst of self-deception.

The American picaresque increases the closeness of the picaro and the confidence man; they blur the lines between picaro and con as a trope for social-justice inquiry. In this work, I intend to discuss how American authors have redefined an old literary genre and reshaped it into a rhetorical vehicle for American audiences. The many voices represent a heteroglossia that speaks of the American reliance upon deception, contradiction, and fascination with the criminal. In American picaresque, the criminal's role is more of a moral question; therefore, he acts as a means to test the boundary between freedom and criminality.

The burlesque, ironic, satiric, cynical, and grotesque styles of the picaresque found in various American literature exemplify a tension between American liberty and a more pervasive form of capitalism. Noted historian Henry Steele Commager says of the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century American's philosophy regarding greed and civics,

Whatever promised to increase wealth was automatically regarded as good . . . where every community was a gamble and an opportunity, the American was a gambler and an opportunist. He had few local attachments, pulled up stakes without compunction, and settled easily into new communities: where few regions or professions were overcrowded and every newcomer added to the wealth and the drawing power, he was sure of a welcome. (7, 12)

We have come to see the capitalist system in America create its own definition of individualism where corporations and big businesses gain liberties equal to individual citizens such as political donations, freedom of speech, and liabilities. Moreover, some American institutions have greater impunity from liabilities than the individual does. In the modern era, individuals even lose some rights to their identity in cases such as Facebook or Twitter when one uploads photos or videos giving the company license to use them under most terms of service agreements.

Although a complete analysis of American culture and the rhetoric that defines our view of it can never fully be realized, I might suggest that there is a heavy reliance upon the assumption of national identity. Our nostalgia for a "new world" keeps us fixated on freedom, equality, and the American Dream, but are we really free? Our history is blotted with national heroes, who during their time, were considered dissidents,

criminals, or rabble-rousers. This thesis might aid how we think about our American culture and our dependency upon deception, falsifications, and identity as a nation. Do we know ourselves or have the freedoms sought by the American picaro? Who exactly is the picaro or picara of American culture—a marginal figure or a national icon?

CHAPTER I  
REFRACTIONS OF THE PICARO

*He told the truth mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing.*

--Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn*

*It is difficult to begin without borrowing.*

--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the picaresque as a genre, tradition, or myth. I make no real distinction between these terms because I am reluctant to define the picaresque in terms of absolutes. The protagonist of the picaresque, called a picaro, or picara (for female characters), is best classified as a trickster and delinquent. The picaro is a character of continual change. He lies and stretches the truth, disguises himself, plays tricks, and hides when confronted with challenges. Likewise, definitions to the picaresque vary significantly between scholars.<sup>2</sup>

In *Road-Book America: Contemporary Culture and the New Picaresque*, author Rowland Sherrill claims one problem seen repeatedly in scholarship of the picaresque is a confusion between continuity and identity. By this, Sherrill suggests that scholarship has focused too narrowly on how similar modern texts appear to the picaresque novels of the Spanish Golden Age. Rather, he calls for a scholarship to incorporate a vast range of

works as a “new tradition.” Many of the works he includes in the canon would not have been traditionally labeled a picaresque because of one or more changes from the taxonomy prior. His concern is not whether a text is identical to past works, but whether we can identify influences and apply them to a new canon. The difficulty of measuring any narrative as a specimen of the picaresque reminds me of the way the picaro and the confidence men of the genre masquerade: whereas the character fools other characters in his world, the picaresque seems to fool us in ours. The genre is “somewhat like its own protean focal characters” in that it “apparently changes masks, shifts, dodges, proves resilient, and survives, all the while maintaining its essential nature” (13). Despite vast differences between novels, most will agree there are some shared characteristics that identify the picaresque tale.

### The Essential Nature of Picaresque

Although the term *picaresque* applies loosely to any series of adventures with a likeable scoundrel, it nonetheless has a long and rich tradition. There is significant evidence to suggest an author’s knowledge of the genre’s history. Numerous authors, including Twain, Melville, and Burroughs allude to the picaresque ancestry of their work—particularly *Don Quixote*, which in itself alludes to previous picaresque narratives. In this sense, the picaresque is what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as dialogic: meaning it carries a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. The picaresque informs and is continually informed by previous work (*Rabelais* 279-280).

Even without intertextual references to previous works, narrative patterns and reoccurring motifs direct the reader from one picaresque tale to the next without having to rely upon references to know that one is reading the story of a picaro.

Generally, the picaresque follows an outcast character (roguish or vagabond) along an episodic series of deviant adventures that require the use of wits and trickery as a central agency. Trickery and narration rely heavily on satire, irony, and role-play. The parody and satire of chivalric and pastoral modes traditionally defined the picaresque as a romance of roguery. Most picaresques are told in first-person, autobiographical format and end without any real resolution to plot or character development. In *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions*, Ulrich Wicks refers to the episodic nature of these narratives as a “Sisyphus rhythm” representing the story of Sisyphus rolling a boulder up the mountain and starting anew each time it rolls down again.

The origin of the picaresque could have easily been a response to the unrealistic expectations of chivalric romance. In this regard, Wicks says romance portrays the fictional world as better than the real world, as a place where a heroic protagonist succeeds at overcoming challenges and finds a moral victory at the story’s conclusion (54-55). By contrast, the picaresque satisfies our impulse for a vicarious journey through chaos and depravity. We share with the picaro the use of his wits and trickery to survive in a landscape of injustice. Whereas romance may satisfy our desire for order, beauty, harmony, and goodness, the picaresque satisfies our darker yearnings for disorder,

ugliness, disintegration, and our pessimistic acknowledgement that the world is not perfect, but rather filled with misgivings and unfortunate events (Wicks 54-55). Despite the “darker yearnings” Wicks calls attention to, the picaresque serves as a form of social commentary or criticism—i.e. the “picaro being a product of social conditions and his delinquency itself a form of this criticism” (Parker vi-vii). The nature of the picaro’s narrative is social interaction and interpretation of social values, but always from the picaro’s perspective. The perspective is unreliable given the picaro’s distrust and trickery toward other characters in the novel so one could assume such traits would carry over into narration, yet the usual first-person narrative makes direct appeal to the reader as a voice of truth.

Wicks notes that another internal rhythm found in the picaresque is the oscillation between the picaro’s exclusion from society and then attempted inclusion, repeating until the picaro resolves his dilemma with a self-exclusion, thereby renouncing the world and the problems it has created for the character (61). The early German picaro, Simplicius, from Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (1669), denounces the world and retreats into hermitage, a pattern repeated henceforth. Consider the unnamed narrator in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, who is expelled from college and rejected by the most of white society before he joins the Brotherhood; however, he eventually grows weary of the manipulation and retreats into the underground.

Most picaros are criminal to a certain extent, although they lack malice and typically do not commit violent crime. Petty crime and moral rebellion accompanies the rejection of the picaro from his society, and it is for this reason that Parker prefers the term “delinquent” to “rogue,” suggesting its connotation of the juvenile and its less vicious nature is more appropriate to understanding the relationship readers develop with the picaro (4). The picaro sees himself as the victim of a cruel joke played on him by his environment. Because of this outlook, the picaro becomes narcissistic—believing that *the self* is all that matters and, because the picaro informs the narrative, the reader likewise defends or justifies the picaro’s actions. It is through his eyes that we are able to challenge authority and social order. In many circumstances this role-reversal of “good guys” and “bad guys” plays out in grotesque humor and punchy satire in which our anti-hero<sup>3</sup> seeks the sympathy of his audience rhetorically by persuasive justification of his wrongdoing, each time relying upon the excuse of necessity for survival.

#### Origin and Legacy of the Picaro

The devilishly entertaining genre has had its hands in the pockets of modernity for a very long time. The picaresque genre originated in sixteenth-century Spain; notably with the anonymous publication of *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities* (1554). However, in dialogic fashion, refractions of earlier picaresque-like traits appear in Homer’s *Odysseus*, Petronius’s *Satyricon*, and Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*. The myths of Sisyphus and Hermes both provide a means for

understanding the vicissitudes and the relativist truths common in many picaresques. While it appears many American authors like Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and Chuck Palahniuk have experimented with various picaresque elements in their earlier works before perfecting the narrative form, the picaresque nonetheless often becomes a bestseller or maintains a longevity of influence for later publications. Each new picaro seems to have something to say about another picaro before him. In addition, each picaresque work seems to incorporate elements arising from the sixteenth-century Spanish novels of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599), Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), Francisco Lopez de Ubeda's *La Picara Justina* (1605), Francisco de Quevedo's *La Vida del Buscon* (1626), and, of course, *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities* (1554).

*Lazarillo* was not entirely new, but it was unique. The story relied heavily on earlier conventions of folklore and myth. The jests, the order of masters, the allusions and use of proverbs are formulaic according to Wicks, but its originality comes in from the narrative structure that follows the tale of an urchin boy told from the “adult’s point of view through the voice of the younger self” (231). Rather than the retelling of significant accomplishments of a person of stature, *Lazarillo* was nobody striving to be somebody, somewhere.

The modern picaro and picara have a mixed voice of outcast and companion, adult and child—a likeable everyman who not only tells his tale of trials and errors, but

also addresses the reader directly and conspicuously. Helen H. Reed describes the picaresque semantics in her book, *The Reader in the Picaresque Novel*, which examines the hypothetical reader, the author-in-the-text, and the personas of various fictional characters as a true representation of Bakhtinian theory in application. Reed notes that the parody and negations that follow *Lazarillo*'s influence are heuristic and critical in ways other fictions and autobiographies are not (13-35).

*Lazarillo* begins with a young boy who is born to a poor, single woman in Salamanca Spain. His mother asks a blind beggar to take little Lazarillo with him as an apprentice. On leaving town, there is a statue of a bronze bull, so the beggar tells Lazarillo to put his ear against it to hear something. When Lazarillo does this, the old man cracks the boy's head against the bull knocking him unconscious. When he awakens, the blind man says, "you silly little nitwit! You'll have to learn that a blind man's boy has got to be sharper than a needle!" (8). Lazarillo tells himself, "I must keep awake because I'm on my own and I've got to look after myself" (8), which begins the motive for all future picaros. Lazarillo learns his wits and eventually fools the blind man and leaves him. The story progresses with Lazarillo serving a new master in each chapter, and each time finding various levels of abuse, neglect, starvation, humiliation, and hypocrisy that he strives to survive by picking up dishonest tactics and tricks that he learns along the way. In the end, Lazarillo gains employment as a town crier and is

married to the archbishop's mistress, but despite the sad case of his marriage, he remains ignorantly happy knowing that the archbishop will provide food and shelter for him.

*Lazarillo* was unique in that it offered readers a realistic perspective on the world of paupers and petty thievery. The use of irony, satire, parody, burlesque, and the grotesque exposed the hypocrisies of early Spanish culture including the chivalric tradition, the aristocracy, and the church. The intention may not have been necessarily to entice empathy from the reader, but it nonetheless appeared threatening to civility, resulting in a ban during the Spanish Inquisition. The picaresque is a protean genre that has changed and altered itself many times since its inception, but a clear history of narrative style and characteristics trace back to the Salamanca youth.

Lazarillo was not original. That is to assume there is such a thing as an "original", but in that regard, Melville says of Don Quixote, Hamlet, and Milton's Satan, all of whom are often credited as original characters, "[each is] novel, or singular, or striking, or captivating, or all four at once [but not original]" (281). Nonetheless, *Lazarillo* was a turning point for the picaro<sup>4</sup>, for whom little Lázaro<sup>5</sup> was the most "singular" manifestation beyond the myth of Hermes and Sisyphus. Likewise, the picaros who come after the rascal boy from Salamanca each leave their own impression on our collective reading. Here I mean the trickster is a heteroglossia of the reader, the writer, and whatever encompasses their individuality and worldview. Even if *Lazarillo* were original, Melville skeptically asked of such character in *The Confidence-Man*, "whence

came they?" (281). Whatever may be the picaro's mask, the role "goes a long way back" (Ellison 15) into human origin and it loses centrality to language.<sup>6</sup> Each revival of the role (played out in narrative form) becomes a new definition, whether it be picaro, rogue, con man, swindler, humbug, or antihero. The picaro of *Lazarillo* and his successors have instilled a romance of roguery.

Following *Lazarillo* there have been countless publications of picaresque and quasi-picaresque novels worldwide. From its simple, adventurous narrative of likeable rogues, the genre has contributed to the anti-hero, the trickster, the confidence man, and the traveler character found in a variety of postmodern literature and films. American publication alone includes hundreds of novels including Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon* (1801), Johnson Jones Hooper's *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964), Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) and *Damned* (2011), and numerous works by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.. Additionally, picaresque-like elements continue to influence contemporary storytelling with television series such as *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005-present), *Dexter* (2006-2013) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), and *Better Call Saul* (2015-present).

### The Universal Collective Unconscious

Let me return to Wicks's summary of *Lazarillo*, by which he says is "universal that it might have . . . emerged unauthored directly from the collective unconscious" (231). Here it is important to turn to Bakhtin for a quick note about the picaro's anonymity. Although we think of the picaro as an outsider, he is actually representative of all of us, whether we look at him as an anachronism or postmodern. Bakhtin sees such universal figures as chronotopic in that their identity expands across time and space ("chronotope" literally means "time space") ("Forms of Time" 84). Bakhtin never discusses the picaresque in great length, but he acknowledges that the rogue, the clown, and the fool have their own special world with their own chronotope ("Forms of Time" 159).

Within the text, chronotope shapes plot structure, serves as an opening, a culmination, or a conclusion. Events and the motifs surround the events such as "parting, escape, acquisition, loss, marriage, and so forth" share a link ("Forms of Time" 98). Chronotope is a means of measuring real events in a time space articulation same as it is a means of measuring fictional events. Consider any reference to 9/11 in today's society. We know instantly that 9/11 is a time (September 11, 2001); we know it is an event (Terrorism); and we usually associate it with a place (New York City, the Twin Towers). In one abbreviated date our knowledge of a historical event, place, and the politics and emotions surrounding it are a compressed chronotope. When we ask World War II

veterans if they were “there” during D-Day, Pearl Harbor, or Hiroshima we are asking them not only their physical, geographical location during a moment in their life, but we also asking them a charged question filled with psychological and social implications. In literature, the events, places, and times have their own chronotope and may or may not seem relevant to our own. However, the picaresque is a novel of social exchange and so its chronotope is universal.

Bakhtin points to the link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road: “In the chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity” (“Forms of Time” 98). He posits that the motif of meeting is in nearly every form a literature and every aspect of culture. The motif of meeting relates to the motif of recognition/nonrecognition; therefore, the picaro is of interest because of how he introduces us to his travels and interactions. The picaro is isolated and marginalized on the road because he is usually in disguise or searching for an identity. The use of disguise, solitariness, and outside perspective allows him possibility to observe unobstructed. He is an un-dogmatic observer, *invisible* and unfeeling to confront reality against certain ideologies. Ralph Ellison’s narrator presents a certain helplessness to intervention and interpretation when he witnessing brother Clifton’s death at the hands of the police:

Why did he choose to plunge into nothingness, into the voice of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside of history? I tried to step away and look at it from a distance of words read in books, half-remembered. . . . All things, it is said, are duly recorded—all things of importance, that is. But not quite, for actually it is

only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events that the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by. . . . And I, the only witness for the defense, knew neither the extent of his guilt nor the nature of his crime. Where were the historians today? And how would they put it down? (439)

Nevertheless, from these masked observations the picaro hopes to show us some truth, even if he cannot fully interpret it himself. I think of Huck Finn watching the circus and a clown holding onto a bucking, wild horse while the crowd laughs, but Huck informs us, “[a]nd at last, sure enough, all the circus men could do, the horse broke loose, and away he went like the very nation . . . and the people just crazy. It warn’t funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger” (206). How these events and motifs interact within the text and to the reader represent the immense difficulties of interpretation. The condition of the traveling picaro being displaced “both geographically and socially gives him freedoms in a carnivalesque world in which ‘normal’ rules and values are very often presented upside-down” (Tomoigă 39).

While the picaro’s chronotope seems to put ours on pause, it is how we interpret his movement, his actions, and his role in relation to our own that makes him universal. For this, I turn to Burke whose terms of identification help us see similarities with the picaro even when there are significant differences:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identity himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. Here are ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, and

individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (544-545)

The description between being distinct and consubstantiality can easily apply to examples of the picaro and the confidence man, which I will attempt to explain later; however, we might wonder how our own interests align with either. Burke explains that humans identify by understanding what or who they are not. Such understanding can be heuristic and internal, or imprinted onto us by society. Huck Finn asserts that he is not civilized, yet his father accuses him otherwise. The picaro's plight is trying to find out who he is "not" so that he might learn to understand who he "is"; division ironically defines identification (Burke 547). In the picaresque world, everyone seems to wear a mask. The setting is carnivalesque and the only means of surviving it is to don a disguise. As the reader follows the exploits of the picaro, he or she also partakes in the masking and unmasking process. Burke suggests that when two men collaborate in an enterprise, they each provide a different kind of service, and each reap a different profit. If we carry this analogy farther, we lose sight of where "cooperation" ends and "exploitation" begins (549). At what point is the reader guilty of the same misgivings as the picaro, and to what extent is the reader different?

The confidence man is one who takes advantage of the ambiguities between cooperation and exploitation, but his schema remains hidden to all but the picaro, who in turn, reveals it to the reader. In this sense, the picaro is vital for our interpretation of the confidence man, yet the two characters appear so similar to each other, that we separate

our own identity from theirs. If we are to mark the picaro as a criminal, which is a motif typical of the American picaresque, we certainly do not blame him, or at least not usually. Consider the modern hacker group, Anonymous, which society both decries and praises. When caught, society prosecutes hackers as criminals, yet when hacking results in the exposure of child pornography rings, we praise Anonymous for their actions. The ambiguous relationship between criminal and hero is prevalent throughout picaresque tradition. The picaro is an outsider, an anonymous actor, whose actions are divisive, yet his role is one we cannot dismiss as being entirely different from us as a whole.

### Conclusion

To date, few sources offer an extensive, purely American analysis of the picaresque genre. While the conceptions of Bahktin and Burke are indeed exceedingly helpful in understanding many of the elements of the picaresque, the critical application of these rhetorical and philosophical lenses has been limited to the confines of early Spanish and European picaros and to singular character types such as the confidence man or trickster.

My interests lie in understanding the similarities and differences between these character types and cultural influence within the ever-expanding canon of picaresque narratives. From the moment I began work on this thesis, I continually encountered the problem of having to explain the picaresque to friends, family, and even colleagues. Given that it is a genre that has been described as the simplest of all narrative structures,

one from which the modern novel owes much of its origin, and an entertaining tale of serious philosophical depth, why do so few people recognize the term “picaresque”? Despite this lack of knowledge, most individuals with whom I spoke are capable of naming one or more texts after I’ve described the genre; therefore, assuring me the picaresque has indeed become a part of our literary history in such integrated mass that examples of its influence remain abundant four-hundred years after *Lazarillo* played his first trick.

But even with all the influence the picaresque has had in shaping modern fiction, why study it now? Why focus on American picaresque? I look to Francisco Sanchez and Nicholas Spadaccini, who have grappled with the problem of writing about a literary genre that has more than received its fair share of academic inquiry. Sanchez and Spadaccini suggest,

[A]n explanation [of the significance for future study] may be found in the peculiar character of the picaresque, which even while retaining its canonical status, allows us to enter into a consideration of the related issues of diversity, difference, periphery, and marginality, issues that have a prominent place in a debate that ultimately deals with the role of traditions and the possibility of alternatives to them. (292)

Despite its simple beginnings, the picaresque is a genre of great significance. Within the discursive travels and trickery, we find, perhaps a more humanitarian understanding of human nature and of language. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Menelaos grapples with Proteus as the god shifts forms and struggles to free himself. We too must grapple with a protean, ever shifting genre with a hope to uncover its secrets, but the nature of picaresque is

revealing to the nature of language. The heroic position of the rogue, while yet maintaining the status of a delinquent seems contradictory, even reminiscent of *Dissoi Logoi* in that every object has two sides contrary to each other. Moreover, the games of semantics confidence men play are something of Derrida's *différance*, vis-à-vis language's innate inability to capture everything. In the American Democracy, there "is a political need to enlarge social discourses to include the voices and experiences of those individuals and groups that have not had the privilege of feeling that the culture into whose midst they have been thrown is also their own" (Sanchez and Spadaccini 305). Every historical event, every war, and every moment of rising tension in America becomes a political agenda of mixed feelings; however, we must remember that every citizen has a right and voice to their country, no matter how marginalized their position, yet we must also overcome the even difficulty of communicating the vast differences in any form of solidarity. Can we overcome such obstacles? I am unsure of the answer, and in such respect, we are akin to the picaro, who equally observes the world's difficulties with an unclear and uncontrollable path ahead, doing whatever we can to survive.

## CHAPTER II

## PERSUASION IN THE MEMOIRS OF THE NOTORIOUS STEPHEN BURROUGHS

*We cannot discern the operation of the human heart in man, until we are in such a situation, as to prevent his wearing a disguise. This situation must be very abject, and then we become of so little consequence in society, that the notice of man is removed from us, and he acts in our presence without disguise; viewing our approbation or disapprobation as immaterial to his prosperity.*

--Stephen Burroughs

*Each writer in his own individual style attempts to persuade the reader of the truth of his version of picaresque life . . . Writers go to considerable lengths to shape the reader's beliefs and to direct his understanding of the significance of the narration.*

--Helen H. Reed, *The Reader in the Picaresque Novel*

In 1798, a man by the name of Stephen Burroughs published his autobiography, *Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*.<sup>7</sup> His name is nearly lost in obscurity among modern scholars, but a history of publication demonstrates that his memoirs had immense popularity, most decidedly, when he was celebrating the peak of his notoriety. During his youth he went from being the “worst boy in town” (3) to a hardened criminal, who had been more or less accurately accused of being a thief, counterfeiter, impersonator, lecher, con-artist, and jail breaker. Despite the seriousness of the charges levied against him, the mode of his narrative softens judgment one might assume against his character. Perhaps it is because of the complexity and completeness of his Franklinesque simplicity and truthfulness (or as truthful as one might assign his nature)<sup>8</sup> that makes him so enduring,

yet it becomes nearly impossible to stifle any laughter and bemusement over his indignation over punishment and his vainglorious attempts to decorate himself as a patriot and scholar. As risible as his contentious writing may seem upon the surface, he has undoubtedly stirred the pot of persuasion in such fashion that he remains, even to this day, an enigma of character. The following chapter will attempt to analyze the persuasiveness of his writing and will ask the question: what exactly makes Stephen Burroughs a likeable villain? Furthermore, is he both likeable and villainous?

There is little historical documentation regarding the “notorious” Stephen Burroughs. This of course, is discounting a few scattered records<sup>9</sup> and his unreliable autobiography. However so, his history remains well preserved in some thirty slightly differing titles in publication over the course of 200 years. Unlike the other picaresque novels that I will discuss, Burroughs’s *Memoirs* stands apart in that it assumes the genre of autobiography, that is, of nonfiction. However, there are several occasions where a reasonable audience can suspect bits of falsehood and truth stretching. Moreover, it is arguable that there is always a fictional element when one creates a rhetorical self. The Stephen Burroughs in the text is certainly not the same physiological Burroughs who lived in eighteenth-century America, nor are his actions and the events surrounding them preserved in the absolute detail and reality in which they took place. In essence, all autobiographical accounts are fictionalized as the author has had time to reflect, forget, or alter specifics in their recollections. In the case of Stephen Burroughs, there are many

areas in which the reader suspects the author of false documentation. He supports his own agenda and writes from a pathos and ethos rich worldview created not with the desire to accurately retell a life story, but rather to appeal to a reader's sensibilities. In this regard, Stephen Burroughs's *Memoirs* can be read as a fictionalized picaresque rather than a criminal confession or autobiography. The lack of distinction between fact and fiction makes his work influential on a "new tradition" of picaresque that shows the adaptability and ingenuity the American culture and the genre share.

Despite a niggling feeling of distrust, there is much in the memoir left unsaid; what we do know of Burroughs retains our fixation on his criminal deeds and boyish pranks. By the age of nineteen, he had been expelled from Dartmouth College, jailed for stealing wine from a ship's captain, discovered as impersonating a preacher with stolen sermons, and arrested for passing counterfeit money. While spending time in prison he obsessed with breaking out, yet after many failed attempts, he was subjected to increasingly harsh confinement. Burroughs unabashedly admits to threats of violence and denounces authority, yet he possesses a keen knowledge of a classical literature, a love for reading, and a belief that every man seeks the highest level of happiness in life—a principle akin to the picaro. He writes as if he is preaching, which, interestingly enough, he worked (albeit fraudulently) as a preacher and as a schoolteacher on several occasions while traveling.

If the audience reads Stephen Burroughs as a confession or travel tale with the expectation that it is autobiographical, then they will trust the ethos of the various letters and editorial notes included in the annotations of the *Memoirs*. He presents his life as one of delinquency, trickery, and adventure. Daniel Cohen's historical account calls the *Memoirs* a "prototype" picaresque for the American audience. The call of American revolutionary dissent echoes in Burroughs's self-exclusion from his society. Burroughs expresses a "distaste for established social values and hierarchies" and masquerades as "an enlightened philosopher bestowing cosmopolitan wisdom on a narrow provincial audience" (Cohen 161). It is debatable whether the artifacts of letters included in the text are, in fact, genuine or whether they are elements of fiction incorporated into the text as a means of persuasion.

The American picaro is identical to the lonely and solitary picaro of Spanish tradition, but he is also more complicated as an individual struggling with both personal identity and national identity. Burroughs's father was a Presbyterian clergyman, living in Hanover, New Hampshire. Burroughs was an only child, an avid reader, and had a "thirst for amusement [that] was insatiable, as in [his] situation, the only dependence for that gratification was entirely within [himself]" (3). Although swearing affirmation for friends, family, and country, his self-determination is reminiscent to young Lazarillo's philosophy, "I'm on my own and I've got to look after myself" (*Lazarillo de Tormes* 8). Unlike Lazarillo, Burroughs had a father and individuals to whom he occasionally sought

help from, but typical to the American picaro, he was never fully accepted in the community he longed to be a part of and thus moved about considerably.

Early strife with his father around 1778-79 stemmed from his determination to enlist in the army and run away from home. Each time, the young Burroughs bundled his knapsack and scampered after the troops as they marched through town. It is during this scene that Burroughs makes his first references to the picaresque tradition, “more than Quixotic bravery” (10). He continues, “surely the knight of La Mancha, had he seen me in my present plight, would have dismounted from the most redoubtable Rozinante, and would have yielded to me the palm of chivalry, as the most accomplished knight on the sod” (10). Despite Burroughs’s pride, his father was less than amused. After his father brings him back home, he sends the delinquent boy to school, but Burroughs runs away again at the age of seventeen. He joins with a ship’s crew as a doctor—though not possessing any medical knowledge, his deception succeeds and he begins his journey of picaro travels and trickery.

Appealing to sentimental patriotism, Burroughs identifies as both American Republican and as a picaro. He yearns for acceptance and to stay in one place, yet circumstance leads him away and he expresses his struggle to understand his position. As his ship leaves port, he remarks,

When I lost sight of America, I cannot say but what my feelings were more disagreeably affected than I expected. Those attachments which we form in

childhood, to places, to persons and things, are pretty strong, I believe, in the minds of all; and none can give them up without a struggle. (37)

For the picaro, there is no home, but for Burroughs, home is America. He must separate and remain American. In moments such as these, the American picaro distinguishes himself as being more psychological and sentimental than picaros of the past. The struggle of identity and the pain of separation become akin to future American picaros and picaras. Burroughs's life is a Sisyphus rhythm of expulsion and acceptance, patriot and rebel. Like the Sisyphus rhythm, each section of his memoir is a reinventing of himself emblematic of his quest for identity.

After the episode on the ship, Burroughs expresses society's desire for him to find a natural and honorable profession. Knowing no other option, he decided to steal his father's horse and a pocket full of sermons before plotting a course to Pelham, Massachusetts. Withholding the truth and using a false identity, he found employment as a clergyman. Nevertheless, when the Pelhamite mob discovered he was not ordained, they ran him out of town. The ensuing chase set the stage for his "hay-mow sermon" when he climbed to the hayloft of a barn and pleaded for clemency while knocking back potential attackers. Later, he was arrested for passing counterfeit money. Subsequently, tales of his exploits circulated nationwide, which lead to many impersonators attempting to capitalize on his notoriety (Jones 32).

It is difficult to separate the counterfeit life of the confidence man from that of the gentleman, for Burroughs plays both roles. Burroughs might be seen, even if post hoc, as one of our Founding Fathers, eternally standing as a reminder of our rebellious nature. On this matter, Robert Frost says in the preface, “Burroughs comes in reassuringly when there is a question of our not unprincipled wickedness . . . for the world knows we are criminal enough” (vii). Frost speaks on the matter suggesting that America’s dissent from England has forever ingrained a fondness for rebellion. The signers of the Declaration knew that their signatures would ultimately gain them new freedom while simultaneously confess their criminal deeds as traitors. However, if we are all criminal, then we do not celebrate the criminal lifestyle with any bravado; therefore, what makes the reader sympathize or downright condone the actions of one criminal over the next?

One might ask the same question about our own non-literary world. Democracy secures liberty, yet paradoxically, it also safeguards dissension across the several political, religious, and domestic spheres of American culture. Civil disobedience echoes from the words of Jefferson, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King Jr. Likewise, anti-war, civil-rights and other political or religious protests are inescapable from America’s history. When is one act patriotic and the other criminal? Indeed, the distinction between an act of liberty and one of deviancy is relative to an individual’s worldview. No nation can possess absolute freedom without endangering itself or its populace because absolute freedom amounts to anarchy and chaos, as we will see later in Melville’s world of the *Confidence-Man*.

### The Picaro and the American-Made Criminal

Prior to Burroughs, there was a proliferation of literary genres dealing with crime. Both noted scholars Daniel Cohen and Daniel Williams introduce an array of criminal-themed discourse between 1674 to 1860 from New England and surrounding communities. Their examples include criminal confessions, execution sermons, conversion narratives, dying verses, last speeches, and crime ballads (Williams 4-5; Cohen 3-22). The intent of the colonial gallows literature<sup>10</sup> was not to create public sentiment for the convicted, but rather it was thought to enforce cultural and Christian values: “In life, criminals were the agents of disorder, but in death they became the opposite . . . By placing crimes and criminals in a linear progression of beginning, middle, and end, narratives negated the misrule inherent in unlawful action” (Williams x).<sup>11</sup> Ministers used the publication of the gallows literature as a way for the public to understand crime and “[b]y doing so, they sought to integrate extraordinary and perhaps frightening communal events into a familiar theological framework” (Cohen 7). Sometime around the mid eighteenth century, criminal narratives began changing hands from the ministers to commercial publishers as public demand increased. Social pressures and factors such as increased literacy influenced the genres’ popularity beyond the scope of “last words” and Christian conversion. The secular and commercial shift away from pious and community oriented objectives allowed criminals to speak to their audience directly (Cohen 23).

As environmental determinism became the dominant theory in American criminology, the literature of the criminal likewise reflected the change in thinking. Between 1760 to 1800 “a few of New England’s criminal narratives had even developed into full-length autobiographies” (Cohen 24). The American culture become more complex and commercial, so where most of the early Puritan crime publications fixated on the idea of salvation and redemption, later texts such as those published and wrote by the accused began questioning the accuracy of verdicts, fairness of proceedings, and the treatment of prisoners (Cohen 25). Many of these first autobiographies contained nothing more than a dates and locations of birth and criminal exploits but a few reflected the picaresque’s spirit of adventure and driftlessness. *The Life, and Dying Speech of Arthur, a Negro Man; Who was Executed at Worcester, October 20, 1768. For a Rape Committed on the Body of one Deborah Metcalfe* represents one such example of picaresque influence into criminal narratives. Here, Arthur tells his audience of his birth and upbringing before confessing to a number of criminal deeds, sexual exploits, disguise, and a bit of bad luck resulting in travel. Whereas such biographies blurred the line between fact and fiction, the humor and philosophical scale of the picaresque had not yet been fully realized until Burroughs.

According to Cohen, Stephen Burroughs’s experiences represent “an emerging libertarian concern over the treatment of criminal defendants, potential victims of the massive coercive powers of the state” (162). The American Revolution had a significant effect on social relations with authority (Williams 20). While some wished to remain part

of England, others fought patriotically against the British. Ultimately, Burroughs raises the question of national identity and challenges it against the notion of the self.

In “Early American Criminal Narratives and the Problem of Public Sentiments,” Kristin Boudreau addresses how publishing criminal deeds and punishments were believed to play an active role in the early American society. Benjamin Rush and other founders of the early republic believed that natural sentiments, like sympathy, were important to the preservation of law and order (249). When earlier criminal narratives focused on the punishment, the crowds had very little opportunity to identify with the criminal, but when the narratives began providing details of the criminal’s life, the crowds could become persuaded to side with the condemned. As Boudreau notes, this shifting of attitude was a topic of debate, it furthermore raised problems for governing officials trying to uphold the law since the violation or unjust treatment of one individual could easily provoke the wrath and disorder of the populace. The bulk of this argument suggested that law could wield little to no power when it was at odds with public sentiment (250).

Whether Burroughs’s ultimate concern was with gaining public sympathy or with enlisting his name in the eternal records of history, it appears that Burroughs was unsuccessful in his lifetime in moving public sentiment in his favor. Even his own sorrowing father “was compelled by a sense of duty to retract the approval . . . and abandon the hope that his son would ever experience a true, reliable, and permanent

reformation” (x). However, with the publication of his *Memoirs*, the reader given the responsibility to uphold the moral and legal charity of Burroughs. I make this claim because of the level of identifying that Burroughs undertakes in his attempt to create a work of quasi-fiction that addresses the reader as a friend and ally to the criminal narrator.

The picaro is an outcast within his social settings, but in many cases, the picaro is not outcast from the reader. Burroughs was well aware of this fact, and revered the relationship between reader and narrator. His justification for nearly any action or want of action reflects back onto the reader in a sort of consubstantial identification. Burroughs seeks not only to explain his actions, but also to pull the reader into the story. He wants the reader to be a picaro with him. He does this throughout the text: “The happiness of ourselves, together with the good of society, is the governing pursuit of every valuable member of the community” (31); “Ought we not to consider ourselves as members of one and the same family” (128); “I granted him that compassion which nature has taught me to show. I now stand in need of your pity; will you not grant what you, in a like situation, would request?” (150). Moreover, Burroughs’s use of allegories attempts to distinguish a difference between his wrongdoings and the wrongdoings of others. He also provides the reader an explanation as to why his actions do not deserve the same pejorative judgment, “Shall man, poor vile man, vain of his own self-righteousness and virtues, presume to be less merciful than his Maker?” (275). Before his notoriety of counterfeiting, Burroughs tried to learn alchemy such as transmuting copper into silver.

His teacher is a man by the name of Philips. Later, Burroughs discovers from pleadings of his friend, that Philips was a con artist:

Burroughs, we have been deceived! Greatly deceived by Philips, that king of villains. Could you have thought, that all the experiments, which he tried before us . . . were nothing but the vilest deception? It truly is the case. We were not alone the dupes of his duplicity . . . the villain had obtained from me, with one hundred dollars in cash. (78)

The exacerbated crime in Philips actions, as opposed to Burroughs's deceptions, according to the author, is nothing more than the element of currency exchanged for services rendered. When defending himself against the angry townsfolk, who felt deceived by his undedicated preaching, Burroughs's argument relies upon deductive reasoning: "he preached well—you paid him well—all parties were satisfied" (71). In Burroughs's case, he provided what was paid for (regardless of it being under false pretensions) and therefore makes him the better man than Philips, the swindler. The comparison between heartless confidence man and picaro repeats in later American picaresque narratives, but Burroughs remains more criminal than most picaros.

The injurious and multitude of punishments keep the seriousness of Burroughs's crimes in perspective for one who might doubt his villainy, yet it further increases the vicarious nature of an unsympathetic reader while eliciting an appeal to the reader's moral sensibilities. In one incident of punishment after an accusation of rape, he describes a punishment that appears to outweigh the evidence against him:

One hundred and seventeen stripes on the naked back; should stand two hours in the pillory: should sit one hour on the gallows, with a rope around [his] neck; that [he] should remain confined in prison three months; that [he] should procure bonds for good behavior for seven years, and pay the charges of prosecution. (211)

Nonetheless, and in a fashion the reader has come to expect from Burroughs, he decries the punishments as overly harsh. As to his guilt of the rape—Burroughs only admits to several attempts of failed seduction. Unlike his otherwise candid defense, he vaguely articulates the scenario from which the accusations arise. He knows that some crimes cannot be justified, but rather he charges the criminal justice system of overreach and overreaction:

A number of circumstances happening to throw a certain enjoyment full in my view, the temptation was too powerful. I fell before it. The fatal moment was past. It could not be recalled. After I had retired from school, the object had its full operation upon my mind. This was a moment of calmness. This was moment in which the examination of my conduct gave me the keenest pain. (195)

Sometime later in the *Memoirs*, a letter, supposedly written by a Judge Havens,<sup>12</sup> dismisses the rape accusations and other crimes. This testimonial reply fills in the spaces that Burroughs had left blank. Furthermore, Judge Havens writes:

Stop, gentlemen, say I, stay your rage; pray hearken to reason. The devil is not so bad as his picture—”But he has committed a rape certainly,” says on. “Not quite so bad neither,” say I and then endeavor to extenuate it by saying that it did not amount to a force, and that I understood that the young woman swore falsely to plaster over her reputation. (274)

Of all the antics Burroughs is accused and willingly admits, the accusations of rape are the most extreme examples of criminal behavior. I am, overall, arguing for his ability to persuade, but most of his boyish pranks and justifiable misdeeds are swept away with the blunt seriousness of such accusation. Yet, I would not be writing this argument if I did not believe that Burroughs somehow settles the matter with the reader in a way that I feel confident in defending him. I will not defend rape, if that is what happened, but I must admit; “beyond a reasonable doubt” does not exist in the context of his *Memoirs*. Perhaps it is because Burroughs himself argues that if a crime does not hurt someone directly, then the law is not broken: “design and spirit of law is to protect each other from injury; and where no injury is intended, nor in fact done, the whole essence of law is attended to” (82). In his defense, Burroughs suggests that a misunderstood seduction did not actually result in injury, rape, nor intent to rape.

Burroughs displaces the blame and his guilt to the promiscuity of the accuser. This is a move typical of rapists, but out of character for Burroughs’s use of language and formation of reasoning. He explains that his relations with the girl began innocently enough as he was accustomed to being alone with her at the school or walking her home. Not wanting the reader to suspect this as abnormal behavior, he compares himself to others who worked or attended the school, “More or less of the scholars, who lived some distance from the school, likewise tarried” (195). Whether he was guilty of the crime, one cannot say based on the evidence. Although Platonic rhetoric is dismissive of pathos

in light of empirical evidence, Burroughs's fictional world is, at times, just as ambiguous as reality. The empirical evidence is gone and language is all that remains, so is determining his guilt or innocence a matter of justice or persuasion?

Law Professor Christopher Rideout says that narratives are innate ways of understanding human experience, which in turn makes them inherently persuasive (55). In this episode of his narrative, Burroughs's rhetoric changes from *confess and justify*, to something more of a *deny and excuse*. As Rideout might suggest, Burroughs's rhetorical tactics go beyond models of persuasion based on formal or informal logic, to encompass a *narrative rationality* (see Rideout). Rather than formulating what "really happened," Burroughs supplies the reader with plenty of "could have happened" excuses and in finale lessens the fault one might have against him. Perhaps it is in this vagueness and personal appeal that Burroughs beats the odds of being the detestable criminal—the "vicious" person who has "disturbed" our rest. Another consideration, if we accept his influence from early Republic criminal narratives, that perhaps he validates the unreliability and criminal nature we suspect, but rather than being repulsed, his candor increases our vicarious nature for understanding the depraved. The contrasting tension between narration and the narrator's attitude increases our suspicion, yet it also increases our intrigue (Wicks 62).

There is something about his writing, I will admit, that makes it easier to overlook the lecherous crimes and to laugh at the grotesque element of Burroughs's character. That

something is a grotesque satire with an unpredictability that arouses a shocked response from the reader. By Burroughs's account, we pummeled with the notion that his eighteenth century world is existentially a valid human experience (Wicks 56-59). In addition to this, the episodic, masquerading characteristics of the picaresque make it difficult to form a solid opinion on the nature of a character. No one really knows the real Burroughs, who says, "you cannot enter into the merits of [any man's] trial, so as to understand it thoroughly, unless you should become really acquainted with the villain; then you would be sensible that too great exertions could not be made against him" (264). Both the physician and lawyer who appear within the text as antagonists firmly believe they would know the real Burroughs on site, yet they foolishly cannot recognize him face to face. When the audience willingly participates in the antics of the protagonist, such as the case in most picaresque narratives, the burden of criminal guilt loses its weight.

For a modern analogy, consider the character Walter White in the TV series *Breaking Bad*. Walter enters into a world of drug dealing and murder upon learning he has cancer. He justifies his crimes as a way to support his family. He believes he has been unfairly treated in life, and sets out to recreate his character. Eventually, he too grapples with the circumstance of identity, but unlike the picaro, eventually comes to terms with his ego. Despite the villainy of Walter White, the show's fans continued to reward the character gratuitous praise and admiration. We might consider Walter a picaro, like Burroughs, who identifies as a man forced into certain criminal deeds, but

between the two, there are differences. Burroughs justifies his actions as moral and natural to man. In addition, the maltreatment by society as a real inversion to natural law, which is closely associated with the European picaresque. However, Walter's worldview is more cynical and self-serving. While the first few seasons of *Breaking Bad* depict Walter and his sidekick Jesse as stumbling through the underbelly of the criminal world, the later seasons see a change in Walter, who becomes purely self-serving. However, not exactly a picaresque, Walter elicits a pardon from the audience because of picaresque influenced elements such as the reliance on trickery and deception and the sense of necessity to commit misdeeds to survive. Walter is not a picaresque in the true sense, nor does he directly appeal to the audience as Burroughs does, but the audience's internal questioning remains the same—what if it were me in that situation? To this extent, I argue that the picaresque is persuasive in eliciting sympathy from the audience against traditional social authorities. If such is the case, then there is certainly evidence in Stephen Burroughs, who as Frost suggested, rewrote his follies and misdeeds into the context of American patriotism.

Christopher Jones's "Praying upon Truth: *The Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs* and the Picaresque" identifies the quintessential statement for interpreting the world in the eyes of a picaresque. The line comes from Burroughs as he describes his transportation to Castle Island Prison and comments upon the spectacle he has become:

We cannot discern the operation of the human heart in man, until we are in such a situation, as to prevent his wearing a disguise. This situation must be very abject, and then we become of so little consequence in society, that the notice of man is

removed from us, and he acts in our presence without disguise; viewing our approbation or disapprobation as immaterial to his prosperity. Under such situation, the human character becomes really known. (129)

In this statement, Burroughs, the picaro, uses the word “disguise” as a metonym for “good behavior,” and what is believed in the social consensus is exposed as false facade (Jones 35). The *Memoirs* presents all the rhetorical and contextual elements of the classic picaresque, such as a struggle to survive on one’s own, a crisis of identity, and a representation that society’s core beliefs in objective truths are nothing more than false.

### Identification

Kenneth Burke discusses the importance of identification as fundamental to human communication. He contends that our need to identify with each other arises from division. No two humans are alike; therefore, each of us being different, we seek to identify to overcome separateness. We experience the ambiguity of being separate yet we are identified with others as being “both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (21). Burroughs shares with his audience the same early national heritage to which he relies heavily upon mere rhetoric to express a united American ideology. He unfavorably compares the correctional system of America to that of England and decries it as barbaric. In addition, Burroughs writes the *Memoirs* as a direct appeal to an imagined friend, similar to Lazarillo, Huck Finn, and most picaros alike. The confidence the picaro entrusts to the reader and the closeness created from the

narrative perspective make for a persuasive element of consubstantial existence between reader and rogue.

Burroughs's persuasion begins in the prefatory letter of the text, supposedly written to a friend who had requested a narrative of the rogue's life. In the letter, he writes,

My life, it is true, has been one continued course of tumult, revolution and vexation; and such as it is, I will give to you in detail, (in this method rather than verbally, it being more convenient to peruse it at your leisure, than to listen to the dull tale of egotisms which I must make use of in a verbal relation). When you become tired with reading, you will be under no necessity of holding the book in your hand from the feelings of delicacy, but can lay it by at leisure. (1)

The use of the words "revolution" and "tumult" are reflective of an era immediately following the American Revolution, which establishes an identity between Burroughs and his reader, yet it coincides with the perennial and episodic discourse of the picaresque. What follows is a long act of rhetoric that emphasizes the role the reader has in making his or her own decisions. By reading at "your own leisure," the reader maintains authority over the text. Even as I write this paper, making my own judgments against or in favor of Burroughs, he reminds the reader,

Whilst I am absent, you will have sufficient leisure to peruse the manuscript and detect the errors, which I have been guilty of, and rest assured that I shall ever receive any suggestions of yours upon that head as an additional mark of that sincere friendship which you have ever manifested (228)

The language and letter format makes Burroughs into a friend of the reader, or at least attempts to establish a friendly relationship to the narrator. As friends, he has found a way to identify with his audience, and can proceed in making additional appeals. Jones

notices that it is similar to the first picaresque novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published anonymously in 1554, and Stephen Burroughs's *Memoirs* are both in epistolary form (34). True enough, the *Memoirs* has short extracts of letters to, from, or about Burroughs. These letters usually share similar syntactical and semantic rhythm and word choices, suggesting to me that many of the letters are fictional and written by Burroughs. In this respect, Burroughs echoes his contemporary, Benjamin Franklin, who, also by Jones's contention, invents a "friend" who has requested the story (34). These elements break the non-letter story into brief episodic events between the direct narratives addressing the reader (friend) and affirms personal explanations and pleas for sympathy.

"Lord Knows We Are Criminal Enough"<sup>13</sup>

Similarly to Huck Finn, Alex Delarge,<sup>14</sup> and other picaros, Burroughs tells his story in a first-person narrative. Literary scholar Claudio Guillén says that the absence of the first-person form "prevents a story . . . from being picaresque in the full sense" (93). He allows the reader inside his head. Similarly, when he needs to identify with the reader, he speaks directly to them in second person, and with an appeal of sameness:

O! ruthless mortals! said I, why so infatuated! Am I not a member of the same family with yourselves? Am not I capable of suffering the same woes with others? Place yourselves in my situation for a moment, and try to regale your feelings in such a condition. Even suppose a brother, a child, or any near relative, or friend, in my situation; would you conduct towards him as you now do towards me, who am a stranger among you? Surely you would not. (107)

Most of the persuasion in the picaresque takes place through the discourse of Burke's identification, psychologically and structurally. Rideout suggests that the psychological and structural persuasion is "not a simple matter of the narrative's accuracy or realism, but rather is mediated through the judgment of the audience" (56). Structurally, the narratives employ the first and second person as tools of identification and ways to induct the reader into the same experience of the narrator. The vicarious journey through the eyes of first-person narration is "ultimately the picaresque's . . . trick, a lure, the narrative analogue of the tricks he has played to survive" (Wicks 58). There is a lot to discuss about the spatial and temporal distances between the picaresque, the implied author, and the reader. The use of "I" has tremendous psychological influence.<sup>15</sup> In short, the narrator plays the psychological trickery that he is not same "I" as the picaresque. The narrator shares his or her guilt or blame, if there is any, with the reader using the first-person pronoun. Furthermore, Wicks says that the reader suspends his "disbelief that anyone should be able to recall such specific details; we consent, that is, to the convention of perfect memory" (57), which Burroughs reaffirms when he begins the narrative:

In relating the facts of my life to you, I shall endeavor to give as simple an account of them as I am able, without coloring or darkening any circumstances; although the relation of many matters will give me a degree and kind of pain, which only they who feel can describe. I have often lamented my neglect of keeping minutes of the occurrences of my life, from time to time, when they were fresh in my memory, and alive to my feelings; the disadvantage of which I now feel, when I come to run over in my mind the chain which as connected the events together. Many circumstances are entirely lost, and many more so obscurely remembered, that I shall not even attempt to give them a place in this account. (3)

The following chapter in Burroughs's narrative creates a short allegory that furthermore prepares the reader to judge Burroughs in the fashion he chooses. Burroughs interrupts his introduction of self to provide a philosophy of child-rearing. He begins the tale with, "I once taught a school in a town of Massachusetts, by the name of Charlton" (7). At such school, a clergyman came applying for the admission of his son, whose antics had caused the young boy (named Dodge) to be expelled from every school in the country, but "with great difficulty, [Burroughs] persuaded the committee . . . to admit him" (7). One incident marked with roguish behavior is when Dodge climbed into the upper loft of the schoolhouse to escape the angry mob, whom he had excited with scandalous insults. The story is remarkably similar to Burroughs's escape into the upper reaches of a hayloft when he too must flee an angry mob later in the narrative. Burroughs's attitude with delinquent children is one of patience and respect. It is his impression that we give troubled juveniles the benefit of doubt when accused of wrongdoing. Burroughs suggests the shame from disappointing a trustful adult will ultimately lead the child to correcting his or her own behavior. Similar methodology for treating delinquency is typical in modern society, during Burroughs's time, it was legal and customary to imprison and even execute children. However, despite the leniency Burroughs suggest, there seems to be more authorial intent than mere philosophical advice. For example, the similarity to his own hay mound escape and even the child's name, which means a "clever or dishonest trick done in order to avoid something" ("Dodge") are more than coincidence.

In both cases, the denial of wrongdoing deescalates the situation. With Dodge, Burroughs claims he does not believe the report that Dodge had conducted himself in such a manner and claims the reporters had made a mistake. With Burroughs's confidence in him unshaken, the young boy came down and behaved exceedingly well thereafter (8). The rhetoric here invites the reader to the lesson that ignoring the bad behavior encourages good behavior. With this story at the beginning of the narrative, Burroughs's character is free to trade places with Dodge, and the reader takes the role of the sympathetic teacher entrusting all confidence in Burroughs despite any disagreement that should follow.

Similar to the "Dodge allegory," the *Memoirs* also includes a short exposé of a tortured slave. During his episode at sea, Burroughs is unfortunate enough to witness the brutal torture of a black man. Burroughs does not know the reason for the torture, but the man is bound and a stake driven through his body:

The dreadful operation of empaling [sic] soon began, which consisted of driving the stake through the body, from one end to the other, till it came out a little above his shoulder. The agonies, which he manifested by writhings and hideous yells, had such an effect on my mind, that I almost fainted. (41)

The graphic depiction seemingly comes out of nowhere, but the picaresque occasionally maintains the grotesque elements of *El Buscón* (1626) and *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (1942) such as when Pascual's little brother has his ears bitten off by a hog and later dies by falling into an oil vat. The grotesque in the *Memoirs* is not unique; however, it serves the allegorical purpose of framing the reader's perspective and further serves to

demonstrate a higher moral consciousness of the American picaro, whose own criminal nature might seem reserved to the abuses committed by others.

Subsequently following the grotesque torture scene, Burroughs writes about his own punishment aboard the ship for after a supposedly false accusation of theft. He describes a chain and spike shackle and a series of whipping and beatings. He says the skin around the iron bands wore down to sordid wounds (44). Just as the reader ought to be shocked and horrified by the torture scene, so too should one be shocked and horrified by Burroughs's "mistreatment." Each episodic story that digresses from the main narrative is carefully developed to persuade the reader that while Burroughs may be wrong, the reader and he are nonetheless equally struggling to make their way in a world of abusive and overreaching authority. Each time the reader makes a correlation between torments and torture, each questionable accusation of some criminal or immoral deed, and each comparison of Burroughs to one of the many short allegorical stories inch the reader closer to sympathizing the criminal.

### Conclusion

The sympathy one has with Burroughs is a complicated matter, both because of the historical nature of his writing, and that of the articulation of the time and place. According to Boudreau, some founders of the Republic such as Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson feared a misplaced sentiment could corrupt the mind and endanger the civil order of the state. Jefferson at times called fictions a "poison" that misplaced an

individual's sensibilities and reason (qtd. in Boudreau 251). The concern over the novel's ability to shape a person's emotional state and posit within them an opposition to authority represents Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. Likewise, Jefferson and Rush's disapproval of fiction seem to reflect the concerns of Plato. To all of these ideas, Burroughs was not the first to engage, but he is an ideal candidate to discuss them. In addition, the tradition of the picaresque or rather the unique quality of its character seem doubly significant following the American Revolution.

Heteroglossia is Bakhtin's term for many voices within a text. It is more complicated than this, but I prefer to keep it simple at this point in my argument. The author of any text has his or her voice to contribute when writing. Bakhtin explains that the author's voice comes through the text in a number of ways: "[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, [and] the speech of characters" represent a "diversity of speech types" specific to the fictional world and the "sociopolitical purposes of the day" ("Discourse" 263). Stephen Burroughs incorporates a wide diversity of speech types. The numerous letters, testimonials, allegories, and the direct appeal to the hypothetical reader (as seen in nearly every picaresque) each represent various agendas within the text and hope to accomplish an extra literary, sociopolitical purpose. From the structure of the Burroughs's narrative, we see a combination of picaresque fiction and post-Revolutionary criminal narrative. The mixture of speech types plays an important role in our contemporary understanding of his era as well as providing us with an entertaining story. Burroughs's motive to challenge authority derives more from the

nonfictional elements exterior to the text, such as his life story, but is conveyed fictionally through the rhetoric of picaresque marginality, individualism, and sentimental appeal.

Although I argue that there is a mixture of speech types within Burroughs's *Memoirs*, there is contention regarding the sentimental quality emerging from his mixing of genres. In terms of Bakhtin, the sentimental novel of pathos "becomes a unitary language for the direct expression of authorial intentions and not merely one of the heteroglot" ("Discourse" 397). Here Bakhtin's concern that sentimentalism narrows the horizon for which man can express his worldview is probably indicative of Plato's contempt of rhetoric. Plato feared that rhetoric could corrupt truth and subvert justice, which is precisely what we accuse Burroughs of attempting. Burroughs's version of justice, for which he is the victim and his expressed micro point-of-view carries pathetic connotations, is such that we remember to read his work with caution.

While Burroughs's appeal to sympathy represents the "poison" Jefferson warns against; wrought with language intended to invoke certain patriot and humanitarian responses, the intention of the author serves a greater good. Despite all his pretensions, Burroughs's use of the picaresque not only empowered the closeness between him and his reader, but it also granted him an opportunity to lampoon a criminal justice system still very much identical to the British and old traditions. The reversal of hierarchy and satirical attacks on the "coercive powers of the state" (Cohen 162) were not only essentially picaresque, but also overall correspondent with the emerging ideologies of the

new republic. Although Burroughs is guilty of using rhetoric in ways Plato disapproved, he exposes the need for sociological reform in the fusion of picaresque survival and autobiography as described by Carlos Blanco Aguinaga:

[T]he center of his liveness reality, however prismatic, becomes fixed in a single point of view from which, by its very lowness of perspective, the falsity of other points of view is exposed. . . . Thus, while he was living his life as a [picaro] every adventure helped him to discover a posteriori the illusion of the world, the novel about that life is posited a priori as an example of disillusion. (139)

Moreover, the heteroglot of false documents within the sentimental framework create a new kind of picaresque for the American author, one that is a confidence game via semantics of sort--a move adapted by Herman Melville sixty-eight years later.

## CHAPTER III

ADJUDICATION IN *THE CONFIDENCE-MAN*

*What is a “picaro” – Lazarillo, Gil Blas and the others? A criminal or an honest man, evil or good, cowardly or brave?*

--M. M. Bakhtin

*Confidence men are hardly criminals in the usual sense of the word, for they prosper through a superb knowledge of human nature.*

--David W. Maurer, *The American Confidence Man*

While Stephen Burroughs used both the structure of the criminal narrative and elements of the picaresque to test the boundary between freedom and criminality, the literary form of a new American picaresque was yet to be fully realized. Until this point, the picaresque continued relatively unchanged from the likes of *Lazarillo* and *Guzman*. Although the picaresque changed as it encountered American culture, which gave rise to narrative innovations, the picaresque had not become structurally parallel to the characteristics of the picaros and confidence men it portrayed. By this, I mean the semantic challenges and unreliability were that of the picaro and his interlocutors alone, but the picaresque novel had not fully engrossed the reader in the contradictory world of the narrator. The American picaresque would develop a deeper psychology than its antecedents; it would infuse in its narrative the ideals and philosophies of the “New World” and challenge our notion of freedom and confidence.

Just four years prior to the American Civil War, Herman Melville wrote his last novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857). Initially construed by critics as a failure given its convoluted and unconventional structure, it nonetheless demonstrates Melville's masterful ability create a picaresque both highly philosophical and stylistically complex. Although there remains some question as to whether one can and should call *The Confidence-Man* a picaresque, it certainly was heavily influenced by the roguish genre, and like the picaro, the text itself becomes a form of subversive rhetoric for challenging the consistency of Americans' worldview.

Like other authors who would come after him, Melville incorporated various traits of the early Spanish rogue in his earlier novels. Ishmael, for example, is a wandering orphan, marginalized, and a storyteller. Like picaresque novels, *Moby-Dick* (1851) is panoramic in that it represents much larger philosophical and social concerns than a plot of mere whaling. I am not suggesting that *Moby-Dick* is a literal picaresque, but it certainly has elements that seem to have prepared Melville for writing *The Confidence-Man*. Likewise, the financial ruin and rejection in Melville's personal life contribute to his cynical criticism of American politics and economics. The writing that results is emblematic of the carnivalesque—particularly the tradition on which Bakhtin based his concept.

### Ship of Fools

The Feast of Fools was a carnival tradition of the Middle Ages. Strongly associated with the fool, the carnival celebration was one of “masking and inversion, during which lesser clerics flouted church doctrine” (Wright 73) with the freedom to criticize and candidly express oneself without fear of repercussion. For Bakhtin, the celebration formalized into a textual concept within the novel. In fiction, the author gains certain freedoms to express him or herself while remaining relatively safe from dangerous implications. According to Salomon Resnik and Stephen Orgel, the history of the courtly fool and the harlequin is one of coveted masked truths; in addition, the fool is an ostensible antithesis for better understanding the ideals we aspire by presenting us with the alternative “world of disorder or vice” (qtd. in Wright 73).

With a satirical start that acknowledges the duplicity that follows, *The Confidence Man* begins on April Fool’s Day aboard a steamboat floating from St. Louis to New Orleans. In the introduction, readers are described a barber’s sign that reads “No Trust,” a phrase meaning both “cash only” and falsehood, which signifies the kind of circular contradictions Melville rhetorical and epistemologically employs. From there, a new character, plot, and confidence game arises in each episodic and disconnected chapter. There is no formal introduction to the protagonist, who, like all the other characters, is more of a “type” than a “character,” nor does the text maintain a self-consistency. The

only certain feature is knowing that a confidence man (or men)<sup>16</sup> is somewhere within the setting.

The story follows historical accuracy in depicting confidence games and gambling that embodied the river scene during the early nineteenth century. Like the dupers and swindlers of Melville's tale, real Mississippi steamboat travel before the war was well known for its concentration of tricksters. Even the ship's name, *Fidèle*,<sup>17</sup> ironically hints at the dubious nature of cast and crew. Like the Pequod of *Moby-Dick*, Melville's steamboat equally represents a microcosm of American antebellum tensions. The use of the Mississippi for the novel's setting, where Twain also emphatically places his own later narrative, is incidental to both the picaresque<sup>18</sup> and American idealism: the great river divides the country while maintaining its place as the heart. As Ezekiel Fry says, "The Mississippi, as is so artfully illustrated later in the 19th century by Twain, is true to its name—Father of Waters. It meanders more or less down the entirety of the country, serving as both a literal and metaphoric heart to the nation's being" (Fry).

Melville writes a story about American being with rhetorical complexity. The resulting semantic structure is ambiguous, yet it "mirrors an unselfconscious reader's own prejudices without the reader aware of the interpretation" (Wright 73); such strategy is not persuasive or even heartily readable, given its convolution, yet it is subversive to a nation that thinks it knows itself.

Fry continues to assess the narrative plot as a harbinger of the problems facing the country, whereby "The *Fidèle* exists as an equivalent . . . moving boisterously after red-

herrings and seemingly momentous nothings while violently dismissing the fundamentals of the country itself. Every day is All Fool's Day" (Fry). This of course, is the larger philosophy of *The Confidence-Man*, and the reader is left wondering whether a crime or what crime takes place.

### Crime or Confidence?

If the picaro lives in a world of hypocrisy and contradiction, then the world of *The Confidence-Man* is an endless carnival of such a world. Unlike picaresque authors before him, Melville emphasizes the problem of truisms and rhetorical stability in the changing frontier. The American picaresque gains momentum during the nineteenth century because of the extraordinary rapidity of social and technological disruptions and innovations. Complementing this development is the fact that change becomes a primary category in modern Western ontology. For all the inconsistencies and duplicity, Melville's *Fidèle* is a place of "infinite substitutions . . . there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions" (Derrida 365). The chaotic and unfamiliar narrative of *The Confidence-Man* is one of the extreme examples of American picaresque literature, especially with the exhaustive role of the confidence man.

Confidence men "are very [similar] to the picaro: socially marginal, pragmatic, unprincipled, protean, resilient, peripatetic" (Lindberg 9). Both the confidence man and the picaro are descendants of the trickster, yet there are characteristic differences:

The picaro lives for the present; the con man, trading on promises, lives for the future and tends to sustain more illusions. The picaro remains a partial outsider in the social order; often the confidence man gradually aligns himself with social powers and takes over them. Finally, the picaro usually has a good heart; the confidence man at his purest seems to have nothing inside. (Lindberg 9)

Whereas Stephen Burroughs teases the boundary between picaro and confidence man, in Melville's novel it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the role of either. Perhaps the reader is the picaro, a partial outsider to alien and lawless world that is the *Fidèle*.

Steamboats of the early Mississippi often had trouble with con men, gamblers, outlaws, and tricksters taking advantage of naive or weary travelers. It was often left to the responsibility of the captain to warn his passengers and drive off any deviant who might seek asylum aboard the boat (Smith 1-24). Long before the first steamboat navigated the Mississippi in 1811, the river had already gained a notoriety of gambling, crime, and vice. One steamboat captain, Emerson Gould, declared the abundance of confidence men and like swindlers, calling the river "a veritable elysian field, for the successful operation of all outlaws" (qtd. in Smith 2). As men migrated across country, so too did lawlessness and disorder, as romanticized in most Western film and literature. In Melville's tale, authority is conspicuously absent. Only a wanted poster and the occasional skeptic present the reader with a sense of order:

[There are] no policemen to arrest the confidence men, no judge to try them, no authoritative documentation to determine their identity, no medical evidence to prove the efficacy of [the] Herb-Doctor's potion and no Black Guinea scrubbed with soap and water—there is nothing outside the masquerade to test or define the limits. (Wright 73).

As with the elusive Ahab, the *Fidele's* captain seems to be missing, along with any regulation of or honesty between passengers. The captain may very likely be another disguise of the confidence man or the true nature of the man since a number of key appearances or foreshadowing material take place near the captain's office. Nevertheless, who exactly is the confidence man? Does the audience ever know his identity? Is he the mute, Black Guinea, the Cosmopolitan, or any of the characters to whom we meet? Without a doubt, there is more than one trickster aboard the ship.

Readers explicitly learn of the various tricksters in the first chapter—the various passengers are all gathering around a place card near the captain's office that offers an award for the capture of an impostor. Furthermore, the sign declares him as an original genius. As the crowd looks on with intense interest, they ignore a mute who holds a sign with cryptic messages about charity. Various “chevaliers,” a term for a common swindler, attempt to pickpocket one another. Here, the unannounced narrator describes the scene to the reader:

As if it had been a play-bill, crowds were gathered about the announcement, and among them certain chevaliers . . . their fingers, they were enveloped in some myth; though, during a chance interval, one of these chevaliers somewhat showed his hand in purchasing from another chevalier. (7-8).

Whether you call them charlatans, swindlers, tricksters, confidence men, or con artists, they are a breed of criminal different from all the rest. The confidence man today shares all the same traits and motives of the confidence tricksters of the past: to gain money, fame, or some other advantage by pretense or deception. Generally, there are laws that

try to protect potential victims against criminal confidence games, but the assumption is that people are responsible for their own fraud detection. Rarely does the law successfully prosecute confidence men, so why is this crime so unpunished? As Melville's mystic asks, "Is a rattlesnake accountable?" (226).

Among several reasons as to why few con men sit in prison, perhaps the most interesting is the definition of criminal behavior. In an existential way, all definitions are up for interpretation, such is the nature of the slippery thing we call language. When the mystic uses the metaphor of the rattlesnake, the confidence man replies, "If I will not affirm that it is . . . neither will I deny it. But if we suppose it so, I need not say that such accountability is neither to you, nor me, nor the Court of Common Pleas, but to something superior" (226). Here, the criminal rejects the laws of man in favor of a spiritual judgment. Without recognizing his dupes as crime, he can furthermore push away the accountability of guilt. In Chapter 18, two unnamed characters discuss the nature of the herb doctor (another disguise of the confidence man). When one man suggests that the evidence of the confidence man's crime is making dupes, the other replies, "Many held in honour do the same and many, not wholly knaves, do it too" (107). The question then becomes worthy of a roundtable discussion of whether a fool can be a knave: meaning, if the criminal believes in his own righteousness or quality of wares when others are at odds, is he a fool or a crook? We might say the same from the other perspective: is the person who gave away confidence a fool or a victim?

How is it a theft or robbery if a person voluntarily gives another person his or her money? The truth is that no one wants to be a fool. Therefore, often, crimes are unreported when someone has discovered he or she has been the victim to an elaborate hoax. The alleged victim is at other times, confused by the psychological games and masquerade, thus eventually adapting to the situation of becoming a self-deserving victim. Confidence games are quintessentially rhetorical. Consider Frank Abagnale, who impersonated Pan Am pilots and doctors until caught. His exploits became the basis of the memoirs and movie *Catch Me If You Can*. When he was only seventeen years old, he admits,

I was an impostor, one of the most wanted criminals on four continents, and at the moment I was doing my thing, putting a super hype on some nice people. I was a millionaire twice over and half again before I was twenty-one. I stole every nickel of it and blew the bulk of the bundle.

In real life, the confidence man a villain and a cheat. Very few people aspire to be a confidence man because it breaks the morals of the Golden Rule. However, in fiction, when the motives of agency transpire from the trickster's perspective rather than from the victim, the crime takes on a sort of fascination for most Americans.

“Do the Hustle,” an article in the *New Yorker* by James Surowiecki, explains that we are enthralled with these crooks for the very basic reasons that, “the con artist, for all their vices, represent many of the virtues that Americans aspire to.” They are independent, self-made, and succeed or fail based solely upon their wits (Surowiecki). The confidence men personify in their theatrical performances—their literal interpretation

that the world is a stage, distills reality into a game of chance. It is within this examination of the gray area between reality and fiction that Melville places his readers, and it should come as no surprise that the burlesque criminality in *The Confidence-Man* was inspired by empirical observation.

William Thompson, a criminal and con artist of the earlier nineteenth century, inspired the fictional *The Confidence-Man*. His arrest was highly publicized in the *New York Herald* (1849):

*Arrest of the Confidence Man.*—For the last few months a man has been traveling about the city, known as the “Confidence Man,” that is, he would go up to a perfect stranger in the street, and being a man of genteel appearance, would easily command an interview. Upon this interview he would say after some little conversation, “have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until tomorrow;” the stranger at this novel request, supposing him to be some old acquaintance not at that moment recollected, allows him to take the watch, thus placing “confidence” in the honesty of the stranger, who walks off laughing and the other supposing it to be a joke allows him so to do. (“Arrest”)

The turn of the century was a time of trickery for the American criminal; according to Karen Halttunen, “one out of ten professional criminals in New York” during the eighteen sixties was a confidence man of sorts (7). It was a time of capitalistic roguery: swindlers, frauds, forgeries, and unscrupulous stock trades all romanced an idea of American individualism and self-made fortune. Melville’s intention may have been influenced by the failures he suffered during his lifetime as an author and businessperson, but what emerged was more than a singular perspective of American greed. Like *Moby Dick* (1851), Melville’s world is one that challenges our presumption of natural and moral order when and if we remove authority. Unlike *Moby Dick*, the author’s internal

motives do not share his character's desire to understand the cosmos; rather, he seems to be challenging the nature of man and particularly the nature of America. In many regards, *The Confidence-Man* has more moral lessons and inquisitions that this paper can examine. It was a ponderous effort on behalf of the retiring author who wrote it, and considering the lack of fanfare the novel received in its early publications, it is easy to assume that humanity has not understood the message.

### Motives and Alibis

Americans have always been, in one sense or another, a sort of confidence men: self-reliant, innovative, and boundary dissolvers. Warwick Wadlington proposes in *The Confidence Game in American Literature* (1975) that America's romantic capitalism and persona of selfhood was the perfect breeding ground for the confidence man (12). As evident in the rhetorical strategies of Burroughs, the primary manifestation of the earliest Yankee, according to Wadlington, was a "lonely, wandering life-style, true to the promptings of democratic patriotism, Romanticism, and free enterprise, [in which] the icon of self-confidence [superseded all else]" (10-11). Eager to shed the burden of European tradition and institutions, the journey toward the "New World" meant that the American was a reinvention, a proprietary, to whom all trust was placed in the untrammled self (Wadlington 11). While Wadlington and Lingberg point to Melville's title character as significantly new and rhetorical conception, neither take the opportunity to parallel the character or narrative to that of the picaresque. Here, I might observe that

one of the most significant changes to the picaresque, in terms of the American tradition, is the propinquity between the confidence man and the picaro.

The closeness of rogue and swindler is identifiable in the criminal counterfeiting of Stephen Burroughs, who for the most part remains a picaro rather than the ever-masked confidence man. However, Melville's novel not only breaks from the first-person narrative, but his picaro and confidence man are the same. Because of these changes, the *The Confidence-Man* is something entirely new to the picaresque tradition. The greatest departure between Melville and his counterparts is the scale to which he authored an undiluted, fully rhetorical, and pervasive new form of picaresque. The novel works less as a lens for analyzing the picaro's world and more as a heuristic for understanding our own.

Melville's *Confidence-Man* appears to "work through mankind's deadly, guilty conflicts and oppositions to discover a shared basic idea" (Wadlington 24). Just as the confidence man uses the most basic approach of trust in his implementation of a criminal deed, we wonder if he is sinner or saint. Burke reminds us that we are symbol-using animals, wanting to persuade and to be persuaded. Gullibility is human, and the action of taking advantage of another person's confidence is no less human: "[w]hatever else may be said about us as language-users, we are a species with greatly increased opportunities for mischief" (Carter 24). If the maxim "you can't cheat an honest man" were true, then certainly there would never be any picaros or confidence men.

The confidence man, at least from my observation of American picaresque, acts as a tutor to the picaro. The confidence man's deceptions in the picaresque are morally worse than those of the picaro's. By contrast, this strengthens the confidence in the picaro, and without the confidence man, the picaro cannot survive. His role exposes the paradoxes evident in all of human language and culture through the process of negation. The role of the confidence man in literature, particularly Melville's *Confidence-Man*, is Hegelian dialectic in that he fashions a truth only in and of himself by means of negation and antitheses.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the double-sidedness of the confidence man's truth-seeking through deception was Melville's response to Emerson, criticizing the Transcendental movement as misguided and "frozen natured."<sup>20</sup>

In Chapters 6, 7, and 8 the clergyman, the gentleman, and the charitable lady all donate money to the confidence man quite readily in the name of some charity proposed, but the novel provides no evidence that money will not be utilized in the manner for which the confidence man has collected it in name of charity. Unlike the confidence men that follow, such as the Duke and King in Mark Twain's famous picaresque, the protagonist of Melville's novel never outrightly displays malice, but nonetheless the endgame seems to be conning others out of their wealth, which he more than succeeds at doing. However, unlike past picaros, whose disguises only change for the necessity of survival, Melville's central character(s) continuously change without any particular pattern or *modus operandi*. They are the very nature of the Greek god Proteus, for whom the picaro and his genre share a mutable quality. There are some chapters where

monetary gain is the clear motive, but in other chapters, the motive is less clear. In these sections, the confidence man gives away money and exchanges nothing. Alexander Gelley makes the same observation, and asks, “What game is being played?” whereby he concludes, “swindling money is only part of it, and perhaps the least part” (252). Despite the lack of money swindling, there is definitely foolery at work, but Gelley echoes other critics in suggesting that the contradicting language tricks the reader just as much as the fictional characters. Gelley suggests that while a confidence game tricks the characters, a similar game confronts the reader in the interplay between readers and the text through the employment of an occasional extradiegetic narrator (251). The shifting and debate between the reality and fiction are one of the many aspects that make this novel important evidence in understanding the pragmatic relations between art and life.

### Extradiegetic Narration and Fictional Reality

*The Confidence-Man* contains several literary elements that criticize the real world, but the novel explicitly draws attention to itself as a work of fiction, especially in Chapters 14, 33, and 44. These chapters shift from the plot so that the implied author has an opportunity to reflect upon the story and the philosophies of writing.<sup>21</sup> It might be assumed that the narrative discourse changes to a “public” voice, meaning the narrator is aware of the fictional context, and is not bound to the story as a fictional character. Because of the shift in narration, Melville takes the opportunity to impart life lessons and explain ties between fiction and reality with intercalary chapters (a structure similarly

taken up by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* [1939]). In the intercalary chapters, he pronounces, “Strange, that in a work of amusement, this severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by any one, who, by taking up such a work, sufficiently shows that he is not unwilling to drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different” (217). The novel is something different indeed, but just as it is amusement, Melville suggests that people do not just look into works of fiction for entertainment, “but at bottom, even for more reality, than real life itself can show” (217). When people read literature, they want (and expect) reality just as much as they seek novelty, but their perception of reality must not actually reflect reality itself, rather it ought to be unfettered and built to expectation. Melville’s narrative works in the opposite direction of Burroughs, whose rhetorical strategy was a temporal presentation, rolling through the potential contradictions, and accumulating each episode as a persuasive element for judging the next. The seemingly chaotic and interrupted narrative reduces the reliability of and confidence the reader has in any presented character or situation within *The Confidence-Man*. The result is not one of persuasion, but one of cynical and careful evaluation, a truly Socratic approach to reading.

It seems that an extra-fictional voice of the author emerges only when characters are behaving in a manner not typical of most novels and therefore the narrator attempts to elaborate by suggesting that their behavior is a reflection of reality. Instead, the voice becomes a suspect to the real motive and intentions of the missing plot. The entire heteroglossia therein acts as one heuristic in reminding the reader of Shakespeare’s

famous line, “All the world’s a stage.” Whether it is a robber donning a mask, a burglar casing his next heist, a guilty murderer refusing to confess, or a greedy businessman selling a faulty product—*The Confidence-Man* is a textual reminder that criminality is part of a theatrical performance.

When the mystic comes upon the cosmopolitan (i.e. confidence man) in Chapter 36, the mystic warns him not to trust Charlie Noble, a man with whom the confidence man had been previously speaking. The previous encounter is this: the cosmopolitan, going by the name Frank Goodman, casually strikes up a conversation with another man named Charlie Noble. Noble is insistent the men drink wine while they talk as if they are old friends. Halfway through the conversation, the cosmopolitan (Goodman/confidence man) says that he is in desperate need of money. Instantly, Noble detects a swindle and goes to leave, but upon being shown that the cosmopolitan has quite a bit of money already, he stays. As it becomes more apparent to the reader and the confidence man that Noble is also a swindle artist, he too seems to have figured out that his game is up. Noble quickly excuses himself, self-admitting the wine is a counterfeit: “I think I must retire; my head . . . feels unpleasantly [*sic*]; this confounded elixir of logwood, little as I drank of it, has played the deuce with me” (222). Promising to meet in the morning, Noble departs and the mystic enters. The mystic instantly declares Noble is a swindler and warns the cosmopolitan, even suggesting he “read his label”; meaning the mystic observed some hint of detection on the part of the cosmopolitan. However, the cosmopolitan responds by asking, “What are you? What am I? Nobody knows who

anybody is” (227). The essential nature of the confidence man in the picaresque, as made prominent by Melville, is one of ontological skepticism, similar to Gorgias’s trilemma: 1) Nothing exists, 2) Even if existence exists, it cannot be known, and 3) Even if it could be known, it cannot be communicated. Here, the confidence man and the picaro share an undogmatic, objective point of view. Although arguably nihilistic, the departure from absolutes grants certain freedoms. Given the financial problems of Melville when he wrote *The Confidence-Man*, it seems that he is taking up the concerned perspective of the picaro: observant of the problems of confidence while simultaneously dependent on a culture breeding his own discontent. He is questioning his identity and the identity of the nation and problematically concluding that any singular ideology is potentially false.

### Conclusion

In some literature, crime is either non-existent, overtly abundant, or a source of agency. The picaresque is a rhetoric of sympathetic appeal, humor, and adventure that explores the world through marginality. The protagonist of Melville’s novel is both an objective observer and an anti-hero: someone breaking rules or laws by necessity or circumstance when no one else can or will. Not exactly picaro but posited into the role considering the structure of the narrative. He is marginalized and observant like the picaro, but ruminative of social boundaries and paradoxes. From this perspective, we see that the world is as equally as unjust as we have come to believe it is just. We must take on the notion that no order exists unless we make it for ourselves: a crime against one

man is the necessity of survival or test of character for another. I'm not siding with the confidence man any more than I feel that I have been duped; I do not promote criminal acts by suggesting that they can be called something else. Instead, I suggest that there are historical similarities between Melville's politically divided days and our modern era. I also suggest that such political polarization and media sensationalism distracts us from understanding the principles for which crime exists. What constitutes necessity over wantonness? How do we classify and punish criminals who are no more than fools or profiteers off fools? Melville reminds his readers of the relativism and paradoxes of absolute truth, but also demonstrates the chaotic world where authority becomes vapid. What remains the most successful about Melville's *The Confidence-Man* is its aim at the unconsciousness of humanity—a truly picaresque quality.

Melville tests the grounds of the confidence man's guilt, asking us to accept him as both a deceiver and a shower of truth. Does the fictional confidence man share the same criminal status, same persecution as the real confidence man? Melville never formally answers this question. In so much of the rhetorical contradictions and ambiguity, Melville invokes the concerns of Plato, who cautioned against certain rhetoric that makes the weaker argument the stronger. Although we might encounter difficulties reading his text, or deciphering the motive of Melville's intent, he nonetheless reminds us of *Dissoi Logoi* in that while something is good for one person, it may be ill for the other, or both at the same time. His narrative highlights the strengths of capitalism while exposing the exploitations and pitfalls of greed. His lesson is to remind us of the shared

iniquities between those we wish to scapegoat and ourselves. While we are never certain of the confidence man's identity, we are also never certain of his guilt. The result is a position of continued reflection that we as a society must engage rather than complacently accepting a singular moral stance—white is no more always white, than black is always black.

CHAPTER IV  
*HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, PICARESQUE, AND THE FAILINGS OF  
 RECONSTRUCTION

*If he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it.*

--Huck Finn, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*How many people must there be in the world who run away from others in fright because they can't see themselves?*

--Lazarillo, *Lazarillo de Tormes*

Whereas Burroughs's libertarian concerns subverted the "values of and prejudices of provincial elites" (Cohen 250) and Melville attacked the rising sociopolitical underhandedness and exploitation of capitalism, the work that most hauntingly deprecates of all pre-twentieth century American picaresques remains that of Mark Twain.

The tradition of any early American picaresque is not complete without a considerable examination of Mark Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), often called the "Great American Novel." Ernest Hemingway, or rather Hemingway's narrator in *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), for example, claimed all American literature since Twain stems from its influence. He further explains, "If you

read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating” (23). There lies the problem—the end of *Huckleberry Finn*—emblematic of America in ways we are still grappling with today. Although Hemingway also dismisses Melville’s rhetoric as unimportant and not at all mysterious in the same breath, his quote about *Huckleberry’s* end possess the same problem scholars and critics have had for years reading Twain’s masterpiece as a bildungsroman, although some have admittedly called it a picaresque, few read it as such. Certainly, this is the case for Leo Marx, who recognizes the adventure but rejects the novel’s ending as a shift into the burlesque, to which he sees as unidiomatic to the rest of the novel.

From a Bakhtinian lens, we might argue that Marx’s failure is that of not seeing the complexity of how *Huck Finn* represents time space and the interpretation thereof. As in the case of *Don Quixote*, there is a hybridization of chronotopes. There adventure-time chronotope, which Bakhtin says must have an “abstract expanse of space” (99) as evident in Huck and Jim’s journey South, yet time is not always boundless, as represented by the journey itself and the interactions between characters. Therefore, *Huck Finn* is also composed of the high-road chronotope typical of picaresque, and yet the charades of the confidence men, of Tom Sawyer, and the hyperbolic theatrics represent a third chronotope of the theatre. In all, the novel does not fit neatly into the ordeal or even bildungsroman category that Marx, T. S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling, or others have classified it as belonging to.

We might argue that Twain’s novel is essentially a quest for freedom as Marx sees it, or it could be a flight from tyranny as James Cox suggests (309), but ultimately it

is “more persuasive as a document of enslavement, of the variety of imprisonments within verbal styles and fictions than as a testimony to freedom” (Trachtenberg 971). The end enslaves the reader to a good number of psychological concerns and as a whole; the text metaphorically represents the continued slavery during the real historic time in which Twain wrote it. Although freedom comes to the characters in various stages of prior enslavement throughout the novel, the ending is unrealistic and Huck’s identity remains vapid, so even when freedom comes, it is bitter and potentially false. Although alarming and nihilistic, this motif is, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, a trademark of the picaresque.

#### Huck the Picaro

It seems fitting for Twain to be the most successful of American authors to write a picaresque similar to the Spanish tradition. This is in part because of the paradox of the post-Reconstruction era. The most prominent feature of Twain’s social criticism focuses on the polemical issues of American equality, which our founding fathers had said were “self-evident,” yet equality continues to face scrutiny more than two hundred years later.

*Huckleberry Finn* is a picaresque because we recognize in it characteristics of the picaresque myth such as Huck and Jim’s outcast status, the use of first-person narrative, satire, travel, and the many uses of trickery and cunning to survive. Additionally, there is evidence of Twain’s intention of writing within the picaresque tradition. As in other picaresque novels, the author’s social criticism derives from the carnivalesque and

therefore relies upon a certain acknowledgement or parody of previous picaresque work doing the same. In an effort to show the dialogism between picaresque authors, it sometimes becomes necessary to find evidence that the author had previous knowledge and interest in writing a picaresque novel. For many authors, the evidence is interliterary (within the text), such as comments by Burroughs, Melville, and Twain referencing *Don Quixote*. Other times, the evidence is extraliterary (outside the text) as historical records indicate.

In the case of Twain, an annotation in the Norton Critical Second Edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* draws a direct lineage from Johnson Jones Hooper's American picaresque *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845). According to the annotation, Twain had read the book when he was young and was greatly impressed by the Cervantes-style of frontier life (253). In addition, Twain wrote voluminously to correspondents and from his letters, we learn of his intentions. Twain was good friends with literary critic and author William Dean Howells, who fervently writes in *My Literary Passions* (1895):

I am sure that the intending author of American fiction would do well to study the Spanish picaresque novels; for in their simplicity of design he will find one of the best forms for an American story. The intrigue of close texture will never suit our conditions, which are so loose and open and variable; each man's life among us is a romance of the Spanish model, if it is the life of a man who has risen, as we nearly all have, with many ups and downs . . . there is an honest simplicity in the narration, a pervading humor, a feeling for character that gives it value. (143-144)

Some fifteen years later, Howells praises Twain as a romancer who had written

*Huckleberry Finn* with a great deal of picaresque quality but says it deviated from the

roguish literature because it was “more poetic . . . [with a] deeper psychology” (*My Mark Twain* 173). Like Howells, Lionel Trilling acknowledges the picaresque origins of the novel, but then moves to suggest that Twain evolved the genre beyond the Spanish tradition:

The form of the book is based on the simplest of all novel-forms, the so-called picaresque novel . . . The linear simplicity of the picaresque novel is further modified by the story’s having a clear dramatic organization: it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a mounting suspense of interest. (qtd. in Wicks 204)

As I have laid out, the American picaresque is not identical to *Lazarillo* and company, but rather forms/is a protean genre capable of assimilating psychology and vast social ideology. Howells forgets that the picaro’s plight is more than physical survival; rather he also seeks a stronger sense of identity, which becomes the primary motive for the American picaro, whose literal starvation is not as likely as his European ancestors.

The decision to write a picaresque gives Twain the greatest leverage for writing about legal and social inequalities between blacks and whites from the innocent and naïve perspective of a child. He writes to Howells in July 1875, Twain exclaims, “I have finished the story & didn’t take the chap beyond boyhood. I believe it would be fatal to do it in any shape but autobiographically—like *Gil Blas*” (“SLC. Letter to William”). Twain is talking about *Tom Sawyer*, and he continues to speculate that he may have made a mistake not writing in first-person. Twain then hints at writing a sequel to correct the mistake and suggests he would carry the character into adulthood, but declares *Tom Sawyer* would not be a good character for it (“SLC. Letter to William”). Years later,

Twain copies the perspective and form of *Gil Blas* with the creation of *Huckleberry Finn*. Although Huck remains youthful like *Lazarillo* and Tom Sawyer rather than aging into adulthood, it is not simply to copy a particular trend in genre, but rather to situate the reader in a different context of the social problems facing the latter half of the nineteenth century. The perspective of a child in the picaresque serves to reinforce the theme of solitude since the child lacks certain agency in an adult world. With Huck, his youth is further excused by his victimization by the Duke and King, yet he too is lumped into the category of criminal perpetrator for his association with the confidence men. Making matters worse, he exists in a society both capable and willing to hang a child upon the discovery of guilt. The scene in which the townspeople exhume the body of dead Peter proves the mob's willingness to deliver their own version of frontier justice. Regarding Huck's youth and the child perspective of other picaros, Wicks writes:

Childhood is admirable when it makes room for the supposedly mature observations we associate with adulthood; but that same adulthood is contemptible, or at best pathetic, when it perceives the world with the naiveté we associate with childhood—that same childhood that can be so adult in its perceptions and observations. (206)

The element of Huck's youth, eternalized in the problematic "child-as-adult" such as the dialogue between him and Jim, and "adult-as-child" such as the implication that Huck writes his narrative as an adult, is a strong indicator of *Huckleberry Finn*'s picaresque ancestry.

Once we establish *Huckleberry Finn* as a picaresque, or at the very least, a negation of freedom and the romantic ideals of Tom's "civilized" world, then we can begin a process of understanding what Cox called the "true rebellion of the book" (312).

### America's Lie: Equality and Freedom

Between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the start of World War I in 1914 many African-Americans were kept in a state of debt peonage and inequality. I believe Twain satirizes debt peonage to highlight the absurdity and hypocrisy of it with the imprisonment of Jim and the “game” Huck and Tom play to free him during the Phelps farm episode. The uncomfortableness of the novel’s ending is a reflection of the real life inequalities and paradoxes for supposedly free African-Americans.

Whereas chattel slavery represents the common notion of slavery—a slave being the personal possession or property of another—debt peonage represents a “modern day” slavery by restricting freedoms and forcing labor or services to repay debt. The indebtedness ensuring peonage can pass from generation to generation, often taking advantage of individuals with limited resources and capital. Former slaves often had little to no property, wealth, or literacy, which indebted them to whites following emancipation. For many African-Americans ownership of land was outlawed; their only option was sharecropping, in which a landowner allows a tenant to use land in return for a share of the crops. White landowners took advantage of the impoverished and illiterate condition of their tenants and kept them in debt and servitude.

Although debt peonage is more specifically related to sharecropping, I will also argue that the peonage Twain is criticizing includes any form of keeping black men and

women in legal bondage and oppression. This includes the convict lease system, vagrancy laws, Black Codes, Jim Crow, as well as sharecropping.

In an effort to enforce the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, Congress passed the Peonage Act of 1867, defining peonage as the “voluntary or involuntary service or labor of any persons . . . in liquidation of any debt or obligation” and thus outlawing the practice. However, peonage and slavery continued to be problematic in practice, though families could not put together the resources to move in in debt. The Thirteenth Amendment reads:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Because of the words, “except as a punishment for a crime” many minority individuals faced continual forced labor as long as it was justified by their conviction as “criminals”. Black Codes and harsh vagrancy laws made it increasingly easy for white authorities to put undesirables behind bars. In addition, the criminal justice system and jury selection remained predominantly white until the early twentieth century making it increasingly difficult for fair representation.

All of the tensions and problems of continued slavery are evident in *Huckleberry Finn*. Represented by the text’s inversion of roles and Huck’s inability to create active change. Social inequalities of the post-Reconstruction become the novel’s message warning a nation of its hypocritical and destructive consciousness. The picaro’s duality

between observant victim and deviant participant posits the unique perspective for grappling with the social problems of the era.

“Call this Govment!”<sup>22</sup>

Huck and Jim share such similar positions in social hierarchy that it is very possible to ask the question Shelley Fishkin did with the title of her book, *Was Huck Black?* (1993). Of course, she is not disputing the fictional character’s race, but rather Fishkin explores the African-American influences she believes went into the development of Huck and Jim’s relationship. The very nature of their picaresque duo shapes the way we see Jim. Despite the criticisms of Jim filling the ignorant minstrel stereotype, his parental protectiveness of Huck humanizes him during a time when African-Americans are free but struggle to be equal with whites. In some regard, both he and Huck play blackface minstrels, only Huck’s role is less obvious. As I have noted earlier, the picaresque is both outsider and representative of a society. In Huck’s circumstance, his treatment is as both white and black, outsider and insider. By being a virtual white slave to his abusive father, Huck embodies moment of hypocrisy in the antebellum romance: slavery comes in many forms.

Huck’s father, Pap, appears in the last line of Chapter 4 and “abducts” his son to a cabin in the woods. Like Lazarillo, Huck too must live under the roof of dominant, abusive, and hypocritical masters. Although in the company of Jim throughout the novel, Jim never represents Huck’s superior, rather, as noted by Ralph Ellison, “Jim’s friendship

for Huck comes across as that of a boy for another boy rather than as the friendship of an adult for a junior” (qtd. in Wicks 206). For Huck, his masters and his transition between them include Miss Watson and Widow Douglas, Pap, the Duke and King, and even Tom. In each situation, the enslavement of Huck is a prosaic allegorization of that of Jim and of America’s failed obligation to equality, but none is as apparent as when he is in the custody of his father.

Angry that Huck is better dressed and more educated than he is, Pap threatens to “take [Huck] down a peg” (27). Huck must endure a series of drunken rants and abuses from his father, whom he fears will kill him while intoxicated. In typical picaresque fashion, the picaro makes no notice of the didactic possibilities, but transcribes them in enough detail that the reader sees the narrative irony. In this episode, Pap Finn demonstrates to the reader, with his drunken fits and singular characterization, the idiosyncrasy of the southern response to the Emancipation Proclamation:

Call this a govment! Why, just look at it and see what it’s like. Here’s the law a-standing ready to take a man’s son away from him . . . which he has had all the trouble and all the anxiety and all the expense of raising. . . . The law backs that old Judge Thatcher up and helps him to keep me out o’ my property. (36-37)

Pap sees Huck as property and justifies his abuses and imprisonment with the excuse that he has put considerable time, effort, and money into raising Huck. Although his paternal role is over exaggerated, he further expresses his malcontent with government involvement when he tells Huck a story about a free slave from Ohio. He is angry that the freedman is a college professor and wears finer clothing than he can afford; both complaints are identical to his criticisms of Huck, who has been more educated than his

father has. Pap Finn and most southern states saw the role of government involvement regarding the emancipation of the slaves as an invasion and a crime. Just as Pap disavows the government as an intrusive entity, Confederate President Jefferson Davis disavowed the actions of Lincoln and northern Republican support for the Emancipation Proclamation during his speech to the Confederate Congress in January 1863. The fears expressed by Davis suggest that without continued chattel slavery blacks cannot care for themselves and the white population faces exile and assassination in the form of a *de facto* rebellion of violence:

We may well leave it to the instincts of that common humanity which a beneficent Creator has implanted in the breasts of our fellow-men of all countries to pass judgment on a measure by which several millions of human beings of an inferior race, peaceful and contented laborers in their sphere, are doomed to extermination, while at the same time they are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters. (13)

The contemporary myth that the Confederacy did not go to war to preserve slavery is evidently false from historical documentation. The South did not see any equality in the African-Americans and further propounded the idea that slaves were content to serve. The aristocracy of the South fought emancipation on every front, including the political arena. Literacy tests and poll taxes became a common practice at the voting ballots to disenfranchise both blacks and poor whites; however, those of color were the primary target. In addition to this, acts of violence and intimidation further rendered an inability for freedmen to voice their concerns.

I would be doing a grave injustice if I scapegoated the South for all the problems of the failed Reconstruction. In a large part, the white populace had misconceptions about

equality. Although predominately Republican and abolitionist in theory, the North has a history of ignoring the plight of the African-American also. Consider the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which prohibited northerners in aiding runaway slaves and penalized officials who did not make arrests. In 1812, long before the emancipation and crisis of the Civil War, Alexis de Tocqueville questioned an inhabitant of Pennsylvania, a Union state, as to why he did not see any free blacks at the polling booths. The respondent declares it “is not a fault of the law; the Negroes have an undisputed right of voting: but they voluntarily abstain from making their appearance” to which Tocqueville says, “they are not disinclined to vote, but they are afraid of being maltreated” (257). Citing the tyranny of the white majority, Tocqueville argues against the romantic notions the North often has of its role in civil liberties among people of color.

### The Uncomfortable Ending

Huck’s moral perseverance plateaus shortly after he parts from the Duke and King in an attempt to save Jim. In the end, all of Huck’s virtue nevertheless seems to vanish altogether during the last portion of the novel during the Phelps episode. The favorite line, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell” (297) is perhaps the most cited for Huck’s realization of Jim’s humanity and true friendship. It is at this point in the story (Chapter 31) when the Duke and King have sold Jim as a runaway slave. Despite Huck’s protest that Jim was “the only nigger I had in the world and the only property” (299), we know that Huck cares deeply for Jim and is determined to save him from slavery. Huck is

aware of the legal and religious repercussions of helping a slave, but in that declaration “I’ll go to hell” Huck’s sin is washed clean and the reader cherishes the accumulation of Huck and Jim’s journey. It is the most significant and proving moment for Huck’s moral development, but the good feeling quickly fades when the momentum of the narrative slows during the final chapters, referred to as the Phelps episode.

It is well known that Twain took periodical long gaps between times of writing, which might explain the sudden turn away from Huck and Jim’s quest for freedom. The “burlesque” ending that Marx criticizes may also be a product of the Sisyphus rhythm of the picaresque, an aspect of the genre that Marx does not appear to recognize. Whatever may be the explanation for the Phelps episode, it is *Huck Finn*’s heart of darkness.

In the final few chapters, several revelations take place, preceded by Huck’s most acute observation of humanity. Concluding Chapter 33, Huck witness an angry mob tar and feathering the Duke and King, to which he replies, “it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. . . . Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another” (320-321). Huck’s sympathy is a distinguishing characteristic separating the confidence man from the picaro. Whereas both are marginal tricksters on the fringe of society, the picaro is capable of feeling pity. Wicks calls this internal resolution an experience unique to the picaro, whose resolution is a dilemma of appealing to the experimental self rather than the prevailing codes of moral and social behavior. The picaro’s own consciousness must remain intact because he has witness how society is

easily corrupted (209). Huck does not identify with his society's need to restore the order that has momentarily been disrupted; instead we, as readers, see his ability to "connect more intimately with the vital and moral issues at the core of such acts of restoration" (Wicks 209). However, as well preserved, as Huck's consciousness may seem, in the final section of the novel his identity is lost.

At the Phelps farm, Huck's identity is not one of careful deception, but rather one of inference. To start, he is automatically given an identity, although he does not know who, which makes him uneasy and eager to "find out who I was" (308). Shortly after, we discover he has been mistaken for Tom Sawyer, which is rather ironic considering how he and Tom become comparably the same in their scheme to further Jim's confinement. So perhaps it is at this moment that Huck's invitation of acceptance into society (Tom's society) that corrupts him. The subservient role Huck assumes under the guidance of Tom and the lasting incarceration of Jim dismantles his moral fortitude.

When Tom arrives in the final section of the book, he invents an elaborate and dangerous game to free Jim knowing all the while Jim is legally free. Once the reader learns the truth, the entire novel begins to feel like a confidence game. Likewise, it is only by the *deus ex machina* of Tom waking up and confessing that ultimately saves Jim from lynching. This moment of revealing is the "cheating" Hemingway describes. In a realistic novel, considering the race riots and civil unrest of post-Reconstruction America, Jim's fate would have been at the end of a rope, yet here echoes the words of Melville's extradiegetic narrator in that we look more reality in fiction than in reality itself. The picaresque reminds us that there are worse things than death. When Huck loses his

identity as Tom, and the real agency of Jim's freedom is not by heroic questing, the novel imparts the disappointing reality that America remains in a sad state.

The progressives of the postbellum era shared the disappointment felt by the reader. The ending is also problematic for anyone who reads *Huck Finn* outside the context of the picaresque genre, but if the ending is representative of both picaresque and the social circumstances of the day, then the ending is synonymous of the novel's intentions.

### Conclusion

For most of the latter half of the nineteenth century, African-Americans faced continued challenges to their supposed freedom. The North failed justly to maintain law and the tyrannical Southern aristocracy relied on inconsistencies, intimidation, and absurd rules in much the same way as Twain's tale of a former slave held prisoner while his white caretakers play a "game" promising someday to give him his already earned freedom. Thus, the episode of Jim's confinement and Tom and Huck's schemes to prolong his captivity under the guise of freeing him allegorizes the elaborate and lasting failures of progressive reconstruction. Twain employed the picaresque because of the qualities of satire and bottom-up storytelling that gives voice to the low classes and marginalized figures of society. The picaresque world is one where authority is hypocritical of its own ethical code and the picaro is unwillingly both victim and perpetrator of the hostilities he wishes to escape. In this respect, I believe Twain

understood his own role of being part of the oppressive class even though he sympathized for the people whom his society continued to deny privilege. Christopher Jones says, “Lies are not merely acts committed immorally by an individual but something that a society perpetuates unawares and dangerously” (111). In this remark, he describes what Twain called the “deformed conscience” where even the most honest and good—natured individual could be corrupted by the society in which he lives. The conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn* is a stark reminder of the hostile and corrupt world that promised freedom but instead only provided more bondage.

## CONCLUSION

*The end was in the beginning.*

--Ralph Ellison's narrator, *Invisible Man*

*Society is a masked ball, where everyone hides his real character, and reveals it by hiding. . . . Let us treat the men and women well; treat them as if they were real; perhaps they are.*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Throughout this work, I have attempted to show various qualities of the picaresque as each new author adapts the genre to explain and understand the complex and diverse culture that is America. I have tried to provide my audience with a brief history of the picaresque and overview of the influence earlier Spanish and European literature had on shaping the new frontier of American picaros. I hope that I have done an honest job of doing so, despite the dishonesty often associated with the actions of picaros and confidence men. The genre is far from being an anachronism; instead, it prospers in a myriad of American books, films, and television shows both in its original form and in the “new picaresque tradition” as argued by the late Rowland Sherrill, who, at present, is the only authority to write comprehensively on the American picaresque.

After already having begun my research and writing for this thesis, I came upon the work of Christopher Jones, whose dissertation, *A Falsifying World: Picaresque Lies, Disloyalties, and Misreading in America* includes specifically the *Memoirs of the*

*Notorious Stephen Burroughs, The Confidence-Man, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Although I *initially* feared my thesis would too strongly echo Jones's work, I decided to expand on his research but chose to focus my area of study more specifically on the cultural influences, the role of the confidence man, and the dialogism within the genre. In this attempt, I have incorporated a wider range of texts to consider alongside the selected works of Burroughs, Melville, and Twain. The effect is panoramic onto the picaresque and the American history that gave rise to such prominent figures such as the Yankee peddler and the confidence man. Jones laments not having the opportunity to write about the relations of the picara, the African-American traditions of the trickster, slave narrative, and twentieth-century contributions to the genre. Although, I too did not have the time and space to devote significant attention to these equally fascinating and influential aspects of the American picaresque, I have included some commentary to further broaden this area of study beyond what Jones, Sherrill, and the other scholars have already done so in writing about the American picaro.

My work here has not included any in-depth examination of the American picara or female authors of the picaresque. In what ways does Stephen Crane's protagonist in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) resemble Francisco Lopez de Ubeda's picara, Justina, or Defoe's Moll Flanders. How does the hitchhiking, free-love, and marginal station of Sissy Hankshaw in Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1976) represent the new American picaresque? Julio Rodriguez-Luis has pointed out that a lack of picaras reflects a patriarchal history of suppressing women's mobility. Likewise,

Rodriguez-Luis highlights the problems of pre-twentieth-century male authors who leave the female tricksters empty and mere caricatures of the picaro; that is, “until the time in history when it becomes possible for a woman of low birth to move up in society with a certain degree of freedom” (43). However, the American picara Dorcasina Sheldon in Tabitha Tenney’s *Female Quixotism* (1801) represents an exception to Rodriguez-Luis’s analysis. Although Dorcasina is not an active picara, her adventures come about from her romantic infatuation with the many male rogues wishing to court her.<sup>26</sup> Like Tom Sawyer, she has read way too much romantic adventure and wants real life to work the same. Even with increased mobility, the continued use of promiscuity and feminine trickery appear to be nothing more than what Edward Friedman calls “[an accentuation of] the ironic voice-over. The intrusion of the author in the narrative . . . the man’s voice claiming to be a woman’s” (228). Like Friedman, Wicks suggests that the male-centered picaresque developed mostly during a time of few female authors and the genre’s male voice remains dominant by tradition (61). However, this is not to say there are not original or non-promiscuous picaras, and if we should find any of them, they exist in an American canon given the great strides women have made in obtaining equality. Altogether, the American picara and female picaresque author remains another vast area of potential future study.

I did not discuss at great lengths the influence of race and ethnicity on the American picaresque tradition, which includes works like Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), Eddy L. Harris’s *South of Haunted Dreams: A Memoir* (1997) and Junot Díaz’s

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Furthermore, there have been attempts to expand the scope of picaresque canon into realms loosely associated, but not entirely alien in characteristic. Identifying less with the episodic and Sisyphus rhythm, Charles H. Nichols suggests that many African-American texts, slave narratives, and the black personae of nineteenth century are “reminiscent of the [early Spanish] picaro” (283). For evidence, he points to the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, and William Wells Brown. All share a “life story [told] in retrospect, after having triumphed over the brutalizing circumstances of their youth” (283). Nichols’s focus is on the similarities of alienation and oppression of former slaves and picaros like *Lazarillo*. Former slave Ralph Roberts<sup>24</sup> writes, “[l]ike Cain, my hand was against every man and every man’s hand against me” (qtd. in Nichols 284-285). Only after the runaway slave found freedom could he safely tell his tale. Like the picaro, he hopes to forget those dreadful moments of his life, but instead, revisits them with a subversive voice, and in turn, exposing the hypocrisies and inhumanity of the “idyllic . . . and cultivated setting created by southern romance” (Nichols 287). In his escape, the slave relies upon his wits and use of disguise: Frederick Douglass fled in a sailor’s uniform and Henry “Box” Brown shipped himself by express to a free state. Although each of these autobiographies contain lowly and outcast heroes who seek both freedom and identity, they deviate significantly from the picaresque in that they are not chronotopic for the everyman, nor do they maintain the trickster role beyond their initial flight. However, African-American literature does contain some elements suitable for the picaresque; even when the genre is

absent. An example of this is the trickster archetypes of Uncle Julius, Br'er Rabbit, and Zora in W.E.B DuBois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), whose wit and occasional comic trickery propel them.

Ultimately, black characters written by white authors resemble the earlier European picares more so than black characters written by black authors. This is because of the satirical and comedic trickery that owes much to minstrelsy, a white tradition that draws upon black cultural elements.<sup>25</sup> Minstrelsy was incredibly racist, but some narrative uses thereof, provided a counteractive rhetoric to the racist agendas in which they originated. Characters such as Sam and Andy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) become foils to Mr. Haley, the slave trader. The two characters intentionally play the minstrel "ignorant" darkies to further delay the capture of Eliza and her child. Mark Twain was an avid fan of the minstrel shows, which is evident when created *Huckleberry Finn* and his inversion of roles and perceptions regarding race relations and Reconstruction ideology.

The future of the picaresque in America may take many forms beyond literature. Indeed, the picaresque has already found its way into film and television, as movie blockbusters look for new book adaptations. As Helen Reed points out, the picaresque develops an interpersonal relationship with the reader through the creation of a hypothetical reader, a sentimental appeal that is personal and individual. American author J.D. Salinger wrote specifically of this problem when considering selling the rights to *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Salinger admits that his own picaresque is more than suited

for Hollywood, but beyond the “readymade scenes” most of the weight “is in the narrator’s voice, the non-stop peculiarities of it, his personal, extremely discriminating attitude to his reader-listener” (Salinger, J.D.) which would make the book ill-suited for the big screen.

When films are made of picaresque narratives, it is common for the movie to maintain audible narration as in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and *Little Big Man* (1970), yet the narration is likely used as a transitional element between scenes rather than interlocutory with the audience throughout. The change in the locution removes the audience from being participants in the picaro’s trickery and worldview, the traditional means through which we interpret and understand the overall heuristics of the work. Film places us in a spectator role that demands less attention to the ironies and sociopolitical paradoxes in exchange for entertainment, and thus I believe the experience of viewing a film is wholly different from how we read the picaresque. Beyond the obvious change in narration in recasting a novel as a film, some picaresque novels change but with an intention to maintain a picaresque element. Director Arthur Penn explains his movie adaptation of the end of Thomas Berger’s *Little Big Man*,<sup>23</sup> in which the Indian chief does not die as in the novel:

We thought long and hard about this and in the first draft of the script he does die, but this death would have introduced an element of sadness into the film and we didn’t want this. The film would have become dramatic, even melodramatic, instead of being picaresque. I also wanted to show that not only were the Indians going to be destroyed, but they were also condemned to live. On the whole, audiences like their entertainment dramatically compact and homogenous, but I

want the opposite. A film should remain free and open, not with everything defined and resolved. (84)

Besides the film adaptations, the entertainment industry creates new picaresque narratives strictly for the screen, such as *Forrest Gump* (1994) and the television series, *Better Call Saul* (2015-Present). To be sure, comprehensive studies of American picaresque are sparse, yet the study of picaresque film adaptations is virtually nonexistent.

Admittedly, there remains room to study mutability between early American picaresques, such as the three examples I have detailed, to those of later and more contemporary works of picaresque-similar qualities. For such considerations, one might turn to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980), Chuck Palahniuk's *Damned* (2011), Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* (1999), and Armen Melikian's *Journey to Virginland: Epistle I* (2011). In Bakhtinian terms, it would be fascinating to see the response by the picaresque from the chronotopes of our post-9/11 world. In addition, I would like to know more as to why there seems to be an American renaissance of the genre in the 1950s and 1960s, but a lack thereof at the start of the twentieth century. To what extent do the chronotopes of fiction interact with the post-modern American culture? To list all the possible refractions for the contemporary American picaresques, both literary and digital would be a ponderous undertaking. Is the lone computer hacker a modern example of the picaro or picara? What about the political outsiders, are they a voice of some truth like the carnival fool or are they akin to the confidence man, playing with the slipperiness of language for their own gain?

Each study of the picaresque, confidence man, trickster, satire, or travel narrative will always remain fruitful for further consideration. No one work could fully encompass a complete survey of the picaresque genre and all that has influenced it and all that it has influenced. The dialogical patterns of any literature or language extend in both chronological directions beyond measure; furthermore, the cultural shaping of a text either in its creation or in the way in which we come to interpret it is also an ever-expansive topic. The picaresque is far from being an anachronism as evident in the numerous works and picaresque-like traits found throughout American literature. In many ways, the American picaro and picara serve to restore some cultural confidence in the validity of American ways of being. No one can make a journey for anyone else. Regardless, if the picaresque is our vicarious window into the boundaries of society, then it is ultimately a road traveled by the rogue him or herself and only briefly understood by the bystander. Certainly though, there are plenty of new roads to travel for future picaros and new ways of making sense of the rhetoric and cultural elements that continue to shape American ideology. Contemporary study of the picaresque demonstrates a broader scope for accepting new works into the genre rather than the limited, anachronistic view that many scholars held until the mid-twentieth-century. The “panoramic structure” that Wicks envisioned within the picaresque mode suggests there is a plethora of picaresque influences throughout literary history then the road for further study seems endless. We must do as the picaro does and reflect backward while anticipating the next adventure to come.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Helen Reed's *The Reader in the Picaresque Novel* (1984) and Warwick Wadlington's *The Confidence Game in American Literature* (1975). Also, I would like to thank Dr. David Grant for helping me articulate the connections between the sociopolitical and picaresque realm using these theoretical lenses.
- <sup>2</sup> Individuals like Alexander Blackburn or Alexander A. Parker, whose book *Literature and the Delinquent* (1967) remains a significant study of the genre as an anachronism, refrain from labeling works such as *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *Felix Krull* (1954) picaresque. Other scholars such as Frederick Monteser and Ulrich Wicks interpret picaresque as a protean genre of shifting form, yet remain fixed to define it according to structure rather than subject matter. Lastly, there are scholars whom I favor such as Rolland Sherrill and Christopher Jones who include a broad range of works within the picaresque. The advantage to the latter grants the reader and literary critic a means of seeing how the old tradition includes "new variations" and "innovations . . . in a different time and place, [which will] enrich the capacities, functions and effects of the tradition" (Sherrill 12) rather than stifle it as a mere artifact of literary history.
- <sup>3</sup> The antihero and the picaro are not necessarily the same; however, the origins of the antihero trace back to Homeric mythos and Spanish picaresque. In addition, the

antihero and picaro share similar traits of dishonesty and delinquency while lacking conventional heroic qualities.

<sup>4</sup> The picaro is a member to the trickster archetype, to which Stephen Gislason describes “the term ‘archetype’” as chronotopic “recurrent patterns of design, story-telling, symbol-making and ritual expressions.”

<sup>5</sup> Lazarillo.

<sup>6</sup> Language as ideologically saturated, or as a worldview. See Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel.”

<sup>7</sup> All quotations are from the Kessinger Publishing reprint of the 1924 Dial Press edition.

<sup>8</sup> See Foreword from 1858 Amherst Edition, or Publisher’s Foreword from 1924 Dial Press Edition.

<sup>9</sup> One such record is included in the National Museum of American History. An exhibit entitled, “American Enterprise,” displays a \$1 certificate on the Union Bank of Boston, dated 1807, signed by Stephen Burroughs as cashier. At a later point in time, the bill’s authenticity was challenged and it was stamped COUNTERFEIT.

<sup>10</sup> Gallows Literature, a term common in England and the United States from about 1730 to the end of the nineteenth century, consisted of biographies, “last speeches,” and “dying verses” of criminals scheduled to be publicly executed. Publishers issued

broad­sides and sermons that fit the event. These sold in shops and at the foot of the gallows.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Rideout uses a similar explanation of narrative structure.

<sup>12</sup> I have found no evidence to suggest Judge Havens is either a fictional creation of Burroughs, or whether a legal representative by that name lived. Either way, it is entirely possible his testimony is fictional as a means to influence the reading of Burroughs contested innocence.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted from Robert Frost.

<sup>14</sup> Protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess (1962).

<sup>15</sup> See the section “Picaresque Point of View” (Wicks 56-59).

<sup>16</sup> David W. Maurer notes Melville as first introducing the term “confidence man” into serious literature, and defines the confidence man as a criminal, often classed with professional thieves, but who does no actual stealing. Instead, the confidence man employs trickery and deception while relying on the fundamental dishonesty of his victim, who he elicits “confidence” (3).

<sup>17</sup> From the Latin word *fidēlis* meaning loyal.

<sup>18</sup> Rivers are often associated with the picaresque. In one respect, this goes back to *Lazarillo*, whose title character’s name denotes his affiliation to the Tormes River. Rivers have historically been used as routes for trade and travel, but unlike roads, they

constantly move and change. The ever-shifting surface is like the picaro, who also changes in an effort to overcome new obstacles.

<sup>19</sup> Suggested by Dr. David Grant who introduced me to Georg Hegel's theory of dialectics, which I believe help explain the marginal status of the confidence man's way of thinking "outside the box" by contrasting opposing agendas and formulating his own agenda.

<sup>20</sup> Page 264 of *The Confidence-Man*, where the confidence man departs from the company of his hypothetical friend, who is a disciple of a "inhuman" philosophy after unsuccessfully altering the man's opinions of charity and unsuccessfully from duping currency from him.

<sup>21</sup> See *Rhetorical Narratology*, in which Kearns defines implied author using Booth's terminology, but suggest that "inferred author" is a more appropriate term. I have to agree that "inferred" is a better term, but "implied author" has already been established as the most widely used way of describing a narrative voice in which the reader associates to the actual author of the novel.

<sup>22</sup> Pap in *Huck Finn*.

<sup>23</sup> The novel *Little Big Man* was published 1964 while the film debuted in 1970.

<sup>24</sup> Nicoles quotes Ralph Roberts from “A Slave’s Story,” initially published in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Science and Art*; issue 9 (June 1857).

<sup>25</sup> Many thanks to Dr. Julie Husband, whose expertise in African-American literature helped me with the historical accuracy of minstrelsy and her introduction to several of the characters and authors whom I reference.

<sup>26</sup> Thanks for the suggestion by Dr. Anne Myles, who has further encouraged me to write and explore the role of picara in American culture and the paradigms of picara, sexual orientation, marginality, and female empowerment.

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## APPENDIX

## A BRIEF LIST OF AMERICAN PICARESQUE

- 1792 Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry: Containing the Adventures of Captain John Farrago and Teague O'Reagan, his Servant.*
- 1798 Stephen Burroughs, *Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*
- 1801 Tabitha Tenney, *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon*
- 1802 Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive: of the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill. Six Years as a Prisoner Among the Algerines.*
- 1836 Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself*
- 1845 Johnson Jones Hooper, *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*
- 1857 Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*
- 1884 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- 1899 Ferdinand Eugene Daniel, *Recollections of a Rebel Surgeon, and Other Sketches: or, In The Doctor's Sappy Days*
- 1951 J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
- 1952 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- 1953 Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*
- 1957 Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*
- 1959 Kurt Vonnegut, *The Sirens of Titan*

- 1964 Thomas Berger, *Little Big Man*
- 1965 Jerzy Kosinski, *The Painted Bird*
- 1968 John Irving, *Setting Free the Bears*
- 1969 John Schlesinger, *Midnight Cowboy* (Film)
- 1970 Arthur Penn, *Little Big Man* (Film adaption of Thomas Berger's novel)
- 1971 Hunter Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
- 1972 Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*
- 1980 John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*
- 1983 Woody Allen, *Zelig* (Film)
- 1984 T. C. Boyle, *Budding Prospects*
- 1989 Paul Auster, *Moon Palace*
- 1998 Joel and Ethan Coen, *The Big Lebowski* (Film)
- 1999 Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning*
- 2006 Larry Charles and Sacha Baron Cohen, *Borat* (Film)
- 2007 Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao*
- 2011 Armen Melikian, *Journey to Virginland: Epistle I*
- 2011 Chuck Palahniuk, *Damned*
- 2015 Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould, *Better Call Saul* (Television Series)