PICARESQUE NECESSITY:
EPISODIC NARRATIVE AND CAUSALITY IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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This dissertation argues that eighteenth-century picaresque narratives opposed modern notions of individual autonomy and social progress by stressing questions of necessity. The picaresque highlights the kinds of causes—such as bodily need or economic hardship—that overpower individual and collective capacities for self-determination. Whereas eighteenth-century scholarship has long emphasized the affiliation between the rise of the novel and the rise of the autonomous individual, *Picaresque Necessity* argues that authors such as Daniel Defoe and Tobias Smollett were preoccupied with how states of extreme need threaten an individual’s capacity for survival and social advancement. I argue that the open-ended and repetitive nature of the picaresque stems from its emphasis on the interminable demands of the body, and that its episodic narrative defies higher order modes of explanation by lingering on the irreducible power of bodily need. Necessity resists being apprehended in the objective language of social or political theory because its impetus can only be felt by the sufferer, whose testimony is thus often disregarded as irredeemably partial and subjective. By insisting that the immediate power of necessity cannot reliably be represented in language, the picaresque exposes a gap between social theory and individual need that continues to trouble socioeconomic discourse to this day.
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Introduction

A classic thought experiment describes the plight of a hungry donkey stationed between two bales of hay, equivalent in size and equidistant from one another. Early modern philosophers puzzled over and satirized variants of this scenario for centuries, with some concluding that the donkey (call it an ass) would starve to death without a strong enough reason to tip the balance between two equivalent choices.\(^1\) The paradox of Buridan’s Ass reveals how philosophical frameworks that privilege reason and choice occlude the power of bodily needs, which have the potential to exert powerful influence on the behavior of humans (as well as donkeys). Philosophers and novelists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Baruch Spinoza to Tobias Smollett, used the paradox of Buridan’s Ass to generate questions about the relationship between freedom and necessity: What does the immanent threat of starvation do to basic beliefs about individual agency and identity, not just in philosophical speculation, but in socioeconomic and political theory? How do the innate needs and limits of the body shape (or deform) human behavior and social institutions? Literary narratives of hardship in the eighteenth century offer a unique set of insights for addressing these questions because they imagine situations of necessity from a less abstract and more immediate perspective than the one used by philosophers. This dissertation uses the picaresque, a genre traditionally associated with the episodic misfortunes of rogues and vagabonds, to

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argue that representations of bodily necessity influenced the way that authors and readers understood the limits of individual autonomy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Picaresque Necessity* brings together philosophical and socioeconomic accounts of necessity with literary narratives of privation and exigency to show how the picaresque contested the emergent model of individual liberty underpinning modern theories of social, economic, and political relations.

 Novelists and philosophers used the word necessity in markedly different ways, ranging from economic lack to biological imperative to divine providence. When Daniel Defoe claims, “Necessity makes an honest man a knave,” he means that poverty overcomes the scruples of otherwise ethical individuals whereas when Thomas Malthus refers to “Necessity, that imperious all pervading law of nature,” he points to the ubiquity of biological principles in a more abstract and systematic sense. Ideas of necessity underpin a range of deterministic frameworks, yet in the eighteenth century, as today, the term was also frequently associated with hunger and indigence. How can definitions of necessity as a pervasive and “imperious” force of nature be reconciled with the figure of a starving pauper? Social theorists and philosophers describe economics and natural law in terms of necessity, which, by tacitly putting models of causation in place, proves to be a way of begging the question. Necessity is a problematic vessel for conflicting meanings, which becomes apparent when the word is applied to a literally starving body. Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary* illustrates the polyvalence of the term by identifying necessity with both “want; need; poverty” and “things necessary for

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human life.” Simultaneously an internal lack—a want that drives the impoverished from within—and an external object without which one cannot live, necessity describes both a state of being and an imperative to alter that state. Picaresque narratives point to bodily needs as particularly distressing forms of necessity that remain external to conscious desires and loftier goals. By using the interminable demands of the body as a way of structuring narrative, the picaresque focuses on instances in which the body rather than the mind propels action, reducing humans to animal instincts and disrupting philosophical and socioeconomic accounts of progress and development.

Seventeenth-century political philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, recast bodily needs as the drive for self-preservation in narratives very different from those of the picaresque. Social contract theory accounts for the emergence of civil society from the state of nature by describing how the instinct for self-preservation led people to form social bonds as a means of achieving collective security. By regarding self-preservation as the motive force that drove individuals from hunger and want into society, the founders of social contract theory acknowledge the driving force bodily needs (as I discuss further in chapter 2). But whereas Hobbes and Locke emphasize the completed passage from the state of nature to civil (and commercial) society, and thus treat necessity as a problem to be solved, authors in the picaresque tradition remind readers that human beings still have involuntary needs that require fulfillment, despite the putative displacement of instinct to some previous era. By demonstrating that beggars

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and vagabonds remain answerable first and foremost to their stomachs, picaresque narratives ask readers to consider why accounts of social progress fail to explain the persistence of poverty and hardship.

In describing the passage from the state of nature to civil society, social contract theorists turned a blind eye the historical state of affairs. Estimates of poverty in the eighteenth century have been the subject of much speculation, with some putting the number of poor in England as high as seventy five percent. At the beginning of the century, Gregory King identified just under thirty percent of the English people as “cottagers and paupers” and another 26.8 percent as “labouring people and out-servants.” Although King’s figures are probably imperfect, as historians have noted, these numbers demonstrate a common perception that less than half of the population could be considered economically independent (i.e. autonomous). The majority of people in England relied on precarious forms of employment, which could be terminated without notice, such as domestic service or agricultural labor. Our notion of the period as a time in which the middle class rose, then, applied only to a small fraction of the population.

Eighteenth-century social theorists tended to view poverty as a necessity, a problem with no solution and an ongoing fact of the world that could never be eradicated but only mitigated. Attempts to alleviate the suffering of the poor tended to worsen, rather than to improve, their plight. It became clear over the course of the century that the administration of the parish relief system was vastly and tragically flawed. As Roy Porter notes, the workhouses instituted as a partial solution suffered tremendous mortality rates: “Out of 2,339 children received into London workhouses in the five years after 1750,

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only 168 were alive in 1755.” Notwithstanding the array of philanthropic projects spawned by the culture of sensibility, little changed in the fundamental economic structures that determined living conditions for the laboring poor and vagrants. By the end of the age of sentiment, things had not improved much. Over two hundred food riots broke out in the years 1790-1810, motivated at least in part by the fact that the poor spent sixty to eighty percent of their money on food, the price of which dramatically rose and fell sometimes overnight. Though these numbers can give us a sense of the harsh conditions of survival in eighteenth-century Britain, the fictional representations examined in this dissertation expose the failure of social institutions to comprehend the realities of poverty in a way that statistics can never capture. While quantitative data can give us a sense of general tendencies from an abstract standpoint, the desperation of hand-to-mouth existence makes such detached perspectives impossible to attain.

Much work on poverty in the period has gravitated toward the perspectives of the middling and upper classes and the systematizing tendencies of political economists. Sandra Sherman’s *Imagining Poverty* emphasizes the affiliations between literary texts and emergent economic methods by arguing that poverty was abstracted into systematic and depersonalizing discourses. Judith Frank’s *Common Ground* similarly argues the eighteenth-century novel was complicit in the disenfranchisement of the poor through its

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satiric trivialization of suffering. Scott MacKenzie’s *Be It Ever So Humble* argues that literary formalization of poverty around the figure of homelessness served as the dialectical counterpart to the consolidation of the bourgeois notion of the home as it took its modern form. My dissertation departs from these views by arguing that picaresque narratives contest the basic models of economic development at the heart of modern theorizations of the social order. Rather than seeing discursive formations in eighteenth-century fiction and eighteenth-century finance as analogues of one another, I argue that the picaresque shows that bodily needs do not translate into economic systems of exchange and ownership because instinctual behavior is fundamentally different than economic behavior. At the same time, the picaresque allows us to better understand the deep-rooted conflict between the figure of the autonomous individual and the involuntary instincts of the body that played out over the course of the century. While discourses of political economy abstract individual experience into financial systems, picaresque narratives insist on the fundamental gap between such macro-perspectives and the everyday experiences of individuals in need.

Criticism on the literature of sentiment, such as Markman Ellis’s *Politics of Sensibility*, has emphasized how sentimental novels stimulated public debate on issues such as poor relief and prostitution, yet these debates were also largely conducted at a remove from any actual suffering. Novels such as Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) figure the poor as

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objects of charity or problems to be solved, whereas the picaresque takes the perspective of the poor themselves as its point of origin. The picaresque’s use of first-person point of view, I argue, asks readers to confront the inescapable demands of the human body as a brute force that cannot be adequately grasped from an objective, or third person, perspective. It is precisely this refusal to subsume individual cases of misfortune into impersonal modes of explanation (statistical or otherwise) that constitutes one of the picaresque’s unique insights into suffering and hardship, as well as its contribution to literary realism.

Theorists of the novel such as Georg Lukács have argued that development of the realist novel is fundamentally linked to representations of the social order as a whole. By exposing all that is omitted from the novel’s version of the social order, the picaresque requires critics to rethink what should be regarded as the “real” in realism. Indeed, Lukács’s *Studies of European Realism* excludes considerations of the body as obstructions to typifying social relations. In distinguishing the realist novel from the determinism of naturalists such as Émile Zola, Lukács claims:

> [A]ny description of mere biological processes—be these the sexual acts or pain and sufferings, however detailed and from the literary point of view perfect it may be—results in a leveling-down of the social, historical and moral being of man and is not a means but an obstacle to such essential artistic expression as illuminating human conflicts in all their complexity and completeness.\(^\text{11}\)

In Lukács’ theory of realism, “complexity and completeness” are premised on the bracketing of biology (and by implication, Zola’s poor, whose experiences are somehow *more biological* than the middle class). Theorizations of the novel have tended to follow

this path by regarding social reality as the primary focus of realistic fiction, though this claim has come under increasing scrutiny in the intervening years.\(^{12}\) While critics such as John Barrell and John Richetti have followed Lukács in emphasizing the way that novelists struggled to articulate the emergence of the social order as a coherent structure in the eighteenth century, picaresque narratives call attention to the intransigent aspects of economic hardship that resist social explanation by insisting on the irreducibility of bodily necessity.

In foregrounding eighteenth-century representations of poverty, *Picaresque Necessity* revises previous accounts that have given central importance to the figure of *homo economicus*. Influential studies in the literary domain such as Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel* and Deirdre Lynch’s *The Economy of Character* have linked developments in the novel’s form to socioeconomic transformations and, in the process, they have tended to occlude the existence of the poor in both literature and history. Though Watt’s study has been disputed and qualified by generations of scholars, many continue to rely on its most basic premises, such as the seemingly indisputable salience of the rise of the middle class to the phenomenon of the modern novel. In contrast with such critics, I will argue that picaresque narratives, which exerted considerable influence on the eighteenth-century novel, called attention those countless individuals that did not have the fortune to “rise.”

\(^{12}\) See, for instance George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago, 1981), 5: “Realism in England belongs, rather, to a much more affable and moderate tradition, focusing not on the dregs of society, not on the degradations and degenerations of humans in bondage to a social and cosmic determinism. It belongs, almost provincially, to a ‘middling’ condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures.”
Not only do picaresque narratives shift our attention to non-elite subjects, they also revise the view that literary texts were structured purely by market relations. Studies of eighteenth-century literary history have tended to reinforce the centrality of possessive individualism by downplaying the significance of the picaresque and its narratives of dispossession in the period. Yet I will argue that our understanding of the eighteenth-century British novel is greatly enriched when we recognize the dozens of translations and adaptations of Spanish picaresque narratives that circulated throughout the period.

The Spanish picaresque first emerged in the mid-sixteenth century in the context of religious debates that made poverty into a reflection of providence, and thus, from its inception the picaresque brings together literary and political claims. According to Domingo de Soto, one of the leading theologians in the years leading up to the publication of the first picaresque texts: “this was the wisdom and the providence of God, that there should be rich men who, like the soul, should be able to sustain and rule the poor, and poor men, who, like the body, should serve the rich by working the land and performing other tasks that are necessary for the republic.” Not only does Soto link the poor with the basic labor of meeting bodily needs (their own and those above them), he also explicitly locates the poor in a social hierarchy in which aristocratic rule and peasant productivity serve as evidence of divine providence’s proper functioning. Picaresque narratives, such as the anonymous La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), responded to the theoretical abstraction of theologians such as Soto by insisting on the daily hardships

endured by servants who struggled to get enough to eat. In contrast with the grand
unifying vision of social interdependence, picaresque narratives depict a fractured world
of suffering and alienation.\textsuperscript{15}

In the eighteenth century, providence remained a crucial method of rationalizing
the social order. Critics have pointed out that the figure of providence was crucial to the
development of the novel, even for authors who were not closely affiliated with the
Puritan religious tradition, such as Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett.\textsuperscript{16} Yet
providential narrative could not easily be reconciled with forces such as hunger and
calamity because narratives that attribute misfortune to divine purpose have the effect of
transforming individuals into (to use Smollett’s phrase) the “playthings of fortune.”\textsuperscript{17}
Voltaire’s famous treatment of the Lisbon earthquake, both in Poème sur le désastre de
Lisbonne (1756) and Candide (1759), is but one instance of a relatively widespread
tendency to question the relationship between divine providence and human suffering.

\textsuperscript{15} Scholars have long emphasized that poverty and hunger are central concerns of the
picaresque. See Claudio Guillén, “Toward a Definition of the Picaresque,” in Literature
as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History (Princeton: Princeton
Family: The Birth of the Picaresque Genre” PMLA 94.5 (Oct. 1979), 876-886, Ann J.
Cruz, Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern
Spain (Toronto, 1999), 21-38; J.A.D. Ardila ed., The Picaresque Novel in Western
Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2015).

\textsuperscript{16} For a claim that the concept of providence was central to the development of the novel,
see, for instance, Leopold Damrosch, God’s Plot and Man’s Stories (Chicago: Chicago
University Press, 1985); For an argument that the doctrine of providence was in crisis
throughout the eighteenth century, see Michael McKeon, Origins of the English Novel

\textsuperscript{17} Tobias Smollett, “The Life of Dr. Smollett, M.D.,” in The Miscellaneous Works of
This anxiety over cosmological design applied not only to real-world events, but also to literary texts, in which seeming randomness could indicate questioning divine intelligence. In a discussion of Shakespeare, for example, Augustan critic John Dennis worried that episodic narratives undermined benevolent poetic justice. He complained that “[P]romiscuous Events call the Government of Providence into Question, and by Scepticks and Libertines are resolv’d into Chance.” Dennis’s formulation makes it clear that episodic narrative structure (or the lack of the “Government of Providence”) could be seen as symptomatic of immoral principles and beliefs. By taking “promiscuous events” seriously, not just as an aesthetic shortcoming, but as a potentially subversive practice, Dennis indicates that narrative structure carries implications for the fundamental operations of cause and effect in the world at large. Narrative teleology makes sense of the disorderly universe by postulating that random events, in fact, serve hidden purposes. In this context, the picaresque frames its refusal of narrative teleology as a critique of the moral complacency of providential narratives. By treating bodily need as the driving force of narrative structure, picaresque narratives call attention to the ways in which moralistic narrative frameworks (“virtue rewarded and vice punished”) have the effect of justifying hunger and suffering for those in need. In contrast to providential narrative, authors in the picaresque tradition underscore events that fail to develop in logical sequence and to culminate in happy endings; instead they recapitulate the interminable demands of the body, which has no meaning but survival and no progress but repetition.

I begin with *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the anonymous sixteenth-century Spanish text that has often been credited as the origin of the picaresque genre. Although critics have
emphasized the text’s proto-novelistic unity, I argue that readers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—including major figures such as Rousseau and Hazlitt—regarded *Lazarillo* as a literary precedent for representing impoverishment in episodic form, in that the interminable demands of the body propel the narrative from incident to incident. By dwelling on the perpetual struggles of its protagonist, *Lazarillo* exposes the circularity of moral, historical, and political explanations for poverty, which tended to regard the suffering of paupers as both causes and effects of their misfortunes. By viewing social problems from the first-person perspective of the subject of necessity, *Lazarillo* insists that individual and collective narratives of social order cannot accommodate the sheer force of hunger. The abrupt and unsatisfying conclusions that characterized English language editions of *Lazarillo* point to a failure of conventional notions of (moral and aesthetic) closure to justify the perpetual struggles of the poor.

In examining the ways that eighteenth-century authors made use of the picaresque to think about economic and political change in narrative terms, I turn to Daniel Defoe. Though Defoe has often been seen as a proponent of burgeoning capitalism, Defoe’s fictions embody his anxieties that bodily necessity overrules moral autonomy by keeping individuals terrified of losing their means of survival. Defoe’s episodic narratives, such as *Moll Flanders* (1722), labor to reconcile the struggle for subsistence with more optimistic models of economic progress and providential deliverance, all of which compete for primacy in the course of his novels. Drawing on Defoe’s *Essay upon Projects* (1697), *The Review* (1704-1713), and *Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), I argue that Defoe disputes the contractarian theories of Hobbes and Locke that describe the passage
from the state of nature into civil society by accentuating the failure of moral autonomy in the face of starvation and extreme insecurity. For Defoe, the passage from nature into society can never be complete because human beings remain subject to inexorable bodily demands.

My next chapter examines the novelist Tobias Smollett, who drew on the picaresque to lampoon popular providential plots that had become increasingly formulaic in the decades after Defoe’s novels were published. By reducing narrative episodes to the random collisions of bodies in motion, Smollett’s novels depict a brutally arbitrary world of accidents. Smollett’s novels suggest that individual and collective narratives of social advancement misconstrue causality by looking to providence to justify narrative outcomes. Smollett’s first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), emphasizes the driving force of hunger that propels the protagonist into a series of adventures, in the process satirizing the misalignment between existing social institutions (such as family relations, courts of law, and occupation) and the needs of the unfortunate. In *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), Smollett turns the traditional picaresque narrative upside down by focusing on the “unnecessary” and unproductive appetites that motivate his spoiled, affluent protagonist. Peregrine’s pranks steadily unravel familial and fraternal bonds while reducing the narrative into a series of pointless episodes. The disparity between the unruly accidents that constitute Smollett’s episodic narratives and visions of providential order that circulated in the period casts doubt on the ability of modern social institutions to avert catastrophic lawlessness.

The failure of modern social institutions is especially evident in popular novels of women’s adventures, which dramatized the episodic hardships of their protagonists as a
means of demonstrating the failure of social institutions to contain or combat sexual misconduct. In contrast to critics who have claimed that eighteenth-century femininity was largely associated with interiority and domesticity, my fourth chapter shows that authors and readers were drawn to stories about starving and homeless women whose situations were worsened by male predation and unwanted pregnancies, which reveal that sexuality could be seen as a manifestation of bodily necessity. Novels such as *The History of Betty Barnes* (1753), *The Histories of Some of the Penitents at the Magdalen House* (1759), and *The Adventures of Sylvia Hughes* (1761) anticipate feminist critiques of political economy that draw attention to the previously unrecognized labor of reproduction. I argue that these texts employ episodic, open-ended narrative conventions as a means of resisting the forms of novelistic and social explanation that were commonly employed to justify the suffering of women.

Not only do these narratives demonstrate that eighteenth-century authors and readers viewed bodily necessity as a limit to individual and collective notions of autonomy, the picaresque also shows how literature helps us defamiliarize (and recognize the shortcomings of) conventional narratives of personal triumph and social uplift in political speech and in economic theory. Though questions of socioeconomic inequality have risen to the surface in recent political discourse, extreme poverty remains less often discussed than the perpetual struggles of the middle class. As long as the economic goals of progressives remain framed in formulations like the “stagnation of middle-class wages” and poverty continues to be displaced onto “developing countries,” issues of social justice remain mired in the narrative structure of progress and futurity. Such a tendency reminds us of Antonio Gramsci’s claim—“The history of subaltern classes is
necessarily fragmented and episodic.”

This dissertation argues that the picaresque narratives of the eighteenth century offer insight into the realities of poverty and suffering that persist in today’s world not just by vividly representing the pangs of hunger of their protagonists, but also by refusing to imagine an end to such hunger.

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La vida del Lazarillo de Tormes, y de sus fortunas y adversidades, the seminal text often credited as the origin of the picaresque genre, is a narrative structured by hunger. Lazarillo was not the first literary narrative to feature a protagonist of low social status; its key innovation was in allowing the protagonist’s bodily needs to propel the narrative and determine the structure of the plot. While much of the existing critical work on Lazarillo focuses on poverty and social issues in general,\(^\text{19}\) this chapter argues that the text’s repeated emphasis on the protagonist’s bodily needs strains against progressive or developmental narrative structures, such as divine providence or the education of the protagonist, by subordinating these more abstract structures to hunger, exhaustion, and other manifestations of bodily necessity. The first part of this chapter analyzes Lazarillo’s episodic structure in narratological terms, while the subsequent sections turn to English language translations and adaptations that accommodate the Spanish text to a wide variety of ends. Lazarillo remained popular in Britain for hundreds of years after David Rowland produced the first translation in 1586, but little critical attention has been paid to the editions that were published in the period leading up to the rise of the British

\(^{19}\) For work on Lazarillo and social issues, see José Antonió Maravall, La literatura picaresca desde la historia social (Siglos XVI y XVII) (Madrid: Taurus, 1986); Javier Herrero, “Renaissance Poverty and Lazarillo’s Family: The Birth of the Picaresque Genre” PMLA 94.5 (Oct. 1979): 876-886, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, La literatura del pobre (Granada, 1994), 67-109, Ann J. Cruz, Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain (Toronto, 1999), 21-38.
The texts that were printed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contained substantial differences from the 1554 Spanish editions. This chapter describes how *Lazarillo*’s English language publication history heightened the episodic structure of the text rather organizing the narrative around a teleological conclusion.

A short summary of the plot illustrates both the way in which bodily necessity structures the narrative and the importance of the conclusion. The eponymous hero is born in a mill on the river Tormes. His father, a mill-worker who loses his position for embezzling grain, leaves his family without means. His mother briefly makes ends meet through an alliance with a stable boy (who pays for sex with food) until her paramour’s petty theft is discovered. In order to relieve his mother of the burden of feeding him, Lazarillo, now a teenager, takes a job as an assistant to a blind beggar. The blind man, parsimonious in feeding the protagonist, initiates his charge into a world of deception

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both explicitly, by telling Lazarillo that he will need his cunning to survive, and also indirectly by starving Lazarillo, which motivates him to pilfer what food he can lay his hands on. The blind man’s frequent and increasingly brutal beatings take their toll, motivating Lazarillo to leave his master. Lazarillo’s second employer, the priest of Maqueda, is more miserly than the first, and the boy manages to feed himself by breaking into his master’s chest of bread loaves. After the priest discovers the deception, Lazarillo loses his position and goes on to serve an impecunious squire. When the squire absconds (fleeing his debts), Lazarillo serves several other masters, including a seller of indulgences, a constable, and a friar. In the final chapter of the 1554 Spanish text, Lazarillo gets his most successful job as town crier and wine seller. The original Spanish text ends on an ambiguous note regarding the nature of the protagonist’s fortune in elevating himself above his origins (something I will return to) but the majority of the action in the narrative is driven by privation and comes to a close only when the protagonist has attained a respite from his struggle to survive.

Much scholarship on *Lazarillo* has read the text either in relatively focused historical contexts, as a product of the Spanish Siglo de Oro, or in terms of its influence on what would become known as the “picaresque novel.”

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themes in *Lazarillo* scholarship has emphasized the text’s function as anti-romance, both as a response to chivalric literary ideals and as a forerunner of novelistic historicity.\(^{23}\) From the mock-aristocratic inflection of the titular “de Tormes” to the choice of subject matter (a servant’s struggle to survive) nominally beneath consideration, the text sharply parodies popular forms of chivalric and pastoral romance, as well as taking a few swings at the epic. Benedetto Croce called the picaresque the “epic of hunger.”\(^{24}\) Frank Chandler’s pioneering study suggests that the picaresque constitutes an inversion of the romantic world of knights, princesses, and shepherds. Destitute hovels displace enchanted castles and abject need displaces heroic virtue: “The picaresque novel was thus grossly real and usual; more than that, it emphasized and made prominent in all ways the lower elements of reality.”\(^{25}\) But the “lower elements of reality” are not strictly parallel to romance and they alter picaresque narrative in “all ways,” producing unfamiliar narrative patterns instead of merely aping old ones.

*Lazarillo*, as well as many of its translations and imitations, takes on an explicitly episodic structure that registers the fact that narratives driven by hunger are qualitatively

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different from narratives driven by more conventional values depicted in heroic romance (such as virtue, courage, constancy). I argue that Lazarillo embodies a materialist perspective that takes the intrinsic needs and limits of human beings as its basic components, in contrast to later variants of materialism that take social categories or scientific principles as their fundamental bases. Analysis of motivation is built into Lazarillo’s first-person perspective because of the way that the narrator, driven to hunger, repeatedly reflects on the causality of his own actions from the retrospective position of an observer who offers sometimes-conflicting accounts of how and why events occurred as they did. The text integrates hunger into its narrative design by eschewing teleology in favor of repetition and the seemingly endless struggle to survive.

By directing attention to bodily needs, the reading I offer of Lazarillo disputes attempts to theorize a strong developmental continuity between the picaresque and the novel. Bakhtin has claimed that representations of bodily appetite, which he analyzes through the concept of carnivalization, have potential for a kind of emancipation, which flowers in the novel. Regarding the social order as the sole agent of confinement, Bakhtin sees the pícaro as essentially free from constraint: “A human being is, as it were,


emancipated here [in the picaresque] from all the entanglements of such conventional unities, he is neither defined nor comprehended by them; in fact, he can even laugh at them.” 28 Laughter is an expression of pure freedom in Bakhtin’s view, which only acknowledges limits to freedom in the form of social relations. But Lazarillo’s narrative structure demonstrates that the body itself is capable of limiting one’s autonomy under exigent circumstances.

Scholars have argued that Lazarillo influenced and drew upon a wide range of other texts in its attention to everyday life. Some critics have focused on the education of the protagonist and deemed it a forerunner of the bildungsroman, while at least one critic has credited Lazarillo as the primary text that inspired the ur-novel Don Quixote. 29 The narrative employs the immediacy of epistolary form as well as posing the ironic possibility that the narrator’s voice is unreliable, both techniques that seem to anticipate later developments in the novel. Critics have also been diligent in pointing out that as much as Lazarillo contained raw material for future literary forms, it also drew on existing literary resources. Lazarillo could be seen as an adapting Greek romances such as Apuleius’s The Golden Ass, borrowing from the Italian novella in the tradition of

Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, as well as serving to anthologize popular narratives such as contemporary folk tales and jokes.\(^{30}\) One thread of scholarship has pointed to Arabic *maqamat* as precursors to *Lazarillo*. *Maqamat* consist of first-person accounts of rogues and tricksters whose occasionally fatalistic reflections anticipate the picaresque in general thematic and formal terms. At the historical period of *Lazarillo*’s publication, Spanish policy effectively forbad Arabic cultural expression. Should *Lazarillo*’s first readers have recognized *maqamat* as a reference point, it would have contributed to a subaltern resonance of the text, rendering it a kind of sixteenth-century *samizdat* in Inquisitional Spain.\(^{31}\)

The wide-ranging efforts of critics to situate the text in such varied contexts have helped to demonstrate, if nothing else, that *Lazarillo* stands as a kind of watershed of narrative structure, though for different reasons according to different critics. Many critics have emphasized the continuities between the picaresque and the novel. In one such account, Peter Brooks discusses *Lazarillo* in the course of formulating his theory of the “dynamic of desire” that drives narrative:

> A rock-bottom paradigm of the dynamic of desire can be found in one of the very earliest novels in the Western tradition, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), where all of the hero’s tricks and dodges are directed initially at staying alive: Lázaro, the ragged, homeless *pícaro*, must use his wits, his human ingenuity, to avoid the ever-present threat of starvation. Each


chapter develops as a set of tricks and stratagems devised to overcome a specific form of the threat, and thus literally to enable life, and narrative, to go forward.  

By regarding the text both as a novel, and as a “rock-bottom paradigm of the dynamic of desire,” Brooks glosses over the essential difference in motivation between the picaresque and the novel at the heart of his argument—what is essentially the difference between need and desire. For Brooks, starvation is the “literal” matter that must be overcome to “enable life, and narrative, to go forward,” presumably by moving beyond the raw material of literalness. Yet *Lazarillo* never really “goes forward.” The text is driven by protagonist’s experience of near-starvation as the motive force of the plot, whereas (for the most part) the great novels of the nineteenth century discussed by Brooks are staged around less exigent motivations. The difference between need and desire is fundamental—to use Brooks’ term “paradigmatic”—and to regard *Lazarillo* in the same category as *Le Rouge et le noir* and *Le Père Goriot* is to overstate the continuity between discrete modes of emplotment. Indeed, Brooks makes the mechanism by which narrative meaning is fashioned out of life’s vagaries the basis of his analysis, while *Lazarillo* repeatedly emphasizes the failure of narrative meaning to cohere under the relentless pressure of bodily demand.

Picaresque, to the extent that the term describes a particular kind of narrative structure, is notorious for its lack of unity, its recounting of “one damn thing after

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33 Brooks is sensitive to this distinction in other contexts. See *Reading for the Plot*, 55.
another.”34 Brooks is characteristic of the tendency to use picaresque as an example of purely chronological sequence in his development of Roland Barthes’s opposition between proairetic and hermeneutic narrative modes: “The proairetic concerns the logic of actions, how their completion can be derived from their initiation, how they form sequences. The limit-case of a purely proairetic narrative would be approached by the picaresque tale, or the novel of pure adventure: narratives that give precedence to happening.”35 Brooks opposes what he refers to as the “empirical” voice of the proairetic to the “interpretive” voice of the hermeneutic, going on to define plot in terms of its “overcoding” of the former by the latter, or of meaning over happening.36 Brooks frames the reflective process of recovering meaning and significance out of sequential episodes in psychoanalytic processes. The distinction between narrative meaning and chronological incident emerges out of the nature and definition of desire and the protagonist acts as a kind of surrogate for the reader by performing the labor of synthesizing empirical fragments into novelistic unity: “The ambitious hero thus stands as a figure of the reader’s efforts to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape.”37

34 See for instance, René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1949), 222: “In the picaresque novel, the chronological sequence is all there is: this happened and then that…”
35 Brooks, Reading for the Plot, 18.
36 The dichotomy is variation on classic Russian Formalist defined distinction between sjuzet and fabula, or discourse and story. For less novel-centric discussion of the distinction, see Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative 3rd ed. (Toronto, 2009), 5-13.
37 Brooks, Reading for Plot, 39.
While this model accounts for many nineteenth-century novels, picaresque narrative resists the impulse to “totalize … experience of human existence in time” by ironizing the protagonist’s attempts to do so (a process that I will explain in more detail in a moment). The novel is frequently regarded as a medium characterized by a high degree of formal reflexivity, but to what degree do bodily demands sustain the same modes of critical self-analysis as of more culturally instilled desires? The unyielding pressure of survival does not leave enough leisure for Lazarillo to reflect upon and totalize his experiences into narrative unity (to the extent that narrative unity is defined by completion). The persistence of the picaresque over the centuries will repeatedly and ironically call attention to the limits of the protagonist’s capacity for reflection and self-definition through narrative by underscoring the impossibility of formal closure. Though other episodic literary forms (travel narrative, romance) proliferated throughout the period, it was picaresque that most explicitly drew attention to the limits of narrative by insisting on bodily necessity as structuring principle.

1. Necessity and Fortune: Lazarillo’s Episodic Narrative Structure

When biological necessity determines narrative structure, the protagonist’s reflections tend to take an ironic form. Lazarillo’s irony is constituted by the doubling of narrative structure through overdetermination, frequently offering two or more distinct

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versions of how episodes fit into meaningful wholes. The text dramatizes the way that rational deliberation competes with involuntary impulses dictated by self-preservation.

For example, starving to death as a result of the avarice of the priest of Maqueda,

Lazarillo reflects on his predicament:

I often thought of leaving that mean master, but I didn’t for two reasons: one was that I didn’t trust my legs because they were so weak with hunger. The other was that I thought it out and said to myself: “I’ve had two masters. The first kept me half-dead with hunger and this one has almost got me into the grave with it. If I leave this one and find one who is worse, all I’ll have left is to die!”

Pensé muchas veces irme de aquel mezquino amo; mas por dos cosas lo dejaba: la primera, por no me atrever a mis piernas, por temer de la flaqueza que de pura hambre me venía; y la otra, consideraba y decía: “Yo he tenido dos amos; el primero tráíame muerto de hambre y, dejándole, topé con estotro, que me tiene ya con ella en la sepultura; pues si déste desisto y doy en otro más bajo, ¿qué será, sino fenscer?"

Lazarillo’s two reasons (actually “dos cosas” or two things) gesture toward a fundamental problem with causality that recurs throughout the text. Episodes are mere descriptions of experiential data (here, weakness from hunger) but they are also units to be folded into narrative patterns (things get worse with change). Lazarillo recounts these

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39 Two Spanish Picaresque Novels, trans. Michael Alpert (Penguin, 1969) 40-41. English language quotations are given in Alpert’s standard translation unless noted otherwise (such when David Rowland’s translation or the Bonwick edition are specified below). Hereafter cited in text.
40 Anonymous, La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades Ed. Alberto Blecua (Madrid, 1972), 117. All Spanish quotations from Lazarillo are from this edition, hereafter cited in text.
41 Alpert’s translation demonstrates the modern preference for rational agents who account for their decisions in terms of reasons instead of things. The Spanish word cosa is derived from the Latin causa and indicates the passage’s concern with the nature of causation. The word choice asks us to think about biological necessity as a “thing” in the sense of a natural actor. See Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 83-85.
alternatives in turn, offering an account of his emaciation as well as a speculative account of how his emaciation fits into a causal chain of before and after. On the one hand, Lazarillo predicts that his body is incapable of carrying him away from the priest. Hunger delimits and determines the possible range of actions. It is in this sense that the text functions as a chronicle of sheer happening.

On the other hand, Lazarillo reflects and apprehends a pattern to his misfortunes, attempting to fashion order out of random occurrence. The detection of narrative structure (things get worse with change) parodies a hermeneutic narrative sensibility and is one of the early indications of the text’s insistence that the protagonist is incapable of understanding his own situation. The reader is meant to understand that (barring some metaphysical intervention) there is no rhyme or reason why one master is more avaricious than the next. That is to say, there is an important distinction between sequence and structure, in that Lazarillo’s attempts to establish meaningful connections between occurrences takes the form of stitching together sequences into wholes that are not descriptive of the real unfolding of sheer happening. The ironic naivety of the childish protagonist in the early chapters of the book is a vehicle for making the distinction between what is merely a series of unfortunate events and not in fact logical developments from one stage to the next.

The problem of narrative structure is made evident as Lazarillo maps an opposition between sequence and causality with punctuation in the passage above (which is present in the original Spanish editions). Setting the internal dialogue off with quotation marks is a kind of proto-psychological gesture that makes the hermeneutic tendency into a soliloquy; reflection is ironized as a dramatic aside rather than as an act
that totalizes episodes into any kind of wholeness. Rather than interiority, we just get the protagonist talking to himself. Punctuation separates reflection out from events rather than stitching them together. The contingency of Lazarillo’s occupational status has been clearly established (he met the priest, his second master, in the street) and the ascription of pattern is a joke. Narrative structure acts as mere rationalization for maintaining the status quo, and a dubious one at that. For it seems likely that we should read Lazarillo’s rationalization as a specious interpretative labor, a failure to understand the arbitrariness of his own situation.

That bodily necessity acts as the primary causal force (the “first thing”) in this episode is part of a more general tendency throughout the first three tratados. The text hammers home the absence of narrative structure by insisting that it is Lazarillo’s hunger that determines his behavior again and again. Lazarillo calls attention to its own non-progressive status through repetitions performed within the narrative. With his first master, Lazarillo tells us, “if I hadn’t used all my cunning and the tricks I knew, I would have died of hunger more than once” (29) [“Digo verdad: si con mi sotileza y buenas manás no me supiera remediar, muchas veces me finara de hambre” (98).] Lazarillo’s narrative captures both the precarious nature of survival on the brink of starvation and also the constant nature of bodily demand. The somewhat absurd formulation of dying of hunger “more than once” reveals bodily necessity to be the seemingly endless motivation for countless episodes. Biological necessity offers its own bottomless logic for production of conflict and incident. Rendered through episodic narrative, the temporal sequence of discrete incidents is less important than their reference to bodily demand as underlying cause that recurs over and over again in various guises. Lazarillo’s constant subjection to
bodily demand distinguishes picaresque narrative from later novelistic narrative, barring him from ambitions and goals beyond his next meal. *Lazarillo’s* episodic structure testifies to this difference by insisting on a form of causality that is involuntary, determined by the rhythms of hunger and satiety.

Episodes are marked as contingent in contrast to more traditional forms of narrative structure—such as Christian allegory—as well as in contrast to Lazarillo’s naïve pattern recognition. This contrast between overarching pattern and episodic structure is emphasized in the third chapter, when the fortuitous arrival of a peripatetic tinker furnishes the hungry protagonist with a skeleton key that gives him access to the priest’s chest of bread. The episode is imbued with ironic religious meaning when filtered through the narrator’s perspective. Lázaro recounts “a tinker came to the door just on the off-chance. I think he was an angel sent by God in that disguise.” (41) [llegóse acaso a mi puerta un calderero, el cual yo creo que fue ángel enviado a mí por la mano de Dios en aquel hábito. (118)] Lázaro’s language acknowledges both the contingency of mere happening (*acaso* or “just on the off chance”) even as he filters the occurrence from everyday life through the framework of Christian theology. Such language is in keeping with what has been widely noted as an anti-clerical theme in the text.42 Unlocking the chest, Lazaro recounts, “I saw the bread in the box, and it was like the very face of God, as they say” (41) [“veo en figura de panes, como dicen, la cara de Dios dentro del arcaz” (118).] The shape or form (“figura”) of the loaves of bread is, like Lazarillo’s ascription

of narrative structure, a parody—the sixteenth-century equivalent of seeing the Virgin Mary’s image imprinted on a toasted-cheese sandwich. Such an image contributes to the sense that traditional religious figures, as well as religious functionaries, have become detached from their putative referents. The text oscillates between sacred and profane within each episode, disclosing base desires behind divine appearances of various religious functionaries. The priest of Maqueda is more greedy than Alexander the Great, sellers of indulgences are consummate con-men, the Friar of Merced has insatiable sexual appetites, and the Arch-priest maintains an adulterous relationship with Lázaro’s wife.

The failure of religious institutions is reflected in a world that is dis-unified and unharmonious, taking the shapelessness of a narrative that embodies all the imperfections of the natural world it represents by being episodic. Lazarillo’s hunger defines his relation to the world by structuring his relationships with each of his masters and reveals a world that has lost spiritual direction by getting caught up in earthly appetites.

Lazarillo’s third master, the poverty-stricken squire, operates as a somewhat different figure of deceptive appearances. While the narrative’s religious officials debase sacred virtues into vices, the squire clings to a title that has lost its currency. In the text’s representative cross-section of the social order, he is the vanishing aristocrat, starving to death under a respectable veneer. Throughout the episode, Lazarillo stresses the erosion and reversal of social relations under the pressure of bodily necessity. Hunger pays no attention to social status. When Lazarillo decides to share the food he has acquired by

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begging with the squire, his decision is narrated through an aside set off with punctuation. The protagonist reflects that his previous two masters “nearly starved me to death and I was right to leave them, just as I’m right to take pity on this one here.” (58) [“me mataban de hambre, aquéllos es justo desamar y aquéste es de haber mancilla.” (142)] Lazarillo’s generosity on this count is one of the bright spots in an otherwise dismal picture of the world. The protagonist defines his behavior as fundamentally right (justo), basing his judgment on past experience. Shortly thereafter, a food shortage (attributed to bad luck or “mala fortuna”) ruptures Lazarillo and the squire’s state of equilibrium. The narrator reports, “that year there had been a poor harvest and the Town Council decided that all poor people who weren’t natives of the town should leave.” (58) [“Y fue, como el año en esta tierra fuese estéril de pan, acordaron el Ayuntamiento que todos los pobres estranjeros se fuesen de la ciudad” (143).] The Town Council’s anti-immigration policy, motivated by the scarcity of food, reduces both Lazarillo and his master to hungry bodies without a place in the social order again. The famine is a reminder of nature’s capacity to disrupt such moments of equilibrium.

While Lazarillo’s relationship with the squire seems to indicate a progressive narrative pattern (the protagonist draws on his former experiences to pity the squire), the protagonist’s growth is ultimately subordinated to bodily necessity. It is the equivalent of one step forward, two steps back for Lazarillo. The protagonist’s education, to the extent that we might call it that, is a passage from innocence to corruption. Lazarillo tells us that his teacher is none other than his own hunger: “Still, necessity’s a good teacher, so all the time, night and day, I thought of nothing but how to keep myself alive. I’m convinced that hunger was my guiding light in finding these solutions to my troubles. (44) [“Como
la necesidad sea tan gran maestra, viéndome con tanta siempre noche y día estaba pensando la manera que ternía en substentar el vivir. Y pienso, para hallar estos remedios, que me era luz la hambre.” (122) In these terms, the narrative’s sequential logic can be thought of as parody of the protagonist’s passage into adulthood through education avant la lettre. His education only reinforces his desperation and lends itself to the picture of a fallen world. Lazarillo’s repeated reduction to bare subsistence is the basic condition upon which his education is premised. There is a sequential narrative development in the text, but only insofar as it shows Lazarillo learning lessons in adapting to his duplicitous environment.  

The narrative concludes when Lázaro, now grown into an adult, has gotten a secure government job as town-crier and wine seller. Married and well fed, the narrator offers a markedly qualified sense of closure, assuring the reader in the last sentence: “At that time I was at the height of my good fortune.” (79) [Pues en este tiempo estaba en mi prosperidad y en la cumbre de toda buena fortuna. (188)] By describing himself at the peak of good fortune, the narrator leaves the reader unsure if the ascent is a real accomplishment or just another crest on the roller coaster, a temporary respite from the oscillating pattern of his previous life. In addition to being qualified by language that is decidedly provisional, the concluding chapter offers several clues why Lázaro’s good fortune might be compromised by the conditions of its achievement. Lázaro hints that his wife’s involvement with the Archpriest is subject to scandalous rumors and that his silence on the matter contributes to his material gain in the form of gifts from the

44 For the importance of the concept of education in the picaresque, see Stuart Miller, The Picaresque Novel, 56-69.
Archpriest (including, of course, foodstuffs). Whether his silence is a matter of ignorance (in which case he is a dupe) or, more likely, a matter of complicity (in which case he is a pimp), the protagonist draws on the lessons he has learned to remain silent and the ending seems to signify his complicity with a corrupt social order.

To the extent that closure is reached in the original text of Lazarillo, it is as a matter of satisfaction of the forces that motivated earlier sections of the narrative. Because the majority of the episodes were driven by hunger, Lázaro’s secure government job seems to guarantee that he will no longer lack anything to eat. For readers of the Spanish edition, the phrase “cumbre de toda buena fortuna” (height of my good fortune) that concludes the text would have recalled the use of the figure of “fortuna” in the Prologue, symmetrically bookended by the earlier reference. The prologue announces Lázaro’s intent to chart a course of social mobility in contrast to undeserving aristocrats: “I’d also like people who are proud of being high born to realize how little this really means, as Fortune has smiled on them, and how much more worthy are those who have endured misfortune but have triumphed by dint of hard work and determination” (24) [y también porque consideren los que heredaron nobles estados cuán poco se les debe, pues Fortuna fue con ellos parcial, y cuánto más hicieron los que, siéndoles contraria, con fuerza y maña remando, salieron a buen puerto. (89)] The sequential narrative logic that unlocks the relationship between the beginning, the middle, and the end is contained in Lázaro’s claim that “fuerza y maña remando” (translated quite differently by Lazarillo’s first English translator, David Rowland, as “force and skill”) are capable of accomplishing individual social uplift despite fortune’s dispensations. Some are lucky and some create their own luck, Lázaro seems to say.
Francisco Rico’s influential study of perspective in the picaresque argues that the entire narrative can be unified by understanding it through what he refers to as the “final situation.” Rico’s argument hinges on two aspects of the prologue. First, the prologue is addressed to an esteemed reader referred to at various points in the second person as “Your Honor” or *Vuestra Merced*. Second, the prologue makes it clear that the whole of the narrative is rhetorically calibrated toward explaining a particular “situation” or case. Lazarillo writes, “Your Honor has written to me to ask me to tell him my story [*el caso*] in some detail so I think I’d better start at the beginning, not in the middle, so that you may know about me” (24). [Y pues Vuestra Merced escribe se le escriba y relate el caso muy por extenso, parescióme no tomalle por el medio, sino del principio, porque se tenga entera noticia de mi persona” (89).] The speaker displays consciousness of the rhetoric of beginnings, middles, and ends by constructing a narrative out of his adventures, tailored to the speaker. Rico argues that if we attend to this aspect of the text, *Lazarillo* is anything but episodic and the narrative demonstrates sophisticated self-consciousness and reflexivity, justifying the inclusion of every seemingly random episode in service of the end. All incidents are meant to explain how the protagonist ended up as willing cuckold. Rico claims, “The various stages in the previous history of [Lazarillo] act like a set of conditional clauses, directed … towards a future which is to fill them with meaning.”

To return to Brooks’s terms, the end totalizes previous episodes through the protagonist’s implied hermeneutic construction. The fictional rhetorical frame—Lazarillo’s attempt to persuade his interlocutor—acts as a narrative template in which the empirical incidents can

be metamorphosed into hermeneutic meaning. Rico’s emphasis on the rhetorical situation helps to explain the vivid attention to detail, which attests to the raconteur’s flair for vivid story-telling, as well as the ironic education that culminates in the protagonist’s complicity in selling his wife’s favors. The narrative exculpates the speaker by making him into a victim of circumstances, inviting the reader to fashion the episodes of his life into an alibi for wrongdoing.

Generic accounts of the picaresque have taken a cue from Rico’s reading and many definitions of the picaresque as a genre hinge on treating the telos of the text as the key to its unity. Such an account of the picaresque may have seemed appealingly counter-intuitive when it was first articulated, redeeming the genre from its previous association with poor narrative technique, though this view has become the new standard reading. Rico’s argument gains traction from the other major exemplar of the genre; Guzmán de Alfarache, the successor to Lazarillo, also retrospectively reconstructs events from a final situation. For Guzmán, it is the gallows that provides the anchoring retrospective viewpoint, projecting hortatory wisdom back from a reformed perspective and moralizing rogueish behavior in relation to an “ending” that prompts confession and conversion. Recently, J.A.G. Ardila has offered a definition of the picaresque that demonstrates the influence of Rico’s reading of Lazarillo. Ardila expands Rico’s claim to stand for picaresque as a genre: “A picaresque novel tells the life of its protagonist in order to explain a final situation.”

Ardila, like Rico and Brooks, makes picaresque into a

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stepping-stone for the rise of the novel that it seems to anticipate in so many ways. Each of these critics makes the protagonist’s retrospective reflections into the medium of narrative unity. These attempts to emplot *Lazarillo* within literary history tend to take the 1554 edition as the authoritative text yet *Lazarillo*’s publication history tells a different, less teleological story. Just as I have suggested that the episodes of Lazarillo’s life resist teleological unity, so the English language editions of the text also resist being regarded as raw material for the modern novel.

2. “Necessity’s No Crime”: Seventeenth-Century Editions of *Lazarillo*

Scholars of the picaresque have developed elaborate modes of classification to account for the considerable differences between the key picaresque texts. Claudio Guillén’s approach identifies eight key constituents of the genre. He further distinguishes between the picaresque as genre (in a fully historical sense) and as myth or mode (as a transhistorical narrative model). In this spirit, a large number of studies of the picaresque developed at both ends of Guillén’s spectrum—on the one hand, rigorous attempts to define the picaresque narrowly by further focusing on constitutive features, and on the other hand, modal studies that see the influence of the picaresque continuing to persist in television and twentieth-century novels. Yet regarding picaresque as a


48 For the more historical approach, see Peter Dunn, *Spanish Picaresque Fiction: A New Literary History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For a more capacious, modal
timeless constellation of themes and formal devices fails to account for the fact that the ideal center of the concentric model of the genre was itself a moving target. Successive editions of *Lazarillo* differed widely from one another in the centuries following its initial publication, meaning that the picaresque, as it was taking shape as a genre, was not only to be distinguished from the texts it influenced and its imitations but from itself.⁴⁹ Perhaps because of its low subject matter, *Lazarillo* never received careful editorial attention in English language editions until the early twentieth century. The result is that the *Lazarillo* that we take to be as the correct text was almost entirely out of circulation for about three hundred years. This disjunction suggests that we should distinguish more strictly between claims made about the 1554 *Lazarillo* and claims about the many editions of *Lazarillo* that were actually printed in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

While Francisco Rico’s reading is possible in regards to the Spanish language versions of *Lazarillo* published in 1554, it does not hold for English language editions published in the next few hundred years. No edition published in English ended with Lázaro’s account of his wife’s dubious relationship with the archpriest and the protagonist’s comments on having arrived at the height of his “good fortune.”

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Additionally, English language editions beginning in 1653 omitted the “Prologue” and subsequent editions entirely eliminated Lázaro’s estimable interlocutor, *Vuestra Merced*. Instead of culminating in a “final situation,” English language editions starting with David Rowland’s translation (first extant edition published in 1586, though there were probably earlier editions that have been lost) conclude with a supplemental chapter, which was probably part of a sequel before being attached to the original text.⁵⁰ The supplemental chapter has been all but ignored by critics. A relatively recent bilingual edition of the Rowland translation purges what it refers to as the “spurious” chapter, with a note that it is “redundant” to the original Spanish text.⁵¹ Such an editorial decision is problematic in light of the fact that the idea of an original text is especially elusive for *Lazarillo*.

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Table 1. This table shows all extant English-language editions of Lazarillo prior to 1700. As I discuss below, the 1639 edition introduced a new ending (designated “Church”) and changed other significant paratextual features tracked in the “Verse Epilogue” column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Prologue</th>
<th>Ending</th>
<th>Verse Epilogue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Rowland</td>
<td>Printed by Abell Ieffes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Turberville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1596</td>
<td>Rowland</td>
<td>Reprint of 1586</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Turberville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Printed by E.G.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1653</td>
<td>Rowland</td>
<td>Printed for William Leake</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>T.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1655</td>
<td>Rowland</td>
<td>Printed by R. Hodgkinsonne</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>T.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>T.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Printed for Eliz. Hodgkinson</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>T.P. [Prologue]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Rowland</td>
<td>Printed for Leake</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Son of Lazarillo</td>
<td>None</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

English readers would have encountered the spurious chapter in every English edition for over two hundred years. In the 1586 Rowland translation, the paratextual apparatus gives no indication that the apocryphal chapter was in any way different from the others; the continuation is integrated seamlessly into the main text. The words that conclude the final chapter of the original text (in the 1554 Spanish editions) are carried over to the first sentence of the supplemental chapter, which begins: “Being now in the top of my prosperity, having fortune my friend.”[^52] The supplemental chapter goes on to describe Lázaro’s friendship with Dutch members of the court of Emperor Carlos V. Among his new friends, Lázaro accustoms himself to plentiful food and drink and the text concludes with the fabric of his domestic situation starting to tear. In terms of

[^52]: *The pleasaunt historie of Lazarillo de Tormes a Spaniarde* trans. David Rowland (London: 1586), 59, accessed via Early English Books Online. All citations to this text refer to EEBO “Image” number, hereafter cited internally.
narrative structure, what the additional chapter seems to suggest is that closure, if instantiated in terms of fortune or prosperity, is tenuous and like Lazarillo’s more youthful attempts to theorize, still eludes hermeneutic totalization.

To return to the Spanish text for a moment, the 1554 editions couples “the height of my good fortune” to the seemingly insignificant coincidence of history at large and biographical micro-history: “That was the same year as our victorious Emperor entered the famous city of Toledo and held his Parliament here. There were great festivities…” (79). [“Esto fue el mismo año que nuestro victorioso emperador en esta insigne ciudad de Toledo entró y tuvo en ella Cortes y se hicieron grandes regocijos y fiestas…” (155-56)]

These words, which provide the inspirational seed for the apocryphal “Dutch” ending (the Dutchmen are courtiers in Carlos’s entourage), have spurred several critics to put forth an alternative to Rico’s reading of Lazarillo. James Parr stresses the inclusion of this seemingly minor detail, suggesting that the entire force of the satire is directed toward “the emperor’s imperialist policy, which has contributed to the creation of a society of inverted values.”53 Parr continues, “The force of hunger is also explained as consequence of this policy; the period’s economic problems arise in a great measure from the enormous expenses that were required.”54 Ongoing and expensive military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire and in the colonial world had stretched the Spanish economy to austerity. Lazarillo’s hunger, by this logic, is the effect of government policy.55 In this case, the final situation has less to do with Lázaro’s explanation of his individual moral

54 Ibid, 380.
55 See also Alberto del Monte, Itinerario de la novela picaresca española, (Madrid, 1971), 40.
quandary and is more of a topical allusion to the contemporary political landscape. Every episode is reduced to an effect of one cause—Carlos V’s imperial regime.

The Dutch episode, which highlights the topical context, was included in every English language edition until the nineteenth century. The new ending changes the emphasis of the text in part by associating Lázaro’s prosperity with a specific historical moment and, consequently, by exchanging the comic resolution for a darker turn in the final lines. Rather than making Lázaro’s temporary prosperity the effect of his “force and skill,” it is the spoils of a wasteful and injudicious regime, by way of association. The episode recalls the thematic focus on hunger by describing the luxurious food that Lázaro enjoys as a consequence of his friendship with the emperor’s courtiers: “as often as we met we should have also slices of bacon, pieces of legs of mutton in that pleasant wine, with all manner of fine spice, and therewith would fill both my bosom and skirts, enough for my wife and me a whole week” (59). The cataloguing of plenty replaces the former narration of privation, with food overflowing and filling Lázaro’s loose clothing. The episode draws out Lázaro’s association with the Dutchmen for a few pages before abruptly ending with their departure:

I continued in this estate, until that fortune thought that she had now given me too much ease, and that she thought it reason for her to turn back and shew me again her severe and cruel visage, to temper those few years which I passed at ease, with as much more travail and deadly sorrow, which now I should endure. (O great God) who is able to write so unfortunate & miserable a case, but must let the Inkhorn rest and put the pen to his eyes? (58)

The spurious chapter allows the traditional image of the wheel of fortune to rotate just a degree further than in the original, sending the hero spiraling back into distress. The doleful turn in the final sentence of Rowland’s Lazarillo recasts the teleological arc of the
narrative from comic rise to tragic fall. Lázaro’s threat to put the “pen to his eyes” recalls Oedipus’s self-blinding and rather than concluding the text “at the height of my good fortune,” Rowland’s edition culminates at the exact moment before Lázaro’s life disintegrates back into hardship. By associating himself with a tragic hero, Lázaro suggests that we regard him as a victim of fateful circumstances rather than as a corrupted individual.

In the final lines, Lázaro questions his own ability to fashion any kind of narrative out of his misfortunes. “Who is able to write so unfortunate & miserable a case” is the kind of question that remains implicit in the 1554 text but comes to the fore in the English translation with the new ending. Rowland’s edition articulates the very question that would preoccupy many future readers of picaresque texts. Lázaro asks if the picaresque subject—the subject of necessity—is capable of narrating his or her own story. In what should be regarded as another iteration of the failure of making narrative totality out of episodic experience, Lázaro despairs that he cannot go on to utter what follows. Earlier in his life, Lazarillo was more willing to find patterns in the jumble of episodes that befell him. But now the pen causes blindness rather than vision. Attempting to give narrative shape to one’s life is futile. Narrative vanishes into the anguish of the present moment and the protagonist’s “writing to the moment” captures empirical experience in its fragmentary immediacy, the unfinished narration of being subject to necessity.

56 The retrospective aspect of the narrative would seem to erase any difference between past and present attempts to consolidate narrative into teleological unity, yet Lázaro represents his youthful attempts as provisional formulations based on each situation, often marked with punctuation as if to call attention to their status as artifacts of a particular circumstance.
In addition to changing the emphasis of the narrative structure by supplementing an additional episode, the first English language edition also adds a verse epilogue that could be read as concluding gesture. English editors responded to the narrator’s inability to totalize his own experiences into unity by making paratextual material perform the labor that Lazarillo cannot. Most seventeenth-century editions of Lazarillo follow Rowland’s edition and end with verse epilogues that supplement the first-person voice of the speaker with summary remarks, like the persona that frequently conclude early modern tragedies and comedies. George Turberville’s poem ends the 1586 Lazarillo with a meditation on the value and truth of the text:

Though truth do purchase hate
and glossing bear the bell:
Yet is the man to be beliked
that truest tale doth tell,
Without respect of place
of country, or of kind:
For so the law of writing doth
each honest writer bind:
Then Lazaro deserves
no blame, but praise to gain,
That plainly pens the Spaniards pranks
and how they live in Spain. 57

The poem affirms “the law of writing” as a binding international force that positions the value of a “tale” in relation to the praiseworthiness of character. Observation of real life (“how they live in Spain”) is a means of attaining a kind of knowledge transcending socioeconomic, national, and ethnic categories (“Without respect of place / of country, or of kind”). Interestingly enough, some of Lazarillo’s first readers in English share with contemporary critics the desire to see the text as transnational and transgressive of

57 George Turberville, “To the Reader,” 1-12.
national boundaries. It is by means of Lázaro’s “plain” pen that such forms of truth are to be achieved. Turberville’s focus on plain speech as a mode of truthfulness anticipates the application of epistemological criteria to novelistic texts in the following centuries. Yet truth is the province of readers and paratexts, not the achievement of the protagonist in question. Turberville lauds Lazarillo as worthy of imitation (“to be beliked”) despite its calling attention to unseemly practices that may offend readers. Turberville suggests that disclosing corrupt and inhumane practices is central to the meaning of the text.

Turberville’s poem is important because it suggests that Lazarillo was read not just as a comic jestbook but as a text that conveyed some kind of truth. Though Lázaro himself is not able to synthesize his own experiences into narrative unity, the critical position of the paratext supplements the text by asking readers to distill truth from narrative. Turberville spent several years as diplomatic secretary in Russia, producing a now lost volume of poems on Russian life, Poems describing the Places and Manners of the Country and People of Russia. The title adds to the sense we get in his poem that Turberville framed literary texts such as Lazarillo as viable forms of research into cultural difference and similarity. Turberville’s words suggest an earnest and respectful approach to Lazarillo, focusing on the “truth” to be gleaned, without specifying the precise content to be derived from the narrative. The poem was reprinted in at least three editions (1596, 1624 and 1631) in the same way—following Lázaro’s meltdown and acting in place of a conclusion. These three editions (as well as some of the later ones) also featured marginal glosses that offered information on Spanish culture. For instance, one gloss reads, “A blanke the xii. part of an English pence. The custome is there upon Saturday to eate the heads, the feete and bowels of all beasts with his licence” (Rowland
Marginal glosses call attention to instances both of translatability (currency exchange) and difference (local diet). While in some cases, the notes served to aid understanding of plot points, they made *Lazarillo* into a factual travel narrative as well as a fictional story. Along the same lines, Rowland’s preface claims: “Considering that besides much mirth, here is also a true description of the nature & disposition of sundry Spaniards. So that by reading hearof, such as have not traveled Spain, may well discern much of the manners & customs of that country, as those that have there long time continued” (Rowland 2). Rowland reminds the reader that *Lazarillo* is less about the individual narrative of a particular servant’s adventures but a component of a larger stock of knowledge about Spain. Rowland’s claim makes *Lazarillo* part of a more general, unfinished project of understanding the world.

In suggesting the open-ended nature of Lázaro’s suffering, the final lines of prose in the Rowland edition could also be read as a kind of teaser, stoking the reader’s desire for more “fortunes and misfortunes,” suggesting that readerly desire might serve as impetus to further adventures. If the final lines were meant to serve as a kind of cliffhanger, sequels were not far behind the initial publication. The 1596 reprint of Rowland’s translation was accompanied in the same year by a sequel, titled *The most pleasaut and delectable historie of Lazarillo de Tormes, a Spanyard and of his maruellous fortunes and aduersities. The second part*. This work was William Phiston’s translation of the bizarre anonymous *Segunda Parte*, originally published in Spanish in Antwerp in 1555. The first chapter of the *Segunda Parte* was the source of the Dutch episode that concludes Rowland’s translation. Rowland follows Saugrain’s 1561 French
edition in making the beginning of one text into the end of another.\textsuperscript{58} Such a confusion of beginnings and ends would continue to haunt \textit{Lazarillo}’s publication history for quite some time as editors altered the text to suit their own objectives. The \textit{Segunda Parte} tells of the protagonist’s transformation into a tuna fish and his encounters with a corrupt underwater kingdom (a thinly veiled attack on the Spanish court).\textsuperscript{59} The unrealistic magical episode was dropped in Juan de Luna’s (confusingly nearly identically titled) \textit{Segunda Parte de Lazarillo}, a text that would gradually be incorporated into the English language editions of \textit{Lazarillo} just as the Dutch episode had been canonized in earlier editions.\textsuperscript{60} While the first and second parts were published separately in 1624 and 1631, in 1639 the first combined edition containing the original text and de Luna’s sequel was released. In the 1639 edition, the second part was clearly distinguished from the first by its own title page but in later editions the lines would be blurred between the two. Juan de Luna, who in truly picaresque fashion was chased out of Spain by the Inquisition and moved from France to England before becoming a Protestant minister in London, published his own English translation of \textit{Pursuit} in 1622.\textsuperscript{61} While Juan de Luna’s second

\textsuperscript{58} See Whitlock, 167. Despite Rowland’s adoption of some of Saugrain’s editorial decisions, it is clear that he used a Spanish source for the basis of his translation. See Santoyo, 34.
\textsuperscript{60} Juan de Luna, \textit{The pursuit of the historie of Lazarillo de Tormes Gathered out of the ancient chronicles of Toledo} (London: 1622), accessed via Early English Books Online (1/15/2014).
part is generally considered inferior to the first, in later editions sloppy editorial practices would fail to emphasize the distinct authorship of each part and treat them as a single text, creating yet another “final situation” for Lazarillo.

James Blakeston’s 1653 edition claims to restore the original text of Lazarillo, after the “mangling and curtailing [of] his ingenious History, by those who had the Licensing of Books in Salamanca.”62 Lazarillo had indeed been censored in Spanish editions and it appeared only in its “mangled” form (known as the Lazarillo Castigado) at the time. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English versions of the text were closer to the original in terms of clerical satire. The Lazarillo Castigado eliminated several episodes that emphasized clerical corruption but more subtly, the censored text shifted in emphasis from widespread institutional corruption to individual morality. Reyes Coll-Tellechea has compared the Castigado text to the original and found that: “the censor’s actions served to redirect the story of 1554 and to infuse it with an alternative ideology in order to make the story work in favor of the status quo as controlled by the royal court and the church.”63 She continues, “For the next three hundred years Spanish readers (including Mateo Alemán, Cervantes, and Quevedo) could only read López de Velasco’s [censored] version of the novel.”64 Turberville’s poem and Blakeston’s preface demonstrate that English language readers were well aware that Lazarillo was critical of Spanish social institutions. Blakeston claims to have access to an

62 Lazarillo, or, The excellent history of Lazarillo de Tormes, the witty Spaniard, both parts (London: 1653), 6. , accessed via Early English Books Online. All citations to this text refer to EEBO “Image” number, hereafter cited internally as Blakeston.
64 Ibid, 90.
uncensored text “by meeting with the original MS. while he abode in Toledo, which had not suffer’d the inquisitor’s hands” (6). Blakeston’s prefatory comments indicate a concern with preserving the original intent of the text despite the fact that his edition is, for the most part, a re-packaging of the Rowland translation. Blakeston perpetuates the image of Lazarillo as a subversive banned book.

Despite his claims otherwise, the main text of Blakeston’s edition has relatively few differences from the previous versions. It even preserves David Rowland’s name as translator on the title page. Blakeston’s edition was popular enough to displace former editions, and it was re-issued in 1655, 1669, and, 1677 with Juan de Luna’s “Second Part” included in the same volume. The main changes are the elimination of the “Prologue” and the inclusion of Juan de Luna’s sequel (following the precedent of the 1639 edition).65 Without the “Prologue,” Lazarillo is no longer teleologically driven toward explaining a “caso” or final situation. In fact, with the addition of de Luna’s continuation, the Blakeston edition takes the protagonist through another series of masters, a wild ride of fortunes and misfortunes that fail to conform to any of various narrative models put forth in the original text (devolution, education, overcoming adversity, exculpation). In de Luna’s sequel Lazarillo is reduced to hunger on more than one occasion but one of the episodes that most struck readers, describes Lazarillo abducted by sadistic sailors who disguise him as a “sea monster” and exploit his manufactured monstrosity in a travelling sideshow.

65 Rowland’s original translation had preserved the material censored by the Inquisition so Blakeston’s text does not do exactly what it claims to in improving upon previous editions. See also Julio-Cesar Santoyo, Ediciones y Traducciones, 131.
The late seventeenth-century editions of *Lazarillo* end in the protagonist’s death, as do eighteenth-century editions. Lazarillo’s troubles continue remorselessly until he throws himself on the mercy of a church where he collapses and dies, presumably in response to his endless distress. Pursued into the church by an angry mob, the hero seeks sanctuary from life’s endless ordeals. In the final paragraph, the narrator describes:

> the Sexton gave me the Cloth of a Tomb, to wrap my self in. I went into a corner, where I considered the crosses of Fortune, and how on every side man is beset with misery, and therefore I determined to abide in that Church, and there end my days (which, in regard of my former woes, could not be very long) and save the Priests a labor of fetching me elsewhere, after my death” (182-83).

The “final situation” in Blakeston’s edition is not complicity with a corrupt social order but death by attrition. Lazarillo is stripped of his dignity and reduced to shivering flesh, charitably covered with “the Cloth of a Tomb.” In this sense, Juan de Luna emphasizes bodily necessity not just as a propulsive force but as a marker of human finitude. Lazarillo can only bear so many misfortunes before he dies. The scene is undoubtedly infused with comic touches – especially Lazarillo’s gesture of “saving the priests a Labor of fetching me elsewhere.” Yet the scene’s stark portrayal of Lazarillo’s abjection can potentially be read as a demonstration of the limits of the body’s capacity for unbridled episodic exchangeability. Lazarillo’s labor is limited by his body’s physical capacity to stand up to repeated abuse in the form of starvation and beatings. Hunger provides the propulsive force in the original text and exhaustion provides closure, suggestive of a literary narrative anchored throughout in bodily necessity.

As in earlier English editions, Lazarillo’s own account is framed by paratextual commentary in Blakeston’s 1653 edition. A poem signed “T.P.” is appended, addressed to the “Publisher of the History” in place of Turberville’s poem:
We thank you for this Honest Cheat
That cozen’s nought but Time,
And shews when Lazaro would eat
Necessity’s no crime.
Who as his Wit did ebb or flow
Did want or get a Meal;
Tost by new Masters to and fro
Like a new Common-weal. (183)

As in Turberville’s poem, T.P. is interested in linking the narrative to a standard of law by which Lazarillo’s behavior is vindicated. Narrative is the instrument that “shews when LAZARO would eat / Necessity’s no crime.” To the extent that the narrative reflects on Lazarillo’s episodic adventures, it follows the “ebb” and “flow” of his wit, which is indexed through his ability to feed himself. The tone of the verses is undoubtedly jocular but T.P.’s reference to “a new Common-weal” would not have been lost on mid-seventeenth century readers. First published during the Interregnum, T.P.’s verses point to the fluctuations of Lazarillo’s well-being as something potentially analogous to the effects of political turmoil on collective well-being. T.P. is sensitive to the reading highlighted by the Dutch episode–political vicissitudes have economic consequences for all strata of society–in his description of Lazarillo being “Tost by new Masters.” Like Turberville (“without respect of place,”) T.P lauds the translation as erasing the distinction between foreign and domestic truth: “His Spanish is so English’d now / We know not which is which” (Blakeston 184). Such a pronouncement in one way comes off as a dust jacket blurb, or advertisement that the new (actually not new) translation is an improvement over the original. But it also suggests that the kind of critique that Lazarillo mounts against the Spanish administration could also be applicable to the contemporary English moment. T.P. sees English political instability as having the same implications for the hungry body as Spanish imperialism. T.P.’s verses remained in place in the 1655
and 1669 reprints of Blakeston’s edition and in the 1677 edition they were moved up front to the preface.

*Lazarillo* and other Spanish picaresque narratives would have had particular relevance for readers in the wake of the English Civil Wars, a period of intense crisis for the legitimacy of authority figures and social institutions. Nigel Smith has claimed that in this period “the boundaries and contents of genres seem to be the focus for the way in which seventeenth-century people came to know themselves, and a means by which they tried to transform their predicament, just as they sought for new, reformed or revived institutions to solve their problems.”66 Smith’s sensitivity to generic transformation over the revolutionary period in other domains fails to take account of the growing popularity of picaresque narrative in the period. It would be difficult to map *Lazarillo* onto any particular historical circumstance of the Civil War, but its fraught iteration of Lazarillo’s masters as tyrants may have struck a chord for readers of varied political affiliations. T.P.’s defense of theft in service of necessity perhaps anticipates the logic of the republican pamphlet *Killing No Murder* (1657), which subordinates the moral prohibition of murder to the political ideals of the people. “Necessity’s no crime” operates under a similar logic of competing legal imperatives as *Killing no Murder* by making Lazarillo into a representative figure of the commonwealth. In this allegorical reading, Lazarillo’s hunger indexes the failure of the state to provide conditions under which the commonweal is able to sustain itself.

Lazarillo’s episodic form contributes to the text’s potential for political allegory by suggesting that the Interregnum break with patrilineal succession unmoors history at large from its legitimate foundation. Lazarillo’s various masters are illegitimate figures of authority not only in that they instantiate corrupt schemes of government, but also in their seriality. Lazarillo’s hopefulness and disillusionment with each succeeding master contributes to a sense that it is not necessarily the blind man or the squire who bear the blame for improvidence and mismanagement of resources but the ubiquitous possessiveness of the society at large. By putting Lazarillo’s masters in serial relation, the text resists the reader’s urge to focus on any single corrupt figurehead as scapegoat. There is no villain to consolidate the moral animus of the narrative into a single incarnation of evil. Instead, Lazarillo asks the reader to see episodic narrative as the particular condition that exposes the pervasiveness of such corrupt practices. That is to say, under the regime of each particular master, Lazarillo finds a way to sustain himself, however precariously. But the seriality of Lazarillo’s career takes its toll by repeatedly disrupting, and ultimately exhausting, his capacity to adapt to new forms of domination.

3. “Nefarious facts”: Lazarillo among the Rogues

In the mid to late seventeenth century, the Blakeston edition circulated alongside the increasingly popular sub-genre of rogue literature. In Spain, the publication of Guzmán de Alfarache (1599, 1604) had immediately altered the way in which Lazarillo was read both domestically and abroad, eventually leading eighteenth-century booksellers
and nineteenth-century anthologists to package *Lazarillo* as rogue literature.\textsuperscript{67} It is important to note the differences in emphasis, style, and narrative structure between *Guzmán* and *Lazarillo* as the growing association between the two texts did much to obscure the significant contrasts between them. Aleman’s novel is similar to *Lazarillo* in making its erstwhile protagonist the product of a corrupt society, starting out destitute and penniless. Guzmán falls prey to con artists at roadside inns and goes hungry from time to time. But *Guzmán* is a very different kind of narrative than *Lazarillo*—six times longer than the original, published in Spain in two hugely popular installments. Over the course of the narrative Guzmán develops from victim to perpetrator of fraud and robbery, transforming from beggar to rogue. Aleman’s novel features a dynamic sense of the formation of character as contingent episodes solidify into patterns of behavior. Criminal acts are balanced out by moralizing asides as the first-person voice of Aleman’s protagonist alternates between narrative exposition and self-conscious digression, turning the episodes of Guzman’s life into occasions for essayistic meditations. James Mabbe’s 1622 translation titled *The Rogue* was reprinted six times in the seventeenth century (1623, 1630, 1634, 1655, 1656, 1685).

Though Aleman’s emphasis on the causal force of bodily necessity is less pervasive and less explicit than in *Lazarillo*, bodily necessity crops up in the narrator’s comments on the events he narrates. At one point, Guzmán advises employers to pay fair wages to servants to avoid theft, “And here I must not stick to tell the Masters

\textsuperscript{67} For a claim that *Guzmán* rather than *Lazarillo* is the archetypal picaresque text, see Alexander Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: the Picarsque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753* (Edinburgh, 1971), 22-27.
themselves, That a great part of this fault [for theft] is theirs; for that Servants wages (usually) are too short, and ill paid. For, if they be served by men, that are in necessity, and constrained by want, they shall find few of them faithful.”68 [“Gran culpa desto suelen tener los amos, dando corto salario y mal pagado porque se sirven de necesitados y dellos hay pocos que sean fieles.”]69 Guzmán points to necessity as a cause of theft and disruptor of social relations. His observation recalls Lazarillo’s rivalrous struggles with his masters, struggles provoked by hunger. Like Lazarillo, Aleman’s novel ascribes causal power to bodily necessity. Yet Aleman reformulates the conflict from a third-person perspective, petitioning his relatively well-heeled readers to recognize hunger as motive force, at least when it came to determining servants’ wages. Guzmán’s observation is realized in the next episode, in which the protagonist is caught filching from his master. Such a suggestive juxtaposition of social commentary and compromised action is characteristic of the narrator’s clever development of the apparent naivety of the protagonist akin to Lazarillo. Most readers regard Guzmán with skepticism, as an unreliable witness, who proffers apologetics for his own behavior in the guise of moral observations. One critic has described Guzmán as an “experiment with the power of writing to define its subject” through autobiography.70 This relatively common reading of Guzmán suggests that Aleman’s text builds on Rico’s Lazarillo; Guzmán

69 Mateo Aleman, Guzmán de Alfarache ed. Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Planeta, 1983), 296. All Spanish citations are to this edition.
70 Nina Cox Davis, Autobiography as Burla in the Guzmán de Alfarache (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 1991), 129.
instrumentalizes the narrative presentation in his own defense, making narrative structure (purposeful juxtaposition of episodes) a means of exculpatory ends.

Seventeenth-century editions reinforced the sense in which Lazarillo lacked the capacity for reflection, so that Aleman’s narrative constitutes an important revision of its model. Guzmán puts narrative exposition in the service of self-fashioning, a far more novelistic procedure than Lazarillo’s narrative demonstrates. Though many readers have conflated Guzmán’s editorializing and Lazarillo’s desperation, Aleman’s narrator was among the first to point out that self-definition through language is a privilege of social status. Just as Lazarillo emphasizes the impossibility of achieving narrative totality under the pressure of starvation, Guzmán also indicates that the power of self-definition is not available to the necessitous. In one of the most frequently quoted passages in Guzmán, the narrator discourses at length on the nature of poverty:

it is a dis-reputation, that drowns all the other good parts that are in man; it is a Disposition to all kind of evil; it is man’s most Foe; it is a Leprosie, full of anguish; it is a way that leads to Hell; it is a Sea, wherein our Patience is overwhelmed, our honor is consumed, our lives are ended, and our souls utterly lost, and cast away forever. (v.2, 128)

la pobreza [es] infamia general, disposición a todo mal, enemigo de hombre, lepra congojosa, camino del infierno, piélago donde se anega la paciencia, consumen las honras, acaban las vidas y pierden las almas. (353)

Mabbe’s translation attempts to capture some of Aleman’s stylistic flair, adapted in a crescendo of anguish rising on the tide of anaphora, but breaks with the original by inserting possessive pronouns into the last four phrases. In the original Spanish, Guzman’s account reflects on “la pobreza,” or poverty itself in abstraction of human subjects; Mabbe translates “our lives are ended, and our souls utterly lost,” joining ranks
for a moment with the ranks of the dispossessed in first-person singular.\textsuperscript{71} In emphasizing the bleak social conditions of poverty, Guzmán articulates the inability of the subject of poverty to tell his or her own story. Mabbe’s translation accentuates this failure by having the subject of necessity come into existence only to own up to his or her privation.

Guzmán’s speech on the subject reaches its climax in a series of metaphorical figures: “The Poor man is a kind of money, that is not current; the subject of every idle Housewife’s chat; the off-scum of the people; the dust of the street, first trampled under foot, and then thrown on the dung-hill; In conclusion, the Poor Man is the Rich man’s Ass” (v.2, 128) [“Es el pobre moneda que no corre, conseja de horno, escoria del pueblo, barreduras de la plaza y asno del rico” (353).] The subject of poverty is not only not an autobiographical subject but an object of the discourse of others, according to Guzmán’s account. He is a vagabond, a circulating object, regarded as human waste. In searching for the right comparison, Guzmán’s speech ends up taking the form of a list or a non-unified catalogue of metaphors. Guzmán lapses into a kind of episodic rhythm at the level of the sentence in abutting discrete figures of powerlessness against one another. Not only is Aleman’s poor man not an end in himself, he is “endless” in the sense that he is outside the circulation of instrumental relations that would emplot him within a single unifying narrative structure.

The popularity of James Mabbe’s \textit{The Rogue} inspired a bevy of imitations that lack the subtlety and richness of the original. Richard Head’s \textit{The English Rogue} (1664), the first and best of the bunch, was eventually followed by knock-offs like \textit{The French

Rogue (1704), The German Rogue (1720), The Highland Rogue (1723), and The Irish Rogue (1740). The national specifications of each imitation demonstrate that the picaresque inspired narrative forms that sought to comprehend international relations as well as individual events. By focusing on figures outside the social order, the picaresque tended to focus on vagrants, refugees, and orphans as emblematic figures of bodily necessity. Detached from the traditional social ties that define identity and relation, the body’s needs quickly come to the fore. Many of the latter “rogue” texts fall more into the category of true crime than picaresque, peppering sensationalized criminal biography with occasional picaresque touches instead of really engaging their putative model, Aleman’s Guzmán.

In The English Rogue, Richard Head’s narrator draws on Lazarillo as well as Guzmán to emphasize the failure of narrative totality to capture the episodic tumult of his life.72 Especially early on, the narrative fluctuates between presenting episodes motivated by biological necessity and what eventually turns into a seemingly endless string of criminal acts. Chapter headings announce “how he was pinched with hunger, and what ways he invented to kill it” and “He is driven to extreme necessity; he describes what it is to be indigent, by what he suffered in that condition.”73 The third-person perspective of

the chapter headings, in contrast to the first-person perspective of the chapters themselves, nudges the reader out of absorption in the sensationalist content of the narrative. The perspectival shift is a subtler version of the one that Henry Fielding would exploit almost a hundred years later by using the chapter headings of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* to disrupt the spell cast by the narrative proper. In Head’s text, the chapter headings call to mind the paratextual moves in the Rowland and Blakeston editions of *Lazarillo*, which rely on editorial vantage points to re-route the episodic flow of experience through prefaces, concluding poems, and marginal glosses. Such procedures suggest that narrative form itself, rather than the protagonist’s reflective consciousness, is the site of managing competing causal accounts and resultant conflicts of interpretation.

Meriton Latroon, the protagonist of *The English Rogue*, traces the origin of his career to a particular historical moment very much the way that *Lazarillo* couples the end of his career to one. Meriton ambivalently identifies the Irish rebellion as point of origin for understanding his biography:

> But since [the revolution], the concatenation of sins hath encompassed the whole series of my life. Now, to the intent I may deter others from perpetrating the like, and receive absolution (according as it is promised) upon unfeigned repentance and ingenuous confession of my nefarious facts, I shall give the readers a summary relation of my life. (7)

In the tangled grammar of the sentence, the narrator struggles to root through his memory to make a whole out of the fragments. Life is figured in episodic terms as a “series” and a “concatenation.” It is composed of “nefarious facts.” Head is particularly attracted to

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using the word “fact” in the now-obsolete sense of a crime. (Throughout *The English Rogue*, Meriton describes his crimes as facts nearly a dozen times.) Facts are both the empirical fragments of experience that constitute his episodic life and the truths that make his narrative believable. Meriton’s turn to the present moment—the time of writing—recalls Lazarillo’s similar turn at the end of the Rowland translation. (In a remarkable development, an eighteenth-century edition of *The English Rogue* went so far as to claim that the protagonist’s tears stain the pages, parodying *Pamela*.) It is, again, an instance of making the moment of composition an explicit component of narrative form, subjecting episodic experience to the unfinished labor of the present moment. Michael McKeon has suggested, “What is achieved by the picaresque, and by the several sorts of Protestant narrative that flourish in England after the Restoration, is a responsiveness to the factuality of individual life so intense that the dominance of overarching pattern is felt to be quite problematic.” *The English Rogue* attests to such a disjunction between narrative structure and “factuality,” which arises out of the unseemliness of its content. Richard Head’s use of the word “facts” is illustrative of how authors that were influenced by *Lazarillo* self-consciously deployed episodic narrative to stress the breakdown of overarching patterns.

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75 *The English rogue; or the life of Jeremy Sharp. To which is added a narrative of Mary Toft; of an extraordinary delivery of eighteen rabbets*, Vol. 3, (London: 1776), 153: “those bitter tears that now wet the paper as I write…” Note the coupling of the rogue’s life with the narrative of Mary Toft, as also juxtaposed in a different manner in Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle*.

76 McKeon, *Origins*, 98.
Meriton’s childhood years parallel passages of *Lazarillo* by derailing the possibility for growth or progress in favor of episodic incident or peripatetic rambling. Driven from Ireland after the rebellion with only a single mother to provide for him, Meriton is a refugee and a figure of stunted growth. While Lazarillo’s mother receives food in exchange for sexual favors, Meriton’s mother prostitutes her religious beliefs to suit the temperaments of charitable communities: “being a rigid Presbyterian at first, but that not proving so profitable, instantly transformed herself into a strict Independent” (13). Head maps episodic political developments during the civil war and interregnum onto Meriton’s mother’s religious opportunism. The narrator goes on to explain “in this manner we strolled or wandered up and down, being little better than mendicant itinerants. Staying so little time in a place, and my mother being more careful to get a subsistence than to season my better years with the knowledge of letters, I was ten years old before I could read.” (13) As *Lazarillo* only implicitly suggests, education (now associated with literacy) is subordinated to the struggle to survive. Meriton’s capacity for reflection will ultimately be the medium of his ability to transform “facts” into confessions. Though many found Meriton’s confession to be mere lip service designed to excuse the salacious content. *The English Rogue*’s failure to achieve a truly unified narrative is reflected in the series of sequels that followed close on its heels. Francis Kirkman published the second, third, and fourth installments of *The English Rogue* in 1671, 1674, and 1680. It seems he would have published another if the franchise hadn’t run out of steam.

In certain passages, Head’s text struggles to reconcile bodily necessity and criminality—two motive forces that vie for explanatory power in the narrative. Finding
himself hungry after setting out on his own, the narrator of *The English Rogue* reflects on necessity as impetus for his turn to criminal behavior in a passage that demonstrates ambivalence about the relationship between biological necessity and voluntary behavior:

Necessity is a thing better known by the effects than its character, and of all things the most insufferable; to prevent which, it puts a man on to venture upon all manner of dishonest and dangerous actions, suggesting strange imaginations, and desperate resolutions, soliciting things infamous, and attempting things impossible; the product of which is only disorder, confusion, shame, and in the end ruin. But when necessity shall conjoin with an evil disposition, a depraved nature, what horrid and nefarious facts will it not instigate that man to perpetuate? (34)

Head’s attention to the causality of necessity is reflected in his observation that most people only witness its “effects” but never its “character,” a formulation that anticipates Hume’s skepticism toward causality more broadly. In suggesting that the “character” of necessity hides behind its effects, Meriton implies that detecting the causal force of biological necessity requires a more scrupulous account of motivation. Carefully parsing his words in the next clause, Meriton slightly changes course and tells us that necessity “puts a man on” “dishonest and dangerous actions.” Meriton’s account is less urgent than its Spanish predecessors, suggesting that necessity contributes to “disorder confusion, shame, and in the end ruin” but it does not cause these things in and of itself. Meriton claims his “evil disposition” as the valve that permits all the “nefarious facts” to flow through it. By framing necessity in terms of disposition, Meriton defuses much of the justification based on bodily necessity that *Lazarillo’s* editors had emphasized as features of picaresque narrative. That is to say, Meriton claims that necessity and “evil disposition” are partners in crime rather than letting hunger itself determine the action.
Individual disposition might intensify the force of necessity’s promptings, “conjoin” with it to produce “nefarious facts.”

This key distinction shows that rogue literature should be distinguished from picaresque narrative in that the former essentializes the “disposition” of the protagonist whereas the latter derives its narrative structure from biological necessity. Both rogue literature and picaresque take serial form but the difference boils down to the way in which desire is distinguished from need through the unfolding of incidents. In that sense, The English Rogue reframes picaresque themes as rogue literature in its depiction of character as “evil disposition.” The frontispiece reinforces this principle theme in a verse caption to the portrait of the hero: “The Globe’s thy Study; for they boundless mind / On a less limit cannot be confined.” Meriton’s behavior is attributed to his insatiable appetite, the driving force of a “boundless mind.” In contrast to Lazarillo, who struggles to get the bare minimum sustenance, Meriton’s character is defined in opposition to any limit, not even the “Globe” itself.

Though picaresque and rogue literature derived their modes of seriality from different motive sources, late seventeenth-century editions either ignored or attempted to overcome the crucial difference. For instance, the unusual 1688 edition of Lazarillo adapts the text to the popularity of narratives such as Head’s The English Rogue. Though the 1688 edition follows the Blakeston edition in most details, it incorporates a short new sequel called “The Life and Death of Young Lazarillo.” The third installment in the trilogy purports to tell the story of the protagonist’s previously unmentioned offspring. Lazarillo Jr. is a rogue, who “steals” forth from him mother’s womb, compared in passing to Rabelais’s Gargantua. Consisting mostly of episodes pilfered from Guzmán, El
Buscón, and The English Rogue, the short narrative abruptly ends without warning. The narrator recounts young Lazarillo being pelted by vegetables by angry town-folk (as in Quevedo’s El Buscon), and suddenly concludes: “that is all we can find of the Acts and Deeds of Young Lazarillo, whose Unfortunate End was bemoaned by all that knew him.” The end of the 1688 edition highlights the difficulty of creating any kind of unity out of such materials, opting instead to make the lack of conclusion a mark of the text’s authenticity. The text is endless because its endpoint is as arbitrary as its continuation.

Despite its association with criminals and vagabonds, the growing body of episodic rogue literature in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was occasionally embraced by moralists. Richard Head’s use of the protagonist’s confession is a step in this direction but other authors sought to moralize the rogue as well. Moralists were able to recuperate rogue literature by emphasizing ends rather than causes of behavior. Teleological narrative structure was of utmost importance to how such readers interpreted rogue fiction. Illustrative of this point is the way in which Marquis d’Argens assesses the relative value of Don Quixote, Guzmán, and Lazarillo based on the way in which they manage to align moral behavior and narrative outcomes. Surprisingly, he writes of Aleman’s Guzmán’s superiority to Cervantes’s Don Quixote in moral terms:

[H]is Romance may even be of more Use, since, by painting in the strongest Colours the Errors and Disorders of civil Life, he makes it plainly appear, that in the End they must turn out in a very villainous Shape. I’m unwilling so much as to mention the Life of Lazarillo de Tormes, the Adventures of Mark d’Obregon, and twenty others of the same Kind, because they only contain the Lives of Beggars and Wretches, just as an infinite Number of sorry little French Romances are, composed

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77 The Pleasant adventures of the witty Spaniard, Lazarillo de Tormes (London: 1688), 203.
with a View of telling certain foolish, imaginary Adventures, with an Appearance, forsooth, of fine refin’d Sentiments. 78

Aleman’s novel is redeemed because of the narrative truth that it contains—“Disorders of civil life” (by which we can assume he means the petty thefts and corruption on almost every page) lead necessarily, as it were, to ruin. Narrative structure is the means by which errors and disorders “must turn out in a very villainous Shape.” Crucially, d’Argens dismisses Lazarillo and “others of the same kind because they only contain the Lives of Beggars and Wretches.” That is to say, the lives of criminals such as Guzmán can be turned to moral ends but beggars cannot be moralized. D’Argens applies aesthetic criteria to Aleman but he excludes Lazarillo on the basis of the limitations of their content.

Spanish adventures and “French Romances,” grouped by an evasive categorical logic, are both foolish and seemingly “infinite.” Such narratives “only contain” lives of beggars, without the possibility of gratifying poetic justice of Aleman’s Guzmán. Beggars have no teleology and so their narratives resist the conjunction of morality and aesthetic form. What d’Argens characterizes as “infinite” is picaresque narrative itself, though the term “picaresque” was not available to him.

Though the term was not coined until the early nineteenth century, many readers recognized some kind of affiliation between Lazarillo, Guzmán and a shifting roster of other texts. Cervantes was the first to suggest the existence of such a category. Ginés de Pasamonte, itinerant rogue, tells Don Quixote of his autobiographical project, which is

78 Marquis d’Argens, Jewish letters: or, a correspondence philosophical, historical and critical, betwixt a Jew and his correspondents, in different parts. Tome II (Newcastle: 1740), 120, accessed via Eighteenth Century Collections Online (1/15/2014). Citation refers to image number.
meant to eclipse “Lazarillo de Tormes, y para todos cuantos de aquel género se han escrito o escribieron”\textsuperscript{79} [“Lazarillo de Tormes, and all those books of that kind that have been or will be written.”] Essential to Cervantes’s joke is that Ginés has not and cannot finish his book, because “¿Cómo puede estar acabado … si aun no está acabado mi vida?”\textsuperscript{80} [“How could it be finished… when my life is not finished?”] Marquis d’Argens’s assessment (about a hundred year and forty later) shows why Cervantes’s joke captures something fundamental about picaresque narrative, in its nervous dismissal of Lazarillo. Indeterminate narrative outcomes elude certain kinds of judgments because they are endless, though they can be dismissed in aesthetic terms as beneath consideration. Episodic narrative, with its lack of a final situation, eludes the moral logic that pairs good deeds with good outcomes and evil deeds with evil outcomes. All the weight falls on the capacity of the protagonist for reflection and transformation. The protagonists of picaresque narratives have no capacity for reflective self-consciousness and so they are not as useful as moral exempla.

While for readers like d’Argens, the distinction between Guzman and its counterparts was of paramount importance, others categorized rogue narratives by separating Spanish originals from English adaptations. In response to The English Rogue, William Winstanley wrote the following doggerel verses in 1674:

\begin{quote}
What Gusman, Buscon, Francion, Rablais writ,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79}Miguel Cervantes, Don Quixote de la Mancha ed. Florencio Sevilla Arroyo (New York: Vintage, 2010), 229.
\textsuperscript{80}Ibid, 230. For a claim based on this passage as to the centrality of the picaresque to Cervantes’s novel, see Claudio Guillén, “Genre and Countergenre: The Discovery of the Picaresque” in Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History (Princeton: 1971), 135-158.
I once applauded for most excellent Wit;
But reading thee, and thy rich Fancies store
I now condemn what I admir’d before.
Henceforth Translations may pack away, be gone
No Rogue so well-writ as the English one.\(^{81}\)

For Winstanley, English adaptation is posited as an improvement on the original, rather than a knock-off. *The English Rogue* was one in a series of local adaptations to what was perceived as an easily imitated and improved-upon template. Thomas Dangerfield’s fascinating *Don Tomazo* (1680) adapts some of the features of the picaresque in a text that, like Head’s *The English Rogue*, starts out as narrative of starvation and transforms into chronicle of dastardly deeds. Dangerfield’s protagonist develops from a hungry vagabond into an insatiable criminal mastermind in rapid order: “His tutoress Fortune had a mind to keep him fasting on purpose, to put him upon trials of skill. She knew necessity and the lowness of his pocket would soon constrain him to summon his wits to a consultation for replenishment.”\(^{82}\) Like Lazarillo and Guzmán, who both claim that their wits are sharpened by hunger, Dangerfield suggests that hunger influences behavior and forms character. Fortune fashions Don Tomazo into an arch-rogue who delights in ambitious capers, through the constraints of necessity.

*Don Tomazo*’s narrator draws a distinction, though, between the protagonist and Spanish precursors: “See here the difference between a Spanish and an English gusman: the one pursuing a poor, hungry plot upon his penurious master’s bread and cheese, the other designing to grasp the riches of the fourth part of the world by the ruin of the


national commerce.” (390) Such passages suggest that English readers were capable of making distinctions between *Lazarillo* and the criminal biographies that followed in its wake. Dangerfield seems to suggest that English “gusmans” are “improvements” on their Spanish predecessors in vicious behavior as well as (as Winstanley suggested) writing. Dangerfield’s opposition between Spanish starvation and English “national commerce” demonstrates that English adaptations of picaresque narratives also took on jingoistic connotations, marking out distinctions between Spanish and English cultural contexts. But they also used these cultural contexts as emblematic of distinct modes of being to reflect on the distinction between narratives driven by subsistence and narratives driven by acquisitiveness. In making such distinctions, authors suggested that biological necessity was a concept that was linked not just to the body itself but also to views of what constitutes the world itself.

4. *Lazarillo* in the Eighteenth Century

A significant number of editions of Spanish picaresque texts were published in the first decade of the eighteenth century. One of the largest collections of such material, *The Spanish Libertines: or the Lives of Justina, The Country Jilt; Celestina, The Bawd of Madrid; and Estevanillo Gonzales, The most Arch and Comical of Scoundrels* (1707) contained a massive trove of material newly translated by John Stevens, including Francisco Úbedo’s *La picara Justina* (1605) and the anonymous *La vida y hechos de Estebanillo González, hombre de buen humor* (1646), though *La Celestina* had been translated in the previous century. Producing these new translations would have
represented a significant undertaking and demonstrates the enormous popularity of rogue fiction in the early eighteenth century. An advertising blurb for *Spanish Libertines* falsely boasts that Estebanillo was the “Predecessor and Tutor to Guzman and Lazarillo de Tormes.”83 The same year, Francisco de Quevedo’s complete works, including the picaresque narrative *El Buscón*, were published. A completely new translation of *Guzmán* followed in 1708, totaling over a thousand pages in two volumes. 1708 also brought the first publication of the Bonwick *Lazarillo*. Every major Spanish picaresque text was published in a new English edition in two short years, 1707-08.

Claudio Guillén has suggested, “The picaresque novel prepares for or follows, apparently, periods of full novelistic bloom.”84 Our sense of the picaresque should be modified to accommodate the fact that picaresque texts were repeatedly re-issued during the eighteenth century. It is difficult not to consider the implication that even Guillén relegates picaresque to the status of fertilizer in literary historical terms, yet perhaps it would be more proper to say that the picaresque survives alongside the rise of the novel, as well as “preparing” for its full bloom. To get a better sense of what the picaresque meant in the eighteenth century, it is important to read the texts that were actually available during the period.

84 Guillén, “Towards a Theory,”
Table 2. This table shows all eighteenth-century editions of *Lazarillo*. Note that the 1777 edition introduced an epitaph, creating another “ending” for the narrative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>Edition</th>
<th>Prologue</th>
<th>Ending</th>
<th>Verse Epilogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1708</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Printed for R. Bonwick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1726</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Printed for R. and J. Bonwick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1745</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Printed for S. Bladon</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Epitaph</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Printed by J. Bell</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Epitaph</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unless they visited the libraries of antiquaries, eighteenth-century English readers of *Lazarillo* encountered an unfortunate text that disguised itself as rogue literature. The Bonwick edition was first published in 1708, then republished twice with minor revisions in 1726 and 1745 (Edinburgh). The text is an anonymous re-translation the French edition of Jean-Antoine Charnés (1688), following revisions of George de Backer (1698). The timeline suggests that *Lazarillo* was continually republished alongside the canonical British novels. It was published in the same year as *Gulliver’s Travels*, just after Defoe’s novels had made their first impact. It seems to have been published again after the first wave of mid-century novels by Richardson and Fielding though we can’t be sure of the exact year of the Edinburgh edition. Two new editions came out in the latter part of the century, in 1777 and 1789, after Burney’s *Evelina* and during a period of experimentation with narrative forms. Though it is impossible to be certain exactly what motivated booksellers to print *Lazarillo*, it is clear that new developments in narrative

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85 The year of the Edinburgh edition is uncertain but scholars have tend to favor 1745.  
form were accompanied by renewals of interest in older picaresque texts. Just as new translations and editions of *Don Quixote* accompanied the rise of the novel, the same was also true for *Lazarillo*.  

To the extent that critics have sought an explanation for the continuing existence of picaresque in the eighteenth century, they have tended to misconstrue the relationship between texts like *Lazarillo* and rogue literature. Many critics have failed to make the important distinction between different motive forces operating within the picaresque tradition, perhaps misled by overly broad modal approaches to the genre. Lazarillo’s hunger is different than Meriton’s evil disposition and both are different from Gil Blas’s ambition for social mobility. Deidre Lynch, for example, argues that the “traditions of picaresque narrative” underpin Smollett’s novels as well as the emergent sentimental novel. She suggests “their allegiance to a logic of parataxis that puts the narrative part before the whole that that seems to emphasize the particular character portrait and play down the specimen’s relation to the impersonal patterns of human nature. Accumulating incident, a picaresque can begin again and again.”  

Like Locke’s model of the tabula rasa, Lynch argues that the picaresque “has no predetermined limit” (86). While this was true of much rogue literature, which frankly depicts acquisitiveness and global accumulation as “boundless” processes, *Lazarillo* is a text that underscores the limits of

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narrative and of the human body. The narrative can only persist as long as the human body can support its trials and tribulations. This is especially true of the versions of *Lazarillo* that were printed in the eighteenth century.

Perhaps part of the reason that critics have conflated the picaresque with rogue literature is that eighteenth-century editions sought to market *Lazarillo* as such. The Bonwick edition greets the reader with a debonair portrait of the hero—one eye and one half of his mustache obscured by shadow under the curved brim of a plumed hat, with one crafty hand poised on his chest as if in self-introduction and a second hand curling restlessly at his waist. Lazarillo is caped and dressed respectably, hardly the starving beggar of the original text or the unfortunate vagabond of the sequel but the Spanish rogue of popular rogue literature and restoration drama. The portrait depicts the mythic archetype of the Spanish rogue, rather than anything one would dream of after reading the text. A caption boasts:

> The man whose picture here you see, a thousand pranks has played. A rogue he was, & none could be more dexterous at his Trade. He took what Shape he pleas’d to take, was often Up & down. Cou’d either be a Saint or Rake, a courtier or a Clown.89

The verses, like the portrait, convey something that *Lazarillo* had picked up in association with his rogue cohort rather than an impression that would be derived from the text itself. *Lazarillo* had become another rogue to book-sellers, who, despite the marked differences between them, lumped Spanish picaresque texts together under the

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89 *The Life and Adventures of that most witty and ingenious Spaniard, Lazarillo de Tormes* (Edinburgh, 1745), 3. Further quotations to this edition refer to the page number of the text and will be cited internally.
rubric of rogue literature. Lazarillo’s transformation into a rogue seems to reflect attitudes like that of Marquis d’Argens, who found criminality easier to categorize than sheer poverty. Readers expecting to encounter the light-hearted adventures of a dapper Spanish rogue, which the frontispiece portrait and title page suggest, would have been surprised to find the desperate struggles of a man beaten down by adversity.

In accounting for its subject matter, the Bonwick edition took a more explicitly biographical form than previous editions. The title page proclaims: “THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES Of that most witty and ingenuous Spaniard, Lazarillo de Tormes: CONTAINING A great Variety of humourous Exploits in the uncommon Fortunes and Misfortunes of his Life, from his Cradle to his Grave Written by Himself” (4). As in Blakeston’s edition, the prologue is eliminated and all narrative logic is dictated, as the title page suggests by the documentation of “life and adventures” from “his cradle to his grave.” The edition presents first and second parts as a seamless unity, containing the Dutch episode (clipped now of its final lamentation) as well as Lazarillo’s final breakdown in the church. The force of biological necessity still exerts itself in Lazarillo’s younger years but in Juan de Luna’s sequel, fortune is a byword for a world abandoned by providence.

90 I follow the Bonwick edition’s usage here in using the diminutive version of Lázaro’s name, even in his adulthood. While the 1554 Spanish text grants the adult protagonist a measure of maturity in referring to him as Lázaro, eighteenth-century English editions (including the Bonwick and the 1777 and the 1789 editions) erased the distinction between child and adult by referring to him throughout by the diminutive. While the difference is probably the result of careless editorial practices, the effect is a denial of growth and progress.
While eighteenth-century editions of *Lazarillo* deviated in many ways from the original, some of the changes point to efforts of assimilating novelistic techniques to the Spanish text. As suggested, the Bonwick *Lazarillo* proclaims itself to be an autobiographical document and, anticipating *Robinson Crusoe* by a decade, contains the words “Written by Himself” on the title page. The anonymous sixteenth-century author had not accounted for Lázaro’s ability to read and write but eighteenth-century editions (following the French edition they used as text) offered an explanation. In the same passage in which Lazarillo reflects on the two things that keep him from leaving the priest of Maqueda, the Bonwick edition interjects new reasoning: “Besides these, I had another important Reason, not to leave so soon the Curate’s Service: He had already taught me to read, and I was beginning to write; but had not then learn’d enough to qualify my self for future Business” (37). To the already tangled cluster of motivations influencing Lazarillo’s behavior, the eighteenth-century edition adds a concern with writing itself. The added paragraph addresses potential disbelief on the part of readers who might wonder how a distressed servant might be able to write his own autobiography. Starving to death and wasting away, Lazarillo calmly decides to remain with his master in order to improve his future business prospects. The turn to “future Business” does not quite fit with the previous two explanations, suggesting that the added passage might add another layer of irony. Lazarillo’s concern with “future Business” is never to be realized.

91 The passage on Lazarillo’s literacy seems to have appeared first in George de Backer’s seventeenth-century text, which remained the standard French edition at the time.
To the extent that any concluding synthesis comes to consolidate the sheer catalogue of experience, Lazarillo’s increasingly cynical reflections on the overarching pattern of his life dispute the possibility. The protagonist admits defeat in attempting to make sense out of the random unfolding of events. Near the end of the eighteenth-century text, having been beaten by his master to the point of vomiting “the little Matter I had to eat” and unjustly fired from another dead-end job, the protagonist tells the reader:

I began to revolve in my Mind the manifold Misfortunes of my unhappy Life, since the Day of my entering into the blind Man’s Service till that very Time, and plainly saw, that it is not rising up early, sitting up late, and Abundance of Toil and Labour, but the Blessing of God alone that maketh rich. (230)

The contents of Lazarillo’s mind do not so much reflect and synthesize as “revolve” his previous experiences. He contests any kind of meritocratic ideal by contrasting his own life with the life of a productive laborer. His negative snapshot of this ideal takes the form of an industrious temporality (“rising up early, sitting up late, and Abundance of Toil and Labour”) that is stripped of its potential value. The seriality of Lazarillo’s life dispels the possibility of individual economic progress throughout the narrative.

It might be suggested that the editors of the Bonwick edition intended Lazarillo to be read as a jestbook, with such troubles constituting nothing more than fuel for the hardened reader’s mirth. Though this may well have been true, some readers understood Lazarillo quite differently. Jean-Jacques Rousseau makes a brief allusion to the “sea monster” episode, using it as an illustration in one of his late philosophical texts, seemingly unaware of any comic implications (as well as being unaware that the episode

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was part of a spurious sequel).\textsuperscript{93} Even in the early nineteenth century, William Hazlitt discusses \textit{Lazarillo} in terms that demonstrate sensitivity to its predominant focus on bodily necessity. He writes that \textit{Lazarillo} “treats of only one subject, that of eating, or rather the possibility of living without eating. Famine is here framed into an art, and feasting is banished far hence.”\textsuperscript{94} Hazlitt suggests that \textit{Lazarillo} subjects its protagonist to “a perpetual adjournment of this necessary process” – that is staving off hunger. “The quantity of food proper to keep body and soul together is reduced to a \textit{minimum}; and the most uninviting morsels with which Lazarillo meets once a week as a God’s-send, are pampered into the most sumptuous fare by a long course of inanition” (111). Hazlitt’s description makes it clear that even though he understood the text to be written in a comic mode, it constituted a kind of bodily necessity. Despite the fact that some readers may have treated \textit{Lazarillo} as comic material (as some readers also treated Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Laurence Sterne) it never disqualified the text from also serving to provoke thought on the nature of biological necessity.

Two late eighteenth-century editions of \textit{Lazarillo} (1777 and 1789) distill the contradictions of the narrative into a striking figure by concluding in an epitaph. As a concentration of the salient episodes of the protagonist’s life, the epitaph recapitulates the problems of narrative form that have been thematized in the text throughout its publication history. The words of the epitaph are present in the earlier Bonwick editions but the 1777 edition adds a transcription of the epitaph, represented typographically:

Here lies
Brother Lazarillo Gonzales
Surnamed De Tormez;
WHO,
After having acted,
Upon the Theatre of this World,
The Personage of
A Blind Man’s Boy,
Clerk to a Country Priest,
And Servant of all Sorts of Masters,
Water Carrier, Public Cryer,
Indian Merchant,
Sea Monster, Gentleman Usher, &c.
Died a HERMIT,
The 12th of September, 1540,
Aged 39 Years, 3 Months, and 11 Days.
R.I.P.\(^95\)

The commemorative gesture can only be read as an ironic parody of epitaph in its
catalogue of indignity and misfortune. The epitaph most strikingly resembles the title
page of an early eighteenth-century novel, flaunting its variety and whetting the reader’s
appetite for tantalizing content. Lazarillo’s life is textualized into a chronicle of
“Personage,” tabulated and abridged with an “&c.” His end becomes a kind of beginning
by taking the form of a title page and the epitaph bespeaks the difficulty of totalizing his
biography into a pithy commemorative phrase. The phrase “having acted, / Upon the
theatre of this World” calls attention to the dramatic quality of the protagonist’s life,
perhaps as a way of contrasting episodic seriality of his life to drama’s traditional unities.
The context of this ironic epitaph is the “World,” perhaps to be regarded as a
commonplace but perhaps a reference to the frequently commented upon global
interpretative horizon of the narrative.

\(^{95}\) The Life and Adventures of Lazarillo Gonsales, Surnamed de Tormes (London, 1777),
167.
Lazarillo’s epitaph could even be construed as a response to Thomas Gray’s popular “Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard,” which extolled the “useful toil” of the poor. The speaker of Gray’s poem famously defends the “short and simple annals of the poor” from the sneers of “Ambition.” In light of Lazarillo, the phrase rings untrue in both narrative and ideological terms. The lives of the poor might be relatively short in chronological time (Lazarillo dies age 39) but lives such as Lazarillo’s are long and far from simple in terms narrative exposition. The struggle to survive endured by Lazarillo does not lend itself to any kind of idealizing template for summary treatment.

Nevertheless, like earlier verse prologues, the epitaph carves out a space for reflection on the meaning of Lazarillo’s life. The epitaph reframes his first-person speech into material for the reader’s reflection on disorderly life.

In this way, eighteenth-century editions of Lazarillo respond to emergent modern protocols for making prose narrative believable at the same time they experiment with procedures for representing the real vicissitudes of the lives of the poor. But to some readers, picaresque narrative also demonstrated some of the problems with the new novel. First-person testimony in and of itself does not constitute novelistic realism; it would have to be complemented by a formal imperative to unity, as realized in a novel like Fielding’s Joseph Andrews (1742). In the preface to his satirical The History of Pompey the Little (1751), Francis Coventry characterized the contemporary moment as a “Life-writing Age … where no Character is thought too inconsiderable to engage the public Notice, or too abandoned to be set up as a Pattern of Imitation. The lowest and most contemptible Vagrants, Parish-Girls, Chamber-Maids, Pick-Pockets, and Highwaymen,
find Historians to record their Praises, and Readers to wonder at their exploits. “⁹⁶ Coventry likely had picaresque texts in mind with such an observation. Brean Hammond has argued that mid-century authors such as Coventry and Fielding defined their projects in relief from “the rash of low-life biographical fictions pouring off the press.”⁹⁷ Though the rise of the novel has been claimed by the middle class in contemporary scholarship, its roots decidedly belong to “the lowest and most contemptible Vagrants” that Coventry seems so worried about. Picaresque narratives like Lazarillo stake their epistemological claims on resisting the urge to narrative totality rather than consolidating them through the reflective processes of the protagonist.

⁹⁶ Francis Coventry, Pompey the Little (London: 1751), 8.
Chapter Two:

Above the Power of Human Nature: Self-Preservation in Daniel Defoe’s Narratives

“Necessitas non habet legem” —Anonymous Latin proverb

“Self-Preservation is the only Law,
That does Involuntary Duty Draw;
It serves for Reason and Authority,
And they’ll defend themselves, that know not why.”—Daniel Defoe, The True-Born Englishman

The epigraphs that open this chapter demonstrate two ways that necessity and law have been theorized in relation to one another—either by pitting necessity against law or by considering necessity as constitutive of its own law. In Defoe’s The True-Born Englishman (1701), the proverbial conflict between necessity and law is recast in the language of contemporary political theory through the use of the term “Self-Preservation,” a modern locution that posits the necessity of individual survival as an impetus for the fabrication of social bonds. What Defoe suggests here is that self-preservation “serves for” or acts in lieu of “Reason and Authority.” Despite this radical displacement, Defoe implies that deviations from “Reason and Authority” only appear to be lawless because we fail to recognize the law-like regularity of self-preservation’s operations. By claiming that self-preservation embodies its own form of law, Defoe

98 In the early modern period, the Latin proverb was often translated into English as “Nede hath no lawe,” suggesting that bodily necessity in particular should be regarded as an indomitable force that defies legal stricture. See Langland, Piers Ploughman, Passus. 23, line 10.; John Skelton, Colin Cloute, l. 865. In its philosophical sense, Thomas Reid quotes the proverb as “Necessity has no law.” See Reid, Essays on the Active Powers, 261.

draws on a traditional distinction between positive law and natural law. In the broader
context of his writings, Defoe leverages this distinction to argue that manifestations of
natural law—exemplified as the urgent demands of bodily necessity—suspend all moral
prohibitions and voluntary contracts. According to Defoe, the pressures that motivate
social life are not fully representable in terms of philosophical concepts or political
institutions because reason does not have access to the natural law that determines
behavior in extreme circumstances.

This chapter explores Defoe’s many experiments in literary form that attempt to
account for just what Defoe means by “Self-Preservation” and how it overturns both
“Reason and Authority.” During Defoe’s lifetime, the relationship between the individual
subject of self-preservation and the institutions of social authority had been radically
revised by John Locke’s model of the social contract, which suggests that individual
agents bring civil society (and with it the rule of law) into being through their consent.
For Locke and the philosophical tradition that he drew upon, self-preservation is
consubstantial with “Reason and Authority,” rather than being at odds with them. Defoe’s
writings represent bodily necessity as the blind spot in social contract theory by insisting
on the power of self-preservation to displace the self.

Many critics have addressed Defoe’s ideas about natural law, though they have
most often remained committed to the vocabulary of liberal political theory that Defoe’s
writings resist. Maximilian Novak observes, “For Defoe and his contemporaries,
Necessity indicated a state of desperation, usually associated with starvation and
destitution, in which the victim is forced to choose between certain death or a life
prolonged only by violating the laws of society, religion, or personal honour.”

The proverbial conflict between necessity and law structures Novak’s description of the plight of Defoe’s hungry protagonists. By contrast, I argue that, for Defoe, at a certain (impossible to identify) point, bodily necessity compromises the capacity to make rational choices, forced or not. Since the Lockean model of the social contract is premised on consent, Defoe’s protagonists, who will preserve themselves “they know not why,” cannot properly be considered voluntary subjects.

The narrators of Defoe’s novels have often been held up as exemplars of individual autonomy, whose narratives chart the possibilities of the individual (political, economic, and philosophical) to shape his or her own fate. Perhaps the most extreme version of this claim belongs to Nancy Armstrong, who sees Defoe as the pioneer of individualist ethos of modernity. John Richetti claims that Defoe’s fictions should be understood as a “means of promoting the self by establishing its primacy as the perceiver and guarantor of reality.” The autonomy of the epistemological as well as the political subject is at the heart of this claim. Defoe’s protagonists are subjects of knowledge as they exert “perfect self-possession” over their own narratives vis-à-vis the reflexive self-

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102 Armstrong claims that “the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same.” She goes on to associate Defoe’s individualism with his use of the picaresque. See Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia, 2005), 3-6.

consciousness that they use to separate themselves (i.e. achieve autonomy) from the vicissitudes of experience and the social world they inhabit. Yet if we take Defoe at his word that bodily necessity is a power that circumvents cognitive processing, neither knowledge nor self-possession is entirely possible. In other words, Defoe’s writings cast doubt on whether there exists a self to preserve without means to sustain the body that houses it.

As evidence for my claims, I point to the narrative structure of Defoe’s novels as well as his explicit claims about necessity. Because bodily necessity substitutes itself for the rational subject, it undermines the developmental trajectory of character, imposing its own law on the confluence of moral, political, and philosophical faculties that supposedly constitute the autonomous individual that drives narrative development. Critics have long struggled to reconcile the loose threads of Defoe’s novels with linear and progressive narrative templates, such as spiritual conversion, maturation, or the achievement of self-knowledge. Moll Flanders is especially illustrative of the conflict that ensues between individual autonomy and bodily necessity, as the protagonist repeatedly struggles to attain some measure of agency over her situation, which is ruptured by forces beyond her control. My reading suggests that the protagonist’s repeated struggles to reconcile the impetus of bodily necessity with her moral growth creates an ironic conflict between self-

knowledge and narrative structure (the developmental form of the subject of knowledge). Language is the medium in which the subject of experience asserts mastery over her experiences (both retrospectively and rhetorically) yet, for reasons that I will lay out over the course of this chapter, bodily necessity resists being represented and disrupts the forward movement of narrative through displacements and inconsistencies. By arguing that the subject of *Moll Flanders* is not actually Moll Flanders but necessity itself, I challenge the critical tendency to regard Defoe as champion of individual autonomy.

**States of Nature**

Defoe’s couplets in *The True-Born Englishman* use the term “Self-Preservation” in a different sense from the social contract theorists. Whereas Defoe argues that self-preservation subverts “Reason and Authority,” political philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke had argued for a fundamental compatibility between self-preservation, reason, and authority. The alignment of these terms differed from thinker to thinker but the association between reason and self-preservation comes out of the tradition of natural law. Long before seventeenth-century philosophers emphasized the role of self-preservation in a state of nature, Thomas Aquinas argued that reason was an innate faculty granted to human beings, which is associated with collective preservation. Aquinas’s writings were of major importance in the way that seventeenth-century
philosophers and jurists discussed natural law and adapted it to modern sociopolitical realities.\textsuperscript{105}

One of the main ways in which Aquinas laid the groundwork for seventeenth-century natural law writing was by emphasizing the human body’s faculties for self-defense and subsistence as the one of the practical bases of political community. Aquinas’s ideas on the subject are worth quoting at length because, as we will see, Defoe was familiar with the basic argument in its Thomistic form as well as its Lockean variation:

\begin{quote}
If it were proper for man to live in solitude, as many animals do, he would need no other guide towards his end. But \textit{man is by nature a social and political animal}, who lives in a community: more so, indeed, than all other animals; and \textit{natural necessity shows why this is so}. For other animals are furnished by nature with food, with a covering of hair, and with the means of defence, such as teeth, horns or at any rate speed in flight. But man is supplied with none of these things by nature. Rather, in place of all of them reason was given to him.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

In seeking to establish the venerable claim that man is “social and political animal,” Aquinas points to necessity as both impetus for and evidence of human sociability by saying “natural necessity shows why” individuals form social bonds. For Aquinas, the respective endowments of “natural necessity” bequeathed to various species of animals serve as confirmation of the traditional argument from design, the idea that biological form reflected divine purpose. Just as “teeth” and “horns” serve as “means of defence,”

\textsuperscript{105} See James Tully, \textit{A Discourse on Property: John Locke and His Adversaries} (Cambridge, 1980). For example, see 64-79. More recently see John Hittinger, \textit{Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Democratic Theory} (Lanham, 2002).

human reason can also be seen as an instrumental capacity in service of natural means and ends.

Aquinas dwells on the fact that reason itself is not sufficient to provide for man but it provides the conditions for the establishment of community as a *means* of subsistence. In this passage, reason is positioned as a kind of substitute faculty to compensate for the physical deficiencies intrinsic to human beings. Aquinas goes on to describe how reason contributes to human community by providing the faculty of speech (reason as *ratio*, as Hobbes would later point out) and leads to a basic division of labor (6). In these ways, reason was not just regarded as a faculty for individual preservation but also as the foundation of collectivity. Seventeenth-century political thinkers would put forth arguments that used many of the same basic ingredients, though with different results.

Self-preservation was a key component of Hugo Grotius’s *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625). Grotius describes self-preservation through an act of reduction, leveling distinctions between humans and animals, rather than emphasizing differences, as Aquinas did. Self-preservation is “that Instinct whereby every animal seeks its own Preservation, and loves its Condition, and whatever tends to maintain it.”

Grotius employs a notion of self-preservation that categorically reduces economic interest to the level of animal instinct, rather than seeing it as a specifically human capacity. Regarding self-preservation as an impulse to “maintain” whatever condition an animal finds itself in

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sets in motion inevitable conflicts between agents, who each have a stake in establishing and maintaining their respective states of equilibrium.

In the process of naturalizing self-preservation, Grotius redeployed the language of political association in his defense of private enterprise, rather than directing it toward the community, as Aquinas had done. Whereas classic republican thought had attributed the power of executive authority solely to sovereign states, Grotius was the first to attribute the rights of war to private entities. Richard Tuck has argued that according to Grotius, sovereign entities were “formed by the voluntary union of individuals to make civil society” (82-83) and therefore “there is no significant moral difference between individuals and states, that both may use violence in the same way and for the same ends” (85). The upshot of Grotius’s claim about the sovereignty of a given “voluntary union” was that transnational corporations could claim the same military right of “self-preservation” that was attributed only to the respublica in classic political theory. Martine Julia van Ittersum has argued that Grotius employed the rhetoric of self-preservation in order to justify military aggression in defense of trade routes that were deemed “necessary” by Dutch commercial interests. Grotius’s vested interest in Dutch colonialism clearly influenced his contribution to international politics by using the notion of self-preservation as a mode of treating economic (and military) behavior as an outgrowth of modes of subsistence.

Though these jurisprudential theorizations seem far removed from Defoe, disputations on the nitty-gritty of international law formed the basis of countless issues of *The Review* and helped to shape Defoe’s notion of political subjecthood. As Katherine Clark points out, Defoe quoted Grotius more often than Locke in his political treatise, *Jure Divino*.\textsuperscript{110} Grotius’s arguments demonstrate the strange exchangeability of the subject of self-preservation. By appealing to the universality of animal instinct, Grotius contends that the difference between private corporations and sovereign states was negligible. By contrast, Defoe was suspicious of the appeal to our base nature as justification for commercial enterprise.

For Grotius, it was important to maintain a distinction between what he regarded as a necessity and existing social institutions because extreme necessity justified commercial interests against the sovereignty of states. In *On the Law of War and Peace*, Grotius argues “in all Matters of human Institution, Cases of extreme Necessity, by which all Things return to a mere State of Nature, seem to be excepted” (570). Grotius imputes a temporality to his opposition as he positions necessity as prior to “human Institution” through the prospect of returning “to a mere State of Nature.” Though not developed into the kinds of fleshed-out narrative that would characterize later contractarian thought, in Grotius’s theoretical formulation, the phrase “state of nature” is already opposed to political authority in a temporal relationship.

Grotius’s opposition between “extreme Necessity” and “human Institution” descends from Aquinas’s thought on natural law. In the Thomistic natural law tradition, 

“lower things are ordained for the purpose of supplying man’s necessities.” The implications are that subsistence outweighs private ownership in the natural law scheme. Aquinas contends, “In cases of necessity all things are common property” (216). The subordination of private property rights to bodily necessity was a commonplace of natural law theory that reappears as a component of Locke’s *Second Treatise*.\(^{111}\) Ironically, Grotius used the natural law argument, which appears to be intended to exonerate paupers for crimes of necessity, to provide an argument for legitimacy for colonial aggression.

Thomas Hobbes followed Grotius in using the notion of self-preservation as a major component of his model of the state of nature. Srinivas Aravamudan has argued that Hobbes, like Grotius, used the discourse of political sovereignty as a legitimating theory for colonial policy.\(^{112}\) Like Grotius, Hobbes derives much of his vocabulary from the discourse of natural law, though more explicitly translated his terms into military vocabulary. Hobbes refers to state of nature as the “state of war,” recalling the title of Grotius’s treatise at the same time that he indicates that the political turmoil of the Civil War served as one point of reference for the hypothetical state of nature. Sheldon Wolin emphasizes the specific power of the English civil war to influence Hobbes: “A civil war was in the nature of a ‘break’ in social existence, a suspended moment which threatened to initiate a reversal of time. The links between past, present, and future had been

\(^{111}\) Locke, *Two Treatises*, 285-291.

snapped.” The state of nature is not only prior to civil society but also threatens to return in the future, looming as a threat to “reverse time.”

Temporality is instrumental to Hobbes’s definition of the state of nature in the *Leviathan*. In a famous passage, Hobbes characterizes the state of nature as an ongoing state of war: “For WARRE, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of Time, is to be considered in the nature of Warre, as it is in the nature of Weather.” Like bad weather that looms and gathers overhead, the difficulties of the state of nature consist not so much in any single manifestation (cold, wind, or rain) but constant uncertainty. The state of nature can be understood as an open-ended narrative form, in that a single instance of violence itself cannot represent it.

In an important qualification, Hobbes registers the skepticism of his readers toward the existence of the state of nature: “It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places where they live so now.” Hobbes (and later Locke) points to America as evidence of the existence of the state of nature in the contemporary world. The state of nature is not primarily instantiated in historical reality but by geopolitical distinctions, or by their analogous relations. Hobbes anticipates a kind of “uneven development” in the passage between the state of nature and the commonwealth.

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Samuel Pufendorf’s 1682 treatise, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, which was cited frequently by Defoe, argues that the independence of individuals in the state of nature should not be overestimated. Pufendorf criticizes Hobbes’s vision of the state of nature: “The character of the natural state, furthermore, may be considered either as it is represented by fiction or as it is in reality. It would be a fiction if we supposed that in the beginning there existed a multitude of men without any dependence on each other.” Sensitive to the narrative aspects of Hobbes’s argument, Pufendorf denounces the temporal priority of the state of nature by labelling it as fiction. He points to the contradictory sense of regarding the state of nature as a historical moment: “Indeed it is obvious that the whole human race was never at one and the same time in the natural state.” (116) Because humans depend on one another for survival, it is impossible that they could ever all simultaneously be in a state of war. For Pufendorf, the natural state is not developmentally prior to social bonds. From this perspective, it is the totality and the temporal priority of the state of nature that are fictions, for there are many kinds of social ties that exist before, during, and after the creation of civil society and states.

It is with Locke’s *Second Treatise* that the state of nature is most explicitly treated as a stage leading to the creation of civil society. Locke argues: “God having made Man such a Creature, that, in his own Judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong Obligations of Necessity, Convenience, and Inclination to drive him into

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Locke’s language recalls Aquinas in arguing that man was designed in such a way as to “drive him into Society.” The question of the relationship between the state of nature and civil society depends upon how the relationship between bodily necessity and human institutions is constructed in narrative terms.

For Locke, self-preservation is a concept that helps to bridge natural law and civil society. What Locke describes as the “Fundamental, Sacred, and unalterable Law of Self-Preservation” contributes to the formation of civil society only indirectly.

Compared to Hobbes’s state of war, Locke’s state of nature is a relatively peaceful place. “The State of Nature has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that … no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions” (271). The innate faculty of reason provides a minimal measure of security in Locke’s state of nature, though later he qualifies the actual power of Reason to achieve any measure of security because “For though the Law of Nature be plain and intelligible to all rational Creatures; Men being biassed by their Interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a Law binding to them in the application of it to their particular Cases” (351). Locke suggests that individuals will fail to subordinate their own interests to the


118 For James Tully, the instinct for self-preservation and social cohesion can be reconciled under the particular theological resonance of Locke’s terms. (Tully, *Discourse*, 47).

119 But as Jonathan Lamb points out, “Locke’s fundamental law, however is not just a law; it is also an instinct that human beings share with irrational animals.” See Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 27.
“plain and intelligible” ethical standard of the state of nature. The transference of social determination from an inherently conflictual state of “self-preservation” into an economy of “self-interest,” premised on “Interest” rather than basic need, erases the role of subsistence from the social order. Locke’s elision of the role of necessity is characteristic of his political philosophy, which tends to treat individuals as rational agents who bring civil society into being through consent, rather than subjects of necessity who cling to any means of meeting their bodily needs.

One of the key similarities between the Hobbesian and Lockean accounts of the passage from the state of nature into civil society is that they both displace bodily necessity to another time and another place—a developmental stage or an undeveloped locale. Following the precedent of Thomistic natural law writing, seventeenth-century contractarian thought regarded “natural necessity” as an impetus to forge collective bonds. Following Grotius, Hobbes and Locke tended to see the threat to survival less in terms of subsistence than in terms of military aggression and defense. The developmental teleology of the social contract drew on a jurisprudential form of argument that moved effortlessly between animals, individuals, private companies, and sovereign states, each of which could claim “extreme necessity” as justification for breaking the law. The extreme portability of the concept of self-preservation, the simplicity to which it could be adapted to colonial enterprise and civil strife, demonstrates that the concept had turned into a kind of formal placeholder for the tautological stories that social institutions told themselves about their own legitimacy, for acknowledging sub-rational motivations and disavowing them at the same time by displacing them to another time and place.
“An Instinct that Never Fails”: The Necessity of Labor

Published and reissued between Defoe’s two painful bankruptcies (in 1692 and 1703), Essay upon Projects is a socioeconomic tract that interprets criminal activity as manifestations of self-preservation. He argues for public work projects, financial regulation, education reform, and ambitious insurance schemes as ways to channel commercial activity into modes of protecting individuals from risk of starvation or bodily harm.\(^{120}\) Though Essay upon Projects is not a book about political legitimacy in the tradition of Leviathan and Second Treatise, Defoe refuses to see civil society as the “end” of bodily necessity. By emphasizing that individuals face starvation in the present rather than relegating it to a hypothetical past, Defoe puts the impetus for self-preservation at odds with existing social institutions.

In a chapter entitled “Of Projectors,” Defoe offers an analysis of the origin of the projecting spirit. The projector embodied the progressive temporality of economic development in the late seventeenth century. Rather than viewing Projectors as dreamers with their heads in the clouds (as Swift would later do in Gulliver’s Travels), Defoe claims that Projectors are motivated foremost by their stomachs. He begins his essay with a reflection on human vulnerability: “Man is the worst of God’s Creatures to shift for himself; no other Animal is ever starv’d to death.”\(^{121}\) The comparison brings to mind Grotius’s claim that the instinct for self-preservation is the commonality between humans and other animals, though Defoe puts a different emphasis on the comparison by calling attention to starvation as the defining feature of man.

\(^{120}\) See Sandra Macpherson, Harm’s Way, 30-35.
What follows from this initial distinction between humans and other animals is an exploration of the implications of human vulnerability. Defoe’s essay slides from philosophical abstraction into specific situation, from material cause to retrospective reconstruction of individual case:

Nature without, has provided them both Food and Cloaths; and Nature within, has plac’d an Instinct that never fails to direct them to proper means for a supply; but Man must either Work or Starve, Slave or Dye; he has indeed Reason given him to direct him, and few who follow the Dictates of Reason come to such unhappy Exigencies; but when by the Errors of a Man’s Youth he has reduc’d himself to such a degree of Distress, as to be absolutely without Three things, Money, Friends, and Health, he Dies in a Ditch, or in some worse place, an hospital. (31)

Defoe demonstrates his familiarity with Thomas Aquinas’s De Regno in the way he lays out the argument that “Reason” has been bestowed on man as faculty for subsistence. By distinguishing between “Nature without” as having provided the raw materials for subsistence and “Nature within” as the innate drive for self-preservation, Defoe’s language situates bodily need as an aspect of man’s nature. Yet as quickly as Defoe naturalizes labor as the instrumental means of carrying out bodily imperatives, he points out that the socioeconomic realm constituted by labor is beset by “Errors,” “Distress” and tragic isolation. How can “an Instinct that never fails” culminate in such calamities if man simply needs to labor to reconcile “Nature without” and “Nature within”? By Defoe’s time, the word instinct, deriving from its Latin cognate instinctus, resonated with various conflicting philosophical and social constructions of human nature. The etymological root of instinctus, to “prick inward,” offers a metaphorical division between inside and outside for construing motivation, as a painful incursion from the outside. But such a metaphor raises the question: what pricks what, from where
to where? The metaphorical “outside” point from whence behavior is pricked into being performs a reversal by which the intrinsic motivation that sustains life is located somewhere external to the subject.

In the tradition of ancient jurisprudence, the Latin word *instinctus* was frequently invoked in theorizations of natural law that attempted to theorize the distinction between necessity and law by describing innate impulses as divinely endowed traits. According to Robert Greene *instinctus* was “often understood as extra-human in origin, frequently divine, at times demonic.” Isidore of Seville claims, “Natural law is defined in many ways. It may at first be said to denote a certain instinctive impulse arising out of animate nature by which individual living things are led to act in certain ways. Hence it is thus defined: Natural law is that which *natura*, that is, God himself, taught all animals” (quoted in Greene 178). Isidore’s peculiar definition illustrates the dangers of parsing natural law by regarding natural regularity as divine will and thereby conflating “is” and “ought.” Eighteenth-century thinkers such as the Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson drew on the long scholastic tradition of regarding “instinct” as part of the divine inheritance of man and a component of his moral makeup. At times, natural law theorists similarly viewed the instinct for self-preservation as an instrument of divine will. For Defoe, though, it was the less often invoked “demonic” aspect of instinct that

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123 On the use of the terms instinct and innate in eighteenth-century philosophy, see Dan Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2005).
124 See James Tully, *A Discourse on Property*, 47.
takes the form of the devil in Moll’s breast, an extra-human force that manifests itself as bodily necessity.

In the early eighteenth century, the word instinct was also associated with the sensual or material aspects of human behavior. Wolf Metternich claimed, “He that makes the Pleasures and Enjoyments of Sense, the Object and the End of his Desires and Pursuits, may be said to follow the LAW, Propension (or INSTINCT) of Mere Nature.” The law of “Mere Nature” directs one toward “Pleasures and Enjoyments of Sense” as the “End of his Desires.” Instinctual behavior is directed toward ends innate to “Mere Nature.” In the Tatler, Addison and Steele’s Isaac Bickerstaff demonstrates skepticism toward treating the instinct for self-preservation as the basis for behavior: “All the great People you see make considerable Figures on the Change, in Court; and sometimes in Senates, are such as in Reality have no greater Faculty than what may be call’d Human Instinct, which is a natural Tendency to their own Preservation, and that of their Friends.” Bickerstaff’s satirical characterization unmasks the high-minded defense of “instinct” as a justification for greed and nepotism, encoded in Grotius’s universalization of self-preservation.

Similarly, Defoe is skeptical that self-preservation is divine in origin. For the remainder his essay, “Of Projectors,” Defoe catalogues a variety of consequences that occur when instinct preponderates over reason. In response to dire straits some hang themselves in despair, while “Others break the Bounds of Laws to satisfy that general

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Law of Nature, and turn open Thieves, House-breakers, Highway-men, Clippers, Coiners, &c. till they run the length of the Gallows, and get a Deliverance the nearest way at St. Tyburn” (24). Binding the series of marginal figures that Defoe evokes is a “general Law of Nature,” which Defoe distinguishes from the existing legal standards by which justice is administered, the law by which rogues are hanged. As social theory, Defoe’s essay is remarkable for the way that it takes problem cases as its central examples. Rather than assuming that all individuals are self-sufficient farmers or productive manufacturers, Defoe’s conjectural society is populated by thieves, highwaymen, and con artists. Though Defoe makes no mention of the social contract as such, he describes experiences of men who find themselves caught up in commercial society without having given consent or resigned their liberty.

Defoe’s account of human nature establishes the scaffolding for his discussion of the origin of the projector: “A meer Projector then is a Contemptible thing, driven by his own desperate Fortune to such a Streight, that he must be deliver’d by a Miracle, or Starve” (33-34). Defoe’s essay puts the “meer” projector in company of the suicide and the outlaw, all of which have been driven by desperation to their behavior. The “general Law of Nature” rules over the unruly proliferation of exempla, the hidden cause that animates Defoe’s gallery of rogues. Such a catalogue demonstrates that though Defoe points to necessity’s role in motivating behavior, he preserves local differences in how necessity manifests itself.

Defoe reserves the final place in the essay for the “Honest Projector.” Defoe recounts, “the Honest Projector is he, who having by fair and plain principles of Sense, Honesty, and Ingenuity, brought any Contrivance to a suitable Perfection, makes out
what he pretends to, picks no body’s pocket, puts his Project in Execution, and contents himself with the real Produce, as the profit of his Invention” (35). The order and subordination of the phrases suggests that the honest projector has “brought” a “Contrivance to a suitable Perfection” before being recognized as such. The honest projector’s honesty tautologically follows from the marriage of financial success and “fair and plain principles.” If throughout Essay upon Projects, Defoe lauds those projectors who have contributed to public good, he also seems to insinuate that the difference between the “meer Projector,” and the “honest Projector,” depends as much on positive outcomes as it depends on character. Since Defoe argues that both the honest projector and the “meer projector” are motivated by necessity, the emphasis lands on the “suitable Perfection” by which projects are completed. In other words, projects can be better evaluated retrospectively than in the present tense.

Defoe further examines the retrospective accounts of the relationship between necessity and economic activity in his playful genealogical accounts of necessity. Defoe situates necessity at the origin of economic growth through use of a proverbial phrase early in Essay upon Projects: “Necessity, which is allowed to be the mother of invention, has so Violently agitated the Wits of men at this time, that it seems not at all improper, by way of distinction, to call it, The Projecting Age” (1). Defoe’s formulation puts universality and particularity in relation by using the ahistorical wisdom of the proverb as the source of the emergence of historical difference. Necessity is the personified agent that agitates the “Wits of men” yet Defoe’s uncertainty about the rationalization of necessity is apparent in his use of the passive voice to legitimate the truth of the proverb. In the course of Defoe’s exposition the antiseptic logic of the proverb is contaminated by
his emphasis on problematic examples. If necessity is the mother of invention, Defoe seems to want to remind his reader that “invention” can also be a species of lying.

In Maximilian Novak’s words, Defoe’s celebration of the “Projecting Age” expresses his “belief that human thought and action could transform history.” Yet the Essay upon Projects registers both progressive optimism toward social reform and skepticism toward such attempts. While he ranks himself among the projectors by putting forth a number of reformist projects (many of which are geared toward alleviation of individual risk and harm), the author confronts the problem that the projecting age is set in motion by desperation rather than imagination or vision.

More important, the initial stimulus of necessity is never completely superseded. Defoe regards the merchant as the most characteristic projector, “These prompted by Necessity, rack their Wits for New Contrivances, New Inventions, New Trades, Stocks, Projects and any thing to retrieve the desperate Credit of their fortunes” (22). Merchants are both “prompted by Necessity” and at the same time laboring to recover lost fortune. The “New” is a means of trying to “retrieve” something that was lost, to go back instead of going forward. In such formulations, Defoe keeps socioeconomic progress closely allied to necessity by suggesting that invention is derived from desperation even as it turns away from it, a dog chasing its own tail.

Defoe maintained that necessity serves as an anterior motive force to economic progress in his writings on the subject in The Review as well as in Essay upon Projects. Defoe’s most playful commentary on necessity in the Review returns to the proverbial

phrase, “Necessity is the mother of Invention,” as a jumping off point for a sprawling allegory that over-extends the proverb in its literal sense. His allegory of Necessity, like his more famous allegory of Lady Credit, tends to lose track of its original conceit as it takes on complex significances in a tangled chain of succession:

NECESSITY—Was a Female Bastard of an Ancient Family, Begetten in the earliest Ages of the World by Male Pride, upon the Body of Female Sloth, and having wasted a great Estate, which her Father Pride had got, as a Legacy left by one his Ancestors, call’d Violence, the Son of Ambition, she became very poor, for most of her Estate being got by Rapin, War, Treachery, and Blood, it therefore could not be expected to thrive much.  

Defoe parodies the brutal origins of the state of nature in looking back to the “earliest Ages of the World” to a time of rape, violence, and insecurity. The language deploys the Biblical resonance of the genealogical tree (“Begetten”) to chide the Hobbesian picture of a world of poverty and violence for its arcane mythic displacement of violence. Defoe pokes fun not so much at the vicious allegorical combinations and their offspring but at their displacement in the pre-historical past.

Continuing with his conceit, Defoe describes how Necessity couples with Poverty to give birth to Invention and Wit. All of the positive attributes of commercial society issue forth from Invention’s lineage—Industry and Parsimony give rise to Ploughman, Grazier, Miner, Gardener, and Dairy; Ingenuity and Diligence give birth to Handicraft, Manufacture, and Barter, who in turn bring Wright, Smith, Engineer, and Trade into the world. All of the negative aspects of commercial society emerge from Necessity and Poverty’s other child, Wit, who “has filled the World with Fops and Beggars, who like the Drones in the Hive, starve and help to undo Mankind, and in spight of all the

Application of her Honest and Prosperous Relations, the Posterity of her Brother

*Invention*, she fills the World with Misery, Poverty, Woe, and Wickedness.“

The cyclical aspect of Poverty is revealed in the suggestion that Poverty “fills the World with Misery, Poverty, Woe, and Wicknessness.” In other words, poverty begets poverty. If it sounds circular, it’s because in Defoe’s genealogy there is no forward movement but only genealogical divisions that attempt to separate things that remain in tension with one another.

Defoe’s bifurcating structure of economic good and evil may seem a bit Manichean and oversimplified, but the importance of the genealogy is that Defoe locates necessity at the crossroads between honest and dishonest productivity, a bifurcation that is recognized only retrospectively from the perspective of the essayist who projects backward in time. Necessity is prior to all economic activity but the question of how we get from necessity to either invention or wit ends up seeming somewhat random. If the use of the genealogical tree seems to harden the opposition between honest and dishonest branches into too stark an opposition, it is also probably useful to keep in mind Defoe’s frequent scorn for considerations of birth. In his most successful poem, *The True-Born Englishman*, Defoe contends that genealogical essence is fraught with historical contingency. English-men are mongrels. By similar logic, Defoe may have meant to intimate a subtle suggestion that economic activity is similarly compromised by muddled origins and consolidated by retrospective editorialization.

Defoe may also have intended the allegory of Necessity as a complement to his more famous allegories of Lady Credit. Defoe’s much-discussed writings on Lady Credit

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have served scholars tracing the persistence of classic republican symbols into the eighteenth century, as well as more modern conceptions of commerce.\textsuperscript{130} According to Mr. Review, Credit has a “distinct essence (if nothing can be said to exist) from all the phenomena of Nature; it is in itself the lightest and most volatile Body in the World… it is neither a Soul nor a Body; it is neither visible nor invisible; it is all Consequence and yet not the effect of a Cause.”\textsuperscript{131} Defoe imbues credit with an almost otherworldly instrumental capacity. If Defoe aligns Necessity with the realm of birth and causes, then credit is pure “Consequence” without body and “not the effect of a Cause.”

Defoe’s Credit and Necessity were occasionally opposed in Defoe’s playful economic allegories. Defoe put Credit and Necessity in opposition more explicitly in arguing that credit should not be extended to meet basic bodily needs:

There is but one Objection to Credit, and that lies in the last Consumer: No Man ought to take Credit, or give it for Food or Cloaths; for as that is the Point or End of Trade, so a Credit there tend not at all to the Encrease of Commerce, but to the Decrease of it——The Retail of the Goods sold is the last Act of Trade: this we call the Consumption, and is the End of Circulation——To trust here is a Kind of Stagnation, not a Revolution——Because here is no rolling on.\textsuperscript{132}

Consumption operates as a damper on the increase of credit. To put “Food or Cloaths” into direct relation with the imaginary self-sustaining movement of credit is to bring two


\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Defoe’s Review}, Vol. 6. No. 31 June 18. 1709.

contrary economic modes into relation with one another. Lady Credit has a “distinct essence” from the self-sustaining acts of consumption, though credit is self-reproducing in a different sense.

Defoe comes at the problem of the relationship between necessity and credit from the opposite direction in his passionate arguments against the injustice of imprisoning debtors in *The Review*. In assessing the broader implications of debts compelled by necessity, Defoe employs the language of natural law to adjudicate where the responsibility falls in conflicts among economic, bodily, and legal imperatives. By drawing the attention to misalignments between natural law and existing social institutions, Defoe argues that bodily necessity over-rules civil law.

’*Tis a Crime to Kill a Man*, but if Necessity of Self-Preservation, War, or Justice demand it; ‘tis not only Lawful, *but a Duty*; you are driven to a Necessity, you *must run in Debt* or be Undone, which is just the same thing, *with Starve or Steal*——But what brought you to this Necessity, and why did you not stop in Time, when you might have redeem’d your self from this Necessity, and been Preserv’d? *There lay the Crime*, and thus we bring our selves under a Necessity, which Nature cannot resist.133

As in *Essay upon Projects*, Defoe puts existing moral and legal norms in conflict with the imperatives of bodily necessity through the invocation of the ultimatum “*Starve or Steal*.” Necessity is the overriding “Duty” that trumps civil and moral law. Though from the abstract perspective of economic theory, Defoe suggests that Credit should not be extended for sustenance, when considering the problem from the perspective of the consumer he affirms the commonsense notion that desperate people will borrow in order to eat.

In the second half of this passage, Defoe calls attention to the narrative dimension that emerges around moments of economic crisis. While for the subject of necessity in the present tense all action is reduced to self-preservation, retrospective examination searches for causes to blame. In the final lines, Defoe acknowledges that “we bring our selves under a Necessity” or that following the causal chain backward may unveil some measure of responsibility. Notably, Defoe takes the first person plural here as if to emphasize the plurality rather than the individuality of responsibility.

Defoe immediately reverses this formulation of responsibility in the next sentence: “Now as this is an Argument to be us’d to the Debtor, so it turns hard upon the Creditor; if you will force Men to run upon Extremities, and drive them into Misery; tho’ they are Knaves in the Fact, the Crime lyes in the Cause, and your Cruelty is the Unnatural Occasion.” Mr. Review’s suggestion that “the Crime lyes in the Cause” reminds us that the Greek term for cause, αί τ ί α, is strongly associated with responsibility and adjudication. The question of who is to blame when someone breaks the law out of desperation involves a consideration not just of individual choice but of the “Unnatural Occasions” that provoke natural responses. Defoe’s turn to second person in these passages demonstrates that one of his intended audiences is creditors themselves, with whom he pleads for humane treatment in increasingly urgent terms.

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135 For the Greek association of cause and responsibility, see Monte Ransome Johnson, Aristotle on Teleology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40-41.
Defoe continues to develop the moral implications of the conflict between natural law and existing legal structures, imploring his audience to consider Biblical precedent as well as natural law:

And yet all this Man’s Crime is Poverty; for God’s Sake, Gentlemen, consider what Scripture Law Punishes Poverty with Death, or when it was made Felony, not to be able to Pay? if then you will Establish Laws, Contradictory to the Law of God and Reason, it must be Lawful to Break them, resist them, or any thing. (115)

It is with the final turn that Defoe suggests that resistance to positive law might be construed as justified by natural law. Directly addressing his “Gentlemen” readers, Mr. Review pleads that financial hardship should not in and of itself be regarded as God’s judgment and that the suspension of law is justified in cases of hardship:

Self-preservation, is the first and Sovereign Law of Nature, and whatever Power or Authority, makes that Criminal or Mortal, which is not so by the Law of God or of Nature, tho’ the Authority be Legal, and therefore the Law regular, and so Binding, if the Law is Morally Evil, it ceases to be a Law to the Conscience. (115)

Defoe is unambiguous in the way that he subordinates civil law to the “Sovereign Law of Nature.” The jurisdiction of natural law outweighs all positive forms of authority, including the laws fashioned for the preservation of property.

Defoe repeats the association between resistance and human nature in his long poem on political legitimacy, Jure Divino. Though the poem’s overt purpose is to dispute the claims of absolute monarchy in favor of consensual forms of government, Jure Divino often stakes its resistance to tyranny in terms of natural law rather than social
contract. For instance, in a footnote Defoe makes essentially the same point in collective terms as he made in individual terms in *The Review*: “Tyrants must reflect on that, who urge the People beyond their Power to bear, and run Things on to such Extremes, that Humane Passions are apt to run too high: Nature has its Buttings and Boundings; and there are Cases in which Flesh and Blood cannot bear any longer the Pressure, but, like the Worm, will turn and oppose.” To compare human nature to “Buttings and Boundings” is to use a landsurveyor’s metaphor to describe the boundaries and limits of the human body, territorial lines that define the province of one legal entity rather than another. The spatial metaphor creates an inside and an outside, each of which have their own legal jurisdiction. The use of the word “Case” (so common in Defoe) reinforces the implication that separate legal spaces are produced through extremity. Such a formulation regards the state of nature in physical rather than in purely temporal terms. Despite the particularities of the situation or “Cases,” limits are defined by nature that remains a constant component and influence in political and economic life. In that sense, Defoe points to the ongoing impetus of the state of nature within, rather than outside of, civil society.

“How Do You Know It?”: The Epistemology of Necessity

By focusing on debtors and victims of political tyranny, Defoe sometimes depicts a world divided between oppressors and victims, yet at other moments he insisted that the very identities that uphold the distinctions between such categories are destabilized by

136 See for instance, Clark, *Daniel Defoe*, 51-77. Clark resists some of the Lockean political views that have been attributed to Defoe.
bodily necessity. It is evident that Defoe was sympathetic toward situations of economic hardship yet he also suggests that there is no firm distinction between the “honest projector” and the “meer projector.” As I argue in this section, Defoe repeatedly positions necessity as a cause external to and erosive of social identities and bonds, capable of undermining honest social relations. In another issue of The Review, Defoe returns to the plight of debtors:

And here I must speak a word of compassion to the unhappy, when brought to the dreadful necessities of trade, ruin in prospect, a gaol in view, the creditor at the door, and all the horrid scene of a rupture presents itself to his eyes. How does this terrible prospect drive the distress’d tradesman, honest before, and in his thought abhorring to do an unjust action? How do these necessities lead him by the hand into thousands of snares, and drive him to the unhappy commission of a thousand things, which before his very soul abhor’d? ¹³⁸

This passage revises the strict dichotomy between honest merchants and crafty projectors to suggest that some manifestations of necessity (not literally tied to starvation) might intervene even in the career of a tradesman who was “honest before” but is driven to desperate acts when economic hardship threatens his livelihood. The “necessities of trade” is a phrase that suggests that economic relations come to take on their own form of determination.

In a way that anticipates the protagonist’s language in Moll Flanders, Mr. Review emphasizes immediate perception as the agent of necessity—“a gaol in view,” “the horrid scene of a rupture presents itself to his eyes,” revealing itself as a “terrible prospect.” Though the experience of necessity is in some ways impossible to confirm (it cannot be empirically verified from any other perspective than that of the victim), it presents itself

to the senses with extreme vivacity. Defoe repeatedly draws on these types of vivid visual metaphors to demonstrate the singularity of the experience of bodily need, which overwhelms the perceiver but remains invisible to others. Necessity undermines the authority of direct experience as the guarantor of reality by confusing intimations of anticipated catastrophe with the actual objects of immediate perception that lie in front of the subject of necessity. Conjuring such a “terrible prospect” would seem to indicate that, like projection, necessity is future-oriented, geared toward anticipating and addressing future concerns, yet what Defoe actually suggests is that the subject of necessity loses the capacity to determine his or her own future as fear of ruin comes to eclipse the capacity for accurate apprehension of the world and its possibilities.

Mr. Review, likely serving as Defoe’s mouthpiece, owns up to personal connection with the “unhappy” on behalf of whom he writes:

I freely rank myself with those that are ready to own that they have in the extremities and embarrassments in trade done those things which their own principles condemn’d, which they are not ashamed to blush for, which they look back on with regret, and strive to make reparation for with their utmost diligence. (Vol. III, 86-7)

Michael Shinagel makes much of this admission, claiming that Defoe’s bankruptcies involved him in unscrupulous behavior that he later regretted. Like one of his own protagonists, Defoe retrospectively conjures visions of imagined prospects that never came to pass, specters of starvation that led him into immoral behavior. What is interesting is that Defoe does not outright confess wrongdoing, but instead he claims solidarity with others, distancing himself through a diffusion of personal responsibility that aligns the speaker with repentant offenders. Mr. Review retrospectively owns up to

moral inconsistency by identifying with a group of anonymous others who have been morally compromised by economic hardship. This confession offers an explanation why, as John Richetti points out, “Defoe seems to have identified himself to great and indeed powerful effect with characters who often strike modern critics as disreputable or inconsistent.” This passage and the experiences that they describe account for Defoe’s sympathies with his disreputable characters. But it is important to note that the sympathy offered diffuses individual identity rather than emphasizing particular persons. Though Defoe uses the language of visual perception to convey necessity’s power with vivacity, he describes experiences that are shared by many others, not just the story of one individual. Mr. Review “freely ranks” himself with debtors, rather than looking down on them as objects of pity. Defoe’s fictional avatars in *Moll Flanders* and in *Colonel Jack* are similarly marked out for compassion not because of their individuality but because their membership. Necessity exerts itself through a kind of substitution that could form the basis of solidarity, provided that there is a sufficient measure of distance.

In the *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Robinson offers the reader a model of such solidarity. By considering the experience of hunger first from the perspective of a participant and then from the perspective of a sympathetic onlooker, he demonstrates that different levels of sympathy adhere to different points of view in a given situation. In coming across a ship that has lost its sails in a storm, Robinson meets with a hungry crew that reminds him of his own experience on the island:

> The Sight of these People’s Distress was very moving to me, and brought to Mind what I had a terrible Prospect of at my first coming on Shore in the Island, where I had neither the least Mouthful of Food, or any Prospect

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of procuring any, besides the hourly Apprehension I had of being made
the Food of other Creatures.\textsuperscript{141}

Robinson is struck by the parallel between the crew’s hunger and his own, a hunger that
is also reflected as a fear of being eaten. By underscoring his sympathetic response, he
contrasts his reaction to that of the crew themselves, who isolated and starved three
passengers to conserve their own food. The starving passengers include a widow and her
son, social roles that Defoe repeatedly associates with physical vulnerability and
dependency. Robinson reflects on the behavior of the crew as a manifestation of the
power of hunger itself to destroy social bonds:

\begin{quote}
For they might ha’ spar’d a small Sustenance to the poor helpless Widow,
that might have preserv’d her Life, tho’ it had been just to keep her alive.
But Hunger knows no Friend, no Relation, no Justice, no Right, and
therefore is remorseless, and capable of no Compassion.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

The catalogue of negatives is somewhat reminiscent of Hobbes’s account of the state of
nature (“no arts; no letters; no society”) where continual fear undermines the synchronic
and diachronic continuities that make collective projects possible. But the contrast is
striking between the emotional response that Robinson highlights in his own account
(hunger with sufficient distance) and the lack of compassion among the crew and
passengers (immediate experience of hunger).

The episode helps shed light on the role of perspective in the perception of
hunger. Robinson sympathizes and extrapolates abstract conclusions from the experience
of the passengers and crew from a detached perspective. Robinson’s detached judgment
of the case takes the form of proverb-like generalizations. Yet Robinson also
acknowledges that the first-person experience of hunger is not based in reason or

\textsuperscript{141} Daniel Defoe, \textit{The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe} (London: 1719), 31.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid. 35-36.
authority. Hunger determines behavior and inhibits social ties but it does not foster the conditions for ethical and social reflection. In an appropriate setting, the crewmembers float at sea, in the international space that makes social connections more provisional and subject to change.\footnote{The sea as a no-man’s land was the subject of international jurisprudence in works such as Hugo Grotius, \textit{Mare Liberum} (1609). For a recent survey of sovereign states in relation to piracy, See Daniel Heller-Roazen, \textit{The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations} (New York: Zone Books, 2009).} The shift between Robinson’s retrospective identification with the crew and the subsequent impersonal claims about hunger seem to map out the ways in which detachment from bodily necessity is necessary for moral behavior.

Defoe’s most extended discussion of bodily necessity occurs in \textit{Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe} (1720). The essay titled “Of the Tryal of HONESTY” is one of a series of ruminations on the topic of honesty that take up nearly the first third of the book. The title of the essay suggests that honesty is being “tried” or tested in a variety of circumstances. At the same time, the “trial” of honesty suggests the legal questions that are raised in the course of the essay, though the domain of law under consideration is not civil law but natural law. The eponymous character philosophizes:

I am of the Opinion that I could state a Circumstance, in which there is not one Man in the World would be honest: Necessity is above the Power of human Nature; and for Providence to suffer a Man to fall into that Necessity, is to suffer him to sin; because Nature is not furnish’d with Power to defend it self, nor is Grace itself able to fortify the Mind against it.\footnote{Daniel Defoe, \textit{Serious Reflections}, 40. Hereafter cited internally.}

Robinson considers the respective causal potency of various candidates: human Nature, Providence, Necessity, and Grace. One might find it surprising that Robinson grants
Providence only the facility to “suffer,” which elsewhere he describes as the “secret Hand of Providence governing the World.” Indeed, Providence is the means of making random incidents into meaningful events, mediating between spiritual and earthly domains to make the world legible in terms of a narrative structure that discloses divine order. Is Providence an active force like an invisible hand or does its power consist in “suffering” events to transpire or not? Here, necessity is external to providence rather than an apparatus in its service. What Robinson seems to mean by human Nature is something like autonomy, the ability to make free choices, which only exists as long as one is unencumbered by necessity.

For Defoe to consider the possibility that Providence should “suffer a Man to fall into … Necessity” raises a number of questions about the causal power of Providence in relation to bodily necessity. Are Providence and necessity accomplices or are they antagonists? Unlike the classic theological question that Friday poses to Robinson when he asks why God does not kill the Devil—put otherwise, why does God allow evil to exist—the conflict between Providence and necessity cannot be resolved by pointing to free will. Defoe repeatedly insists that necessity trumps moral choice, making what he

147 Colonel Jack provides the latter image: “I saw clearer than ever I had done before, how an invisible over-ruling Power, a Hand influenced from above, Governs our Actions of every Kind, limits all our Designs, and orders the Events of every Thing relating to us.” See Defoe, Colonel Jack, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 308.
refers to as honesty impossible. Defoe’s protagonist in *Roxana* makes the same point: “as to honesty, I think honesty is out of the question when starving is the case.”

Defoe imputes honesty with vast moral significance, as can be seen in the way that Robinson defines it: “Honesty is a general Probity of Mind, an Attitude to Act justly and honourably in all Cases, religious and civil, and to all Persons superior and inferior” (30). For Robinson, honesty is more than just truthfulness. It is a positive vision of just conduct, a hopeful standard of charity and gratitude. In this definition, Defoe emphasizes the fact that honesty transcends circumstances, that it appertains “in all Cases.”

Robinson goes on to clarify: “Honesty does not consist of Negatives; and ‘tis not sufficient to do my Neighbor no personal Injury in the strict Sense and Letter of the Law” (36). For Robinson, the “Letter of the Law” actually tarnishes honest relations and honesty is embodied in examples of faithful friendships rather than legal protections. To illustrate honesty, he draws on an example from the first installment of *Robinson Crusoe*, in which the protagonist’s friends do him good turns, which he reciprocates in his fortunate state. The reciprocity of honesty gives it an orderly narrative form and it seems like no coincidence that *Robinson Crusoe*, in which providence guarantees Robinson’s needs are met, instantiates this reciprocity. Honesty, in Robinson’s account, enables narrative closure.

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Defoe insists, though, that necessity makes honesty impossible. Necessity is the case that somehow over-rides honesty’s jurisdiction “in all cases.” In Colonel Jack, the protagonist’s learned servant voices a similar claim with strange redundancy: “I believe my Case was what I find is the Case of most of the wicked Part of the World (viz.) that to be reduc’d to Necessity is to be wicked; for Necessity is not only the Temptation, but is such a Temptation as human Nature is not empower’d to resist.”150 The repetitiveness of the servant’s claim calls attention to the circular logic of instantiation that underpins the relationship between case and frame. The servant uses his particular “Case” as evidence of the general “Case of most of the wicked Part of the World.” Generality and particularity both participate in the same “Case,” a case that is oddly described as if it were a specific geographical entity that could be located on a map, a “state of nature” outside the bounds of civil society. Such a gesture is derived from Defoe’s association of necessity with the construction of a metaphorical space that remains exterior to the moral autonomy of the individual.

In Serious Reflections, Robinson uses a number of rhetorical strategies to convince his reader that honesty and necessity are incompatible. At one point, Robinson directly addresses the reader, “You say, you are an honest Man, How do you know it? Did you ever want Bread, and had your Neighbor’s Loaf in your keeping, and would starve rather than eat it?” (39). Such direct and confrontational language is rhetorically calibrated to force the reader to imagine herself in distress, rather than treating the situation from a position of abstraction. It is not a matter of disinterested moral deliberation, a luxury the starving man cannot afford, but a matter that can only be

150 Daniel Defoe, Colonel Jack, 161.
properly understood by starving to death oneself. Defoe seems intent to absorb his reader in a vividly rendered situation in order to make the urgency of the problem manifest. By turning to second person address, Defoe puts the burden of proof on the reader and suggests that it is impossible to know what anyone would do when faced with hunger. Necessity is a matter of praxis that will not conform to theory, or particularity that will not submit to abstraction. And yet, necessity operates with perfect constancy. It is only our reason that is incapable of grasping it.

The emphasis here should fall on the form of the question as much as on the second person address. By putting the case in the form of a question “How do you know?” Defoe suggests that there is something fundamentally unknowable about how bodily necessity will influence circumstances. Since it can only be apprehended from a first-person perspective, there is no way to measure or quantify its determination from a detached perspective.

In *Serious Reflections*, Robinson puts such justification of necessity in an even more extreme form by arguing that even cannibalism might be practiced when necessity exerts its incontrovertible force. In characteristic anecdotal form, he narrates: “What shall we say to five Men in a Boat at Sea without Provision, calling a Council together, and resolving to kill one of themselves for the others to feed on, and eat him? …this has been [done] by honest Men; and I believe the honestest Man in World might be forc’d to it; yet here is no Manner of Pretence, but Necessity, to Palliate the Crime” (40). Robinson’s defense of cannibalism underscores that bodily necessity is, as it were, beyond good and evil. Even cannibalism, which in the first installment of *Robinson Crusoe* serves as the ultimate act of savagery, cannot be resisted under the force of necessity. Bodily necessity
impels behavior that causes the actor to revert to his uncivilized state, to return to the state of nature.

The natural law tradition that Defoe invokes is meant to justify bodily necessity’s claim to suspend all ethical, legal, political, and even religious norms. Such a prospect is unwelcome and even disturbing to Defoe but it is an incontrovertible part of human nature. The fact that almost all of Defoe’s protagonists are motivated by bodily necessity at some point in their careers shows how important the issue was to Defoe. But it also shows us that first-person fictional narrative was a form that was especially suited to conveying the reality of bodily necessity. What unites Defoe’s various claims about necessity is that they insist that necessity is prior to economic and political activity and remains an active force within social life as well. There is considerable variation in how and what kind of behavior emerges in response to necessity, but Defoe points back to the threat of starvation as the motor of the economy and necessity as permanent threat to moral autonomy.

**Moll Flanders: Of Truth and Lie in a Picaresque Sense**

If bodily necessity cancels out honesty, what is the status of the first-person testimony of a character that relates her experience of near starvation? There is an inherent tension between the experience of bodily necessity, which is indissociable from the perspective of the subject of necessity, and any truth claim originating from it. Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* best calls attention to the instability that ensues as a result of the conflict between the narrator’s professed necessity, its consequences, and the conditions of its articulation. The problem is not just that an assertion of need cannot be
disinterested, that it always has a motive, but also that it cannot be verified or falsified from any other perspective than the one that experiences it.

Moll’s unreliability or duplicity has most often been taken to be a demonstration of pure economic individualism. Robert Alter argues that Moll Flanders perfectly depicts the values of instrumental reason (borrowing the concept from Max Weber), identifying Moll’s motivation as the “single-minded duty to the increase of capital.”151 For Juliet McMaster, the narrative tells of “mercenary values engulfing all others.”152 These critics and others put the emphasis on the way that possessive economic rationality dominates Moll’s character and eclipses all other values. But such ascriptions of instrumentality fail to account for the fact that, for Defoe, economic activity was often just a means to meeting basic needs rather than as an end itself. Doubtless Moll at times does conform to the model of the acquisitive individual, as she documents the ebb and flow of her fortunes with scrupulous inventories of gold watches and plate, yet such accounts assume that Moll possesses a mastery over circumstances that Defoe is at pains to demonstrate that Moll lacks.

By ascribing primacy to instrumental rationality, critics have neglected the important role of affect in the novel. Moll repeatedly emphasizes not profit but her all-consuming fear of starvation as the driving force of her behavior. My reading suggests that Moll’s narrative recalls the contractarian account of the state of nature in its open-ended immediacy. Like Hobbes’s description of the state of nature as a “Tract of Time,” the radical insecurity of Moll’s situation comes to shape her perception of time and space.

151 Robert Alter, Rogue’s Progress, 52.
Fear and mistrust foster precarious social relationships, which reciprocally reinforce fear and mistrust as relationships disintegrate into mutual predation and trickery. Moll finds herself caught in a circular pattern of self-reinforcing negative affect, largely conditioned by limited opportunities afforded to women.

In theory, Hobbes’s state of nature should only exist previous to or outside the geographical boundaries of the commonwealth yet Defoe’s novel demonstrates that such distinctions do not obtain for individuals suffering hardship. Precarious conditions of survival continued to exist for many (if not most) in Defoe’s time. This is especially true of women, who, as *Moll Flanders* shows, in most case were regarded as dependents and whose labor was devalued. By giving us an account of the state of nature “from below,” Defoe’s novel suggests that the ability to think rationally (or sympathetically) requires a measure of distance from the struggle to survive. Like the other texts that I have discussed in this chapter, *Moll Flanders* calls attention to the moral and political conflicts that ensue between positive law and natural law under exigent circumstances. The protagonist recounts her criminal exploits to underscore the misalignment between existing legal practices and the impetus to self-preservation that displaces her moral autonomy. Moll finds herself alienated from her self as she is forced to objectify her own body in order to survive.

*Moll Flanders* repeatedly subordinates individual identity to external causes in situations that manifest themselves as episodic incidents. The contrast between her supposed autonomy and the external imposition of causes is evident on the title page, which carves up the varied incidents of the narrative into distinct parts that fail to cohere into a unified whole:
The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu’d Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereas once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv’d Honest, and died a Penitent.\textsuperscript{153}

The initial phrase “Fortunes and Misfortunes” (which echoes Lazarillo’s “fortunatas y advisidades”) suggests a pattern of reversals or oscillations rather than linear progress. Segments of Moll’s life are coordinated with numerical measurements, as if in an effort to tabulate the parts into an equation in order to sort out its meaning. The numerical units themselves are presented in different modes, from the calendric (“twelve Year a Whore”) to the repetitive cycle (“five times a Wife.”) These different modes of quantification fail to add up to a whole though, instead calling attention to piecemeal nature of her narrative, which accrues its meanings through serial relationships. The phrases seem to point toward her reform and penitence and yet there is no grammatical or mathematical subordination established between the constituent, aggregated units. The title page suggests a variety of possible social categories by which we might understand Moll’s biography—as wife, thief, or penitent—but fails to indicate that a single category is capacious enough to engulf the others (except perhaps the “&c” that follows her name).

The narrative proper presents an accumulation of incongruous units in the spirit of the title page. Rather than consolidating into a single, unified thread, Moll emphasizes how she falls outside of established social categories of reference. Her birth in Newgate prison seems to establish a lawless foundation for a life of crime, but what it really

signals is the unfolding of a higher order of law than that which is recognized by civil law. Moll’s brief counterfactual glimpse into how her story might have been different in the first few pages demonstrates the text’s concern with the misalignment between natural law and social conventions. Observing that “in France, or where else, I know not” children of criminals are “taken into the Care of the Government, and put into an Hospital call’d the House of Orphans,” Moll tells us that such was not the case with herself:

Had this been the custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate; and by which I was not only expos’d to very great Distress, even before I was Capable, either of Understanding my Case, or how to Amend it, nor brought into a course of Life, which was not only scandalous in itself, but which in its ordinary Course, tended to the swift Destruction both of Soul and Body. (10)

Moll underscores her dependence and vulnerability from birth in terms that emphasize her inability to provide for herself or understand her own situation. Moll’s state in early life is defined by negativity—lack of friends, lack of cloths, and lack of help or helper. Like Hobbes’s state of nature, Moll’s early life is driven by the denial of the basic goods of collective life. Though Moll’s explanation here purports to provide a causal account of the relation between lack of a social custom and its consequences, the catalogue of effects multiplies into an overextended chain of clauses that fall further and further afield of the original proposition. The final level of complexity takes the form of the evocation of an “ordinary Course” by which the “Destruction both of Soul and Body” are effected, leading the reader wondering whether Moll’s life followed such a course or (more likely since she lives to tell the tale) constitutes a deviation from the probable narrative outcomes alluded to.
Moll repeatedly couples bodily necessity to her being “without Friends,” a phrase that captures her social alienation and powerlessness. Moll’s dependency drives her into a series of relationships that constitute the picaresque rhythm and tempo of the novel. Moll’s serial relations might be understood in terms of an open-ended search for narrative fulfillment through the establishment of some kind of stabilizing social contract. For Moll, a social contract is not an abstract agreement between individual and society but a series of local arrangements between herself and her companions. Early in her life, her companions are caretakers such as her nurse and the mayor’s family. When she is an adult, they are her husbands and lovers. Moll’s seducer offers a suspicious variant of friendship: “I shall be a private Friend to you” (46). Late in her life, it is under the influence of her friend, Madame Midnight, that she turns to theft. Her repentance and reformed years are likewise the product of relationships, first with the priest and finally with her husband Jemy. Such companions offer precarious and temporary shelter from the fear and uncertainty of her solitary existence.

If the text is viewed as a sequence of relationships, it is in the interstices between those relationships where the determining force of bodily necessity becomes most pronounced. That is to say, Moll is at her most individualistic when she is starving to death. Moll has her own way of putting this problem in terms of her motivation: “I knew what I aim’d at, and what I wanted, but knew nothing how to pursue the End by direct means; I wanted to be plac’d in a settled State of Living, and had I happen’d to meet with a sober good Husband, I should have been as faithful and true a Wife to him as Virtue it self could have form’d” (103). Moll’s language of “ends” and “means” brutally instrumentalizes the domestic ideal that she points to as a potential endpoint for her serial
relations. Her professed ignorance of instrumental reason, “I knew nothing how to Pursue the end,” highlights the failure of her individual reason and self-determination to solve the structural problem of her life, to turn the picaresque into romance. Marriage is only a means of satisfying basic needs to Moll, who presents the positive ideal in counterfactual form (“had I happen’d to meet with a sober good Husband”). If such sentiments sound unscrupulous and mercenary, Defoe’s narrative continually emphasizes the exigent circumstances that drive the protagonist to such formulations.

The narrative asks the reader to consider to what degree Moll is able to meet her needs through the various avenues open to her, such as through labor and through economically motivated relationships. In one of the earliest dialogues in *Moll Flanders*, the protagonist debates her nurse about her capacity to earn her own living: “‘What can you earn?’ says she; ‘what can you get at your work?’” When Moll responds that she can earn “threepence when I spin, and fourpence when I work plain work,” the nurse breaks the news that such earnings are not enough to survive on: “‘Poor child! it won't keep you,’ says she; ‘it will hardly keep you in victuals.’” The starvation wages being offered for needlework will not stretch far enough to provide for Moll’s basic needs. Defoe highlights the protagonist’s naivety in her response: “Then I will have no victuals” (12-13). Moll’s curious ignorance of her own needs sheds light on the contradiction between the desire for autonomy, which seems capable of becoming detached even from subsistence in Moll’s suggestion that she might go without victuals, and the more basic bodily necessities, which are never completely surmounted by economic relations.

In *Moll Flanders*, social relations are not disembodied abstractions (as in social theory) but real interpersonal connections that depend on contingent bodily realities.
Moll’s dialogue with her nurse initiates a series of reflections on the relationship between Moll’s means and her needs. Moll’s body is her only form of capital and she uses it to the best of her ability as a means to sustain herself. Moll’s body, as a currency of exchange in the marriage market, becomes an alienated form of value. The protagonist occupies an ambivalent position among various emblematic or allegorical conventions using women’s bodies as ways of illustrating the relationship between nature and economics. For one critic, Moll’s “incest can be read as the literalization of a figure for capital increase” yet such capital is relatively difficult to instrumentalize in practical terms. By making a woman the protagonist of his novel about poverty and hardship, Defoe demonstrates that Moll’s social position is far more precarious than a Lazarillo or a Guzman. Because social conventions severely limit her employment opportunities, Moll’s ability to sustain herself is more closely tied to her body than it is for Defoe’s Colonel Jack, who also contends with financial hardship but finds ways to string together incidental work to make ends meet.

Defoe’s novel emphasizes the way that the human body cannot function as an abstract form of capital for long because it is a kind of non-renewable resource, subject to irreversible transformations rather than unimpeded exchangeability. At certain moments, Defoe marks the passage of time through changes in Moll’s body, demonstrating a gap between market relations and material realities. For instance, after her third marriage effectively ends, she reflects “I had the World to begin again; but you are to consider that I was not now the same Woman as when I lived at Redriff; for first of all I was near 20

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years older, and did not look the better for my Age” (102). Moll’s assessment demonstrates the limitations that the physical body might put on endless serial adventures as a wife. The protagonist wryly notes her own capacity to “begin” is intimately connected to the status of her body. Unlike the socioeconomic body of a pícaro who is able to begin again by finding a new employer, the woman’s body no longer lends itself to the creation of new contractual relationships. Moll loses the means to find marital partners as she passes child-bearing age and loses her youthful good looks.

The passage of time enacts irreversible transformations upon Moll’s body. Defoe’s realism consists in shaping the narrative to reflect the bodily realities of his aging protagonist—the consequences of her maturation, her intermittent pregnancies—rather than projecting upon her the fantasy of moral autonomy. Moll’s pregnancies are perhaps the most striking example of the intrusion of bodily necessity into otherwise interchangeable adventures. While Moll’s social standing might, in theory, be treated as the ebbing and flowing of economic and social prestige that could always be lost or regained, in giving birth, Moll generates children who will not simply disappear and reappear with newly attained social roles. Though Moll is forced to treat her pregnancies as economic problems to be solved, the implicit suggestion is that necessity has made motherhood as a nurturing relationship impossible. Like Necessity in The Review, Moll is all generation and no sociality, no succor, and no cultivation.

Moll’s relationship to her surroundings is more markedly determined by fear of starvation as she careens toward economic hardship in the second half of the book. In one moment of reflection, Moll’s perception of her own life is colored by the threat of necessity:
I began to consider here *very seriously* what I had to do; how things stood with me, and what Course I ought to take: I knew I had no Friends, no not one Friend or Relation in the World: and that little I had left apparently wasted, which when it was gone, I saw nothing but Misery and Starving was before me: Upon these Considerations, I say, and fill’d with Horror at the Place I was in, and the dreadful Objects, which I had always before me, *I resolv’d to be gone.* (55)

The passage hinges on Moll’s vivid apprehension of “Misery and Starving,” which recalls Defoe’s similar description in *The Review.* By calling attention to the “Course” that her life takes, Moll reconstructs the way that hunger shapes the narrative trajectory of her life. Moll’s diminishing resources instill “Horror” and fear of starvation into the very “Objects” which she has before her. Moll’s environment objectifies and externalizes her own affect, which is experienced as something outside of her body, pricking her onward.

Though such passages of reflection seem to indicate Moll’s reflective process of decision-making, this example stresses “Horror” taking precedence over rational deliberation. It is not reason but the non-cognitive push of self-preservation that motivates her behavior. In a similar moment, Moll tells the reader “I was frighted out of my Wits almost, and knew not what to do, for I was, as it were turn’d out of Doors to the wide World” (17). Moll emphasizes her lack of knowledge, that she “*knew not* what to do” in her moment of necessity. As she moves toward complete destitution in the second half of the narrative, Moll’s language is more often inflected with such markers of fear of starvation. Moll reflects on her distress as a mental experience as well as a purely physiological one:

I saw nothing before me but the utmost Distress, and this represented it self so lively to my Thoughts, that it seem’d as if it was come, before it was really very near; also my very Apprehension doubl’d the Misery, for I fancied every Sixpence that I paid but for a Loaf of Bread, was the last
that I had in the World, and that Tomorrow I was to fast, and be starv’d to Death.¹⁵⁵

Moll’s language is remarkable for the way that it makes her distress seem urgent at the same time that she acknowledges “it seem’d as if it was come, before it was really very near.” Defoe’s narrators frequently describe anticipated future events as if they occupy their visual space, as Moll does here in saying “I saw nothing before me but the utmost Distress.” This metaphorical spatialization of her temporal situation externalizes possible outcomes as physical stimuli. The passage in the Review uses the same kind of language (see above, p 25). Yet Moll’s language is all the more remarkable for transforming Moll’s distress into a psychological drama that has been fully comprehended by a retrospective narrator: “it seem’d as if it was come, before it was really very near.” Even the pronominal substitution, “it,” transforms the mechanism of appearance into a mode of abstraction.

Defoe also experimented with the ways that necessity distorts perception in his final novel, Roxana. Early in Roxana, the protagonist is abandoned by her husband. She assesses her situation as especially worrisome “with five Children, and not one Farthing Subsistence for them, other than about seventy Pound in Money, and what few Things of Value I had about me, which, tho’ considerable in themselves, were yet nothing to feed a Family, and for a length of Time too” (13). Roxana distinguishes between her cash on hand and the ability to “feed a Family.” It is not so much her present situation as its open-ended form, the ongoing demand without means, that presents such a challenge. When Roxana becomes her landlord’s mistress, she reflects “Poverty was my Snare; dreadful

Poverty!” And, echoing *Moll Flanders*: “I had no Friend in the World to have Recourse
to; I had no Prospect, none, not a Bit of Bread; I had nothing before me, but to fall back
into the same Misery as I had been in before” (39). The language echoes *Moll Flanders*
in that both protagonists initiate morally proscribed behaviors prompted by bodily
necessity. Roxana maps her situation in a confusing conflation of spatial and temporal
coordinates (“nothing before me, but to fall back”) that turn both into repetition.

The figurative language that Defoe employs in *Moll Flanders* also insists that
necessity distorts Moll’s sense of temporality. When she tells us that she fancied “that
Tomorrow I was to fast, and be starv’d to Death,” she recounts an (anachronistically
traumatic) experience that was repeated over and over, that fuddles the chronological
unfolding of calendar time in its seeming urgency. Moll experiences time as one endless
emergency, which seems to stretch into infinity precisely because it always remains just
another day away. Like Hobbes’s state of nature, Moll’s life takes its narrative structure
not from actual experience but from the anticipation of pending catastrophe.” Moll’s
language embodies not just her “Thoughts” but the increasingly urgent motive force of
starvation as it invades her thoughts, gradually transforming moral choice into
involuntary response.

Moll’s account of approaching poverty, in addition to staging the protagonist’s
mental experience of distress, also demonstrates Defoe’s experimentation with invoking
necessity through fictional means. As a novelist, Defoe is interested in how an experience
that “seems” real might be created—how the distant could be made to seem as if it were
close—and uses Moll as a kind of illustration of how necessity might be brought home to
the reader. Defoe is not just trying to make an epistemological claim, to convince his
readers to believe something is true, but to experiment with methods of provoking affective response.

Moll’s experience encompasses not only fear but also despair. After selling off her belongings and moving into a smaller house, Moll reflects on her diminishing fortune:

I liv’d near a Year upon that [sum], spending very sparingly, and eeking things out to the utmost; but still when I look’d before me, my very Heart would sink within me at the inevitable approach of Misery and Want: O let none read this part without seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of a Desolate State, and how they would grapple with meer want of Friends and want of Bread. (150-51)

Like similar passages in Defoe’s non-fictional writings, Moll’s words emphasize that necessity is capable of directing movement regardless of individual choice in its “inevitable Approach.” Moll works her way up to addressing her readers (“O let none read this part”) to put themselves in her position and imagine what they would do in similar circumstances. The height of Moll’s soul-searching is captured in a strange inversion between inside and out: “it was all Fear without, and Dark within” (153). Moll’s emotions are attributed to the world itself, rather than her own self.

The novel’s most famous account of causality involves the “Devil within” Moll’s breast. Though Defoe’s use of the Devil implies a supernatural explanation for his protagonist’s behavior, Moll’s language also suggests a material analogue: “I had an evil Counsellor within, and he was continually prompting me to relieve my self by the worst means; so one Evening he tempted me again by the same wicked Impulse that had said, take that Bundle, to go out again and seek for what might happen” (153). In the early eighteenth century, the word “Impulse,” like “Instinct” was a technical term, associated with philosophical questions of causality. Locke’s use in the Essay serves to illustrate the
material resonance of “impulse”: “We cannot conceive how any thing but impulse of Body can move Body.” ¹⁵⁶ Later in the century, David Hume would also use the word in one of his famous illustrations of the mechanics of causality: “The impulse of one billiard-ball is attended with motion in the second.” ¹⁵⁷ The strong association between the word “impulse” and considerations of material causation suggests that Defoe meant to invoke material as well as spiritual explanations with the appearance of the devil. Whether regarded as bodily instinct, mechanical impulse, or supernatural temptation, the point is made that the motive for theft originates as extrinsic to Moll’s will.

Moll appeals to Providence as the retrospective mechanism that should redeem her criminal acts—the final cause that explains why things happened the way that they did. Yet bodily necessity remains incommensurate with Providential causality: “my past wicked and abominable Life never looked so Monstrous to me and I never so completely abhorr’d it, and reproached myself with it, as when I had a Sense upon me of Providence doing good to me, while I had been making those vile Returns on my part” (263). Moll regards her crimes (which were justified according to natural law) as “Monstrous” or unnatural economic transactions (“vile Returns”) conducted with the hand of Providence. What Defoe has claimed is inevitable and beyond rational choice, self-preservation, appears as monstrous from the retrospective perspective of Providence. As for Robinson, who waxes philosophic on the plight of the marooned ship, Moll’s circumstances are easier to moralize from a distance than when bodily need presses upon her.

The appearance of the figure of monstrosity in the retrospective judgment of the protagonist calls attention to Moll’s repeated failure to recognize her past behavior as constitutive of her own self. Following Moll’s usage, the economic form of her narrative should be seen as a disjunction between Providence and necessity rather than a form of equivalence between the two. Moll fails to perform the labor that would transform the raw materials of her experience into a coherent narrative because there is a fundamental incompatibility between the immediacy of bodily necessity and the moral abstraction of the retrospective self. Though Moll’s fortunes culminate in her religious conversion and her attainment of financial solvency after transportation, the coincidence of Moll’s Newgate conversion and her subsequent economic salvation have rankled some readers as inconsistent with the moral tone of the earlier book. Critics have disagreed on the capacity of various perspectives (socioeconomic or religious) to subordinate the criminal material under a single moral rubric without leaving ironic traces of another mode of reading. Though the debate over the role of irony in Moll Flanders has for the most part been put to rest, the contradiction remains in place between Moll Flanders’s account of bodily need and the moral register in which it might be recognized.

One way to describe the pressures exerted by external forces of determination and Moll’s reflective self is that Moll continues to experience her own body as a thing rather than as an autonomous self. The contrast between these two versions of Moll can be seen

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in the oscillation between passages of moral reflection and confessions of criminal conduct, a rhythmic episodic structure that recalls Guzmán de Alfarache. Moll Flanders’s repetitive ironic structure derives from the misalignment between these two modes of narration. Paul de Man’s “The Rhetoric of Temporality” describes irony as the episodic drama of a trope, which might be understood as repeatedly failing to reconcile the disjunction between the self as body with needs and the self as an autonomous individual asserting mastery over her history through narrative: “Nature can at all times treat him as if he were a thing and remind him of his factitiousness, whereas he is quite powerless to convert even the smallest particle of nature into something human.”

De Man goes on to describe the repeated “falls,” or attempts to gain self-knowledge, a process of coming to grips with the incommensurability of language and things in themselves. Like de Man, Defoe confronts the inadequacy of language to represent or comprehend nature. For Defoe, it is natural law that is never fully apprehensible to reason through our practices of representation.

In Defoe’s vision of society, bodily necessity can never fully coincide with civil society because the labor of self-understanding is not sufficient for transforming things into objects, or the body into a completely rational self. Though the ironic spiral described by de Man is rooted in the shortcomings of language, Defoe demonstrates the misalignment between nature and its representation in narrative form has political implications as well. To regard political institutions as fully rational and voluntary forms of association is to disqualify from political representation all those non-cognitive

faculties that constitute our basic bodily needs. Though Defoe regards the domain of necessity as ultimately unknowable, to exclude it from the political realm entirely is a form of idealism.
Chapter Three:
“The Consequence of Compulsion”:
Necessity and Social Order in Tobias Smollett’s Picaresque Novels

In the ensuing decades between Defoe’s final publications and Tobias Smollett’s first ones, authors and readers placed the conventions of narrative structure in prose fiction under greater scrutiny. One such author was Tobias Smollett, whose novels draw on the picaresque tradition in structure and theme. Long before Ian Watt censured Smollett for “the manifest flaws in the central situations and the general structure of his novels,” eighteenth-century readers recognized episodic narrative as a key feature of Smollett’s prose.160 In 1783 James Beattie remarks, “it does not appear that [Smollett] knew how to contrive a regular fable, by making events mutually dependent, and all cooperating to one and the same final purpose.”161 To Beattie, the failure of events to cooperate with one another indicates Smollett’s ignorance of the norms of constructing successful narrative structure, in the sense that teleological purpose can be seen to be guiding the interrelations of events. This “lack of cooperation” gestures toward a more general conflict between necessity and individual agency that marks Smollett’s early writings—in which the breakdown of narrative structure follows from the reduction of individuals to bodily instincts. In this chapter, I will argue that Smollett’s first two novels parody the generic conventions of both classical and contemporary eighteenth-century narrative forms, opting to employ a mode of causality derived from bodily drives rather than from cosmological design. By drawing on the picaresque tradition, in the sense that

imperatives of the human body drive the action, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* and *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* call attention to the unacknowledged force of bodily needs through episodic narrative structure by deviating from the oft-providential devices that serve to unify plot elements in the majority of eighteenth-century novels.

In Smollett’s early novels, bodily needs vie with a host of conventional and modern causal models—such as providential purpose, classical precedent, and socioeconomic theory. I will argue that Smollett’s tendency to use hunger and privation as the engines of his narratives is precisely what breaks down the developmental coherence of the plot. Episodic narrative disconnects human behavior from divine purpose because the struggle to survive seems meaningless when detached from any overarching teleology. Attending to unacknowledged facets of behavior can turn episodic narrative into a kind of anthropological diagnostic tool for understanding the patterns of causality that predominate in all of life’s vagaries because it calls attention to the springs of motivation. Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle find themselves without secure means of satisfying their needs at various points in each text, but in tracking the contrasting elements of Smollett’s first two novels, we can see that Smollett was preoccupied with what constitutes the impetus to action in both high society and low life. While *Roderick Random* documents the protagonist’s subjection to bodily need, *Peregrine Pickle* understands “unnecessary” appetite in continuity with biological need.

Despite the fact that eighteenth-century readers such as Beattie were sensitive to the episodic nature of Smollett’s novels, twentieth-century critics have disagreed about the role of moral teleology in his fiction. Paul-Gabriel Boucé strenuously rejects Smollett’s affiliation with the picaresque, posing moral purpose and the picaresque as
categorical opposites. He argues that in *Roderick Random* “Adventure … has an 
educative function on the physical, intellectual, and moral plane,” making the text into an 
early novel of formation.\(^{162}\) Jerry Beasley emphasizes the episodic nature of Smollett’s 
novels to suggest that the aggregation of random experiences contributes to and 
culminates in an affirmation of orthodox faith in providence as the logical response to the 
despair of an episodic and seemingly arbitrary universe.\(^{163}\) While it is evident that 
Smollett’s comic resolutions employ providential explanation as a means of containing 
the interminable flow of episodic narrative that precedes each ending, I claim that 
Smollett’s use of providence is ironic if not subversive in its unabashed conventionality. 
Providence stands as an obvious falsification of reality when read in context of the 
picaresque tradition that Smollett continually invokes.

My argument builds on the work of recent critics that emphasize Smollett’s 
preoccupation with the materiality of the human body, such as Donald Bruce, Aileen 
Douglas, and Mark Blackwell.\(^{164}\) For these critics, Smollett’s obsessive attention to the 
body—its potential fragmentation and its involuntary drives—distinguishes his work 
from the majority of mid-century novelists (perhaps with the exception of Sterne). By 
making the body the nexus of narrative structure, the sheer persistence and repetition of 

\(^{162}\) See Paul-Gabriel Boucé, *The Novels of Tobias Smollett*, Trans. Antonia White 
73-74.
\(^{164}\) Donald Bruce, *Radical Doctor Smollett* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1965), 161, and 
Raymond Stephanson, “The (Non)sense of an Ending: Subversive Allusion and Thematic 
Discontent in *Roderick Random.*” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 1.2 (January 1989):103- 
118; Aileen Douglas, *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body*. (Chicago: University of 
Chicago Press, 1995), and Mark Blackwell, “Disjecta Membra: Smollett and the Novel in 
Pieces.” *The Eighteenth Century* 52.3 (2011).
episodes driven by need makes the appeal to providence into a problem. If bodies are subject to involuntary biological demands, as texts in the picaresque tradition repeatedly emphasize, how can this purely physical force be compatible with the teleological design of providence that structures so many mid-eighteenth century narratives?

Eighteenth-century narratives frequently used the notion of providence as a means of creating the very sense of narrative coherence that Beattie criticizes Smollett for lacking. Providence unifies narrative by making sense out of contingent happenings, knitting together arbitrary events into an intentional design. Writing of seventeenth-century didactic religious pamphlets that showcase providence’s role in day-to-day life. J. Paul Hunter points out, “Providence books are reminders of the cultural desire to thematize narratives, to make some interpretative sense of what are otherwise only wonderful random events.” Hunter’s use of the term “random” calls attention to the fact that eighteenth-century notions of randomness and chance were conditioned by narrative form in highly self-conscious ways—such as the retrospective interpretation of events in a text like Robinson Crusoe. Leo Damrosch argues that providence was an especially important component in the canonical novels of the period by Bunyan, Defoe, and Richardson, disclosing divine agency by making events seem purposeful in the end. Even for authors that were less explicitly engaged with the religious framework from which providential doctrine was derived, such as Smollett and Fielding, providence provides a model capable of, in Beattie’s terms, “making events mutually dependent, and all co-operating to one and the same final purpose.”

166 Damrosch, God's Plot, 4-13.
1. “Those who are either obliged or inclined to live frugally”: *Roderick Random*

While there are numerous similar examples, the “diving for dinner” episode in *Roderick Random* is a particularly illustrative instance of the emergence of random accident out of bodily need, a causal relationship that recurs throughout the text. The novel documents the wandering career of an over-educated but penniless Scottish youth who drifts from job to job in search of a secure livelihood, yo-yoing across geographical and social barriers with his loyal childhood friend and sidekick, Hugh Strap. The text is littered with episodes that are difficult to harness to a central narrative trajectory but the diving episode condenses much of what has come before into a vivid tableau. At Roderick and Strap’s arrival in London, a helpful fellow Scotsman introduces them to the process of “diving” for dinner, a way of eating ironically described as being “practiced by those who are either obliged or inclined to live frugally.” Roderick and Strap’s host brackets the question of what constitutes necessity in the form of a conjunction. Divers are “obliged or inclined” to subject themselves to a meal determined by chance as the language puts bodily need (Roderick and Strap must eat) on par with a kind of choice (frugality). A more accurate descriptor than diving would be “gambling” for dinner as diving consists of “plunging a fork into a large pot containing portions of meat and then paying a small sum for the privilege of taking whatever the fork brings up.” Divers are compelled by bodily imperative to feed themselves in some manner but the content of their meal is a matter of accident or chance. Smollett uses the actual historical practice to

exemplify how a kind of randomness emerges out of bodily necessity. Throughout the novel, Smollett uses such ambivalent formulations—compulsions that are also regarded as choices—to indicate an interpretative tension between biological necessity (“obliged”) and individual choice (“inclined”). The causal mechanics of the episode are further illustrated when diving quickly evolves from a metaphor for the fork’s descent into the pot into a reality, as Strap tumbles down a staircase on the way down to the cellar where he and Roderick intend to get their dinner.

Hunger propels accident that takes the shape of a downward-moving causal chain. Roderick descends into the crowded cook’s shop first and notices the “out of place” footmen (both unemployed and disorderly) and other desperate diners. When he turns and sees his friend falling behind him, he notes “Strap, in his descent missing one of the steps, tumbled headlong into this infernal ordinary, and overturned the cook as she was carrying the porringer of soup to one of the guests” (70). Cartoonish images collide and sprawl over one another in a scene crowded with comic cues. The downward motion spreads from body to body as Roderick observes: “In her fall, she dashed the whole mess against the legs of a drummer belonging to the foot guards, who happened to be in her way, and scalded him so miserably, that he started up, and danced up and down, uttering a volley of execrations that made my hair stand on end” (70). Strap’s fall initiates a chain of events that runs from accidental misstep to collision, spilled soup, and subsequent injury. The episode emphasizes randomness in a physical sense by tracing the velocity of a headlong fall into a series of physical consequences from Strap to soup to drummer’s oaths to Roderick’s involuntary physical reaction. Roderick emphasizes the contingency of the collision by suggesting that the drummer “happened to be in the way.” There is no
hint of providence in such an episode, which slips through the cracks of narrative design in its inconsequential attention to everyday and “ordinary” life.

The “diving for dinner” scene plays little or no role in developing the narrative of the plot of the novel, pointing to the way in which physical bodies are subject to collision and conflict that emerge from bodily necessity. The descriptive quality of these slapstick scenes contributes to a kind of “randomness effect” that anchors the causality of the novel precisely by resisting accommodation to the “final purpose,” recalling Roland Barthes’s “reality effect.” For Barthes, the discourse of realism employs a kind of “narrative luxury” in offering useless details that index the domain of the real. These “useless details” do not actually manage to “denote the real directly, all they do—without saying so—is signify it.” In Barthes’s view, details that cannot be accommodated to narrative purpose create a sense of realism precisely because they disclose the arbitrary workings of signification. Smollett’s episodic narrative points forward to the discourse of realism in its inclusion of episodic detail but it ultimately has a different rhetorical effect. Rather than trying to convince the reader of its verisimilitude (for scenes like “diving for dinner” are comic rather than realistic), episodic narrative introduces the velocity of colliding bodies as a rival form of causation to the providential determination of novelistic narrative. In this way, such scenes, with their rough-and-tumble chains of causation strain providential interpretation through proliferation of episodic randomness.

Smollett’s use of the word “random” in the title of his first novel would have had a different set of associations for his first readers than it does to us today, but as Hunter 169

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suggests, it could be opposed to providence. The association between randomness and strangeness or peculiarity only arose in the 1970s, while the idea of statistical randomness is, of course, a product of the nineteenth century. The word “random” was fairly uncommon in the eighteenth century, in contrast to words like “chance” or “accident,” which were prevalent. In choosing “random” over one of these more common alternatives, it is likely that Smollett had in mind the etymological association of the word, derived from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French term *randoun*, which denoted impetuosity, great speed, and violence.\(^{170}\) The word was employed as a noun in describing military maneuvers and related contexts until the sixteenth century when it took on the meaning of a haphazard or aimless course. Smollett only uses the word as proper name in *Roderick Random* but in *Peregrine Pickle* the word is employed several times to denote speed or violence. For example, Smollett writes: “the mischievous Pickle distributed sundry random blows in the dark.”\(^{171}\) The majority of Smollett’s usages of the term, like this one, could be interpreted in either obsolete or modern senses.

In his 1755 *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson offers a compressed cluster of terms to define the word a few years after the publication of Smollett’s first novel: “Want of direction; want of rule or method; chance; hazard; roving motion.”\(^{172}\) Johnson’s definition shows that the idea of the “random” had mutated in common discourse, equally capable of describing brute velocity or roving, speed, or aimlessness. These meanings are

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not necessarily opposed to one another but over time, randomness has grown more abstract while in the eighteenth-century the term retained an association with violence. At times Roderick embodies the impetuosity and violence of its older sense, as in the frequent boxing matches and duels that crop up throughout the novel. At other times, Roderick’s travels seem to be characterized by a haphazardness that has less to do with physical movement and more to do with a general “want of direction.” Smollett’s first novel might be said to demonstrate how the more modern usage is derived from the former, or how randomness as we know it may arise out of the violence and impetuosity of physical bodies, suggesting a physiological rather than a mental foundation of action.

There is something counter-intuitive and seemingly paradoxical in Smollett’s habit of making “randomness” the most reliable and consistent quality of his first novel. If we take randomness to be rooted in this propensity to impetuosity, speed, and violence, it becomes clear that Smollett’s novel suggest that the cause of randomness is the hair-trigger propensity to violence that accompanies precarious survival. From the moment that his grandfather effectively disinherits him by failing to recognize his father’s ill-fated romance with the housekeeper, Roderick acts a body without a defined position in the social world and randomness arises from, or coincides with, his desperate attempt to distance himself from the struggle to survive. As in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the physical body serves as a vantage point from which the problems of the social order are demonstrated through a series of violent collisions and conflicts.
Stuart Miller has argued that the picaresque should be regarded as a genre that “expresses an intuition that the world is without order, is chaotic,”\textsuperscript{173} turning the frequently pejorative sense of picaresque into a positive condition of its formal definition. Smollett’s first novel stresses the “random” quality of the world, but its disorderliness serves to bolster its irreverent satire of idealistic high genres, posing the body’s needs as the repressed real of tragedy, epic, or romance convention, distressing the heroic world with the unexpected yet constant demands of bodily experience. Bodily necessity only seems random because our expectations have been conditioned by the wrong causal models. Smollett follows Cervantes in hoping to correct the misprision of the world through satire but Smollett’s emphasis falls on the occluded power of need in determining the outcome of situations. According to Ronald Paulson, episodic narrative is the natural vehicle of satire, often taking the form of a journey or “rogue’s gallery,” a collection of satirical portraits unified by the speaker’s indignation. Paulson suggests, “a resolution, happy or otherwise, is antithetical to the general aim of satire.” This is because satire “is essentially the middle of the story.”\textsuperscript{174} Considering the picaresque as a variety of satire, rather than as primitive novel, helps us see how its focus on the physical body and its narrative form are both aspects of an anti-romance tendency to resist closure through insistence on reduction to the mere body.

The interminable appetites of the body do not lend themselves to standard modes of narrative closure. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the grotesque image of the lower stratum

\textsuperscript{173} Stuart Miller, \textit{The Picaresque Novel} (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western University), 10.
radically depicts “a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world.” 175 Grotesque realism resists the enclosure of individual identity as well as the closure of narrative form by depicting a world of interpenetrating organic forces. While for Bakhtin this worldview is emancipatory and “ends in nothing less than ideological enlightenment,” 176 Smollett’s attitude toward the body is more cautionary than celebratory. Bodily necessity is a force that is irrational and desperate, spurring one to act without regard to decorum or morality. What often appears as randomness in *Roderick Random* is an effort to stress bodily necessity as a force that dispels the illusions and conventions of high genres but remains dangerously volatile, triggering violence at every turn. If an episode appears random it is because it undermines the transcendent metaphysical assumptions – such as providential design – employed to unify narrative form. Along these lines, Mark Blackwell argues that Smollett’s novels highlight the fragmentation of the body and the unstable, contingent quality of the identities attached to bodies. Blackwell argues that “Smollett’s thematic obsession with humans’ reduction to *disjecta membra*, and with the varied forces that bend, break, and remake individuals, parallels and amplifies his formal preoccupations, especially his ongoing experiments with the totality and integrity of the novel’s ‘body.’” 177 Blackwell points to the way in which Smollett’s episodic narratives and his attention to the materiality of biological bodies complement one another. Bodily

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175 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.
necessity is a force that fragments the novel into episodes by stressing the difficulty of containing randomness.

The summaries at the headings of each chapter offer a way of reflecting on the force of bodily necessity in formal terms. Occurrences of Roderick’s life are frequently designated “accidents”; chapter headings use the word no fewer than six times. The heading of chapter VII declares “an Accident happens,” Chapter XIII announces “an Accident at our Ordinary,” in Chapter XIV, “an Accident befalls Strap,” and Chapter XXVI complains “A disagreeable accident happens to me in the discharge of my office.” The word accident is applied to farts and fatal gunshot wounds, a shipwreck and an attempted rape. Not all of these events directly thematize the body, but they constitute the situations in which Roderick is subject to the vicissitudes of forces beyond his control. None of these accidents contribute to any sort of moral purpose and Smollett tells us as much by tagging such occurrences in the paratextual chapter headings, naming them accidents. Framing chapters in such terms calls attention to the episodic nature of the text.

Within the novel itself, Roderick displays awareness of the connection between bodily need and episodic narrative when he laments, “I found myself deserted to all the horrors of extreme want, and avoided by mankind as a creature of a different species, or rather as a solitary being, no ways comprehended within the scheme or protection of providence” (36). The protagonist’s awareness of his desperate state (“the horrors of extreme want”) coincides with feeling of being outside of providence. If Roderick’s locution seems a bit overstated, what is interesting is that it is the occasion of a reflection on the nature of his species-being (from the imagined perspective of “mankind” in general) as well as its narrative implications by putting him outside of the “scheme” of
providence. Providence, here, should be considered as a principle of narrative unity rather than as a theological concept, as I will show in my discussion of the conclusion of the novel. Being deprived of elite social status means suffering accident after accident, or being confined to potentially endless episodic narrative. While this section focused on the emergence of randomness from bodily necessity, the next section of this chapter addresses the misalignment between social status and bodily need.

2. “The continual wants to which I was exposed”: Social status and bodily necessity

The bulk of the episodes in Roderick Random document how bodily needs compel the protagonist to take a series of demeaning jobs. Smollett’s preface calls attention to its thematic preoccupation with low material by excusing the presence of “mean scenes” in the novel, saying of the protagonist “the judicious will not only perceive the necessity of describing those situations to which he must be confined, in his low estate, but also find entertainment in viewing those parts of life, where the humours and passions are undisguised by affectation, ceremony, or education” (4). Smollett’s sailors and prostitutes are, like classical shepherds, reconstructed images of uncultivated life. In this way, picaresque functions as a kind of anti-pastoral discourse with an ambition to disclose something fundamental about what constitutes human nature through its attempt to represent passions otherwise unrepresented because they are beneath consideration.178

The inclusion of situations from low life pulls Smollett’s novel in directions that

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178 Michael McKeon suggests “pastoral and picaresque are the antithetical and complementary parts of the literary totality of conservative ideology.” See Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 238. Smollett hints at an equivalence between the cunning pícaro and the innocent shepherd, contrasting anthropological models that are somehow “antithetical and complementary.”
undermine the decorum of the novel through an over-investment in scenes of privation and penury.

From its opening sentence the novel defines social status in relation to extreme poverty, making “means scenes” and Roderick’s “low estate” the touchstones for understanding the nature of social hierarchy. The emphasis falls on an opposition between aristocrats and beggars as Roderick introduces us to his “grandfather, a gentleman of considerable fortune and influence, who had on many occasions signalized himself in behalf of his country” (17). The conventionality of the opening clause seems innocuous when read at first but as it develops from appositional embellishment into a string of modifying phrases, it launches resentment back into the opening praise as Roderick continues, “and was remarkable for his abilities in the law, which he exercised with great success, in quality of a judge, particularly against beggars, for whom he had a singular aversion” (17). Roderick’s satirical approval of his grandfather makes the conjunction, “and,” the site of a turn to satiric disclosure of avarice. Suddenly, Roderick’s grandfather’s “considerable fortune and influence,” grammatically not essential to the coherence of the sentence, reveals that his consolidation of wealth in part is derived from legal action against beggars. Smollett’s sentence performs its satire through a kind of “episodic sentence” that acts in ways analogous to the narrative at large. The sentence accumulates descriptive phrases that eventually revise and undermine the meaning of the clause that they modify, moving backwards across a minor connective conjunction that entirely changes the meaning of what came before it at the mention of poverty. Smollett’s sentence takes hold through descriptive excess by turning a seemingly unnecessary detail into an implied critique.
Smollett’s novel underscores how the body’s needs are a causal force than can be misrecognized in socioeconomic terms as character. Roderick speaks early in the novel of his outward appearance as a marker of his social status: “The contempt which my appearance naturally produced, in all who saw me, the continual wants to which I was exposed, and my own haughty disposition, impatient of affronts, involved me in a thousand troublesome adventures” (21). He describes the contempt of “all who saw me” as “naturally produced,” that is, suggesting that bodily need compromises social identity. Roderick’s behavior is contemptuously attributed to “continual wants” by the community and his hyperbolic “thousand troublesome adventures” – echoing the Adventures of the title – emerge from a confluence of pride, resentment, and bodily demand. Roderick’s character is not properly an attribute of his “self” but the demands of his body. When he goes on to document his youth in what is described as the “character of a vagabond,” Roderick represents his adventures as issuing from a kind of misrecognition or socio-economic pigeonholing. Falsely accused of robbing orchards, killing cats, stealing gingerbread, and abusing an old woman, the young Roderick conveys his anger that he is denied a gentleman’s invulnerability to the arbitrary legalities that haunt plebian existence with dehumanizing and arbitrary interpellations. A gentleman’s status, which Roderick feels is his right, would for the most part shield him from most of the misfortunes and accidents of everyday life.

Because of his precarious ability to meet his basic needs, Roderick alternately identifies himself as either a gentleman or a hungry pauper. Pride is the tool which he uses to attempt to distance himself from abject poverty. Roderick’s awareness of his own “pride and resentment” is such that he refers to these qualities as “two chief ingredients in
my disposition” (97). That is to say, his disposition, or his character, is socially regarded in terms of bodily need (his “character of a vagabond”), which Roderick is desperate to deny. Pride and resentment bring Roderick back to his body in episode after episode as socioeconomic distinctions are reduced to fistfights. Roderick’s efforts to distance himself from bodily need, or to elevate himself above the material world, often backfire and result in his further debasement, exemplifying literal and figurative forms of downward motion. Smollett achieves this effect through the use of satire directed toward his own protagonist. Pride is perhaps the most traditional object of satire and Smollett makes his protagonist into both the object and vehicle of satire throughout the text. In doing so, Smollett also exploits the dual meaning of the word “vanity” as futile worldly toil (“Vanity of vanities”) and exaggerated self-regard.179

Smollett’s novel makes it difficult to discern whether Roderick is to be read as a vain pretender, desperately trying to rise above his station, or as a sympathetic underdog, heroically struggling to restore his lost status. John Barrell points out that as often as Roderick insists on his right to be treated as a gentleman, his claim to this status is far from clear: “We may read the novel either as a criticism, a parody even, of the idea of the gentleman and his ability to see and understand the variety of social identities and the relations between them, or we may read it as an extreme, a rather desperate attempt to

179 Vanity (in the classical tradition) is a word that assesses the value of both individuals and society at large, in that it signifies both the overestimation of one’s own worth and also the worthlessness of social or cultural achievements in general. Satirical figures like Roderick caution against the over-valuation of one’s own qualities and expectations. Moral reflections in a Horation tradition (like Samuel Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes”) evaluate the futility of social prestige. Stephanson points out that Roderick’s beloved Narcissa functions as nothing more than a narcissistic reflection of the protagonist’s vanity. (109) Smollett would have been familiar enough with the Ovidian resonance of the name to suggest that Roderick’s love is only another attempt to elevate himself out of the bleak reality of day-to-day privation.
vindicating them.” Smollett betrays his perfectly achieved ambiguity is in the preface, where the author indicates that Roderick should be regarded with some measure of sympathy: “I have attempted to represent modest merit struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed” (4). But the narrative as a whole makes it difficult to swallow “modest merit” as an appropriate phrase to use in describing a character frequently distinguished by pride (even if “modest” modifies merit rather than its bearer). Smollett’s lexical choice is either a poor joke or a subtle hint of the ambiguity of the effect that he seeks to elicit. In *Roderick Random*, pride may be a component of social distinction, but in the rhetoric of satire its basis is in part derived from blindness to bodily necessity. That is, Smollett frequently undermines his protagonist’s pride by reducing him to a mere body at the very moment that he feels entitled to better treatment.

Roderick’s indignation is aroused as he is forced to swallow his pride and take a number of menial jobs that expose him to a host of perceived indignities. Roderick runs out of career options for sustaining himself and the middle section of the narrative increasingly focuses on the protagonist’s interactions with impersonal institutions. Unable to secure a position as a surgeon’s mate, he passes time in London waffling between career options until his savings are exhausted. The scenes in London depict a kind of eighteenth-century version of Kafkaesque bureaucracy, composed of waiting rooms and interrogations in which Roderick struggles to distinguish himself from other Scottish immigrants: “At length I found myself at the Navy-Office, which I entered, and saw crowds of young fellows walking below; many of whom made no better appearance

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than myself” (80). Roderick dismisses the other applicants as “no better” in physical appearance than himself in a manner that demonstrates his pride as a form of distinction from anonymous and interchangeable bodies. Later, one of the Navy interviewers comments, “you Scotchmen have overspread us of late as the locusts did Egypt” (86). The interviewer’s Biblical analogy makes Scotchmen into parasites and poses social relations as competition for limited resources. Smollett’s novel is resentful of the mismanagement of social institutions such as the Navy office and this critique comes through most clearly in its reduction of Roderick to an anonymous hungry body precariously clinging to the title of gentleman to avoid being regarded as an immigrant parasite.

Precisely what Roderick wants out of a gentleman’s title is a social identity to shield him from randomness, such as the false accusations he endured in his youth. Deidre Lynch’s The Economy of Character has been influential in linking changing notions of character in the eighteenth-century to the social and economic transformation that took place during the period, arguing that the reading of character was a domain which “people used characters … to renegotiate social relations in their changed, commercialized world, to derive new kinds of pleasure from the changes, to render their property truly private, to cope with the embarrassment of riches.”181 But Smollett’s novel does more than mediate the development of bourgeois ideology through the practices of character reading; he is also intensely concerned with what falls through the cracks when social narratives are constructed solely using modern economic models. Treated like an exchangeable commodity at the Navy office, Roderick is plunged into desperation when

181 Lynch, The Economy of Character, 4-5.
the economic reality resembles not so much an “embarrassment of riches” but a plague of locusts. Smollett’s novel makes it clear that commercial relations can have a dehumanizing effect that is reinforced by bodily demand. If Roderick had his druthers, he would turn his nose up at the Navy office but driven by hunger he is compelled to adopt a lower social station. The novel emphasizes that behind the fluctuations of social identity (occupational roles, etc.), the needs of the body are capable of determining the nature of social identities.

In underscoring the power of bodily necessity to motivate action, Smollett anticipates Hannah Arendt’s work on the political force of bodily necessity. As part of her analysis of the impact of the peasantry in the French Revolution, she writes “Poverty is more than deprivation, it is a state of constant want and acute misery whose ignominy consists in its dehumanizing force; poverty is abject because it puts men under the absolute dictate of their bodies.” For Arendt, the acute misery of poverty is not just unfortunate but exerts causal primacy because “men under the absolute dictate of their bodies” will do anything to meet their needs. The body’s primacy in the determination of character is demonstrated in Roderick’s last resort decision to enlist in the military as a common volunteer. After running out of options in London, Roderick reflects: “I saw no resource but the army or navy, between which I hesitated so long, that I found myself reduced to a starving condition” (139). Roderick’s delay and indecision mark the position of someone whose agency can only be exercised through resignation. He is unable to make a choice that will result in the curtailment of his liberty but Smollett emphasizes that even freedom to choose one’s social occupation is pre-empted by the body’s needs.

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Hunger turns Roderick’s liberty to choose into compulsion to choose: “My spirit began to accommodate itself to my beggarly fate, and I became so mean, as to go down towards Wapping” (139). Smollett’s turn to the immaterial “spirit” drives a wedge between mind and body as Roderick narrates his forced choice in a tone of resignation. The language suggests a reversal whereby the body occupies the speaking position (“I became so mean”) and the “spirit” is a foot-dragging appendage, struggling to reconcile itself with “fate” that is nothing more than bodily necessity in the form of hunger. At Wapping, Roderick is pressed into service at the very moment that he is on the verge of joining up. The last-minute turn of fate erases the tiny degree of agency that Roderick held onto by accommodating himself to his “beggarly fate.” Press-gangs in the period were a source of indignant controversy over the course of the eighteenth century because of the way that they threatened the liberty of English subjects but this passage is just one of a series of episodes designed to associate bodily necessity with Roderick’s curtailment of agency.

Smollett’s provoking use of the press-gang draws on and complicates the discourse of liberty and enslavement in the novel by contrasting the bodily necessity that compels Roderick to enlist with the physical coercion employed by the press-gang. Smollett emphasizes how the press-gang curtailed Roderick’s negative liberty in a literal sense by impeding physical movement but bodily necessity had already made his decision for him by the time he got to Wapping. Throughout his time aboard the Thunder as well as his short stint in the French army, Roderick expresses his indignation at being

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beaten, pinioned, robbed, starved, and spit upon, suffering the humiliation of being treated as mere body to be manipulated. Roderick’s more basic needs serve as reminders of an internal necessity even more basic than the constraints imposed by the press-gang. The fact that Roderick was driven by “beggarly fate” down to Wapping makes his impressment secondary to bodily necessity, something that determines events even more fundamentally than being physically abducted. Smollett continues to thematize the demands of the body aboard the *Thunder*, where his friend Thompson’s intercession temporarily affords Roderick deference and the preferential treatment of a gentleman. The common sailors have accommodated themselves to meager diets, interspersed with vegetarian “banyan days,” in which, as in “diving,” dietary austerity has an air of the exotic or unusual. Confronted with a meal of “boiled peas,” Roderick is “not very much tempted with the appearance of this dish, of which, nevertheless, my messmates ate heartily, advising me to follow their example” (134). His snobbery toward the peas is a means of exerting a small degree of power in the midst of reduced circumstances, demonstrating Roderick’s proud nature.

Social status is debased into bodily mortification when Roderick finds himself subject to military discipline, which he experiences as “the domination of an arbitrary tyrant” (144). After getting into a fist fight with his rival Crampley, Roderick is reduced from the preferment of a gentleman enjoying distinction from the common crew to human fodder, restrained in stocks upon the deck as the battle rages about him. Nothing could more clearly emphasize the curtailment of Roderick’s liberty than his physical restraint amidst bloody combat. Roderick impotently watches the battle: “I could contain myself no longer, but began to bellow with all the strength of my lungs” (149). A
drummer attends Roderick’s cries and is immediately killed by a shot that “tore out his intrails” (149). “I redoubled my cries, which were drowned in the noise of the battle; and, finding myself disregarded, lost all patience, and became frantic” (149). Impotence and rage are compounded by Roderick’s sense that he has become nearly invisible through bodily restraint, and his voice disintegrates into the “noise of the battle.” The scene attributes Roderick’s powerlessness and vulnerability to the physical body, debasing the heroic struggle of war into pathetic and mindless suffering. The passage has a kind of mock-epic emphasis on splattered blood and guts but Smollett labors to debase and deromanticize the hazards of war into brutal and meaningless violence. Roderick demonstrates his courage in some of the comic scenes earlier in the novel, such as the confrontation with Weazel, but, ironically, he is powerless to act at the moment of crisis.

Smollett further emphasizes the ways in which Roderick’s agency is limited through bodily necessity during his short stint as a French soldier when rigorous treatment takes its toll on his body. Having been convinced to join the army after a soldier complimented his gentlemanly manners and thus flattered his vanity, he quickly regrets his decision. Roderick’s description of the soldier’s life demonstrates his intense distaste for the rigors of military discipline. As a soldier, he is pushed to what he regards as his body’s limit: “It is impossible to describe the hunger and thirst I sustained, and the fatigue I underwent in a march of so many hundred miles” (222). Roderick resorts to cliché in claiming that the force of hunger and thirst is “impossible to describe,” but his turn to particularity a moment later partakes of a more vivid mode of description: “I was so much chafed with the heat and motion of my limbs, that in a very short time the inside of my thighs and legs were deprived of skin” (222). The striking evocation of the
abrasion of the body wearing itself away through sheer physical movement stresses the contours of the legs as masses subject to erosion and decay. This sentence alone bespeaks an odd sensitivity to the body’s fragility even its most natural movement.

Roderick’s bodily discomfort provokes him to reconsider his vocation and culminates in a significant disagreement with a French soldier. The quarrel concerns liberty and it is in one sense a purely ideological one but in another sense it distills Roderick’s pride into a desperate speech on the value of freedom. The provoking offense is the French soldier’s declaration to Roderick to “pray to the good God, that you may be as happy as I am, who have the honor of serving Lewis the Great, and of receiving many wounds in helping him establish his glory” (222). Roderick’s response is telling evidence of his own complex and contradictory defense of the principle of liberty: “I observed, that if his situation was the consequence of compulsion, as having been pressed into the service, I would praise his patience and fortitude in bearing his lot.” Had the soldier’s service been compulsory, Roderick would find his patriotism laudable as a form of stoic resignation. Happiness is admirable when anchored to necessity as in Roderick’s own case of being “pressed into service” onboard the Thunder. But as a volunteer, the soldier “was no more than professing himself a desperate slave, who voluntarily underwent the utmost wretchedness and peril, and committed the most flagrant crimes, to soothe the barbarous pride of a fellow-creature, his superior in nothing but the power he derived from the submission of such wretches as him” (222). What Roderick finds so offensive is not just the indignity of the soldier’s life, but that the soldier would voluntarily submit both his body and his social agency to a sovereign, making himself into a “desperate slave.” Roderick places emphasis not on the content of the soldier’s life, as repulsive as
Roderick finds it, but on the attitude that the soldier bears toward his service, its ideological justification. What is more, by suggesting that “Lewis the Great” is distinguished from the French soldier by nothing more arbitrary social hierarchy and “barbarous pride,” Roderick reveals himself as a hypocrite who is willing to accept the benefits of status when they accrue to him (such as the preferential treatment he receives aboard the Thunder) but turns into a radical when forced to come to terms with the determining force of bodily necessity. Nationalism acts as another form of pride that the protagonist uses to try and elevate himself above the demands of the body by clinging to “English liberty” as a way of distinguishing himself from the French soldier.

Roderick’s argument with the French soldier debases the discourse of liberty into satire. Roderick’s ignorance of his own necessity makes him the object of satire as he desperately insists on his own hollow claims to liberty in the most compromised of circumstances. Roderick’s pride is located in the minimal degree of freedom that he clings to in order to make his occupation feel like a choice and not just “the consequence of compulsion” yet he denies the bodily necessity that repeatedly compels him into such situations. Smollett’s satire anticipates Hannah Arendt’s claim, “Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity.”

The thematization of Roderick’s hypocritical insistence on the importance of his liberty alongside descriptions of his bodily suffering show that Roderick’s inability to recognize bodily necessity is the limit to his professed freedom. Roderick’s belligerence and

assertion of “the natural right to liberty” culminates in a sword fight in which he is disarmed and injured by the soldier, described as “poor little shivering creature, decrepit with age, and blind of one eye” (223). Smollett’s champion of liberty is humiliated by an elderly French patriot in order make Roderick into the butt of a satire who lacks knowledge of his own body’s potential and limitations. The scene calls our attention to the body by debasing the high-flown rhetoric of the debate into random physical violence and transforming Roderick’s haphazard or directionless career change into another violent confrontation. In a comic turn, Roderick manages to get his revenge on the French soldier by defeating him in a rematch and burying his sword in a pile of excrement, but the point has already been made that Roderick’s professed liberty can be subordinated to physical force. Scenes such as this exemplify Roderick’s failure to recognize the primacy of the body in determining the outcome of events, soliciting the reader to note of that which blinds the protagonist.

3. Recognizing Randomness: Parodies of Anagnorisis

While the previous section showed how bodily necessity is crucial to the determination of social status in Roderick Random, this section emphasizes the parodic aspects of Smollett’s text as a means of reducing providential unity to random episodes. Just as vivid descriptions of pratfalls have the potential to redirect our attention from choice to chance and rumbling stomachs have the power to preempt vocational decisions, audacious transgression of literary convention can make events seem arbitrary and random. Roderick’s physical distress is always on the cusp between tragedy and comedy, or between the high seriousness of dignified tragic suffering and the low physical gags of
the Spanish picaresque and satire. One question that I have raised is to what degree does Roderick’s perceived social status or the validity of his claim to a gentleman’s title mediates the way in which we are to read Smollett’s satire. Roderick’s social status also plays a role in determining the generic status of the text by evoking the relatively aristocratic conventions of classical tragedy. During the composition of *Roderick Random*, Smollett demonstrated his regard for tragic form in spending a decade attempting to get his tragedy, *The Regicide*, produced. While most readers find the play a failure, it reveals Smollett’s youthful dedication to the formal unities of classical tragedy. Smollett’s interest in tragedy (as well as his energetic frustration with patrons, theater managers, and actors) comes through both in the Melopoyn episode of *Roderick Random* and his impassioned preface to his tragedy. Referring to his play as his “orphan” and his “abortion,” Smollett reveals deep-seated resentment directed both outward and inward, blaming his own failed “paternal sense” as well as the London theater scene for the play’s failure.\(^{185}\) The status of Smollett’s tragedy, as well as Roderick’s social existence, both depend on “paternal” recognition to achieve dignity and acknowledgment. In *Roderick Random*, Smollett might be said to have redirected his rage from theater managers to the decorum and balance of the classical unities themselves, shattering the formal integrity of the tragedy into disorderly fragments. Yet one of the ways that Smollett’s investment in

\(^{185}\) Tobias Smollett, *Poems, Plays, and “The Briton* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press: 2012), 90. “I wreaked my Resentment upon the innocent Cause of my Disgraces, and forthwith condemned it to Oblivion, where, in all Probability, it would have for ever slept, like a miserable Abortion; had not a young Gentleman of Learning and Tastes waked my paternal sense, and perswaded me not only to rescue it from the Tomb…”
tragedy carries over into his first novel is the use of the narrative device of recognition or *anagnorisis*.

For tragic theory beginning with Aristotle, *anagnorisis* provides an important link between unity of action and character but Smollett parodies the device as a way of undermining the formal integrity of narrative contrivance. Moments of self-recognition may serve as pivotal plot points, structuring the action of the play, while simultaneously acting as turning point in the self-understanding of a central figure. Smollett repurposes recognition to provoke understanding of bodily necessity in lieu of any other form of identity. Aristotle writes in the *Poetics*, “Recognition, as very the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading to friendship or to enmity, and involving matters which bear on prosperity or adversity.”186 This rich definition poses recognition as a plot device that effects epistemological, interpersonal, and narratological change in one efficient gesture. Terence Cave writes that recognition is almost invariably surprising because of the way that it “operates surreptitiously, randomly, elliptically and often perversely, seizing on precisely those details that from a rational point of view seem trivial.”187 It may be that recognition appealed to Smollett because of the way that it made the world seem to be both accidental and providential – even irrational – by deciphering clues from the physical body. In classical tragedy, a token (such as Oedipus’s scar) may trigger the tragic self-knowledge that brings with it reversal of fortune and dramatic closure. Smollett’s *Roderick Random*, on the other hand, parodies classical *anagnorisis*

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by projecting it into the banal world of everyday life, creating a kind of Menippean satire by compromising the dignity of respectable narrative forms and making events seem arbitrary. For example, early in the novel, Roderick and Strap fail to recognize one another in the barbershop until, besmeared with shaving cream, small talk gradually discloses their relation. Smollett writes of the moment of recognition: “At that instant recollecting his face, I flew into his arms, and in the transport of my joy, gave him back one half of the suds he had so lavishly bestowed on my countenance” (41). Such scenes recur frequently as mock-epic provocations, displacing literary contrivance into the everyday world. They offend the decorous gravitas of narrative development by laying bare its devices, the social prestige of tragic protagonist, and the fatalist vision of the world. At the same time, they redirect our attention to the way in which the physical body (recognition of the disguised body) determines narrative outcomes in unexpected ways, bathetically plunging from relative seriousness to comic banality.

Smollett’s novel alerts his readers to recognition as a satirical issue, rather than as a tragic one in the opening pages of his novel. The “Apologue” (though not present in the first edition, it was added in 1754) makes satirical (rather than tragic) recognition the center of a kind of moral fable about how to interpret the novel but it also clues us into the importance of the body. It describes a painter’s portrait of four animals in possession of human objects (wig, coffee pot, sailor’s dress), which at first provokes mirth and then, once a “mischievous wag” reads the painting as a portrait of the painter’s friends, indignation and resentment. Smollett’s “astonished painter” protests that “he had no

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188 In addition to the passages I discuss below, see also Roderick’s reunion with Narcissa, “Good God! is it possible!” (292) and Roderick’s reunion with his long lost father (351).
intention to give offence, or to characterize particular persons: they affirmed the resemblance was too palpable to be overlooked” (7). There is something tongue-in-cheek about Smollett’s suggestion that, in effect, any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Many of Smollett’s first readers would have immediately recognized antagonistic sketches of David Garrick and others in the novel. But regardless of the conventionality of Smollett’s disavowal of personal satire, he calls our attention to the fact that the painter’s friends seem to perceive themselves through objects that stand for occupational categories, taking their social and professional identities to heart and becoming ridiculous precisely by identifying with the image of an animal. Smollett’s “Apologue” alerts us to what he perceives as problem in the way that his contemporaries recognize themselves as objects of satire. He reverses Jonathan Swift’s classic claim that “Satyr is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body’s Face but their Own,” finding his own readers all too eager to acknowledge the likeness between themselves and animals. Mundane objects from the everyday world, such as wig and coffee-pot, have displaced the scars of antiquity. In this sense, Smollett diagnoses his contemporaries’ defensiveness as a problem in the reading of character in that social categories are mistaken for identities.

Anagnorisis classically advances tragic plot through revelation of character but Smollett’s novel repeatedly emphasizes recognition of some form of bodily need at crucial junctures. Roderick’s reunion with his uncle Tom Bowling, which brings these different registers into relation with one another, is one of the most striking recognition scenes in the novel. Roderick glimpses his uncle in a kitchen filled with Dutch sailors,

noticing him first as a result of his alienation from the others. While the sailors are described in a group “at breakfast, with a large loaf, a firkin of butter, and a cag,” Bowling is alone, dejected, and without food, reduced to an outcast. Perhaps recalling his own subjection to want, Roderick writes, “The appearance of distress never failed to attract my regard and compassion; I approached the forlorn tar with a view to offer him my assistance, and notwithstanding the alteration of dress, and disguise of a long beard, I discovered in him my long lost and lamented uncle and benefactor lieutenant Bowling!” (211) Poverty has disguised Tom Bowling’s appearance under “alteration of dress and, disguise of a long beard.” Bowling, as a “forlorn tar” has become something of a literary cliché, which accentuates the conventionality of the scene. Like Roderick in being “avoided by mankind as a creature of a different species,” Bowling’s hunger is presented alongside his social alienation as two sides of the same coin. Roderick’s compassionate inclination toward the stranger translates from a random act of kindness into providential emplotment as he unknowingly brings himself one step closer to his fortunate fate by aiding his uncle who will later re-unite him with his father. The scene contrasts the banal world of breakfast with the highly stylized mock-tragic recognition scene in a way that purposely invites the reader’s skepticism toward the artificiality of narrative form.

Roderick’s encounter with his uncle in the French tavern is a peculiar kind of recognition scene because of the way that Roderick recognizes hunger first and the narrative implications of the encounter only much later. Tom Bowling’s body has an “appearance of distress,” set in contrast to a group of sailors eating breakfast. Bowling’s unkempt and unshaven body is the sign of bodily necessity. His individual identity has been literally obscured by misfortune, making him unrecognizable. A similar scenario is
played out at sea where Roderick encounters his friend Thompson after being pressed onboard the *Thunder*:

If I knew him at first sight, it was not easy for him to recognise me, disfigured with blood and dirt, and altered by the misery I had undergone. Unknown as I was to him, he surveyed me with looks of compassion, and handled my sores with great tenderness. When he had applied what he thought proper, and was about to leave me, I asked him if my misfortunes had disguised me so much that he could not recollect my face? (130)

Roderick has been “disguised” by his misfortunes as random events out of his control (being press-ganged onto a ship where he is treated with suspicion and cruelty) have inscribed themselves onto his body as signifiers of necessity. Roderick’s unfortunate body is at first unrecognizable to Thompson, whose disinterested behavior stands in contrast to almost every character in Smollett’s novel. The improbability of the scene heightens the sense of narrative contrivance and makes the recognition scene a kind of satire that calls attention to the body.

The final twenty pages are notable for the way in which all of Roderick’s struggles are resolved in a series of fortuitous coincidences attributed to providence. When Roderick tells his beloved Narcissa that he has discovered his father in Paraguay, he tells us that she “congratulated herself and me upon my good fortune, and observed, that this great and unexpected stroke of fate seemed to have been brought about by the immediate direction of Providence” (360). Narcissa’s manner of accounting for this turn of events emphasizes the “immediate direction of Providence,” calling our attention to velocity (or randomness) of transformation rather than the lack of mediation. After the happy couple retires to the country, Roderick’s echoes his wife when he remarks, “I received this inestimable gift of Providence as became me” (364). Roderick’s declaration should be read as an ironic attack on the idea of providence rather than as a celebration of
it. Over the course of the novel, there is not much in Roderick’s conduct to merit reward and his pride only intensifies in the final chapters. Smollett repeatedly emphasizes Roderick’s vanity throughout the conclusion and when he gets out of prison, Roderick dresses in the “gayest suit in my possession” (341). After he is reunited with his father, he surprises Strap with the “magnificence of my apparel” (353). Returning to London, Roderick mentions, “I found leisure sometimes to be among my former acquaintance, who were astonished at the magnificence of my appearance” (361). Smollett repeatedly underscores Roderick’s pride throughout this sequence to make it clear that he is still the object of satire despite his deliverance and fortune. His pride continues to obscure acknowledgement of the humbling knowledge that his fortune is a product of chance rather than fate.

In addition to highlighting Roderick’s vanity, Smollett adds several other discordant notes to the conclusion that flag Roderick’s egotism as the medium of retrospective providential attribution. Not only is Roderick complicit in trading slaves in the same voyage he discovers his father, but the majority of the crew on his ship is press-ganged back into service when they return to England. In describing his part in trading the slaves, Roderick comments: “Our ship being freed from the disagreeable lading of negroes, to whom, indeed, I had been a miserable slave since our leaving the coast of Guinea, I began to enjoy myself, and breathe with pleasure the pure air of Paraguay” (349). Whatever Smollett’s intent in implicating Roderick in human trafficking, the episode demonstrates a profound non-recognition of human suffering, making Roderick look myopic and self-serving in the final pages, compromising his celebration of providence with the passing reference to the sickness, death, and enslavement of
hundreds of men and women aboard his ship. Roderick’s language is a striking contrast
to the one in which Thompson nurses his wounds and intercedes on his behalf. Roderick
regards himself as a “slave” to the uncertainty of commercial activity until the moment he
exchanges his cargo, marking off his new status in contrast to the endless exchange of
bodies and goods.¹⁹⁰ He demonstrates similarly unsympathetic feelings a few chapters
later when many of the crew are pressed into service: “My uncle resolved to run up into
the Downs at once, but the wind shifting when we were a-breast of the isle of Wight, he
was obliged to turn into St. Helens, and come to Spithead, to the great mortification of
the crew, thirty of whom were immediately pressed on board a man of war” (356).
Roderick’s language registers a note of surprise and even disturbance but nothing can
dampen his mood of jubilation. The details of the scene, which recall Roderick’s own
impressment, seem designed to suggest to the reader that chance still has the power to
curtail the liberty of the sailors onboard his ship as the shifting of the wind redirects their
course. Roderick regards his change of fortune as the workings of providence but events
unfolding around him show that his fate is as arbitrary as the change of winds. Life
remains random for those who have not achieved social protection from such coercion.

¹⁹⁰ J.G.A. Pocock points out that seventeenth and eighteenth-century republican thinkers
defined freedom differently than the philosophers such as Locke and Hume. Republicans
worried not just about freedom from constraint but the way in which the mobility of
property (or the commodity form) ultimately undermined freedom: “political relations
were becoming relations between debtors and creditors … and this was seen as leading
not merely to corruption but to the despotism of speculative fantasy.” Roderick’s
describes his slave trading as a kind of slavery because he is still compelled (implicitly by
his body) to earn a living, in this case at any cost. See Pocock, “Mobility of property and
the rise of eighteenth-century sociology,” Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on
Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge:
Cambridge, 1985), 112.
Smollett includes these details in the midst of the happy denouement as if to suggest that the world is still episodic and arbitrary for those outside the fold of wealth and power.

Smollett’s satire is intended to expose Roderick’s pride, which blinds him to the role of chance in determining the outcome of events. The invocation of providence in such a context should be read as an imposition of the protagonist’s retrospective bias rather than a reflection of cosmological design. Freed from the determining force of bodily necessity by financial stability, Roderick fails to recognize how those around him are still subject to treatment as bodies to be exploited. The conclusion has the potential to arouse indignation at a social system that puts people at the mercy of their bodily needs but only if they recognize what Roderick is not able to. Roderick’s self-satisfied celebration of providence is tainted by irony when read in context.

Later in his life, Smollett prepared an edition of Voltaire’s works that contains a note that lends credence to the view that Smollett saw providence as an artificial construction. In his edition, Smollett appended an intrusive footnote to the last sentence of *Candide*:

> The moral of this piece then seems to be, that nothing is more absurd than to believe that Providence hath ordered every thing for the best; that nothing is more ridiculous than the exercise of reason; that nothing is more futile and frivolous than the cultivation of philosophy: that mankind is a species of savages, who devour one another; and that true contentment is no where to be found, but in a possessing and cultivating a few acres of ground in Turkey—where the most brutal despotism reigns, and where there is no sort of security either for property or for life.\(^{191}\)

\(^{191}\) *The works of M. de Voltaire. Translated from the French. With notes, historical and critical. By Dr. Smollet, and others*, Volume 18 (London: 1761), 147. This passage is also cited in Bruce, 44.
Smollett’s gloss on Voltaire does not necessarily summarize Smollett’s own perspective, but it shows us that he recognized how providence could be employed as an artificial explanatory device. Smollett extracts a series of distinct “moral” lessons from the text. He makes explicit the manner in which Voltaire mocks the absurdity of faith in providence, moving on to a debasement of reason and philosophy, suggesting a tacit parallel between the two (effected within the text through Pangloss’s optimism). Additionally, Smollett’s note suggests that Voltaire’s novel characterizes “mankind is a species of savages, who devour one another.” This cannibalistic image turns on the nature of human appetite, knitting together the previous claims by suggesting that both providential order and reason are implicated in the misrecognition of the causal force that drives social relations. The language shifts from negative constructions (“Nothing is more absurd to believe…”) to making a positive claim regarding the nature of mankind. The final clause shifts from apodictic pronouncement to ironic pastoral. Contentment, which interests Smollett in Peregrine Pickle in the form of the satisfaction of appetite, is only possible in the context of “brutal despotism.” While one of Smollett’s primary achievements in Roderick Random is to put pressure on the mechanism by which this process of retrospective revision makes the connections between events appear necessary, he continued to interrogate the relationship between the immanent causal power of the body and the orderly design of narrative providence throughout his career. In his second novel, it is not bodily necessity but the cynical and anti-providential proposition that mankind is “a species of savages, who devour one another” that determines narrative form.

While Roderick’s recurrent hardships compel him to act at the behest of hunger, *Peregrine Pickle* investigates the impetus to action in bodily necessity’s absence.

Whereas Smollett’s first novel brings its protagonist’s adventures to a close through the stasis of prosperity, Smollett’s second novel refuses to equate status with stability, taking as its subject the episodic nature of appetites considered gratuitous or “unnecessary.” Peregrine’s relative affluence to some degree makes all action seem pointless in comparison to the survivalist mentality of *Roderick Random*. Whereas events in *Roderick Random* are precipitated by bodily need (Roderick is on the verge of starvation and must find a new job), in *Peregrine Pickle* the narrative takes on an episodic form as it tracks the banal occurrences of everyday life. Roderick’s narrative indirectly calls attention to bodily need as the repressed force that establishes causal connections between seemingly random episodes. In Smollett’s second novel causal explanations are strained by the shift to third person perspective because behavior is motivated by causes less obvious than bodily necessity. Smollett’s shift from an autobiographical voice to a narrative perspective outside the action has the effect of making motivation into an interpretative problem. In *Peregrine Pickle*, Smollett’s adoption of a narrative perspective external to the action is part of an effort to “rise above” what he depicts as insatiable appetites by examining the nature of motivation in serial form.
As is the case with Roderick Random, many scholars have emphasized a moral message as a way of unifying the baggy and episodic nature of the narrative. At times, Smollett seems to have a moral agenda for Peregrine Pickle, but my argument focuses on the episodic narrative form that his novel takes in the absence of the impositions of bodily necessity that punctuate Roderick Random, in which episodes proliferate out of the drives of the main character. As in his first novel, Smollett remains committed to organizing his satire around the comprised motivations of the protagonist but in Peregrine’s case, the novel attempts to account for behavior that is utterly pointless—what seems at times to be an endless compendium of practical jokes and slapstick gags.

The bulk of the narrative focuses on the protagonist’s propensity for pranks, embodying his idle yet strangely irrepressible passion for mischief. What the narrator refers to alternately as Peregrine’s “passion,” his “fancy,” or his “appetite” stands as a cipher for motivation in the absence of bodily necessity as the narrator calls attention to the interpretative work of understanding behavior from an external perspective, seeking to knit together that which resists unity. The precise nature of Peregrine’s motivation changes throughout the novel but what remains constant is that his appetite is defined in contrast to bodily need. Near the end of this chapter, I will return to the broader socio-economic implications and the implicit critique of luxury but in the next two sections I want to show how Smollett’s novel embodies excess through narrative structure. Not

192 Boucé suggests that the novel traces the symmetrical form of a capital V, following Peregrine’s descent and ascent. See Boucé, 143. By way of contrast, John Skinner counters, “Peregrine Pickle comes as near as can be imagined to a state of pure narrative shambles.” See Skinner, Constructions of Smollett: A Study of Genre and Gender (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 72.
only the narrative perspective, which provides a vantage point from which the impetus to action can be expressed in physical terms, but also the episodic structure of the novel embodies this non-biologically determined form of appetite in its aggregation of pointless incidents. Events occur without logical connection to one another in a manner that expresses their “unnecessary” nature.

The narration frequently turns to the enigmatic causes that lurk behind the behavior of the main character, or the motive force that operates in the absence of need. *Peregrine Pickle* puzzles over what determines character and behavior once the basic needs have been satisfied.193 Smollett’s novel suggests that the mere satisfaction of bodily need itself does not necessarily lead to stability or progress, either at an individual or a collective level. Lacking the driving force of hunger, *Peregrine Pickle* accumulates episodes that highlight superfluity rather than need. Smollett satirizes the idle appetites of various social types—such as retired businessmen, cultural snobs, corrupt politicians, and aloof misanthropes—by underscoring the banality of their impulses, when set free from their basic needs. The novel represents desire in excess of necessity as absurd and futile by piling on episode after episode of trivial comic incidents. Smollett represents seemingly endless patterns of behavior in an episodic form that embodies compulsive or involuntary determination of action. In segments of the novel in which Peregrine is subject to his uncontrollable appetite, the text itself loses touch with any real narrative

193 In this respect *Peregrine Pickle* thematizes luxury, what John Sekora has argued is the central concept in Smollett’s oeuvre. Sekora makes relatively little mention *Pickle* in his study, perhaps because its content is difficult to harness to a moral framework. See John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
Episode upon episode accumulates, mirroring the protagonist’s insatiable appetite, with almost no coherent thread to build a sense of development. Most of the episodes in the novel could be shuffled around or deleted without making much of an impact on the continuity of the novel as a whole. Smollett demonstrated as much when in the second edition he trimmed some of the tasteless and controversial episodes down to size or deleted them entirely. In a telling moment, the narrator comments of the protagonist, “It would be an endless and perhaps no very agreeable task, to enumerate all the unlucky pranks he played on his uncle and others, before he attained the fourth year of his age” (53). Smollett’s narrator’s assessment is a specimen of hyperbole—though they may seem so at times to the reader, Peregrine’s adventures cannot be “endless.” When read more carefully it seems that the modifiers are out of place. It is not the narrator’s “task” but the protagonist’s appetite that is “endless.” Nevertheless, the narrator conjoins the two, making us aware that the line between limits imposed by narrative convention (the ends of the “task”) and the motivation of the protagonist (the ends of the protagonist) is artificial—it has been imposed from outside. Similarly, Peregrine’s pranks themselves could loosely be described as “unlucky” though it is not at first clear why (after quite some time one of his jokes lands him in prison) and perhaps the word was intended for his victims as much as his actions. In his loose application of modifiers, Smollett’s narrator calls attention to the task of the narrator in establishing the limits of the narrative and in assigning causal links between events. For “unlucky” is a word that is perhaps

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194 See for instance 223-391, which spans approximately twenty percent of the text between Chapter XLVI “Peregrine resolves to return to England, is diverted with the odd Character of Two of his Countrymen” and Chapter LXXIX “Peregrine arrives at the Garrison,” a diversion that constitutes the 168 pages of narrative between resolution and execution. Another quarter of the novel is comprised by two interlarded narratives, the “Memoirs of Lady Vane” (423-540) and the “Memoirs of a notable person” (691-732).
most intended to convey the ill-fated nature of Peregrine’s pranks, adding a teleological trajectory—how antecedents foreshadow effects—to what seems otherwise pointless.

In this way, Smollett’s narrator uses his position as observer to reframe the compulsive, repetitious, and tedious desires of the protagonist within a broader narrative context. Most third-person narratives do as much to some degree, but in *Peregrine Pickle* the narrator’s unifying task is strained by the sadistic nature of the protagonist, whose behavior resists decorum while his actions resist unity inasmuch as they are pointless pleasure-driven exploits that can only be recruited to a conclusion through ascription of a teleological purpose absent from the character himself. The narrator regards Peregrine’s actions by turns as unusual and distasteful, resorting to a variety of rhetorical maneuvers to account for the protagonist’s “unaccountable” behavior. Some of the words that Smollett’s narrator uses to describe the cause of Peregrine’s behavior—imagination and passion—are words that seem to imply psychological depth but in Smollett’s usage, talk about passion and the imagination serves as a place-holder for appetite in the absence of necessity:

Howsoever preposterous and unaccountable that passion may be which prompts persons, otherwise generous and sympathizing, to afflict and perplex their fellow-creatures, certain it is, our confederates entertained such a large proportion of it, that not satisfied with the pranks they had already played, they still persecuted the commodore without ceasing. (72)

This characteristic passage suggests that Peregrine and his partners in crime (Lieutenant Hatchway and Tom Pipes) are somehow hosts or “entertainers” of an “unaccountable passion,” as much a disease as a guest. The rhetoric of “prompting” also contributes to the sense that passion is external to persons rather than an internal element of the self. The narrator frequently situates action from this odd perspective, defamiliarizing the
causality of behavior through language that regards motivation as something that takes the hungry body as its causal template, or its metaphorical incarnation, even in the absence of biological need. Passion, in this passage, is externally determined like physical hunger but with the essential difference that it can never be satisfied. Peregrine and his confederates are never satisfied with their pranks because they are ruled by a passion that originates somewhere outside of their control. Smollett’s language repeatedly emphasizes that what he refers to as passion should be understood as superfluous rather than essence. The language of measurement that recurs throughout, such as “unaccountable” and “such a large proportion,” contributes to the sense that this superfluous motivation paradoxically couples “never enough” with an implicit “too much.” Peregrine and his confederates have too much time and too much energy. It is a gratuitous appetite that cannot be satisfied, on the model of the carnal appetite but without its intrinsic limits.

One way of situating Smollett’s use of the causal force of passion in the instance above would be through the notion of the “ruling passion.” While the notion of the “ruling passion” was something of an eighteenth-century commonplace, its nature was elusive and broadly contested. Bernard Mandeville says in the “Introduction” to the *Fable of the Bees*, “I believe Man (besides Skin, Flesh, Bones, &c. that are obvious to the Eye) to be a Compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no.” Mandeville posits the being of man to consist of passions, relegating anatomical matter to a parenthetical “besides” that positions the body as secondary to appetite. Alexander Pope’s *Essay on* 

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Man and his Moral Essays serve as the *locus classicus* of the ruling passion, suggesting “Search then the Ruling Passion: There, alone, / The Wild are constant, and the Cunning known.” The ruling passion is the key to seeing unity in the discontinuity of “Wild” behavior. According to Patricia Meyer Spacks it is a poetic fiction to used to “claim the comprehensibility of character.” Samuel Johnson’s “Life of Pope,” vigorously disputes Pope’s theory of the ruling passions on the basis of the plasticity of appetite. First: “Human characters are by no means constant; men change by change of place, of fortune, of acquaintance; he who is at one time a lover of pleasure is at another a lover of money.” For Johnson, close attention to the ruling passion calls into question the unity of character. Johnson drives his point home by saying of the theory of the ruling passion, “in the examples by which he illustrates and confirms it, [Pope] has confounded passions, appetites, and habits.” What is needed for Johnson, as for Smollett, is closer attention to the difference between distinct kinds of motives of human behavior. Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle* should be read in the context of these debates over the nature of the ruling passion, giving an account of motivation borrowing from the episodic narrative form of the picaresque as a way of intervening in contemporary discussions of motivation.

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Peregrine Pickle also draws on and revises contemporary philosophical discourses—such as popularized forms of Epicurean thought—in order to represent passion as a force distinct from—yet continuous with—biological need. David Hume’s essays on happiness address the nature of human passions and appetites, in turn ventriloquizing “The Epicurean,” “The Stoic,” and “The Sceptic” “as to deliver the sentiments of the ancient sects that naturally form themselves in the world.” Hume represents ancient philosophical positions in the terms in which they have been popularly disseminated as means of meditating on various definitions of happiness in a progression of contrasting positions. According to the logic of the Epicurean, appetite and fulfillment are fundamentally yoked to biology— the human body is the medium of all pleasure. The Epicurean version of the “ruling passion” resonates with Smollett’s second novel: “When by my will alone I can stop the blood, as it runs with impetuosity along its canals, then may I hope to change the course of my sentiments and passions.” In Hume’s Epicurean logic, sentiments and passions are commensurate with the circulation of the blood, outside the jurisdiction of rational control and subject to intrinsic laws of physical bodies. The parallel that Hume’s Epicurean makes between passion and the circulation of the blood would have appealed to Smollett in both its choice of analogy as well as its bent. Such an Epicurean model of causality is germane to the narrative causality that presides over Smollett’s narratives in that he frequently seeks to ground action in biological terms.

Smollett, like Hume’s Epicurean, sought to understand the motive force of behavior that, like the blood coursing through one’s veins, cannot be stopped on demand.

While Smollett’s explicit ties to Epicurean philosophy are tenuous, he moved in a circle of physicians who sought to understand human behavior in line with the most recent scientific and experimental research—bringing the philosophical speculation of the Epicurean about the involuntary nature of “sentiments and passions” down to earth. Smollett seems to literalize Hume’s Epicurean equation between passion and the circulation of the blood in an episode in which his mother, Mrs. Pickle, concludes that his swaddling bandages “should be loosened and laid aside, in order to rid nature of all restraint, and give the blood free scope to circulate” (28). In the passage above, Smollett’s narrator calls the circulation of the blood the agent of “nature.” Like Hume’s Epicurean, Smollett here treats blood flow as a literal manifestation of the course of nature. Restraining or stopping the blood is regarded as a rhetorical absurdity for Hume and for Smollett it is the human body and its passions that drive narrative forward. In *Peregrine Pickle* the inability to stop the blood translates to an inability to contain the endless flow of episodic narrative, in which narrative is tied to the protagonist’s body.

What Smollett means by “nature” can best be understood by attending to the circulation of the blood. At the most literal level, Smollett displayed a lifelong interest in the relationship between the circulation of the blood and health. His sole medical treatise, *On the External Application of Water*, argues that cold baths can increase the flow of

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203 Donald Bruce points out that Smollett’s two closest friends, John Armstrong and John Moore, published texts that located the causes of action in the body itself. See Bruce, *Radical Doctor Smollett*, 22-29.
blood and treat various ailments.\textsuperscript{204} Twenty years later after publishing this treatise, in

\textit{Travels Through France and Italy}, he reiterates many of the same points about

circulation and health with different examples.\textsuperscript{205} Biology becomes not just the subject of

the narrative but it trumps all sense of decorum in determining the content of the novel.

At one point, the narrator of \textit{Peregrine Pickle} makes an apologetic maneuver that recalls

Smollett’s “Preface” to \textit{Roderick Random}. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Sorry I am, that the task I have undertaken, lays me under the necessity of
divulging this degeneracy in the sentiment of our imperious youth, who
was now in the heyday of his blood, flushed with the consciousness of his
own qualifications, vain of his fortune, and elated on the wings of
imaginary expectation. (353)
\end{quote}

At first glance, the passage reads like a tongue in cheek disclaimer that the views and

opinions expressed in this novel do not necessarily reflect those of the author. The “task”
of the narrator, as in the above passage, constitutes a justification for including all manner

of vulgar material, like the “mean scenes” in \textit{Roderick Random}. Peregrine’s degenerate

sentiment is consequence of his developmental stage and his need to sow his wild oats is

the justification for the inclusion of scandalous content. The narrator points to biology as

a determiner of the protagonist’s motivation. Nature takes the form of blood both in terms

of the associative link between a particular developmental stage – the “heyday of his

blood” – and also a particular sentiment and also in the verbal choice, as he is “flushed

with the consciousness of his own qualifications.” Vanity circulates through Peregrine’s

mind (as through Roderick’s). The design of the sentence clashes with its import,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{204} Tobias Smollett, \textit{Essay on the Use of External Water} (London: 1752). See especially
5-8.

\textsuperscript{205} Tobias Smollett. \textit{Travels through France and Italy}. ed. Frank Felsenstein.
(Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2011),16, 383. Smollett was likely influenced by
\end{footnotesize}
balancing a polished triplet of modifying phrases off of a disingenuous apology for the inclusion of salacious content.

The protagonist’s “imaginary expectation” here is that his refined manners will aid in his seduction of his main love interest, Emilia Gauntlet. The protagonist’s insatiable appetite is highlighted in the subsequent episode. In a moment in which he believes he has successfully seduced Emilia, Peregrine “congratulated himself upon his triumph over Emilia’s virtue, and began to project future conquests among the most dignified characters of the female sex” (403). Far from taking any satisfaction in the accomplishment of his seduction, Peregrine is more interested in projected future conquests than the actual experience, driven by what Smollett’s narrator excuses as natural appetite.

Smollett offers a bodily foundation for his protagonist’s passions by treating his mother’s pregnancy as a causal origin of his behavior. Anticipating Peregrine’s insatiable temperament, Mrs. Pickle develops a series of eccentric cravings. Mrs. Pickle’s “longings” the narrator tells us, “were not restricted to the demands of the palate and stomach, but also affected all the other organs of sense, and even invaded her imagination, which in this period seemed to be strangely diseased” (24). The vivid language that Smollett’s narrator uses dramatizes “longing” as a gradual movement that passes through the “palate” and after descending into the stomach passes into the imagination. (Previous episodes dramatize Mrs. Pickle’s craving for a pineapple.) As in the earlier passage dealing with Peregrine’s “passion,” motivation originates from a figurative purchase point outside the self even as it is anchored to the body; in this case longings are capable of “invading” the imagination if not checked. Smollett’s narrator
uses the distinction between inside and outside (implicit in the passage into the body) as a way of narrating the supersession of mere bodily satisfaction by a type of longing that is “not restricted to the demands of the palate and stomach.” Defying the restriction of the physical body, longings grow monstrous, a word that crops up later in describing Peregrine’s relationship with his mother. Setting Mrs. Pickle’s longings off from bodily “demands” has the effect of emphasizing their superfluity. This impression is reinforced subsequently when the narrator tells us that Mrs. Pickle “longed to pinch her husband’s ear” and “wished for an opportunity of plucking three black hairs from [Mr. Trunnion’s] beard” (24). Indeed, Mrs. Pickle’s longings are the precursors of her son’s inclination for sadistic practical jokes, rooted somehow in the transmission of appetite from one generation to the next. Later in the novel, Smollett’s narrator describes Peregrine’s character by referring to “that mischievous fertility of fancy, of which we have already given such pregnant examples” (81). Admittedly, this might be over-reading but by describing Peregrine’s propensity for pranks in terms of “fertility of fancy” illuminated via “pregnant examples,” Smollett’s narrator metonymically reminds the reader of the connection between his mother’s “longings” and the disposition of her son.

To modern readers, Peregrine’s dispositional inheritance may look something like a genetic affinity but George Rousseau has shown that the episode recalls primitive theories surrounding the effects of pregnant women’s imaginations on the physical form of their children. The most famous instance in this period involved Mary Tofts.

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206 See 108. Mrs. Pickle develops an obstinate hatred of her own son, described as a “monstrous prejudice.”
“insisted that she had eventually given birth to at least seventeen rabbits” after craving them throughout pregnancy. Smollett’s version seems to be directed not merely toward the ridiculous image conjured of the event but toward mode of causality of which it partakes. The idea that a fleeting and contingent craving—by all rights beneath consideration—could determine the disposition of a human being implies a causality in which the “unnecessary” is invested with causal primacy. Mrs. Pickle’s longings are a matter of chance rather than essence. She is the occasion of her son’s insatiable appetite not because of the quality of blood that runs through her veins but because of something that occurred during Peregrine’s prenatal development. To put it another way, Peregrine’s character is determined by contingency (what Mrs. Pickle longed on a particular day) rather than by fundamental identity (Mr. and Mrs. Pickle’s essence). This is a causality that is rooted in the everyday temporality of wants and desires, even as it is situated in excess to the body’s needs (“longings” that exceed the palate and stomach). It is worth lingering over this episode, in part, because Smollett devotes several chapters to it. Like Fielding’s Tom Jones, published a year before Peregrine Pickle, Smollett’s narrative takes some time to set the scene for the birth and development of his protagonist by offering representative portraits of the surrounding community. The importance of Smollett’s gesture, though, lies in contingency rather than universality (no allusions to Milton in Smollett) and the sequences that precede the protagonist’s birth emphasize chance rather than providence.

The narrative implications of Smollett’s insistence that random or pointless longings are capable of determining biological form is that *Peregrine Pickle* resists symmetry and order by anchoring its narrative to the arbitrary direction of the protagonist’s appetite. During his childhood and adolescence, Peregrine’s appetite is represented as a force that resists disciplining regulations and abstract principles. The relationship between Peregrine and his tutor Mr. Jolter exemplifies the young student’s struggle against any attempts to curb his appetite. The conflict takes on allegorical form as the protagonist and his tutor act as stock figures, loosely associated with reason and passion, or nature and culture, only to tumble back into satirical caricature. Jolter’s continual attempts to contain and regulate his pupil’s behavior take shape in a series of episodes that highlight Jolter’s vanity and inability to regulate his charge. Jolter attempts to manage Perry’s misbehavior by making him study Euclid’s geometry, “he, with rapturous encomiums, recommended the mathematics, as yielding more rational and sensible pleasure to a youthful fancy than any other subject of contemplation; and actually began to read Euclid with him that same afternoon” (83). Peregrine gives it a try but after not too long “no consideration could prevail on him to extend his inquiries further in this science; and he returned with double relish to his former avocations, like a stream which beingdammed, accumulates more force, and bursting o’er its mounds, rushes down with double impetuosity” (83). The episode sketches a crude dichotomy between rival causal frameworks. Jolter’s geometry is structured by “rational and sensible pleasure,” which is meant to override “youthful fancy.” Peregrine embodies a different principle, something undisciplined and naturally intransigent. It accumulates force and gains strength from any attempt to curtail its force. The liquid analogy extends from other
oppositions that Smollett creates, like swaddling bandages and the circulation of blood. By describing Peregrine’s disposition as a “stream” that accumulates force to the degree that its motion is restricted, Smollett’s narrator treats his protagonist’s behavior as a natural force continuous with other kinds of physical force found in the natural world.

Geometry recurs elsewhere in the novel in contrast with similar figures of natural causation. Standing for the abstract reasoning, remote from the actual world of things as they are, mathematical thinking is a kind of learned falsification of reality. Travelling between Dover and Calais, a storm rocks the boat upon which Peregrine launches on the grand tour. Meanwhile, “the governor, experienced in these disasters, slipt into bed, where he lay at his ease, amusing himself with a treatise on the Cycloid, with algebraical demonstrations, which never failed to engage his imagination in the most agreeable manner” (187). Smollett creates sharp contrast between the rolling of waves above board and the “algebraical demonstrations” that serve to distract Jolter from his natural environment, like dreams that transpire under the covers. One can easily read the passage in an erotic vein and view Jolter’s practice of “laying at his ease, amusing himself” as a kind of solipsistic and masturbatory epistemophilia, substituting solitary mental exertion for a real engagement with the world. Smollettportrays Jolter as a perverse mathematical Quixote who willfully blinds himself to the natural world. The narrator tells us,

All his maxims were the suggestions of pedantry and prejudice; so that his perception was obscured, his judgment biassed, his address awkward, and his conversation absurd and unentertaining: yet such as I have represented this tutor is the greatest part of those animals who lead raw boys about the world, under the denomination of travelling governors. (207)

Smollett’s narrator makes an odd realist claim here, gradually turning up the volume of his indignation. Associated with dogmatic conservative values and pedantic intellectual
pursuits, the tutor fundamentally misperceives reality. Jolter’s “maxims” are the moral analogue of his intellectual preoccupation with geometry, abstract principles that are orderly and rational, but without foundation in nature.

A similar episode re-iterates Jolter’s erroneous alignment of moral and geometrical reality through the ascription of narrative form. The tutor lectures his charge on the inevitable ruin that proceeds from indiscrete behavior (in this case, Peregrine’s sexual appetite). The rhetoric of abstract mathematical necessity is instrumental to Jolter’s construction of narrative inevitability. Jolter “very gravely undertook to prove by mathematical demonstration, that this intrigue, if further pursued, would tend to the young gentleman’s ruin and disgrace.” (133) The tutor proposes to “proceed upon geometrical principles. Then hemming thrice, observed, that no mathematical inquiries could be carried on, except upon certain data, or concessions to truths, that were self evident” (133). Jolter’s appeal to the “self evident” relationship between geometric laws and human affairs is an aggressive (and caricatured) satire of rationalist philosophy.

Peregrine’s response is telling:

His pupil having listened to him this far, could contain himself no longer, but interrupted the investigation with a loud laugh, and told him that his postulata put him in mind of a certain learned and ingenious gentleman, who undertook to disprove any existence of natural evil, and asked no other datum on which to found his demonstration, but an acknowledgement that every thing that is, is right. (134)

Peregrine fails to “contain himself” and his laughter interrupts, an involuntary force rupturing a geometrical figure. Like the river bursting its banks, geometric order

209 On dogmatic conservative values, see 229-233. Smollett stages a political debate between Jolter, who represents absolute monarchy, and the Physician, who is a republican. Both sides are made to look absurd, but Jolter unquestionably loses the argument and storms out of the room.
intensifies rather than inhibits the emergence of laughter from its proscribed boundaries. Smollett’s reference to Leibniz’s philosophical rationalism anticipates Voltaire’s Pangloss. Jolter attempts to show how philosophical and moral attempts to rationalize behavior take a narrative form by coupling predictable causes and outcomes. Smollett makes Jolter the butt of Peregrine’s ridicule for misunderstanding the nature of motivation but Jolter is just one of the stock figures in the novel that similarly impose ideal models onto material recalcitrance. In the next section, I discuss classical literary precedents that, like Jolter’s geometry, appear in the novel in debased parodic forms. In *Peregrine Pickle* classical models, like Jolter’s application of geometry to morality, are the wrong narrative templates for understanding motivation.

5. “Entertainment According to the Manner of the Ancients”: Parody and Culture

Food recurs as a causal component in each of Smollett’s first two novels in a different capacity, creating a tacit contrast between Roderick’s hunger and Peregrine’s insatiable appetite. Both novels are episodic but for seemingly opposite reasons: famine and plenty. By writing *Peregrine Pickle* as a pointless sequel to *Roderick Random*, Smollett establishes continuity between the drives of the body and “unnecessary” appetites that proliferate in necessity’s absence. Throughout the novel, *Peregrine Pickle* emphasizes food in excess of, or superfluous to, its role in sustaining human life. The episode that exemplifies this tendency to transform food from its role in bare survival into a luxurious supplement to basic subsistence is the chapter called the “Entertainment According to the Manner of the Ancients.” The title of the chapter alerts us to its satirical representation of the “Manner of the Ancients,” a phrase that could reflect on custom (or
manners), style, or cultural forms of classical civilization. The episode revolves around a banquet planned in an antiquarian spirit by the novel’s stock pedant, known as the physician or the doctor. Smollett recalls the debate of the ancients and the moderns in the physician’s preparations of a banquet composed of “certain pickles and confections which were not to be found among the culinary preparations of these degenerate days” (233). The narrator’s irony leaks through in the use of the word “degenerate,” a judgmental modifier that implies a skepticism toward the project that is borne out in the ensuing scene. The Physician is decidedly a classicist and has organized his entertainment to the end of recovering classic “taste” through antiquarian modes of food preparation but Smollett’s literalization of the notion of taste has the effect of debasing undue esteem of the past.

In the context of Peregrine’s grand tour, the episode condenses and satirizes the supposed benefit that the protagonist gains from his travels as high culture is dragged down to the level of bodily response. The mischievous protagonist ensures that the attendees are composed of the upper echelon of European high society, with figures representing the respective countries of the Grand Tour: “Peregrine proposed that some foreigners should partake of the banquet; and the task being left to his care and discretion, he actually bespoke the company of a French marquis, an Italian count and a German baron, whom he knew to be egregious coxcombs, and therefore more likely to enhance the joy of the entertainment” (234). Peregrine’s concern with enhancing “the joy of the entertainment” is of a piece with his hedonic pursuits throughout the novel. Though

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disgusted by the food being offered, Peregrine turns the banquet into an occasion for pleasing himself. Additionally, the diversity of palates and national characters will help to emphasize the repulsive nature of the food. For if each diner is accustomed to a particular regional cuisine, then the fact that the Physician’s fare elicits universal repugnance is further emphasized by the diversity of guests.

Smollett foregrounds the physical body by devoting several paragraphs to describing the bodily contortions of the guests, who find it difficult to reconcile modern dress with the ancient habit of eating in a reclining position. The coxcombs fret over their appearances as they lower themselves onto the couches and hilarity ensues when stockings are torn, bodies collide, and a periwig flies across the room. Smollett’s narrator clumsily depicts a tableau of “feet suddenly tilting up” and a “stocking being torn” using language that conveys an uncomfortable sense of bodily contortion, in contrast to natural and relaxed bodily posture. The satire seems directed against the coxcombs, who are overly concerned with their appearance, but also toward the unnatural manner of eating practiced by the ancients. Peregrine’s response is predictable: “The drollery of the distress that attended this disaster entirely vanquished the affected gravity of our young gentleman, who was obliged to suppress his laughter by cramming a handkerchief in his mouth” (236). As when confronted with Jolter’s geometrical morality, Peregrine’s uncontrollable laughter is triggered by pretension. Images similar to Peregrine’s attempt to seal off his mouth with the handkerchief recur throughout the episode, with fragrant odors rising up to meet the diners: “our hero found means to exclude the odour from his sense of smelling by breathing only through his mouth; and the poor painter running into another room, plugged his nose with tobacco” (235). The body is the site of invasion
through the orifices, as figured elsewhere in the novel in a literalization of the idea that causes originate outside the body.

Like the “longings” that invade Mrs. Pickle through the palate and the passion that “entertains” Peregrine and his partners in crime, external triggers have a way of eliciting involuntary bodily responses. The focus on the body in the banquet episode highlights involuntary reactions to gross or disgusting food. Loss of control of the body signifies the failure of polite manners to contain one’s own behavior, and by extension the failure of to maintain autonomy and control: “The Frenchman having swallowed the first spoonful, made a full pause, his throat swelled, as if an egg had stuck in his gullet, his eyes rolled, and his mouth underwent a series of involuntary contractions and dilatations” (237). The description compares the Frenchman to a snake, reducing his foppish manners to sub-human “contractions and dilatations,” making him passive as parts of his body (muscles) act independent of the whole. Other banqueters undergo “violent distortion of features” and Smollett emphasizes how Peregrine repeatedly holds back his laughter at all images of the body’s unruly nature escaping the confinement of the polite ego. The banquet escalates into a “vortex of … tumult” as words associated with randomness such as “misfortune,” “unlucky,” and “disaster” recur throughout the chapter. Smollett strives to create a sense of random movement in which all manner of activity is going on at once, losing forward momentum as everything unfolds simultaneously. Thomas Rowlandson’s illustration for the 1796 edition captures the sense of the scene by arranging the figures around the over-turned banquet table with gaping mouths, each figure moving away from the table. [See Figure 1, p. 63.] The image centers on overturned plates and bottles, crooked extended limbs, and angular furniture in a
claustrophobic jumble. Relatively little food is on display, as open mouths express astonishment and horror, rather than gobbling up the fare. Rowlandson captures the way that the episode as a whole should be read as a denunciation of unthinking reverence for traditional Roman culture, finding the emulation of the past unnatural and undesirable. While some of Smollett’s satire is directed toward the physician’s eccentricity, the scene contributes to the sense that classical “manner” is incommensurate with the randomness of modern life. Classical precedent implicitly raises the question of the repeatability of the past – to what extent does tradition partake in a kind of episodic repetition?

What remains unsaid here is that the same traditional Roman culture whose recipes are so unpalatable to modern diners also gave birth to celebrated literary genres of the eighteenth century Augustans. If classical fare is inedible, classical literary forms such as epic, tragedy, and romance are by extension also implicated. Smollett gestures at the connection between gustatory taste and literary taste when the Physician tells the diners that he “regretted his incapacity to give them a species of the alieus, or the fish meals of the ancients” (240). Pedantically lecturing on fish meals, “which in Galen’s opinion [are] hard of digestion” and “described by Pliny in his natural history” and as prepared by Julius Caesar “six thousand for one triumphal supper,” the Physician “observed, that the manner of dressing them was described by Horace, in the account he gives of the entertainment to which Maecenas was invited by the epicure Nasiedenus” (240). Overdetermined by the Physician’s encyclopedic diatribe, the fish meals constitute material for classical history, natural science, medicine, and poetry but not subsistence. That is to say, the fish meals are anything but food.

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211 Jerry Beasley regards the scene as a modernization of Trimalchio’s feast in Petronius’s *Satyricon*. See Beasley, *Tobias Smollett*, 110.
The reference to the “epicure Nasiedenus” faintly recalls philosophical Epicureanism, a hedonistic philosophical tradition dedicated to understanding the world in terms of random atomic collisions in contrast to providential purpose. Classical precedents cited by the Physician or referenced less directly, serve not to anchor the novel to the past but to assail the diachronic continuity of custom, whether it takes the form of diet or literary form. Literary history itself is episodic and repetition signals futility rather than continuity. This is demonstrated in another example of Smollett’s tendency to debase literary allusion into satirical caricature, which occurs through a classical reference to the Pygmalion myth from Ovid. Peregrine takes up “Nymph of the Road,” a young woman reduced to the status of beggar, and “metamorphoses” her “into a fine Lady” (596). The narrator suggests that to pass the Nymph off as a woman of fashion, “the only essential difference in point of demeanor, is the form of an education, which the meanest capacity can acquire, without much study or application” (599). Peregrine’s motivation in the prank, of course, is not social uplift but to embarrass a set of fashionable ladies who are unable to tell the difference between a gentle lady and what they refer to afterwards as a “common trull” (601). Aristocrats and beggars are reduced to the same level when the rudiments of education can be got “without much study or application.” Education has no teleological payoff, as it will in later bildungsroman novels. The novel identifies causes of character that are extrinsic – resulting from arbitrary combinations like Peregrine’s meeting with the nymph of the road.

Underpinning both the “Entertainment According to the Manner of the Ancients” chapter and the Pygmalion episode is a sense that the novel is driven by the protagonist’s pleasure.

_Peregrine Pickle_ takes on a narrative shape that is derived not from classical precedent but from Peregrine’s appetite—pleasure that appears episodic and random because it is not purposeful in any meaningful sense. John Cleland’s review of _Peregrine Pickle_ points out, “the author seems to have aimed more at proportioning his style to his subject, in imitation of _Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzman d’Alfarache, Gil Blas de Santillane_, and _Scarron’s Comic Romance_, than he has of respecting the delicacy of [his] readers.”

Cleland picks up on the picaresque tradition in which “proportioning” of style (or manner) is determined by the nature of the central character, rather than classical decorum. While some readers have objected that _Peregrine Pickle_ should not be considered as a picaresque novel at all because it revolves around a gentleman, Smollett and readers like Cleland thought otherwise. It is important to remember that the picaresque fails to maintain a rigorous sociological distinction between _picaros_ and aristocrats because the causal structure that determines events in the picaresque derives from the body itself. _Lazarillo de Tormes_ as well as Quevedo’s _El Buscón_ frequently insist on parallels between aristocrats and beggars, an analogy that is important to both

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214 This notion could be linked to Aristotle’s idea that comedy should depict people of lower status. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 45.

215 Boucé writes, “Neither Roderick nor Peregrine is ever spurred on by hunger. Their origins are extremely honorable and Smollett’s first two novels depict not so much a rise in social scale as the more or less arduous recovery of a material situation…” (82).
Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle. Smollett’s decision in his second novel, to cast a gentleman in the role of a pícaro, follows from his confounding of the two categories in Roderick Random.216 Precedents exist in that Quevedo’s low-born pícaro aspires to become a gentleman and Defoe’s Moll Flanders professes the desire to be a lady. Smollett extends the picaresque model of a protagonist subject to hunger to the analogous situation of an affluent protagonist subject to irrepressible appetite.

6. “Through a perspective of spleen:” Necessity and Social Order

Peregrine’s appetite, though marked with features that vaguely seem to align it with economic developments of the period, is almost exclusively determined by non-economic causes. Peregrine Pickle suggests that appetite beyond bare necessity takes on an episodic form—endless and pointless. Such a position is a provocative rejoinder to eighteenth-century arguments that recruit desire for luxury products as the engine of collective socio-economic progress because it refuses to affiliate passion with the social good.217 Bernard Mandeville’s The Fable of the Bees famously perceives desire for luxury goods through the formula of “private vices, public benefits.”

216 R. G. Collins points to evidence that Peregrine should be regarded as a bastard, which would add a traditionally picaresque element of illegitimacy to the protagonist’s background. See Collins, “The Hidden Bastard: A Question of Illegitimacy in Smollett’s Peregrine Pickle,” in PMLA 94.1 (Jan., 1979): 91-105.

justification for such a formula relies on a causal model that reframes individual appetite in socio-economic terms:

The short-sited and Vulgar in the Chain of Causes seldom can see further than one Link; but those who can enlarge their View, and will give themselves the Leisure of gazing on the Prospect of concatenated Events, may, in a hundred Places see Good spring up, and pullulate from Evil, as naturally as Chickens do from Eggs. (123)

Understanding proper causality is a matter of perspective, or enlarging one’s view, also it is dependent on having the “Leisure of Gazing,” a leisure that in Mandeville’s words is connected to will. Enlarging one’s view is a matter of will, or of autonomy. Especially salient is Mandeville’s presentation of “concatenated Events,” and his account could be construed as describing the emergence of order out of episodic occurrences. Mandeville’s simile (typical of the overall structure of *Fable of the Bees*) regards economic activity as analogous to “natural,” or biological, activity – seeming random until regarded from the right distance and the right “will.” By way of contrast, Smollett’s novel takes a third-person perspective to portray desire in excess of basic necessity that does nothing to drive prosperity. For all the talk of insatiable appetite that seems to resonate with emergent forms of consumerism, there is no shopkeeper benefitting from Peregrine’s pranks and no tax that could be levied from cruelty. It is at this level that Smollett insists on “concatenated Events” without the kind of collective payoff that Mandeville promises.

When Smollett does turn his attention to commerce in *Peregrine Pickle*, he takes fleeting pot shots at cartoonish misers and money-grubbing merchants.218 Smollett’s emphasis on gratuitous appetite, instantiated in episodic narrative, has the effect of detaching

218 For example, see the serial escape artists in the Fleet Prison (686-690).
individual appetite from collective prosperity, treating pleasure as an end in itself rather than a means of driving collective prosperity.

_Peregrine Pickle_ follows _Roderick Random_ in rejecting the kind of providential form that translates concatenations of events into purposeful activity.²¹⁹ John Barrell has suggested that mid-eighteenth century literary texts mediated this translation of randomness into order through a “preoccupation was with the problem of the viewpoint, the intellectual or social position, from which… coherence could be observed” because “from any but the ‘right’ position, social experience, social events, will appear random, and society will seem a loose and unorganized collection of individuals each pursuing selfish and separate ends” (177). We can see an example of the relativity of social perspective implied in Barrell’s claim – the idea that social positions are inflected by self-interest – in _Roderick Random_, where Roderick’s retrospective bias colors his interpretation of events that otherwise seem random. In _Peregrine Pickle_, Smollett’s narrator makes little attempt to unify a “loose and unorganized” collection of episodes or ground their unification in the “right social position.” Smollett’s second novel does indeed examine the relationship between perspective and perceived randomness but the text is not optimistic about the possibilities of attaining a unifying perspective on the social order that would give order to the serial episodic structure.

Perspective and its relation to the social order is thematized in the text in a series of episodes in which Peregrine and his friend, Cadwallader Crabtree, spy on high society, learning dirty secrets that function as serial pleasures for the voyeurs. Late in the novel,

²¹⁹ Mandeville described his view of the social order explicitly in providential terms by defining “Man, whom Providence has designed for Society” (92) in terms of passions that drive prosperity “from a seeming Necessity of Natural Causes” (92).
Smollett’s narrator tells us, “our adventurer still had the opportunity of knowing everything which happened among the great, by means of his friend Cadwallader” (623). By masquerading as a deaf and senile old man, Cadwallader gains intelligence of the goings on among unsuspecting victims. Many readers have seen the inspiration for these episodes in Alain Le Sage’s *Le Diable boiteux*. In the year before writing *Peregrine Pickle* Smollett translated Le Sage’s text as *The Devil upon Crutches*, a text that has become the paradigmatic example of the spy chronicle, a sub-species of the picaresque revolving around the serialized exposure of corruption. Le Sage’s novel follows the demon Asmodeus, who has the ability to fly around, raise the roofs of houses and peek into private lives, exposing the vices of society. Within *Peregrine Pickle*, Smollett recalls Le Sage’s novel by pairing the protagonist with Cadwallader (the devil on crutches). Cadwallader is a kind of conduit through which Peregrine has access to salacious stories. The narrator notes, “Crabtree saw and considered everything through a perspective of spleen, that always reflected the worst side of human nature” (623). Here, Smollett gives us a kind of inversion of Barrell’s or Mandeville’s lofty perspective. Instead of seeing the collective good that emerges out of concatenated events, Cadwallader’s perspective is colored with cynicism. The more he observes, the more his cynical view of human nature is confirmed, creating an endlessly gratifying feedback loop of confirmation bias. Smollett’s choice of words here is important, as Crabtree’s perspective is produced through the body itself in the form of “spleen.”

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Peregrine’s break with Cadwallader is perhaps the closest thing to redemption in the novel as a whole, in that it points to a way out of the endless hedonist behavior of the previous sections. Cadwallader unwittingly helps to inoculate Peregrine against his own appetite by representing an extreme form of his own behavior. Smollett narrator tells us, “our young gentleman began to be disgusted, at certain intervals, with the character of this old man, whom he now thought a morose cynic, not so much incensed against the follies and vices of mankind, as delighted with the distress of his fellow creatures” (623). Peregrine’s reaction is not so much a rational appraisal as an emotional reaction that accrues through aggregation. He makes an assessment of that is attributed to character but which turns on the causal origin of Cadwallader’s motivation. It is not satirical indignation (“not so much incensed”) as hedonistic pleasure (“delighted with distress”) that is the basis of Cadwallader’s behavior. To put it another way, Peregrine is disgusted to learn that it is not morality but appetite that determines Cadwallader’s behavior. The novel aligns this realization with an analysis that proceeds from involuntary response (disgust) rather than from abstract reasoning or “enlargement of perspective.”

Peregrine’s disgusted recognition of the determining force of appetite is the culmination of much of what has preceded it, in which secondary characters serve as targets or victims to Peregrine’s malicious appetite. In the earlier sections of the novel, Hawser Trunnion is the character that best demonstrates the convergence of the protagonist’s pleasure in cruelty and the reader’s complicity as observer. Smollett’s narrator goes to great lengths to enumerate the physical disabilities and quasi-monstrous appearance of the retired seaman, offering a grotesque description itemizing his “aspect rendered hideous” (7) through mutilation and involving him in frequent slapstick fracases
and mishaps. The rambling and disconnected episodes that introduce Trunnion’s eccentric appearance and habits all serve as preamble to the moment that the young Peregrine targets his uncle: “One would imagine he had marked out the commodore as a proper object of ridicule, for almost all his little childish satire was leveled against him” (52). The narrator maps satirical decorum (in designating the “proper object of ridicule”) onto whimsical cruelty, creating an odd conflation of a literary mode and Peregrine’s “unaccountable passion.” I’ll return to the relationship between satire and Peregrine’s appetite in a moment, but the narrator subsequently tells us: “Perry took great pleasure in treading by accident” (52) on the seaman’s gout-stricken toe. Smollett lingers over the sadistic pleasures that the protagonist takes in tormenting Trunnion, making “accident” into the screen for gratuitous cruelty. What appears to be accidental is driven by Peregrine’s appetite and the narrator arbitrates the reader’s response with sardonic constructions that highlight the way that accident becomes an alibi for illicit pleasure. Embellished descriptions of the Trunnion’s reactions tacitly invite readers to partake in the pleasure of laughing at the victim’s pain and annoyance. But as the novel progresses from childhood pranks to less innocent pastimes – such as Peregrine’s aggressive sexual appetite – the complicity that has been established in such moments calls into question the reader’s own appetite for cruelty.\(^{221}\) Peregrine and the reader both are implicated in satirical pleasure in ridiculing others.

Smollett encodes his protagonist’s unchecked appetite, or his episodic nature, by aligning his disposition with satire itself. In this text, satire seems to be not so much a literary mode as way of deriving pleasure from exploiting the weaknesses of others.

\(^{221}\) For the widespread nature of jest books and other mean-spirited texts in the period, see Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*. 
Given Smollett’s own affinity for classical satire and his habit of using the term to describe his own work, it is surprising that his actual usage of the word is far less restricted in his novels. In *Roderick Random*, the word “satirical” is several times affixed to facial expressions, as in “I congratulated him on his prospect with a satirical smile” (85). Satire is associated with pleasure at someone else’s expense here, but more specifically it is embodied. Peregrine’s behavior is distinguished by “that practical satire which was so agreeable and peculiar in his disposition” (540). Practical is a word that here means embodied or applied rather than written in a poem or a novel (though one might say that text constitutes a different form of embodiment). In these cases, satire is more of a practice than a genre. Later in the novel, Cadwallader’s affinity with the protagonist arises out of this same “agreeable and peculiar” quality. He tells the youth, “there is something in your disposition which indicates a rooted contempt for the world, and I understand you have made some successful efforts, in exposing one part of it to the ridicule of the other” (383). From this perspective, Peregrine is not so much a character as a disinterested instrument of satire. But to regard Peregrine as Cadwallader does here – as a kind of grotesque superhero – would be to miss out on the narrator’s dry sarcasm in praising “our youth, who was a professed enemy to all oppression” (212). For young Peregrine, satire is an instrument of pleasure – the inflection of a smile – rather than of moral or political vision. In its most reflexive moments, though, *Peregrine Pickle* operates as a kind of meta-satire, or an attempt to lay bare the aggressive tactics of Smollett’s own mode of writing and supersede the endless cycle of petty attacks. If anything, the text could be said to exhaust the reader’s capacity to take in joy in another’s
suffering through sheer repetition and incremental escalation, to incite disgust through “an endless and perhaps no agreeable task.”

The similarity between young Peregrine and the misanthrope Cadwallader makes it hard to see Peregrine’s satire in the spirit that some critics interpret it. R. G. Collins argues that “Smollett excuses almost all of Peregrine’s practical jokes as corrective action, or comedy for the sake of comedy, as in the tricks exercised against Trunnion.”

To suggest, as Collins does, that the narrative endorses Perry’s behavior in moral terms (or at least that he does so up to a certain point) is miss out on the difference between “corrective action” on the one hand and “comedy for comedy’s sake” ad naseum on the other. For what is corrective about Peregrine’s stomping on Trunnion’s foot, drilling holes in his foster mother’s chamber pot, or raping farmer’s wives? In a variation of Collins’s position, Ronald Paulson argues “Peregrine… progresses from a satirist making fun of foolish people to a monster exploiting simple people.” Though this reading gives us a better sense of Peregrine’s mischief as a kind of slippery slope from correction to criminality, it is hard to see how many of Peregrine’s youthful acts qualify as satire unless we admit that satire stands for a serial form of appetite (like Mrs. Pickle’s “longings” beyond the needs of the body) that is driven by pleasure. In contrast with critics that view Peregrine a kind of proto-bildungsroman, I’m claiming that Peregrine Pickle operates by exploiting the convergence of the reader’s and the protagonist’s episodic pleasure as a means to provoke recognition of the implications of an episodic narrative form driven by pleasure. Smollett pushes episodic narrative to the point of

223 Paulson, Satire and the Novel, 184.
incoherence as a means of diagnosing the motive force of appetite without limits. As translator of key texts of the picaresque tradition, such as *Gil Blas of Santillane, The Devil upon Crutches*, and *Don Quixote*, Smollett was perhaps the principal advocate of picaresque narrative in the mid-eighteenth century. His early novels show that understanding the nature of episodic narrative could help to understand the nature of appetite and what he regarded as the “worst side of human nature.”
Chapter Four:
Sex and Necessity in Mid-century Women’s Novels of Adventure

“Necessity is the worst bondage; it forces our wills, and enslaves our bodies; it obliges us to do things most contrary to our choice.” — Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House

“Economic dependence is the ultimate form of control over our sexuality.”— Silvia Federici

In my first epigraph, the speaker describes necessity as a condition, “the worst bondage,” and then personifies it as cruel and abstract taskmaster (an “it”) that enslaves and obliges the anonymous first-person plural subjects to engage in behavior at odds with their choice. Mid-eighteenth century biographies of prostitutes, such as Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House, regard economic necessity as a force that overpowers women’s consent through the threat of starvation, external somehow to both their “wills” or to their “bodies.” As with Lazarillo, Moll Flanders, and Roderick Random, the location of intrinsic bodily need as an agent external to the protagonist postulates necessity as a paradoxical figure of explanation for the co-existence of conflicting sources of causal power—brute bodily determinism and individual moral choice. Whereas previous chapters have been limited to a single individual’s struggle to survive, the narratives that I discuss in this chapter frequently express bodily necessity in collective terms. The episodic narrative structure of mid-century narratives of women’s adventures and hardships represents the “necessary evil” of male sexual predation as an


irrepressible and interminable force that constrains their agency and determines their economic status.

Eighteenth-century novels of women’s adventure prefigure feminist critiques of political economy in the way that they highlight the labor of reproduction, described by feminists such as Federici as housework and/or sexuality. In this chapter I discuss some lesser-known texts such texts as *The History of Betty Barnes* (1753), *The Histories of Some of the Penitents at the Magdalen House* (1759), and *The Adventures of Sylvia Hughes* (1761) that explore the limits of women’s autonomy in economic and moral domains. Though they have not traditionally been read as picaresque, each of the texts underscores bodily necessity and vulnerability as the fundamental condition of their protagonists, and each illustrates the ongoing experience of hardship through its serial form. I examine these narratives in dialogue with the tradition of the female picaresque by tracing continuities between the texts that I discuss and “The Spanish Jilt,” an eighteenth-century translation of *La pícara Justina* (1605). Reading mid-century novels of women’s adventure as continuing the tradition of the female picaresque reveals the deep ambivalence that persists in the space between the rise of commercial culture and the shifting frameworks for understanding feminine labor and feminine sexuality.

Scholars have long recognized that discourse concerning the female prostitute served as an indicator of the increasingly-charged significance of commerce in eighteenth-century culture. Perhaps the most famous claim about the economic status of the prostitute is Marx’s claim that “prostitution is only a specific expression of the
general prostitution of the laborer.\textsuperscript{226} By this synecdoche, the particular exigencies of women’s lives are continuous with more general economic transformations, specifically, that the form of commodity restructured social relations by impelling subjects to alienate their labor.\textsuperscript{227} By contrast, critics such as Catherine Gallagher have emphasized the way in which women took advantage of the liberties associated with the figure of the whore in order to fashion pseudo-anonymous authorial identities for themselves in the period. Katherine Binhammer looks to seduction narratives for the ways that they underscore positive forms of women’s desire or self-knowledge, rather than the lack of agency that is associated with the figure of the prostitute. Whereas the Marxist perspective subordinates prostitution to the broader currents of economic modernity, critics like Gallagher and Binhammer emphasize women’s agency at the expense of sensitivity to the experiences of the less fortunate and less empowered women in the period. In contrast to both of these positions, I will suggest that women’s novels of adventure represent normative forms of social conduct, whether economic or moral, as unable to contain the perennial force of male predation. At the same time, I argue that rather than relying on Marx’s account of the commodity, we gain a less anachronistic and better understanding of the way that eighteenth-century authors and readers perceived the relationship between women and the marketplace through the figure of necessity, which confounds socioeconomic subject/object distinctions between persons and things.

\textsuperscript{227} For a study of eighteenth-century prostitution that develops this line of argument, see Laura Rosenthal, \textit{Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).
It has become a common critical assumption that views of prostitution shifted around mid-century, when the descriptive rhetoric of the prostitute shifted from “sexual predator to economic victim.” Rosenthal frames this profound change in generic terms by observing that the primary mode of representing (or not representing) illicit sexuality shifted from the libertine to the sentimental. The standard account is that Restoration representations of the whore impute women agency at the cost of their public moral character, while sentimental accounts recover moral standing for women at the cost of their agency. The shift can be best understood through the change in terminology employed to describe the transition from figure of the whore (who has sex for pleasure) into the figure of the prostitute (who has sex for money). Yet to put too much emphasis on this semantic metamorphosis is to fail to recognize how female picaresque texts had drawn attention to the problematic nature of the distinction between sexual predators and victims long before, and well into, the eighteenth century. Because the female picaresque depicted women who were victimized by patriarchal oppression and, at the same time, duplicitous authors of their own narratives, texts such as *Justina* articulated the conditions of women’s agency in less zero-sum terms than the standard account would have us believe.

The midcentury shift in terminology for women’s sexual transgression had implications for all women and not just prostitutes. Ruth Perry observes that in the eighteenth century, “It became nearly impossible for anyone thinking about women’s condition to mention wives without mentioning prostitutes or prostitutes without
mentioning wives.” Scholarship on the relationship between women’s social roles and economic change has emphasized that the eighteenth-century redefinition of sexuality was part of a net loss in women’s agency that corresponded to economic developments such as the breakdown of domestic agricultural economies, the rise of (masculine) economic individualism, and the institution of new domestic ideologies such as separate spheres. In contrast to the critical attention that has been paid to changes in women’s domestic roles in the period, this chapter highlights narratives that did not emphasize women’s roles as wives, but rather as abject and suffering bodies, for the most part, outside of traditional kinship structures. By the end of the eighteenth century, I will argue, women authors still labored to distinguish their narratives from scandalous novels of entertainment at the same time that they offered critical accounts of the ways in which constraints on sexual behavior and socioeconomic status complement one another to limit women’s autonomy.

1. *La Picara Justina*: Translating Sex, Power, and Entertainment

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Many sixteenth-century Spanish female picaresque texts have yet to be translated into English and, as a result, seem to have had limited direct influence on English literature in the eighteenth century. One exception to this pattern of omission was Captain John Stevens’ edition of López de Úbeda’s *El libro de entretenimiento de la pícara Justina* (1605), which was translated as “The Spanish Jilt” in 1707. Professing itself to be a “book of entertainment,” the text offers an unapologetic and seedy disclosure of the protagonist’s sexual misadventures.\(^{230}\) *La pícara Justina* is a long and digressive narrative from the perspective of an innkeeper’s daughter who lives by her wits and roams the countryside playing tricks on unsuspecting victims. The original text alternates between Justina’s loquacious first-person account (rife with untranslatable puns and other wordplay) and a morally censorious third-person voice, which offers a series of disciplinary corrections to the protagonist’s amoral views and activities. For obvious reasons, many scholars have regarded *Justina* as a misogynistic attack on women’s duplicity, and such studies regard the editorial voice as the implied normative position.\(^{231}\) Feminist criticism on *Justina* has challenged this view by emphasizing the dialogic aspect of the text in order to regard it as a (likely unintentional) critique of the subjugation of

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\(^{230}\) Some of the other female picaresque novels include Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo, *La hija de Celestina; o la ingeniosa Elena* (1612) and Alonso de Castillo Solorzano, *La niña de los embustes, Teresa de Manzanares* (1632) and *La garduña de Sevilla* (1642), which was translated as *The Spanish Pole-Cat* by Roger L’Estrange and John Ozell. For a recent overview, see Enrique García Santo-Tomás, “The Spanish female picaresque” in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque* ed. J.A. Garrido Ardila (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 60-74.

women.\textsuperscript{232} David Castillo summarizes, “The comical episodes, anecdotes and digressions of \textit{La picara Justina} simultaneously celebrate and condemn the \textit{picara}’s ability and determination to deceive men and to profit from their foolishness.”\textsuperscript{233} The text’s capacity to hold contradictory values, to “simultaneously celebrate and condemn” women’s power over men, is attributed by Castillo and Davis to its double-voiced narrative structure.

Later in this chapter, I will suggest that eighteenth-century representations of female prostitution reproduce the conflict between women’s autonomy and moral constraint (which in the 1606 Spanish text takes the dialogic form of protagonist vs. editor) in terms of the encroachment of masculine literary authority onto women’s narratives. Though it is impossible to ascertain to what degree \textit{Justina} may have played a role in influencing views toward female prostitution in Britain, its prominent portrayal of a wandering female protagonist resonated with the figure of the female prostitute as “nightwalker,” a woman who rambled in search of adventures and conquests. The lingering association between the Spanish picaresque and prostitution, though, can be seen in the way that \textit{The Juvenile Adventures of Miss Kitty F----r} (1759) bills itself as a Spanish translation, despite its obvious references to British personalities and locales.\textsuperscript{234}

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The abridged and redacted version of *Justina*, titled “The Spanish Jilt,” was one of five texts included in the omnibus *The Spanish Libertines*, which also included “Celestina, the Bawd of Madrid,” a translation of Fernando de Rojas’s *La Celestina* (1499). The inclusion of these two texts demonstrates that prostitution was a motif that editors and translators, such as Stevens, associated with the Spanish picaresque. Like English-language versions of *Lazarillo*, Captain John Stevens’ adaptation of *Justina* eliminates the original prologue and flattens out many of the nuances of the original text, turning it into a more straightforward and “entertaining” narrative. Most importantly, it cuts out the editorial interventions that characterize the dialogic tension of the original. The result is a text that represents feminine deception as a strategy of survival that makes the reader complicit in the heroine’s tricks.

“The Spanish Jilt” attributes the fundamental composition of the protagonist’s character to the inculcation of duplicitous economic practices from an early age. Redacting numerous prefaces and introductions, the English text begins with a lengthy account of the protagonist’s origins and upbringing. During her childhood, Justina is not allowed to leave the house at night because sexual predation is a palpable presence in her neighborhood. Upon her parents’ deaths, Justina takes up a life of rambling. To the extent that necessity shapes her fate, it is as a matter of self-preservation as she defends herself from sexual violation. When she finds herself about to be raped by a gang of men, she boasts to the reader, “Necessity is the Mother of Ingenuity; I set my Wits to work and you will see how they brought me off” (30). By stepping out of the flow of narration to directly address the reader and objectify her “Wits,” Justina transforms her own actions into entertaining tidbits for the reader, flagging the reversal of traditional patriarchal
power relations as an opportunity for the reader to take pleasure in her ingenuity. Justina entices the men to overindulge in drink, and escapes their clutches after alerting the local townspeople that the gang has plundered their provisions.

“The Spanish Jilt” represents sexual self-preservation as the heroine’s initiation into a career of deception and fraud that escalates in proportion to the forms of social injustice that she faces. After being swindled out of her inheritance by her brothers, Justina fools them into thinking that a burglar has stolen their jewels when she has merely appropriated what she considers her due share. (Women’s exclusion from inheritance will also be a theme in Betty Barnes and Sylvia Hughes, as I discuss below.) The pleasures of Justina’s narrative consist in the playful accruals and distributions of insult and retribution as the narrator addresses the reader and describes her schemes. The apotheosis of the plot is the protagonist’s marriage, which is sought for the sake of recuperating her lost inheritance. As an aid to finding a husband, Justina tells the reader that she “resolv’d to Trick my self up and dawb my Cheeks” (34). Dressed in luxurious clothing and wearing make-up, Justina attracts a host of suitors, from which she has the liberty to make her choice. Justina confides in the reader, “In fine I wanted a Husband, and one that would stand up for my Right, and defend my Patrimony, which made me pitch upon a Man of Metal, whom I had before chosen for my Protector and Guardian” (61). In seeking to recover her livelihood, Justina resists the institution of primogeniture through self-conscious manipulation of her image, and attracts her suitors by pretending to be someone she is not.

Even as “The Spanish Jilt,” associates the protagonist’s marital choice with economic self-preservation, the narrative’s fundamental ambiguity remains as to what
degree the *picara* actually maintains control over her own situation. Though the 1707 text never allows Justina to become a victim, her actions largely consist of reactions to threats to her wellbeing. In this, Justina is a very different character than the one that Gallagher assigns to the Restoration whore. In a reading of the popular courtesan narrative, *The Whore’s Rhetoric* (1683), Gallagher claims “the essence of prostitution is not exchanging sexual favors for money but dissimulating affection in words and actions.”²³⁵ The dichotomous contrast between regarding whoredom as an economic exchange and regarding it as self-conscious dissimulation leaves out another option, that the financial and the fictive aspects of prostitution are both facets of the primary motive, which is self-preservation. Though Justina’s adventures represent a way of trying to turn her disenfranchisement into a form of power over men (including her readers), such dissimulation is a strategy undertaken as a last resort.²³⁶

The eighteenth-century translation of *Justina* manufactures a specific ambiguity out of the uncertain quality of the protagonist’s agency by stripping away the layers of reflexive commentary that are present in the original. Since there is no (male) authoritative perspective outside the protagonist’s voice, the reader can never have full knowledge of the sincerity or reliability of the account. Instead, questions regarding truthfulness of the narrative are subordinated to the pleasure aroused by it. As a “book of

²³⁶ Many reader dispute Justina’s professions of autonomy. Enrique García Santo-Tomás points out that the original text ends with the metaphor of Justina as a paradoxical “statue of freedom,” immobilized by her liberty as reified in a work of art. Santo-Tomás concludes that she is “an island surrounded by male domination.” See García Santo-Tomás, “The Spanish female picaresque,” 65.
entertainment,” “The Spanish Jilt” encourages the reader to take enjoyment in the rhythmic tension of conflict and resolution that unfolds in one episode after another. Justina’s addresses to the reader operate as a dialogic form of pseudo-prostitution, she sells herself to the reader as material to be consumed as entertainment. In this sense, translations of picaresque texts in this period partake in what William Warner describes as the entertainment culture that preceded and accompanied rise of the novel, even as polite authors disavowed the pleasures that their texts aroused.237 Though Justina calls attention to its manifest fictionality, the text dramatizes the intersection between women’s socioeconomic disempowerment and the forms of sexual coercion that non-elite women were frequently subjected to in the period. By producing a tension between the protagonist’s professed power over men and her implicit subordination in the social hierarchy, Justina articulates a critique of the double-standard by which the popular imagination paradoxically regarded women as both powerful agents (who seduce and trick men) and helpless victims (without independent legal status).

The socioeconomic status of women continued to be discussed through contradictions and paradoxes in discourses concerning prostitution in eighteenth-century British culture. For instance, moralists and social theorists often denounced prostitution as a symptom of economic modernity by associating it with the traditional sin of luxury, an association that multiplies ambiguities rather accounting for them, because of the way that luxury (like necessity) often was simultaneously construed as a property of the

subject and as a property of the object. While some argued that women turned to prostitution because they developed insatiable appetites for luxury commodities, others construed prostitutes themselves as “luxury objects”. In turning to Bernard Mandeville, I look to one of the most influential thinkers on the relationship between luxury, morality, and social order in order to show how the emergent discourse of political economy drew on the rhetoric of bodily necessity in order to give a gendered form to collective desires, when construed from the perspective of national commerce rather than the individual.

2. “Necessary Passion”: Mandeville and Prostitution in the Eighteenth Century

Recent critics have argued that Mandeville’s *Modest Defence of Publick Stews* (1724) contributed to the gender-construction of the modern economic domain. In looking at the way that *Modest Defence* figuratively describes heterosexual male desire as a force of nature that cannot be controlled, but only partially remediated, I am interested in how Mandeville construes sexual desire in relation to other forms of bodily necessity, such as hunger. It is well known that Mandeville’s pamphlet advocates for the


240 With great reluctance, I use the phrase “masculine desire” throughout this chapter as shorthand for the male heterosexual desire that Mandeville posits as an intrinsic drive in *Modest Defence*, though I acknowledge that this is an extremely problematic reduction of the complexities of sexual orientation to a single normative form. For criticism that gives a better sense of the range of sexual practices in the early eighteenth century, see
legalization of prostitution, primarily in order to monitor the transmission of venereal
disease. Mandeville distinguishes between cultural norms and intrinsic drives in a line of
argument that dispenses with the project of overcoming lust:

If this was a Vice acquired by Habit or Custom, or depended upon
Education, as most other Vices, there might be some Hopes of suppressing
it; and then it would, no doubt, be commendable to attack it, without
Distinction, in whatever Form or Disguise it should appear: But alas! this
violent Love for Women is born and bred with us; nay, it is absolutely
necessary to our being born at all. 241

In the voice of the social planner, Mandeville’s persona conflates the first person plural
voice of a masculine desire (“violent Love for Women is born and bred with us”) into the
biological imperative of the human species as such. This conflation of masculine desire
and the human species has the effect of ascribing causal primacy to male sexual behavior
as the engine of collective life. In some ways, Mandeville’s characterization could be
seen as an improvement on the misogynist depiction of women in La pícara Justina,
which represents the essence of femininity as inherently duplicitous. But Mandeville’s
argument has the effect of transforming women into either victims of predation or objects
of male domination.

Even in defending women’s chastity, Mandeville tends to regard women’s virtue
as an object of male possession. Further refining the primacy of masculine desire,

Randolph Trumbach, “Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male
Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London,” Journal of the History of
History: Modernity and the Sapphic 1565-1830 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
2015).

241 Bernard Mandeville, Bernard Mandeville’s “A Modest Defense of Public Stews”:
Prostitution and Its Discontents in Early Georgian England ed. Irwin Primer (New York:
Mandeville reasons: “if we consider the true Source of Whoring, and the strong Impulse of Nature that way, we shall find, it is a Thing not to be too violently restrained; lest, like a Stream diverted out of its Proper Channel, it should break in and overflow the neighbouring Enclosures” (58). I have also called attention to this hydraulic analogy as a commonplace figure in discussions of natural instincts in Richard Head’s The English Rogue and Tobias Smollett’s Peregrine Pickle. Mandeville repeats the comparison throughout Modest Defence, elsewhere claiming the “Torrent of Lewdness” is “too strong to be opposed by open Force” (84).242 In Mandeville’s particular usage, the image of the overflowing river indicates the threat that sexual desire presents to women as objects of private property, in compromising the boundaries between “neighbouring Enclosures.”

The most obvious reading of this passage is that Mandeville worries that excessive sexual appetites threaten the bounds of marital fidelity, but elsewhere the author expresses concern that pent-up lust will also interfere with commercial pursuits, a point which has been often noted by critics. For instance, Mandeville recounts, “The next Thing that comes to be consider’d in this Vice, is the Expence it occasions, and the Neglect of worldly Business, by employing so much of our Time and Thoughts; for let a Man have ever so much Business, it can’t stop the Circulation of his Blood” (66). According to Mandeville’s signature irony, legalized prostitution would aid commerce as a pressure valve that allows merchants to better focus on their commercial endeavors, once they have released their pent up lust. Most eighteenth-century critics who discuss

242 Mandeville traces the extended conceit of male desire as fluid motion to its source as a reference to ejaculation in a cluster of references to the wisdom of antiquity. See also Mandeville, Modest Defence, 45.
Mandeville’s pamphlet fail to recognize that it regurgitates a traditional argument from the medieval period. Ruth Mazo Karros argues, “Prostitution was central to medieval culture because people believed that it offered a necessary outlet for masculine sex drives which, unrelieved, would undermine the social order.” What is novel about Mandeville’s argument is not the central argument but the self-contradictory form in which it lays stress on the irresolvable conflict between the imperatives of virtue and the imperatives of commerce.

Mandeville figures women’s virtue in commercial terms through the employment of another rhetorical comparison as well. Having argued that male sexual desire is a force of nature that cannot be restrained, Mandeville suggests that the only viable mode of containment is to sacrifice a small quantity of female modesty: “As there is constantly in the Nation, a certain Number of young Men, whose Passions are too strong to brook any Opposition; Our Business is to contrive a Method how they may be gratify’d, with as little Expence of Female Virtue as possible” (86). By describing “Female Virtue” as a kind of social resource, Mandeville construes this stock of virtue as a form of currency to be expended rationally and methodically, rather than haphazardly. Men are the source of irrational intrinsic desires and women are the “tools” of acculturation. In other words, women allow men to supersede their base desires by sacrificing their bodies. Commenting on this passage, Jennie Batchelor sardonically quips, “the prostitute’s most valuable contribution to the national economy is to lie back and think of England.”

Some readers, including Batchelor, have raised the question of whether Mandeville’s pamphlet is to be read as a sincere policy recommendation or, more likely, as an ironic critique of conventional views of prostitutes.\textsuperscript{245} As in his more infamous work, \textit{The Fable of the Bees}, Mandeville ironizes the moral foundations of his contemporaries by calling attention to the conflict between narratives of socioeconomic progress and conventional understandings of virtuous behavior. Mandeville’s speaker repeatedly figures women as objects—either objects of sexual desire or objects of marital possession—and demonstrates the way that political economy uses gender as a means of enforcing women’s subordinate position in the social order. When he does consider the causes that drive women to prostitution, he emphasizes their economic constraints: “The Reason is evident: They are utterly abandon’d by their Parents, and thereby reduc’d to the last Degree of Shifting-Poverty” (63). Surveying the various quantities of sexual desire and modesty possessed by women, Mandeville concludes that “by far the greater Part of Womenkind hold their Virtue very precariously; and that Female Chastity is, in its own Nature, built upon a very ticklish Foundation” (79).

The word “precarious,” as Lauren Berlant reminds us, has its roots in a form of land-tenancy in which the owner can revoke the gift at any moment. In other words, precarity describes a limit to the dominion of private property, a form of ownership that is conditional and fleeting, rather than absolute and timeless.\textsuperscript{246} Mandeville’s use of the word precarious suggests that women cannot absolutely own their own virtue because

\textsuperscript{245} See also Irwin Primer, “Introduction,” in \textit{Mandeville’s Modest Defence}.  
they are subject to unpredictable revocations of the ownership of their own bodies.\textsuperscript{247}

This understanding of the status of women’s bodies and their relationship to property recalls the designation of prostitutes as “common women,” to be regarded as public property rather possessing ownership of their own bodies.

Prostitution is an especially poignant case for thinking about precarity, for the way that it reveals the gendered form of the relationship between property and the body in the eighteenth century. Locke’s \textit{Second Treatise} justifies the relation of property based on labor, specifically, the mixing of labor and nature:

\begin{quote}
Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.\textsuperscript{248}
\end{quote}

Part of what gives Locke’s example its force is that it accords with our intuitions that food production is a necessary, and therefore morally justified, form of labor. Yet Mandeville helps to show that the form of labor used to illustrate the transformation of labor into property is not gender-neutral under the conditions of modern life (as opposed to Locke’s conjectural society). That is, while Locke takes it for granted that “every \textit{man} has a property in his own person,” Mandeville argues that women do not necessarily possess the same privilege. At the same time, Mandeville’s reference to enclosure highlights the sexual politics of economic individualism, while Locke’s state of nature

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{247} The obsolete legal sense of the word “precarious” seems to have largely dropped out of usage by the eighteenth century, though the word retained the connotation of external control. For example, Addison writes of fame, “This little Happiness is so very precarious, that it wholly depends on the Will of others.” See Addison and Steele, \textit{The Spectator} 256.
\end{footnote}
creates the illusion that property is abstracted from the realm of sexual difference by choosing an example that highlights non-gender specific bodily needs. Mandeville’s extraction of socioeconomic value out of women’s prostitution (“as little expense of Female Virtue as possible”) demystifies the task of abstracting property out of labor by emphasizing the gendered hierarchy that remains embedded in modern forms of collectivity.

Mandeville’s *Modest Defence* raises the crucial question as to whether sexual appetites should be regarded as involuntary demands, on par with the nutritive needs satisfied by agricultural labor that Locke highlights in the *Second Treatise*. Though the pamphlet largely implies their equivalence (which suggests satire), Mandeville undermines the analogy between hunger and sexual appetite through the invocation of classical authority on the subject, illustrating the *differences* between the basic drives rather than their similarities: “*Diogenes, the Cynick*, us’d to say, that Women ought to be in common, and that Marriage was nothing but a Man’s getting a Woman in the Mind to be lain with: He often us’d Manual Venery in the Publick Marketplace, with this Saying. *Oh! that I could assuage my Hunger thus with rubbing of my stomach!*” (47). Since Diogenes’ observation that masturbation can satisfy sexual appetite runs counter to the primary argument of *Modest Defence*, that such desires are irrepressible except through

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coitus, the mere inclusion of the anecdote suggests that Mandeville was more interested in emphasizing the contradictions of conventional moral views of sexuality than earnestly recommending legalized prostitution. The incisive critical force of the Cynical anecdote lies in the way that it cuts across categories that we have come to consider dichotomous; for instance, by situating masturbation “in the Publick Marketplace,” Diogenes contrasts sexual desire, on the one hand, to hunger and, on the other, to economic activity. For the Cynic, sexual and nutritive appetites might be distinguished from economic transactions in terms of their ultimate foundation in the human body.250

The analogy between nutritive and sexual appetites has a place in the modern understanding of gender, via Gayle Rubin’s articulation of the distinction between sex and gender. By construing hunger and sex as analogous components of the biological makeup of the human being, these drives gain an ontological status very different from the status that Mandeville or Diogenes accords them:

Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. Every society has some form of organized economic activity. Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained. Every society also has a sex/gender system—a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner. 251

By construing tautological biological identity as the absolute other of cultural “arrangements,” the differences between biological drives such as hunger and sexual appetite diminish in importance in relation to their status as raw materials to be shaped by

culture. The comparison between hunger and sex implicitly hinges on both transformations being “equally culturally determined and obtained” out of the realm of nature, a formulation that reinforces the hegemony of culture through its abstraction from any referent. In Rubin’s re-reading of Lévi-Strauss and Freud, kinship structures that treat women as a form of currency are the means by which gender hierarchies maintain their force. Mandeville’s invocation of the “expense” of women’s virtue recognizes the way that systems of political economy make use of such kinship structures to “traffic” in women’s labor and women’s bodies. One significant factor that distinguishes Mandeville’s argument from Rubin’s, though, is his claim that male sexual appetite is formative of cultural practice, rather than just raw material to be shaped by it. It is this distinction that shifts over the course of the eighteenth century, as Lockean accounts of individual subject-formation gain a foothold and ontological explanations lose their currency. By reading the female picaresque in the context of Mandeville’s ironic account of masculine sexual desire as a “necessary evil,” we can discern the undervaluation of reproductive labor in the socioeconomic arena as a question of the role of bodily necessity in shaping women’s lives.

3. Betty Barnes: Sex, Service, and Precarity

*The History of Betty Barnes* is an anonymous, episodic narrative about an impecunious maidservant who works in a series of households until she inherits some money and marries well. Commenting on the constant threat of sexual violation that runs through the first half of the narrative, Joyce Grossman calls it “a sobering revision of the
male picaresque.”

By using the protagonist’s vulnerability to sexual aggression to drive its plot, the text adapts the picaresque’s thematic concern with survival to the particular threats faced by mid-eighteenth century women, especially women of non-elite origins. The protagonist is born in a barn (hence her name), spends her childhood begging in the road, and is taken in by a benevolent widow named Lady Benson (that is, after being run down by the Lady’s coach). When her benefactress’s nephew attempts to rape Betty in an orchard, he is only the first in a line of sexual predators that populate the narrative, disrupting one situation after another and repeatedly sending the protagonist back in search for work. One claim that I want to make about this little-read novel is that its episodic narrative uses repetition as a means of emphasizing the way that the irrepressibility of masculine sexual desire shapes the careers of female servants and prostitutes.

In eighteenth-century novels of women’s adventures, both maidservants and prostitutes circulate precariously. According to Hannah Arendt, classic Aristotelian economic theory aligned the labor of the household with slavery under the domain of necessity, which was opposed to the freedom of the marketplace. Yet domestic servants and prostitutes are not just the invisible workers that enable the functioning of society, they also represent a kind of artificial supplement to the tradition kinship roles consigned to the oikos: servants are employed because extra help is needed to maintain the household and prostitutes are (apparently) employed because men’s sexual appetites

253 See Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 83-84.
cannot be satisfied in the household. Though it is not until the twentieth century when feminists would articulate an explicit critique of the exclusion of reproductive and household labor from the scheme of political economy, Betty Barnes, like La picara Justina, calls attention to the economic disempowerment of its heroine by setting its protagonist in motion as a form of sexual self-preservation. Unlike the forms of survival discussed in my previous chapters, the threat of rape is not in and of itself life-threatening, but public exposure of sexual violation disqualified women of reputable means of making their living and thrusts them into a seemingly inevitable spiral of hardship and desperation.

Betty comes to recognize her subordinate status through her encounters with numerous other women that she meets in the course of her adventures, which frequently take the form of inset tales. These narrative cul-de-sacs serve as occasions for moral reflection and ironic commentary on the status of women. Each of the inset tales focuses on a different woman’s misfortunes. The first such tale occurs only sixteen pages into the novel and lasts twice as long as the chapters which precede it, immediately raising the question of which is the primary story and which is the digression. Indeed, the story of Mrs. Evans, who is Lady Benson’s housekeeper, like the story of Betty Barnes, is a story of economic adversity that illustrates the slippage from sexual objectification into economic disenfranchisement. During her youth, Mrs. Evans makes an imprudent alliance with her father’s clerk and bears his child, only to discover that he was already married to another woman. In one sense, Mrs. Evans’s plight is highly conventional, an easily moralized seduction narrative. But the fact that she is the third woman deprived of socioeconomic status in the first sixteen pages of the novel demonstrates that The History
of Betty Barnes approaches social inequity through the figure of repetition rather than through exemplarity.

By creating a complex, interlaced network of narratives rather than a single linear strand, The History of Betty Barnes draws on the tradition of the framed-novelle, in addition to the picaresque, as a way of imagining social relations. Josephine Donovan argues that women authors in the long eighteenth century, such as Aphra Behn and Jane Barker, used inset tales as dialogic counterpoints to patriarchal discourses, sites of resistance within texts that otherwise pay lip service to dominant sexist ideologies. Unlike their male counterparts in the framed-novelle tradition such as Chaucer and Boccaccio, women authors, such as Marguerite de Navarre, Margaret Cavendish, and Aphra Behn destabilize the privileged voices of the men in their collections through critical irony. For Donovan, this process works through the way that specific cases ironize their frames by calling attention to the fallacies and inconsistencies of patriarchal discourses and exchange systems. Though Donovan’s cases do not constitute the same form of episodic narrative that I attribute to the picaresque, Betty Barnes uses its narrative structure to feminist ends by calling attention to the repeating figures of disempowerment that constitute women’s careers. Though Donovon claims that by the late seventeenth century “women writers were beginning to realize some of the limitations of a strictly paratactic structure,” midcentury women’s narratives continued to highlight the failure of diachronic coherence as a way of allegorizing the failure of universal normative claims to encapsulate the lives of non-elite women in the marketplace.

Betty Barnes draws on (what Donovon refers to as) the framed-novelle tradition by setting the trajectory of the heroine in contrast to the repetitions and digressions of numerous inset tales that document the hardships of seduced women such as Mrs. Evans. The novel’s brisk pacing compares and contrasts such episodes as Alicia Askew’s seduction and confinement to a madhouse (197-220) to Betty Barnes’s courtship and Miss Milner’s ruinous confidence in a duplicitous suitor (285-295) to Betty’s patience with her own. Despite the differences in outcomes in various inset tales, such differences end up seeming less important than the similarities between the women, who are most successful when they turn to each other for support and most vulnerable when they trust men to keep their promises. The novel continually sets its protagonist in contrast to less fortunate women in order to demonstrate that the suffering of disadvantaged women is largely impersonal. Women’s subordinate position depends on the fact that they constitute an impersonal stock of domestic labor and sexual satisfaction.

The formal repetitions of the novel recapitulate the way that the text thematically devalues individuality in order to articulate a standard of impersonal benevolence, its primary moral standard. For instance, when Lady Benson brings Betty into her household, the narrator indicates that it is a matter of disinterested charity rather than a particular attachment to the girl: “I should, like my brother writers, tell you, that it was something peculiarly taking in the face, the prattle or the air of this poor orphan, that influenced the lady in her favour; but as her ladyship never mentioned the motive, I am apt to believe it intirely proceeded from her humanity and benevolence of heart.”

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Though the truth of her motivation is pointedly bracketed off from public access, the narrator asks us to interpret Lady Benson’s lack of praise of Betty’s individual merit as evidence of her right intentions. Benevolence consists not in rewarding individual merit but in relieving suffering as such, impersonal suffering. By contrasting the mode of description employed from that of her “brother authors,” narrators who focus on physical beauty as a signifier of merit, Betty Barnes’s narrator gestures toward the way in which gender dynamics shape the bestowal of individuality.

The impersonality of benevolence also takes a gendered form in the case of Joseph, a former servant in the household where Betty is born. He and his fiancé, Susan, find a foster home for Betty after she is ejected from the Seward estate, pledging to come back and provide for her education when she comes of age. When Joseph and Susan marry and have a son, though, they quickly forget about the foundling. In a few unforgiving sentences, the wife and child grow ill and die and Joseph is admonished for having expended his savings on his family instead of helping Betty. Taking on a didactic tone, the narrator reproves Joseph for having been “blinded by a criminal excess of a passion, which, when kept under proper bounds, is a source of the most refined and rational delight, I mean paternal affection, that he thought the saving a few more guineas of more importance, than the great, the godlike pleasure of doing good, than the dear delight of giving instruction to the ignorant, and rescuing the orphan from beggary and wretchedness” (61). The narrator conflates Joseph’s patriarchy and his economic individualism by linking the “saving a few more guineas” to the role of fatherhood and asks us to construe “paternal affection” as a motivation that can be taken to a “criminal” extreme.
Though explicitly describing Joseph’s behavior as an excess of passion, the text more indirectly asks the reader to consider how the practice of primogeniture functions as an all-too linear narrative structure, a social institution that excludes women from property in order to maintain an unbroken line of male succession based on biological birth. Primogeniture blinds Joseph to the difference between personal economic advancement and impersonal hunger (“beggary and wretchedness”). Betty Barnes accuses the patriarchal structure of being irrational in its fixation on specific kinds of “objects,” that is young men of property. The “godlike pleasure of doing good,” on the other hand, requires detachment from personal bonds and the recognition of un-propertied females.

The narrator’s critique of primogeniture goes so far as to suggest that Joseph’s son’s death has had a positive outcome on the father: “This stroke, painful as it was, was attended with very happy effects, since it restored to a just way of thinking, a mind naturally benevolent, that had been contracted and made narrow by a too fixed attention to one object” (62). The narrator’s ironic account of the moral conclusion to be derived is somewhat counter-intuitive in suggesting that Joseph’s son’s death should be regarded as a moral lesson for the father. Yet later it turns out to be important in terms of the novel’s plot when Joseph suddenly dies and leaves two hundred guineas to Betty, freeing her from service obligations. By making Betty’s freedom from service (and her concomitant freedom from male predation) an achievement hinging on the death of a male heir, the novel asks us to think about freedom in terms of a competition for resources between the interchangeable lives of women, rambling from position to position, and the fixed identities of male heirs, whose property is linked to their family name. The text’s relentlessly episodic narrative structure discourages the reader from “too fixed attention
to one object” as it contextualizes Betty’s struggles as part of a broader pattern of inequity that is occluded by too close attention on isolated acts of charity or avarice.

Betty’s encounter with urban prostitution further reveals the unequal power dynamics of women’s ramblings. In his study of eighteenth-century prostitution, Tony Henderson suggests that many unemployed maidservants dropped in and out of sex work as a way of making ends meet between service jobs.256 When a pimp offers Betty service work in his sister’s house, one of Betty’s eavesdropping fellow travelers mocks her, “it will fit you to a hair; we shall soon see you as fine as a five pence” (163). The protagonist is too naïve to see the double meaning in the remark, which, in comparing her to a coin, suggests that she will soon be in public circulation. Not only will she be “fine as a five pence,” she will be traded and treated like one.

The comparison between Betty and a five-pence coin reminds us of Mandeville’s accounting for the “expense” of female virtue and calls attention to the cultural metonymy that obtained among luxury goods, monetary currency, and female prostitutes. Laura Rosenthal points out that the very word “commodity,” functioned as slang for female genitalia and Bonnie Blackwell has argued that many popular it-narratives, such as Pompey the Little and Adventures of a Corkscrew, in fact serve as coded references to the lives of London prostitutes.257 The formal relevance of the it-narrative resides in the way that these narratives from the point of view of household objects and pieces of currency were also explicitly episodic, loosely connected collections of what might be

regarded as inset tales if there were any organizational logic from which the components might be regarded as exceptions. Depending on how you read them, it-narratives might be regarded as fantasies of unrestrained social circulation or as satires of deep structural inequalities built into the emerging marketplace for luxury goods, separating the social order into subjects (owners) and objects (property).²⁵⁸

One of the similarities between the female picaresque and the it-narrative consists in the way that these genres encourage the reader to take pleasure in reading about vicious practices. Blackwell frames the gender politics of the it-narrative and the picaresque as a problem internal to the formulation of genre: “Picaresque protagonists are often male, and if female, are required to be prostitutes or loose women in order to account for the many adventures requisite to the form. The formal exigencies of the genre, then, dictate a loose sexual character, for a virtuous woman with no sexual history has few adventures to recount.”²⁵⁹ This circular definition of the picaresque makes sexual promiscuity the self-reinforcing effect of genre, rather than its object. Female picaresque novels are about whores; therefore protagonists of female picaresque novels have loose sexual characters. Blackwell neglects to articulate what seems like the most significant aspect of her analysis—that sexual virtue is boring (“a virtuous woman with no sexual history has few adventures to recount”). Betty Barnes nearly concedes the point when Betty’s first would-be rapist taunts her: “You shall have no more cause to complain of words, my little lady, for since you love telling of tales, I warrant I’ll furnish you with

²⁵⁹ Blackwell, “Corkscrews and Courtesans,” 287. On this point, see also Deidre Lynch’s brief comments on gender in the it-narrative in Lynch, The Economy of Character, 100.
something to talk of” (82). Of course, Úbeda’s Justina or Richardson’s Pamela also might serve as cases-in-point of the way that, as distasteful as we may find it, near-rape is often just as “entertaining” (in fact, more so) than the actual transgression. The significance of the episode in the context of the novel, though, is to contrast the “false necessity” of the would-be rapist’s sexual desire to the “true necessity,” or the threat of Betty’s starvation, which the text suggests may have been the long-term consequence if the act had been carried out. The episode in which Betty evades being raped (she is saved by a child who pelts her attacker with fruit) calls attention to a distinction between male sexual appetite and female bodily necessity.

The disarticulation of sexual desire from bodily necessity is just one of the functions of episodic narrative in women’s novels of adventure. Betty Barnes also reveals the difference between bodily appetites and bodily needs by showing the failure of economic categories and processes to apply to biological life. That is, the point of the comparison between Betty and a coin is not that they are both exchangeable but that they resist abstraction into pure exchange value. Just as coins and coats and corkscrews begin to lose their value as they exhibit wear and tear, the traffic between domestic service and prostitution has irreversible consequences in much of the moral discourse of the mid-eighteenth-century. To the extent that Betty Barnes underscores the consequences of behavior, it does so in order to inculcate moral principles that have little to do with individual merit. But the novel’s inconsistencies are as telling as the moral truths that it attempts to communicate.

During her time in the brothel, Betty befriends a prostitute named Katherine (probably a reference to Kitty Fisher, the infamous mid-century courtesan who inspired
multiple fictional biographies at roughly the same time). The narrator paradoxically attempts to account for Katherine’s employment as both an economic “luxury” and a form of bondage: “The young woman [Katherine] who had been abroad with Betty Barnes had had the advantage of a pretty good education, and tho’ she had been many years a slave to vice, was by no means so abandoned as some of the poor unhappy wretches who earn a precarious living by prostitution” (172). In considering the degrees of abandonment of prostitutes, the narrator lapses for a moment into the immediacy of the present tense to describe women “who earn a precarious living by prostitution” at the same time maintaining a temporal and moral distance from them by regarding Katherine as “many years a slave to vice.” Nevertheless, for Katherine and Betty, slavery is a temporary condition and both manage to extricate themselves from the brothel and move back into the world of legitimate social relations. Unlike the irreversible moral decline of Moll Hackabout in William Hogarth’s Harlot’s Progress, the bondage of prostitution is not permanent for Katherine, who marries in the novel’s denouement. The episodic accumulation of incidents in the novel’s various narrative strands demonstrates a fundamental contradiction between its insistence on the reversibility of moral choices in some cases (such as Katherine’s temporary stint as prostitute) and the irreversibility of such choices in other cases (such as the cautionary inset tales). Rather than seeking coherence in the jumble of fortunes and misfortunes, I would suggest that though the novel remains committed to representing the persistence of male oppression, it represents women’s lives as varied and subject to contingencies beyond their control. By structuring the narrative around repetition rather than progress, the novels asks us to think about the
abstract reproduction of structures of oppression rather than the moral foundations of individuals.

Though Betty Barnes attempts to hold Betty apart from the seduced women of the inset tales, the novel suggests that differences of character matter less than differences of circumstance by insisting on an impersonal standard of behavior. Betty’s success appears less as an example and more as an anomaly when viewed in context of the other women she meets. Despite the fact that The History of Betty Barnes ends with the protagonist’s wedding and a clumsy attempt to tie up many of the loose ends, the heroine’s adventures leading up to the final chapters reveals a deep sense of helplessness regarding the power of virtue alone to repel sexual abuse. In this sense, the novel gestures toward the way that structures of domination and power (kinship and male privilege) outweigh the power of individuals to determine their own fates.

In coming to terms with the power of social structures to shape an individual’s fate, women’s novels of adventure at times revealed the flimsiness of conventional moral platitudes. For instance, The Female Rambler (1754), another anonymous romance novel published not long after Betty Barnes, directly defends the ideal of virtuous poverty in its final sentences. After recounting the adventures of an unfortunate woman who, in the end, marries well and overcomes economic disadvantages, the romance concludes with a moral admonition:

From this genuine Narrative, I’d have all young Ladies learn not to despair; since Providence, ever watchful over the Innocent, is constantly ready to relieve them, when they do not expect it. If they are depressed, Fidelity and Virtue will soon enable them to triumph; and that Poverty, which was look’d upon with Contempt, will prove their greatest Glory. (188-89)
To misquote Milton, women’s novels of adventure are meant to vindicate the ways of Providence to women. The narrator anxiously assures “all young Ladies” that innocence will eventually be relieved and poverty will prove to be “their greatest Glory.” Yet these claims are strained by the overwhelming quantity of narratives of distress that were soon to be published in the second half of the century, in which providence fails to relieve poor women before they are forced to prostitute themselves. By contextualizing a singular woman’s success with inset stories of women’s failures, Betty Barnes seemingly unintentionally introduces the question of whether providence is actually watching over women’s virtue.

4. The Histories of Some of the Penitents: Prostitution and Literature

Simultaneously a work of entertainment (offering tantalizing stories of fallen women) and a work of propaganda (championing the role of the titular institution, which was funded through donations), The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House tells the stories of four women who turn to prostitution as a result of economic necessity before being admitted into the recently-established Magdalen House. The Histories has been most frequently been understood in conjunction with the rise of the sentimental movement in literature and philanthropic activity.\(^{260}\) In this section, I will

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consider to what degree the narrative also embodies a picaresque tension between bodily necessity and individual autonomy, which undermines the belief that women have the power to preserve themselves through their wits or their virtue.

To identify the text with picaresque representations of prostitution such as *Justina* requires understanding the continuities and discontinuities between the two literary modes. Scholars have little to say about just how quickly representations of prostitutes shifted from the crafty Restoration whore to the modern sentimental victim. In claiming that the picaresque was one of the cultural resources that *The Histories* drew upon in order to represent bodily necessity, I want to point to a transitional stage that sentimental narrative had to pass through in order to attain cultural legitimacy. *The Histories* attempts to elevate the hardships of women to the level of polite literature and, at the same time, to draw on the resources of narratives of entertainment, including amatory romance and the picaresque. By attempting to harness the best of both high literature and entertainment literature, the text frequently creates an ironic juxtaposition of conflicting modes of explanation.\(^{261}\)

Though I will not claim that the unknown author of *Histories* intended the text to be read as ironic, I will argue that the attempt to ennoble and dignify the women’s struggles ends up calling attention to the incompatibility between the moral language of the social elite and the hardships of the women in these texts.

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\(^{261}\) What I am referring to as “high literature” was, of course, a relatively new concept in 1760, but it bears pointing out that one of the key figures in its fabrication was also central to the Magdalen House. William Dodd compiled the bestselling *The Beauties of Shakespeare* (1752) before taking up his post as the Chaplain and Minister to the Magdalen House until his execution for forgery in 1777. For Dodd and the canon, see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon*, 108-115.
The creation of the Magdalen House was a public project in which social planners were invited to submit proposals to be considered as plans for the charity. The differences between the various plans give us a sense of some of the most common explanations that eighteenth-century thinkers gave for prostitution. Binhammer summarizes, “Propagandists such as Jonas Hanway and Robert Dingley represent the prostitute as passive virtue in distress, and, by testifying that her loss of virginity was caused by an evil libertine seducer, and not her own wilful desire, they create the pathetic object for their institution.” Sir John Fielding (half-brother of Henry Fielding) differed from planners such as Hanway and Dingley in suggesting that poor young women “often become Prostitutes from Necessity before their Passions can have any share in their Guilt.” Fielding’s economic explanation drew on other midcentury accounts, such as Samuel Johnson’s “A Prostitute’s Story” in *The Rambler* (1751) numbers 170 and 171.

If the plurality of cultural explanations for prostitution divided Fielding’s “industry in distress” and Dingley’s trope of seduced woman, *The Histories* adds another explanation by suggesting that maternal instincts also propel women into prostitution, albeit indirectly. The first and last of the penitents tell stories in which they emphasize their need to support their children as a motivation for turning to prostitution. The first penitent, Emily, is the daughter of a clergyman in the West of England. Upon her father’s death, she takes up service and is seduced by her employer, who impregnates and abandons her. Emily reflects: “As soon as my shattered brain grew a little composed, anxiety for my child made me desirous to preserve a life which seemed to promise me

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nothing but misery” (30). The image of the “shattered brain” is an appropriate metaphor of the fragmentation of the protagonist’s self into an instinct to feed her child and a reflective self that abandons the task of reconciling her behavior with any form of self-reflective agency. By suggesting that Emily is driven to prostitution by her maternal instinct to provide for a helpless infant, the text puts its protagonist in an impossible deadlock between maternal instincts and traditional morality, emphasizing the reproductive facet of sexual difference as a rationale for justifying her turn to prostitution. This emphasis on the necessity of maternal care should be seen as a rebuttal to Mandeville’s ascription of responsibility for the continuance of human life to masculine sexual desire (which I mentioned above). The labor involved in the continuance of the human species is not limited to sexual reproduction, but also includes many years of nurturing and care.

Emily uses all the methods available to her to try and resist prostitution, though in the end, she is coerced into selling her body through a remarkable series of events. After her abandonment, Emily attempts to raise herself out of poverty through entrepreneurship, as she takes the remaining pocket money left to her by Mr. Markland, her former lover, and sets up a haberdashery. Not long after, bailiffs seize all her belongings and stock, telling her that Markland had never paid for her lodgings and that she owes back-rent for the years that she inhabited her dwelling. She is rescued from debtor’s prison by a seemingly generous old woman, only to realize that her savior is a bawd who seeks to exact the debt by selling Emily’s body. With a nod to Clarissa, Emily is forcibly detained in the brothel, where she overhears clamorous revelry through the walls. When she is set up with a client, she manages to negotiate her way out of sleeping
with him, a scene that recalls Justina’s cunning sexual self-preservation. As recompense, the other prostitutes gang up and attack her: “they fell on me with the utmost fury, and beat me in the most merciless manner, till one of them hit me such a blow on my temples as struck me senseless to the ground” (41). As for Clarissa, the protagonist’s loss of consciousness allegorizes her lack of consent, the sheer physical force used to determine her fate.

The text reflects on the powerless position of the protagonist through a confrontation between Emily and the bawd who serves as her jailor. She stands up to the bawd and claims that she will seek justice, claiming in a weakly worded counter-factual defense: “The law would grant me some redress against such inhumanity” (42). In response, the bawd delivers a cynical corrective to Emily’s naive belief in social justice: “Does thou take lawyers for knights-errant, who have nothing to do but deliver distressed damsels? Know, that money only can obtain justice; those who cannot buy, must go without it; the redress of the law is out of the reach of poverty; content yourself, there is no law for you” (42). The invocation of the figures of knights-errant and damsels in distress recalls the classic Quixotic juxtaposition of romance values and the everyday deceptions and injustices among individuals without social status. Despite the fact that this dour speech is put in the mouth of the bawd, it might be taken as one of the fundamental arguments of The Histories, which solicits donations from its readers in order to remediate the social position of its otherwise powerless “objects.” The text concedes the structural malfunction of public justice in exchange for a project of philanthropic amelioration that accepts its limited capacity to change the system.
One of the major formal distinctions between the Magdalen narratives and picaresque narratives is that *The Histories* labors to elevate its contents through intertextual allusions to the major authors of English literature. Each of the chapters is headed with an epigraph from Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, or some other figure of cultural authority. Such a strategy seems to be intended to elevate the “low” materials, to ennoble the struggles of the protagonists by comparing their adversities to those of recognized heroes and heroines of canonical literary texts. More than comparing the actual figures themselves to heroic or tragic figures, the author wants to associate their sentiments with those found in literature. The epigraphs isolate particular emotional foci as occasions for moral reflection and abstraction. For instance, when one of the penitents recounts being trapped in a gothic dungeon, the epigraph quotes Dryden: “I have been in such a dismal place, / Where joy ne’er enters, which the sun ne’er chears” (197). The de-contextualized “I” of the epigraph stands in for a reader that sympathetically joins with the detained magdalen, even as they distance themselves by taking pleasure in the captive’s distress.

Though in many cases the epigraphs amplify the sentiments of the original, in other cases they run counter to the events depicted. Set in opposition to the content, they recall the original *Justina’s* ironic juxtaposition of the male editorial voice and the female first-person victim. In this, *The Histories* emphasizes the ways in which the lives of the women in these tales fail to conform to idealized moral standards that have often been shaped by literary sources. By positioning narrative content against the grain of epigraphs that endorse ideals incommensurate with reality, *The Histories* illustrates a conflict between theory and practice embodied in the disconnect between elevated sentiment and
entertaining content. Leah Price has argued that eighteenth-century novelists and editors used the formal segmentation of texts into chapters, excerpts, and epigraphs in ways that “punctuated the narrative, interrupted the time of reading, and forced readers to surface periodically from the self-indulgent pleasures of mimesis to a higher, less particularized, more disinterested plane.”\textsuperscript{264} The anonymous author of the \textit{Histories} uses epigraphs in almost the opposite sense, to show that the “higher” plane of reflexivity fails to comprehend the “lower” urges that drive the women to perform acts that could only be construed as immoral from a disinterested perspective.

Though there are many to choose from, the best example of the ironic use of the epigraph occurs during Emily’s tale. The chapter in which Emily’s prostitution has reached its peak is headed with an epigraph that praises poverty for the virtues it bestows. The passage, which comes from Dryden’s translation of Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” in \textit{Canterbury Tales}, offers a defense of poverty:

\begin{quote}
Want is a bitter and a hateful good,  
Because its virtues are not understood:  
Prudence at one, and fortitude it gives;  
And, if in patience taken, mends our lives,  
For ev’n that indigence that brings me low,  
Makes me myself, and Him above, to know:  
A good which none would challenge, few would choose,  
A fair possession, which mankind refuse. (50)
\end{quote}

Sometimes the sense of this passage is translated as “poverty is an eyeglass,” with the idea being that poverty reveals true character.\textsuperscript{265} Yet Emily’s narrative is one in which her capacity for self-understanding is physically subtracted from her body through

violence and denied legal status. The idea that poverty inculcates moral values such as prudence and fortitude is completely antithetical to the account that Emily has offered. The penultimate claim in Dryden’s translation, that poverty is a form of individual and metaphysical identity, that “indigence… Makes me myself,” and that this brutal formation of selfhood by necessity is divinely sanctioned, is indeed borne out in Emily tale, but only through vice rather than through virtue.

_The Histories_ treats the theme of poverty less in the manner of Dryden’s Chaucer and more in the manner of the picaresque. In highlighting the way that hunger impels women to engage in non-volitional forms of sexual labor, _The Histories_ acts as a corrective to perhaps the most prominent mid-century prostitute narrative, John Cleland’s _Fanny Hill_ (1748). The third penitent, who is wryly named Fanny, should be read as a gritty, realistic rewriting of Cleland’s romanticized portrait of the “happy hooker.” Fanny grows up as an orphan and at the age of thirteen, she goes into service for a craftswoman who starves her:

I always rose from my meals hungry. To eat till I was able to eat no more, was a piece of gluttony with which no one could reproach me. I had just food enough to keep me always hungry; a greater degree of fasting, would have damped my appetite: I properly speaking, eat to live; for any abatement in my meals must have had mortal consequences. (92)

The austerity of Fanny’s circumstances provide an implicit corrective to traditional biographies of whores in which feminine sexual appetite was portrayed as a voracious and insatiable continuation of their gustatory appetites. Fanny’s narrative represents

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266 The editors of the Pickering & Chatto edition of _The Histories_, Jennie Batchelor and Megan Hiatt, call attention to this point by directing the reader to William Dodd’s _The
her starvation as the impetus that justifies leaving her mistress in search of her true origins. She reflects: “if I failed in that, [I] could not be nearer starving than where I was” (97). The distinction to be insisted on is that hunger itself does not cause sexual appetite but, rather, it exposes the heroine to the determination of male sexual appetites. In another narrative, Fanny’s running away from her parsimonious mistress might be regarded as the first step of her freedom. In *The Histories*, Fanny’s independence only leads to her more pressing necessity.

The fourth and final penitent articulates the most striking critique of the concept of negative liberty, which is implicit in Fanny’s tale: “Certainly those must have a great love of freedom, who think it a recompense for the want of subsistence; and indeed what liberty can a person in the utmost want boast of possessing?” (177). Reduced to poverty after the death of her common law husband, the fourth penitent engages in prostitution in order to feed her three starving children. The epigraph for the final chapter is taken from Dryden’s *Oedipus*: “Death only can be dreadful to the bad: / To innocence ‘tis like a bugbear, dress’d / To frighten children” (178). The sentiment seems to chide the penitent for superstitious fear and for engaging in prostitution to feed her starving children. Yet the stoic resolution that it recommends does not actually constitute a practical solution to the woman’s dilemma. Instead, the text calls attention to the incommensurable gap that

*Sisters* (1752) in which a licentious relationship is depicted as a “luxurious feast.” For a link between eating and sexuality in the Spanish picaresque, see L. Fourquet-Reed, *Protofeminismo, erotismo, y comida en La lozana andaluza* (Potomoc: Scripta Humanistica, 2004). Henry Fielding also plays on the relationship between nutritive and sexual appetites in Tom Jones’s meal with Jenny Jones, which was humorously adapted in the 1973 film version.
separates a literary ideal of tragic immutability from the modern woman’s precarious social position.

5. The Adventures of Sylvia Hughes: Domesticating Necessity

Women’s novels of circulation labored to reconcile the lawlessness of bodily necessity with the moral prescriptions of feminine behavior and the propriety of literary self-representation. In this final section, I discuss a novel of women’s adventures that treats economic necessity as a stimulus to self-authorship. The anonymous The Adventures of Sylvia Hughes suggests that women who face starvation and sexual predation might be able to write their own stories and use literacy as way of transforming their hardships into entertainment and/or instruction. While texts such as The Female Rambler, anxiously insisted that providence would come to the aid of the virtuous poor in the nick of time and The Histories demonstrated that providence fails to feed starving mothers and their children, Sylvia Hughes imagines a more pro-active solution for women’s social problems, though it does so only by occluding the narratives of women unable to represent themselves in written form.

Following its protagonist from her middling origins to a fall from grace and redemption, Sylvia Hughes fantasizes about self-authorship as mechanism of social uplift. Reminiscent of the original Spanish text of Lazarillo, the novel opens with a cloying address to a socially superior benefactress who has requested the protagonist to write her story. Recalling Justina, Sylvia displays consciousness of the way that her narrative constitutes her public image. She addresses her benefactress: “You flatter me with the
Pleasure, that must arise from a Delineation of those Misfortunes, that have befal me in my various Adventures.”\textsuperscript{267} By underscoring the “Pleasure” that accrues from representing her hardships, the narrator acknowledges that her text will function as a vehicle of entertainment at the same time that it assists her social standing: “You observe, that a faithful Portrait of my former Self, must not only afford me an invincible Pleasure; but, by shewing it to my friends, strengthen and confirm that Affection they bear me” (xiii). Through the dedication, Sylvia acknowledges the somewhat self-aggrandizing motives that impel her to put distance between herself as an author and her “former Self,” transforming her misfortunes into entertainment and celebrating her own triumph over adversity.

Raised as the only daughter of a yet another eccentric country clergyman (in the mould of Parson Adams), Sylvia spends much of the first half of her “Adventures” describing the formation of her literary tastes. Sylvia’s youthful appreciation of both Latin classics and modern English authors distinguishes her as a sophisticated reader, capable of seeing through the imprudence of her peers and (later in the narrative) the vanity of her employers. By lingering on the protagonist’s literary discernment, the text sets up an alternative field of action, in contrast to Justina’s ingenuity, creating a foundation for her later authorship.

As in previous narratives of women’s hardship that I have discussed, Sylvia’s crisis is precipitated by disinheritance. Her father’s sudden death leaves his modest fortune in the hands of Sylvia’s uncle, a clothier who subsequently dies a few months later. When her uncle’s residual debts absorb her father’s bequest, Sylvia is left penniless.

in London and she goes to live as a guest in the home of a friend of her father (who confusingly shares her surname). As she waits for her virtuous suitor to finish at Oxford, the elder Mr. Hughes propositions, kidnapst, and eventually tries to rape Sylvia. In a strikingly visceral scene, the protagonist defends herself by suffocating her attacker:

We struggled together some Time, when a sudden Thought came into my Head how to behave. I seized him, as I had done before, by the Throat with both my Hands; and now the Thoughts of his intended Villainy rushing in my Mind, so animated me, that I found my Strength more than trebled. I grasped him so closely, that he soon looked black in the Face; and though he exerted his utmost Efforts to deliver himself, yet was he unable to effect it. (155)

Sylvia recounts her instinct for self-preservation as a surge of strength, what we would now regard as a burst of adrenaline. Repeatedly described as a “Thought” that suddenly “came into my Head,” the protagonist’s physical resistance is represented as an involuntary response to the threat on her virtue and recalls Justina’s description of avoiding rape as a product of her “Wits.”

Having preserved her life, though, Sylvia loses her only support in a hostile world. The remainder of the narrative unfolds the protagonist’s increasingly desperate struggle to survive in a society that takes advantage of women without social standing. In London, she tries to find a service job without any luck: “A Month more rolled away without my being able to procure what I sought for, which forced me to sell almost all my Cloaths for Sustenance” (174). Sylvia is hired as a Quilter at Six-Pence per day, which is not enough to pay her room and board. She finds her new employment, “very fatiguing” and recounts: “we rose every Morning at Six, and work’d ‘till Eight; and sometimes we staid up all Night, such a vast deal of Business my Mistress had” (177). Despite the long
hours, Sylvia recounts, “the Pay allowed us was so small as scarce to sustain Nature” (177).

Puzzled as to how the other quilters manage to survive on such a meager wage, Sylvia approaches one of her co-workers, who tells her that many of the workers maintain lovers in order to help make ends meet. She takes a principled stand against such behavior: “I told her that was a way of Dealing I could not think of without Horror; and that I was determin’d to work my Fingers quite bare, before I would submit to so odious a Crime as Prostitution” (180). Sylvia asks to hear her less scrupulous co-worker’s life story:

I begged her to relate it to me. She accordingly inform’d me of her Birth, Parentage and Education, Life, Character and Behavior, as our dying Speeches have it; but, as I was mistaken in my Opinion, and there was nothing remarkable in her Life’s History, I don’t think it worth while to trespass on the Reader’s Patience, in whose Hands these loose and careless Sheets may happen to fall, with a Recital of it. (181)

This pointed dismissal of the other woman’s biography represents the moral line that the novel draws between what is worth recording and what is not. Sylvia reflexively calls to mind the possibility of giving her poor co-worker space to tell her story in an inset tale, but thinks better of it. In doing so, Sylvia Hughes reveals that the moral lesson that it offers is not capacious enough to stand for those less privileged (well-read and well-bred) than her self.

Despite her virtuous stance, Sylvia finds that her troubles only worsen. She manages to find a service job, but, predictably, the master attempts to rape her and she is fired. Sylvia looks for work, gradually moving from cheaper to cheaper lodgings, selling her clothes and getting more and more desperate: “I had Thoughts of offering myself as an Actress or a Singer, to one of the Theatres; but the Appearance I made was so
despicable, as banished those Thoughts almost as soon as they were conceived” (202). In desperation, the protagonist goes to Hyde Park and considers suicide (“the fatal Determination”), decides against it, reminded of her religious faith. Lying prone in the grass, Sylvia is luckily greeted by a gentleman who asks to hear her story and gives her money when she is finished. Having rejected actual prostitution, Sylvia seems to realize that she can support herself by telling her story.

With a small sum of money to support her, Sylvia takes begging to a respectable domain by writing a series of letters to fashionable ladies, asking for their support: “They were unmoved at my sufferings, and, stretched under the Canopy of Grandeur and Plenty, were insensible of those Heart-gnawing Cares and Mind distracting Ills which attend those on whom Fortune frowns, and Poverty has laid her Iron Whip” (207). After many failures, Sylvia succeeds in finding a benefactress in the Countess of ******, who is moved by Sylvia’s letter and offers her a position as housekeeper. Sylvia is delivered by Providence at the last moment before starving, and after a period of years, she is reunited with her lover. The novel’s major unstated problem is that the coherence of Sylvia’s narrative of triumph over adversity comes at the cost of turning a blind eye to women like the unnamed quilter who makes ends meet by having sex with men for money.

At stake in Sylvia Hughes and the other texts that I have discussed in this chapter is the question of whether women facing the threat of starvation have the potential to rise above their hardships by transforming their struggles into narratives of progress. The female picaresque, in this sense, recapitulates many of the problems that I have discussed in previous chapters, such as whether stories of individual hardship are compatible with more general narratives of social advancement. For the penitent magdalens in The
Histories of Some of the Penitents, economic necessity manifests itself as a kind of personification of fate that impels women to sell their bodies (as well as their stories) in an economic system that fails to bestow value on the reproductive labor that maintains the existence of the human species. In contrast to economic frameworks that view culture as a product of human self-invention, the female picaresque calls attention to the fact that no individual is ever completely cut off from nature, and that bodily necessity continues to make demands upon the unfortunate and the needy. Eighteenth-century picaresque narratives reveal that it is precisely the privilege of forgetting that we are biological creatures that culture affords us.
Coda

Though picaresque narratives such as *Lazarillo de Tormes, Moll Flanders, Roderick Random,* and *Betty Barnes* call attention to private and public abuses of power and the persistence of social and economic inequalities, these texts offer few consolatory bromides and very little in the way of solutions for the dilemmas that they pose. That is to say, it would be a misreading of picaresque narratives to suggest that they foment radicalism or labor to redress the real problems that they document so thoroughly. And though *Lazarillo* has occasionally been described as “subversive,” it would be difficult to make the case for a conspicuous political agenda in any picaresque text. The narratives that I have discussed over the course of this dissertation represent bodily necessity as a force that overturns narratives of social progress. By overturning progressive narratives that resolve social problems through the use of satisfying conclusions, picaresque representations of bodily necessity refuse to sentimentalize the poor.

Whereas the sentimental tradition exploits scenes of poverty to produce pleasurable tears, the picaresque arouses mirth and pleasure in readers despite dealing with matters of desperation and hardship. Though it would be impossible to document the complete range of effects produced by a given text or body of texts, we can recognize contradictory inducements to identification and to dis-identification in the major texts of the picaresque. Although readers can only experience Lazarillo’s desperate hunger vicariously, we delight in his tricks and come to side in his duplicity. We laud the penitence of Defoe’s narrators, even as we delight in their repeated transgressions. Smollett invites us to sympathize with Roderick, only to relentlessly expose his vanity
and affectation. Magdalen narratives ask us to sympathize with seduced women as victims, but they also undercut such sympathy by treating them as prostitutes.

Unlike works of social theory, picaresque narratives ask readers to participate in the daily hardships of the poor. Yet they recognize the impossibility of fully understanding the power of bodily necessity from any position other than one experiencing it. These narratives thus provoke competing and conflicting emotional responses of empathy and disapprobation, challenging readers to negotiate their affective response in regions less familiar to them than the pathos of tragedy or the contempt of satire. Although the picaresque does not cue the “proper” emotional response, the affective gray area of the picaresque encourages readers to reflect critically on their responses to narratives of hardship. In the process, the picaresque exposes the limits of pity — and of the sentimental — as a tool for repairing social and economic inequities.

Indeed, the great achievement of the picaresque resides in the way that it refuses to sentimentalize the poor. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the sentimental displaced the picaresque as the primary medium for representing poverty. Whereas texts such as Lazarillo, Moll Flanders, and Roderick Random suggest that hunger is a feature inseparable from the social order, later texts such as Histories of Some of the Penitents incorporate the sentimental, treating hunger as problem to be solved by philanthropic projects, even as they retain some of the ironic skepticism of their picaresque forebears. The distinction between the picaresque representation of poverty and the sentimental can best be understood in terms of their formal differences. Whereas the first person in the picaresque is the victim, in the sentimental novel, it is typically the sympathizing observer. The first-person point of view of the picaresque continually reminds us that
basic survival occludes the imagination of any kind of future by narrating the experience of hardship as an unrelenting series of beginnings, while the sentimental, stitches together isolated scenes of tearful suffering into episodic narratives that enjoin readers to take pity on pathetic scenes. Both genres, in these terms, balk any move to social change. The immediacy of the picaresque operates not by figuring the poor as pitiful objects to be relieved by so many charitable donations, but by articulating their lives as unending struggles. Whereas the picaresque, by fracturing the narrative between self-preservation and self-presentation, postulates necessity as an inescapably ironic feature of narratives of hardship, the sentimental novel turns to irony as it can never extend the circle of feeling ad infinitum. Both genres thus struggle to represent the boundlessness of necessity through the formal containment of narrative structure.

Despite its lack of explicit political agenda, the picaresque provides resources for thinking about how collectives can come to terms with the force of hunger in times of political and socioeconomic volatility. In her account of the French Revolution, Hannah Arendt claims that the “boundlessness” of pity constituted a dangerous force, describing the worst moments of the revolution in relation to the structure of pity: “it was determined by the exigencies of liberation not from tyranny but from necessity, and it was actuated by the limitless immensity of both the people’s misery and the pity this misery inspired”\(^\text{268}\). Arendt describes bodily necessity as an essentially apolitical force, which unleashes violence in defiance of the rational and humanizing structures of social order. The value of the picaresque lies in the way that it refuses the sentimental reduction of the poor to mere objects. Instead, the picaresque asks us to move outside of our own

point of view and to forestall facile sentimental judgments. In recovering the picaresque, we gain resources for thinking about the politics of necessity at a moment in which we need them more than ever.
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