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TRANSGRESSION AND SUBVERSION
Gender in the Picaresque Novel

[transcript] Gender Studies
Is the pícaro, the roguish hero of early modern Spanish adventure fiction, a ‘real man’? What position does he hold in the gender hierarchy of his fictional social context? Why is the pícara so ‘non-female’? What effect has her gender constitution on her fictional social context?

In terms of a gendered subject, the picaresque figure has hardly been analyzed so far. Although scholars have recognized it as a transgressive and subversive model, the ‘queer’ effect of the figure is yet to be examined. With regard to the categories of class, generation, topography, and gender, the contributions assembled in this volume explore Spanish, French, English, and German novels narratologically from the perspective of culture and gender theories.

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Transgression and Subversion.
Far from Gender?
An Introduction

MAREN LICKHARDT / GREGOR SCHUHEN / HANS RUDOLF VELTEN

The picaresque universe is without any doubt a patriarchal and phallogocentric construction, in which most of the characters are male, where physical and non-physical violence is omnipresent, and where femininity is depicted as a constant threat to the male identity of the adolescent anti-hero, the picaro. Even though the collective ethical norms in this “great wolves’ game” (Bauer 1993: 85) work in accordance with the narrative pattern of mundus inversus, which means that feudal social hierarchies are – to quote Bachtin – “carnivalized”, the prevailing patriar- chally determined gender norms in the picaresque diegesis do not seem to be in- verted at all, not even in the female picaresque (cf. Cruz: 1999).

This general observation serves as a starting point of our volume and leads us to the crucial question why the transgressive and subversive potential of the pica- resque narrative challenges and criticizes the feudal hierarchy of the social strata without subverting and transgressing gender norms. Moreover, if the gendered norms of the picaresque novel really perpetuate the misogynist tradition of medi- eval treatises on the hierarchy of the sexes, which role does the genre-specific device of picaresque irony or satire play? And finally: Does the fact that female characters are so uncommon in the picaresque novel automatically suggest that womanliness is of minor importance to the genre? Especially the appearances of the picaro’s mothers and their doubles in several key scenes of the texts might complicate this assumption, as Anne J. Cruz suggests in her contribution to this volume. That gender issues are rarely located in the center of the rich scientific reception history of the picaresque genre makes analyzing “Gender in the Pica- resque” even more challenging.
THE SPANISH PICARESQUE

Shortly before the end of his long journey through the cities of early modern Spain and just before getting married, Guzmán de Alfarache informs his readers about the preferences of young women when choosing the ideal husband. This chapter is written in a manual style and is explicitly addressed to young women. According to the narrator, most of the inexperienced girls make poor decisions because they mostly rely on the wrong parameters. Following the arguments of the narrator, only money and social status should be taken into account. The passage begins with the stereotypical attribution of inconstantia to his female readers: “Haces como mujer: eres mudable” (Alemán 2010: 388); (“You act like a woman: you are inconstant”). What follows is a long list of examples why women usually choose the wrong husband: They marry in order to escape their parents’ houses, they marry because of love, they marry to avoid social isolation by losing their honor, they marry because they have read the wrong romantic books, or they marry because of their lovers’ physical appearance. All of these points touch on the relationship between the two sexes, and they reveal much about the image of women. Only the last point does not focus on stereotypes of femininity or develop a binary typology of male and female, but provides insight into images of masculinity as it describes how to look like a ‘real man’. Women should not choose young men who care too much about their physical appearance (Alemán 2010: 393): “mocitos engomados” (“tarted up young men), “pulidetes más que Adonis” (“smoother than Adonis”), “aderezados para ser lindos” (“prepared to be beautiful”). The playful use of “goma” / engomado” hints at the true character of these young men: “goma” usually means ‘rubber’ or ‘pomade’, but it is also – according to contemporary dictionaries (cf. Covarrubias 1611: 441) – a familiar expression for syphilitic tumors (by the way, also the term fuentes has this double meaning: it means ‘fountains’, on the one hand, and purulent wounds, on the other). Both meanings of goma are usually attributed to women: women who fix their hair with pomade or the syphilitic prostitute, such as Úbedas Picara Justina (cf. Hanno Ehrlicher’s paper in this volume). This is because syphilis as a venereal disease is closely related to sexual debauchery, which is stereotypically regarded as a female vice. This shows clearly that in the gendered picaresque universe sexual excesses – or sexual activities in general – constitute a bodily practice which serves as a mode of differentiation between the two sexes. Such a corporeal practice which constitutes masculinity is the excessive use of physical violence, as for example the first half of Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) demonstrates (cf. Gregor Schuhen’s contribution to this volume). In short, it is not the narrative depiction of the body itself which
establishes binary sexual differentiation, but corporeal practices in the strictest sense of doing gender.

Returning to Guzmán’s remarks on women, it is not only the sexual double meaning of goma which refers to issues of gender difference, but also the fact that practices such as hair dressing (“copetes”) and makeup (“las colores y buena tez”) are clearly attributed to women “que lo han menester y se han de valer dello” (Aléman 2010: 393-94); (“who need them and have to make use of them”). This passage echoes a similar phrase from the beginning of the novel where the narrator states that these practices depict “actos de afeminados maricas” (Aléman 2012: 140) (“acts of effeminized faggots”).

If it is true that this excerpt also serves as a manual on how to behave like a ‘real man’, this becomes clear in the exclamation “Sea la mujer, mujer, y el hombre [...]. Bástale a el hombre tratarse como quien es. Muy bien le parece tener la voz áspera, el pelo recio, la cara robusta, el talle grave y las manos duras” (Alemán 2010: 393-94). A man should remain natural, should abstain from female practices, which are moreover judged as morally reprehensible.

Interestingly enough, passages dealing explicitly with sexual differentiation are scarce, at least in the male picaresque (Frank Estelmann examines the relationship between gender and genre in the female picaresque). The picaresque sexual discourse seems mainly to consist of misogynist addresses by male narrators or characters. Even in the passage quoted above, female practices are portrayed as morally odious, and feminization has been classified as one of the main and most dangerous threats to masculinity (cf. Solomon 1997), an observation questioned in this book. Moreover, gender constitution is strictly related to different corporeal performances. Men mainly use physical violence to prove their masculinity, whereas women act as strongly sexualized characters. According to the inverted social framing of the picaresque narrative, both modes of gender constitution are presented as moral antitheses to Renaissance humanism and official Christian values. One might expect that the ironic literary depiction of the picaresque mundus inversus not only refers to social hierarchy and moral values but also includes gender norms in terms of subversion or transgression, as the title of this book suggests. As far as we can see, this is not the case. The passage just discussed, by mentioning classical queer aspects such as effeminacy and cross-dressing, reveals that these phenomena are unambiguously marked as abnormal in a strictly heteronormative discourse. Therefore, we have to add a question mark behind the title of our book. Furthermore, if the gendered body can be conceived only as a performative construction, we have to ask which specific roles the excessive amount of corporeal imaginary plays, since bodily excesses undoubtedly belong to the typical ingredients of the picaresque narrative.
The passage quoted at the beginning of this introduction evokes the double meaning of *goma* and *fuentes*. Both terms refer to rather disgusting physical phenomena: syphilitic tumors and purulent wounds. This leads to a theoretical approach by Julia Kristeva that can be regarded as crucial in the picaresque representation of gender constitution: In her essay *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, written in 1980, Kristeva analyzes the mechanism of abjection. Among other things, the abject is described as body fluids which cause disgust and nausea, but which are vitally important for the organism’s survival. The paradox of abjection is that it enables the body to remain healthy, on the one hand, and that it reminds the body of its own boundaries and its transience, on the other. The abject is neither subject nor object, as Kristeva states: “Pas moi. Pas ça. Mas pas rien non plus. Un ‘quelque chose’” (“Not me, not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing”) (Kristeva 1980: 10). In the picaresque aesthetics, fecal imaginary and scatological speech are omnipresent and can be related to Kristeva’s thoughts on abjection. Cruz distinguishes two ways of abjection that both belong to the gendered order. First, the abjection of the *picaro* himself as being a non-hegemonic, liminal male “something” which is visually demonstrated by his contamination with all kinds of body fluids. Second, the abjection of the feminine, which is not only constitutive for the *picaro*’s precarious masculinity (cf. Schuhen 2018), but for the constitution and the continuation of the patriarchal system depicted in the picaresque novel as well:

The patriarchal system in which [the picaro] remains enclosed is paradoxically supported by its rejection of the other, by its abjection, not only of [the picaro] but, conspicuously, of the feminine. As scapegoat for the social ills of the time, [the picaro] shares with the abjected feminine what Kristeva names the embodiment of the remainder; that is, that which escapes symbolic identification, and which is emphasized in the later picaresque narratives’ profuse scatological references (Cruz 1999: 131).

In the passage from *Guzmán*, neither the *picaro* or the mother nor any other female character is stigmatized with purulent wounds and syphilitic tumors. The excerpt belongs to the long reflective, mostly moralistic passages that constitute more than half of the novel. The narrator therefore explicitly informs his readers about general social problems in a rather abstract, almost sociological manner. It is the “mocito engomado” or the “afeminado marica” who is in the focus, thus a ‘queer’ figure *avant la lettre*, or at least a male character who did not perform the abjection of femininity successfully, but rather integrates female practices and desires in the conception of his male identity. Once more this indicates that the feminine or the queer is regarded as a threat to the formation of masculinity or, generally speaking,
to the patriarchal system itself: Feminization automatically leads to abjection – a misogynist stereotype that is not only valid for premodern gender configurations. Therefore, transgressions of boundaries between the sexes are sanctioned as long as male-to-female switching is concerned, because male-to-female marks a synonym of social degradation, as Timo Kehren observes in his contribution to this volume. We will consider the queerness of the picaresque figure and its consequences in this book.

**European Heirs**

So far, we have exclusively discussed the Spanish picaresque novel, which was adapted quite early in France and England, where the transmission was altered by intermingling with other genres so that we can speak of semi- or neo-picaresque texts (Bauer 1994). The French version of Quevedo’s *Buscon* by Sieur de La Gene-este shows some modifications of the genre which, as such, greatly influenced the European picaresque tradition. The English picaresque novel – or the rogue novel – can be considered as a genre of its own that was especially popular in the 18th century. It already started as an original genre with Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* in 1594. In contrast, the early modern German picaresque novel was adapted and translated relatively late. The first translation of *Lazarillo* into German is a manuscript dating from the year 1614; a newer, printed version dates from 1617. The much modified German *Gusman* by Aegidius Albertinus was published in 1615, and *Buscón* did not appear in German until 1671 by Johann Michael Moscherosch, based on the French *Buscon*.

As we are dealing with intricate traditions and as these texts have been adapted to the German cultural context and set new accents in various respects, they deserve special attention by German literary historians. Especially the relevance of picaresque texts as media of the reformation and counter-reformation leads to a disambiguation of the picaresque narrator, who is, more or less credibly, chastened and has converted to Catholicism at the end. In addition, the picaresque encounters already existing literary traditions, like early German printed jest books, for instance *Dil Ulenspiegel*, and a widespread jester literature (*Narrenliteratur*), which preceded and influenced the reception of the picaresque novel. Hans Rudolf Velten discusses this German pre-history of the picaresque and the interconnections with the jest novel to question the thesis that masculinity is weakly marked and to ask how gender relations and sexuality shape the male protagonist.

However, an original German picaresque tradition did not start until 1668, when Johann Jacob Christoph von Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus* – which has
only a few picaresque traits – and Hieronymus Dürer’s *Lauf der Welt und Spiel des Glücks* were published, soon followed by Grimmelshausen’s *Courasche* in 1699 (*Courasche* of course refers to *Picara Justina*). The novel primarily deals with female sex and gender in any respect and shows the transgressive and subversive potential of the picaresque handling of gender. We encounter a female narrator who has lived in sin and in the end regrets nothing. Concerning the male picaresque figure, many aspects of the Spanish picaresque novel also appear in German picaresque texts, although we confront modifications of the genre formula (Bauer 1994). These aspects will be discussed in the following in connection with Hieronymus Dürer’s *Lauf der Welt und Spiel des Glücks*.

Once again, the male pícaro remains rather volatile, for masculinity appears as a performative category. Where Dürer’s anti-hero Tychander shows traits of a picaresque figure, hardly any markers of gender are visible. Tychander is at the mercy of Fortuna and suffers physically from her ups and downs (Heßelmann 2007), but his body is sexually unmarked. While the female figures are fixed according to current ascriptions to femininity like gentleness and fickleness and are staged as beautiful, physically attractive women, a male physicality or physical masculinity remains elusive. We learn from a story within the story that Tychander’s father even manages the typical early modern cross-dressing – which is also performed in Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus*. He can easily pretend to be a pregnant woman simply by putting on women’s clothes and a pillow. “Er verkleite sich in weibes-kleidern und weil ihm doch von natur der bart langsam wuchse / soo ließ er die wenigen milchhaar / die noch übrig waren / mit einem schwermeßer vollends abnehmen.” (“He disguised himself in women’s clothes and because his beard was sparse by nature / he had the few fine hairs / that still showed / shaved off with a shear knife.”) (Dürer 1984: 116). What marks his manhood is the barely expressed physical sign of the beard – which can simply be shaved off. The father also puts on makeup. But this is not necessarily to pretend femininity. The pale face merely insinuates that he is not feeling well. So pretending to be pregnant and sick requires a greater effort than pretending to be feminine Again, gender is staged as a performative category restricted to men. Women are marked as such, and they are object of othering, which is the topic of Grimmelshausen’s *Courasche*. But, ultimately, her sex is staged to be undermined in the novel. Maren Lickhardt focuses on the female picaresque figure Courage in Grimmelshausen’s novel and shows how she not only transcends gender norms as a self-determined subject but is also the object or result of male ascriptions and valuations.

If we ask more precisely what shapes the masculinity of *Tychander*, it gets more complicated. The novel mixes various genres, which significantly impacts the staging of the sexes. In fact, we encounter a hybridization of the picaresque,
historical, chivalric, and pastoral novel in which the genres not only overlap but comment on each other (Mayer 1970, Unsicker 1974: 226). Only where chivalric narration dominates in the text, the main character performs masculinity. Through forms of gallantry, Tychander stabilizes his gender role, which simultaneously means that the picaresque is challenged as a genre by other genres. Only when the genre comes into motion, the sex of the figure is fixed against the background of a heteronormative framework, whereby the latter is never transgressed or subverted as such (cf. Lickhardt 2016). But sex is not only fixed in terms of stereotypical male practices and behavior. It also becomes disambiguous because the picaresque figure now has sexual relationships with women, from farce-like affairs to romantic love stories. Tychander is not only definitely not impotent, but also even possessed by love (Mayer 1970: 30). “Diesem nach wurde ich nicht von der liebe alsgemach eingenommen / sondern plötzlich überfallen / und zwar mit solcher macht / daß ich nicht wuste / was ich weiter antworten solte / und stund eine weile ganz erstarret und gleichsam entzückt und betrachtete mit verwundern dieses kunst-stücke der Natur.“ (“In this way I was not captured gradually by love / but ambushed by it /indeed with such force / that I did not know what to answer / and stood thunderstruck and at the same time enraptured and regarding these wonders of nature with amazement.”) (Dürer 1984: 208). And love is not a flash in the pan. It leads to a desire for stabilization, “the virtue of constancy, which is totally foreign to the picaro […]. With love he announces most emphatically his intention to be at home in the world” (Mayer 1970: 30).

Overall, it is remarkable that gender relations extend the more basic picaresque body discourse of hunger and other corporeal requirements. Sexuality in many senses of the word belongs to Tychander and forms a strong motif that underlies the notion of just surviving. The struggle for survival supports and from time to time is replaced by the struggle for sexual or romantic contact, which might not only result from genre transgression and hybridization but also allegorizes them. Moreover, the genre mixing means that Tychander develops a memory, which is the first step for a general personal development (Friedrich 2014).

In the German picaresque novels, the transgression and subversion of role models go hand in hand with those of genre. As this can be described as a process of ‘becoming bourgeois’ (Hirsch 1979), it corresponds with figures that are socially less limited than the ones in the Spanish picaresque novel—which obviously leads to a wider range of masculine registers. Dürer delivers just one example that shows the dynamics of the picaresque universe, where all parameters are fleeting, being transgressive and subversive in dynamic interrelations. Gender is only one of the categories questioned and challenged. Alexandra Schamel discusses in this volume to what extent the picaresque practice of dissimulation is reactivated in
Marivaux’s novel *La Vie de Marianne*; she conceives the domesticated female body as a set of masks of authenticity, playing with the indexical codes of established discourses and genre differentiation. Here, the subversion of the protean male body of the picaro is transformed into a non-readable mask of authenticity which exceeds gender. In a different approach to genre blending in the 18th-century English picaresque novel, Jens Elze troubles the transgression of female gender roles in a comparative study of Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and Tobias Smollet’s *Roderick Random*. Whereas the casuistry of sex and gender schemes in *Moll Flanders* continues the precarious picaresque forms, Smollet’s *Roderick Random* shows a similar stability in order to enforce satirical and genre transformation and classification.

Returning to later examples in German Literature, Hans-Joachim Jakob focuses on picaresque elements in Wilhelm Raabe’s *Lorenz Scheibenhart* and *Aus dem Lebensbuch des Schulmeisterleins Michel Haas*. Jakob shows how the masculine identity of the itinerant vagrant is stabilized and destabilized by the intermingling of different genres, which appears as a travestying form of the picaro novel which becomes highly dysfunctional in an age dominated by historicism. Matthias Bauer, concluding the volume, follows the tracks of the German and English picaresque novel from the 17th to the 20th century – e.g. John Barth’ *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Irmtraud Morgner’s *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* – to show how the inverted world of each different German and American picaresque variation reveals the contingency of gender constructions, which simultaneously leads to a liberation of gender roles and to gender trouble.

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