INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600
Beyond housekeeping: The American picara in twentieth century narrative

Ryan, Cathy Lynne, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1994

Copyright ©1994 by Ryan, Cathy Lynne. All rights reserved.
BEYOND HOUSEKEEPING: THE AMERICAN PICARA
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY NARRATIVE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in
the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

Cathy L. Ryan, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1994

Dissertation Committee: Approved by

Morris Beja
Katherine H. Burkman
Valerie Lee

Adviser/Department of English
To those who taught me to have faith in the road that lay ahead—my parents, Beverley and Joseph.

To the man who had the courage to join me there, my husband, Tom, who has been the finest traveling companion; and to our children, who someday will learn pleasure on the open road.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express sincerest gratitude to Morris Beja for having had the nerve to take on this project, and then to muck through its various metamorphoses. Thanks to Katherine H. Burkman for her guidance, through the straits when I lost a sense of direction. Thanks also to Valerie Lee, my third reader, who stepped into an advisory position with consummate grace. All my committee members have given me encouragement and support throughout the writing process for this dissertation, with wisdom and kindness. Also, I thank the various professors whose teaching proved most instrumental in my developing the theory espoused in this dissertation, namely: Morris Beja, Katherine H. Burkman, Howard Floan, Patrick Horner, FSC, George B. Kirsch, Debra Moddelmog, Mary Ann O'Donnell, and Barbara Rigney. I owe a debt of gratitude, finally, to the late Richard Bjornson, who lent to this study numerous insightful discussions, and shared with me in the delights, pleasures, and riches that accompany study of the picaresque novel.
VITA

July 4, 1963 ....................... Born: Yonkers, New York

1985 ................................................ Bachelor of Arts Degree,
                                Manhattan College, Bronx,
                                New York

1987 ................................................ Master of Arts Degree,
                                English Department,
                                The Ohio State University,
                                Columbus, Ohio

1989-Present ......................... Writing Consultant,
                                Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major: English

Specializations: 20th-Century Literature, British and American
                 American Literature to 1900
                 Drama, Classical to Present
                 Comparative Literature
                 Film and Literature
                 Business and Administrative Writing
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ............................................................ ii
Acknowledgments .................................................. iii
Vita .......................................................................... iv

I. Introduction ...................................................... 1-19

II. The Picara: A Brief Overview .............................. 20-43

III. Marginality, Voice, and the Wayfarer's Heart in
     Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 44-90

IV. Birth of the Modern American Picara: Keeping
     the Home Fires Burning in Marilynne Robinson's
     *Housekeeping* ............................................. 91-127

V. Detection and the Search for Self-Identity in
     Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* ............. 128-154

VI. Conclusion: The Picara-Artist ............................. 155-160

Works Cited ....................................................... 161-174
'Sometimes I imagine life itself as merely a long preparation and waiting, a long darkness of growth toward these adventures of the spirit, a picaresque novel, so to speak, in which the episodes are all inward.' (Mary Sarton, *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*, 174)

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. (Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, 3)

Spellbound, I would listen as they juggled parables and quotations, verses and explanations, trying to exact a hidden meaning, a moral precept, a lesson. (Elie Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers*, epigraph)
CHAPTER I
Introduction

In The Representation of Women in Fiction, published in 1981, Margaret R.
Higonnet (and coeditor, Carolyn G. Heilbrun) stated, "[A] new literary history is
being written today, shaped in part by feminist studies of the representation of
women" (xiii). Over the past two decades, women's literary analyses have
altered the landscape of our contemporary scholarship. One perception is that
new analyses of literature retrieve a past heretofore unknown. The analysis of
literature by female scholars also creates that past. In analyzing the picara's
trek through the literary landscape—over centuries and national boundaries—
contemporary scholars create her history anew.

Women's studies have created a discursive body of literary products on the
subject of women's historical status, their accomplishments, and their writing.
This literary history has unearthed and brought to light both forgotten and
marginal texts. But picaresque literature has been nearly forgotten, a quiet
corner in the house of scholarship. Of the five articles listed on the subject of
the picara in the MLA Bibliography (1980-Sept. 1992), four are non-English
products. Christine Whitbourn had published a significant book on the picaro
as knave and rogue. But the picara's experiences in twentieth-century fiction
as distinct from those of the picaro receive only scant attention in the literary
scholarship. Ironically paralleling this muted scholastic response, the picara
has been notable for her apparent lack of voice, or silence, in a narrative that
should be her own.

In the United States, until 1991 when Anne K. Kaler published The Picara:
From Hera to Fantasy Heroine, no woman had published a book devoted to
examining the representation of the picara. Kaler begins by stating that the
picara's legacy in literature has been both ignored and misread by critics.
Despite her full realization in literature, the picara has been mistaken often as
the feminine counterpart of the picaro or for the feminine extension of the
picaresque. Thus, not only is the picara's position in literature elusive and neglected, but her lot has been worsened by misinterpretation. Kaler's own work is not entirely successful, either, in that she relegates her study to the realm of science fiction rather than examining the picara's place in more respected, canonical works.

Although authors publishing in the field of picaresque studies seldom call their subject a "picara," Ann Daghistany's "The Picara Nature" (1977) is one notable exception. The picara is the female protagonist of picaresque narrative, and, not surprisingly, her life and experiences differ substantially from those of her male counterpart, the picaro. In examining the picara's voice in narrative, Edward H. Friedman speaks obliquely of the "feminine variations of the picaresque" (xi). Robert Butler similarly uses a generic term in calling his female protagonist a "picaro." Studies such as Friedman's The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque (1987) typically limit examination of their female (for example, Friedman examines narration and point of view). Similarly, even while championing her subject, Marcia Welles renders a flat treatment of the picara in assessing the "vanity" of virtue. Overall, the tendency among scholars is to marginalize the picara even as they give her breath in recent literary scholarship.

Contemporary scholars do not afford the picara a singular tradition or literary history. As previously stated, Butler's study of the woman writer as "American Picaro" describes the "persistent vitality" of Americans, namely their "quest for open motion," especially in recent fiction by American women; he identifies a recent American literature peopled with heroes who "fall in love with distances" as they strive to explore freely and independently themselves and their world (Butler 309). Such a description embodies the experience of the modern American picara. But the way that Butler sets about supporting these points becomes problematic. Though operating from sound intuition, in proving these points about recent fiction by American women, Butler cites sharply contrasting worlds--Columbus's New World, Cooper's West, Melville's seas, Whitman's open road, and Twain's territories. Where is the picara's world?

Thus, scholarship on the modern American picara has been only marginally successful. Likewise, literary historians have omitted the picara from their coverage of primary adventure and picaresque narratives. As a singularly compelling example, Michael Nerlich's Ideology of Adventure: Studies in Modern Consciousness, 1100-1750, vols. 1-2, in his words, began as a
study of the picaresque novel (xvii). However, though Nerlich discourses on subjects like Knightly Adventurer, Adventure Prince, Merchant Adventurer, and Armchair Adventurer, he fails to highlight any adventuring female prototype. Clearly, there is much work to be done in this field of study.

Whereas the picaro enters the world as an apprentice to a series of masters, the picara’s experiences traditionally have been defined by her relations to men. An awakening to sexuality or seduction usually triggers the picara’s early entry into the world, and her character is defined thereafter by a series of marriage contracts: Justina’s adventures end when she marries Guzmán, the reigning male prototype for the picaro in seventeenth-century Spain. When Lazarillo has trouble with a master in Lazarillo de Tormes, usually in the form of a beating to near-death, he heads on down the road in search of a new apprenticeship. Though the picara’s experience differs in that her life comprises a series of marriages or relationships with men, rather than masters per se, Zora Neale Hurston’s Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God shows graphically in her marriages to Logan Killicks and Jody Starks how the distinctions between the two (marriage/master) may become blurred.

Most commonly, a dichotomy is clearly set up in picaresque narratives between marriage (entrapment) and picaresque life (freedom, autonomy). Erica Jong’s Isadora Wing sees life as presenting two options in the first part of Fear of Flying—to be “homeless and rootless” or to be an “American slavewife” (Jong 253). In the picara’s experience, self-identity and actions are determined most often through her relationships to men. For example, although Sarton’s protagonist in Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing makes a strong distinction between her “married self” and her “self” (Sarton 45), she is yet known to all by the titular “Mrs. Stevens.” Nonetheless, as suggested in the following chapters, the modern American picara achieves an independence and self-identity apart from previously well-defined relations to men.

What distinguishes the picara/picaro as a particular wanderer type is the “tenacious, satiric, clamorous, humorous, and impudent demand to be heard” (Kaler 8). Tenacity and the ability to persevere, to endure, are the picaresque character’s most prominent features. How clamorous, humorous, and impudent varies from novel to novel. Mateo Aléman’s Guzmán seems most set on delivering preachy aphorisms. Lazarillo, in contrast, conveys a pithy wit. Furthermore, the protagonist’s clamor and impudence also seem to rely on several factors, including: how poor the picaro or picara’s environs; physical
condition (usually, hunger drives acts and behavior); and audience. The picaresque character generally shows great impudence in crime; shows great relish. clamor, and aplomb in escape (sometimes from the hangman’s noose); and, even so, generally shows quiet resignation in confronting his or her fate.

As noted by Gustavo Pellón and Julio Rodriguez-Luis, contemporary scholars have transformed the protean picaro into many forms. Prototypes of this persona include that of an antihero (protagonists of Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March* and Gogol’s *Dead Souls*), that of a fragmented and alienated man in a hostile society (R. W. B. Lewis’s existential, “picaresque-saint”; Haley’s *Malcolm X*), and that of an artist of deception and trickery whose task is to reorder the world, even as his narrative works to satirize it (Ellison’s *Invisible Man*; Mann’s godlike Felix Krull). One of the picaro’s manifestations that is closely aligned to the picara’s is Mann’s libertine, Felix Krull; these prototypes both find that their bodies and charm become highly marketable commodities.

In another manifestation, Grimmeishausen’s *Courage* seems to fit closely with the picaro prototype, like Simplicissimus, in thieving and fighting: when physically challenged by men, Courage reigns supreme—with sword or pistol in battle, with cudgel after a domestic dispute, with a knife in the woods, or with “wit, false tears, and pretty words,” she triumphs—men who oppose her wind up “beaten up or humiliated, taken prisoner, killed, duped or exploited by her” (32). Speier describes Courage as a “female picaro” (-40). This term, a constant in the early and modern scholarship of the picara’s life is, in this case, apropos.

Early in her development, in contrast, Janie Crawford occupies the more typical position of the “sentimental picara.” Namely, the young girl idealizes romantic love, which combines with vanity, to cause her premature entry into the world. Commonly, the picara falls to a seduction whose ill-fated end signals her loss of all former caregivers (relatives, friends, guardians) and security, with scant tools or preparation to aid her progress. For example, Jong’s Fanny is left as a baby upon the doorstep of a wealthy family, and she remains there (without knowledge of her birth parents) until she falls to Lord Bellars’ seduction; thereafter, awakening from the sleep of the innocent in a Blakean transformation, Fanny possesses newfound awareness of men. With this understanding, Fanny dries her eyes and, as she says, sets about preparing for her “journey” (54). Fanny laments, “‘Home, alas, was far away, and lost to me fore’er by my Indiscretion with Lord Bellars” (108). Some variation on this
incident provides the catalyst for picaresque life.

Thus, the picara's experience often incorporates many adventurer types, both within and beyond the construct of marriage, as seen in the case of Grimmelshausen's *Courage* (warrior, thief, financier, gypsy queen). Although momentary stays against the chaos present themselves, in the form of conventional housekeeping or forms of employment, the picara consistently chooses the less traveled path—which often proves to be fraught with danger, emotional embroilment, verbal frays and tests of wit, as well as run-ins with the law. In this sense, too, she mirrors the development of the picaro.

Although the picaro's history shows him active in traveling the seas, traversing the roads, or battling (and plundering) in war, with the notable exceptions of Grimmelshausen's *Courage*, *The Adventuress* (notably, the source book for Brecht's *Mother Courage*), Jorge Amado's *Tereza Batista, Home from the Wars* (Brazil, 1972; translation, 1975), and Erica Jong's imitative *The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (1980), the picara's is more often an antiadventure novel. In the twentieth century, the picara often adventures within the confines of a room or within her imagination, rather than traveling outward in the wide world. Many modern picaresque narratives share this form of limited, interior adventuring.

As the most important implication of the picaresque novel's development in twentieth-century American literature, the picara has achieved a voice and heightened awareness that distinguishes her from her predecessors: she has become creating artist. Her life has three primary components: adventuring, searching for a voice and self-identity, and creating the text (commonly, a first-person narrative). May Sarton's *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*:

'Sometimes I imagine life itself as merely a long preparation and waiting, a long darkness of growth toward those adventures of the spirit, a picaresque novel, so to speak, in which the episodes are all inward.' (174)

Most of Hilary F. Stevens' adventures have concerned her relations to books, her own work, critics, and most importantly, forays within herself.

This movement inward has its roots in early Spanish narratives. For example, in a section entitled "The Hero in No-Man's-Land," Nerlich introduces
Baltasar Gracián's *El Criticón* (1661-67)—a type of "antiadventure novel" whose protagonists "do not travel on for the sake of adventure (the modus operandi of many early picaresque novels)." Rather, they travel through the world, through life, as on "a journey through the soul... an attempt at the complete unmasking of a human being..." (40).

As stated, Gracián's development of the interior, "antiadventure novel" foreshadows a similar focus in twentieth-century picaresque narrative. Cervantes' *Don Quijote* played no small part in this development when he wrote his novel to counter the immensely popular picaresque novel. Although Davenport's Foreword to Nabokov's university lectures, *Vladimir Nabokov: Lectures on Don Quixote* (1983), identifies the picaresque journey "as the 'harmonizing intuition'" of *Don Quixote* (xvii), most critics accept that Cervantes' novel is not picaresque in the truest sense. But later picaresque novels manifest signs of Cervantes' influence, nonetheless, particularly in the highly romantic, "sentimental picaresque" form adopted by authors such as Tenney and Hurston. Namely, Cervantes' work challenged the picaresque novel and, ultimately, affected its evolution in literature.

Nabokov's opening remarks to an undergraduate class while guest lecturer at Harvard introduce the prototypical picaresque novel, under the notebook heading, "GENERAL REMARKS ON FORM":

> [T]he picaresque novel—-from pícaro, meaning rogue in Spanish—-a type of story as old as the vineclad hills, which has a slyboots, a bum, a quack, or any more or less droll adventurer for hero. And this hero pursues a more or less anti-social or asocial quest, moving from job to job or from joke to joke in a series of colorful, loosely strung episodes with the comic element factually predominating over any lyrical or tragic intent. It is also significant that by selecting a bum for his hero, the author in times of political oppression when a moral message is enforced by the government or church... slyly sheds any dangerous responsibility for his hero's social-religious-political background since the tramp, the adventurer, the madman is fundamentally asocial and irresponsible. (11)

Nabokov eloquently conveys the picaresque character, the wanderings as "antisocial" and "asocial" in nature, the form of those wanderings being a series of "colorful, loosely strung episodes." Furthermore, he identifies certain character types—"tramp," "adventurer," "madman"—and earmarks each
character's asocial behavior and irresponsibility.

When applied to the picara, these points apply with slight variations in nuance; that is, although her wanderings are antisocial or asocial she is no "tramp," "adventurer," or "madman." Rather, because she is a "woman," she does not easily fit within the social fabric and, therefore, she journeys likewise in the margins of society. To make another distinction, she is not irresponsible and asocial so much as she is (like the tramp and madman) invisible and voiceless within that society. Finally, the American picara is ingenuous in a way that places her beyond the actual realm of her experiences, often mitigating her asocial or irresponsible behavior. Notably, this characterization parallels that of the earliest picaros such as Lazarillo and Pedro, but runs entirely counter to the early caricatures of the picara as bawd/entertainer in Golden Age Spain.

Thereafter, the picara/picaro assumes multiple forms and social positions in picaresque narrative, from ingenuous water boy/servant (Lazarillo and Pedro), mistress (Moll Flanders and Janie Crawford), and hermetical visionary (Simplicissimus) to scam artist and felon (Felix Krull, Lafcadio, Pascual Duarte). Chandler chose the word "rogue" to describe the picaro. It is noteworthy that Pellón and Rodriguez say that a recent translation for the term is "likeable rascal" (20, n. 3). However, the picaresque character remains unique within the literary canon. Peter N. Dunn writes in "The Spanish Picaresque Novel: Review and Conclusions":

In earlier fiction, the principal characters were stable, their status being inseparable from their identity: a knight, a priest, a merchant, a prince, a poet, a man of law, etc. This is not so in picaresque fiction. The picaro is someone on the move, a boy who is becoming what he is not yet, a man seeking to be other than what he is. From the point of view of social existence, the picaro is he who is not. (60)

Herein lies the picaresque narrative's ultimate value as a genre or literary form. In presenting the person "who may be," the person perpetually on the brink of "becoming" him- or herself, the picaresque narrative presents the story of eternal striving and growth. This is a prospect as eternal as the story of Adam and Eve. If the picaro is "he who is not," as Dunn suggests, then he is the person who may be. Nothing comes from stasis for the central character in picaresque fiction. From movement and striving comes all.
One of the distinguishing features of the picaresque narrative has been the protagonist's marginality. For example, in *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), which this study considers as the first picaresque novel, Lazarillo is forced prematurely into an apprenticeship to a blind master when his father's imprisonment leaves his mother unable to provide for him at home. This event sets into motion the course of events that comprise the novel. Ruthie, in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* is similarly "orphaned" when some years after her father's desertion, her mother commits suicide. A picaresque life is, thus, generally forced on a protagonist prematurely due to external circumstances that are, in large part, uncontrollable.

Marginality is the key. For example, when Ruthie's mother drives into the lake in Robinson's *Housekeeping*, orphaning her daughters and releasing them to the care of two spinster great-aunts, they are "exiled" from regular upbringing; that is, they are "homeless." Gould asserts that homelessness especially forces a woman outside the narrow limits of acceptance and shakes the foundations of the social order; therefore, she must be "defined as marginal" and treated as less than "fully human" (Gould 5). Early adventures arise in Robinson's novel, for example, in the life Ruthie and Lucille live under the uncertain tutelage of the spinster great-aunts; thereafter, life as lived with Aunt Sylvie opens up for the girls the possibilities inherent in an emergent "new world." The secure world is turned upside down when the great-aunts entrust the young girls to Sylvie. First the world changes when the girls confront Sylvie's unorthodox world view and transient ways and, second, when their home is affected by the natural elements of flood and fire. These elements together effect Ruthie's transformation into modern American picara.

Nonetheless, even literary characters such as Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*—protagonists whose fates seem willed by naturalistic forces greater than the self—prove that the picara's fate remains self-determined. *Sister Carrie* does not have to remain in Chicago, but may potentially return to her family. Manifesting traits of the picara, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* "fulfills[es] herself by rejecting all the forms of stability which men offer her" (a pattern in picaresque narrative); she sees her life as "an American open journey," says Butler, "Rocking in a chair which outwardly limits her movements but which almost magically frees her imagination, she can see her life in protean terms as an endless series of metamorphoses, limitless growth" (312). Yet, Lena Grove is
another type of picara altogether: similarly rejecting all forms of stability (foremost, marriage), she finds autonomy by journeying unsheltered down an endless, dusty road in Faulkner's *Light in August*.

Although the central protagonist in picaresque fiction offers readers access into a topsy-turvy universe, lending readers his or her eyes with which to see, this character is seldom "at home" in that universe. For example, there is no "home" for Ruthie, who writes her narrative from some place "out there." Perhaps, however, the picara/picaro arrives home in writing the picaresque narrative. The most contemporary picaresque fiction arises when the road turns inward; readers travel the self-same road as the protagonists. The clearest embodiment of this phenomenon in contemporary American picaresque narrative appears in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, which merges the roles of protagonist/author and Sarton's *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*, which collapses literal distinctions among life/art/readership.

One of the clearest manifestations of the picara's difference is highlighted by the dissertation title, "Beyond Housekeeping: The American Picara in Twentieth-Century Narrative." This title denotes a different type of housekeeping that derives from several sources: first, Robinson's notions of contemporary "housekeeping" in *Housekeeping*, during which Sylvie opens up the home to the external world in signifying openness, especially to extraordinary perceptions and uncommon choices, and as importantly, seemingly disavowing customary "frames" and structures that may inhibit the journey she undertakes (namely, homelessness equates to transcendence; cf. Mallon 95). Robinson drafts an image at the novel's closing of the "spirit of the house" breaking through windows and doors, astonishing neighbors (*Housekeeping*, 211); second, Janie Crawford similarly revises traditional notions of housekeeping in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, particularly in her settling on the porch in overalls with bare, dust-caked feet to tell her story to Pheoby. Third, readers believe, also, that Oedipa Maas in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* will not give up her hard-earned role of picara to return again to the America, within conventional schemas of housekeeping, whose borders are Tupperware parties, the media, psychiatric treatment, and Muzak.

Broadly speaking, the contemporary American picara redefines "housekeeping" and moves "beyond" most in housing all the particulars of "home" within her own memory and self-possession. May Sarton characterizes
the artist as being someone with "no walls" (Sibley 72); this notion especially suits the modern picara-artist and the journey she undertakes. Most notably, the modern American picara manifests a freedom beyond housekeeping, in a conventional sense, which redefines traditional parameters; that is, the example of the picara's life seems to embody "all the essentials of a house, and nothing for house-keeping" (emphasis added, Thoreau 164).

In many portraits of the picara in literature, what separates her from the picaro and picaresque literary characters more generally is her autonomy. This feature of her character is singled out for attention by Kaler when she presents the picara's individual characteristics as comprising a full spectrum of colors. She assigns to autonomy the base color most fundamental to that spectrum, white. This white represents her "survival instinct": "to know, to experience, to adventure" (Kaler 9).

Accordingly, the picara scorns traditional "women's arts," possibly excepting those that derive from the use of her body. Moll Flanders, for example, certainly scoffed at making domestic chores and household management full-time ventures though such were clearly within the realm of possibility (for example, she did not sit home at the estate quietly doing needlework upon the death of her first husband). Following in the tradition of the bawd Celestina and the marriageable Justina, she is a supremely skilled entrepreneur. Courage is gifted in all her undertakings through various realms of life including business, war, and marital affairs. Similarly, Jorge Amado's Tereza Batista proves to be a capable mediator and assured, diplomatic society woman. Security seems to be a high priority, yet in attaining that security the picara is her own worst enemy, epitomizing as she does, transience.

As shown by the person of Tenney's O'Connor in Female Chastity (1801), the picaro is hampered differently in his search for security by his isolation--the severity of which is determined by his offenses as a criminal (the ultimate form of isolation is prison). For the picara, generally speaking, this isolation takes place uniquely within relationships to men (husbands, lovers). Whereas the picara's marketable commodity is his strength (e.g., ability to haul water, success in outdistancing the law officials) and adaptability (e.g., as an errand boy, thief), the picara's marketable commodity is often her body. Moll Flanders, for example, parlays her body (and its various resources) into great wealth. Similarly, Erica Jong's Fanny Hackabout-Jones entertains and beds some of the most famous people of the day, including Cleland, Swift, and Pope.
Note that the distinctively feminine form of "picaro" adopted in this study, "picara," denotes her singularly female life and form in literature. The most noteworthy aspect of this recent transformation in contemporary American literature is her position as "picara-artist" (for example, see May Sarton's *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*).

Clearly, Erica Jong's *The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (1980) presents the most "literal" manifestation of the picara-artist in twentieth-century American literature. But Fanny is not a typical eighteenth- or twentieth-century woman and thus warrants only cursory treatment in this collective portrait of the modern American picara. Consider a mosaic of the picara's life in literature. Jong's novel helps create this mosaic in the brief discussion that follows.

Jong's Fanny Hackabout-Jones has a feminist braggadocio that links her as hybrid of the earliest picara prototype embodied by Justina and Courage. Picaras the likes of Ruthie, Robina, and Janie derive partly from Quixote, especially his sentimental delusions and fair notions of romance. However, another aspect of the contemporary picara reaches its utmost development in Jong's Fanny-Hackabout Jones. In addition to making her living by her beauty and her wits, Jong's Fanny adds a third member to create a triad--beauty, wits, and "Pen" (*Fanny Hackabout-Jones*, 18). A case may be made that Robinson's Ruthie is at the incubus stage, considering her writing as a career or as a way of making a living, if not a literal life. Fanny embodies the picara-artist, in part, when she dreams of going to London to seek her fortune as a "Bard" (30).

Jong's novel succeeds well in describing the specific parameters of the picara's experience, combining both traditional and modern. In terms of the picara-artist, early in *Fanny Hackabout-Jones*, Fanny's sense of herself as a writer (prospective picara-artist) is keenly developed, as in the remark, "Yet of all the Crafts I learnt in Childhood, writing is the one that hath stood me in greatest Stead during my whole Live and hath most distinguished me from other women" (21). She also finds herself lamenting "counterfeit Love" and dwelling on the fundamental question of her "outcast" or marginal status (cf. 278). Similarly, in traveling from one outrageous scene to another (sideshow circus to coven), Fanny learns simple lessons such as, "You yourself are the Creator of your Destiny" (79-80). Together with Lancelot Robinson and his band of Merry Men, Fanny is rechristened Fanny Hackabout-Jones--a woman who shares
"larcenous adventures," lingering just beyond the hangman’s noose (though stealing for “good purpose”) in the shadow of Newgate (119, 116, 131; cf. 128)—renamed, thus, because she, in Lancelot’s words, has been “so cruelly hackt about by Fate,” with the surname “Jones” to “teach ye Modesty” (121).

Within the American literary canon there seems to be a sentiment that the picara has the inherent ability to “birth” the nation, a task which becomes the picara-artist’s primary work. This is the implication of Oedipa’s journey at the end of The Crying of Lot 49. Here, also, the witches predict for Fanny, “From your Child-Womb will America grow” (205). Lancelot (the picaro) dreams of settling in America, where he “means to build a true Democracy and take all Fugitives who come, whether Indentur’d Servants, Debtors, Blacks, or Indians” (258). At least within the construct of the novel, such ambitions prove to be only dreams, unless, of course, America grows metaphorically from Fanny’s “birthing” of the novel.

Similarly, another tenet within the contemporary American picaresque canon is that the picara comes to see herself as possessing a transcendent purpose. Robinson plays in Housekeeping with the very notion of “election,” when in their respective “conversions,” Ruthie comes to represent an “elected soul” (the picara) and Lucille’s more conventional path comes to represent the other extreme. As a result of her education at the hands of mentors such as Bartholomew Dennison and her friend, Susannah, Fanny comes to see herself as “self-appointed Intermediary with God” who is “destin’d for some Mission which had not yet become clear” to her (390). A similar transformation occurs in Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, when Janie claims intimate knowledge of God’s “inside business” (the Starks section) and then returns as pseudo-prophet to speak her tale to Pheoby. The modern American picara—including Hurston’s Janie, Robinson’s Ruthie, and Jong’s Fanny rises “like the Phoenix o’er the Ashes of [her] former Life” to become picara-artist: her book, of course, becomes the novel of the picara’s life (cf. 453).

Yet another quality of the modern American picara’s changing form in literature becomes apparent in Jong’s novel: the development of the picara’s character surpasses that of the setting in which she exists. This development runs entirely counter to the premise for the development of picaresque character in the early Spanish novels (cf. Nabokov’s earlier comment). On this point, Jong writes, “I have tried to write an interesting and entertaining novel, not an historical treatise, so the development of my heroine’s character has
always been more important to me than the setting in which we find her" (504).
Thus, readers have a significant development in contemporary picaresque
novels; namely, the picara's development in character, as picara-artist, enables
her to transcend her setting:

In many ways her consciousness is modern. But I do believe
that in every age there are people whose consciousness
transcends their own time and that these people, whether
fictional or historical, are those with whom we most closely
identify and those about whom we most enjoy reading. (504)

For the modern American picara the future looks bright indeed.

Modern American literature, however, excepting few cases (including
Jong's Fanny Hackabout-Jones and, possibly, Sarton's Mrs. Stevens Hears the
Mermaids Singing), presents the picara's life within an oral, anti-intellectual
tradition—"If you are hearing this, then I am alive." This might be the
sentiment of Hurston's Janie Crawford, for example. Substitute the word
"reading" for "hearing" in this line and you convey the essence of Robinson's
Ruthie Foster, whose development is the focus of the Housekeeping chapter on
the "birth" of the modern American picara.

Each of the female protagonists in this study—Janie Crawford, Ruthie
Foster, Oedipa Maas—acts to convey a sense, albeit incomplete, of the picara's
life and nature. Janie Crawford acts, within this collective portrait, as a bridge
character between the classical and modern; however, her development
remains distinctive in that she arises from a distinctive African-American
literary tradition. All of the protagonists in this dissertation depict aspects of
the picara's experience, primarily her risk of invisibility within society and
her struggle to achieve autonomy, self-identity, and voice.

Early chapters of this dissertation offer models for the picara's experience
in the classical mode, which remain nonetheless infused with the experience of
modern life. Chapter I briefly introduces the picara's life, and in particular,
defines the modern "picara-artist"; Chapter II lends fuller insight into this
phenomenon by presenting a broader historical overview; Chapter III briefly
introduces the example of slave narrators who established through their actions
(escape, revolt, writing) a heroic model and tradition based on necessity.
Raymond Hedin argues cogently that taking to the road came to signify in such
narratives "the romantic fulfillment of the hero's quest with social, moral, and
ideal justification" (641-42). Jorge Amado’s *Tereza Batista, Home from the Wars* (Brazil, 1972; English translation, 1975) models well the contemporary picara’s life, illuminating aspects of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (if one accepts the theory that “Afro-American” or black literature extends beyond the cultural and geographic boundaries of the United States--two continents and the Caribbean archipelago). As modern American picara, Janie Crawford’s life has three stages which, nonetheless, remain indistinct--searching for self-identity, developing autonomy and a distinctive voice, and authoring of her life’s story. Interpreting *Their Eyes Were Watching God* within the picaresque literary tradition, solves the problem of voice in the novel (critics focus on how Janie’s silence prevails in a narrative that should be her own), helps to justify the problematical aspects of the text (the Tea Cake interlude, the Everglades section), and illuminates how the creation of the text “becomes synonymous with the creation of a life” (Friedman xii).

Although it may seem illogical to move from a discussion of the picara’s life to a treatment of her “birth,” there is a compelling rationale. First, the earliest years of the picara’s life are usually not given full coverage when she authors her narrative; rather, they become a perfunctory necessity. That is, most narratives of the picara’s life use the early years primarily to “set the stage” for exhaustive treatment of the picara’s later travels, dupes, and more interesting private affairs. In contrast, Marilynne Robinson focuses almost exclusively, in painstaking detail, on the years prior to her protagonist’s emergence as modern American picara in *Housekeeping*.

Chapter IV thus presents an in-depth treatment of the period just prior to the picara’s “birth.” Focusing on Sylvie’s major role in presenting a model for the picara who is self-assured, rootless, and independent, this chapter examines Ruthie’s coming-of-age in the series of events leading to her choice of the fugitive, picara’s life beyond society’s usual laws and boundaries. Foremost, Robinson’s novel provides a powerful metaphor for picaresque life in that Ruthie must literally set fire to the ancestral Home, signifying the picara’s break with society and traditions, and thus allowing her to venture free.

If the home offers a woman isolation and entrapment, does the road offer the same woman freedom and independence? Not necessarily. Chapter V shows how the picara’s life embodies a dynamic process of limitless exploration; Oedipa senses indeterminacy but also works to find synthesis creatively for the infinite possibilities offered by modern American life. What is interesting in analyzing
Pynchon's novel is that, as B.W. Ife notes in his study of the Spanish picaresque, readers and protagonist, alike, become bound up in the web of intrigue and together must search to separate hoax from reality. This action parallels the picara's search for identity, and this activity includes the picara's reading of her own life's experiences. An important implication of this study, speaking of narrative, is that the only possibility for closure seems to come in readers' interpretations, understanding of, and relations to the text at hand.

Finally, Chapter VI, concludes by summarizing some key aspects of twentieth-century American picaresque narrative, with two main objectives: first, to create a context for discussing the picara's life and narrative within a well-defined literary and socio-historical tradition, and second, to assert the picara's position as one of the primary female agents, autonomous and self-possessed, who has become a major literary persona in twentieth-century literature.

Above all, the modern American picara is creating artist. As cited earlier, May Sarton has said that Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing should be interpreted as a picaresque novel in which "all the episodes are inward." Mrs. Stevens is a picara who lives life with a quick glance over her shoulder toward the literary page. The adventures concern primarily the woman writer's acquaintance with, and reliving of her past, and her reckoning with an as yet uncertain future. Hilary F. Stevens has rarely left her home to journey through the world—her adventures concern her relation to books, her own work, critics, and most importantly, forays within herself; the life stands starkly juxtaposed to the art that speaks eloquently of the frail, inadequate nature of such representation.

For the picara venturing free on the road in narrative, human consciousness thus becomes the last great, unknown land of discovery. New worlds are created in the mind's interaction with its environment, and in its reckoning with the past, as both are expressed, finally, in the written product that becomes the novel itself. Mrs. Stevens's encounters at home fuse the acts of living and artistic creation: she is no inveterate, displaced person. The "picara-artist" is moving forward to a place she has not been before. To reiterate, the picara, who began as a flat caricature in sixteenth-century Spain and seventeenth-century Europe, has achieved in the twentieth century a voice and heightened awareness that distinguishes her from her predecessors: she has become creating artist. Her life has three primary components: adventuring.
the search for a voice and self-identity, and the creation of the text.

In contemporary times, the picara experiences an inward journey which ultimately signifies personal growth. Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows how the picara transforms her experience of the outer world into a more personal vision: namely, how self-recognitions translate into actions, and afterwards, how taking to the road comes to signify the romantic fulfillment of the heroine’s quest. Robinson’s Ruthie becomes “picara-artist” when she travels the rails and emerges to tell “the tale” of her life open-journeying in the novel, *Housekeeping*. Oedipa Maas, in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, struggles to become full-fledged picara-artist: most of her travels in the novel relate to her attempts to gain entry into Inverarity’s world via the interpretation she “projects” of that world (the story yet to be written).

With this preliminary understanding comes a two-part corollary: a) life remains indeterminate, with the future expanding before us as an inexhaustible frontier and b) the lesson of the modern American picara’s life is that there is value in a person’s having ventured and looked about. If the modern picara’s text delivers her identity and frees her from silence, we (readers and critics) receive that text and must begin our own journey of self-exploration, identity, and finally, strive for mastery of our words.
Notes

1 For example, when James Mandrell assesses the experience of the modern American picara in "Questions of Genre and Gender: Contemporary American Versions of the Female Picaresque" (1987), he focuses on three novels of lesbian experience, including Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Similarly, Angela Hague marginalizes the modern American picaresque by examining the Angry young novel of the 1960s. Less narrowly, Kaler marginalizes the modern picara by opting to focus on fantasy and science-fiction products instead of more mainstream and canonical texts.

2 Hans Speier writes, in introducing the novel: "To the modern reader the name Courage is most familiar from Bertoldt Brecht's play, Mother Courage and Her Children. Anna Fierling is called Mother Courage because she meets all adversity and misfortune with ever new hope and resolution to make a miserable profit in her trade. She stands for all the downtrodden who believe that they have nothing but their own courage to lose" (38). Speier suggests that readers see Bertoldt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children: A Chronicle of the Thirty Years' War*, English version by Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1963, pp. 75-6).

3 As such, says Nerlich, it is "not an adventure at all" (emphasis added)—and, thereafter, he says to contradict himself that Gracián uses "the basic pattern and narrative structure of the picaresque novel to portray their journey" (40). I assert that these protagonists are adventurers, probable predecessors of Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Gracián's novel sets a precedent for the modern picaresque narratives, particularly those of the American picara.

4 Among critics who specialize in studying the picaresque novel, *Don Quixote* often is considered an "antipicaresque" novel. For example, Carroll B. Johnson (Don Quixote: The Quest for Modern Fiction. 1990) asserts that although the Spanish picaresque tradition is a "major literary presence" in *Don Quixote*, as she explains, "Paradoxically, what is noted in the text is its absence" (cf. 77). E. C. Riley similarly calls *Don Quixote* a "non-picaresque" novel (Riley 18). For additional sources on this debate, see: Peter N. Dunn's "Genre Definition and Interplay in Cervantes' Fiction: Introduction" (1986); Dunn argues that Cervantes' "mixing" of genres allows him to retrieve what "has been lost through the traditional setting of boundaries..." (11); Dunn had earlier argued that Cervantes' stories, if not picaresque, were "a bricolage of picaresque formal and narrative devices" ("Cervantes De/Re-Constructs the Picaresque," 111); Anthony J. Cascardi writes in "Genre Definition and Multiplicity in Don Quixote" (1986) that there is no "totalizing perspective available for the novel independent of or prior to reading the book" (49); Harry Sieber suggests a middle ground: "The picaresque novel as a genre emerges, as Cervantes clearly perceived, out of the confluence of the Lazarillo and of the autobiography of a criminal" (Sieber 11). In Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the galley-slave, puppeteer, and author Ginés de Pasamonte proposes in his *Vida* to "surpass Lazarillo and its
successors" (cf. Guillén 73-4; similarly to Claudio Guillén (who relies on this passage to interpret the novel as representing a "countergenre" to the picaresque), I interpret Cervantes' work as challenging the picaresque novel and, ultimately, affecting its evolution in literature.

5 In the late twentieth century, the term "picaro" has come to embody a term of endearment. See Parker, p. 144, n.6.


7 Courage's skill in life is notably large, as she records:

I was merry in company, brazen in conversation, but also as heroic as any man against the enemy, in the field as thrifty as a housewife, in the care of horses better than any equerry, and in garrison of such prosperity that my captain of infantry could not have wished for better; and when he had cause to rebuke me at times, he was quite willing that I contradict him and act on my own judgment, because our money multiplied as a result to such an extent that we were obliged to put a good part of it into safekeeping in a large city. (Hiller and Osborne 60)

8 Most of Fanny's "apprenticeship" for authoring of this book occurs in Book II: when Lord Bellars's mistress, she writes tragedies, epics, romances, pastorals, among others, vowing "to write and write until perchance I wrote one Poem worth preserving" (cf. 295); she writes a comic interlude entitled "LADY FANNY'S LYING-IN" when pregnant and, afterwards, determines to write a "great book" for her child, Belinda (cf. 331-32). This book of her life experiences and "Love Adventures" becomes the novel, *The True Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*. The novel's Epilogue concludes with a catalog of Fanny's literary successes (cf. 490-95). By the time she is seventeen years old, Fanny has known witches and highwaymen, whores and hell-fire, intrigues and ecstasies: in sum, she has readied herself to become picara-artist.

9 "The Word can change the World," a secondary character in the novel named Bartholomew Dennison teaches Fanny, "we must believe it" (386). He elaborates:

'But I believe that God hath sent me upon this Earth to be a Scribe, God's Quill, as 'twere, His Amanuensis, as 'twere, so I observe all most faithfully and put it in my Book. For I know that when the Inhuman Abuses of the Slave Trade are commonly known, all reasoning Men shall rise up as one Body and protest these Evils.' (387)
The Epilogue laments the success of Dennison's Book (493). But through the influences of Bartholomew (who tells her, "Books are like Bricks wherewith we build the House of Justice," p. 388) and her friend, Susannah, Fanny comes to uneasy acceptance of her role as picara-artist. In an example from real-life, Rosa Guy asserts that one of the Harlem Writer's Guild members, John Killens, used to say something that she thought very important: "You must write as though you are God" (Chamberlain 9).

10 Butler gives an inkling of this world when he speaks of an art which the picara relies on to open up the self as "frontier." Within this construct, human consciousness becomes the last great terra incognita: Via the artistic process the picara experiences reality creatively as infinite in its possibilities (cf. 317). This notion of the self as American frontier is set out by Henry David Thoreau, among other notable Americans, especially in his private Journals. It is in part from Butler's interpretation of the picara's relationship to her world via her art that I coin the term "picara-artist."
CHAPTER II

The Picara: A Brief Overview

The recent popularity in usage of the term "picaresque" connotes that a significant development in twentieth-century criticism—from the 1950s to the present—has been a broad-scale reinterpreting of the picaresque novel in contemporary terms.¹ What is clear from a literary overview of critical efforts is that writers call upon the picaresque paradigm to assess and quantify diverse literary products. In so doing, they are building upon and reinventing the picaresque, signifying its vigor and relevance in speaking to and for us today. This reevaluation includes both discovering contemporary picaresque fiction² and reinterpreting the picaresque tradition in contemporary terms.

Sources for the picaresque genre's development go back to Apuleius's The Golden Ass and Boccaccio's Decameron. For example, Ann Daghistany's work on the picara's nature traces her development to predecessors in the classical period also, including Quartilla in Petronius's The Satyricon and Fotis in The Golden Ass (Daghistany 51). Models for the twentieth-century picara include Fernando de Rojas's Celestina (1499), Ubeda's La picara Justina (1604), Grimmelshausen's Courage (1670), and Defoe's Moll Flanders (1722).

Early picaresque novels shaped the rogue's life into an artistic form narrated from the viewpoint of the picaro (Sieber 2; this interpretation may apply to the picara also). Among the earliest picaresque studies, F. W. Chandler predicted that because of his low origin and his narrative's ties to the criminal autobiography, the picaro's life in print would be limited, strictly short-term. But history has proven the case to be otherwise, as the picaresque narrative has shown four centuries beyond its inception to be a popular and enduring genre. What remains clear in twentieth-century criticism is that something in the picaresque genre speaks to our contemporary lives.
Most scholars today who study the picaresque adopt a less orthodox position than Chandler's, as seen in part by their various attempts at definition. Today's scholarship seems linked historically to the efforts of Fonger de Haan (An Outline History of the Novela Picaresca in Spain, 1903). De Haan first espoused the ahistoric view, an interpretive mode that suggests picaresque fiction is part of a continuing literary tradition or continuum. Wicks cautions, however, that given the current popularity of the "open" approach, picaresque fiction itself has become increasingly problematical, as "recent attempts to account for a contemporary picaresque have not taken the historical context into consideration" (Wicks 25). Because readers may be unacquainted with the picara and her rich literary tradition, the following pages distinguish between the picaro's and picara's life in literature, and present a brief overview of literary sources, critical heritage, character, and form.

For the picaresque form to arise in literature the world must be askew (not the exclusive domain of the picaresque); that is, the world must seem to be sitting uncomfortably upon its axis. This "crookedness," or imbalance in worldly affairs, supplies the underlying foundation for the low life, cunning, poetic, absurd, comedic mix of the genre. The picaresque form arises in literature at times when the literary imagination feels particularly threatened (Blackburn stresses, for example, "breakup," p. 201, and chooses as a particular focus, "disintegration" pp. 201, 215). The modern protagonist has an internal hunger. Often seeker and swindler, a figure marked by homelessness (physical, spiritual, psychic), the picaro/picara commences upon an adventure; narrative development usually leads the character to knowledge or discovery (that is, to an awakening or new awareness and understanding of what he/she must do to endure in the world).

Many theorists have tried to identify the type of picaresque situation that corresponds to the central character in picaresque fiction. Three of the most successful paradigms appear in the work of Richard Bjornson, Ulrich Wicks, and Stuart Miller. Bjornson (The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction) finds that there is an essential "picaresque situation" which takes the form of a confrontation between an isolated individual and a hostile society. Wicks ("The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach") similarly defines what he calls an "essential picaresque situation" that shows "an unheroic protagonist, worse than we, caught up in a chaotic world, worse than ours, in which he is on an eternal journey of encounters that allow him to be alternately both victim of
that world and its exploiter" (Wicks 106). Finally, Miller (The Picaresque Novel) identifies an "adventure-retirement schism," a term that describes the picaro's "inability to stay in a secure position retired from the world's chaos" (88; this characteristic applies to the picara also; for example, Moll Flanders does not sit quietly at home as a widow, though such is possible).

Usually, the first-person narrative comes to readers filtered through the protagonist's consciousness as a record of experience or report, or comes to readers in the third-person, via an acquaintance or confidante. Generally speaking, the modern picaresque narrative may be understood as:

[A] fictional work that contains a narrative structure in which the protagonist, who is usually the narrator, passes through a variety of social milieux that together with the cumulative (rather than in-depth) treatment of those experiences provides an opportunity for social and psychological criticism, as well as for psychological portraits. (Pellón and Rodriguez-Luis 8-9)

Most commonly, the protagonist's writing of his or her memoirs sets this record in motion. Following the precedent set by Lazarillo de Tormes, this record may take the form of a defense for past actions: this facet of the picaresque is particularly visible in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. As readers, we do not so much look at the rogue as see the world through his eyes (Chandler 60); meanwhile, readers are asked to look as much at the picaro/picara as at the world that protagonist experiences. The picaresque novel does not reflect the world in a literal way but itself represents a discovery which Dunn describes, compellingly, as "a new means of extending human consciousness that is captured from within, in contrast to the incidents and adventures seen from without" (Dunn 16).

Among models of picaresque literary development, Andrés, a boy who tends sheep for his master and who seems to have no parents or family in Cervantes' Don Quixote, represents the early picaro. His relationship with Juan Haldudo closely mirrors Lazarillo's relationship to the blind old man in Lazarillo de Tormes (the anonymous novel which is credited as the earliest picaresque novel): in the former case, Andrés is subjected to brutal beatings for thieving; in the latter case, especially in the famous episode of eating grapes, Lazarillo is beaten by his master to near-death for petty crimes. Andrés, like Lazarillo, is schooled by adversity at the hands of a cruel master. To interpret Andrés as a
prototype of the picaro seems logical, especially when he tells Don Quixote: "I would rather have something to help me get to Seville than all the revenges in the world" (Part I, Chapter XXXI: 243).

As an adult exemplar, the Andalusian innkeeper from Don Quixote presents another prototype for the picaro. The Andalusian is described as being crafty as a thief and full of tricks, and as having spent his younger days in the red light district of Seville, the Horse Fountain of Córdoba, and the Taverns of Toledo, among famous meeting places for delinquents, prostitutes, gamblers, and petty thieves (Part I, Chapter II: 32, 35). Cervantes provides the following catalog of the picaro's credentials:

[In the aforementioned places] he had proved the nimbleness of his feet and the lightness of his fingers, doing many wrongs, courting many widows, ruining a few maidens and swindling a few minors, and, in short, bringing himself under the notice of almost every tribunal and court of justice in Spain. (I: 35)

In contrast, Don Quixote's is no true picarism (see Introduction, n. 4). His brand is uniquely warped—a skewed perception that lends itself to guarding troughs (and causing near-death to mule drivers intent on watering their animals), attacking windmill giants, freeing galley slaves, and battering clerics. Whereas the picaro is a doer of wrongs, Quixote is seemingly the misguided righter of wrongs who fails, thus committing wrongs himself (as happens in Book I, Chapter IV, when he attempts to free Andrés). Perhaps the key embodiment of the picaro in Don Quixote, however, appears in the person of Ginés de Pasamonte—galley slave, author, and itinerant showman/puppeteer (cf. Part II, Chapter XXVI; Master Pedro, the puppeteer highlights their very tangible differences when he tells Quixote, "Can't you see they're not real Moors you're knocking down and killing and destroying, but only little pasteboard figures... how you're wrecking and ruining all my property!" [573]). Ginés manifests many of the picaro's features: he has written a first-person narrative about his life; he is a clever fugitive who lives by his wits; he demonstrates a protean ability to cop disguises and reinvent himself; and he revels in his ability to devise trickery and to run from the law as a mode of existence (cf. Lazarillo de Tormes, El buscón, and Guzmán de Alfarache).

No work represents the traditional picaresque in the twentieth century better than Chaplin's short film, "A Dog's Life" (c. 1920). This film begins with a
long shot of ramshackle tenements at the break of day. When the camera pans down, we get our first glimpse of the picaro—curled up on a small roll bag at the base of a fence post. The picaro’s first act in the film is to cover his rear with his tailcoat in a sleepy movement (the picaro is always looking out for his tail). He then proceeds to block up a draft from a hole in the fence with his hanky. As we know, the picaro is a bundle of contradictions, and Charlie’s stopping of a hole with a handkerchief shows the fact ironically. What does a tramp sleeping on the pavement have to do with a pristine handkerchief? Already we have learned from Chaplin’s visual narrative that the picaro is poor, without home, at the lowest rank of society, and in the picaresque tradition (the Spanish hidalgo), a combination of gentleman-Tramp.

Yet the picaresque may often be developed by means of two figures functioning together as two halves of a whole (especially in the picara’s life which features the picara’s close relationship to confidante/mentor: as in Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Robinson’s *Housekeeping*). Traditional picaresque treatments of this theme include Cervantes’ exemplary novel, *Colloquy of the Dogs*. This theme is given a new twist in Chaplin’s version when we are introduced to “Scraps,” the neighborhood dog. He, like Charlie, is hungry, and in earning his title of neighborhood dog has no home and no set relations. Scraps is certainly a new rendition of the picaro’s “dog’s life.” In the truest tradition of the picaresque, Charlie begins his day with an act of petty thievery, stealing a hot dog from a street vendor. As suggested, many theorists insist that the picaro is a rogue (Frohock identifies the picaro as being “a scamp and a scalawag who lives by his wits with scant respect for the law,” 44). Chaplin’s “A Dog’s Life” strongly asserts this element of roguery.

Despite some debate as to the picaro’s epistemological origin, evidenced by the anonymity of Lazarillo de Tormes, the picaro’s genesis is, clearly, as a servant or apprentice to a series of masters. The earliest picaresque novels in Golden Age Spain stressed the picaro’s social position. However, later novels from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain to the present have focused more exclusively on the picaro’s crimes and delinquency. Lazarillo is keen and noted for his hunger, his sharp wits, and his ability to learn; his progeny, more commonly, are noted for the pleasure they derive from dupes, disguises, and unscrupulous petty theft (Mann’s *Felix Krull* and Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, for example, basically catalog underhanded deeds).
Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) illustrates an uncharacteristic reversal in picaresque narrative when it depicts the traditional picaro role in the figure of the gamine (Paulette Goddard). This film persona represents well the early status of the modern American picara as being merely the embodiment of the picaro--orphaned and "determined not to go hungry," she is roguish and fearless, a brash child of the streets. Her concerns are primarily physical. In contrast, the Charlie character represents the more modern image of the picara in narrative. After suffering a nervous breakdown (having been wrongly arrested as a Communist leader), Charlie is relegated to the streets. The fates of the gamine and Tramp criss-cross until they are being carted off to prison together: the Tramp cheerfully accepts misfortune, showing the picara's somewhat finer sensibilities in the wrinkling of his nose and fanning of his hat to ward off the foul stench of the paddy wagon; meanwhile, the gamine, in the traditional picaro role, upon the prospect of imprisonment, shows in the gleam of her eye that she will have none of it. Though the central protagonist in picaresque fiction offers readers access into a disordered world, lending readers his or her eyes with which to see that world, this character is never "at home." The most contemporary picaresque fictions arise when the road turns inward.

Although in the picaresque narrative readers sense the pathos and misery of the picaro, the dominant impression is that of resilience and durability. The picaro will endure. Durgnat notes that the picaro both incorporates and transcends the wanderer, the jester, and the have-not; in other words, he embodies "picardia," which Durgnat defines as "the slyness of the trickster who lives on his wits, just short of delinquency if possibly he can" (Durgnat 76). In Chaplin's words, the figure on the screen "has a protective air of mock dignity—takes the most outrageous liberties with people—and wears adversity as though it was a bouquet" (Payne 22). To explain, Chaplin closely defines the traditional picaro's character as being simple, resilient and durable even in the face of illusory fulfillment:

He does not cut a dashing figure as he blunders through a drab and commonplace existence... His fortunes always drag a little behind his expectations and fulfillment lies always just out of reach. And as he shambles along with dwindling hopes he is smitten more than ever with a sense of his own unfitness and inadequacy. (qtd. Payne 21-2)
Traditionally, the picaro's heritage has been strongly tied to beggary and wandering. In keeping with this heritage, perhaps, the picaresque character seems to be out of sync with time itself, or even to represent some "lost epoch," a characteristic apparent in the everyday world of Chaplin's film persona, the Tramp.

Moreover, in the picaresque narrative, often there is a strong sense of the protagonist's victimization at the hands of a larger conspiracy. Most often, opposing the presumed happy endings of picaresque narratives such as Moll Flanders and Simplicissimus, the central picaresque character is guaranteed defeat though giving life a staunch try. On this point, Robert Alter writes that the world seems most often to have "joined hands in a monstrous conspiracy" (65) that works deviously against the picaro/picara. This quality reigns in the experience of Pynchon's Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49, particularly late in the novel when she must backtrack to reexamine the venues of her most recent experience and attempt to separate hoax from reality (Robinson's Ruthie extends this sense of conspiracy in Housekeeping to include the possibility of "conspiracy of the senses with the world," 131). Chaplin's "A Dog's Life" illustrates this phenomenon well in a brief episode where Charlie comes upon a sign that reads: "WANTED: STRONG YOUNG MEN FOR SEWER WORK. BRING RECOMMENDATIONS." Though the Employment Office has yet to open, in his enthusiasm the Tramp rushes within. When the office opens, every man who enters the office crowds out Charlie and receives employment. Charlie weaves and fights his way through the press of bodies, to no avail. No employment slip. All the Tramp can do is shrug his shoulders and continue upon his journey once again. The picaro's is so often a life of unceasing hardship that Sieber calls the figure, rescripting Joseph Campbell's term, "the 'anti-hero' with a 'thousand faces'" (Sieber 63).

In the picaresque narrative, there is a continual hint of irony, an insistence upon the disparity between the values of the world at large and how these are perceived by the picaro/picara whose eyes readers share. One of the best episodes to illustrate this point appears in the opening sequence of Chaplin's City Lights (1931). While the mayor of the city and the city-dwellers understand the code of conduct implied by the dedication of a civic monument, "Peace and Prosperity," the Tramp has no concept of this code. The disparity in understanding forces viewers to see the world from an unusual position, through the Tramp's eyes. He knows only that the statue's lap affords him a sheltered place in which to sleep; therefore, his conduct is entirely in keeping with his view of the world.
Originally, the picaresque character's roots are in limited consciousness due to the picaro's fundamental naivete and the picara's genesis as a pasteboard character meant to entertain. However, Cervantes' influence on the genre in addition to later developments in the modern novel, such as the stream-of-consciousness technique, have brought about a transformation in picaresque character. Today, the modern protagonist allows him- or herself to be carried beyond the bounds of the law, even should this terrain be in the interior world of imagination. In imagination there is no law, pressure of circumstance, or dread of opinion to keep her within bounds. Becoming outlaw/fugitive, the central protagonist in the picaresque genre, in both life and narrative, takes readers through various places and experiences that may at journey's end leave protagonist and readers much changed. The protagonist in picaresque narrative is always a fictional creation; that is, a picaresque character can only be fictional.

Female Quixotism (1801) is a text which illustrates the main differences in temperament between picara and picaro, deriving many of its features from Cervantes' Don Quixote rather than the picaresque novel, as Tabitha Tenney's title suggests. The novel's protagonist, Dorcasina Sheldon, is introduced to readers as a "fanciful girl, educated in retirement and totally unacquainted with the ways of the world" (Tenney 9). This female Quixote passes her early years dutifully "between her books, her attendance upon her father, and acts of piety and charity" (27). Notwithstanding the excesses of Dorcas' imagination, her only real life experience comes in the form of the novel's "hero" persona, a picaro type who has escaped from the hangman's noose by a stroke of good fortune. An Irish nobleman's son, this character fulfills the picaro's life (as detailed in Chapter IV):

During his life time, his father had kept him at school. The boy was likely, impudent, and a good scholar; always at the head of all mischief in every school he attended; and remarkable for having always a pack of cards in his pocket, and for attending every cock fight and horse race, within a dozen miles of him. Upon the death of his father, which happened when he was about twenty, being left in a destitute situation, he repaired to London, the general resort of people of all conditions, to try his luck at gambling, or any other kind of villainy which would procure him a subsistence...

... Upon his first arrival at this metropolis, he chance[d] to form an acquaintance with a gang of young highway robbers; who, finding him a lad of true spirit and mettle persuaded him to attach himself to their company. (30-1)
Soon after making the acquaintance of this company, however, the picaro is apprehended and committed to prison, prior to standing trial for robbery. Expected to swing for his villainy (hangman's noose), he escapes by an error of indictment, and vows to “forever renounce the business which brought him into it [thieving]” (31). This resolution leads him to Dorcasina Sheldon, the picara type modeled in the form of Quixote. Consider the following passage recounting their meeting:

Overjoyed at being once more at liberty, he continued firm in his determination of quitting an employment which had led him into such dangers, in spite of all the remonstrances and even threats of his companions. . . . Nonetheless he became by degrees so bold and unguarded in his practices, and was so frequently detected in unfair play, that no person would venture to employ him. He thought it now high time to decamp, and repair to some place, where, being unknown, he might pass unexpected. He hesitated for sometime (regarding) what part of the world to visit; but becoming accidentally acquainted with a master of a vessel from America, he engaged passage for Philadelphia. . . . An asylum to European convicts, fugitives from justice, and other worthless characters. (32-3)

Although America is identified as a haven for picaros, on Dorcasina’s part she finds O’Connor not at all the rogue; rather, conditioned by her reading, in part, she surmises that he is handsome, graceful, and “a great flatterer” (68). Though she finds him to be “insinuating” as well, in an off-color manner, she kindly identifies him as a “needy adventurer” (68), instead of a cognomen that strikes closer to the truth. In so doing, distinctively coloring her experiences by calling upon her reading of romances, Dorcasina is led “so widely astray from the path prescribed by reason and prudence” (124) that she can be called none other than picara. Tenney’s Dorcasina Sheldon cuts a most dangerous path (encumbered only by her reading) through the American wilderness. A more contemporary treatment of what I think of as the “sentimental picaresque” is Emma Tennant’s The Adventures of Robin. By Herself, published in 1986.

In terms of the early prototypes of picaresque character, scholars note that the picara may have actually preceded the picaro in literature. For example, Kaler argues persuasively that the picara’s identity preceded that of the picaro, which is logical interpretation if one accepts that Celestina precedes Lazarillo de Tormes by
more than a half-century. Authors, such as Whitbourn and Kaler, cite as one of the earliest sources, the character of Trotaconventos in *Libro de buen amor* (1330-43). But another, more commonly noted source, is Celestina in *La Celestina* (1499). Both of these highly dramatic works relegate the picara to a relatively flat, literal stereotype of the bawd (just as Chaplin's gamine represents a stereotype of the picaro in this century). Celestina is introduced by de Rojas, as follows:

By this title bawd is she generally known. If she pass along the streets and someone blurts out, 'See where's the old bawd,' she turns about, nods her head, and answers with a cheerful look. If she pass by where there be dogs, they bark out this name. The frogs that lie in ditches croak no other tune. Your shoemakers sing this song, your combmakers join with them. Your gardeners, your ploughmen, your reapers, your vinekeepers pass away the painfulness of their labors in making her the subject of their discourse, your gamesters never lose but they peal forth her praises—to be short, all things repeat no other name than this. Not one stone that strikes against another but presently noiseth out: 'Old whore!' (de Rojas 13)

Above all, Celestina controls men's and women's fates with consummate skill.

Tijeda's *Justina* started the genre, strictly speaking, in *La picara Justina* (1653), when she left her parent's inn with scant funds and sound instructions in how to handle herself in the world, and afterwards, she left a trail of lovers and booty. Mid-eighteenth century saw Grimmelshausen's creation of the warrior-gypsy Courage, made equally famous in this century due to the play by Bertoldt Brecht. Grimmelshausen's Courage sets several precedents for the picara's life in the classical literature. First, *Courage* sets a precedent for the picara's experience of a descending life (e.g., Moll Flanders, Tereza Batista, and Janie Crawford). Grimmelshausen's *Courage* marries the captain of foot soldiers; then she marries a lieutenant; then, in rapid succession, she marries a sutlerman, a musketeer, and finally, she takes a lover to accompany her gypsy queen (cf. Speier 31).

Second, differing from the male protagonist in picaresque fiction who proceeds from one adventure to the next without change in character (perhaps excepting Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*), Courage changes as a result of her experiences. But, rather than stressing the "positive" and the "good" as do contemporary American authors of the picaresque, who almost without exception fashion a life-affirming story of heroic dimensions. Grimmelshausen
gives the "negative" an upper hand. Specifically, Courage becomes mean-
spirited in response to senseless misfortune and the cruelty of men (Speier 32;
 cf. Hiller and Osborne 19). But this notion of "senseless misfortune" and
"cruelty of men" is hard to accept as a premise for Courage's change in
character because she nearly without fail proves the victor, and easily claims
the largest share of spoils. In keeping with this latter opinion, Hiller and
Osborne describe Courage as "the antithesis of the world of the Beyond" (20).

In twentieth-century American literature, in contrast, the picara's
experience of true love comes to represent life in the world Beyond: this love
signifies for the picara a kind of transcendence or knowledge of a higher deity.
In the late twentieth century, instead of becoming a wanton user of men (such
as Courage), Jong's Fanny, similar to other contemporary picaras including
Tereza Batista and Janie Crawford, experiences true friendship and love with the
picaro prototype (i.e., Lancelot, Janu, and Tea Cake, respectively). This is a key
transformation of the picara's life in literature.

Nonetheless, Courage manifests strains of modernity, as when she exhibits
extraordinary skill in exploiting men in the premarital agreement she drafts
prior to her marriage to the musketeer. Hints of this "modernity" appear
throughout the canonical narratives of the picara's life. A notable instance is
the catalog of suitors which ends Ubeda's La picara Justina. Thus, Justina and
Courage are models of the "new" woman; this becomes particularly apparent
when Courage makes her prospective husband quit his regimen to become her
servant and to pledge his submission in "all things"; she also demands that they
not marry in a Church until she finds herself with child, and, making a
mockery of their marriage, she insists that he give her the right to play the
field (to "have and hold authority in every way and form, not only over the
provisions but also over my own body. indeed even over my servitor himself, in
just the way a husband usually has jurisdiction over his wife," making him a
cuckold prior to the wedding night, see Hiller and Osborne, 108). Another
instance of her skill in running her personal affairs occurs even beyond the
pages of her story when Hopalong (ex-lover Simplicissimus's friend and
Courage's present lover) writes in Chapter 5 of his autobiographical Hopalong
that she secured him a model (The Adventures of Simplicissimus). paper, ink,
quill, and payment such that he "could not but be satisfied with her" (Hiller and
Osborne, Appendix B, 192).
Another key similarity between Courage and the modern American counterparts (Janie Crawford, Ruthie, Oedipa Maas, Fanny Hackabout-Jones) and picaras in the interim years (Moll Flanders) is, as Courage says, she could have arranged affairs differently and "steered a more honorable course" (156). For unspecified reasons, Courage cannot leave the war and live in peace and quiet, either as a householder in Prague or on the estate of her late husband, the captain of infantry. Uniquely, when Janie Crawford returns home from her travels she washes dust from her feet in an action which at least one critic has called an "opening-up" of the home to the influence of the road. This pattern of blurring distinctions between internal and external spaces occurs more explicitly, however, in Robinson's *Housekeeping*, with the literal opening-up of the domestic realm to the natural influx of flood, among other influences which over-run common boundaries (cf. 69-75).

Grimmelshausen aptly describes Courage as being "more mobilis than nobilis" (qtd. Hiller and Osborne 2). In this respect, also, she resembles contemporary female protagonists such as Janie Crawford and Tereza Batista. Their lives are similar in that before their husbands (including common law, live-in companions) are "hardly cold in the grave," each has numerous suitors (Courage asserts, "[I] could not drive off the importunate bumblebees that were buzzing around me as around a fat honeypot without a lid," 61) and each woman must ask her "heart's dearest" to regard her as an equal (Courage sets a precedent by asking her lover to be "as . . . [his] mate and not his doormat," 63). Janie represents the most obvious case in point when she delivers her "Equal Rights" speech to Tea Cake upon his return from an all-night revelry.

Commonly, the picara experiences fellowship with a "Bohemian mother," "nurse," or a fellow traveling companion, sometimes teacher and guide (cf. Courage's words, 156). But the modern American authors of the picaresque diverge from tradition in this respect. After Janie's maternal grandmother sends her out into the world with the best intentions, her female mentors number zero. In effect, early in life she is entirely on her own (a point which stands up only if one discounts Pheoby's significant role in framing the events of the novel). Meanwhile, Oedipa Maas experiences only male mentors. Among contemporary novelists drafting a picaresque narrative who are discussed within this study, only Marilynne Robinson and Erica Jong provide their protagonists with female guidance and companionship (Robinson's picara (Sylvie) is notably unobtrusive; Jong's usage of the genre, at least in this
To make another distinction, whereas Janie Crawford uses her voice sparingly throughout her life, similar to Robinson's Ruthie and Pynchon's Oedipa Maas, Courage to the contrary (in keeping with her development in the picaro's mold) speaks effortlessly, especially when on trial for her roguish tricks; for example, she demonstrates the ability to "talk like a lawyer," asserting, "my arguments and protestations were so sharp and sly that even the experts were shocked" (166). She is also well-versed in "thieve's language" (178; the principal study of Pynchon's Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49). Hopalong avows, "Since God created the world the sun has never shone on a more wanton bestia" (187). Courage seems herself to hold this opinion:

> With these people [the gypsies] I have since visited every corner of Europae several times and invented, devised, and carried out very many rascally and thievish tricks, so that one would need a whole ream of paper if one wished to tell all of them. Indeed, I do not think a ream would be enough; and just for this reason nothing has astonished me more in my whole life than that they suffer us in any country, since we desire neither to be of use nor to serve either God or man, but nourish ourselves by lying, cheating, and stealing... (181-82)

Above all, Courage represents a stereotype, similar to that of Justina (the entertainer), Celestina (the bawd), and Chaplin's gamine (the picaro), rather than embodying some flesh-and-blood prototype of a woman—she focuses more on dominating men than on any other criteria in life. In this same vein, consider April Bernard's Pirate Jenny (W. W. Norton, 1990)—a case in point to prove that stereotypes of the picara are still being authored in contemporary American fiction.

As modern American picara, Bernard's Jenny is crafted, undeniably, in Courage's mold. Jenny is a pernicious, cross-dressing protagonist with multiple identities—baker of Tollhouse cookies, sometimes student of economics and introductory business administration—who shows a penchant for acting and storytelling, especially regarding false claims about family roots, native origins, and potential offspring (akin to the classical picaras, Justina and Courage). As Bernard's Pirate Jenny unveils its tortuous course of events, Jenny ("fierce" and "astonishing in... [her] insincerity," 15; "everyone was going to do exactly what she expected," 39) punches her own mother, hard, in
the sternum (forcing her to fall partially down a flight of stairs) and filches everything from the clothing, passport, and family jewels to the traveler’s checks and even the identity of her new husband. Tom Claverack (the picaro)—after she has doped him with a full package of sleeping pills and half a bottle of Valium (236-37), before disembarking into “the bosom of her homeland” (the world at large; 240). Her endearing response to men may be imagined with the background accompaniment of the “magical sound of sleigh bells” (as in the novel): “‘Got ’im,’ she said out loud. ‘Bagged ’im, got ’im, nabbed ’im, tracked ’im down and shot him’” (154). Jenny seems to be the physical embodiment of Courage’s notion that “every woman should be ready for pilfering” (Hiller and Osborne 178).

Such modern picaras as Pirate Jenny take their lead from Courage, about whom Speier writes: “If she confesses anything it is her godlessness. She fears God as little as men. She loves life and is not afraid of death” (Speier 43). Uncharacteristically, Grimmelshausen’s Courage remains untroubled by the life she has led; most picaras, such as Moll Flanders, avow conversion to a life of good acts at narrative’s end. Courage’s lover speaks of the genesis for the writing of her Adventures (he calls the book various names including “Spite-Simplex” or “story of her wanton life”), which he drafts at her command along the highways and wilds of the Black Forest (cf. Hiller and Osborne, 193).®

By contrast, twentieth-century writers have taken this flat, caricature (with few exceptions, such as Bernard’s Pirate Jenny) and remade her into a more memorable and remarkable form—in the image, for example, of Brecht’s Anna Fierling (Mother Courage and Her Children) rather than Grimmelshausen’s spiteful Courage:

Anna Fierling is called Mother Courage because she meets all adversity and misfortune with ever new hope and resolution to make a miserable profit in her trade. She stands for all the downtrodden who believe that they have nothing but their own courage to lose. (Speier 38)

Often, this stand before God runs counter to the view espoused by the novelist whose hand actually governs the narrative. For example, in a preface to The Enchanted Bird’s-nest (1675), Grimmelshausen likened the related novel to a “sugar-coated pill” meant “to teach the reader that he is being watched by God and should not believe that his sins will go unpunished”; this same God,
accordingly, witnesses all human events and "metes out rewards and punishments justly" (73-4). Zora Neale Hurston achieves this same effect in the opening image to her novel, as well as the title itself, which together ensure that readers remain transfixed by a single idea, namely, "Their Eyes Were Watching God."

One of the common means to depict this theme of a higher deity at work in human affairs is to liken life to a puppet show "which only the halberdier understands" and, like God, this halberdier (omniscient and omnipotent) "pulls the strings" (cf. Speier 55). In at least one possible interpretation, Thomas Pynchon brings this theme new life in the twentieth century when Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49 becomes subject to Pierce Inveracity (the "halberdier" or "puppet-master"), the unfolding plot in San Narciso (his "machiinations"), and the auctioneer's crying at the end of the novel (the final "show").

In twentieth-century American literature, a concern for "unmasking others" surfaces in the form of protagonists' attempts "to recognize in ordinary conversation the secrets hidden in the hearts of other people" (51). This action manifests itself in a variety of ways, from Oedipa Maas' reading of the scribbling on bathroom walls to the reader's deciphering of Tereza Batista's true life as rendered in myriad, mellifluous voices. In the classical literature, Grimmelshausen's Simplicius (The Adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus) is led by the spirits to a netherworld where he may view the follies of human life; Lesage's young protagonist is raised high above the rooftops by a Devil (The Devil on Two Sticks) to witness the affairs of citizens of his town after the rooftops are lifted to reveal a panoramic view (the hidden side of human affairs—doctor, lawyer, clerk, et cetera); but perhaps Quevedo takes the prize for heavy-handed treatments of this theme when he leads his protagonist down a path by the "Undeceiver-General" on the "Hypocrite's Walk" (the fifth Vision, cf. 51). In twentieth-century literature, no obvious lifting of the rooftops or passage to the netherworld occurs. Instead, protagonists sometimes leave the telling of their stories to the "people of the street," who often view such affairs from the best vantage point (e.g., Amado's Tereza Batista). Invisible to the higher echelons of society, these folks move unnoticed (maid, servant, taxi driver) observing the big "show" in which they are only bit players, and in their rough voices sans diploma tell all.

Noting the picara's autonomous, archetypal pattern of individualism, Kaler coins the term "picarisma" (Kaler 5). She, meanwhile, likens the protagonist...
in picaresque narrative to both mystic and murderer; also, this character exemplifies the continual tension between the community and the alienated person. In some cases, such as Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, this tension manifests itself in a literal trial, nearly counterposing the picara (rogue) and the community. In Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, the “case” is much more implicit—literal, more in the modern sense of literary production—an implied readership who judges the protagonist/author on the shape and quality of her words, as well as the nature of story itself.

Often, the picara becomes subject to the judgment of gossipers’ tongues (Hurston’s Janie Crawford, Amado’s Tereza Batista) or must confront the judge/arbitrator (Janie’s trial, Oedipa’s puppet-master) directly in a final showdown. Historically, the protagonist in picaresque fiction has been known as a rogue (thief, bawd). Most roguery in picaresque narratives takes the form of dupes and petty crimes. Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* is an exemplar. For the picara, this roguery includes making false claims of paternity, the difficult lesson Grimmelshausen’s *Courage* teaches Simplicissimus. One of the most notable developments in modern portraits of the picara, however, is her ingenuousness as she pursues a path toward freedom, self-knowledge, and autonomy.

As a result, one of the key debates in picaresque studies concerns how, exactly, to interpret the nature of the picaro/picara. As mentioned previously, Kaler likens the character to both mystic and murderer. This type of remark opens a Pandora’s Box among contemporary theorists. Consider the case of R. W. B. Lewis’s *The Picaresque-Saint* (1959). Many scholars, including W. M. Frohock, contend that Lewis’s individual chapters on Camus, Silone, Faulkner, Graham Greene, and André Malraux, “make a peculiarly disconcerting list” and, furthermore, that the key term “picaresque-saint” is antithetical to the common denominator in studies of the picaresque (the “rogue”; cf. Frohock 43). Paradoxically, he argues, the characteristics rendering such works eligible candidates for “sainthood,” render them ineligible for “inclusion in a list of authentic picaros” (44).

But clearly there is partial justification for Lewis’s choice of terminology, as there is justification for Kaler’s. Grimmelshausen’s Simplicissimus is both Robin Hood and hermit, to cite one notable picaresque character. One of the most respected critical overviews in picaresque studies is Robert Alter’s *The Rogue’s Progress*. Like Chandler, Alter accepts roguery as a fundamental characteristic of picaresque experience. Yet Alter’s book has a chapter entitled
"The Incorruptibility of the Picaresque Hero" (11-35). Alter's title at least implicitly suggests an element of goodness (saintly or not). Notably, Alter introduces his chapter by saying that the picaro unexpectedly becomes a "kind of ne'er do well Christ" (12). In choosing the words "ne'er do well Christ," Alter seems to justify partly that element of the picaro/picara's character that Kaler has linked to the mystic—metaphysical awareness, if not overt religiosity or saintliness.

To Lewis's credit, among contemporary scholars, he both senses the picaro's "apprenticeship" or even "failed" state and responds to that sense of life's rendering us in modern times "outsiders" or "strangers in an alien world" (Lewis 31-3). Lewis's purpose in coining the term "picaresque-saint" was to create a paradigm successful in conveying the essence of "modern man with both his suffering and his hope, both his crimes and his grandeur, both his saintly aspiration and his roguish tendencies..." (108). He describes a figure who "tries to hold in balance... by the very contradictions of his character, both the observed truths of contemporary experience and the vital aspiration to transcend them" (31). Generally speaking, the picaro/picara is a contradictory character capable of both roguish tendencies and near-saintly aspirations.

In many narratives of the picara's life this element of roguery becomes much more muted, unless one counts prostitution and marriage plots. Also, in the picara's narrative the pairing is much less likely to be a thieving duo than it is to be picara and matronly guardian/teacher who not only instructs her young charge in the ways of picaresque life but acts as confidante and protector (Courage, Moll Flanders, Housekeeping, and Fanny Hackabout-Jones).

Moreover, "criminality" manifests itself in unusual ways in contemporary American fiction. For example, the modern American picara's subjective view of the world means that there is no longer any "public" domain as distinct from the "private" self. Thus, in an episode late in Robinson's Housekeeping, Sylvie (the picara who keeps all her worldly possessions in a cardboard box) "uses" a rowboat and, meanwhile, fails to understand the owner's protestations (145). As Sylvie interprets worldly affairs, because nobody has claimed use of the rowboat in the present, it is hers to take: She has internalized the world order; the world and the self are one. Having "domesticated" the public world, Sylvie's perception is governed by an "as needs" basis of use founded not on the concept of ownership but on the concept of utility (cf. 145-47).
Whereas the picaro's wanderer status is represented best by the open road and a series of masters, the picara and her progeny are represented best by the self, autonomy, and distinct visions of "housekeeping." Strikingly, Hilary F. Stevens seems to embody a picara who is independent of both "masters" and society. Although the prototype of picaresque experience had typically been a flat caricature or stereotype such as Celestina and Courage—or, in this century, Crane's Maggie ("Maggie: A Girl of the Streets") and Dreiser's Sister Carrie (Sister Carrie)—the recent internal movement of the picaresque endows the narrative with a richness and fecundity not known to the genre prior to the twentieth century. One outstanding example is Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.

Traditionally, the situations (people met, places passed through, experiences) were developed in close, even microscopic detail, but the picaresque character remained a blank. This characteristic seems to be especially true of narratives written by male authors who choose female protagonists. For example, the featured player in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is not so much Oedipa Maas as San Narciso. Likewise, in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, readers learn more, perhaps, about society than about the picara (especially true when treating the activities of an inanimate corpse). Yet in other novels gender distinctions figure not at all. Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy* is full of descriptions of place, and catalogs of things more notably, but its personal characterization is scant.

As the clearest exemplar of the ideological reorientation of the picaresque in contemporary times, May Sarton characterizes the picara as creating artist when she explicates her novel, *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*. Mrs. Stevens has rarely left her home to journey through the world. Nonetheless, Peter Selverson (interviewer from *The Review*, a literary magazine) says to his colleague, "She's been a wanderer, an oddity" (76). This notion of exploration within the bounds of four walls, home, is apparent in Mrs. Stevens's response to the female interviewer, Jenny Hare, who asks her a question about "woman's work": Mrs. Stevens's replies, "Let's explore, shall we?" (171-72). The fullest possible explanation, follows:

'Sometimes I imagine life itself as merely a long preparation and waiting, a long darkness of growth toward these adventures of the spirit, a picaresque novel, so to speak, in which the episodes are all inward.' (174)
Most of her adventures have concerned her relation to books, her own work, critics, and most importantly, forays within herself. Even the delivery of the daily mail makes "reverberations" (60) in the progress of the hours in that life. Then, too, there is a bit of her father perhaps in Hilary Stevens; he had been a man easy and "at home in the saddle" but who remained "so baffled by the human situation" (69). F. Hilary Stevens is a "person in continuous dialogue with herself" (87)—journeying to locate the crucial, unsolved, ghostly elements of life both to confront them and to discover their hidden meanings (127). In this respect, the picara, as artist, strives for a type of "transparency" (cf. 152). In a sense, invisibility equates to life itself. Mrs. Stevens is picara-artist.

Whereas the traditional narrative of the picaresque life represented a bare bones portrait of life itself, this modern picara suggests that the work of art comes from a writer's particular capacity to grow and to change—to become, in modern times, the "she who is not" (rescripting Dunn's synopsis of the picaro). Hilary Stevens describes her fight to be a woman, "It was a fight for being, my own being," and the interviewers become witnesses to this struggle, which is intense and continuous (160-61). This intensity nearly springs from the pages of her memoir, when she tells Ms. Hare, "There's no standing still. Life at best is terrifying, don't you agree? One either keeps on growing and changing (and that is painful) or one begins to fossilize, take your choice!" (178). To make an important distinction, whereas the picaro seldom stops "borrowing other people's houses, other people's lives," the picara, via her narrative, finds being and resolution on more private ground—as Hilary Stevens says, "[I] made peace with myself in a house of my own creation" (186).

For one—perhaps a contemporary American picara—who possesses the ability to "hear the mermaids singing" (30), poetry has a way of teaching "what one needs to know" (31). Hilary Stevens agrees to the interviewers' visit because she sees it as a challenge; for example, she hopes secretly that "she might be forced to confront certain things in her own life and in her work that seemed unresolved..." (16). In speaking about her relationship to poetry-writing to Mar, a young boy in the novel, she tells him:

'It's one way of meeting the enemy.'
'What enemy?'
'One's self, of course.' (23)
As an extension, for someone the likes of Mrs. Stevens, poetry can take one beyond the realm of "being" into the realm of "making" (35). In another sense, too, the picara differs importantly from her male counterpart in fiction: the picaro's travels bring disunion and disharmony, whereas the picara throughout her travels attempts to foster a finite integration, bringing to others the sound of the mermaids singing, perhaps. And the focus of the picara's effort is not so much the outer world as the inner world. This interior venturing is a new development in the picaresque literature, notable particularly in the late twentieth century.

Ultimately, the primary subject becomes explicating this transformation, during which the central character in twentieth-century picaresque narrative becomes creating artist. For the modern American picara this means assessing both the experiences leading to this transformation and the necessities of the picaresque mode of life. Once the protagonist in picaresque fiction is no longer a marginal adventurer—once Simplicissimus or Moll Flanders takes a pen in hand to write memoirs or Lazaro writes his defense to the unnamed gentleman that becomes Lazarillo de Tormes; once Janie Crawford draws her horizon in upon herself and ceases her travels to share her story with Pheoby, a confidante who passes it on to us, readers—then these characters seem to abdicate picaro or picara status, at least superficially. If any claim may be made to enduring picaresque status, it lies in the form of the stories themselves. These narratives not only record former life experiences (in the tradition, also, of Cervantes' Ginés de Pasamonte) but also allow for a reliving of those experiences in the act of writing itself.
Notes

1 Ulrich Wicks, for example writes that there has been in the twentieth century a universal "return to picaresque fiction as expressive of a human condition which is not unlike the period which developed the picaresque in Spain" (Wicks 38-9). Nearly three decades ago, Stuart Miller concluded his study of the picaresque (The Picaresque Novel) by writing that for whatever reason, the picaresque novel "seems to disappear between 1750 and 1900, but undergoes a revival in the twentieth century" (133). In 1967, he wrote that the term picaresque had achieved such currency in literary discussions that one could not "pick up a literary magazine without reading about someone's purportedly 'picaresque' novel" (133). The same is true today, because to seek out and analyze all printed material called "picaresque" would be for someone a full-time job. According to Wicks, the task of literary scholarship now seems to "require an awareness of a picaresque tradition whose transformations and functional influence on contemporary fiction must be carefully and less historically considered" (Wicks 40). This study of the picaresque sets but one example of the type of analyses now called for in surveying our contemporary picaresque literature. Most criticism that emerged through the 1970s is listed for easy reference in Wicks's overview of literary scholarship. A comprehensive bibliography of the picaresque scholarship into the 1990s appears at the end of this study.

2 Claudio Guillén, in "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," cites the publication of contemporary novels of "more or less roguish character" (71) as proof of the continued creation of the picaresque. Paul Julian Smith cites the abundance and variety of "secondary" literature devoted to study of the picaresque as evidence of the "continued importance of the genre to a modern audience," as well as evidence that picaresque narrative "presents contradictions or problems which remain unsolved and which may, indeed, prove to be unsolvable" (Smith 88).

3 For example, Catherine E. Bourque and Ronald J. Quirk argue in their essay, "Andrés in Don Quixote: A Cervantine Picaro" (1985), that Andrés is the "true Cervantine picaro" (cf. 20-2).

4 See Bourque and Quirk, who suggest, "In many of Cervantes' works Seville is the haven of picaros. There he places the master rogue Monipodio and the other picaros of Rincone y Cortadillo, as well as the picaresque settings in El celoso extremeño and El refían dichoso" (22).

5 Because of his valueless position in society, the wanderer gravitated toward lower levels of employment, usually servitude, as more fitting to his lack of a trade. The unskilled wanderer was "relegated to an arcane representative of a lost epoch since he could neither toil nor spin. As a rootless person, unsupported by family name or wealth, he was forced to search for his livelihood wherever he could,"
writes Kaler (4). Kaler also cites a shift in emphasis after the end of feudalism and the rise of the Church, during which land (property ownership equating to financial security) was replaced with capital as the touchstone of wealth. Hidalgos peopled the countryside in sixteenth-century Spain; landed gentry had perhaps land and title but no capital. Also, the picaro may derive from the mendicant wandering weavers called "beghards" or "bigardos" who owned nothing; these mendicants were quasi-religious (sects were called by "Pyghard") and were periodically charged with heresy (Kaler 4).

Strikingly, Hilary F. Stevens (Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing) seems to embody a picara who is independent of both "masters" and society. In this regard, Mrs. Stevens likens the "creative person" to the "leper," and in this passage returns the picaresque narrative unknowingly to its very origins (169; cf. Lazarillo de Tormes). In describing the "Literary Origins of the Picaro and the Picara," pp. 12-41, Kaler explains the specific etiology: "Coming from the Greek 'Eleazal meaning 'God helps,' the name Lazarillo or little Lazarus in Spanish can be traced back to a 1528 tale of the Andaluzian picara Lozana, a tale which precedes Lazarillo by a quarter of a century. The name Lazarus first refers to two men in Scriptures: the first is the brother of Mary and Martha, the friend that Christ raised from the dead; the second Lazarus appears in Christ's parable of the poor beggar at the gates of the rich Dives. Both men named Lazarus exhibit some state of decay: because of his four days in the tomb, Christ's friend's winding cloths resemble the scales of leprous skin while Lazarus of Dives is a beggar with open wounds which dogs lick. Thus, pious tradition gives the title of 'Lazar' to any poor or undernourished person likely to have scrofulous skin disease which resembles the lesions and scars of leprosy." (13) By contrast, Lazarillo de Termes is "an open-ended, episodic, satiric, pseudo-autobiographical journey of a self-deceiving trickster who values survival over honor" (14). Nonetheless, "Iconography [e.g., various renderings from the catacomb artisans to Van Gogh's rendition of Rembrandt's Lazarus]... merges Lazarus the leper at the rich man's gates and Lazarus of Bethany into one imaginary St. Lazarus, the sufferer who is a human equivalent of the suffering Christ" and together with suffering beggar saints such as St. Roch and St. Peregrine, as "pilgrims and wanderers, their legends became one basis for the picaro's tales in literature and iconography" (14). Again, to return to Alter's "ne'er do well Christ" and the picaro's tangible ties to the unroguish saint, this etymology strongly favors such an interpretation, contrary to much scholarly opinion, which focuses almost exclusively on the picaro's roguish behavior. In describing the "creative person" as a "leper" the fictional Mrs. Stevens adds another layer to the modern interpretation of both the picara, and her kin, the picaro's nature.

Erica Jong's Isadora Wing speaks of herself uniquely as "a fictional character invented by me" (cf. Butler 325) and, every now and then, a real-life individual does seem to emerge from a picaresque novel. Such is the case with Lars Eighner, whom The New York Times Book Review describes as a "full-time down-and-out" who "finds a second career as a serious writer" (3; see Travels with Lizbeth [St. Martin's Press, 1993]). The cover story bears a picture of a highway underpass beneath which are standing a large man and a mongrel dog, and the title, "The View From a Literary Dumpster." This title fits a genre more suited to underlings than to high society.
But this is where most points of similarity end. Significantly, Courage wishes "not to be a woman," whereas the modern picaras strive to be recognized as such. Meanwhile, her compatriots describe Courage as "the devil himself"—no Jacobean heroine can hold a candle to Courage, who is lustful, envious, greedy, and vindictive, with a vengeance that compels her to pillage the ranks of men:

In battle she is more valiant than her male companions, on marauding expeditions more daring, as a thief more resourceful and cunning. In most of her enterprises she is mistress, rather than helper; often she directs men to assist her. Her vitality is inexhaustible. When at the end of her career she has reached the status of an outcaste, she remains a queen, if only of the gypsies, aged, but still beautiful in appearance, her spirit unbroken and her skill unrivaled. (Speier 32)

Overall, this breed of picara including Courage and Pirate Jenny is wild, unsatiated, and has little or no conscience (cf. Speier 36). A caricature and mockery of social conventions and womanhood, she stands as a challenge to conventions and morality, though moving in a socially undistinguished milieu. Characteristically, she makes a mockery of conventional marriage and describes husbands and lovers in denigrating terms (Courage refers to husbands as "trainable," cf. Hiller and Osborne 173). Further, as Courage explains, she acts not out of need or want but "mostly because I wished to avenge myself on my adversaries" (139-41). In contrast, modern picaras, excepting Bernard's Pirate Jenny, resemble Hurston’s Janie as she stands in the background beyond the central action of Hurston’s narrative or framed in a window in semidarkness. Most of Robinson’s Housekeeping keeps the central protagonist, Ruthie, in similar repose until she “breaks out” by traversing the rails and, eventually, by drafting the narrative that becomes her story.

On this point, Courage’s lover speaks of the genesis for the writing of her Adventures:

It was her [the highways and byways in the wilds of the Black Forest], noble Sir, that this godless Courage began to dictate to me her Spite-Simplex, as she called it, or better, the story of her wanton life; she did not talk to me in gypsy dialect, but instead in a manner which showed her good intellect and also made it clear that she had lived with gentlefolk and through the wondrous vagaries of fortune had seen the world far and wide, learning and experiencing much. (Courage, trans. Robert L. Hiller and John C. Osborne, 193)

Kaler extends Monteser’s claim that the term “picarismo” existed before the word or archetype of “picaro,” and his consequent use of the term to describe all picaresque literature. Operating from this premise, she strives to explicate the traits, characteristics, and general literary origins of the picara before
discussing specific picaresque traits which include hunger, avarice, criminality, sexuality and children, marriage and prostitution, wandering and fighting, disguise and deception, isolation, and inferiority.

10 This roguery, excepting few cases (e.g., Gide's LaFCadio's Adventures and Cela's The Family of Pascual Duarte), falls short of truly heinous crimes; for example, Hurston's Janie Crawford murders her lover in an act of self-defense.

11 In Lazarillo de Tormes this awareness manifests itself several times in Lazarillo's being entombed alive. The same occurs, most graphically, in Poe's Adventures of E. Gordon Pym. This feature of the picaresque narrative stands as further evidence of Lewis's justification in identifying a "picaresque-saint." In Fanny Hackabout-Jones, Erica Jong identifies Lancelot, leader of highwaymen and robbers, as a Christ figure when he undergoes a near-death experience, after which he finds, as he says, "twelve o' me Fellows following, screamin' o' the Resurrection an' the Messiah..." (132). Death stands close by in picaresque narrative, as many a picara learns first-hand—often in physical hardship and the loss of a guardian, lover, or child. In this regard, Fanny is dubbed at one point in the novel, "Moll Hackabout," the "woman who always suffers for the Sins of all Mankind" (cf. 225).

12 Again, return to the example of Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus (a "chestnut" in the picaresque canon). Grimmelshausen presents a picaro who leads a private, hermetical existence, partakes in extreme flights of imagination, and even shares an idyllic existence (keeping a record of days on palm fronds) when shipwrecked with another man, a carpenter, on an island. This same Simplicissimus also acts as a Robin Hood—master of disguise and thieving, and outlaw of great renown. Klaus Poenicke's "Fortune's Wheel and Revolution: On the Picaresque View of History" opens by describing the evocative opening scene from Beckett's Waiting for Godot (cf. 120-21). Vladimir's striking metaphysical awareness strongly parallels that of the mystic. Marilynne Robinson's Ruthie is no less striking for her transcendent, metaphysical travels in mind in Housekeeping.
CHAPTER III
Marginality, Voice, and the Wayfarer’s Heart
in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God

[For families will not be broken. Curse and expel them, send their children wandering, drown them in floods and fires, and old women will make songs out of all these sorrows and sit in the porches and sing them on mild evenings. (Housekeeping, 194)

'It’s uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo’ papa and yo’ mama and nobody else can’t tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves.' (Their Eyes Were Watching God, 285)

Unlike any other literary form, the picaresque highlights the disparity between "official" discourse and the discourses and stories that arise from subcultures. From these ranks of the subculture, within the picaresque narrative, arise shocking allegations, titillating accounts, and heart-stilling recognitions. For the most part, the works cited in this study all arise from the subculture, and thus represent minor voices. Edward H. Friedman’s The Antiheroine’s Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque (1987) opens with the words, “Narrative thrives on the fact that all voices are not equal” (vii). Alice Walker speaks of the need people have to share and tell stories, particularly women, who must give voice to their lives to due to their extreme risk of invisibility within society.

Clearly, an early precedent for Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God is set by the African-American slave narrators who established through their actions a heroic model and tradition based on “necessity” (cf. Sherley Anne Williams 59). Raymond Hedin (“The American Slave Narrative: The Justification of the Picaro”) argues cogently that taking to the road came to
signify in such narratives "the romantic fulfillment of the hero's quest with
social, moral, and ideal justification" (641-42).

Although readers may look to Hurston's African-American heritage in
order to justify her protagonist's silence, this understanding may be deepened
profoundly when readers examine Their Eyes Were Watching God in light of the
picaresque tradition. In doing so, the novel's so-called problem areas
(characterization, voice, and episodic structure) no longer remain unresolved
or confusing issues in the text but exemplify the rich literary heritage of the
picaresque novel. Further, a radical shift in allegiance occurs in the twentieth
century on the part of the authorial figure whose aids the protagonist, rather
than ridicules, via the narrator's words. In fact, this authorial figure goes far
beyond simple support to convert her life into "legend," and typically, in the
female renderings of the genre, into "the stuff of romance" (cf. Friedman xv).
This characteristic of narratives of the picara's life partly justifies the most
critically maligned features of Hurston's narrative (including the Tea Cake
interlude from their love affair and travels) and, particularly, the flood in the
Everglades section of the novel.

With the understanding that Jorge Amado's Tereza Batista, Home from the
Wars (Brazil, 1972; English translation, 1975) also provides as a contemporary
fiction of the picara's life, the study's focus becomes Janie Crawford's struggle
for autonomy and self-assertion, and voice, as she becomes modern American
picara. One of the key facets of Janie's experience is her "wanderer's heart,"
which leads her to accept marginality and to journey anew toward an
inexhaustible and timeless far horizon. Janie's life comprises three indistinct
stages: searching for self-identity, developing a distinctive voice, and
authoring her life's story in the novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Interpreting Their Eyes Were Watching God, thus, within the picaresque
literary tradition, solves the problem of voice (the novel's critics focus on how
Janie's silence prevails in a narrative that should be her own) and also shows
how the creation of the text "becomes synonymous with the creation of a life"
(Friedman xii). As a modern American picara, Janie travels beyond conformity
to "sing" the praises of nonconformity, and simultaneously finds a release from
the silence which seems to envelop her throughout the novel. This song of the
picara's life culminates in the eloquence that comprises Janie's life story in
narrative form.
As literary scholarship enters the mid-1990s, it remains striking how little scholars have chosen as literary subject the picaro's female counterpart, the picara. Generally speaking, scholars accept Lopez de Túbeda's La picara Justina (1605) as the first narrative of the picara's life. The full title of Túbeda's novel is The Entertaining Life of the Rogue Justina: Túbeda's novel depicts the life of the female rogue as comprising a series of marriage plots, tracing Justina's departure from her parents' inn and her premarital adventures before her engagement to Guzmán, the reigning picaro in seventeenth-century Spain. Túbeda's novel is foremost an entertainment piece.

Ulrich Wicks (see Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide) points to the titillating "supermarket-tabloid" style of Defoe's Moll Flanders, and this quality is shared by many picaresque novels of female experience. The focal point of many narratives of the picara's life can be expressed minimally as "Who's kissing whom?" The axis of such narratives is the bed chamber, and no less focally, the prurient interests of readers who hunger to learn all possible information about the acts and deeds (or lack of deeds) taking place therein. Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God fulfills this same general pattern as it records Janie's relationships with men up until her meeting and parting from Tea Cake, whose name aptly signals his picaro status.

Whereas the picaro usually suffers from direct verbal and physical assaults, the picara's early education and violation is most often of a sexual nature. The picara, like her male counterpart, is orphaned and prematurely thrust out into the world in the typical picaresque plot. However, the picara does not venture off with a master, per se, as would the picaro (cf. Lazarillo de Tormes). Awakenings in the picara's experience are almost always linked to her body. In this respect, many of the stories that comprise Janie's narrative relate to awakenings in her conscious life about sexuality and marriage. When this first awakening of sexuality occurs in the picara's life, she usually is tossed out prematurely into the world. Nanny, having witnessed Johnny Taylor's kissing Janie, recreates Janie's world, with the words: "Janie, youse uh 'oman. now..." (Their Eyes Were Watching God, 26; hereafter TEWG). Nanny reiterates, "Ah wants to see you married right away" (26, 27). Janie embodies the picara's experience, thereafter, as she moves in Hurston's narrative through a series of relationships with men (Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake).
If the first hint of an emergent sexuality or loss of virginity signals the picara’s premature entry into the world, Hurston depicts Janie’s life as a series of progresses along “de big road” or, alternately, as still moments of leaning over an obstructing gate to gaze up and down that road. Symbolically, the white gate signifies the first coming of sexuality and maturity for Janie. This occurs early in the novel when she leans just beyond it to be kissed by Johnny Taylor, who is just a boy. That kiss (witnessed by Nanny) and the central image of the blossoming pear tree in her grandmother’s yard, together signify a maturing consciousness in Janie’s life (cf. 23-24). She is sixteen years old, and as a young girl on the cusp of life, full of impatience and longing, she views as much of the world as possible from behind that white gate. Notably, just as the low status of the speaker in picaresque narrative increases the distance between desire and fulfillment, this gate enforces Janie’s early circumscribed life; she seems to have been destined to be born and to be raised on “premises” without partaking in either ownership or in the adventures promised by the expansive road. The gate heightens the irony of her position as a bastard child, particularly of domesticity and its illusions.

Although Janie spends many of her years living the “close life” (a term denoting circumscribed behavior and hidden feelings hemmed in by social codes and culture; Waller 29), she discovers in the course of her travels that true love becomes a refuge in a world that seems to be God-abandoned. The picara is driven by an inner longing for fulfillment as compelling as the picaro’s physical necessity and hunger. The picara’s promise often arises from an unlikely source: with the presence of Tea Cake (the picaro, train jumper and roustabout) on her horizon, Janie finds this fulfillment as an equal (social customs inhibit her success but cannot deny her potential). Thus, the road ultimately comes to signify a movement toward “home,” a place that supplants the wayfarer’s marginal life of travel. Ideally, this will be a place where both love and the heart reside, comprising for the picara “the whole world.”

If the picara’s quest for romantic fulfillment takes the form of a series of marriage contracts (dating from Ubeda’s La picara justina) and awakenings are linked to her body (sexual violation commonly provides the impetus for the picara to be thrust prematurely into the world), it is the picara’s heart that provides a compass for her travels upon the road. Janie’s “wayfarer’s heart” guides her away from her grandmother’s vision of married life as a “stand on
high ground" (the pedestal), also away from Joe Starks's vision (the doll baby), and finally, to and beyond Tea Cake's picaro tutelage on love and life. What happens when the "wayfarer" picara is no longer marginal and journeying physically, but ends her journey to relive her adventures in mind, and ultimately, to use her newly acquired voice to convey her life's story to readers in the form of the novel? Like the promise of the open road, Janie's silenced voice bears a message of repression, resurgence, and a resilient hopefulness that ultimately becomes manifest in the novel she "authors."

Contemporary American literature is peopled by female protagonists who are doing much more than waiting, banking on possibilities, their dreams on the shelf; rather, they take to the road, tracks, and highways to fully grasp them. If creation of the picara's text "becomes synonymous with the creation of a life" (Friedman xii), the novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God, delivers the picara's identity and frees her from silence.

In assessing the nature of this silence and the related problem of the picara's voice in the novel, Raymond Hedin's cogent analysis of the early slave narratives and the picaresque tradition proves instructive. As African-American slaves established through their actions (escape, revolt) a heroic model and tradition based on necessity, the slave-author's narrating voice became the most problematical aspect of the slave narrative; the authors worked to condemn the system without directly implicating individuals (i.e., white owners). Since narrators had to maintain "a subtle and compassionate stance as well as an absolute moral distinction," says Hedin, the effect was to eliminate "the roguery of acceptable narrators" (Hedin 635). Thus, the individualistic, self-concerned, partly asocial adventurer (the picaro) went "underground," so to speak, as taking to the road came to signify "the romantic fulfillment of the hero's quest with social, moral, and ideal [personal] justification" (641-642).

Simultaneously, just as escape of necessity required the slave to use the picaro's repertoire of shrewd cunning and disguise, the narrator had to adopt an equally shrewd form of distanced narration. Since narrators had to maintain "a subtle and compassionate stance as well as an absolute moral distinction," the effect was to "eliminate the roguery of acceptable narrators" (635); the earlier, natural fit of the slave narrative with the picaresque now became an "uneasy fit" and the narrator had to find "strategies for turning to his own advantage the tradition that he was, in a sense, trapped in" (636). All of
this, suggests Hedin, helps explain the consistent, self-conscious attempts of
slave narrators to "purify" the picaro. As he explains, narrators showed acute
awareness of even minor offenses (e.g., the telling of lies, the wearing of
disguises) and their main tactic was to deflect responsibility back onto slavery
itself, with the justification that there was no other recourse within such a
system (cf. 637-38). Using the example presented by James W. C. Pennington's
escape narrative, *The Fugitive Blacksmith* (1849), Hedin concludes that for
many male African-American slave narrators the pain of leaving families
behind was borne only because of their stronger duty to escape bondage. Thus,
the picaro was transformed into a hero (cf. 641-42).

Why is it, for example, that the issue of Janie's culpability never arises
when she leaves Logan Killicks? The constant illusion in Hurston's *Their Eyes
Were Watching God* is that Janie Mae Crawford is a moderately good woman
cought up from necessity in relatively bad acts. William L. Andrews cites the
case of Venture Smith, who realizes at the end of his journey that without
power, community, or religious faith to assuage his sense of alienation and loss,
he could "find consolation yet in his love for his wife, his conviction of his own
integrity, and above all, his freedom" (16). Such an historical figure as Venture
Smith provides real-life evidence supporting Janie Crawford's audacious travels
in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, especially her taking to the road as the
romantic fulfillment of a quest, with social, moral, and personal justification.

Perhaps taking its cue from American slave narrators, Hurston's
narrative works indirectly in its plot development (for example, signifying:
occurs when she writes that the seat of Logan Killicks' wagon is "a lonesome
place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been," and
even though Janie enters Killicks' house to "wait for love to begin" (39),
nothing comes to fruition in that barren, flavorless terrain. In another
example, Logan Killicks nicknames Janie "LilBit," highlighting her scant
knowledge and conversation; asserting her diminutive status as his new wife;
and foreshadowing the novel's mule metaphor (that is, being small she needs
only a small bit to control her movements (*TEWG* 45)). Killicks' abuse is never
physical, beyond his insinuation that Janie help him till his land by leading the
mule or bring wood inside the home. Love is the primary issue for Hurston's
protagonist. Yet, as Janie sits in the parlor of her new, fine home or in the
kitchen speaking to her Grandmother, her thoughts focus on the fact that love
has decidedly not accompanied marriage. Americans have always been prudish about details relating to the bedroom. As evidence, consider an event in American popular culture which occurred roughly concurrent to Hurston’s publication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), when in the film, “It Happened One Night” (1934), Clark Gable lent his nightshirt to his female sleepmate (Claudette Colbert). The film caused a national furor due to its immodest Hitch-hiking scene and the now-famous “Walls of Jericho” scene in which a blanket dividing the motel room into halves (his/her) comes “tumbling down.” We learn about Janie’s private affairs only indirectly in Hurston’s narrative—I cannot recount a single instance when Logan and Janie occupy the same bed (even more curious, Janie says only that he comes to her bed in the morning).15

Usually, the picara’s former education proves inadequate for her experiences in the world. In Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, this fact becomes apparent when several months after her marriage Janie returns to get a “lil’ information” from Nanny about why love has been tardy making her married acquaintance:

Nanny: ‘Don’t tell me you done got knocked up already...’

Janie: ‘Ah’ m all right dat way. Ah know ‘tain’t nothin’ dere.’

Nanny: ‘You and Logan been fussin’? Lawd, Ah know dat grass-gut, liver-lipted nigger ain’t done took and beat mah baby already! Ah’ll take a stick and salivate ‘im!’

Janie: ‘No’m, he ain’t even talked ‘bout hittin’ me. He says he never mean to lay de weight uh his hand on me in malice. He chops all de wood he think Ah wants and den he totes it inside de kitchin for me. Keeps both water buckets full.’ (40)

Janie so far exposes no grievous wrongs: Logan seems to be a doting husband. Beneath the surface, however, Janie’s worries focus on a spiritual good, if not physical pleasures, which Nanny responds to by “pooh, poohing.” Nanny volunteers, “[W]hen dey got to bow down tuh love, dey soon straightens up” (41). Nanny’s message is that if you are suffering no abuse, you have got no complaint. For Hurston’s Janie Crawford, there seems to be no such thing as “innocuous” talk; her utterances and conversations always seem to drive to the heart of the matter. In the following conversation, Janie’s concern is not
physical abuse but is some less tangible physical response:

Janie: "You told me Ah mus gointer love him, and Ah don’t. Maybe if somebody was to tell me how. Ah could do it."

Nanny: 'You come heah wid yo' mouf full uh foolishness on a busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin’ me 'bout love.' (41)

Similar to most picaras who are undereducated in the ways of the world, Janie’s been ill-prepared by her grandmother prior to entering married life. This verbal exchange shows once again Hurston’s language of absence, the “unsaid” and reinforces the “lil’ information” Janie possesses. Nanny responds flat-out, “If you don’t want him, you sho oughta” (41). Her basis for this assumption becomes clear as she catalogs Janie’s goods which accompany her marriage to Logan Killicks: the only organ in town in her parlor, a house bought and paid for, and sixty acres of land “right on de big road” (41). Janie seeks another gain: she replies that she could throw ten acres of land over the fence each day and not look back, and for that matter, that she could do the same with Killicks, a man she says “never was meant to be loved” (42). The most crushing blow, for Janie, is that Logan “don’t even never mention nothin’ pretty” (42).

But Janie occupies a common ground, among picaras, in that she places exceptional importance on words, themselves. This hierarchy of valuation foreshadows her misfortunes to come in the novel. Simply put: words are cheap, acts hold value. In this context, notice that when Janie does speak (critics commonly point to her silences), the few words she expresses carry weighty conviction; their very simplicity heightens their effect and creates a homespun “eloquence” for which Hurston has few rivals. Nanny urges her grand-daughter to be patient, yet something in Janie’s words proves profoundly affecting, as seen in her grandmother’s more private response:

And when she gained the privacy of her own little shack she stayed on her knees so long she forgot she was there herself. There in the basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought. Nanny entered this infinity of conscious pain again on her old knees. Towards morning she muttered, 'Lawd, you know mah heart. Ah done de best Ah could do. De rest is left to you.' (43)
Janie uses simple words only. However, her grandmother's response is so profound that Hurston's readers inevitably interpret the above episode as the direct cause of her death one month later. This death has symbolic meaning also in that it occurs simultaneously to Janie's being asked to tote wood and work the plow. She has no companion, no solace. Perhaps the most significant aspect of modern picaresque narrative is that readers learn as much about the picara (her wants, needs, and volition) as about the people surrounding her (the places and the society she passes through), which represents a complete reversal of early picaresque narrative.

Critics often assert that the protagonist in picaresque narrative signifies a "blank" or "tabula rasa" upon which experience makes its imprint. This being so, the burden of interpreting that imprint falls to readers with little aid from the text's narrator(s). Born in Nanny's employers' backyard in West Florida, Janie tells a story as a way to convey her first coming to an awareness of her place in the world. The incident embodies this image of the picara as "blank slate" (which Hurston encapsulates in Janie's first nickname, "Alphabet," passage below), as well as the idea that readers must interpret the picara's self-portrait in narrative form. Janie and some others had been viewing a photographer's pictures, in which Janie noticed a little black girl amidst the group of white faces. She tells Pheoby:

'So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be. . . . So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me.' . . . [Miss Nellie had] pointed out the dark girl and said. 'Dat's you. Alphabet. don't you know yo' ownself?' (TEWG, 21)

This question could be considered the novel's key: as picara, her travels take the form of a lifelong self-exploration, and quest for self-expression and identity.

The former passages from Their Eyes Were Watching God convey, in part, the way that Hurston's narrative works, indirectly, through what she calls "mind-pictures" and what at least one critic has labeled a "call-and-response" strategy (cf. n. 13). Particularly in the Nanny-Janie episode, Janie calls her grandmother's attention to a problem and the weight of the narrative then falls
on her grandmother's (i.e., audience) response. In the picture-viewing incident, Janie herself approximates the reader's relation to the narrative. In the picaresque novel, a similar burden falls upon readers (i.e., audience) to decipher the riddle of the picara's life and, then, to draft or enact an appropriate response. Janie's immediate response to her "failed" marriage is to move along "de big road" toward future fulfillment.

Generally speaking, for the picaro, sexual duplicity is but another weapon in his cachet of tricks (e.g., as when Mann's Felix Krull becomes a libertine); for the picara, sexual violation most directly causes her early entry into the world, and thereafter, her body becomes her surest tool. As previously mentioned, for Janie Crawford, Johnny Taylor's kiss is the impetus that springs her loose upon the world. Thereafter, her body becomes the blossoming, honey-sweet lure she uses to bring her a new life. Her answer to disappointment, always, is to look "up the road towards way off" (44); it is there, that sweet-looking, sweet-talking Joe Starks finds her, and, it is there that Hurston employs an effective mind-picture, when on the moment of the "death" of Janie's first dream about marriage equaling love, she ends Chapter 3 on Janie's epiphany: "She became a woman" (44). Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development) write that development takes the form of brief, epiphanic moments, such as Janie's above, in narratives of female development; moreover, because the significant changes are internal, "flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an action" (12).

The picara differs from the picaro (more or less a fixed entity), in this sense, because she is apt to show signs of growth as a character. Upon leaving Killicks, Janie seems to shed her grandmother's lexicon: she surpasses Nanny's vision of womanhood and, thereafter, hopes to "define" herself anew. Janie realizes that "new words would have to be made and said" (1FGW55), as though language itself must be crafted anew. Actively seeking self-identity, autonomy, and voice, Janie must craft herself anew; she must become picara.

Life with Joe Starks, however, proves to be another misstep along the road for Janie, as his doll baby role for her does not demand much by way of voice, thought, or act. Starks sums up his philosophy in a scant dozen words: "She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (69). Hedin characterizes the female slave narrator's appropriation of the sentimental novel form, citing descriptive terms the likes of "basically helpless," "immobilized," and "a passive observer"
To characterize her life midway through the novel, Janie may be thought of as embodying this persona, just beyond the hub of conversation, silent. Janie thus finds herself awkwardly in a position of being alienated and marginalized from life itself, meanwhile a witness to the life force of Starks, whom the townspeople refer to as "uh whirlwind among breezes" (TEWAG 78).

Even though Starks keeps her silent, Janie rebels by privately sharing in the game of story-telling that focuses on the topic of Matt Bonner’s mule; that is, she makes modest inroads into the nature of "authoring." When finally giving voice to this invention, on the occasion when Starks frees the mule, Janie speaks eloquently. Janie’s empowerment—partaking at first privately in the stories concerning Matt Bonner’s Mule ("They had him up for conversation every day the Lord sent," 81; see Chapter 6, pp. 81-84, 85, 87-89) and then, publicly (92)—develops indirectly in modest increments throughout the Jody Starks section of Hurston’s novel. In fact, her voicing a response to Jody’s freeing of the mule has as much pent-up emotion and verve as Nanny’s “text” she preaches to Janie in the novel’s opening pages; single-handedly, as well, Starks seems to embody the very power whose absence Nanny laments:

‘Jody, dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. ‘Tain’t everybody would have thought of it, ‘cause it ain’t no everyday thought. Freein’ that mule makes a mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed a mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something.’ (92)

Janie thus silences Jody’s voice using the same strategies of big talk and hyperbole taught to her by Starks’s example. Janie has herself become a moderate voice. Hambo, a character in the novel, says, "She put jus’ de right words fuh our thoughts" (92). This shining moment represents an oddity in a shallow, mean life that for Janie offers no satisfaction and no promise in the new day.

In living the Killicks and Starks versions of womanhood, Janie has simply fulfilled her grandmother’s vision of what life may offer Janie. Or has she? In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Nanny provides the earliest example of "wordsmith" for the picara to witness. Hurston’s Janie Crawford is an anomaly among picaras, notably, in that she is a "wordsmith" in the oral
tradition epitomized by the early American slave narratives. Her skill becomes apparent when she affects her grandmother in the passages concerning love and, most tellingly, when she puts exactly “the right words” to the common people’s feelings (as Hambo says) regarding Joe Starks’ saving of Matt Bonner’s mule.

Nanny has been Janie’s earliest teacher in Hurston’s novel, and she wields her words to strong effect, even if their meaning lies beyond her own grasp. For example, Nanny has a truly remarkable speech when she tells Janie (in one of the only references in the novel) about her mother:

‘Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high, but they wasn’t no pulpit for me. Freedom found me with a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah’d take a broom and a cook-pot and throw a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost offa de highway and next thing Ah knowed here you was in de world. So whilst Ah was tendin’ you of nights Ah said Ah’d save de text for you. Ah been waitin’ a long time, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed.’ (31-32)

This excerpt demonstrates the oral, folk quality of Hurston’s narrative. Nanny conceives of herself as “authoring” the speech; she has conceived of her role as a “preacher” saving the “text” for the proper audience, Janie. The problem occurs in that Nanny’s vision, arguably suited to a different era in history, does not suit Janie’s conception of self. Unknowingly, perhaps, Nanny nonetheless offers Janie in her prefatory remarks introducing her “text,” the road map (the information she has been seeking) to guide her travels along “de highway,” the unusual metaphor Nanny adopts for the good life. To explicate, fully, highways offer a random passage through life that is fixed, direct, and which often provides sustenance for and, otherwise, aids and abets materialistic gains. Interesting, in this context, is that highways are fast-paced and far-reaching; they are not places where one plans to stop or revel at the scenery, though they may lead to such places if one knows the proper exit, and they may pass through places of distinction, commensurate with the notions of progress and civilization. If the picara ever needed a traveler’s guide assessing her position in society and compass for future affairs, Nanny’s prefatory remarks work admirably well.
Janie is marginalized, in this context, both homeless and parentless; poignantly, other children would tell stories about hounds chasing after her papa and would refuse to play with her because “they couldn’t play wid nobody dat lived on premises” (22). These are the “stories” that preface Nanny’s remarks, bringing with them as they do the full context of slavery and its related conditions. By implication, Janie seems already running to outpace the image of the chasing hounds. In this context, Nanny says:

‘Ah couldn’t love yuh no more if Ah had uh felt yo’ birth pains mahself. Fact uh de matter, Ah loves yuh a whole heap more’n Ah do yo’ mama, de one Ah did birth. But you got to take in consideration you ain’t no everyday chile like most of ‘em. You got no papa, you might jus’ as well say no mama, for de good she do yuh. You ain’t got nobody but me.... Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do.... But nothing can’t stop you from wishin’. You can’t beat nobody down so low till you can rob ’em of they will....’ (30-31)

It is from Nanny’s talk, echoing the themes of a patriarchal, materialistic culture that Janie initially fashions a “comfort” prior to her marriage to Logan Killicks (38). If you question the importance of this talk, observe Hurston’s allotment of seven pages to the exchange, followed by a nearly equal number of pages detailing the marriage to Killicks. Logan Killicks disdains talk (cf. 51). Nanny calls for a stand on high ground; Janie responds by marrying Killicks despite her reservations about love.

Throughout Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie continually places spoken language significantly higher in her regard than work and food, among other commodities. In terms of the call-and-response analogy, men speak in Hurston’s novel (especially Joe Starks, who proves his stake to a “big voice,” 48, 74); Janie then responds (cf. 25, 48). Preeminentmly showing the allure of words, Starks calls for Janie to come with him along “de big road” to fulfill his vision of her as doll baby (50); Janie places faith in this vision, not knowing any other (excepting Nanny’s, which has already failed her), and finds only cheap and false security. Certainly, not love. Life for Janie while Joe forges a town and lights the darkness (cf. 70-3), proves none other than a stark equation equal to Killick’s former opinion that Janie’s “got no particular place,” excepting where he should need her (52). Townspeople assert that “She sho’ don’t talk much” and that the way Starks treats her in the store when he is
displeased is "sort of ungodly" (79). When they arrive in Eatonville, a secondary character corrects another's talk about how he hankers to procure a wife—"Wid mah talk, man" (58)—by asserting that it takes a lot more than talk to provide sustenance for a pretty woman. There is no small measure of truth in these words. With Tea Cake, Janie responds to words respectfully; her actions are educated and deliberate. Then, finally, the call-and-response strategy used by Hurston shifts, imperceptibly with Janie's as the lead voice and Tea Cake's in response.

Most often, the picara's education comes in the form of "talk" issuing from the street personae (innuendo, symbolism, gossip; in other words, mostly through their signifying); her mentors arise during her travels along the road. As picara, Justina's adventures begin in Ubeda's novel when she is inducted into a society of highway-robbing gypsies by their so-called noble leader. Janie's and Tereza's mentors are similar false types the likes of Joe Starks and Daniel Gomes, who look nice enough on the outside and certainly talk a sweet, fair game; but these are hollow men.¹⁷

Sherley Anne Williams' study proves insightful in this respect. As stated, she explains that Blacks established through their actions a heroic model and tradition based on necessity. In order to trace a source for this hero, she looks to the character types immortalized in Black songs, legends, and experience. Both Joe Starks and Tea Cake "Vergible" Woods embody aspects of this prototype:

> [The rebel leader who revolts against physical bondage, and the streetman, the hard man, the supreme game runner who survives through heart—courage—the power of his rap—his conversation—and the bossness of his front—the effectiveness of the various guises and disguises which he wears in order to manipulate others, as well as the calmness—the icy cool—with which he faces the always changing fortunes of his life. More often than not, his survival involves... guile, deceit and treachery. In Black America, it is called putting folks into tricks, running games on them or merely hustling, and Black people will applaud, admire and envy these heroes even as the heroes run games on them, put them into tricks and rebel against the rules and conventions which have prescribed the places of Blacks and whites alike in this nation. (58)]

Joe Starks, if such can be true, represents the "legitimate" manifestation of this picaro type: he is the rebel who builds a town in the wilderness, who scams
only to become Mayor and then rides "the bossness of his front" and the "power of his rap" to win friends and influence people—he manipulates, hustles, and runs games in Eatonville, most often, to bring positive changes in the fledgling community. In contrast, Tea Cake represents the "illegitimate" manifestation of the picaro, who tricks, uses deceit, and hustles more often than not, for personal gain (as when he disappears with Janie's money and throws himself a big bash). Whereas the Starks breed exhibits the "icy cool" meanness which gives rise to sentiments of disfavor among the community, the Tea Cake variety receives unyielding admiration and love. Starks, the "Emperor of the crossroads" (*TZWG* 136), is dangerous in a way that Tea Cake can never be dangerous in his charm and protean role-playing; nonetheless, both men accept the "street life" ethic (of numbers runners, gamblers, stickup men, pimps, playboys, church sisters, con artists, thieves, pushers, musicians, and preachers): "Take what you can when you can get it."16

On another level of interpretation, by inserting such secondary characters as Starks and Tea Cake into the narrative, authors of the picaresque teach readers simultaneously about interpreting characters and their words. In this respect, Zora Neale Hurston drafts one of the memorable scenes in American literature when she has two youths engage in a verbal sparring contest which matches their wits in order to win Daisy Blount's affection (they are "playing the dozens"). Charlie Jones starts the contest by avowing, "Gal, Ah'm crazy 'bout you" (105).17 In this episode, Hurston writes that three girls "hold the center of the stage" in the courtship play until Daisy Blunt comes "walking down the street in the moonlight" (105). Before a group of young suitors, Daisy struts her stuff. The word contest begins:

Charlie Jones: 'It must be uh recess in heben if St. Peter is lettin' his angels out like dis. You got three men already layin' at de point uh death 'bout yuh, and heah's uhnother fool dat's willin' tuh make time on yo' gang.'

Dave: 'He don't love yuh lak Ah do.'

Jim: 'Who don't love Daisy? Ah know you ain't talkin' 'bout me.'

Dave: 'Well all right, less prove dis thing right now. We'll prove it right now who love dis gal de best. How much time is you willin' tuh make fuh Daisy?'

Jim: 'Twenty years!'

Dave: 'See? Ah told yuh dat nigger didn't love yuh. Me, Ah'll
beg de Judge tuh hang me, and wouldn't take nothin' less than life!

There was a big long laugh from the porch. Then Jim had to demand a test.

Jim: 'Dave, how much would you be willin' tuh do for Daisy if she was to turn fool enough tuh marry yuh.'

Dave: 'Me and Daisy done talked dat over, but if you just got to know, Ah'd buy Daisy uh passenger train and give it tuh her.'

Jim: 'Humph! Is dat all? Ah'd buy her uh steamship and then Ah'd hire some mens tuh run it fur her.'

Dave: 'Daisy, don't let Jim fool you wid his talk. He don't aim tuh do nothin' fuh yuh. Uh lil' ole steamship! Daisy, Ah'll take uh job cleanin' out de Atlantic Ocean fuh you any time you say you so desire.'

There was a great laugh and then they hushed to listen.

'Daisy,' Jim began, 'you know mah heart and all de ranges uh mah mind. And you know if Ah wuz ridin' up in uh earoplane way up in de sky and Ah looked down and seen you walkin' and knowed you'd have tuh walk ten miles tuh git home, Ah'd step backward offa dat earoplane just to walk home wid you.'

Hurston ends the episode abruptly amidst a "big blow-out laugh" (in which, Janie revels while enjoying the play-acting, 108-109) and the fissure caused by cataclysmic influences: the arrival of Jody Starks who hastened Janie to attend the needs of Mrs. Bogle. Mrs. Bogle is a character in the novel who manifests the ability to turn men's heads like "a wind on the ocean," but who more importantly, shows in her "sunken cheeks" and colorful foliage what Daisy, or Janie, may become in future days. In essence, she physically embodies the "cheapness of talk": she married first a coachman-jurist-preacher, and next, an orange grove worker/aspiring preacher, neither of whom seem much on her present horizon as she walks the streets. The sweetness of the above word contest greatly soured, in the person of the street-walker, Hurston hammers reality home when Starks tells Janie, in their first exchange post-Gallant's contest—in response to her prompt, "You sho loves to tell me whut to do, but Ah can't tell you nothin' Ah see!"—"It would be pitiful if Ah didn't. Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows" (110). Janie retorts, with a sharp-edge to her voice and authority heretofore undemonstrated in
Hurston's novel, "Ah knows uh few things, and womenfolks thinks sometimes too!" (110-11).

Having been a student of the youngsters' talk games and play-acting, Janie undertakes a bit of "play-acting" herself, which is common in the picaresque narrative. Specifically, having demonstrated the ability to lend a voice to her thoughts and feelings, for the duration of her second "marriage," Janie prompts herself to relearn silence. As a result of the previous verbal exchange, and in keeping with the Daisy (Blunt) analogy, Hurston describes Janie as being "petal-open" no more (111). Hurston depicts the difference in their marriage symbolically, writing, "The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again" (111). She also redraws Nanny's vision of herself as a "crack'd plate" (to symbolize disenchantment and age) by having Janie experience something fall off the "shelf inside her"—namely, it is her "image of Jody tumbled down and shattered" (112). Just as words had built him up, words demonstrate also the ability to make him topple. Joe Starks had been but a "propped up" love, someone she'd chosen to "drape her dreams over" (112).

Thus, Hurston exhibits a skilled hand in use of word images to symbolize, first, Janie's enchantment with the language of courting in the Play of Gallants and, second, Janie's disenchantment with her own marriage in the terms described above. Thereafter, Hurston's narrative focuses on Joe Starks's meanness, even to the point where a starving mother (Mrs. Tony Robbins) comes to the store seeking scraps of food on behalf of her hungry children; Mrs. "Tony" asserts of Starks's mean-spirited actions (denying her food): "Some folks ain't got no heart in dey bosom. They's willin' tuh see uh po' woman and her helpless chillun starve tuh death. God's gointuh put 'em under arrest, some uh dese days, wid dey stingy gripin' ways" (115). This speech proves a premonition of Starks's death, and Janie's voice sounds out the syllables which seem to be the nails in his coffin, beginning, "Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business..." (117) and, ending—past the moments of ridicule and derision and past Starks's angry physical assault (he strikes her with his fist)—with Janie's assertion, "Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it" (122).

Janie's tutelage in using her "voice" occurs primarily during this period of imposed silence. Her skill becomes apparent when she finally emerges from
silence to narrate the novel in words passed orally to her friend, Pheoby—Janie's voice soars. Yet, throughout Hurston's novel, Janie's knowledge in terms of "voice," and speech more generally, is the "catch-as-catch-can" variety. A prime example of this occurs when she witnesses the Gallant's show with Daisy Blunt, the passing of Mrs. Bogle, and the travails of Mrs. Tony Robbins; more simply she learns from watching Starks's dealings in town and in the store (notably, there is never any mention of a single woman friend visiting Janie during her twenty-year stay in Eatonville). The picara's knowledge is intuitive and inferential based on meetings only at a "distance," certainly impersonal, and clearly reinforcing her marginality and pariah standing in the community and world at large:

Digging around inside herself like that [after Joe's funeral] she found that she had no interest in that seldom-seen mother at all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. . . . [Stretching the horizon that her grandmother had twisted into a kerchief tight enough to choke a person round the neck, Janie] had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. (emphasis added, 138)

But Janie's emergence as picara means that she must "bridge" this distance with words—though a marginal character, even a pariah of sorts, she needs to begin her journey "to the horizons in search of people" (138). Oddly enough, this journey begins in her "master's house" so-to-speak (Starks's store). As previously suggested, false types such as Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, among other men (e.g., those who sit around her at the store "grinning at her like a pack of chessy cats, trying to make out they looked like love," 140), are Janie's primary teachers; namely, their verbal calisthenics on the store's porch make up the majority of her education. Janie proves an apt pupil. Late in the novel, Ike Green brings up the subject of marriage in a way that closely echoes Starks's approach to Janie when his words carry Janie away from Logan Killicks. The picara will not be duped by the same scam twice. Contrary to the smitten response she had given to Joe Starks's words on "de big road," Janie shows how well she has learned the art of "talking" from Joe when she pulls a Starks-type of reversal: "Dis subjick you bringin' up ain't fit tuh be talked
about at all. Lemme go inside and help Hezekiah weigh up dat barrel of sugar
dat just come in“ (141). In this episode, readers see how Janie wields her self-
imposed silence to great purpose. This is no lily-livered, weak-kneed, passive
antiheroine: Janie’s a modern American picara doing exactly what she’s
learned from being holder of an associate’s degree from the School of Hard
Knocks, determining her own future course along the highway with whomever
she chooses.

As a rule, men represent only momentary stays in a picara’s life due to her
need for autonomy and freedom (cf. Shultz 342). Moreover, their loss often
brings some advantage. After Starks’s death, for example, Janie has a female
friend: “She and Pheoby Watson visited back and forth and once in awhile sat
around the lakes and fished” (TEVG 143). Janie also demonstrates
unprecedented self-assertion: she is certainly opinionated (e.g., “Let ’em say
whut dey wants tuh, Pheoby. To my thinkin’ mourning oughtn’t tuh last no
longer’n grief,” 143). In Chapter 10, with the arrival of Tea Cake on Janie’s
horizon, it is Janie who has got all the pick-up lines; for example, when Tea
Cake implies that she is an important person in town, instead of passing on the
flattery as has been a pattern late in the novel (e.g., the Ike Green episode), she
replies, “Look lak Ah seen you somewhere” (144-45). After a tussling checkers
match resounding with laughter and hand-clasping, Tea Cake asks to come back
to teach Janie to play. Hurston uses the occasion of their shared “courting talk”
to implement the call-and-response strategy for which Janie’s is the lead voice:

Janie: ‘It’s all right tuh come teach me, but don’t come tuh cheat
me.’

Tea Cake: ‘Yuh can’t beat uh woman. Dey jes won’t stand fuh it.
But Ah’l come teach yuh agin. You gaintuh be uh good player
too, after while.’ . . .

Tea Cake: ‘De name mah mama gimme is Vergible Woods. Dey
calls me Tea Cake for short.’

Janie: ‘Tea Cake! So you sweet as all dat?’ She laughed and he
gave her a little cut-eye look to get her meaning.

Tea Cake: ‘Ah may be guilty. You better try me and see.’

She did something between a laugh and a frown and he set his
hat on straight. (147-49)
Liking the word-play game, Tea Cake makes an entirely new start after hiding behind an imaginary lamp-post:

Tea Cake: 'Evenin' Mis' Starks. Could yuh lemme have uh pound uh knuckle puddin' [a beating with the fist] till Saturday? Ah' m sho tuh pay yuh then.'

Janie: 'You needs ten pounds, Mr. Tea Cake. Ah' ll let yuh have all I got and you needn't bother 'bout payin' it back.' (150)

In this new era at the Starks' general store, Janie jokes and laughs with other folks until closing time (150).24

Unlike the picaro, the picara is not particularly given to duplicity. Janie displays only minor duplicity when she hides her feelings, and voice, from Joe Starks, post-revelation. When she leaves Killicks, without looking back, moreover, duplicity hardly seems an issue. This fact is underscored often in narratives of the picara's life by the author's highlighting the duplicity of others in the novel; meanwhile, the picara's character seems unassailable. The constant illusion in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, as previously stated, is that Janie Crawford—like picaras before and after her, including Moll Flanders, born in Newgate prison—is a moderately good woman caught up from necessity in relatively bad acts (for example, Janie commits bigamy). However, there is substantial evidence that the "criminal" misdeeds occur less due to physical necessity than due to private inclination.25

Amado's Tereza Batista illustrates this point well. Similar to Janie's occupation with Starks, Tereza takes up work behind the counter in the store because the Captain learns she can figure accurately and she possesses a legible hand (142). Against this backdrop, Amado paints a "brotherhood of scoundrels" made up of the "unholy quartet" of mayor, chief of police, Captain, and judge (cf. 142). Although the narrator tosses aspersions Tereza's way—trying to cast her as the "deep-dyed villainess of the piece" ("so young, so perverse, her heart hardened to stone by vice," 147)—the rap will not stick; her integrity and character are unassailable. The only "rap sheet" to stick is that she suffers from her duties in bed, serving as the Captain's "mount" (149). Tereza's days are occupied by "pain, blood, filth, resentment, and servitude" (150). Yet on the surface, akin to Janie's life with Joe Starks in Their Eyes Were Watching God, Tereza's role is that of a pretty plaything to be shown off to other men, a prized bauble (cf. 155).
If epithets from "pretty little strumpet" to "murderer" will not stick on the picara's resilient frame, the negatives applied to her mentors, friends, and acquaintances prove somewhat more durable. The narrator, moreover, seems never at a loss in describing these secondary characters. The world does seem to be somewhat in a bad way. Meanwhile, not all characters in the picaresque narrative are strictly "good" or "bad."

In both Their Eyes Were Watching God and Tereza Batista, death and love are uniquely intertwined. Most often, the picara must make a choice between child and lover. More often than not the lover prevails. Indirectly, this choice also reinforces the picara's secondary status as an individual in society, because it reinforces the illegitimacy of her position:

[Dr. Guedes told Tereza] 'I don't want any byblows.' The cultivated voice was cruel and inflexible. 'I've always been against it: it's a question of principle. No one has the right to bring into the world a human being born with a stigma, an inferior status. And besides, no one who has family commitments should have illegitimate children. You have children with your wife, that's what you marry for. A wife is for conceiving children, giving birth to them, and bringing them up; a mistress is for life's pleasures. When she has to take care of a child she's just like a wife; what difference is there between them? No byblows; that's how I see things. I want to enjoy my Tereza at leisure, I want her to make me happy when I have a few days for myself, not to have the worry and nuisance of children. (344-45)

Even should the picara want a child, a child is not often the picara's lot in life; commonly, a child is not even subject of discussion. In the course of Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie passes the years with three men and never once discusses the subject of children. They are the "disappeared ones" in the picaresque novel. Marilynne Robinson plays much on this theme in her contemporary American novel, Housekeeping. Erica Jong's Fanny is almost the single exception to this rule in contemporary literature as she creates her narrative, The Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones, for her daughter, Belinda.

The child's absence allows the picara to pass through life as an individual on her own, self-assertive and ever-changing, which is one of the reasons also that the protagonist in picaresque literature often falls accountable to the critic's claim of being "irresponsible"; that is, shirking usual societal
commitments and niceties. In allowing the picara to be free of children, authors also allow her to make a transition to heightened romance.

As part of the oral tradition that comprises the picaresque narrative, characters' words carry the weight of the novel's denouement, and this oral tradition includes the reader's response to the picara's narrative. In Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when Pheoby sets out to discover the truth herself, the women pelt her back with verbal barbs as she departs, hoping for answers that are "cruel and strange" (14). These women are surrogates for the supermarket tabloid's prurient readers. Note in Hurston's opening scene the way that she describes the porchwomen who sit among "Words walking without masters" (10). These terms relate also to the novel's reading audience. In being able to marshal our words, knowledge and mastery of our selves follows. Readers, in the act of reading, assume a stance that closely mirrors Pheoby's, in setting out to discover the "truth" in the narrative of the picara's life. Janie seems to include this hypothetical reader when she says to her friend Pheoby, "You can tell 'em what I say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (17).

This quality of the necessary interpretation of events is especially well-developed in thoughts a secondary character, the maid Nina, expresses upon Dr. Guedes' death in Amado's *Tereza Batista*. Although Nina refers to Tereza as "Miss Smartypants" and "Miss Hoity-Toity" (335), the rap won't stick. Rather, she simply exposes her own bad manners, envy, stupidity, and flirtation. She especially becomes a foil for Tereza's character when Amado's narrator describes them both in mourning for the Doctor: Nina, thinking, "[W]ho but the heretic over there ought to be praying to God for him? She ought to be on her knees, praying and repenting of her sinful life with another woman's husband, living in sin all the time ... Why didn't the heretic look unhappy, cover her head with ashes, break out crying and sobbing? Couldn't she even put on an act?" (302-03); Nina, "dressed all in black like a caricature of a witch or a prostitute in a low-class brothel on the night of a party" (333). Meanwhile, Tereza, dry-eyed, simply remains at her dead lover's side, watching and waiting. The Doctor is even allowed his own revisionist effort regarding the former relationship shared with Tereza, seemingly prompted from the grave by the gossiping: "By keeping you here a prisoner, dependent on my convenience, a thing, an object, a captive. I was the master, you the servant..." (408). Tereza's response to these words is simple: "All I can say is that you were always good to
me; you taught me how to be a woman and how to love life" (408). As the ambulance leaves, the curiosity-seekers wait on the sidewalk in front of the house, talking among themselves—they will not, cannot, understand—and, locking the children in, Nina also "joined them, her tongue flapping" (409; this scene gives partial voice to the gossipers who make Janie the subject most on their tongues after Tea Cake’s death).

Gossip thus places a key role in the picara’s narrative; wherever she goes, the picara seems to become a favorite subject of conversation. It is both a product of her difference and of the way that she passes through multifarious company. Broadly differing from Pheoby’s enlightened, sympathetic response to Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the society women (symbolic of others throughout the novel) are likened to “lords of sound and lesser things” (*TEWG* 10); that is, they are the passive receptors through whom sound enters and passes (cf. 10, 274-75). In Amado’s novel, although Tereza tells the Doctor she does not mind the gossip (“As far as I’m concerned they can gossip all they want to,” 384), she finds herself ill at ease during their infrequent outings in town. This interplay heightens her outcast, almost fugitive, status within society. Moreover, Tereza is continually subject to the “sidelong glances of the ladies” and the gaping of “throng of nincompoops” from a distance (387). As Janie demonstrates visually in the opening of Hurston’s novel, discussed previously, the picara’s empowerment derives partly from her ability to stare down the glances and whispers of the curious society people; her narrative stands as a tribute to the picara’s strength in accounting for that pariah lifestyle.

The narrator of the picaresque story often casts off-color remarks the picara’s way, but for the most part, her character remains unassailable. This is true even to the moment of the picaro/tutor’s death. When Janie stands trial for Tea Cake’s murder, as when she had failed to wear appropriate clothing or demeanor for mourning, people talk. They do not understand. Nonetheless, the integrity of her character rises above the mean words. She prevails. Amado’s Tereza Batista similarly undergoes a trial by verbal fire in the crucible directly after the Doctor’s death, as lengthily described in the passages above. Similar to the symbolic passage beyond gates, the death or loss of a lover seems to signal growth in the picara’s capacity for love.

The picara’s experience remains, nonetheless, a distinctive mixture of violence as well as love. Perhaps the simplest manifestation of this violence is
all the silent "bowin' down" and "obedience" Janie has to deliver under the strain of Starks's "voice" (cf. ZEWF 134). Violence and love literally become inseparable when Janie physically confronts Tea Cake with the shotgun, and, in an earlier episode, symbolically, when Janie uses her words (voice) as one would wield a fine instrument against Joe Starks (in a "down-dressing" which numerous critics have referred to as a demasculization or loss of manhood itself; at least one critic has interpreted Janie's speech, ending, "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life," p. 123, as the immediate cause for Starks's death).

Generally speaking, Hurston's Janie Crawford shares most in the heritage of 'Ubeda's Justina in that the narrative focuses almost to a fault on the picara's private relationships with men without endowing her with female friendship, female mentoring, or a broader appeal to women. Of course, this statement is conditional in that Janie shares the entire narrative itself with her friend and confidante, Pheoby. She has a significant effect on the community only in the Everglades, and, for the most part, this effect can be summed up as simple friendship and camaraderie.

Signaling a positive development in twentieth-century literature, Tereza's function as picara within the community in Amado's novel is proactive: when she witnesses an injustice, she works to set it right. When the law officials, led by Dogfish, are going to move the prostitutes to the Lower District, the "filthiest, rottenest part of town," Tereza asks a prostitute, "But can't something be done? Can't you complain?" Someone responds, "Ain't you learned yet? Take what you're thrown and be grateful, or you'll get something worse" (cf. 439-40). But the picara's life in literature proves that if you refuse to accept blindly the fate you are dealt, you do not "get something worse."

Part of the picara's task, upon her enlightenment, is to guide and give voice to sundry people but primarily to those who suffer silence. For instance, Tereza Batista is a social revolutionary: call her dense, but she never learns the lesson of the "dog's life" she is supposed to lead. Therefore, she gives voice to the prostitutes' plight and then lends her body in the fight. Tereza Batista, "never knowing when to leave well enough alone" is distinctive among her picara counterparts for her "mania for fighting other people's battles and not just standing by while injustice [i]s done: a seditious, untamable disposition" (449). She insists that the rank-and-file prostitutes resist the police order, stating, "I've been in some pretty tight spots, and one thing I've learned is that
if you aren’t willing to fight you don’t get what you want in this world. And you don’t deserve to” (465). This is the hidden context, or subtext, of Nanny’s preamble to her “Sermon on the Mount” (i.e., taking a stand on high ground, a pedestal) that she voices for Janie in Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Whereas Hurston broadens the sphere of focus only upon the closing of her novel (the oral tradition of sharing the story), Amado’s narrative broadens from the picara’s immediate experience to encompass the experiences of numerous women. In a twentieth-century version of Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, for example, Tereza succeeds in getting the prostitutes to “lock up their services and throw away the keys” (477, 480). Amado heightens the effect by opting for a journalistic approach to the “closed-basket problem,” focusing on various news excerpts. Hurston uses this “headlines” (news) orientation only once, when she has Janie describe her fear that life is passing her by, notably, that the newsboys are calling “Extry” and she has not read even the common news (cf. _TEWG_ 172). This example shows, also, the “illiterate” or “unschooled” nature of Janie’s experience. The effect this shift in style of narrative (journalistic form) has is to displace the reader’s sympathies; in adopting the news reportage mode, the author forces readers into a more objective role, albeit an uncomfortable one because the individual reader must take a personal stand in choosing sides.

Amado’s narrative, unlike Hurston’s, is in constant flux with its multifarious string of narrators, from renowned poet and high priestess, to cabby and Lacerda elevator operator in frock coat and top hat. In a strictly conventional sense, Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God is a more common form for the picaresque, funneled as it is mainly through a third-person consciousness; but, Amado’s shifting form of narration is not that uncommon in the twentieth century, particularly given the nefarious influence of James Joyce and his picaresque novel, Ulysses. Obviously, there can be no such phenomenon as an “unbiased account.”

What does seem a bit surprising is that only the picara is left free of this interpretive dilemma, excepting Pynchon’s Oedipa Maas. She seems not of society itself; rather, she moves through it without deterrent such as law, convention, or order—whether accompanying prostitutes to the nave of the Blacks’ Church of the Rosary for recitation of the Lord’s Prayer (514) or leading single-handedly the fight against smallpox (289):
'Below God' is just a manner of speaking, just a saying: God never got that far. That wasteland at the end of the world is what you might call godforsaken, and if it hadn't been for those poor miserable women from Soft Cancre Street, there wouldn't have been hide nor hair left of any living creature to tell the tale. God's got enough to do hearing masses and things like that.... Somebody did look after them, though: none other than our own Tereza Batista, nicknamed Tereza Knifecut, Tereza Wiggle-Hips, Tereza Seven Sighs, and Tereza Tread-Softly. She earned every one of those names.... Tereza Ain't-Afraid-No-More, that's another name they gave her. Maybe that was the very first nickname she got a long time ago. (75-6)

Namely, the picara assumes two roles in the picaresque narrative: the private woman—primarily shown in the sections comprising a more conventional romance—and the public woman—the mythic persona who drapes the sun around her shoulders for a shawl and who draws the horizon in upon her; or the persona who chews up and spits out the smallpox, "Tereza Ain't-Afraid-No-More" (76).

The narrative of the picara's life, from Justina and Moll Flanders to Their Eves Were Watching God, Tereza Batista, and Fanny Hackabout-Jones, most often concludes as a romance. Life with the picaro is fleeting but priceless, offering the picara the experience of true happiness and a legacy of spiritual enlightenment that borders inexplicably on transcendence. The power of this experience does not find its true measure in experience but, rather, finds its fullest expression in the narrative itself, which reshapes the conversion narrative into a fantastical form that borders on Harlequin romance. But to this romance add the picara’s desire to sit in a home of her own making (see Mary Brent Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl) and her need to find freedom in self-discovery: “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free” (Ellison 185).

Rather than expiating sins on the gallows, as so often proves the picaro's lot in life, the picara’s pilgrimage as stranger/outcast in an alien world ends in the epiphanic experience of a refuge which obliterates the self and brings about a grace, short of never-ending bliss: True love. Endowing the picara with both a profound self-knowledge and a home, true love also signals the novel’s end (sometimes with the promise of new accounts of adventures to follow in serial publication, as in Justina and Moll Flanders). The answer to the query of the picara’s life often appears in the person of the picaro: Justina's Guzman, Tereza's Janu, Janie's Tea Cake, Fanny's Lancelot.32
What Tea Cake offers Janie is an uninhibited entry into a man’s world. In pairing with their male counterparts, her predecessors Moll Flanders and Justina were offered the same. When Pheoby expresses her fear that Tea Cake is not good enough for Janie, she responds, "Tea Cake ain't draggin' me off nowhere Ah don't want tuh go. Ah always did want tuh git round uh whole heap..." (169). If Janie learns to “speak” thus in the course of her travels, she also learns to “read” about the story of life’s promise, displaying a voracious appetite for storytelling, checkers, jokes, digging nightcrawlers, hunting, fishing, driving, endless possibilities. Up on her grandmother’s pedestal Janie had nearly languished to death (Janie explains, “Ah felt like de world wuz cryin’ extry and Ah ain’t read de common news yet,” 172), but living the picaresque lifestyle with Tea Cake was for Janie the very stuff of life:

[U]s is goin’ off somewhere and start over in Tea Cake’s way. Dis ain’t no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma’s way, now Ah means tuh live mine. (171)

Note that cross-dressing is a necessary complement to the picara’s experience, prior to her entry into full picarisma and, particularly, the male-dominated realm of authoring books. Janie adopts the overalls of the day-laborer and, finding this attire liberating, will not reassume a woman’s dress, not even widow’s garb. A secondary character in Jong’s Fanny Hackabout-Jones describes a woman in male dress as one “dress’d to repel the Wickedness of the World in her Adventures on the Road...” (cf. 89). If one carries this opinion forward, Tea Cake provides Janie with two main instruments in possessing her freedom: a) he teaches her how to drive an automobile, thus widening the circumference of her world and b) in enabling her to wear men’s clothes, he gives her the accompanying freedom of thought and opinion. If Janie accepts the inner machinations of male behavior with men’s clothing, this may help justify further her emerging sense of voice in Hurston’s novel after the Tea Cake interlude.

The picaresque lifestyle is neither serene, nor stodgy. Tea Cake’s first act when they begin their travels together is impulsively to disappear with all Janie’s savings. He hosts a party and pays “all the ugly women not to enter” (183). This sequence will be familiar to readers of the picaro’s life. Upon returning, having discovered “what it felt like to be rich,” purchased a new
guitar, and saved a few dollars in his pocket, Tea Cake explains his position to
Janie:

'Dem wuzn't no high muckety mucks. Dem wuz railroad hands
and dey womenfolks. You ain't usetuh folks lak dat and Ah wuz
skeered you might git all mad and quit me for takin' you 'mongst
'em. But Ah wanted yuh wid me jus' de same. Befo' us got
married Ah made up mah mind not tuh let you see no
commonness in me. When Ah git mad habits on, Ah'd go off and
keep it out yo' sight. 'Tain't mah notion tuh drag you down wid
me.'

'Looka heah, Tea Cake, if you ever go off from me and have a
good time lak dat and then come back heah tellin' me how nice
Ah is. Ah specks tuh kill you dead. You heah me?'

'So you aims tuh partake wid everything, hunh?'

'Yeah, Tea Cake, don't keer what it is.' (186)

Before their so-called "marriage," Janie's life with Tea Cake is marked by
sheer playfulness: if readers remember the transforming influence of gates in
the novel, it may help to note that now Janie's smuggles Tea Cake in and out by
the back gate like "some great secret" she is keeping from the town; Janie
characterizes her feelings as "like a child[']s breaking rules" (cf. 155).
Significantly, Janie drafts a new map of experience, in the above exchange.
She fosters a singular voice in making her sentiments known; therein, she
embraces the picara's marginal life in striking contrast to her former "close"
life with Killicks and Starks--when four walls determined the circumference
of her experience, when she had no real character, and when she adopted a mask
of silence. Now her life's circumference broadens to include fun, fraternity,
and sharpshooting (cf. 192-94), as well as the picaro's common stock of dice and
card playing, gambling, and knifings. On the "muck" in the Everglades, Tea
Cake teaches Janie to shoot, avowing with the picaro's common sense, "[I]t's
always some trashy rascal dat needs uh good killin'" (195).

This last detail foreshadows the novel's end, as much as does Janie's
surprising ability to "tell big stories herself" (200). After nearly two years of
married life, Janie has a final chance at self-definition when she and Tea Cake
are threatened by a hurricane (Hurston writes, in the titular comment, "They
seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God," 236). Janie
tells Tea Cake:
'Once upon uh time, Ah never 'spect ed nothin' ' Tea Cake but bein' dead from standin' still and tryin' tuh laugh. But you come 'long and made somethin' outa me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anything we come through together.' (247)

Janie's voice, not Tea Cake's, echoes through the night. This speech offers a premonition of the end. For Janie this end takes a peculiar test of courage; the last exchange for Janie and Tea Cake becomes the report of gunfire, as Janie kills Tea Cake (who "stood for far horizon"), to save herself. Tea Cake is mad due to the rabid dog's bite in the Everglades. Still, beyond immediate necessity, Janie cannot take him where she must go; he stands in the way of who she is to become. The picara must stand alone. In this case, this point is especially true when she stands trial before a jury of her peers--the law is never far from impinging upon the picara's movement in picaresque narrative.

In sum, modern authors of the picaresque add a deeply-textured third dimension to former categories of interest in the slave narrative--the quest for true love, which is a consequence of the picara's "wayfarer's heart." This quality of the picara's adventure becomes apparent in Hurston's novel as early as Janie's first speech to Nanny after marriage to Killicks. Similar to the slave narrators, also, Janie's pattern of experience in Hurston's novel is to keep her mind "on the nobler possibilities of freedom even while staying one step ahead of the hounds" (cf. Hedin, in Sekora and Turner, 27). In Their Eyes Were Watching God, this pursuit (implied in the prefacing remarks to the text of Nanny's speech) becomes literally intertwined with love when Tea Cake looms before Janie in the posture of a "mad dog" after the attack he endures while rescuing Janie from the rabid dog in the Everglades storm. Symbolically, this episode transforms Janie from being the helpless, immobilized, passive observer looking through her window, apart from the field of action, in the early stages of Hurston's novel. She assumes a mythic status, due to the Everglades episode and its aftermath (ending in Tea Cake's death), and is ready, in the truest sense, "for the great journey to the horizons in search of people" (TGWG 138). She is full of voice and ready for the trek homeward as modern American picara. Moreover, Janie Crawford is ready to become picara-artist.

After the encounter which transforms the picara's experience, the picara--newly escaped from what Houston Baker calls the essence of "blankness," a state of scarcely any a priori assumptions to act as stays for self-definition--feels a deep social mission to ensure that the future does not repeat
the past (qtd. Niemtzow 198). Most often, the picara displays the Gatsbyesque
drive to deliver the story through either a surrogate or self. In the latter

case, the picara may undertake a lengthy period studying the art of writing.

Again, Janie’s experience is uncharacteristic in that she focuses not at all on
this period of life; perhaps, this omission is a result of the oral nature and
heritage of her tale, as well as her experiences throughout the novel (told to
her friend, Pheoby, beneath the expansive “monstropolous” sky; cf. 18-19).

More characteristically, Tereza’s experience with Dr. Guedes in Tereza Batista
shows her absorbing study of the art of writing:

Tereza spent whole afternoons poring over her books and
practicing penmanship in her notebook... Since Tereza to work
to learn how... For Emiliano Guedes it was an absorbing task to
guide and follow the girl’s steps as she struggled to learn rules
and methods of analysis. Many and various were the things the
Doctor taught his young protégée as time went on, in the garden,
in the orchard, inside the house and in the street, at the table and
in bed; but none so useful to Tereza just then as the lesson plan he
made for her. Before he went away he would have homework for
her to do, subjects to study, exercises to work on. Books and paper
filled Tereza’s idle hours... (337)

Janie’s American schoolhouse is the street corner variety—in passing
with acquaintances or while overhearing the discuss among themselves in
groups at the general store. Basically, in the tradition of the picaresque
character development, Janie uses her god-given talents, native eloquence, and
common sense to apply the snatches of conversation and overheard dialogue to
herself. She is, in this respect, self-taught in terms of education. Only later
does she learn to labor manually, tell stories, fish, dance, and such from Tea
Cake. Often, the male would-be suitor characterizes the bulk of the picara’s
education. Thus, the writer-author-intellectual strain in Their Eyes Were
Watching God occupies less than a finger nail’s portion of Janie’s self-portrait
in written narrative.

Foremost, Janie’s life of impromptu adventures must end so that she may
confront society’s judgment and stand before it in an attitude of defiant
reckoning. Somehow, Zora Neale Hurston had to demarginalize Janie, a task she
accomplishes in scripting Tea Cake’s audacious death. But families will not be
broken. “Curse and expel them, send their children wandering, drown them in
floods and fires,” writes Robinson, “and old women will make songs out of all
these sorrows and sit in the porches and sing them on mild evenings”
Families, in this context, represent not so much family bonds as kinship bonds (Janie— Tea Cake; Ruthie— Sylvie; Oedipa— Inverarity; Fanny— Lancelot); the preservation of such bonds is left to the women who eulogize and memorialize their life experiences by turning them into art.

Typically, the moment of narration in picaresque narrative begins when the marginal lifestyle of the picara is forgone, as the travels cease and the protagonist settles down. What is unique in Janie’s experience is that she has never received mentoring on the subject of writing. Her education has been totally in an oral, storytelling tradition. Once home, Janie’s adventures continue not in the form of “de big road,” but in the form of her wanderings in memory and the story she tells. She must author the text.

Moreover, the narrative as it unfolds seems to endow the picara with a sense of empowerment, a new identity; this is the implication at the close of Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, when Janie draws in the sun for a shawl, as she calls upon the world to bear witness. Related to this point, Lillie Butler Jugurtha notes that the most compelling factor of the slave narrative is the “relentless presence of an eye-witness”—the participant-narrator’s recounting of experience thus becomes rather complex (cf. Jugurtha, in Sekora and Turner, 110).

This assessment becomes particularly true in that the picaresque narrative itself usually takes the form of a “defense” for past acts. Both Lazarillo de Tormes and Their Eyes Were Watching God begin by denouncing the gossip of scurrilous tongues. Such rumor-mongers render silence an inadequate defense. In drafting his defense (addressing the rumor that his wife is mistress to the local Archpriest), Lazar diminishes the gravity of the case by projecting the assumption of shared culpability back against, as George A. Shipley notes, “those evil tongues and then outward to the horizon of his and their experience” (Shipley 187):

From the Prologue’s here and now the narrator launches himself outward and backward as far as his memory and his imagination, in cooperation, can project him. From way back then, unspecified decades ago, and way over the horizon, in a space similarly remote, the narrator comes tracing and sketching the career that eventually brought him to the place and moment of narration. (179)

There are parallels among the novels discussed in this chapter evident in this excerpt, even to the narrator’s need to retreat all the way back to his origins,
which bestow upon him an inheritance of thievery, sexual truancy, and persecution. Shipley suggests that this strategy amounts to "a prefiguration of the design traced in his own life's errantry"; this design and its root cause, the narrator implies, are beyond Lazarillo's control, that is, "He reacts as a passive agent to a rhythm fixed prior to his birth and determined anew by the manipulative actions of each succeeding master" (187). Hurston sets up this same pattern of experience in Their Eyes Were Watching God: in Janie's "case," her mother's rape at the hands of the schoolmaster prefigures a destiny fraught with troubles (throughout successive relationships to men).

In effect, Lázaro's written narrative (comprising the first picaresque novel, Lazarillo de Tormes) responds to rumors circulating in Toledo that Lázaro's wife is mistress to the local archpriest. Thus a written reply becomes Lázaro's "defense," as he assumes an author's role (cf. Sieber 14). As an interesting parallel, Janie is put in a similar position of drafting a defense in Hurston's frame for the novel—first, when she is placed on trial, literally; second, when she must return home as subject of the town's intense curiosity, tonguelashing, and gaze; and finally, when establishing her "case" in the oral "self-defense" which becomes the novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Sieber records that not only is Lázaro's story of his origins and life a new subject for fiction, but new in that the protagonist simultaneously tells the story of how he becomes an author (Sieber 14). Through writing his narrative, Lázaro seizes upon the opportunity to create/recreate his life for his reader. But Lazarillo de Tormes also examines the nature of language itself—especially oral language—and as importantly creates a context for a twentieth-century novel such as Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, which is told predominantly in the oral, folk tradition of narrative. Sieber traces this progression at length in assessing Lázaro's narrative:

If we look beneath the surface of his 'picaresque' adventures, we find that each of them [masters] teaches him something different about the nature of language, especially oral language. From the blind beggar he learns the magic quality of words: they produce money from unsuspecting almsgivers. From the priest who says mass everyday, Lazarillo perceives that his 'sacred' words bring forth money as well as food. From the squire he learns that honor is as 'real' as the language used to create it. But the most important lesson he learns is from the pardoner, whose salesmanship involves 'all sorts of ruses and underhanded tricks'. . . . Lázaro's discovery of language as the basis of social reality is also his discovery of the full implication of
himself as the 'voice' of Toledo [i.e., town crier]. We are no more, no less, than the language we speak and write. (Sieber 16-7)

This is the pattern of experience that also characterizes the education of the modern American picara. She learns that the boundaries of her world are no more, no less, that the language she writes and speaks. Returning to the problem of voice in the novel, Friedman discovers that the Spanish texts gradually remove the picara from the discourse, "excluding the protagonist from the act of narration" (xv). What becomes manifest, then, is not the voice of the protagonist herself but rather her silence.

Thus, there is a literary precedent for Hurston's frame in Their Eyes Were Watching God which silences Janie much of the narrative, placing Janie's tongue in her friend Pheoby's "mouf" (17). This justification for Janie's silence proves to be particularly significant, because intense attention has been focused on this aspect of the narrative: Why is it, critics ask, that Janie does not tell her own story? Literary renderings of the picara's life share a common problem in the creation of narrative voice (cf. Friedman 203). Pheoby (the omniscient narrator) provides Hurston with both the distance and credibility necessary for telling Janie's story in the narrative. In Janie's telling Pheoby, "'[T]ain't no use in me telling you somethin' unless Ah give you de understandin' to go 'long wid it" (TFWGW 19), Hurston addresses readers also without implicating us in the story she tells (adopting the strategy that authors as diverse as Cervantes and authors of the slave narratives had used to create distance, so as not to implicate their audiences in the stories they told). Pheoby allows Hurston authenticity by lending Janie's narrative her filtering voice. In the female picaresque, especially, discourse must be mediated by someone other than the picara in order not only "to satisfy the mythic and socio-political aspects of the text but also to heroize the protagonist in human terms" (Friedman 200).

It is a given that Pheoby's "coming forth with the story might result in tawdry gossip and unkind debasement" (Waller ix). Yet, upon hearing Janie's story, Pheoby undergoes a transformation that borders on epiphany: it has altered her worldview, transformed the way she thinks, and restored her faith in human relationships. Upon hearing Janie's story, Pheoby says, "Lawd! ... Ah done grewed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie" (TGWGW 284). The implication is that Pheoby will herself mirror the pattern of Janie's experience, at least in the sense that she shares Janie's story. But this response
does not extend to society as a whole.

As Hurston describes the porchdwellers and their speculation and gossip upon Janie’s return (fortyish, barefoot, in faded shirt and muddy overalls), it becomes apparent that Janie is still marginalized, suspect and misunderstood. This is the position she is to keep in relation to general society (excepting Pheoby) throughout the novel; this is the position that readers keep in relation to the events in the novel. Given Janie’s oral history, readers are forced to go outside or beyond the text to live and to know for themselves (Wolff 32).

Janie’s “wayfarer’s heart” guides her away from her grandmother’s vision of married life on a pedestal (what she calls a “stand on high ground”), also away from the “doll baby” vision of Joe Starks, and finally, to and then beyond Tea Cake’s picaro’s tutelage on life and love. Janie refigures notions of conventional womanhood—from her fluid and easy notions of marriage to her donning of men’s overalls; in effect, she “throws up a highway in the wilderness” that is certainly far from Nanny’s vision, and uniquely her own—seeking fulfillment, love, selfhood, and equality.

Janie is an “outlaw” or criminal because she seeks to live beyond the realm of law and societal norms; meanwhile, her self-possession and voice set her apart from other female characters in Hurston’s narrative. In this sense, Janie commits a sin common to Evangelical conversion narratives (namely, becoming a law unto herself); her punishment occurs in the flood episode and its aftermath in Their Eyes Were Watching God. The havoc in the Everglades symbolically represents the power and wrath of a God whose power becomes apparent, at least in Hurston’s cosmology, when at the opening of Jonah’s Gourd Vine, he appears “grumbling his thunder and playing the zig-zag lightning through his fingers” (qtd. Bone 127):

[As the criminal confessions indicate, an excessively uncompromising self, one that became a law unto itself in both a secular and spiritual sense, needed to be restrained and punished by the world. One could not spurn some worldly institutions, such as the home, the church, or the state, without casting oneself in the role of subversive or rebel. To step outside the divinely-sanctioned institutions of the world was, once again, to plunge into the chaos of unbridled self and savagery. (Andrews, in Sekora and Turner, 9)]

The fact that Janie prevails over the hardships, first, of flood and destruction, and second, of Tea Cake’s madness and death, shows that she has earned her
right to this “rebel” status. Thereafter, she may return home and teach through her example. Janie’s narrative sanctions her picara’s life.

Once home, Janie’s adventures continue not in the form of “de big road,” but in the form of her wanderings in memory and the stories she tells—in essence a form of “interior” venturing. Kimberly W. Benson asks rhetorically in “Facing Tradition: Revisionary Scenes in African American Literature”: “Does the tradition, in effect, seek to become its own voyeur, looking back on the differential displays of self-portraiture with ‘happy’ assurance of its final self-constitution?” (Benson 107). If she were to have considered Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, the answer would have been a resounding “yes.”

The novel ends on a high note of affirmation, as Janie’s adventures and Tea Cake’s memory inspire these final words: “She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see” (286). Finished with her traveling days, Janie tells Pheoby that she can now sit back (284). By contrast, upon hearing her friend’s story Pheoby says, “Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo” (284). In effect, Janie’s post-romantic, antisocial sensibility favors nonconformity over conformity and her discourse is profoundly affecting for readers, leveling even in its eloquent silences a heavy blow to the status quo and the establishment.

In closing, it is readers who must give fullest realization to Janie’s voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God. The picaresque adventure has not finished; rather, it has been passed on to the novel’s readers. Perhaps the greatest lesson to arise out of the picaresque tradition in literature is that readers must travel together with the picara/picaro: perhaps, seeking a self-identity, developing a voice, and authoring a text. As Janie tells Pheoby, and via her friend whomever else might care to listen, “‘It’s uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there.... [People] got tuh find out about livin’ fuh themselves’” (285). Even if life in sum remains indeterminate and the future lies before us an inexhaustible frontier (alternately, Hurston’s endless horizon), there will be value in a person’s having ventured and looked about.
Notes

1 Giving form, shape, and voice, to the voiceless proves to have been the impetus for creation of the picaresque novel in Golden Age Spain: the picaresque was the first novel form to choose as a fictional subject the life experiences of a lower class, marginal character in society. This study distinguishes between the voices of the subculture(s) (minor voices) and those of the dominant society (major voices): that is, the latter group creates the “official” discourse (mostly white, Anglo-Saxon male). For the most part, the works cited in this study all arise from the subcultures, and thus represent minor voices. Essentially, the discourses and stories arising from this spectrum of voices include subjects as diverse as the graffiti scrawls on subways, Latino poetry, the Black culture’s “rap” music, and a full spectrum of underprivileged discourse(s), including those of women in society.

Thus, the most compelling question raised by critics regarding Hurston’s novel is the problem of voice. Critics seek to justify Janie’s apparent lack of voice in a novel that should be her own. On this subject, Margaret Homans points out that women, due to gender roles, may be excluded categorically from the language of the dominant discourse, which she explains makes us aware of the inadequacy of language, its inability to represent female experience, and its tendency not only to silence women but to make women complicitous in that silence (qtd. Washington 238). Michael G. Cooke writes that the “problem of finding a voice haunts black literature” (81). William L. Andrews calls the exercise of reading such works an “exercise in creative hearing” (Andrews 8). Scholars work, then, to let “the margins speak.” Friedman writes, “[The picaresque] texts put women in center stage to air their grievances and to overshadow their masters, even those who would deprive them of the word” (xi). Janie sets a precedent for this life. Molly Hite points out a paradox, in that “a speaking margin cannot be a margin at all” (Hite 446). If in authoring the text the picara becomes a “speaking margin,” she has successfully nullified the condition of marginality itself.

2 Walker tells a story about a childhood incident involving her brother and herself, which well embodies society’s “whitewashing” of life, especially in accounting for minor voices within society. She links becoming a Pulitzer-prize winning author to this childhood experience. Her brother had committed a deliberate, malicious act—shooting her in the eye with a toy weapon and leaving Alice permanently blind. In effect, she was injured twice: first by a projectile striking her eye and, second, by her parents’ “whitewashing” of the incident. In calling the shooting an “accident,” they deliberately protected her brother from the burden of his own actions; meanwhile, Alice Walker carries the burden of consciousness forward to this day, particularly in the form of her physical disability. The source for this information was a televised interview, November 25, 1993.

3 Darwin T. Turner explains the picaresque genre’s “natural fit” with the narrative tradition of early African-American writers in the following terms: a) the “picaresque quality” of the slave narratives derives partially from the
actual conditions of slavery itself; thus, b) a faithful rendering of their lives seems "episodic"; c) "whether in flight or on the plantation, any slave—even the most docile and self-abasing—remained in such continuous jeopardy that his or her status amounted to that of a picaro who played the rogue to survive"; and d) upon escape, with the experience of freedom, the slave told his or her "story" (Turner 129, 133).

4 In the literary scholarship, critics have pinpointed Hurston's over-reliance on folk sayings in Their Eyes Were Watching God, the novel's bawdiness or crudeness, and Hurston's own propensity for overwriting. Arthur P. Davis exemplifies this type of response in From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers, 1900 to 1960 (1974) when he writes that although Hurston captures the right mood, she nonetheless "fills in too many tall tales, too much folk anecdote" (116). Robert Bones writes in his seminal study, The Negro Novel in America (Yale UP, 1965), that the real danger in Hurston's work is that these folk sayings "destroy rather than support authentic characterization" (127). This type of response to Hurston's writing had appeared as early as Andrew Burris's response to Jonah's Vine Gourd (1936), which he proclaimed was a "really significant book" but that Hurston's novel was a failure because "she used her characters and the various situations created for them as mere pegs upon which to hang their dialect and folkways" (166-67). Detractors of the picaresque novel make similar claims: claims equally peppered with admiration even in the midst of detractions.

5 Marcia L. Welles points out that, historically, creation of the picara proved surprisingly influential, as other writers chose to follow 'Ubeda's example and thereafter "the literary world was speedily peopled with picaresque heroines" (Welles 63).

6 One critic asserts that 'Ubeda's La picares Justina was written as a book of "vanidades" (frivolous talk); the full title of the book may be translated as The Book of Entertainment of the Rogue Justina; and, finally, the novel's dubious morality led one nineteenth-century critic to call Justina "a monument of bad taste" (see Damiana 23).

7 Characteristically, the picara's body is seen as a commodity to be objectified and possessed, and that is way. Friedman writes, "the texts define identity in negative terms of in terms of what is left unsaid" (73). Even stories about encounters that are embedded within the primary narrative concern moments in Janie's life when her relationships with men are threatened, as when Nunkie threatens Janie's marriage to Tea Cake (Chapter 15) or when Mrs. Turner plots to have Janie leave Tea Cake and marry her brother (Chapter 16).

8 The gate represents the picara's watchful anticipation and waiting, perhaps even signifying daydreams: however, in the picara's passing beyond the gate, too often, fulfillment occurs primarily in the male domain. For example, in Amado's Tereza Batista, Tereza's life with Dr. Emiliano Guedes is described mostly
influence of gates in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Amado's use equally conveys the idea of the gate as a portal to new life: for example, the narrator says, "When he [Emiliano Guedes] opened the gate and went into the garden, it was as though he sailed into the magic harbor of a fairytale world where only peace, beauty, and pleasure existed. Life, waited for him there in the laughter, the eyes, and the arms of Tereza Batista" (381). Joe Starks partakes of Janie's "pleasures" in a similarly one-sided manner. Notably, then, the gate superficially represents romance, with a darker subtext: Amado's characterization, above, notably excludes Guedes' cold stare in demanding the aborting of his bastard offspring as well as his notion that mistresses are for "loving" and wives for "childrearing" (cf. 344-45).

9 Ubeda's novel traces Justina's premarital adventures which lead to her engagement to Guzmán, the reigning picaro introduced by Matéo Aleman's *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Richard Bjornson groups *Justina* with the other picaresque prototypes—Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzmán de Alfarache, and Celestina—because Ubeda "implies that these books comprise a literary tradition of works dealing with picaresque life": he suggests that this life is "defined pictorially" in the frontispiece to the first edition of *Justina* in the central image of "la nave de la vida picaresca" (the ship of picaresque life) that is steered by Time and occupied by Celestina, Justina, and Guzmán (Bjornson 69). Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* begins, as in this frontispiece to *Justina*, with the image of a ship. However, Hurston uses the ship more than to carry individuals as she distinguishes between the sexes in the opening to her novel: "Ships at a distance," she writes, "have every man's wish on board"; however, for women, "The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly" (*TEWG* 9). Impetus for actions, then, remain grounded in the tangible realm beneath their feet for men; women grasp reality from the sky, the realm of dreams and imagination—explaining, in part, why "their eyes are watching God."

10 Sieber records that not only is Lázaro's story of his origins and life a new subject for fiction (*Lazarillo de Tormes*), but new in that the protagonist simultaneously tells the story of how he becomes an author (Sieber 14). As cited earlier, the picaresque novel is also the first narrative form that treats and heroizes a lower-class, marginal protagonist. In this sense, also, Janie is "author."

11 In this regard, consider Hedin's literary paradigm in positing a direct link between the African American slave narrative and the picaresque literary tradition. In the article, Hedin traces the historical development of the slave narrative, primarily highlighting the necessity for former slaves to develop narratives of their lives in slavery—at first merely to discredit slavery and encourage abolition, and later (heavily influenced by white, northern editors) to argue in language that would not offend their predominantly white audience. William L. Andrews suggests that as the tradition of African American storytelling developed into the mid-nineteenth century, "black writers, white prefacers and editors, and white reviewers tended to single out the narrating voice itself as the most problematic aspect of either the writing or the reading
voice itself as the most problematic aspect of either the writing or the reading of a narrative as authoritative" (Andrews 23). One result was a transition away from the black self in a narrative written for the larger white society. Narrators came to espouse a position in their writing that slavery was an impersonal system which worked with a corrupt internal logic. As a result, the slave narrators were able to condemn the system without directly condemning individuals.

The resulting paradox, writes Hedin, became one in which the individualistic, self-concerned, partly asocial adventurer (picaro) had to disappear at a time when the survival strategies of the picaro were becoming even more important to the slave than before (cf. 635-36). Henry Bibb, for example, proves a descendent of Lazarillo (an equal in subverting the logic of slavery in matters of morality) in his Narrative of the Life of Henry Bibb, an American Slave (1850), as Bibb, accused of stealing a jackass, defends himself with this rationale:

But I well knew that I was regarded as property, and so was the ass; and I thought if one piece of property took off [with] another, there could be no law violated in the act; no more sin committed in this than if one jackass had rode off another. (qtd. Hedin 638)

Similarly, people whom Lazarillo meets always seem to say, as voiced by almsgivers in Toledo, "You there! You are a scoundrel and a tramp. Get along; go look up a good master to serve" (Lazarillo de Tormes, 33).

Among primary responses to Hurston's novel, Melvin Dixon voices a typical response, saying that Zora Neale Hurston "takes readers to the horizon and back" in the story of Janie's travels (Dixon 83). Wendy J. McCredie writes, "As Janie tells her story she pulls in her past, her horizon, and makes it part of herself" (McCredie 25). Henry Louis Gates's afterword to the Harper & Row edition of Hurston's novel (published in 1990) similarly describes the novel as "charting" Janie Crawford's fulfillment in terms of autonomy and imagination (187). Also, as previously cited, Lee R. Edwards finds that Janie's life becomes a "compelling model of possibility for anyone who hears her tale (qtd. Washington 250).

This aspect of narrative experience finds its equivalent in Hurston's novel in the call (i.e., story telling) and response (i.e., interpretations) strategy she uses to depict interactions among and between characters. This idea derives from several sources. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. interprets the novel as plotting Janie's journey from object to subject as the novel shifts from third-person narration to a form of "free indirect discourse" (a blend of first- and third-person narration) which, he suggests, signifies Janie's growing awareness of self in the novel (187). John F. Callahan examines the way that Hurston (the author) and Janie (her character) work together collaboratively in an "intimate rhetoric of call-and-response" as the narrator and storyteller share voices and perspectives throughout the novel (119-20). But the most thorough study of this issue appears in Karla F. C. Holloway's The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston (1987), in which Holloway develops an extensive linguistic approach to Hurston's works that intricately accounts for the multiple facets of language and voice.
The mule becomes a powerful symbol in both Amado’s and Hurston’s narratives of the picara’s life. One reason that the mule becomes such a powerful symbol is that both narratives are the “salt of the earth” variety, depicting country and small-town life. Defoe’s Moll Flanders, for example, does not lead the picara along to guide the plow or work the country general store; rather, Defoe’s narrative has Moll take up what may be called “city arts” such as pick-pocketing and petty dupes (which consequently land her in Newgate prison; notably, Tereza Batista spends several occasions in prison, as does Janie briefly after she kills Tea Cake in self-defense). Janie’s grandmother tells her, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (29). Later, when Killicks anticipates a large crop of “taters,” he goes to investigate the prospect of buying a second plow: “Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah’m talkin’ ’bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle ‘im” (46). Joe Starks offers a new spin on the mule theme: “You ain’t got no mo’ business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday.... A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo’self and eat p’taters dat other folks plant just special for you” (49). Last, although he promises to “make a wife” of Janie Mae Killicks, it becomes apparent that Mr. Starks’s “doll-baby” has much in common with Matt Bonner’s mule. Bonner’s mule achieves mythical status in Hurston’s novel via stories that endure long after the mule’s death, passed mostly in “porch talk” (97), and in the imaginations of children who visit the mule’s bleaching bones in the spirit of adventure.

In keeping with former comparisons between Hurston’s and Amado’s narratives of the picara’s life, in Tereza Batista the mule shows a much more brutish presence. In Chapter 13, Amado introduces a well-known ghost demon called the “Headless Mule,” “that critter, with fire where his head ought to be” (cf. 115). Tereza’s empowerment is much more explicit throughout Amado’s novel. Tereza represents the heroic persona of the slave narratives when confronting this “Headless Mule.” Distinguished from her peers, Tereza Batista is described by the narrator as the “only one with the spunk to face up to an evil spirit”:

She looked an evil spirit in the eye and fought it too—and if you don’t believe me, just ask anybody who was there. She didn’t run and she didn’t cry quits; and if she yelled for help when she was getting the worst of it, it’s a sure thing nobody came; she just had to save herself the best she could. No gal on this earth was ever so alone and so forsaken by God and man. (116)

The picara, overall, shows an uncanny ability to adapt and prevail continually throughout the episodic, picaresque narrative. If Tereza matches the spirit of the Headless Mule, there are other folks not as fortunate as the picara in Amado’s narrative. For example, people refer to Gabi, “the priest’s concubine” and “sacrilegious whore” by the nicknames, “Headless Mule” and the “Priest’s Mule” (cf. 120-121). The story of Gabi details how she “shacked up” with the priest and then opened up a whorehouse after his death with the money he had got saying masses. This story prefaces Tereza’s initiation into the bed chamber and parallels the story of the gentlewoman, Doris, who becomes the Captain’s legal wife, while Tereza is his mistress. and then slavishly dotes on
him. The moral of this tale is obvious: without Tereza's "spunk," Doris physically deteriorates and finally succumbs to premature death in childbirth. As much as Amado's Tereza Batista represents a story of the "light," it represents a story of the "dark." Tereza's lot may have been cast in either direction. However, she straddles two worlds. What remains uncanny is that Tereza's punishment is meted out liberally and she continually rises above it in nearly mythic dimensions, without losing her humanity.

15 If Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God is predominantly expressed in this "language of absence," words describing "what isn't" rather than "what is," Amado's forte in Tereza Batista (the contemporary picaresque novel) is the "language of presence," even should this presence be brutish in an instinctual, Hobbesian way. Sweet language finds its complement in brutal acts. In Amado's novel of the picara's life, Hurston's "said nothing" (the implicit "said"; see Donald Hall's "Poetry: the Unsayable Said") becomes a resounding, explicit "said": chalk this difference up to the passage of years and a new era in literature. Perhaps. In Tereza Batista, Captain Duarte da Rosa tangibly embodies and fulfills exactly what Logan Killicks more simply implies in Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Amado's narrative, due to its explicit nature, works well to introduce the picara's life in literature (generally speaking), as well as to highlight some of the notable differences between Hurston's modern American novel and other twentieth-century picaresque novels. For example, Amado spells out the ABCs of Tereza's induction into the art of the bed chamber in painstaking detail, a clear omission in Hurston's narrative. Namely, the Captain sees as his duty where Tereza is concerned "to teach her proper fear and respect for the lord and master who had bought her from those who had the right to sell her": he pleasures in "hitting for the sake of hitting" and "abusing for abuse's sake" (131-32). Furthermore, he wields against her, literally, the big heavy ferule "from slavery days" (137) as his "bullyboys" pin her down on the bed:

Each time the Captain took her he had to fight for her. Each new trick was learned slowly and by dint of brute force. Suck, the Captain ordered, and the disobedient vixen clenched her jaws tight and he hit her on the lips with a belt buckle. . . . Each lesson took long nights to learn, and the teaching aids were slaps in the face with an open palm, blows on the chest with a fist, belt, ferule, and whip. . . . Clotted blood, the stink of urine, bellows of pain initiated Tereza into the art of the bedchamber. (139)

This passage, if anything, is explicit about the picara's initiation into the art of the bedroom; for Tereza, this bedroom becomes literally a "battlefield" (138). Amado's subtitles the novel in its English translation, "Home from the Wars."

16 George White's Brief Account: Written By Himself (1810) may have been the earliest example of a narrative which conceived of a quest for greater liberty in creating the vocation of "black wordsmith"—prophetically, this expression applies an archetypal parallelism to the terms "liberty," "speak," and "text" (see Andrews, in Sekora and Turner 18).
17 Part of the picara’s education, then, comes in learning to identify false
types. Amado also embodies this experience in Avelo Auler’s classic pursuit of
Tereza. Auler’s intentions are spelled out explicitly:

[He was a] kind of Dan in the form of a traveling salesman, a
second-class philanderer gleaming with brilliantine and reeking
with cheap toilet water. . . . In search of some richer, more
succulent dish, real fun in bed with no danger of engagement
and marriage, some restless woman with time on her hands, some
wealthy man’s unengaged mistress, in fact. (Amado 336)

Prior to her experience with the angelic Daniel, who gave her a glimpse into
the nature of loving and led her to murder the Captain (the man who bought
her but failed to break her spirit), Tereza would not have known how to deflect
his smooth-talking advances. As importantly, Daniel (the law student) teaches
Tereza, “Every subject has its time, every conversation its place” (225); this is
the lesson Starks teaches Janie implicitly in the example of his life.

18 This phrase gains legitimacy from its source, Elliot Liebow’s Tally’s Corner:
A Study of Negro Street Cornermen (Boston: Little Brown, 1967). See p. 147,
where Liebow elaborates on the meaning of this phrase for the “street”
persona. At least one contemporary person who embodied this ethic in both his
life and authored text is Malcolm X (cf. Alex Haley’s The Autobiography of
Malcolm X).

19 This is a fine example of the dramatization which Jugurtha writes
characterized the slave narratives, essentially throwing “characters against
characters,” thereby increasing the role of the reader, who must rely on
inference to evaluate the tale (see Jugurtha, in Sekora and Turner, 110; another
example occurs in Maya Angelou’s I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, when the
white girls confront Maya’s grandmother—the world takes a deep breath,
having doubts about “continuing to revolve,” 25). In certain slave narratives,
writes Jugurtha, perspectives are multiplied by the dramatization of episodes
(e.g., Matt Bonner’s Mule). This occurs in the Gallant’s Play: “Standing
between the storyteller and his audience, the mind of the author is never
obliterated, merely restrained. Still, in the dramatic scenes, characters are
seemingly thrown against characters and, with the author’s voice modified,
there is an increasing need for the reader to rely on inference, to himself
become an evaluator of the tale” (Jugurtha, in Sekora and Turner, 110).

20 Rebecca S. Bowman asserts that a feminine voice and its identity can be
discerned beyond the silence through the dialogue that it initiates (4-5). She
writes:

Underscoring and accentuating . . . [plot], then, is an ideological
dialogue initiated by a feminine voice which both underscores its
own marginality and attempts to disrupt and reconstitute social
codes pertaining specifically to feminine identity. The
marginality of perspective . . . is stressed through the
relationship of the protagonist to her community; in these novels, not only do the protagonists strongly assert that they are outsiders, but much of the dramatic tension arises from their struggles to remain so. And the dialogic effect of this emphasis on marginality seems obvious: as outsiders, these protagonists can achieve the freedom and subjectivity that allows them to reassign value to their own experiences and issue a direct challenge to conventional social codes... (9)

This aspect of the narrative is particularly evident in the Jody Starks section of Hurston’s novel: at the moment of Janie’s self-imposed silence, as well as in the dialogue regarding Matt Bonner’s yellow mule.

21 Inner development of picaresque character had traditionally been rudimentary. In Hurston’s novel, “thought pictures” described as “crayon enlargements of life” (81) beautifully show readers Janie’s inner development. The image of a crayoned picture of life seems ideally matched to the picaresque genre, the first form to address a “common” audience about a “common” subject (the picara/picaro); no other writing implement is more common or rudimentary than the crayon, the first instrument held in a child’s hand. In the picaresque narrative, such pictures play an important part in conveying sense and character. Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God is highly visual in ways similar to Cervantes’ Don Quixote, also, in that readers may strongly visualize events due to this strong visual element and the ability of the narrative to strike upon lasting images. One key image is that of something falling off “the shelf inside” Janie, as suggested, and this image works well to sum up the picara’s progress in the novel’s middle pages.

22 Such moments of recognition usually culminate the picara’s affairs with an intermediate lover in the picaresque novel. An intermediate lover, Daniel, similarly taught Tereza Batista pleasure in love, making her “a woman at last” (207; cf. 203-07). Later, a similar moment of epiphany appears in Amado’s Tereza Batista upon the occasion of the Doctor’s death, as conveyed via multiple perspectives on Tereza’s situation, “To the comadres she was a little tart, mistress to an elderly, rich, married man. To the Doctor she was a lady he had molded to his taste in his idle hours. Tereza did not feel like either one thing or the other, only like a woman grown” (379). The picara, unlike any other female protagonist in literature, lives alone, with only momentary stays (relationships to men, primarily) supporting her amidst a profusion of life.

23 This is, furthermore, a rephrasing of the same argument that Janie’s grandmother had used in the novel’s opening, when she told Janie she could not “stand alone” and needed Killicks for protection. Ike Green puts his argument in the following words: “Womenfolks is easy taken advantage of. You know what tuh let none un dese stray niggers dat’s settin’ round heah git de inside track on yuh. They jes lak uh pack uh hawgs, when dey see uh full trough. Whut yuh needs is uh man dat yuh done lived uhround and know all about tuh sort of manage yo’ things fuh yuh and generally do round” (140-41).
This brief episode demonstrates how in the American picaresque novels, characteristically, amidst the threat of violence and hint of wrong-doings (e.g., Tea Cake’s “knuckle puddin’”) carries an air of mock-gentility. American novels in this tradition include *The Great Gatsby*, *Billy Bathgate*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Invisible Man*, and *The Crying of Lot 49*. This characteristic extends to American films in the picaresque narrative tradition, including Chaplin’s *Modern Times* and the film adaptation of Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*.

Richard Bjornson’s analysis of Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* demonstrates that the ambiguity surrounding Moll’s claims, particularly her declarations that honest employment and a good husband would have kept her from a life of crime, are smokescreens. He cites how Moll focuses throughout her narrative “upon external details and quantifiable measures to give the impression of honesty”; meanwhile, she acts dishonestly, contriving numerous ways of deflecting the reader’s attention from her own culpability as she condemns an action but not herself for having performed it—most notably, she willfully chooses thieving when it proves a more profitable scheme than needlework, or chooses to abandon a potentially good husband when a more advantageous match presents itself (Bjornson 193-94). “Moll’s version of reality,” he concludes, “nevertheless provides readers with sufficient information to recognize the process during which she learns the rules of the game and develops the very self-image expressed in her interpretation of events” (196).

For example, Amado’s Libório das Neves (traveling salesman, racketeer) is likened in a Jonsonian sense to a “jackal”: “[He is] a long lean individual dressed in funereal black, with swollen eyelids, slick hair, stooping shoulders, and a flaccid mouth” (9). Similarly, Clerêncio, the sexton, regards Tereza, thinking “what a nice piece of meat,” the “vulture,” before hastily making the sign of the cross (358).

Dr. Emiliano Guedes, Tereza’s lover, endows her with the gifts of learning (dance, writing, manners) and friendship (he had treated her as if “she were somebody, a real person”—he had freed her from jail and brothel to lift her “out of humiliation and indifference to her own fate” and to teach her “to love life” (354). Her bounty? Apart from loss of an aborted child, a child she very much wanted, Tereza catalogs: “tenderness, warmth, constant attention, sweet friendship, and love” (356). In Tereza’s eyes the Doctor appears as nearly “a saint, a god, someone so far above everyone else” (354). Immediately afterwards, an unnamed narrator interjects, “Fond words, affection, kindness, gifts, and money, certainly, are common currency between lovers. But love, Emiliano? Since when?” (356).

Briefly, consider an elaboration on this point. Amado’s Tereza Batista receives painstaking mentoring in the arts of reading and writing (cf. 337) and then utilizes this education throughout the community: testimony to her success, the lawyer, Lulu, introduces her to Judge Benito Cardoso: “Her name is Tereza Batista. She’s a rare beauty, old man. And she fights even better than
she writes" (62; cf. 25-34). This is the Tereza who "taught the children their ABCs and the multiplication tables and penmanship..." (51). Unlike Janie Mae Crawford, she is a vital member of society throughout the narrative; her "wars" are both private and community directed. This is the active life for which Janie yearns (like the butterfly yet to emerge from the chrysalis stage) and which she experiences fully only in the Everglades with Tea Cake; it is also a position never occupied by the self-serving picaro, whose vision rarely moves beyond himself.

29 Amado dramatizes the episode by having the poet's voice resound again, this time, calling to all whores that "the time has come to say: Enough!":

With no bill of rights, no organization, no word card, no union, no program for a better life, no manifests, no banner. . . .

Women riddled with disease but with no clinic, no doctor, no hospital bed; hungry and thirsty but with no right to unemployment assistance or retirement pension or a vacation, no right to have children, no right to a home, no right to love, just the right to be whores and nothing else? Did you know or didn't you? Well, if you didn't I'm telling you now. (441)

This cry is not far different than Courage's cry in demanding that her new husband sign a document giving her equal rights. Certainly, it is not far different from Justina's cry at the close of Ubeda's novel, wherein she avows that the qualities of companionship and personal attraction ought to guide a woman in choosing her marriage partner prior to the nuptial bed (after a lengthy discourse on potential husbands). The most effective means to give voice to those who suffer in silence, as Hurston knew so well, is by utilizing a language of absence.

30 Specifically, these headlines read: "BATTLE IN THE TENDERLOIN, MOVING DAY FOR RED-LIGHT DISTRICT BEGINS WITH RIOT; POLICE TRUCKS TAKE PROSTITUTES TO CODFISH HILL..."; "Only one photographer, the bearded Rino, had turned up to document the heroism of the police as they battled with nightsticks and revolvers against women." (484; "Cudgels thudded and blows rained down upon the women. The order was not to let up until the criminals went back to 'the life' and opened their baskets," 513); and Nereu Werneck, short on material, falls back on discussing the officials' plan for getting prostitutes back to work, "Operation Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, It's Back to Work We Go":

He knew that the secret of keeping the fans on the edge of their seats was suspense.... What will happen, the sports announcer asked with rhetorical eloquence, when the woman-hungry sailors find no one with whom to slake their natural appetites? What then? (503)

The burden on the reader increases in proportion to the choices apparent in the picaresque narrative. Passing the final word on the "closed-basket problem," Councilman Reginaldo Pavão describes the "Dantesque spectacle" and
addresses the people, especially making a moving appeal to his “dear fellow countrywomen whom the storms of existence have caused to stumble and fall, only to be washed up on the dismal shores of prostitution” to assume a patriotic spirit in assisting the “heroic sailors of the invincible South Atlantic fleet,” imploring them, “Your untimely abstinence threatens to provoke an international incident” (510).

31 The effect, I think, is not unlike the slave narrator’s use of dramatization to pit characters one against the other. Namely, in setting up the episode thus. Amado achieves the effect of making the reader a part of the fray, muscling his or her way toward a private response to the whole affair and working toward a resolution about its place within the larger narrative. Councilman, sports announcer, popular columnist, photographer—what Amado achieves in invoking these figures is twofold: first, he decreases the narrative distance between his readership and his text because these are well-known people across continents and time boundaries; second, he reinforces the notion that every event is subject to interpretation—each of these individuals plays a part in shaping our response to events. The narrator, too, plays no small part in this interpretation (even if he is a plain cabby):

I’m only telling it to you the way it happened because you wanted to hear about it so bad, and a cabby owes his customers a good jaw at least. Anybody who thinks he can explain all the things that happen in this world by chopping them up into neat little facts and figures and then tying up all the loose ends—well, you’ll excuse me, friend, but he’s nothing but a false materialist, a half-pint know-it-all, a short-sighted historian, a buttinsky, and a fool. (528)

32 In this respect, the picara’s narrative adds an important, third dimension to the American slave narrative form, whose general interest may be said to fall into two categories: a) the interest of a good story of horror or adventure in which the protagonist survives and overcomes by courage, skill, and luck, and b) the interest of the issues of enslavement and freedom, of the psychology of those who pass or fail to pass, legally or spiritually, from one state to the other (Doyle, in Sekora and Turner, 83). As Hedin writes in “Strategies of Form in the American Slave Narrative,” “[O]n the road they [slave narrators] keep their minds on the nobler possibilities of freedom even while staying one step ahead of the hounds” (Hedin, in Sekora and Turner, 27).

33 As in the female slave narrator’s appropriation of the sentimental novel form; see Harriet Brent Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Boston, 1861); Hedin, 28).

34 Although Tereza shows an ability to “straddle two worlds” (she assumes mythic dimensions in her narrative, she is also, foremost, human), she never strays far from the role ascribed by the early female slave narrators in their appropriation of the sentimental novel form; her life at one point may be
superimposed on that of Mattie Griffiths in *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857); she resides in a quiet puritanical town in Massachusetts where she engages in "teaching a small school of African children; happy in the discharge of so sacred a duty" (399). Griffiths sees the narrative, moreover, as an instrument of conversion: "And so, my history, go forth and do thy mission! Knock on the doors of the lordly and wealthy; there, by the shaded light of rosy lamps, tell your story..." (401). Similarly, Tereza Batista's skill and calling to be a teacher become apparent several times throughout her narrative (she is described as an "amateur schoolmistress," 334); this characteristic is common in the picaresque genre in which the protagonist often assumes the role of writer/author, actor in stage plays, and chosen spokesperson for the underprivileged classes.

In novels treating the picaro's life, narrative form traditionally has been epistolary. This type of narrative earmarks *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Simplicissimus*, as well as contemporary works such as Beckett's *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. This epistolary form also characterizes the picaro's life as scripted by male authors (e.g., *Moll Flanders*). *Lazarillo de Tormes* sets the precedent in that Lazarro's *Vida* has been solicited by an unknown gentleman addressed in the narrative as "your grace" and "your honor."

Andrews identifies one weakness of this narrative strategy: namely, that when natural discourse takes on this authenticating role in a novel the narrating voice gains a measure of credibility only at the cost of a considerably depleted "fictive potential" (Andrews 27). This depleted fictive potential is characteristic of picaresque novels, whose characterizations have so often become ridiculous caricatures or outrageous stereotypes.

However, one effect of the author's stance in relation to the picara (support instead of ridicule) that occurs in Hurston's novel is that the question of Janie's moral responsibility for her actions comes up only once (she commits bigamy, among other crimes), at the novel's end, when she is put on trial (for manslaughter). Tea Cake. Hurston, similar to Defoe, dodges the question of moral responsibility by deflecting responsibility back onto the system (society) itself, a ploy also used effectively by the early American slave authors/narrators. As Valerie Lee aptly noted in conversation (Spring 1994), the question of Janie's culpability in leaving Logan Killicks never arises as an issue in the novel.
CHAPTER IV

Birth of the Modern American Picara:
Keeping the Home Fires Burning in Marilynne Robinson’s

Housekeeping

I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer House than Prose—
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—For Doors—

Of Chambers as the Cedars—
Impregnable of Eye—
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky—

Of Visitors—the fairest—
For Occupation—This—
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise—
(Emily Dickinson, P657, c. 1862)

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature,
and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell
and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails.
(Henry David Thoreau, Walden, 70)

Similar to the bridge spanning Lake Fingerbone, Marilynne Robinson’s
Housekeeping does more than assert a “poetics of transience” or a “philosophy
of aggressive motion.” The narrative bridges centuries of female literary
tradition in the picaresque novel. This study specifically focuses on Sylvie’s
modeling role in the novel as picara and shows Ruthie’s transformation (as both
protagonist and first-person narrator) in the series of events leading to her
choice of a fugitive, picara’s life beyond society’s laws and common boundaries.
Robinson’s novel also provides a powerful metaphor for picaresque life as
necessarily lived by the picara in her burning the ancestral Home, which
signals the picara’s break with society and tradition.
Although it may seem illogical to move from a discussion of the picara's life to a treatment of her "birth," there is a compelling rationale. First, the earliest years of the picara's life are usually not given full coverage when she authors her narrative; rather, they become a perfunctory necessity, as cited earlier. The picara recounts the early period in life as a means to "set the stage" for her later travels, dupes, and private affairs (usually, relationships to men). But Marilynne Robinson drafts a narrative that mostly excludes men, and focuses, exclusively, on the years prior to her protagonist's emergence as modern American picara in *Housekeeping*.

As significantly, in altering the American scene for her female protagonist, Robinson transforms the meaning of "Home." She accomplishes this primarily through Sylvie's role in creating a model for the picara who is both rootless and independent (her ties are primarily to jumping and traveling aboard boxcars). Equally significant is the novel's exploration of possibilities for the American woman as seen in the relationship between sisters. A mother's suicide initiates the novel, *Housekeeping*, as the narrative focuses on the shared experiences and developments in the lives of Ruthie (the younger sister) and Lucille (the older sister) upon being orphaned. Ruthie's unorthodox path diverges broadly from that of Lucille, as the latter accepts social codes and conventions and the former becomes a modern American picara. Thus, Robinson's novel disproves the adage espoused by Ruthie's grandmother that "[so long as you] own the roof above your head, you're as safe as anyone can be" (*Housekeeping*, 27; following citations from the text will be noted as *H*). In sum, the experiences within the home (with Sylvie, the flood, house fire) work to show the ineluctable rationality of accepting picaresque life.

Robinson's narrative is striking among examples of the modern American picara for its in-depth presentation of the picara's birth. Other contemporary novelists convey the picara's experiences (e.g., Hurston's Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Erica Jong's Fanny in *The Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*), but no novelist more fully depicts the process of choosing, in thought as well as act, the picaresque mode of life. Thomas Foster has interpreted Ruthie and Sylvie's decision to become vagrants as representing a "kind of death" (Foster 86). But that "death," symbolized in the burning of the ancestral Foster home, leaves Sylvie and Ruthie to rise from the ashes like the mythical Phoenix. May Sarton offers a beautiful vision of the artist as being "someone with 'no walls'" (Sibley 72); this vision is particularly true of the
picara-artist due to her propensity for journeying. Moreover, in burning the
home's structure, the adventurers may "house" all of its particulars within
themselves via memory and self-possession (Thoreau's "golden age" house).
This shedding of the "structured" past leaves Robinson's protagonist free to soar
"above the level plain of tradition and prejudice" (see Chopin 110); specifically,
the picara's passage becomes akin to that of the flood waters, "liquid, capable of
assuming new forms" (H 27).

For the picara's "birth," the lake itself proves instrumental in creating
for Ruthie a position of marginality. Lake Fingerbone's complicity in the
novel's affairs seems even more noteworthy when viewed in light of William
Dean Howells prescription for the prototypical American story in an essay on
Lazarillo de Tormes published in the 1890s—the "intending author of American
fiction," wrote Howells, would do well to study the Spanish picaresque novels," as "one of the best forms for an American story" (qtd. Reed 218). The
prototypical American story, wrote Howells, needed to be "loose and open and
variable" (218), which returns us to the waters of Lake Fingerbone. Namely,
when Ruthie's mother drives into the lake, orphaning her daughters, and
Sylvia Foster (the maternal grandmother) also dies, Ruthie and Lucille are
"exiled" from normal upbringing. The father had deserted long ago. The girls'
world is turned upside down—opening the narrative door to the possibility of
picaresque life (loose, open, and variable), when the spinster aunts, adept at
"embroidering their hopes" but ill-starred in parenting (H 42), relinquish
their caretaking role to the younger relation, Sylvie. Early on the spinsters
come to function brilliantly in the novel as a kind of modern-day female
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

A more serious disjuncture occurs through the novel's introduction of
Sylvie's unorthodox world view and transient lifestyle and, almost as an
extension of Sylvie's presence, through the natural elements of flood and fire.
Ruthie first loses her mother (thus, losing the last remnant of a nuclear family),
then loses her desire to be conventional. Consequently, she begins to lose
interest in school (the pattern in the novel is one of increasingly more flagrant
school violations and absences). At last, Ruthie leaves society entirely, under
Sylvie's tutelage, becoming more a child of the woods and the railroad tracks
than hostess to social teas and soda shop pleasantries. In accepting this
alternative rule, the life-style modeled by Sylvie's eccentric, transient ways,
Ruthie accepts a fugitive life of self-imposed exile.
Metaphorically, Ruthie first must "unhouse" herself in learning to see with her own eyes, and—in following the advice of Mr. French (the principal)—learning to speak with her own tongue. Ultimately, Sylvie and Ruthie function coequally in Robinson's story of Ruthie's emergence as modern American picara. Nonetheless, it is Ruthie's independence which becomes manifest in the first-person narrative comprising the novel, *Housekeeping*.

*Housekeeping* is a story of heroic selfhood in which the sphere of experience opens inward. Sylvie comes to Ruthie and Lucille as a kind of apostle or prophet of sorts, offering her eyes (the ability to see) to the young girls who, Ruthie writes, "had none" (cf. 786). Abel et al. suggest in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983) that, traditionally, women have not been free to explore, to leave home: accordingly, the usual female protagonist's "object is not to learn how to take care of herself, but to find a place where she can be protected, often in return for taking care of others" (8). This is the model presented by the previous generations of Foster women, Sylvie excluded. Their own mother had shown gentle indifference to her daughters. Sylvia Foster had taught the girls the domestic patience and ordinariness of daily routines (cleaning house, turning down bed linens) and had easily accepted a churchwoman's role, even though her husband's death had left her (and all the Foster women) "cut free from the troublesome possibility of success, recognition, advancement" with "no reason to look forward, nothing to regret" (13). Ruthie and Lucille had been spoonfed Lily and Nona's vision of fragile maidenhood prior to their desperate flight (Sylvie even takes on a hue of chivalric romance, appearing in the spinsters' minds as an outcast, "maiden lady," 43). Similarly, the churchwomen had been steadfast in their determination to keep the girls "safely within doors" (183), reinforcing their own "oppression" and "fixed identity" (90). These women, propelled by notions of piety and good breeding, prove to be instrumental in alerting the male authorities about Ruthie's dangerous habits.

Among the possible female role models in *Housekeeping*, Robinson presents a vivid portrait of the modern American picara: Sylvie, whose interest in newspapers is keen irrespective of their dates; who stashes saltines in her pockets; who sleeps clothed, with her shoes on (or tucked under her pillow; whose possessions are kept in a single cardboard box under the bed; who slept now and then in the car; who invites strangers (including a "murderer's cousin") home for dinner; who lies in the park with a newspaper tented over
her face; who offended Lucille's sense of propriety; who had no concept of hours or minutes; for her these were names of trains; and whose very manner embodied transience (102-05, 166). Ruthie's experience closely mirrors Sylvie's in that Robinson's novel suggests that she is abandoned by her own mother, Sylvia Foster, for unknown reasons (a possible rejection of some aspect of herself, perhaps), "virtually omitted from all conversation" and from "her will" (EZ 42). Therefore, Sylvie has been "orphaned" in respects, foreshadowing Ruthie's transformation in the novel in both the pattern of her consequent behavior and her decision to embody picaresque life. Sylvie has neither phone, possessions, job in society, nor home, prior to coming to care for Ruthie and Lucille; that is, she personifies transience.

Contrary to all potential role-models in the narrative, Sylvie does not force Lucille and Ruthie to follow her example. Instead of striving to "mold" her young charges in her image, as her predecessors had done, she entreats them softly, by offering her lifestyle and behaviors simply, straightforwardly ("I'll take you with me sometime," 50):

She ate with her fingers and talked to us softly about people she had known, her friends, while we swung our legs and ate buttered bread. (87)

Ruthie waits throughout the novel for Sylvie to "claim" her, but she does not (106). Rather, like the all-consuming, indifferent flood waters that engulf Fingerbone, Sylvie's potential engulfs Ruthie, as seen in her determining to swim below for a closer look (seeking the darkness); in contrast, Lucille climbs aboard with the citizenry of Fingerbone, housed safe above the watermark. Essentially, the picara becomes a plumber of depths, representing the world of the dispossessed (transcendence) versus the world at large (material gains, civilization). Ruthie's message is clearly articulated in the passage below, embodying the essential mode of picaresque life:

Every spirit passing through the world fingers the tangible and mars the mutable, and finally has come to look and not to buy. So shoes are worn and hassocks are sat upon and finally everything is left where it was and the spirit passes on, just as the wind in the orchard picks up the leaves from the ground as if there were no other pleasure in the world but brown leaves, as if it would deck, clothe, flesh itself in flourishes of dusty brown apple leaves, and then drops them all in a heap at the side of the house and goes on. (73)
Simplicity, pleasure in the moment, transience. That sense of life as a journey. Each of these qualities infuses picaresque life with a poetic sense of one’s “passing through” on the way to somewhere else.

Most remarkable about Sylvie—and the modern American picara, more generally—is her ease and complacency, independence and autonomy, in a spiritually dampened world. As adolescents, Ruthie and Lucille often focus on playing out “intricate and urgent dramas of entrapment and miraculous escape,” such as in their exploring the old quarry deep within the two hills which they imagined were “the ruins of an ancient civilization” (99) or their digging of caves and secret passages with kitchen spoons in the garden. Significant, in this respect, is that the girls would never think of imagining the “rescue” the young boys effected in aiding Helen Foster, their mother, in her flight off Whiskey Rock into the blackest part of the lake. By contrast Sylvie offers stories from real-life, of entrapments and not so miraculous escapes, and offers a physical autonomy that relies no more on domestic artifacts such as kitchen spoons than on the need for caves and secret passages. She is not a real estate collector, but gives it away with the ease of a tycoon (she offers a unique spin on Monopoly, cf. 84). She enlarges the landscape, making the days “unnaturally lengthy and spacious,” and the girls feel small and out of place (79) in comparison. Standing juxtaposed to the other women in the novel, Sylvie accumulates evidence of women’s heroism, as when she pays homage at the war memorial park (camping under her newspaper tent) to the woman who lost an arm in an aircraft factory, but who still managed to support six children by giving piano lessons (105).

In the American grain, following from the previous discussion of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with its oral, folk education, Sylvie teaches a natural distrust of book learning. When Lucille asks about the element represented by the symbol “Fe,” Sylvie answers, “Iron.”

‘Wouldn’t it start with F?’ Lucille responds.
‘It’s iron,’ Sylvie said, ‘They try to trick you.’ (59)

However, as model for the American picara, Sylvie is not beyond her own trickery.
Though she is most noteworthy for her almost painful honesty, Sylvie is not beyond tossing an apparent incongruity into the lap of her "readers" (including Lucille and Ruthie) and saying, in effect, "You make the call. Use your own eyes." An important episode, in this respect, concerns a conversation between Sylvie and Lucille about Sylvie's husband, as follows:

'Where's your husband, Sylvie?'
There was a silence a little longer than a shrug. 'I doubt that he knows where I am.'

'How long were you married?'
Sylvie seemed a little shocked by the question. 'Why, I'm married now, Lucille.'

'But then where is he? Is he a sailor? Is he in jail?'
'We've been out of touch for some time.'
Lucille sighed noisily and swung her legs. 'I don't think you've ever had a husband.'
Sylvie replied serenely, 'Think what you like, Lucille.' (101-02)

Days later, for proof, Sylvie clips a photo of a sailor from a magazine. Sylvie's fielding of this question is not "canned": she is very much a human being as she makes her response regarding his whereabouts self-referential and seems almost hurt by Lucille's implying that she is no longer married. Also, in avoiding a direct response to Lucille's question, Sylvie leaves open the possibility that she knows where he is, even if he does not know where she resides. Immediately, Lucille adorns his memory with an element of roguery (sailor, jailmate). But her impression is unfounded (similar to Ruthie's own adornment of Aunt Molly's history). Sylvie's response, "We've been out of touch for some time," speaks to a more common marital fissure. Even so, the narrative jumps on the imaginative "bandwagon," in asking its readers, "How could people of reasonableness and solidity respond to such tales?" (104). Notice the difficult tongue-thickening, multisyllabic pattern of this query. It seems to shift from the rapport of the above exchange to an almost halting difficulty in communication, like a freight train grinding to a jarring halt—perhaps signaling societal intrusion or mirroring the difficulties imposed by the reintroduction of the missing male quotient into the picara's narrative.

Among potential antecedents to Robinson's narrative of the picara's life, nineteenth-century American literature conveys a singularly rich tradition of women artists who penetrate and see below surfaces, including Emily Dickinson. In the twentieth century, Gertrude Stein speaks in The Making of Americans of
discovering the "bottom nature" of men and women (Stein 263), an image that also conveys this sense of diving beneath surfaces. This consciousness extends to certain characters in twentieth-century literature, also, such as Sarton's Mrs. Stevens and Woolf's Lily Briscoe; Woolf's fictional persona, Lily Briscoe, to "urge her own exception to universal law" and to "plead for it" (77), struggling "against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say, 'But this is what I see; this is what I see'" (emphasis added, Woolf 32).

Nonetheless, the female sphere of experience has been limited, traditionally, to the domestic realm. Jack London's The Sea-Wolf presents an American version post-Moby Dick of that "wonder and perplexity, that questing, that everlasting query... as to what it was all about" (London 71). The exceptional woman artist, Maud Brewster is tossed in as an appendage, or afterthought, to the Adventures of Humphrey Van Weydan, Dean of American Letters, the Second (158). Miss Brewster is given the immortal lines, "I have no clothes, nothing" and "You hardly realize, sir, that I am not a man, or that I am unaccustomed to the vagrant, careless life which you and your men seem to lead" (155). Is there a woman in Moby Dick? Are any women in Fitzgerald's novels active, unflawed? Do Hemingway's female offspring do anything independently of relationships to men? Hence, women's experience in modern American literature needed to be explored independently, within a new construct of adventuring.

As a modern protagonist in twentieth-century picaresque narrative, Ruthie inevitably reaches to depths of thought and emotion previously unknown to the picara's text. May Sarton signifies this transformation when she asserts that her novel, Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing, should be read as a picaresque novel in which all the "adventures are inward." As she asserts in Plant Dreaming Deep, her general concern is "the inward-turning of the life adventure" (Sarton 181).

For her distinctive modus operandi, the modern American picara stakes her territory in the West of the mind. Many critics note that Robinson looks for a literary model to Thoreau. As Odell Shepard records in The Heart of Thoreau's Journals, when others were going West in search of gold or adventure, Thoreau was more than content to "sit in his attic or woodland hut recording his explorations of thought's wilderness and staking out his claims in the West of the Mind" (Shepard ix). Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man also provides a possible source, as an original American "thinker-tinker," kin to Ford, Edison, and
Franklin (Ellison 11). A more direct, female predecessor in the American literary tradition leading to Ruthie is Katherine Ann Porter's protagonist in "Old Mortality," Miranda.

Above all, Ruthie is refreshingly nonconventional; that is, she does not easily fit one of the well-known female stereotypes in the twentieth-century novel, and this is true of the picara's life in fiction, more generally. For example, Robinson's protagonist is not bound up in romantic imagination (such as Chopin's Edna Pontellier in The Awakening), mired in the time-honored conventions of being a man's wife (notably, Cather's Marian Forrester in A Lost Lady), or presented as a Great Earth Mother whose integrating presence keeps the bodies moving in rhythm to societal constellations (like Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay in To The Lighthouse). Robinson refreshingly drafts a narrative freed of the defining, limiting construct of a woman's relationships to men. Moreover, Robinson's novel breaks from the tradition of madness or death that has symbolized the experiences of women in much twentieth-century literature.

Joanne S. Frye (Living Stories. Telling Lives) points to modern fiction's refusal of narrative closure and indeterminacy as novelistic practices that allow authors to supersede previous female conditions like "passive entrapment in romance or sexual destiny" (qtd. Ryan 82). Yet the picaresque novel has been offering this forum for women's experience since the 1700s. Defoe's Moll Flanders is particularly liberated for her era in history, for example. The earliest picaresque narratives such as La picara Justina focused myopically on the picara's sexual destiny, a shortcoming. The picara was developed by male authors for the entertainment of a privileged male audience. In the twentieth century, however, Robinson rectifies this problem through an indifference to sexuality everywhere apparent in Housekeeping. Robinson thus rejects the traditional, linear narrative that begins with a woman's adolescence, unremarkably passes through middle age, and culminates in death/marriage. Robinson seems to perceive of history (like Faulkner) as being curiously in flux, like flood waters: she has stated in an interview that the "past is a malleable substance, which we work into expressive shapes that in turn shape us" (Conversations, 34). Accordingly, the picara's search for self-identity is intricately bound up with the acts of creation and "authoring"; the act of interpretation (creating art) constructs both the self and the journey.

Part of the nineteenth-century American literary heritage that so richly fosters Robinson's novel, Emily Dickinson confirmed, "Unless we become as
Rogues, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven—" (Sewall 454). The image of the modern American picara most fully embodies the radical, asocial adventurer that seems closely to convey Dickinson's private sense of self. The picara's is a nery, palpable displacement of self in place and time. Like the Gymnast in Dickinson's "A little East of Jordan" (c. 1859), the American picara's balletic, interiorly striving assertions are strong and bold. An outward "gentle indifference" characterizes Ruthie's behavior as well, masking an internal movement that is turbulent and consuming. By contrast, Lucille's follows a path in keeping with her memory of Helen, her mother (i.e., orderly, vigorous, sensible, a widow)—her interpretation belongs to an age-old mode of ordering and "cleaning up" appearances to fit explicit social exigencies (p. 109). This is the social form of ordering and "cleaning up" known to protagonists such as Cather's Marian Forrester. A balance is set up by Robinson in the narrative as she depicts the sisters' growth apart. Lucille comes to represent conventions, rules, and surfaces, just as Ruthie comes to stand for nonconventional choices, violation of society's rules, and the underterrain below surfaces.

As the narrative implies, the meanings that Ruthie and Lucille derive independently from one another outline their difference in the novel: that is, the picara is offered various versions of self from which to choose in her passage toward maturity. And, contrary to some opinion, dangers for the picara seem to come from the most unlikely sources. Intrusions on the world's circumference are not the realm of men alone (e.g., Lucille's memory of her mother). Even Ruthie's beloved grandmother, Sylvia Foster, partook in this same obstruction, as an earlier passage in the novel portends: "Sometimes it seemed to me my grandmother saw our black souls dancing in the moonless cold and offered us deep-dish apple pie as a gesture of well-meaning and despair" (26). To accept passively one's fate in gestures of well-meaning and despair is to aid and abet, act as accomplice to the traditional rails circumscribing a woman's world. Sylvia's violation of the self manifests itself in a fretful reenactment in dreams of heroic acts: catching babies falling from airplanes in tea strainers, imagining the experience of a woman she'd known who had been obsessed with the image of ghost children, urchins with teary faces who danced sky black, naked in the streets, "furious with hunger" (25). Ruthie and Lucille may be, metaphorically speaking, such children, who spend their whole lives watching and waiting with constant attention (130).
In not understanding social codes Sylvie proves herself to be a descendant of the traditional picaresque; however, she adds a heightened quality of awareness that can only be called "modern." Sylvie's presence in Fingerbone is, indeed, otherworldly. For example, she seems not to comprehend the simplest social amenities, such as a note from the parent/guardian explaining a child's absence from school:

Please excuse Lucille's absence. She had pains in her wrists and knees, a buzzing in her ears, a sore tongue, faintness, a stomach ache, and double vision, but no fever or loss of appetite. I did not call the doctor, because she always seemed quite well by 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning. (77)

So striking about this particular narrative (i.e., note of absence) is its hyperbole, that is, its exaggerated list of ridiculous ailments (sore tongue, buzzing in ears); also striking is its apparent naivete. But note that Sylvie is well aware of what symptoms warrant medical attention (fever, loss of appetite) and what symptoms may not be treated by the doctor. Also note how closely aware Sylvie is of Lucille's daily pattern of behavior—hers has been no gentle indifference, for she has keenly made note of an improvement in condition at approximately 9:30 or 10:00 each day. Finally, note the proximity in Robinson's Housekeeping between Lucille's absence from school due to illness and Ruthie's recital in class of Emily Dickinson's poem, "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—" (four sentences) and appreciate the similarities between the speaker's experience in Dickinson's poem and the ailment Sylvie ascribes to Lucille (buzzing in ears, vision problems).

Symbolically, then, this minute narrative functions centrally in the novel. Ruthie has issued the picara's "artistic" manifesto in echoing the words from Dickinson's poem, dying a metaphoric death and willing away keepsakes and that portion of herself that "be Assignable" when a Fly (society) intervenes, "Between the light—and me—/ And then the Windows failed—and then/ I could not see to see" (P465, ll. 223-24). Ruthie is becoming modern American picara. Lucille (more like the Fly that intervenes and obstructs the windows) issues no similar manifesto. Readers may surmise from later events in the novel that this minor narrative acts as a prelude to Lucille's running from the model of picaresque life embodied by Sylvie (sight), and Ruthie's embracing of that model.
Often, Sylvie’s lessons in modeling the picara’s life occur mostly through narrative. This characteristic is particularly visible in both Hurston’s and Pynchon’s novels as well, especially in the narrator’s use of cautionary tales (particularly true of the stories of love, for example, when Tea Cake has run off with Janie’s money, leaving her to wonder, the narrative abounds with cautionary stories). Sylvie uses cautionary tales such as, “I knew a woman once who was so lonely she married an old man with a limp and had four children in five years, and none of it helped at all” (66) Such stories, however, are usually followed by the disclaimer that they are stories (an artifact) because Sylvie has not witnessed the woman’s history first-hand. Sylvie suggests, “She was probably crazy” (67). She thus offers no certitude. Only the ebb and flow of narrative, the stories of our lives.

The picara’s narrative seems to attempt to order a chaotic universe; meanwhile, it seems to represents the picara’s life’s work. Thus, the narrative serves a dual purpose. The picara’s most noteworthy task is creating order from a universe that is perceived to be chaotic and indeterminate. “What are all these fragments for,” Ruthie asks, “If not to be knit up finally?” (H 91). Ultimately, avoiding the traditional woman’s roles of nurturer, wife, and mother (e.g., knitting, darning socks, cleaning house), the picara develops the narrative which, in turn, becomes a surrogate form of “woman’s work” (apart from traditional housekeeping or childrearing). A common tenet in modern picaresque narrative is that of the picara’s seeking to order the universe symbolically through her art, which becomes particularly apparent in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49.7

That the picara pursue extraordinary forms of employment is not a new development in literature; however, that her self-identity be so entirely bound up with artistic endeavors is new. To explain more fully, the picara has historically “captained” her fate, especially in relationship to men.5 The frontispiece to La picara Justina, for example, shows Celestina and Justina with Guzmán aboard a ship that is steered by Time (Bjornson 69). Nonetheless, the earliest picaresque works featured stereotypes of female experience (e.g., warrior, bawd). In La picara Justina, Justina leaves her parents’ inn to travel the world and, at the end of her adventure, to marry Guzmán de Alfarache, the reigning picaro (and most renowned literary figure) of her day. Grimmelshausen’s Courage, as her name implies, has the strength and fortitude to battle in wars together with men. Defoe’s Moll Flanders adeptly manages her
affairs, including her body, with the finess of a financial broker. As becomes
evident from surveying the novels, these picaras are determined through
relations to men, much like this century's sentimental picara.

Sharply breaking from the entire tradition of picaresque narrative, Robinson's narrative, like those of other contemporary authors including
Sarton, drafts a narrative almost free of the influence of men. The picaresque
narrative has traditionally been founded on a series of relationships with men.
Loss of a husband or lover is a key ingredient in the picara's narrative. That he
not be replaced is an entirely new slant on an old theme. Anne-Marie Mallon
opens her article entitled "Sojourning Women: Homelessness and
Transcendence in Housekeeping" by fully intoning the substance of this
disruption:

When Marilynne Robinson opens her novel Housekeeping with
the image of a 'spectacular derailment' that sends a sleek, black
train plunging into the depths of a lake, thereby abruptly
widowing three women in the fictional town of Fingerbone,
she is signaling her reader to expect the unexpected in what
lies ahead. Surfaces will be shattered in this narrative; circles
will be broken; and the lives of the Foster women will be marked
from generation to generation by strange disasters and perilous
departures. Of such a remarkable history must come
extraordinary perceptions and uncommon choices. Robinson's
women will not be contained within customary frames nor
distracted by conventional stories of female valor. They will
make their own way in the world, inviting us as readers to
release ourselves and them from structures, domestic or
narrative, that would inhibit that journey. (95)

Mallon's opening paragraph may well be the preamble to a picaresque
narrative, as she hits upon its key characteristics: a) a disruption that signals
readers to "expect the unexpected," b) a narrative that "shatters" surfaces,
offering both "extraordinary perceptions" and "uncommon choices," c) a
narrative that disavows customary "frames" and structures that may inhibit
that "journey," and d) a narrative that invites readers to come along, to make
"their own way in the world"—in sum, the central tenets of contemporary
picaresque experience.

As modern American picara, Ruthie has a strikingly rich inner life that
complements her transient, adventurer's life. Ruthie is mindfully rooted in
her past, not only the immediate past but a familial past that occurred long
before her own birth. Throughout the narrative, with her keen sense of "history" and frequent dwellings in ruins of the past, Ruthie seeks to preserve memorials to that history, such as the dictionary into which her grandfather had pressed wild flowers, arranged alphabetically, A-Z. The delicate blooms—pansies and lady’s slippers, and Queen Anne’s lace—manifest proof of Edmund Foster’s need to order his world. Because Lucille’s principle is one of utility, she does not treasure this relic of the past. Instead, she levels its use in the present to defining “pinking shears,” objects used to clip and order. Lucille is replicating her grandfather’s fetish unawares. Ruthie keenly feels, like Sylvie, the life of “perished things” (126). This dichotomy between views of the world appears most importantly, however, in Robinson’s use of the home. For Robinson, transience and homelessness allow for transcendence above the everyday world.

Offering an early vision for America, Benjamin Franklin writes that the builder’s plan should focus on three characteristics—convenience, security against fire (ironic, given the context of Robinson’s plot in Housekeeping), and cheapness—a kind of “Pattern House” (vii-viii). Franklin’s vision of domesticated America consisted mainly of development projects. His priorities are convenience, cheapness, and utility. Contrast Franklin’s vision with that of Edmund Foster, Ruthie’s maternal grandfather, who had grown up in a house “dug out of the ground, with windows just at earth level and just at eye level, so that from without, the house was a mere mound, no more a human stronghold than a grave, and from within, the perfect horizontality of the world in that place foreshortened the view so severely that the horizon seemed to circumscribe the sod house and nothing more” (213). This womblike house, so circumscribed, is a rather incongruous place; that is, unless we consider Dickinson’s famous earthen mound. This incongruous dwelling with its stunted form may be thought of as the berth of imagination—all other possibilities having been exhausted. This unique home, which Robinson describes as being tomblike, also foreshadows the ancestral home that Sylvie and Ruthie burn, as suggested by the novel’s closing:

Imagine the spirit of the house breaking out the windows and knocking down the doors, and all the neighbors astonished at the ease with which it burst its tomb, broke its grave. Bang! (211)
Thus, the imaginative world may potentially unleash itself, in answer to T. S. Eliot, with a “Bang!” Edmund Foster opens the home, so to speak, to this possibility in his imaginative construction of the Fingerbone homestead, with its stair leading to a blank wall and sloping hallway with a single step in the middle—variations certainly on Franklin’s practicality scheme. As compellingly, his failed version of “housekeeping” (the derailment) starkly contrasts to Ruthie’s own version (rail bound) which provides her successful passage where her forefather had failed.

Nowhere is the picara’s difference from more conventional patterns of the woman’s life more clearly illustrated than in Robinson’s use of the “home.” Sylvia Foster and the spinster Aunts represent traditional womanhood—orderly, based on routines, denial of the self in quiet, even suffering. These traits are evident in the way they manage the ancestral Foster home. In contrast, Sylvie’s transience and indifference to traditional woman’s “arts” manifest themselves in the natural influx of leaves and cobwebs, squirrels and small birds, darkness and disorder (piles of tin cans and stacks of magazines) in the home. Not even natural catastrophes such as flood impinge on her native serenity and indifference.

Distinctively, the modern American picara creates a version of home and housekeeping which incorporates the external world into an internal structure of both self and dwelling. As suggested earlier, Sylvie’s housekeeping functions as a “tending to and nurturing of the exterior world, an opening up of the outside world to the inside”; Thomas Foster interprets this “housekeeping” as the part of of Sylvie’s vagrancy that domesticates the exterior world (Foster 88). This movement, opening up interior space to the outer world, uniquely represents Robinson’s revision of a woman’s “nesting instinct” rather than signifying a cleaning of house in the traditional sense, Sylvie’s form of “nesting” allows for an opening up of the natural world that prepares for the picara’s imminent “birth” (namely, entry into the world). Thus, Sylvie’s actions as picara become not the least bit indifferent, but deliberate and purposeful. Among the lessons of the traditional picara, remember her tenacity when challenged. So as not to lose Ruthie, a kindred spirit, Sylvie decides to burn the Foster home. In so doing, she graphically depicts the picara’s radical break with the past and the nature of the journey she is about to undertake, along the rails, transient and free.
A similar pattern of unorthodox "housekeeping" is suggested by the closing pages of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Remember the symbolic actions of Janie Crawford upon returning home: an opening up of all the windows, doors, and porch-sitting with the dust of the big road coating her bare feet and, as a result, the home itself. One possible precedent for this influx of the external world into the inner domain in American letters is Thoreau.

Thoreau's vision is a bridge to the picara's world. In his *Journals*, under a section subtitled "A Wide, Wide World," Thoreau writes, "Let us migrate interiorly without intermission, and pitch our tent each day nearer the western horizon" (Shepard 12). In *Walden*, he records, "Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly"; thus, all of nature presents itself as a "possible site for a house" (Thoreau 59):

No yard! but unfenced nature reaching up to your very sills... --no gate--no front-yard,—and no path to the civilized world. (90).

The twentieth-century American picara gives form to Thoreau's vision. Thoreau offers his own version of American house-keeping in a dreamed of "golden age," a larger and more populous house of enduring materials, consisting of only one room, a "vast, rude, substantial, primitive hall, without ceiling or plastering, with bare rafters and purlins supporting a sort of lower heaven over one's head," a roost for the weary traveler:

[S]uch a shelter as you would be glad to reach in a tempestuous night, containing all the essentials of a house, and nothing for house-keeping; where you can see all the treasures of the house at one view, and everything hangs upon its peg that a man should use; at once kitchen, pantry, parlor, chamber, storehouse, and garret; where you can see so necessary a thing as a cupboard, and hear the pot boil, and pay your respects to the fire that cooks your dinner, and the oven that bakes your bread, and the necessary furniture and utensils are the chief ornaments; where the washing is not put out, nor the fire, nor the mistress, and perhaps you are sometimes requested to move from off the trap-door, when the cook would descend into the cellar, and so learn whether the ground is solid or hollow beneath you without stamping. *A house whose inside is as open and manifest as a bird's nest, and you cannot go in at the front door and out at the back without seeing some of its inhabitants; where to be a guest is to be presented with the freedom of the house...* (emphasis added, *Walden*, 164)
This dream appears in Thoreau's Walden under the subtitle "House-Warming." This is a home where neither the washing, the fire, nor the mistress are "put out"; a house whose inside is as open and manifest as a "bird’s nest" and where to be a guest is to be presented with "freedom"; "all the essentials of a house, and nothing for house-keeping." Robinson’s form of "housekeeping" finds its prescription nearly in the passage from Thoreau cited above. If this home represents freedom, there may imagination also find its embodiment. Where else can a woman keep house but not be put out? Where else can a house be as open and manifest as a bird’s nest? Thoreau’s version of perfect housekeeping was but a dream. In literally setting fire to the Foster home, Sylvie and Ruthie embody Thoreau’s dream: All the essentials of a home, and nothing for house-keeping. In open-traveling, Ruthie keeps all the essentials of the house within her, that is, within the compass of her mind.

Rescripting her story of origins through narrative, mirrored in the “birth” of the modern American picara, Ruthie writes:

Of my conception I know only what you know of yours. It occurred in darkness and I was unconsenting. I (and that slenderest word is too gross for the rare thing I was then) walked forever through reachless oblivion, in the mood of one smelling night-blooming flowers, and suddenly—My ravishers left their traces in me, male and female, and over the months I rounded, grew heavy, until the scandal could no longer be concealed and oblivion expelled me. But this I have in common with all my kind. By some bleak alchemy what had been mere unbeing becomes death when life is mingled with it. So they seal the door against our returning. (214-215)

The latter two lines take on heavy significance within the frame of picaresque life: as Ruthie emerges from her state of invisibility or "nonbeing," society seems to "seal the door" against her return. Within this process, the "initiate" becomes "pregnant" with knowledge, rounding and growing heavy, until finally, she is expelled. She is picara.

Symbolically, the art resulting from the picara’s authoring of this life represents a breech from the individual anarchy wrought by the mode of picaresque life. Ruthie’s symbolic “homecoming” occurs in her act of drafting the narrative that becomes Housekeeping. The text brings the picara back to the mainstream. Notably absent from Robinson’s novel is the rudimentary
development in consciousness that in classic picaresque literature has rendered the picara a talky, posturing cartoon. This type of caricature resurfaces in twentieth-century American literature in Pynchon’s Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Rather, much contemporary American literature that may be called picaresque shares a feature that Bruce Allen allotted to the protagonist of Robert Chibka’s *A Slight Lapse*, an American novel which he described as “picaresque”: namely, the protagonist speaks of “my life: bits of breath arranged as if to convey something” (Allen 22). This facet of the contemporary picara’s experience becomes manifest in Ruthie’s similar struggle to record her life’s story.

Traditionally, the picara had stood outside of ruling conventions and thus marginalized had rediscovered values anew. Now the picara achieves a heightened type of integration in the text that she authors. Because twentieth-century literature tends to present an escalation of disconnected scenes rather than to adopt more traditional forms of linear plot development, it is no surprise to see the picara (and picaro) gaining literary prominence as a newly transformed symbol for the creating artist.

Martha Ravits suggests that Robinson’s novel enlarges the central tradition in American literature in *Sylvie and Ruthie*’s repudiation of the domestic sphere but “leaves them still at the crossroads in a materialistic, patriarchal society” (Ravits 644). To the contrary, Robinson’s modern picaresque narrative provides a venue that carries its protagonists well beyond the crossroads. Notable in this regard are the “stories” Ruthie constructs about the previous generation of Foster women who had found themselves at a crossroads. For example, from several photographs found in a bureau drawer—including that of a barefoot man squatting against a wall, his face hidden in the shadow of a large hat; a young woman feeding a baby by cup; three old women standing in a row, shading their eyes—and a caption, “I will make you fishers of men.” Ruthie fashions this history for her Aunt:

This document explained my Aunt Molly’s departure to my whole satisfaction. Even now I always imagine her leaning from the low side of some small boat, dropping her net through the spumy billows of the upper air. Her net would sweep the turning world unremarked as a wind in the grass, and when she began to pull it in, perhaps in a pell-mell ascension of formal gentlemen and thin pigs and old women and odd socks that would astonish this lower world, she would gather the net, so easily, until the very
burden itself lay all in a heap just under the surface. One last pull of measureless power and ease would spill her catch into the boat, gasping and amazed, gleaming rainbows in the rarer light. (91)

Ruthie concludes, “Such a net, such a harvesting, would put an end to all anomaly” (91). According to Ruthie’s vision, Molly has become a celestial fisher who catches the gleaming rainbows of humanity to draw them, freed of their burdens, into a rarer light.

In many ways, this metaphor Ruthie ascribes to the experience of her Aunt well signifies the task of the modern American picara: a creating artist whose work “catches” up the many colors of human experience so as to reclaim and order a problematic world. This relatively minor “ordering” narrative (based on a collage of photos) also foreshadows the several voyages to the lake in the novel, and most significantly, gives a premonition of Housekeeping’s closing: Sylvie, standing in the boat and waving her arms in the still night, uses the word “harvesting” to describe her arms’ motion in the air; Ruthie rocks in the boat, seeking ascension (cf. H 92). These episodes together illustrate the interplay between pretext, text, and subtext in Robinson’s novel. According to Sylvie, Molly had gone to work as a bookkeeper in a missionary hospital. Robinson’s novel affirms, however, that such points in Ruthie’s narrative, seemingly erasures of possible errata, are “accidental” (116)—that is, actual events are of small consequence within the “ordering” narrative that creates the essence of the picara’s experience.

Sweeping the turning world, the picara’s narrative has as its pulse sensory experience. Ideally, Ruthie says, her art will effect a “general reclaiming of fallen buttons and misplaced spectacles, of neighbors and kin,” time and error and accident would be undone, and the world would be made “comprehensible and whole”:

For why do our thoughts turn to some gesture of a hand, the fall of a sleeve, some corner of a room on an anonymous afternoon, even when we are asleep, and even when we are so old that our thoughts have abandoned other business? What are all these fragments for, if not to be knit up finally? (92)
For the woman artist, embodied by the modern American picara, Robinson sought the realm of true, serious revelation. In the example above, Aunt Molly’s “ascension” (the subtext of Ruthie’s experience) occurs due to Ruthie’s creative (re)visioning. The modern picara’s perception of the world makes that world complete. In narrative, this protagonist’s appeal for readers is that she consistently reflects, to use Robinson’s favorite analogy, as a type of “ghost child,” before the eyes of a world wearied and laden with burdens and “derailments.” The picara/picaro represents potential, always, the person who may be—the person yet to arrive, the self yet to be fulfilled. Thus, the narrative comes to function primarily through its stories as a window that opens onto a better world, a “counterworld” (not a Utopia) fashioned in the realm of imagination. That narrative is given sentient life as readers become another loop in the shared narrating of stories through their individual responses to the novel, Housekeeping.

As previously noted, the picaresque narrative comprising Housekeeping is cradled within the isolated terrain of Ruthie’s consciousness and inner vision. In earlier twentieth-century narrative, Mrs. Ramsay dreamed of the lighthouse that in her private vision stood for a “country, uninhabited of men” (Woolf 23). Robinson has made this dream reality. The only men in Housekeeping serve to represent church, school, and state (the Methodist church, the principal, the sheriff); in other words, they represent life’s boundaries. Unless a model of picaresque life (such as Hurston’s Tea Cake, vagabond, jumper of rail cars), men disrupt the otherwise natural flow of the picara’s narrative. Only the father, Reginald Stone, is a kind of picaresque model in absentia, described as a traveling salesman who abandoned his family to run off with a cocktail waitress (H 52). Fueled by Sylvie’s many stories about trains and bus stations, Ruthie dreams:

I imagined her [Sylvie] seizing my hand and pulling me after her in a wild waltz down the hall, through the kitchen, through the orchard, the night moonless and I in my night gown, almost asleep. Just when the water in the orchard had begun to rush from us and toward us and to leap against the trunks of trees and splash against our ankles, an old man in a black robe would step from behind a tree and take me by the hand—Sylvie too stricken to weep and I too startled to resist. (68)

The old man in black may be a domestic relations court justice or a threatening symbol of corrupt America. Possibilities abound. But what is most apparent
from Ruthie’s dream is the oppositional structure she sets up between her fluid, dreamlike experience with Sylvie (the “initiate” in white) and the disruption and darkness that descend with the old man’s entrance. More notable about the men in Robinson’s Housekeeping is that they are replete with the deficiencies traditionally given to women in novels. Mr. French, the school principal who takes an inquisitor’s delight in unanswerable questions, is a particularly stunted male, with his seemingly pygmied, small and smooth skull and underdeveloped hands. As social representative, French discusses the fallen Ruth’s “attitude problem,” meanwhile commending Lucille’s “conversion.” But the inverse meaning becomes apparent as the picara’s narrative develops in that Ruthie comes to represent the new American woman, an “elected” soul (heroic, autonomous, free). By contrast, in suddenly fleeing to Miss Royce, the Economics teacher (to be her “adopted” daughter), Lucille comes to represent the traditionally stunted, visionless, domesticated American woman. Ruthie, feeling the world’s gaze as a “distorting mirror,” goes to the woods for “the woods’ own sake” (99), but Lucille comes to see this venture as a “banishment” (99). To be away from society’s core, out of the inner sanctum, is in ways a form of vanishing or nonexistence for Lucille, who seeks society, the light; that is, in venturing to the woods she will have disappeared from the eyes of society, from whose reflection she derives her fragile sense of self. In the novel, Lucille acts as “an intermediary between Sylvie and those demure but absolute arbiters who continually sat in judgment of our lives” (105). Ruthie seeks darkness as most fitting her perceived invisibility: “I often seemed invisible— incompletely and minimally existent, in fact” (105). Throughout her narrative, there is an increasingly self-reflexive element, seen in Ruthie’s saying, “I feared and suspected that Sylvie and I were of a kind, and waited for her to claim me, but she would not” (106).

What the narrative comprising Housekeeping asserts, foremost, is the will implicit in choosing the cast of one’s life. When Sylvie disappears, Ruthie and Lucille sit in the dark house naming states and their capitals, perhaps in an effort both to explore and order (alphabetically) Sylvie’s options. Upon her return, she tells Ruthie and Lucille, “We used to go to the same place when we were little girls. Liberia. We were close, then, like you two” (108). “Liberia” representing liberty? The autonomy of imagination? What is significant in this strand of Ruthie’s narrative is the direct comparison between the older generation (Sylvie and Helen) and the younger generation (Ruthie and Lucille).
Ambiguous referent use in an ensuing paragraph merges Helen and Sylvie into one body (that is, merges the forms of the girls' dead mother and her younger sibling), and concludes. "Darkness is the only solvent" (116). For Ruthie and Lucille, that test comes most vividly in their venture to the lake, "a place of distinctly domestic disorder, warm and still and replete" (113). Together they create a new version of home:

We dragged driftwood halfway out on the point. We used a big stone in its side as one wall, we made back and side walls of driftwood, and we left the third side open to the lake. We pulled down fir limbs and made a roof and floor. It was a low and slovenly structure, to all appearance random and accidental. (114)

Upon awakening to the moonless night, both girls find themselves immersed in pitch darkness around their "ruined stronghold." Escape or no? Ruthie absorbs the night. But Lucille would not accept, as Ruthie records, "that all our human boundaries were overrun" (115). If details are "merely accidental" (116) says the narrative, where do the essences truly lie?

In many ways, the girls' shared experience by the lake signifies a shift in the narrative, as the foreground becomes Ruthie's development as picara. By Chapter 7, two-thirds of the way through Ruthie's narrative, her allegiance is being decided: "For that summer Lucille was still loyal to us" (109).

'Do you know where we were last night?' Lucille asked. Sylvie laughed. 'You were dining with John Jacob Astor,' she said. (118)

This small exchange highlights the developing tension in Sylvie's interaction with the girls. Her response teasingly implies that Lucille had been passing her time in imaginary travels among society's upper echelon. Lucille's immediate response is definitive: "determined to make something of herself" (132), reading various novels to improve herself, including Wuthering Heights and Little Men (her horizon is narrowing much like Edmund Foster's circumscribed mound), and making plans to go to Boston, with its implicit aristocratic heritage. By contrast, Ruthie's choice is to fill the pages of Lucille's diary, in drafting imagined assessments of herself on Lucille's behalf, writing: "She would surely note somewhere in it that I was more the image of Sylvie with every day that passed..." (133). The picara's life becomes for Ruthie a conscious choice.
Ruthie envisions herself as being "left alone," "indifferent" (to clothes), "comfortable" (in her skin), "unimproved," and "without the prospect of improvement" (123). Unexpectedly, when the novel's readers have been led to expect the departure of Sylvie, Ruthie, or both, Ruthie reports to readers: "It was now obvious that Lucille would soon be gone" (134).

On the night Sylvie narrates to Ruthie the nature of her special place, the secluded cabin in the valley, Lucille prepares for a dance and her defection to Miss Royce's (the type of woman that boys lock in supply cabinets), without saying good-bye. Ruthie reads The Prince and the Pauper. So the symbolism is a little heavy-handed, but not so obvious in its symbolism is Miss Royce's returning to the Foster home to fit Lucille's things one by one into a "carpet bag"—symbolizing Lucille's impending journey as much as Ruthie's own.

Foreshadowing the young girls' potential future lives, early in their history with Sylvie, Ruth and Lucille had run alongside a train "to stay abreast of the window of a young woman with a small head and a small hat and a brightly painted face" (54), a woman who regards herself in the window's reflection—clearly absorbed by "her own reflected and painted image" (90). Lucille has glimpsed this woman and has chosen a life that will potentially some day reflect a Bostonian. Ruthie speaks against surfaces, and for the depths represented by the lake's inner core. She observes:

[Memories are by their nature fragmented, isolated, arbitrary as glimpses one has at night through lighted windows. (53)]

Ruthie speaks out against all enclosure, for "unsheltered people," who in looking from darkness to light see "all the difference between here and there, this and that" (157-58). Notably, she fights to shatter the glass that encases the "unknown, indifferent woman" (162-63)—the woman that ultimately claims Lucille. One of the most potent images in Thoreau's work is that of the lake as "earth's eye," looking into which "the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (Thoreau 128). Whereas Lucille chooses surface, Ruthie chooses depths. On this latter point, the town's image of Ruthie's disappearance into Lake Fingerbone on the night she crosses the railroad tracks with Sylvie remains, in many respects, a decent epigraph to preface the narrative.

As newly emerging American picara, Ruthie has come far since Housekeeping's early pages. Initially, like other twentieth-century American novels such as Cather's A Lost Lady and Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Ruthie's
narrative had begun as though a breath was being held expectantly. Marian Forrester laments, “Nothing ever does happen!” (Cather 132). Daisy Buchanan watches expectantly for the longest day of the year, and then misses it. Even male protagonists share this same malaise. Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome is seeped in this quality of motionlessness as its narrative focuses on failure in human relationships—the expecting, waiting, and wanting. Faulkner’s Light in August looses in the shadows Gail Hightower, a man who lives his life transfixed by the ghosts of the cavalry that ride thunderingly through his brain. Ruthie writes:

If I had one particular complaint, it was that my life seemed composed entirely of expectation. I expected—an arrival, an explanation, an apology. There had never been one, a fact I could have accepted, were it not true that, just when I had got used to the limits and dimensions of one moment, I was expelled into the next and made to wonder again if any shapes hid in its shadows, ... And so the ordinary demanded unblinking attention. Any tedious hour might be the last of its kind. (166)

It is for this reason, primarily, that Fingerbone’s residents are drawn to the lake post-train wreck: for some kind of an apology or explanation. But as the boys discover, only flotsam rises to the surface (the briefcase, seat cushion, and lettuce, each arguably symbols of civilization: business, commerce, and capital). The lake forfeits symbols of progress and keeps bare essences. This derailment is the event that propels the novel into “its own female life” (cf. Aldrich 129).

As journeying American picara, Ruthie strives to understand such essences and moves beyond the realm of apology and expectation, even beyond invisibility, into the realm of doing and saying without fully embodying the empowered female quintessence of Emerson’s vision. Before the night Ruthie crosses the bridge with Sylvie she had been merely drifting (adrift), in that fluid state of becoming that Lassner has suggested "threatens to dissolve her" (Lassner 57)—metaphorically, like the lake waters that know no boundaries, Ruthie’s fluid nature lends her particular breadth in reinventing the potential in women’s lives.

Beyond the metaphoric birth suggested by previous passages, are the prior more “literal” passages of rebirth. The most explicit, of course, is the scene that describes Ruthie’s crawling out between Sylvie’s legs in the boat. Ruthie notes on the voyage out, in early dawn, “She [Sylvie] could as well be my mother. I crouched and slept in her very shape like an unborn child” (emphasis added,
Critics have described the prenatal experience exhaustively: including Ruthie's resting in the bottom of the leaky boat "immersed in water like a fetus in amniotic fluid"; moreover, the scene of "empowering selfhood" at the deserted cabin, says Ravits, is "clearly framed in the language of Robinson's larger narrative as part of a birth sequence"; and, after her experience at the ruined cabin, Ruthie imagines herself on the return voyage as swelling within the nurturing enclosure of Sylvie's coat, after Sylvie has wrapped her in her "oversized transient's coat as though swaddling and embracing a newborn child" (cf. Ravits 660). Ruthie finally imagines an awakening and emergence in what she describes as a "second" birth (H 162).

By contrast, Lucille's "antibirth" is an overlooked aspect of the novel, for in contrast to Ruthie who experiences liberation in Sylvie's presence as American picara, Lucille experiences recurrent dreams of being smothered as a baby by Sylvie, who appears in the dream to drape blankets over her face and prevent her from breathing. Because of this horrible "stifling" of her being, Lucille runs to Miss Royce, the Home Economics teacher. Moreover, note the significance of this decision: both girls began their journey at the same place. Lucille, suggesting explorations and keeping stride, as when ice-skating: "Only we and the ice sweepers went out so far," Ruthie writes, "and only we stayed" (34). Both girls, then, began with the same potential for development, leading to the inherent pull of the heart strings when their paths diverge so broadly at the novel's end.

Broadly speaking, critics often interpret Ruthie and Sylvie's journey to the secluded ruins across the lake as a metaphoric return to origins in a "feminine landscape." Ravits sees the encounter as representing the prototypical hero's trek to the remote wilderness where she will "undertake the struggle for autonomy" (654). The secluded cabin in modern American literature has become "an image of cultural inheritance" as the secluded woods "echo with cultural memory" (655); for Robinson, as for other twentieth-century American writers, the deserted homestead represents "not freedom but the narrowing of options and the dangers of nostalgia": that is, the "abandoned cabin is a moving tribute to American romanticism, but it is a ruin that cannot be restored" (656). Ravits interprets Sylvie's abandoning of Ruthie at the site as a kind of "test" to see if she truly wants to become a sister transient. Ruthie thinks, "Let them come unhouse me of this flesh, and pry this house apart" (H 159). For the American woman housed symbolically in the picara's vagrant
form, this influx of will brings self-reliance. Sylvie's notion of remaining transient without leaving the home (carrying the home within) represents a new version of female autonomy.

One of the foremost distinctions between Robinson and previous American writers is in their interpretations of "public" and "private." A picaresque character internalizes the world order: this subjective view of the world means that there is no longer any "public" domain as distinct from the "private" self. The world and the self are united. This facet of the picara's experience is seen in *Housekeeping* when Sylvie exercises a *noblesse oblige* and utility when she appropriates (steals) the rowboat and, then, tells Ruthie to pay no attention to the man's protestations (presumably the owner) because to do so would only make him protest more loudly. Sylvie has no idea why the man is enraged, nor does she care. She finds the act of "hiding" something inexplicable, and her sense of responsibility is surprisingly keen—"I always put it right back where I find it. I don't care if someone else uses it. You know so long as they don't damage it" (145). Because nobody has claimed use of the boat in the present, it is hers to take. In summary, having "domesticated" the public world, Sylvie's perception is governed by an "as needs" basis of use founded not on the concept of property ownership but on the concept of utility. Meanwhile, Robinson describes Sylvie's conception of time (which is skewed) as a "millennial present" (94), implying a perpetual moment that signifies a potential period of happiness, peace, prosperity, and justice.

Sylvie, and presumably Ruthie, consider themselves to be part of a larger community of "vagrants," even should vagaries comprise shared stories and nothing more. The primary embodiment of this community is the freight train, whose image additionally describes the act of narration as well as suggests the form of the picaresque novel. This image conveys that sense of timeless, perpetual motion well-known to both protagonists and readers of picaresque narrative. The protagonist (like the narrative) keeps plugging along. Sylvie teaches Ruthie the related philosophy of vagrants on the rails: "You can bet there were a lot of people on the train nobody knew about," and finishes, "I never thought of it as stealing.... You just find yourself an empty place, out of everyone's way—no harm done!" (168-69).

As previously noted, most of the picara's life is spent "out of bounds," apart from the law and society. In the twentieth century, heroic female protagonists make resolutions that radically break from tradition. Marcia
Aldrich has found that Edmund Foster embodied "the American spirit of enterprise" which is shaped by his days in the eye-level, sod-bound, womb-like house in the Midwest: "Foster, like many heroes from fiction by Cooper, Melville, James, and Fitzgerald, must confound the circumscriptions of his original home by appropriating a space fit for imagination" (Aldrich 128). Robinson rewrites the history of this "American spirit of enterprise" in the late twentieth century by having Ruthie's life story mirror this same necessity to appropriate a space fit for imagination by confounding circumscriptions (not the least of which is being a woman). In this rewriting, instead of depending on a "taming" and mastery of the land (virgin territory), Robinson's measure of success lies in the picara's ability to set this land "free." The modern American picara restores what had been previously domesticated to its presettled state—in effect, reclaiming the virgin America. Robinson's reversal overcomes the problem for women, and especially women artists, who "in any traditional thematics of gender" are identified with nature (e.g., Mrs. Ramsay) and are caretakers (e.g., Marian Forrester) rather than developers of homes (Aldrich 130). Although arguably a "traditional thematics of gender," the picaresque paradigm allows women, artists or not, freedom for exploration and development given Robinson's illustration of "fluid" housekeeping, which is demarcated less by corners, nooks and crannies than by flood waters and wide open spaces.

In creating the text that becomes Housekeeping, Ruthie returns home to offer herself up to trial by a jury of her peers, apart from whom she has spent her mature life. Ruthie describes the townspeople's stand on her transient, picaresque life in another of her imaginative "offspring" that act as surrogates for the opinions of others throughout her narrative:

Like the dead, we could consider their histories complete, and we wondered only what had brought them to transiency, to drifting, since their lives as drifters were like pacings and broodings and skirmishings among ghosts who cannot pay their way across the Styx. However long a postscript to however short a life, it was still no part of the story. (179)

Of course, the picara's narrative will never be thought of as part of the townspeople's "official" story. More likely, it will be thought of as a curious epigraph, to be noticed politely in passing, and seldom pondered. Nonetheless, the picara's path intersects with that of society when she authors her life story through narrative.24
Through her art the picara accounts to society in surfacing from a state of "nonbeing." Often in twentieth-century narrative, this accounting takes the form of a metaphoric or literal "trial." On one end of the spectrum Porter's Miranda makes a break with tradition, similar to Oedipa Maas' decision in the middle of Pynchon's novel, in choosing "not even [to] remember them" (people from her past; Porter 179). In a sense, then, she is running away. Hers is an act of denial, blindness, and cowardice, though she seeks heroic vision and autonomy. At the other end of the spectrum, Woolf's Lily Briscoe braces herself, similarly to Janie Crawford in Hurston's novel, to stand the public "trial" (Woolf 80). Lily's act is a figurative one, silently "pleading" her case, as all artists must who withstand the public's gaze; however, Janie's act is more literal, as she is placed on trial for her actions in a court of law. In Housekeeping, by contrast, Ruthie takes a stand in the middle ground: she neither seems consciously aware of her role as creating artist, nor is she literally placed on trial for her crime of crossing the tracks and leading a life beyond Fingerbone. Her "case" is presented in the form of the novel itself, a kind of hearing or "trial"; the verdict or "judgment" comes in the response of the novel's readers.

In the younger generation of Foster women, Robinson has depicted a potential beyond that of "women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (Chopin 10). The pioneering generation of men such as Cather's Captain Forrester had mapped out their vision in mind: where to dig a well, where to plant a grove and an orchard, and where to place a wife "to make it attractive" (Cather 53):

[A] thing that is dreamed of in this way is already an accomplished fact. All our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteaders and the prospector's and the contractor's. We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water. (55)

This dream made the American West manifest. This West had been settled by magnificent dreamers, great-hearted adventurers, a "courteous brotherhood" who "could conquer but not hold" (106). Given this framework, the ensuing generation (including Helen and Molly Foster), as a whole, "never dared anything, never risked anything"; they fulfilled Cather's vision for the new, visionless and prosperous Americans, who "would drink up the mirage, dispel
the morning freshness, root out the great brooding spirit of freedom, the
generous, easy life of the great land holders” (106). Sylvie’s model of the
picara’s life restores this dream, especially in rooting out the “spirit of
freedom.”

Stories from picaresque life produce the impression of both movement and
stasis, as images presented by a kinetoscope (Robinson’s analogy) or, more
appropriate in the context of Robinson’s novel, a freight train. Under a section
subtitled “Fruits of Literary Labor,” Thoreau writes in his Journal: “I am
freighted with thought” (Shepard 123). Here, the train metaphor is adapted to
describe the nature of story-telling within the picaresque narrative: Lucille
and Ruthie are borne along on the freight train of Sylvie’s small verbal
ruminations about people she has met and places she has traveled. Ruthie
writes in Housekeeping:

I saw the three of us posed in all the open doors of an endless
train of freight cars—innumerable, rapid, identical images that
produced a flickering illusion of both movement and stasis, as the
pictures in a kinetoscope do. The hot and dangerous winds of
our passing tattered the Queen Anne’s lace... (50)

In this passage, Robinson has uniquely welded the image of the train to the life
of the modern American woman—within the domestic sphere of imaginative
autonomy, most powerfully in the image of their passage’s tattering the Queen
Anne’s lace. Robinson thus usurps one of the most famous symbols in American
letters—the locomotive as timeless mechanism representing “business and
commerce” (96). In effect, she claims for women that same quality of new,
|flying, American advancement posited by Henry Adams in The Education of
Henry Adams.

By authoring her life in narrative, Ruthie abdicates her transient, picara
status, if speaking, narrowly, about anonymous adventuring outside of society’s
boundaries. Ruthie’s departure with Sylvie along the railroad tracks on the
night that fire destroys the ancestral home draws Fingerbone’s populace to
several suppositions, not the least of which is that the women had been killed
when crossing the lengthy bridge spanning the lake that had claimed both
Ruthie’s mother and grandfather. Such a possibility is nullified, however,
when the picara sits to record her life’s story. Housekeeping serves as notice to
Lucille that Ruthie is not dead. Foremost, as proven by Janie Crawford’s
experience in Their Eyes Were Watching God—especially when she sits quietly
on the porch telling her story to Pheoby as the townpeople gossip and stare—a book is a social construct. Nonetheless, Ruthie offers readers no directives and no closure beyond the example set by the various storied lives that breathe in her narrative.

If any claim can be made to enduring picara status it lies, perhaps, in the stories themselves. They not only record picaresque life experiences (in the tradition of Cervantes' Ginés de Pasamonte and Defoe's Moll Flanders) but allow for a reliving of those experiences in the creative act of writing. Through her narrative, Ruthie as newly born American picara remakes the American West myth in a distinctly female form. As importantly, it seems that her narrative serves as a report: "I am alive, very much so, alive."
Notes

1 See Marcia Aldrich's "The Poetics of Transience: Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping," pp. 127, 138. Aldrich's premise is that Robinson attempts a new kind of expressivity that inscribes "female difference within writing itself," as enacted through a "poetics of transience"—a specifically female mode of experience and language. Moreover, she finds that Sylvie and Ruth adopt a "philosophy of aggressive motion"—inhabiting "transitions" and being always "elsewhere" (138). Citing Emerson's vision in "The Poet," (especially his idea that imagination should "flow" and never "freeze"), Aldrich asserts that Robinson reshapes the Emersonian imagination from a feminine perspective (cf. n. 23, p. 140). Although this observation may have validity unto itself, it does not serve best as a paradigm to order the full experience of Robinson's novel, particularly its narrative form. Rather, to complete this task, I call on the model of the picara's life presented by the picaresque novel.

2 In another sense, an equally apt precursor would be the Biblical figure of Lazarus. Since Lazarillo de Tormes's anonymous publication in 1554, picaresque narratives including Quevedo's El buscon, Poe's The Adventures of E. Gordon Pym, and Jong's Fanny Hackabout-Jones have used metaphorical entombment and the ensuing "rise from the dead" to characterize the picaresque character's experience. The accompanying notion of the character's being somehow an "untouchable" heightens the sense of the rogue's near religious form of experience.

3 Marilynne Robinson is unique for her portrait of this transition from so-called "normalcy" to picaresque life as a mode of existence. See later discussion of Sylvie in this chapter. In Kristeva's model, writes Foster, Helen's (the mother's) example corresponds to "entry into history made on male terms, an appropriation of the detached position of the male subject" in which the private sphere (mothering) is subordinated to her public life (work outside the home). Correspondingly, the girls' return to the grandmother "performs the narrative function equivalent to the rejection of official history that characterizes the second moment in Kristeva's model." Sylvie, then, marks the beginning of the third generation in combining these two attitudes, mostly in her redefinition of traditional domestic economy (cf. Foster, p. 88; the term Robinson uses is "becoming").

4 In the picaresque narrative there is usually an awakening to consciousness (often depicted as a "rebirth") or heightened awareness. Broadly speaking, Abel et al. trace a two-step narrative pattern in women's fictions of development: first an apprenticeship paradigm (childhood to maturity) and, second, development delayed by inadequate education until adulthood, when it blossoms momentarily and then dissolves; this movement represents no gradual development from stage to stage, but instead represents an "awakening" (Abel et al. 11). Such development is true of women's experience in fiction, generally, as in Porter's "Old Mortality," for example, when in noting the experience of
women such as her Cousin Eva ("'Ah, the family,' she said, releasing her breath and sitting back quietly, 'the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth'" [Porter 175-76]), Miranda finds herself "feeling homeless, but not sorry for it" (178):

'It is I who have no place,' thought Miranda. 'Where are my own people and my own time?' She resented, slowly and deeply and in profound silence, the presence of these aliens who lectured her and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes, who demanded that she accept their version of life and yet could not tell her the truth, not the smallest thing... I will be free of them. I shall not even remember them." (Porter 179)

As evident in the above passage, Miranda struggles also to earn the privilege or "the right to look at the world with her own eyes."

5 Even an American artist as serious as Emily Dickinson has been rendered by scholars, most often, as a woman in white, cavorting with squirrels and robins, baking pastries bound together with poetry, and entertaining her father's social guests, including Ralph Waldo Emerson (Dickinson's impression: "As if he had come from where dreams are born," in Sewall, p. 468).

6 Robert Alter writes, "It seems reasonable to assume that the picaresque novel is not simply a long finished episode in Western literature but rather a permanent addition to the storehouse of literary resources, capable of regenerating and transforming itself in a surprising variety of new environments (viii-ix). The authors considered in this dissertation seem to show Alter's assertion to be true.

7 Anne E. Kaler's narrative construct, in her recent book on the picara, describes the picara's "tapestry" of colors. Similarly, May Sarton calls on the "tapestry" metaphor often in her poems (as in Sonnet 2: "The tapestry will not unweave itself...": see Hunting, p. 194). The creative paradigm in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 is vested in the Remedios Varo painting that depicts women knitting a tapestry of the world. This act of creating/ordering is apparent also in the sense of "knitting" suggested by Ruthie when she says, "What are all these fragments for... If not to be knit up finally?" (AZ 91).

8 This action seems to become an extension of the the picara's gender difference from her male counterpart, the picaro. Throughout American literature also, broadly speaking, there seems to be a coherent construct of women's ways versus those of men. For example, if a woman chooses to exert individual will against the elements, say as Maggie does in Stephen Crane's "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" or Edna Pontellier does in Kate Chopin's The Awakening, she will be punished. The usual penalty or "sentence" will be
Female fictions of development reflect the tensions between the assumptions of a genre that embodies male norms and the values of its female protagonists. The heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood. The deaths in which these fictions so often culminate represent less developmental failures than refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound convictions and desires. (11)

Significantly, the picaresque narrative allows the picara a metaphoric "death" (e.g., social death) that frequently functions as a metaphor for "rebirth"--for example, dead to society, alive to profound convictions and desires.

By contrast, the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is granted a more complex fate, madness. Hawthorne's Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter receives her bounty of quiet suffering and penance, only proving her woman's worth through creating her beautiful hand-sewn artifacts, in exile. If a woman such as Dreiser's Sister Carrie or Cather's Mrs. Forrester resigns herself to representing "sexual force," she will endure as a type of Siren (see, for example, Alfred Kazin's introduction to Dreiser's Sister Carrie, xi), known only through her allure to men.

9 Martha Ravits writes, "The frontier in this contemporary novel is not a geographic or historic construct but the urge to move beyond conventional social patterns, beyond the dichotomy of urban and rural existence, beyond domestic concerns and physical boundaries into metaphysics (Ravits 666).

10 The most effective means of conveying this sense of transcendence is, perhaps, to cite the example used by Lesage in The Devil on Two Sticks: as part of his initiation into the ways of the world, the protagonist in this adventure is afforded a privileged view from above by a master who lifts the rooftops from homes, exposing the life therein.

11 Cather may have developed a type of literary foil for Robinson's notions of housekeeping in early twentieth-century American literature. There are particular parallels to Marian Forrester's experience upon her husband's second stroke and her lover's marriage in A Lost Lady and Ruthie's experience with Sylvie in Housekeeping, especially in the way Cather describes the upstairs bedrooms as being "full of dust and cobwebs" and the way she describes society's incursions (violations) into the home--the church society grows bolder and bolder (Cather calls them "creatures") and intrusions into the home increase in direct proportion to Mrs. Forrester's loss (Cather 138-39). In fact, Cather describes Mrs. Forrester as being like a "ship without ballast" (152), a wording apropos to Ruthie's drifting in the rowboat.
12 See Phyllis Lassner, who writes, "Sylvie's transient style, her reinterpretation of nesting, set her apart from the endless cycle of mothering, genealogy, and conflict. Her behavior sets the stage for the separation that can save the Foster heiresses from the entrapment of resemblance and sameness" (Lassner 56).

13 Aldrich has argued that building houses "has been, most obviously in Thoreau's Walden, a metaphor for the highly valued masculine and figurative rituals of art. One builds houses to possess what nature otherwise possesses" (emphasis added; see Aldrich, p. 130). She also notes that this paradigm is problematic for women and women writers. While I agree with the value of the latter remark, contrary to Aldrich's first assessment, I find, especially in the passage cited in the paper, that Thoreau offers a unique precedent for a "female" mode of housekeeping that focuses more centrally on a caretaking function than on those of possession and ownership.

14 I adapt Peter N. Dunn's belief that the picaro is "he who is not" to describe the picara's status also (see Dunn's "The Spanish Picaresque Novel: Review and Conclusions," p. 60). Historically, in presenting the person "who may be," the picaresque narrative presents the story of eternal striving and growth. Nothing comes from stasis. As a type of tabula rasa in human form the picaresque character comes to represent in the novel limitless possibilities. Stuart Miller identifies what he calls the "adventure-retirement schism," a term that describes a notable pattern of the picaresque character's "inability to stay in a secure position retired from the world's chaos" (Miller 88). The picara's narrative bridges this "adventure-retirement schism" as both a product of adventure (life) and retirement (literary product). But even in the act of narrating her life's story, the picara's life seems to replicate the path of a pendulum's swinging motion—her progress may slow, or become more circumscribed, but it seems unable to stop. Thus readers do not learn Ruthie's whereabouts or history since leaving Fingerbone, only that she remains out there an explorer in a world comprising a body much broader and larger than a Fingerbone holds.

15 See Anne-Marie Mallon's article in which she writes that "Ruth's greatest power lies in her ability to 'conjure,' to re-image the world and remember the past in her mind" (Mallon 99). In this sense she becomes a magician of (co)text: a proclivity that falls from her like an old disguise when at the ruins she confronts the "ghost children." Ruthie imagines her role first as "rescuer," second as their companion or "one of them" and, finally, spirit alone ("no shelter now") in undergoing a gradual process of self-negation that Mallon suggests brings her "to the edge of nothingness" (101). Mallon notes that the key act is memory (104). Often, this narrative journeys back in time, retrospectively seeking insight into past lives and events, striving to repossess intangibles lost or misplaced by the human heart. Importantly, this divesting of the ghostly past (including past selves) frees Ruthie to undertake a picaresque mode of life as "a nobody." (See n. 14.)
16 For example, after speaking of Edmund Foster's ghost as the "only figure in the text offered to male readers to situate themselves in opposition to the sheriff, the law, with respect to the events and characters of the narrative," Thomas Foster writes, "As a male critic, I must make this ghost speak. This essay is, I hope, marked by a sense of the political urgency and the risk such an undertaking carries" (Foster 89-90). Note the emotion and sense of urgency in Foster's response. Also note that Foster omits the presence in the narrative of Reginald Stone, the father. This omission is significant because it is like the picaresque character to be "invisible," a nearly forgotten figure in narrative. Finally, note the example he sets, therefore, for his daughter Ruthie's invisibility.

17 This juncture also mirrors the traditional boundaries between the natural world (Sylvie) and the civilized world (the old man) that has been a mainstay of the pastoral tradition that includes the likes of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. In the First Book of Wordsworth's Prelude (1805) there is a similar scene to that Robinson employs in Sylvie's theft of the boat to traverse the lake. This lyric poem also shares in the pastoral; the speaker in the poem describes his acts as being led by Nature. The related passage follows:

A skiff that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
'Twas by the shores of Patterdale, a vale
Wherein I was a stranger, thither come
A schoolboy traveller at holidays.
Forth rambled from the village inn alone.
No sooner had I sight of this small skiff,
Discovered thus by chance,
Than I unloosed her tether and embarked.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
(ll. 374-386, p. 48)

Wordsworth describes this scene as a type of initiation, even as a rite of passage leading to knowledge. He describes the boating itself as "an act of stealth/ And troubled pleasure" (ll. 361-361); this description applies to Ruthie and Sylvie's passage as well. In terms of the natural scene, there are similarities also in the terrain surrounding both Fingerbone and Walden Pond--each has a railroad cutting its path through, and each is encircled by mountainous terrain; Thoreau referred to his natural pond once as "Walled-in Pond" (Thoreau 126).

18 Here, I use "free" in the sense that Chopin's Edna Pontellier conveyed in The Awakening: "Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life" (Chopin 124). This autonomy is not measurable in so much a social,
economic, or political sense as it is quantifiable in a more private sense of self-awareness and inner vision. In learning to "see," the modern American picara's autonomy (contrary to the experience of Chopin's protagonist) allows her the ability to "apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life," without madness or suicide.

19 In this respect, Aldrich notes that in response to Lucille's defection, Ruthie dedicates herself fully to life with Sylvie because "she believes that whatever she has lost might be found in 'Sylvie's house'" (cf. H 124; Aldrich 136).

20 Ravits addresses this point, noting that Robinson's first-person narrative serves as a report from someone "who sees the world feelingly," someone who does not fall into the subjective myopia of lyric poetry but who incorporates its richness, and someone whose "boldness resides in the active power of imagination"; as such, the narrative is controlled by an "expansion and contraction of inner vision" (Ravits 647).

21 Maureen Ryan calls Ruthie the "New American Eve" in the tradition of Emerson's Poet. She writes, "Having claimed her own voice, become namer instead of named, Ruthie recognizes and examines throughout her story the subjectivity of experience and the implications of existing in a world in which she refuses to be defined by others" (Ryan 83). In contrast, I find that Ruthie fulfills a more secondary role than Emerson’s Poet, because she virtually "made no impact on the world," characteristically watching it "unawares" (H 105-06).

22 Notably, this characteristic typifies the narrative structure of female novels of development, as Abel et al. suggest: "Women characters, more psychologically embedded in relationships, sometimes share the formative voyage with friends, sisters, or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists" (Abel et al. 12). Foster describes Sylvie's role in the narrative well when he describes her as "companion in becoming" (Foster 93).

Consider several related points: a.) The transcendental philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, thought of assuming the garb of transcendence as one would assume a suit of clothing. In this sense, this passage has added significance. b.) The wording "in her very shape" may refer not only to childbearing, but perhaps more importantly to Ruthie's taking on the form (aspect, lifestyle) of the modern American picara whose "shape" has been modeled by Sylvie's actions throughout the narrative. c.) More tangentially, Ravits notes that the imagery of rebirth and adoption is complete when Ruthie uses the mother's name "Helen" in calling out to Sylvie directly above the spot where her grandfather, and by extension, mother lie submerged. Significant, in this context, is that in completing this "adoption rite," as to speak, Ruthie metaphorically gives up her mother's surname "Stone" and accepts Sylvie's surname "Fisher" (cf. Ravits 661). Implicitly, Ruthie will not drop, weighted, passively to lake bottom (like her mother). She will, rather, remain above plumbing the depths of life's mystery and darkness, as symbolized in the act of the fisher (like Sylvie). This
conclusion hearkens back to Ruthie's image of her Aunt Molly, a celestial fisher who catches the gleaming rainbows of humanity to draw them, freed of their burdens, into a rarer light. The resurrection (and possible salvation) implicit in this action calls to mind Robert Alter's assignation ("ne'er do well Christ") in describing the picaresque character, who wears no saintly frock but instead dons an "oversized transient's coat." Does Ruthie become, in this context, a "pica-ra-saint"? (See R. W. B. Lewis's The Picaresque Saint.) Given this new version of the American woman "memory is the seat not only of prophecy but of miracle as well" (H 196).

23 Housekeeping lends insight into the "blind spot in canonical narratives," writes Aldrich, in illuminating the lives of women who have been literally and metaphorically nameless—made to be what she refers to as "the female vagrants of literature" (Aldrich 132). Sylvie and Ruthie's final act is to disappear into the narrative of their own making. This is the modern novel's favorite ploy: what I think of as the "lost in narrative phenomenon" (the twentieth-century protagonist's fate remains indeterminate, lacking closure). The task, then, falls to readers themselves to make inferences and conclusions. This aspect of twentieth-century narrative is discussed in Chapter V.

24 According to Nancy Chodorow, the woman's basic sense of self is connected to the world (e.g., at the end of Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie draws the world around her like a shawl) but the male's sense of the self is more separate (qtd. Abel et al. 10). That is why, in many instances, the picara measures her own welfare bound together with that of her society; by comparison, the picaro seems not to care about the world at large, only about his individual welfare in that world. The difference is seen in a Horatio Alger protagonist's exploits in the city (e.g., Ragged Dick, Mark the Match Boy) versus those of Robinson's Ruthie in Fingerbone. Even the town's name in Robinson's Housekeeping shows the intimate relationship of society to individual (i.e., Fingerbone).
CHAPTER V

Detection and the Search for Self-Identity in
Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49

[Slan Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America. (Lot 49, 178)

'The Word can change the World,' he said, 'we must believe it.' (Fanny Hackabout-Jones, 386)

The chapters of this study have shown that the picara's life in narrative comprises a dynamic process of limitless exploration. Picaras, including Pynchon's Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49 (hereafter, Lot 49), sense indeterminacy but, nonetheless strive to find synthesis creatively for the infinite possibilities offered by modern American life. What is interesting in analyzing Pynchon's novel is that scholars note how readers and protagonist, alike, become bound up in the web of intrigue and together must search to separate hoax from reality. This characteristic parallels the picara's search for identity. Building on B.W. Ife's study of the early Spanish picaresque novel, I examine how this activity includes the picara's reading of her own life's experiences. Her life fulfills the three basic components of the modern picara's experience: adventuring, searching for self-identity (reading/detection), and authoring the text (creating art). Finally, the only possibility for closure seems to come in readers' interpretations of the text, that is, in their understanding of and relations to the picara's narrative.

Although critics accept that Thomas Pynchon is a writer to be reckoned with, each differs as to the nature of that reckoning. At odds as to the best
approach for Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, interpretations turn to use of myth, language and narrative theory, studies of allusion, and metaphor (paranoia, entropy, information theory). Many critics view Pynchon’s novel in terms of a quest. Some even conjure images of Oedipa’s “Rapunzel-like” imprisonment in the tower below which white knights romp o’er the landscape. This idea of the quest is successful if applied to scholars, or to Oedipa’s progress within the novel, but not as a unifying construct. Foremost, the quest genre fails because it does not function well in assessing the structural and thematic complexities of Pynchon’s narrative. In accounting for such complexities, and the challenges they pose for readers, the picaresque literary tradition provides a singularly rewarding context for study of Pynchon’s novel.

Picaresque narratives usually begin with a rupture of the ordinary, an effect which Pynchon achieves with dexterity in *Lot 49*. Oedipa’s picaresque journey commences as she must shuffle through “a fat deckful of days” (11), trying to remember that last phone call from Pierce Inverarity—schizophrenic, finally easing into the tones of Lament Cranston: “But Margo,” he’d said earnestly, “I’ve just come from Commissioner Weston, and that old man in the fun house was murdered by the same blowgun that killed Professor Quackenbush...” (11). Fun houses, blowguns, allusions to Marx Brothers’ films, each bit of earnest illogic sets up the picara’s marginalized world.

Given Pynchon’s novel, it may be more appropriate to speak of the picara’s “funhouse-blowgun-quackomaniac world.” Formerly, at home, Oedipa Maas had confronted primary disturbances the likes of her husband Mucho’s nightmares, her shrink Hilarius’s faces, and her lawyer Roseman’s covert drafting of *The Profession v. Perry Mason, A Not-so-hypothetical Indictment*. At home, there had been a sense of buffering and isolation, an absence of intensity, as if she’d been magically imprisoned in a tower, as depicted symbolically in the triptych of the Spanish exile Remedios Varo (20). The women in Varo’s “Bordando el Manto Terrestre” had been “embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void... the tapestry was the world” (21).

If this artwork is symbolic of Oedipa’s experience, beyond the usual constraints and limits of picaresque narrative, it is largely symbolic of her journey toward meaning in the “tapestry” of art. Characteristically, the picara
is much more self-conscious and inner-directed than the picaro, as previously discussed. The picaro lives and, correspondingly, schemes and plots strategy to provide life in future days.

Because the modern American picara’s experience is more inner- and self-directed, her primary concern is discerning the features of her experience as lived. Throughout her travels, Oedipa seeks privately to create a tapestry of the world, to order the chaos she perceives and free herself from imagined captivity (just as the artist Pynchon weaves his own tapestry of words). David Cowart suggests this internal movement in explicating the artist’s triptych, determining that towers and castles were for Remedios Varo “personal symbols for both a state of mind and the circumscribed life that engendered it” (22). For Oedipa and readers alike the artist’s triptych, then, comes to symbolize both an inner and outer life.

As in the Varo triptych, the acts of creation and ordering function centrally in the journey that Oedipa undertakes. Pierce Inverarity’s will fuels Oedipa’s escape, the height and architecture of her tower becoming then only incidental, as a new world opens before her. Upon the road how would experience differ? Notably, Oedipa’s journey is neither to be tainted with chivalric overtures, nor is she a heroine in sentimental romance, for such possibilities are negated in Pynchon’s opening formula: “If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against magic, what else?” (22). Oedipa must venture forth. Driving in her rented Impala into San Narciso, literally on the road to discovering herself (self-definition), Oedipa trembles with her suspected truths, concealed meanings, and communication just beyond her reach. Rendered an “outsider” and slightly rebellious, according to Pynchon’s text, Oedipa is set to become picara in this modern picaresque narrative.

In modern times, the picara seems to represent an older order (chivalry, communication) as tested in a series of rude awakenings. In this sequence of events, the verbal play works additionally to make the world seem more unreal, almost “like an artistic creation to be judged and criticized on the basis of its surface flaws” (qtd. Fox 139). Specifically, Oedipa comes upon Echo Courts, where nothing moves, artifice and dropouts abound, and the Paranoids sing. Oedipa’s “first night out” is emblematic of her entire journey. Echo Courts is a motel where she initially stops her travels, a motel one might expect to see in
Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* for its color, or Eliot's *The Waste Land* for its atmosphere. Expecting hierophany, private access to the water, maybe Book of the Dead, Oedipa awakens in a residue of hair spray fog and the Paranoid serenade, to find herself getting laid. Pynchon writes, "She'd come in on a sexual crescendo in progress, like a cut to a scene where the camera's already moving" (42). If Oedipa is starring in the "Life of Oedipa Maas," she is doing poorly to sleep through the climax.

Although Oedipa shows a fetish for meaning, history, and order throughout her adventure, her focus becomes understanding The Tristero mystery and its curious logic. It is not unusual for the modern picara to show introspection or a preoccupation with self-assessment. Yet throughout her travels, Pynchon's Oedipa Maas seems to be the lone possessor of composure of sorts. normalcy, if we accept the term loosely. Typical of the picara in contemporary times, Oedipa does not live and then try to figure it all out; rather, she tries to figure it all out as she lives, as seen in the previous examples of May Sarton’s *Mrs. Stevens* and Robinson’s *Ruthie*. Oedipus begins his search for the solution of a problem "as an almost detached observer, only to discover how deeply he is implicated in what he finds" (Mendelson 118); this same pattern of experience applies to Pynchon's Oedipa Maas. Oedipa shares two primary characteristics with Oedipus: a) Oedipa searches for the solution to a problem and b) Oedipa finds that events are to a degree self-imposed or self-authored.

Before Oedipa can author her text, however, she must first assess (that is, "read") the nature of her experiences. Throughout *Lot 49*, Oedipa's journey as "reader" determines the parameters of her life; moreover, this reading is closely related to the picara's search for self-identity and development of voice. The protagonist in picaresque fictions had always been earmarked by curiosity. Early in the novel, after receiving a governmental blurb telling her to "REPORT ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR POTSMASTER" (46), Oedipa encounters Mike Fallopian of the Peter Pinguin Society in a bar. While there, she wants to know what actually happened on the Pinguinian's charter date. It's like someone, upon finding out you are a professor in the Humanities, asking you what the weather was like at Stratford-upon-Avon when Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*. "Who cares?" Fallopian says, "We don't try to make scripture out of it" (50).

Oedipa wants scripture. Having been trained as a student, she is confident in her cognitive skills and in the ability to find deeper meanings in both art and
life. Even though Fallopian tries to deliver her from such tendencies, Oedipa Maas, as much detective as pseudo-literary scout and adventurer, seems destined to find an underworld of reversed meanings and hidden truths among lipsticked obscenities:

Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L.A. (52)

Most of us would not think immediately of private undergrounds and mysteries when confronted with this message upon a public restroom wall, yet as with most of Oedipa's forays into literary detection, and often, self-analysis, her response is governed as much by state of mind as by the literal.

No strand of Oedipa's experience as picara seems to her unrelated; she assumes, simply, that there is a greater plan in some way directing her activities (not unlike, notably, the way a puppeteer governs his or her puppets). Later, when Oedipa is audience to Wharfinger's "The Courier's Tragedy," after the play—still looking around for words and feeling helpless—Oedipa goes behind the scenes because she "wants to see if there's a connection" (76). Randolph Driblette disdains talk. "You came to talk about the play," he says, "Let me discourage you. It was written to entertain people. Like horror movies. It isn't literature, it doesn't mean anything" (77). Oedipa wants her proof. "You don't understand," says Driblette: "You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for... the reality is in this head" (79). Driblette tells Oedipa:

You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied the words and a yarn. I gave them life. (80)

Just as Driblette supplies a life to Wharfinger's play, Oedipa must supply life to her fictional presence in Pynchon's Lot 49.

Oedipa, as a protagonist in modern picaresque narrative, represents the crude embodiment of artist. Although she is yet a novice at constructing
hypothetical reality, she is learning about the very essence of the art she hopes to master: reading, authoring, and gaining insight into the work of performer, actor, and artist. The traditional picaro was schooled by many different masters. In a modern variation, Oedipa is schooled exclusively by artists, foremost: Metzger (the actor), Driblette (the director), Mike Fallopian (the writer), Stanley Koteks and John Nefastis (inventors at large), Emory Bortz (the professor), Mr. Thoth (dreamer and storyteller), Genghis Cohen (researcher). The crux of Oedipa's picaresque adventure appears to be Koteks's question: "Can you really influence policy, or make suggestions they won't just file in the garbage?" (85). Oedipa is slow. "I didn't think people invented any more," she says (85). "It's mental work," Koteks explains (86).

In other words, Koteks posits, "Can you really order a universe convincingly, project a world?" Remember Driblette's analogy: "I'm the projector at the planetarium..." (79). This idea of the artist's projection of the world is common. As Rosa Guy explains, "Pooling my experiences, my understanding, I was creating my world. My creation which I projected, to give more understanding to the world" (Chamberlain 9). Beneath the symbol of the post horn Oedipa had copied into the memo book she writes, "Shall I project a world?" (87). In essence, she wonders, "Shall I become creating artist?" Lest we miss the correlation, Koteks's remark is as telling for the reader/critic working mentally upon the text as for the protagonist working within the novel's pages. Interpretations are projections of a world.

For Oedipa, a picara's sensitization is a matter of trained attention and expectations, as she burrows into the mystery of Tristero's world. Throughout, Oedipa has only a tenuous, fatigued correlation binding herself and her experiences to the "truth" as she perceives it (93). And this realization dawns:

Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (95)

What makes this world so extraordinary is Oedipa's perception. She expects, "suspects" is the word often used, that there will be some connection, some
larger meaning which may emerge from the various strands of experience. How ironic that her new world comes to hinge on a stamp design with an "extra little doojigger sort of coming out of the bell" (96-7). Oedipa remembers her former education, in which others had made her "just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" (104)—not helpful, really, when one is trying to order the universe, project a world.

Now Oedipa begins, we're told in Pynchon's narrative, a time of "random drift" as with vagabonds and, I suggest, picaras—order and the universe, Tristero and a dead man's estate are for the time forgotten—Oedipa plays the "voyeur" and "listener" (cf. 123). Even so, Oedipa again follows the random direction of the muted post horn, which lands her in a bar called The Greek Way. While there, she addresses the owner of a post horn pin, "What if I told you," she says, "that I was an agent of Thurn and Taxis?" "What," he answers, "some theatrical agency?" (111) The meager knowledge she possesses exiles her. Near hysteria, Oedipa pleads, "I use the U.S. Mail because I was never taught any different," continuing, "But I'm not your enemy. I don't want to be" (112). It might be the lament of someone schooled only in the New Criticism, in first encountering an alternate theory—Marxist, Feminist, Deconstructionist, Reader Response. Not only is the picaro/picara marginalized by life's experiences but, more importantly, by the misapprehension of language and the rules governing life.

For Oedipa this stage of the picara's journey presents her with a whirlwind of experience—even pieces of her own past, revised. Her journey also changes in that she no longer travels by rented Impala but by city buses and on foot. The city appears to her in phases of real and dreamed, each indistinct from the other. Among others, Oedipa encounters Jesús Arrabal in an all-night Mexican greasy spoon. Arrabal remembers the time she had been with Pierce Inverarity in Mazatlan. As they speak, Oedipa learns that Jesús finds himself in exile from his Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas and notices that he holds a copy of the anarcho-syndicalist paper Regeneracion (dating from 1904), upon which is marked the image of the post horn. Later, when Oedipa encounters children playing in Golden Gate Park who fail to recognize the meaning of "Thurn and Taxis" (the Trystero brigands), she retaliates by "not believing in them" (the children recite, "Tristoe, Tristoe, one, two, three./ Turning taxi from across the sea" and, "Oedipa, to retaliate, stopped
believing in them,” cf. 119). For the picara, experience is much less literal than symbolic. For Pynchon's modern American picara, Oedipa, more often than not, experience needs to be interpreted by relying on perception and related cognition and interpretation, rather than on physical breath or movement.

Picaresque adventures commonly traverse a great many terrains, throughout levels of society, as the protagonist meets with varied individuals and experiences. Often, the image in a reader's mind is that of a panoramic vision of life (for example, Lesage opts to render this vision by lifting the rooftops in *The Devil on Two Sticks*). Oedipa's journey differs from the norm in picaresque narrative in that everyone Oedipa encounters seems to know a unifying anarchist code. Even on city buses, scribbled graffiti reads: "DON'T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN" (121). Elsewhere—bulletin boards at laundromats, post horns traced in the hot breath of a Mexican girl upon glass, AC-DC, an Alameda County group dedicated to victimizing the socially integrated and well-adjusted—all know Oedipa's Tristero secret. In moving throughout the novel, Oedipa has been listener and voyeur, but at this juncture in the novel (at night's end) she proves much changed. The narrator asks:

Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narciso? That optimistic baby had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from the hidebound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery. (124)

Perhaps Oedipa learns that many times we approach life (and texts) naively, armed only with faith in individual grit, resourcefulness, problem-solving abilities, and discover only when tested later—that to believe is one thing, to live and know quite another. Beyond all else, Oedipa wants entry into Tristero's world.

If there is an incident in *Lot 49* which marks an arrival at the portal of that world, it is Oedipa's meeting with the old man in the Embarcadero. Still walking through the world of the homeless, Oedipa comes upon a rooming house in whose open doorway she encounters a man suffering from alcoholic delirium tremens and wracked by grief. Shaking and tired herself, Oedipa sees the faded post horn tattooed upon the man's left hand, and asks, "Can I help?" It is the first moment in the book that Oedipa gets beyond herself, offering her
assistance. Still, Oedipa sits and holds the man in her arms, advising "I can't help," gently rocking, "I can't help." Pynchon offers us a metaphor beyond "DTs" or delirium tremens—and the possibilities for Oedipa are mindboggling—paranoia, disguise, or a "vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last" (129). Prior to this moment in the novel, Oedipa has been in that nether-region, the dreamy middle range between inaction and activity, perhaps even the region where unconsciously a decision has already been made and a dim layover period is passing before consciousness. This is the exact "awakening" discussed previously, particularly in the Hurston chapter, in terms of the picara's shift from sentimental heroine to full-fledged persona in picaresque narrative. The meeting in the Embarcadero opens for Oedipa a portal for discovery, and the need to post the vagrant's letter spurs Oedipa to action.

Consistent with the picara's actions after her initiation into the ways of the world, After her encounter in the Embarcadero, Oedipa becomes more than voyeur and listener; she becomes an active participant in the Tristero underworld. Pynchon's Tristero underworld seems omnipresent. Prowling among the sunless, concrete underbelly of the freeway Oedipa finds "drunks, bums, pedestrians, pederasts, hookers, walking psychotics" (129). In exploring this strata of society, Oedipa traverses what one may dub "the undiscovered country." Soon after, in finding the mailbox with the hand-painted initials W.A.S.T.E., Oedipa Maas, late of Tupperware parties and psychiatric care, not only delivers the letter from the man in the Embarcadero but becomes herself a Tristero agent. After viewing the ultimate "anarchist miracle" of the Deaf-Mute's collision-free dance, Oedipa is ready to journey homeward.

In the picara's life, usually, all security is lost: including home, family, and daily securities. Yet unlike the shrink Hilarius, who can no longer cope, Oedipa has not taken anyone hostage; hers has been a solitary voyaging. Further reinforcing Oedipa's marginalization upon her meeting up with Mucho Maas (her husband) late in the novel, Oedipa is treated like a stranger. In fact, Mucho interviews her regarding the Hilarius Hostage-taking (he'd held Oedipa hostage) and thanks her as though she were foreign to him, "Thank you, Mrs Edna Mosh" (139). The theme of lost identity prevails, as Caesar Punch, program director at KCUF, also draws a blank on Oedipa's name. Oedipa offers, "Oh, call
me Edna" (140). When Oedipa is truly marginalized from the "respectable" world—in accepting the "Edna Mosh" designation—she gives up her own name, Maas. In Spanish, "mas"—and by extension "maas"—means "more." Thus, by accepting her new name, Oedipa may be symbolically saying, "No more." Finding her old world gone topsy-turvy, Oedipa thus opts to become a "fugitive" (145), an act foreshadowed in the novel's early pages, and her dis/assimilation is complete:

'The cops.'
'I'll be a fugitive.' (145)

When fugitive, Oedipa embodies that classic position in picaresque narrative which Guillén has described as being "half-outsider": this term suits Oedipa well in that it describes an individual who chooses to live his or her life on "the razor's edge between vagabondage and delinquency" (Guillén 80).

Characteristically, in the picaresque not only does the picara suffer a fugitive alienation but the promise of integration into new worlds seldom reaches fulfillment. Upon venturing forth, Oedipa finds all of her new world guiding lights, or masters (to use the analogous term from the Spanish picaresque), dead: Emory Bortz merely sits in the sun, drinking beer with students and lobbing empty bottles at seagulls; Zapf's Used Books, where Oedipa found her copy of "The Courier's Tragedy" has been torched for insurance money; Randolph Driblette has faded out to sea; and Mike Fallopian is involved in a scam on Government surplus swastikas. "They are stripping from me. she said subvocally... one by one, my men" (152-53). Oedipa, meanwhile, feels nauseous and exhibits signs of pregnancy. Her new knowledge even endows her with a certain "harassed style" which Grace Bortz mistakenly attributes to kids. Ironically, Pynchon writes that Oedipa's version of the Tristero paradox may be founded on a sort of "Bowdlerization in reverse" (151). She must, it seems, base her reality more on the spirit of the word than on the word itself. "Where am I?" Oedipa asks (153). Importantly, not only must she strike a course, but redefine a world and her own position in it.

One of the last stages in the picara's journey in _Lot 49_ is Oedipa's final introduction to Blobb's _Peregrinations_. Blobb's text is the Tristero Bible, so to
speak. Oedipa goes forth with "the light, vertiginous sense of fluttering out over an abyss" (156), reads Blobb’s account of the Trystero brigands, and pastes together the fragments of her faith. After numerous treks to the libraries and earnest discussions with Emory Bortz, among others, the journey comes full circle in that Oedipa finds herself once again at The Scope bar speaking to Mike Fallopian. "How’s your quest?" he asks (167). Oedipa responds with "a quick status report" (like some new field recruit) only to find him responding, "Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody’s putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?" (167).

If Oedipa’s trek as picara has been an interior exploration and an external journeying through the underworld, then in meeting Mike Fallopian she is grounded once more above ground. If she has been sucked in by Inverarity’s counterfeit reality, she must now become self-conscious of her own "report" as formulation. Carroll B. Johnson writes that if the danger of fiction is that its "counterfeit reality" sucks readers in, making them identify with what she describes as "figments of someone’s imagination, and so on," then the response must be "a form of fiction that constantly calls attention to its own status as representation and not reality" (Review, 227).

For Oedipa, it is a more clear-cut case than for readers external to the text. She knows the venues of her adventure by heart. Nonetheless, at this juncture in the novel (confronting the hoax concept) she possibly mirrors the response of Lot 49’s readers when she decides to backtrack and check things out. And adopting the role of literary analyst, usurping the usual place of readers, she finds an unsettling pattern: In reevaluating Pierce Inverarity’s assets Oedipa finds that Pierce owned the whole shopping center that housed Zapf’s Used Books, Tremaine’s surplus, and the Tank Theater also. Even Emory Bortz acts as an employee of the Inverarity endowed San Narciso College. All roads lead to Inverarity. Waves of nausea, headaches, nightmares, accompany Oedipa’s realization that among alternate possibilities:

[A] plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what—all besides... (171)
Having gone through a particular affair, how does one refuse a believing so deep within that to do so would be to disassociate from the very self? Genghis Cohen taunts Oedipa with one final test. The Tristero "forgeries" are to be sold as lot 49 at an auctioning off of Inverarity's stamp collection which Pynchon describes in Chapter 3 as "vistas of the world" from which Oedipa must choose, seemingly, her course (i.e., interpret her own life's meaning and direction). She drives the freeway in total darkness with the headlights out. Maybe in the future she would be more deliberate, but for now she sees her travels and experiences as no practical joke. Oedipa is saturated with a reality she cannot possibly evade.

What about readers and scholars working beyond Pynchon's novel? Just as Oedipa believes the Tristero conspiracy too complex to be a put-on, scholars examine Pynchon's Lot 49—its intricacies, threads of development, contortions—and feeling sick, assert that the novel may be a great hoax and Pynchon a prankster, but that all the signs point to significance and meaning. For example, in his early review of the novel, W. T. Lhamon designated Pynchon the "foremost of the irresponsible bastards":

Some might say he's irresponsibly debased the limits of fiction. He has. Pynchon has de-based our understanding of fictional provenance by exploding it. In the highest, most nay-saying sense, Pynchon is an 'irresponsible bastard.' (26)

Yet, in its closing, Pynchon's tapestry of words becomes larger than fiction, comes to equal nothing less than America itself.

Rendered to complete vagabondage, Oedipa understands that when she had tried to order Inverarity's estate, she had tried to tackle not the abridged version, but the complete legacy of America:

Sian Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America. (178)

The narrator tells us that perhaps she had only needed to look "to find The Tristero anywhere in her Republic..." (179). How does this point relate to
readers of Pynchon's fiction? Pynchon, once in writing a pitch for Richard Farina's *Been Down So Long It Looks Up to Me*, celebrated his friend's ability to spin a yarn and "the reader as well"; more importantly, he pointed to Farina's strength--"an unerring and virtuoso instinct about exactly what, in this bewildering Republic, is serious and what cannot possibly be..." (rpt. Mead 41). What Pynchon seems to value foremost is "virtuoso instinct," namely, the ability to decipher the riddle of the "serious" from "what cannot possibly be."¹⁰

The novel tests Oedipa's "virtuoso instinct," not surprisingly, throughout *Lot 49*, particularly when she assumes the role of reader and she must determine whether the Tristero has been seriousness or an enormous hoax. For all involved--author, protagonist, reader, scholar, and critic--even should there be no clear and final answers, there will remain some value inherent in having looked. And, perhaps, it is the journey itself that proves to be of most value.

With any score of possibilities, readers believe that Oedipa will not easily give up her status as picara to return again to the American land of Tupperware Oz. As evidence, at the novel's end Oedipa identifies with squatters and thinks not of Mucho and Kinnerrett, the Paranoids, or any vestige of that time past. Instead, Oedipa "remember[s] drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night, zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination" (180). Exiles, wanderers, picaras--each shares a marginal, wayfarer's existence, as each wanders through undiscovered country with no true destination. Oedipa has heard of a possibility and lives now as though the telling were fact. Are readers the Americans to whom Oedipa listens, "speaking their language carefully, scholarly" as though in exile? Is the reader's role to complete the novel somehow?

Among possible responses, I suggest that the roles of reader/detective and author/creating artist are not mutually exclusive, but that they combine in the picara, and by extension in the novel's readers also. Just as Sophocles' Oedipus proves to be both reader and author in determining his own fate, Oedipa shares both qualities. As in the novels discussed in previous chapters, an important movement in Pynchon's *Lot 49* is from passivity to activity. Oedipa is at first observer and voyeur--looking to Randolph Driblette, John Nefastis, and others
to solve her Tristero mystery—yet in her meeting with the man in the
Embarcadero, Oedipa's involvement is transformed from that of curious voyeur
to nothing short of passionate, mindful involvement.

This activity is mirrored in the acts of readers of Pynchon's novel. By
presenting the klutz rather than the traditional hero or heroine, fiction writers
break down distances in narrative. Creating such a "human" protagonist,
Pynchon engages readers fully by more readily subsuming readers into the
action of the text. Specifically, in terms of the reader's relation to the
narrative, as with Joyce's Leopold Bloom or Orwell's Winston Smith, Pynchon's
Oedipa Maas brings readers closer in their recognition that she is a protagonist
who is fallible, unreliable, and keenly human. That is, she is very much like us.
To explain via a Holmesian detective analogy: with the mental expertise of a
Holmes we usually find ourselves distant and passive observers, but with the
fumbling Watson we feel comfort in close proximity, living, so to speak, within
the text.

Just as Pynchon creates his novel and Oedipa orders the Tristero paradox,
readers interpret Pynchon's text. B. W. Ife writes in Reading and Fiction in
Golden-Age Spain: A Platonist Critique and Some Picaresque Replies that the
skillful writer of fiction will "put as heavy a burden on the reader as he can,
asking him not just to supply meaning sentence by sentence, but to build the
text into a coherent and credible mental construct, filled-out almost ad libitum
with all kinds of unspecified yet convincing detail" (83). Ife suggests that when
writers construct a hypothetical reality they become collaborative partners
with readers and that between them "they set up a double-ended process of
implying and inferring, encoding and decoding, meaning and understanding"
(68). One finds this refrain among scholars who publish studies of Pynchon's
narrative. C. E. Nicholson and R. W. Stevenson are among others who note that
Oedipa's journey "involves the reader in similar scrutiny of the ways in which
we interpret as we read; and in an analogous 'deconditioning' of conventional
assumptions about the relation between fiction and the wider world in which it
is written and read" (298). Thus, the reader's role in Pynchon's *Lot 49* actively
parallels Oedipa's. The reader shares not only Oedipa's uncertain attempts to
understand the implications of Inverarity's will, the textual variants of "The
Courier's Tragedy," and the entire Tristero paradox, but also her lessons
learned--about prevalent critical assumptions, the nature of literary texts, and
the fallibility of our research methods.

Knowing readers' natural tendencies toward discovering patterns and ordering narrative, writers such as Pynchon, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, and Barth increase the amount of indeterminacy in their texts to the breaking point and beyond. What distinguishes *Lot 49* from other works in this picaresque tradition (notably, Cervantes and Sterne) is that Oedipa, as protagonist, must tread the same byways as readers; that is, Oedipa's attempts at ordering Inverarity's estate simulate the reader's forays into ordering Pynchon's narrative.

If the picara's character is unassailable, such is not the case with her male partners (Oedipa Maas discovers this data only after an exhaustive search into the labyrinthine textures of Pierce Inverarity's life upon being named executrix of his estate), and the third-person narrator seems to derive much enjoyment from allowing readers insight into this part of the picara's (in)experience. Nonetheless, in respects, Oedipa's experience runs counter to even that of other twentieth-century picaras especially in that the burden of interpretation fall so heavily upon her shoulders. For example, Jorge Amado's Tereza Batista resides in a rarefied sphere of experience that allows her to straddle the worlds of the private (woman, lover) and public (mythic persona), without having to enter the interpretive sphere.

Amado writes of Tereza Batista's relationship to Dr. Emiliano Guedes in his narrative of the picara's life as being characterized by both "the riding whip and the rose" (*Tereza Batista*, 343, 350). The "rose" part of their relationship comes clearly in the idyllic days they pass together, but their pleasures are tinged with the realities that surround the eminently respected Emiliano Guedes. Tereza Batista never fully relinquishes the "rose"—even as Guedes' family rushes to the mistress's home and the ambulance arrives to recreate a mock-death respectfully en route to the local hospital. Rather, Tereza imagines the Doctor, were he with her at that moment, telling his family: "This is Tereza, my wife" (388). This fact is certainly debatable.

Oedipa is in a similar position upon Inverarity's death: they have been lovers, clearly, and the last phone call he made to her certainly connotes fondness and goodwill, or at the very least, playfulness; still, their relationship just prior to his death is never fully examined, and the narrative does not fill in any of the "blanks." What characterization is more accurate: Inverarity joking
amiably on the phone and romancing Oedipa abroad? Inverarity keeping
Oedipa imprisoned in the tower? Or Inverarity schooling Oedipa, even from his
grave, in the ways of Tristero’s underworld? After the death of the primary
mentor in modern picaresque narrative, the picara’s judgment is called into
question by a “doubting Thomas” narrator who chums along with readers and
seems to relish disclosing, as an afterthought, the dirtier side of the
relationship.

In Amado’s Tereza Batista, the narrator catalogs the violence upon which
the Doctor built his sweet, honey days with Tereza. Rhetorically, the doubt
arises, “[W]ere the Guedeses a clan or a gang?” (cf. 390-91). The chips stack up
against Dr. Guedes the way they stack up against Inverarity: each man leaves
behind a legacy of bribes, violence, and authority bent by hook or by crook. Dr.
Tulio Bocatelli (Guedes’ son-in-law—weak, vulgar-aristocrat, fortune-hunter
and opportunist), for example, feared that the Doctor would have him “rubbed
out” (392). Clearly, the picaro represents a libertine whose goal is self-interest
and materialistic gains.

The picara, as the chapters of this study show, is a much different
character—excepting picaras closely approximating the picaro’s form such as
Grimmelshausen’s Courage and Bernard’s Pirate Jenny. The picara manifests a
striving and hopefulness that is much more metaphysical, focusing as it does on
personal fulfillment and the quest for true love. Who was Pierce Inverarity?
What does Oedipa gain from being executrix of his will?

Narrating itself becomes in the picaresque novel, sometimes, a type of
shell game. As the reader is advised late in Amado’s Tereza Batista: “If you’ve
got the hand and the nerve, you can throw the shells on the table” (414).

’So you’ve heard a lot of contradictory stories... and some of
them don’t make sense? Well, it’s only natural that your
different stories from all over don’t jibe; they hardly ever
do these days, when everybody thinks he knows it all and won’t
admit he’s ignorant, when what you don’t know’s easy enough
made up.’ (413)

As one narrator says, “’What takes a little gumption is guessing why she did it’”
(293). The slant in the narrative shifts from focusing on the picara to focusing
on the reader in a rigorous, unrelenting way. Amado asserts in Tereza Batista
through one of his narrators, that a person wanting to explicate the "definitive text" of the picara's life must pursue the following course, which parallels that of Pynchon's Oedipa Maas in *Lot 49*:

> 'J[ust naturally has to snoop and pry around and button hole everybody he sees. . . . Just don't believe everything you hear, but take a good hard look at who's talkin'. You can't take it all for gospel, 'cause lots of people love to run off at the mouth and make up what they don't know. . . . they'd be ashamed not to know all the chapters upside-down and backwards. You be careful now, you ain't lived so long you can't be fooled pretty easy. When you don't fool yourself, that is.' (293-94)

Much like Oedipa Maas' hard-earned discovery in Pynchon's *Lot 49* concerning Inverarity's true character, readers learn that most people associated with Dr. Guedes are shady characters.

Ife maps out the formula for Pynchon's structural and narrative development in *Lot 49* in his study of the Spanish picaresque novel. Scholars have noted that the experience Oedipa goes through is very much like a reader's experience in reading a book. But, more notably, the specifics of her journey mirror the typical reading experience brought about by picaresque narrative. Ife speaks of the estrangement experienced by readers of the picaresque. Specifically, consider Oedipa Maas as reader, in the ways she mirrors the actions of Pynchon's external reading audience within Ife's construct concerning the picaresque narrative, as follows: Authors of the picaresque genre seek to make readers' relationship to the text dynamic, casting them in roles and making them adopt positions that are often found to be untenable; they refuse readers a consistent viewpoint by which to make sense of the fictional world, making them question the (In)veracity of what they are told and the plausibility of what they think and feel in response; they use the natural empathy of the reader and protagonist as a snare (usually prelude to an unhappy awakening) and entangle protagonist and reader in a web of irony from which no one escapes (91). Within this interpretive framework, Fallopian's "hoax" theory developed in the novel's late pages is the "snare" and the ensuing "web of irony" derives from the hidden connections Oedipa, and readers, discover in backtracking, as well as the indeterminate resolution offered by the literally inescapable "crying" of lot 49.
Many readers and critics respond to Pynchon’s *Lot 49* by voicing their discomfort with the novel’s loosely episodic, open-ended narrative structure.\(^4\) But not all critics share this discomfort. Lance Olsen and Debra A. Moddelmog have reacted positively to the potential for such narratives.\(^5\) A characteristic indeterminacy is standard fare in the picaresque genre. The indeterminacy arises primarily from the fact that the protagonist’s life, as literally voiced by Ginés de Pasamonte in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, is unfinished (he even goes so far as to suggest that his *Vida* be read as a picaresque novel).

Refusing closure, the picaresque narrative at its closing leaves readers and protagonists hanging in the balance, as occurs in both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Housekeeping*. Pynchon’s *Lot 49*, similar to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, closes upon a moment of waiting, protagonist and reader’s attention held in sudden anticipation. Readers of Pynchon’s novel know that the stamp collection is to function centrally in determining Oedipa’s fate. After Inverarity’s death the stamp collection subject to auction comes to represent possible vistas of the world from among which she must choose. “Much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left,” as Pynchon writes, “thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time” (cf. 45).

Traditionally, the picara or picaro had possessed a severely limited capacity for thoughtful explication and understanding of experience; twentieth-century writers of picaresque fiction redraw traditional narrative boundaries, endowing their protagonists with a mindful life that is vibrant and full, if imperfect. The key “proof” in this assertion comes in the following passage:

That America coded in Inverarity’s testament, whose was that? . . . [Oedipa] remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night, zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination . . . [Searching among possibilities] for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word. (180)
Oedipa’s search for this “magical Other” in this context signifies a search for self-identity (maybe, the search for a “true love,” if one allows for romance); “the recognition” signifies her recognition and acceptance of the picara’s life (as protagonist, she exhibits signs of being “pregnant” with new knowledge upon being privy to the venues of Inverarity’s plot; remember the picara’s symbolic “rebirth” as described in *Housekeeping*); and the “Word” signifies her translation of “The Courier’s Tragedy,” Blobb’s text, and the various “teachings” of her mentors prior to delivering to readers, and herself, the “text” that becomes the novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Much of Oedipa’s education has been in an oral tradition, similar to that of Hurston’s and Robinson’s modern American picaras—words, stories, and interpretations she hears from Randolph Driblette, Jesús Arrabal, Stanley Koteks, the man in the Embarcadero, Professor Bortz, Mr. Thoth, children in the park, as well as the scribbling on bathroom walls, scrawls on city buses, and the lettering on mailboxes. All meaning she tries to derive from traditional sources, such as “The Courier’s Tragedy” and Blobb’s *Peregrinations*, proves to be tenuous, at best. Although Oedipa tries, she does not have success in tracing the definitive texts. Perhaps the keys to this knowledge are three simple words: Know thyself, Oedipa.

Such understanding may also aid the reader confronting the cryptic ending of Pynchon’s *Lot 49*. Typically, the picara has been object of men’s attention (their gaze, their bidding; in this respect, note the men’s “stares” and “half-concealed thoughts” in the passage below). In Pynchon’s closing scene, upon her entering the auction house, Oedipa seems to hold an important stake in asserting her own author(ity):

> The men inside the auction room wore black mohair and had pale, cruel faces. They watched her come in, trying each to conceal his thoughts. Loren Passerine, on his podium, hovered like a puppet-master, his eyes bright, his smile practiced and relentless. He stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I’m surprised you actually came... . The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49. (183)

In the auctioning of lot 49, Oedipa (yet homeless, marginalized) seems to await the novel’s outcome. What readers know is that Oedipa has a half-baked plan about the mysterious Tristero bidder, a vague idea about causing a scene large
enough to allow the cops ample opportunity to cuff the individual whose identity she sought to know. Readers are told that she might lack the nerve, leaving the business forever unfinished.

Although the actual "crying of lot 49" remains indeterminate, Pynchon's narrative may yet conclude. Among the possible alternatives: Oedipa may be in an auctioneering house as easily as in a lunatic asylum; the crying of lot 49 may be Oedipa's fantasy or a novelistic reality, or hoax; Loren Passerine, the puppetmaster, may manipulate his following as one would crepe-paper dummies or a liturgical sect, or may represent another version of corrupt America in his bright eyes and practiced, relentless smile; or Oedipa may solve her puzzle, find her mysterious bidder, and conclude her story. Ultimately, it remains for us to choose our version from among the possibilities, private meanings and nuances implicit in that choosing, and having done so conclude our study of Oedipa Maas.
Notes

1 See David Kirby’s “Two Modern Versions of the Quest,” Southern Humanities Review 5 (1971), pp. 387-95; Linda Wagner’s “A Note on Oedipa the Roadrunner,” Journal of Narrative Technique 4 (1974), pp. 155-161; and Robert D. Newman’s Understanding Thomas Pynchon (South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 1986), for interpretations of The Crying of Lot 49 as quest. Kirby writes that the “Quest/Heroin” must “have a specific goal,” “undergo a series of tests calculated to try her mettle,” and experience at novel’s end “an element of defeat as well as victory” (387). All of these elements apply to Oedipa’s journey in the novel. Yet however successfully the quest theory accounts for elements of plot, it fails ultimately to account for the problematic response of readers, in addition to larger structural and thematic complexities of Pynchon’s narrative.

2 David Cowart speaks of Oedipa’s “Rapunzel-like plight” in his study of the novel and Roger B. Henkle finds Pynchon’s structure for Lot 49 suggestive of “the romantic epics of the late middle ages and the Renaissance,” writing, “Like medieval tapestries, the novels lay out a field on which villains, heroes, and maidens romp and struggle in frozen moments of the cultural past or seek elusive grails in the dark green forests of imagined evils” (216).

3 Scholars seem to approach the novel in the spirit of Richard Altick’s scholar-adventurer. Like Oedipa, readers and critics want to get backstage, behind the scenes to find the orchestrator of the mess. Oedipa Maas thinks “with a thousand other people to choose from, [she’d] had to walk uncoerced into the presence of madness” (87). Critics make this same lament when confronting Pynchon’s Lot 49. One offshoot of this impulse may be the compulsion of scholars to search for Pynchon himself. See Matthew Winston’s “The Quest for Thomas Pynchon,” Twentieth Century Literature 21 (1975), pp. 278-87, for an extended study of how the scholar’s quest not only concerns Lot 49’s structure and form but the nature of Pynchon himself. George Levine and David Leverenz suggest that the search for Pynchon is “another version of what the books put us through: a confrontation with our urge to snoop, to be informed, to label and fix” (10). Finally, like Oedipa’s experience in trying to interpret the meaning of Driblette’s staged performance of “The Courier’s Tragedy,” readers of Pynchon’s novel seem to feel compelled to go backstage to find “the orchestrator of the mess.”

4 Danger in use of “picaresque” as a descriptive term is that the word is commonly stretched to encompass any journey focusing on a single protagonist. Richard Bjornson explains that authors of the picaresque do not consciously adhere to “formal or compositional rules which together might serve to define a genre,” but that the term “picaresque” is a “synthetic somewhat arbitrary label for a collection of works which critics and scholars have retrospectively grouped together” (4).
Consider, for example, the contrasting case of the picaro's development given by a novel such as Paul Theroux's *Waldo* (New York: Ivy Books, 1967) published during the same period as Pynchon's *Lot 49*. Whereas the picara's education is striking in its personal dimensions—its implicit nuances and talk-around-the-edges meanings—the picaro's education in Theroux's novel focuses explicitly on the picaro's initiation into the writer's life. In Part I of the novel, roughly detailing the pre-College years, Waldo spends much of his time in the Booneville School for Delinquent Boys. There, Waldo starts a prison weekly newspaper, and upon his release begins learning to "make up stories" ("It was easier than telling the truth," 24), focusing on "moving that little dry house that roosted inside your chest, that place where some of the memories and all the glands lived. People had a tendency to give the little dry house names like heart, soul, ego, which did not interest Waldo at all. He knew only that he would have to leave soon and in leaving he would have to lug the little house with him to give its occupants (memories, glands) a change of scenery" (54-5). Similar to Richard Farina's protagonist of the same period, Waldo becomes a student (Rugg College), and while there he determines to be either a "writer" or a "reporter" (71, 77). In Part II of the novel, a mentor named Fred Wolfpits teaches Waldo about reporting, "If you want to be a reporter you've got to crawl inside people's heads, crawl through the debris" (125).

Waldo left the room (Wolfpits' party) and stood on the front steps of the house mentally numbering the usable stories he had heard since coming to Rugg. Those stories were worth money to the right person, to a reporter, for example, even if he didn't have a hat.... Plenty of stories, sweaty and otherwise, and not excluding The Great Booneville Affair [when, in one of the novel's most memorable scenes, Waldo hides in an oven during a fight in the pen; the authorities' response is to do their best to bake him alive], a ballad of sugar and pain. All I have to do is leave and I'm free. Waldo felt like reporting. (163)

By Part III of the novel, moving beyond Clovis Techy (his mentor-lover, who teaches Waldo the "value of the dollar," 178), Waldo decides to be "an artist"—what he calls "a bullshit artist to be sure, but an artist" (cf. 178-179). After his first story about Willy Czap, Waldo was, 

[Hailed as a blazing new talent, full of wit and verve, with a sharp ear to dialogue and a sharp eye for human interest. He was someone to be watched, fresh, vivid, uproarious, original, marvelous, with real fire, brilliance, and with heart-stopping moments of disturbing insight. He made people howl with laughter and bang the wall with grief. His deft pen had turned the story of Mrs. Czap and her late son into a wildly gruesome, dazzling, bitterly savage, funny rollicking, Joycean parable, a triumph of classical rhythms, a masterpiece, Greek in implication, unsurpassed in high comedy, Whitmanesque in conception, containing unforgettable moments in the Menagerie we call Life Itself. Waldo was well on the way to becoming
nothing less than the most gifted writer of ripe mid-century Americana. (212-13)

Soon after, Jasper Pistareen (an underworld figure) lands Waldo and Mrs. Czap a contract to perform their Willy interview live at the Mandrake Club: "Jasper's best [ideal was the glass writer's-cage that he had built for Waldo. He explained that Waldo would get in and then, in someplace like the Mandrake Club, Waldo would demonstrate just how it was done, writing, a writer writing" (emphasis added, 216). The author and his creation performed simultaneously: "[In his special cage] Waldo turned up his microphone and tapped on the typewriter. "Fika-fika-fika-fika," and the audience twisted their heads up and listened to the tapping of the typewriter; "They applauded both. They saw history in the making right before their eyes" (220). Although Waldo's apprenticeship begins with a new lover, it ends with her death: Putting the muzzle deep into Clovis's mouth, he fires:

He could create and destroy and what he had just done in bed he would now do on paper; he had power over life and death. he was famous, he was rich, he had a nice simple glass writer's cage [suspended in air, unopenable from the inside]. And he typed faster and faster (the people applauding the whole time)... It didn't have anything to do with love. [The novel's last line.] (227)

6 In a striking application of this castle analogy, Gerald Brenan (The Literature of the Spanish People, 1957) describes the nature of the picaresque novel within the scope of the Spanish national character:

The Spanish soul is a border castle, adapted for defense and offense in a hostile land; soberbia, or pride, and an eternal suspiciousness are its most ingrained qualities, together with a distrust of any but its own skill or weapons. But what the garrison feels all the time is loneliness. (174)

Brenan's research on the picaresque may be important for scholars explicating Lot 49, especially as regards Oedipa Maas' character in the novel (specifically her suspicion, distrust, and paranoia).

7 Just as Sophocles' Oedipus proves to be both primary detective and author of his own fate, Oedipa shares similar qualities of detective/author. (Scholars, including Edward Mendelson and Debra A. Moddelmog, draw similar parallels between Oedipa's type of detection and that of Sophocles' Oedipus.) In this respect, Robert Houston pairs "picaresque brethren" Huck Finn and Philip Marlowe (cf. New York Times Book Review, January 20, 1991, p. 7). However, among scholars who point to the failure of Oedipa's role as detective, Georgiana M. M. Colville writes, "Her role as a private eye is a failure, and if she is a spy she is trapped at the end of the book" (57) and Lance Olsen asserts that Oedipa's movement in Lot 49 actually counters the direction of the conventional
detective in moving from certainty to uncertainty (158). Therefore, this analogy of picara/picaro as detective works only in a limited sense due to the very nature of picaresque fiction (open-ended, indeterminate). It may be more appropriate, in this case, to note the parallel and more simply assert that the act of reading has much in common with the act of detection.

8 A similar pattern occurs in Cervantes’ Rinconete y Cortadillo: the protagonists speak, act, and move in the first half of the novel; they are the agency by which readers may gain access to different levels of society and experience different world views in the second half of the novel. In the latter half, as Dunn writes, the boys are seldom called upon to speak, for the most part “standing in the same relation to the underworld as we, as readers, have stood to them” (cf. The Spanish Picaresque Novel, pp. 81-2).

9 On a secondary level of experience, for readers of Pynchon’s text this is a shared moment. In trying to assess the novel, we think of Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 as counterfeit reality and reflect upon our own manipulation by the narrative. Richard Poirier suggests that we “are met with inducements to tidy things up, to locate principles of order and structure beneath a fragmentary surface. We work very hard at it. And then we are told in fact we have been acting in a witless and heavy-handed fashion...” (130). Painfully self-aware, we wonder. See Peter L. Cooper’s Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World (1983). Cooper experiences this union of reader and protagonist so strongly that he begins his study by saying that as readers and critics “we ape the plights and practices of the characters about whom we read” (1) and concludes by saying that “our inevitable and always frustrated attempt to read meanings” ultimately becomes the subject of the book (176). Also see Georgiana M. M. Colville, who writes that at the moment of Koteks’ question (“How’s your quest?”), “Pynchon appears to speak directly to both Oedipa and the reader” (21).

10 In terms of the novel itself, Richard Fafîna’s Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me. (New York: Random House, 1966), begins with a protagonist who claims “invisibility” as his domain, and writes, “See me loud with lies, big boots stomping, mind awash with schemes” (3-4). A character whose preoccupation is food and sex (love is a “consolation,” a “sideshow panacea,” p. 216), and who speaks of the “regimented good will and force-fed confidence of those who are not meek but will inherit the earth all the same” (13; this characteristic fell under similar attack in Pynchon’s Lot 49). Fafîna’s protagonist, busted for being vagrant (64), demonstrates a knack for asking the most disarming questions, with the response, “I’ve been on a voyage...a kind of quest” (the “asphalt seas were calling,” p. 329), concluding, “I’ve seen fire and pestilence, symptoms of a great disease. I’m Exempt” (15). A student-lover, he studies the art of the “con” under a number of mentors, mocking the “sterility” of the general populace (34). From this vantage point, he asserts, “Supposed to be fertile, they tell me, but it all looks barren. You know. Too rich. Creamy. Exploited, wasting with fat. God Bless America” (38). Finally, when characters
in the novel accuse him of being cryptic, he responds, lending an important insight into Pynchon's novel, perhaps, "Always present a moving target. 'Define a thing and you can dispense with it, right?"' (39); a secondary character asserts, "Nothing... Not even the suspicion of a meaningful answer will be give you. Nothing" (258). These clues, combined with his notion that "Life is a celluoid passion" (186; Oedipa's adventure as celluoid Passion play) provide potential insights, also, into the nature of Oedipa's journey in Pynchon's Lot 49.

Twentieth-century authors seem to have particular fun in asking readers, "What do you make of this?" On this subject, I remember reading a quote by Tom Stoppard in the London Times which showed mischievous delight in his Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead's ability to keep scholars, critics, and academics gainfully employed in producing theory and responses to the play. Among the products generated by Pynchon's would-be responders, Tony Tanner tells a story in which the Sobo Weekly News published a theory that Thomas Pynchon was really J. D. Salinger, simply using another name. Pynchon’s response, reports Tanner: "Not bad, keep trying" (Tanner 18). Similarly, when confronted with "The Courier's Tragedy," Pynchon's readers think not so much of Wharfinger's Angelo, evil Duke of Squamuglia, as of Oedipa of Kinneverett, sweet damsel tower-imprisoned now venturing free. We apply the same procedures and methods to Pynchon's Lot 49 as Oedipa to her Jacobean tragedy, asking ourselves: What are the implications? nuances? where the hidden meanings? In short, we find ourselves as riddled by questions as Oedipa, and like Oedipa, we want to head for the ladies' room to examine the bathroom walls, though to explain why we feel so compelled would be a fine trick. Because we do not come easily upon our answers, uncertainty sneaks into the text, and like Oedipa we learn a new mode of expression: "It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance" (Lot 49 71).

For example, Amado’s narrative describes the period of Tereza’s life with the Doctor spent in Estância as an idyll, the stuff of romance. Now, upon his death, the narrator seems to turn the tables: seemingly, this narrator becomes kin to that proverbial thug, except that instead of knocking off a jewelry store or murdering someone, he derives his living, and enjoyment, from metaphorically poking with a pin at the reader (particularly, his or her understanding of the conventions of romance). Notably, in Amado’s narrative, the narrator joins in the “loose” tongues wagging about Dr. Guedes and Tereza. This narrator describes an entirely different picara: he speaks of Tereza, “isolated behind the walls of a mansion, almost a prisoner,” and recalls the Captain with his pleasure in making other men envious by showing off his fighting cocks, his saddle horses, his German pistol, and his "necklace of maidenheads" (367). He interpolates a memory of the Doctor’s telling Tereza, “I want you all to myself”; suggests that the Doctor has fit Tereza in only at the edges of his life, a thief of time, in stolen moments ("always time stolen from the mill, from the bank, from his business, and family"); he also interjects the memory of the Doctor’s empty promises and failed excursions, including a ferryboat ride; and, to end the catalog, the narrator asserts that Tereza’s life
with the Doctor represented to her lover only "a restful pause in his busy
routine" (367).

13 This case illuminates so well differences between the picaro's and picara's
backgrounds and later experience, as well as shows many similarities to the
potential underworld kingpin. Inverarity. Amado's account of Tulio Bocatelli is
just about textbook in terms of the picaro's development in fiction:

Tulio Bocatelli had indeed been born in a count’s palazzo, where
his father doubled as a doorman and chauffeur. While still a
child he abandoned the damp cellars of the old house to seek his
fortune and never looked back. It hadn't been easy, and he had
spent some time in jail. Three girls walked the streets to keep
him clothed and fed by the time he was eighteen. He worked as
doorman and bouncer in a night club, guided tourists to blue
movies full of lesbian orgies, then graduated to gigolo to elderly
American ladies. His handsome face brought him a pleasant, easy
life, but it was not enough. He wanted the security of real wealth,
not just a trickle of money that he couldn’t count on. At the age
of twenty-eight he took the plunge and came to Brazil on the trail
of a cousin, who had hit the jackpot by marrying a rich girl in
São Paulo. He booked a third-class passage to Brazil and landed
at Santos with two suits of clothes, his face, and a count’s title.
Flirtation, engagement, and marriage followed in the twinkling
of an eye. (399-400)

In addition to his business associates and local henchmen, his immediate family
are especially flawed characters: Aparecida (Apa), his daughter, is described as
a "whore" who liked "variety" in men and drink (393; as noted, Apa marries a
picaro prototype); Jairo, his son, is a homosexual, described as being "mounted
like a woman" in the streets (396). The Doctor confesses to Tereza, "Tereza,
once I horsewhipped a scoundrel in the street and made him swallow an article
he had written against me and my kin. It took a hard beating and a lot of tears
to choke it down; it was a long article" (397).

14 Remington Rose, an early reviewer of the novel, responded thus, calling
Lot 49 "a patchy collection of images propped up by claims of significance" and
adding that "nothing is really done, nothing is worked through; there has been
too little effort [on Pynchon's behalf] to make a novel..." (40). Although most
critics do not come down so harshly on the novel, many do share Rose's opinion
as to the incoherent, episodic structure of the book.

15 Debra A. Moddelmog writes, "By following up on the 'clues' of the
narrative—allusions to myth, science, literature, history, pop culture, and the
like—we arrive...at possibilities only" (249). Lance Olsen also reacts positively
to the potential for such narratives, concluding: 'The true effect of the last page
is not to glide the reader out of the text with a sense of completion as in a myth,
154

a romance... [but to cast us] back into the book's intricacies, densities, convolutions, incompletionseven uncertainties...” (162). For the most part, this literary technique has the effect of bringing fiction even closer to life (in so doing exploding usual perceived boundaries), for the continuous journey of readers within and beyond the narrative mirrors the processes of life itself.

16 This legacy includes Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Gatsby's life shares with Oedipa's some characteristics of picaresque experience, including the fact that he changes his identity after being schooled by someone whose ties to the underworld are commonly known and, like Inverarity, himself engages in "shady" activities. Pierce Inverarity's words of advice for Oedipa--“Keep it bouncing” (178)—evoke the words of Fitzgerald's epigraph for his novel, taken from Thomas Parke D'invilliers: "Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;/ If you can bounce high, bounce for her too./ Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, I must have you!" (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1925). In this sense, is it possible that Inverarity is not dead at all; rather, the elaborate "hoax" in the novel becomes, in this improbable scenario, a test preliminary to his winning the girl, Oedipa, who will respond, "I must have you!"
CHAPTER VI
Conclusion: The Picara-Artist

"Yet of all the Crafts I learnt in Childhood, writing is the one that hath stood me in greatest Stead during my whole Life and hath most distinguished me from other women."
(Fanny Hackabout-Jones, 21)

"Would I always be an Outcast, wand'ring the World, seeking my own Native Tribe, and finding it briefly only to be cast out again?"
(Fanny Hackabout-Jones, 278)

The picara, who began as a flat caricature in sixteenth-century Spain and seventeenth-century Europe, has achieved in the twentieth century a voice and heightened awareness that distinguishes her from her predecessors: she has become creating artist. Her life has three primary components: adventuring, the search for a voice and self-identity, and the creation of the text. Contrary to the picaro, the picara in contemporary times undergoes an inward journey and experiences personal growth. Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God shows how the picara transforms her experience of the outer world into a more personal vision: namely, how self-recognitions translate into actions, and afterwards, how taking to the road comes to signify the romantic fulfillment of the heroine's quest.

The picaresque fiction allows its central character to experience many different "visions" of life and all that it has to offer. Notably, the picaresque novel was the first narrative form to treat and heroize the lower-class, marginal protagonist; in contemporary American fiction, authors have found this form
well-suited to conveying the lives of female protagonists. When the wayfarer picara is no longer marginal and journeying physically, she ends her journey to relive her adventures in mind, and to use her newly acquired voice to convey her life's story to readers in the form of the novel. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the novel itself, delivers the picara's identity and frees her from silence.

Generally speaking, new words must be "made" and "said," as the picara's experiences require her to craft language anew. Characteristically, it seems that the picara's main obstacle when journeying beyond the home becomes her own perception regarding experiences she undergoes. If the home offers a woman isolation and entrapment, do experiences as lived upon the road offer the same woman freedom and independence? The law is never far from impinging on the picara's movement in picaresque narrative. Nonetheless, her efforts comprise a dynamic process of limitless exploration, as the picara counters indeterminacy by working to find synthesis creatively for the infinite number of possibilities offered by modern American life. What is interesting, in the context of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, is that readers and protagonist, alike, become bound up in the web of intrigue and together must attempt to separate hoax from "reality." This action parallels the picara's search for identity.

Broadly speaking, the prototypical experience in twentieth-century narrative becomes such geographically undirected journeys, in life and literature, with a focus on a kind of "perpetual arrival" rather than completion: nothing is finished, squarely, and neatly packed away. This includes, it seems, the picara's own "reading" of her life's experiences. Speaking of narrative, the only possibility for closure comes in the form of readers' interpretations and their understanding of and relations to the text at hand.

The novelist Barbara Kingsolver has written that plot may be becoming extinct in our culture; that is, our literature tends to present an escalation of disconnected scenes in lieu of a plot in which one scene is logically linked to the next. Ultimately, she writes, life "happens to us and we have no control over it, therefore no responsibility" (Kingsolver 14). This world view meshes well with the picaresque life, which is free-flowing and lacks closure. This form similarly suits the episodic picaresque narrative (Claudio Guillén has described its form as being linked together like a series of boxcars), which often appears to be disjointed and seemingly random.
But there is an operative logic to this narrative form: the picaresque narrative mirrors the progress of a protagonist's life. Until the life has ended the narrative may not conclude. But narrative in picaresque fiction is an act of deception also—think of its progress as but another of the protagonist's many disguises. More aptly, consider Ruthie's analogy in *Housekeeping*: one must choose one of any number of boxcars and then open journey on the rails.

Though experience seems uncontrolled and random, it is not so much so as one would initially think. Richard Bjornson shows compellingly that Moll Flanders could have assumed a conventional widow's life; she, similar to Janie Crawford in more recent times, nonetheless, opted for picaresque life—a life that, given her talents, could provide greater excitement, challenge, and monetary rewards.

In the picaresque narrative there is a pattern, indeed, multiple patterns. For a literary exemplar, consider Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. His "Song of Myself" is composed of seemingly random, disconnected scenes or vignettes; however, each is unified by the character's experience and unifying consciousness. The song recorded in poetic form by the "self" persona, does not suggest "no responsibility" due to lack of control but, instead, the passing of no judgment. The guise is that of a pure record free from bias and given in the immediacy of experience. Similarly, picaresque authors set up a foil situation which also distances the protagonist from the act of narration, a strategy that lends the narrative verisimilitude. Various strategies include relying on the picara's "confidante" to record the narrative, like Hurston's Pheoby in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Grimmelshausen's Courage relies on a lover to be transcriber/translator; and Pynchon calls upon an omniscient, third-person narrator to record Oedipa's experiences in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Picaresque narrative claims as its crucible the passage of life itself. Because the illusion is that of an unimaginative, realistic rendering of life, the picaresque narrative functions effectively to "unlock" meanings that presumed fictionalizing can only near at a distance (cf. Roth 7-8). The illusion in picaresque narrative is that its course may proceed without baggage (as does a lone character on the road, so to speak) in a visibly unencumbered, singularly unfettered way. This is an illusion that readers readily accept. Perhaps this happens because in this fictional form readers may feel the protagonist's pulse in every transient sentence that leads imperceptibly to our unraveling the knot and knowing the essential life's history.
Modern literature tries to capture the poetic free-for-all quality of actual lived experience. If the author is creating artist, character and reader of the fiction are artists as well. Robert Alter suggests in Rogue’s Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel that the picaro "handles experience much the way an artist handles the materials of his art" (128). He writes:

To the ordinary man things happen; for him most of the components of experience are to use the Aristotelian distinction, already actual, just as lines, shapes, textures, and colors are simply actual to someone who will never be a painter. But experience for the opportunist picaro—like the elements of the visual world of the painter—is always predominantly potential (which is another reason why picaresque novels have no endings). (128)

Character and reader are artists as well. Like Oedipa Maas in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49, for example, how we perceive and piece together the “word strands” (no word unto itself being complete), creating plot, says a lot about us and the world we inhabit. Know thyself. Read fiction.

Although for some literary personae experience is actual, in the form of straight lines of development (E. M. Forster), more recent experience in literature seemingly represents potential. At the close of Pynchon’s narrative, Oedipa Maas awaits closure to her attempts to organize the various strands of her experience in the final crying of Lot 49. Similarly, for critics who attempt to assess their reading experience of such narratives in words, the act of writing seldom reaches a satisfactory close; scholarly texts also signify potential, growing and changing as do their reading audiences.

As with the collision of molecules that form the DNA, or script, for the human body, for a writer, drafting an extended narrative is an eclectic, instantaneous process. The process develops in the "instant"--multiple instants--during which the germ of an idea extends itself onto the page. Then, moment by moment, the narrative's form emerges. Annie Dillard writes in Holy the Firm (1977) that a thinker "lives in the bright wick of the mind" (47). A thinker (one who would think something) also lives both "in the clash of materials" and "in the world of spirit" (47).

Narrative captures the essence of life itself, particularly the picaresque narrative, which embodies well life’s dual catalysts--the incendiary, watchful wick of the mind and the movement in a physical “romancing” of the next
horizon. For writers assessing a literary subject, materials interact within the mind somewhat like guests conversing at a dinner party or symposium: there are upstarts who sneak in by the back door and more decorous, opportunist gate-crashers, but other guests are invited. When approaching a writing task, as writers, we invite others to join us, in the form of the novels or research materials that we survey. Therein, the materials converge and coalesce into an understanding. As in travels of the picaresque character on the road, the occurrences and exchanges that take place at the mind's symposium are eclectic—due both to chance and deliberate choice—and from experience as lived moment to moment.

A body of literature cannot be arranged and classified exhaustively according to mutually exclusive, hierarchically arranged categories. Rather, we can discuss this body of literature only in ordered ways that bring enlightenment to us as researchers or bring similar benefits to our readers and students, respectively. In surveying the field of picaresque literature, both the novels and theoretical works, the primary test has been to not only consider a body of texts but to suggest how these texts may speak to our lives today.

In sum, although the picara's experience is defined most often by her relations to and experiences with men, Marilynne Robinson has created a picara whose narrative (Housekeeping) seems wholly freed from their influence. However, the novel's focus is the picara's earliest, formative years. Meanwhile, Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God creates a picara in the classical mode. Janie Crawford's earliest experiences, similar to Ruthie Foster's, leave her orphaned and marginalized. But when she reaches adolescence, rather than walking down the railroad tracks toward an indeterminate future as a contemporary picara, she kisses a boy. Most of the picara's experiences relate to her body in the classic picaresque narrative: awakenings and self-recognitions teach her about the ways of the world. Janie experiences different world views—as a lady on a pedestal, as a "doll" baby, and finally, as picara—and she drafts her narrative, seemingly, as a defense of picaresque life. Modeled upon the narratives of early-American slave authors, as well as the picaresque, Janie's oral history records her life's experiences and asks readers to go out into the world to experience "far horizon" for themselves. Although Pynchon's Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49 also ventures forth, her relations to men are even more tenuous: her husband loses his grasp on reality, her shrink goes mad, Inverarity dies, and her many male relationships in the novel similarly
self-destruct. Oedipa must, at novel’s end, project her private interpretation of the world and its possibilities.

Critical renderings of texts are in flux as much as the narratives that they work to transfix in words. Literary criticism and discussions of literature are the realm of the “scholar-adventurer,” in keeping with Richard Altick’s sense of literary exploration. That act takes place on a field with few boundaries. In entering that field, scholars assume a “marginal” life that parallels the picaro/picara’s. In reading, we find ourselves journeying in mind, a journey that is amended and recorded by notes that take form in book margins, scholarly manuscripts, and classroom note binders. Similar to the picaro and picara, scholars inhabit an outsider sphere, beyond logical certainty and full of striving, that is only anchored in the concrete immediacy of speech, or writing. To reconstruct texts critically is to create new fictions.

In twentieth-century criticism and scholarship, the picaresque genre has shown a consistent need for stretch in any categorical assessment, as it responds to cultural, historical, and societal change. Obviously, critics approach “picaresque”—as a descriptive term and as a form—with contrasting visions that achieve ultimately contradictory results. If we can trace the origins and forms of the picaresque novel, study its mutations, and acknowledge the secondary influences on its development, an understanding of the form we find in the twentieth century begins. Possibly, acceptance of canonical picaresque novels published during the twentieth century will soon be as clearly undisputed as acceptance of those novels written during the early period in the genre’s development.
WORKS CITED


Ravits, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's


