The Neoliberal Bildungsroman: Individual and National “Development” in Peter Mountford’s *A Young Man’s Guide to Late Capitalism* and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*

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“Politics in our novels therefore is, according to Stendhal’s canonical formulation, a ‘pistol shot in the middle of a concert.’”


Neoliberalism is not just a set of economic policies; it is an all-encompassing ideology that continuously reshapes both global conditions and individual configurations. It requires a fundamental formation of individuals to perpetuate its continued success, which it has achieved to an excessive degree. Literature is beginning to respond to these new existential conditions with novels that trace the development of neoliberal subjects. Peter Mountford’s *A Young Man’s Guide to Late Capitalism* (2011) and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) are two contemporary novels that center on characters who come-of-age in our current context of global capitalism. As each character adapts traits applicable to success in the neoliberal world, we witness the formation of a self-obsessed, grotesque human being who participates in a global order that “currently kills as many of the world’s children every year as the Nazis killed of the world’s Jewish population during World War II” (Foley 38). Balram Halwai, the protagonist of *The White Tiger*, becomes a thug of a businessman and murderer, while Gabriel de Boya, the protagonist of *A Young Man’s Guide*, manipulates, betrays, and exploits both his mother and his lover in order to procure a sizeable profit, ending up alone by the novel’s end. Paralleling the development of the protagonists, the geographic locations of the narratives—the nation of Bolivia for Mountford and India for Adiga—likewise “come-of-age” in the increasingly globalized world. *A Young Man’s Guide to Late Capitalism* and *The White Tiger* are two examples of a larger literary trend which I refer to as the “neoliberal bildungsroman.” The “neoliberal bildungsroman” is an attempt to understand the formation of individual and national
identities, as they transition from liminal states into solidified position within the current system of globalized hegemony known as neoliberalism. The “neoliberal bildungsroman” helps us map present and project future shifts in the global economy.

The Neoliberal Bildungsroman

Mountford and Adiga are participating in a new development in the genre of the bildungsroman, marking a continuation of its tradition and indicating an evolution in its form towards a transnational, neoliberal perspective. Literary scholar and Marxist critic Franco Moretti argues that the bildungsroman is the “symbolic form’ of modernity,” whereby European culture reconfigured its conception of youth in order to accommodate the great changes modernity introduced (5). Furthermore, Moretti states that through the bildungsroman Europe “attach[es] a meaning, not so much to youth, as to modernity” (5).¹ Youth is chosen “because of its ability to accentuate modernity’s dynamism and instability,” a consequence of the numerous social, technological, and economic revolutions at the turn of the nineteenth century (Moretti 5). By extension then, the “neoliberal bildungsroman” follows the logic of its predecessor in its global attempt to attach meaning to the conditions of postmodernity under neoliberalism.

The bildungsroman first appears in form roughly during the historical rise of what Fredric Jameson (using Ernest Mandel’s model) refers to as “classical or market capitalism,” near the time of the industrial revolution (“Cognitive” 469). The “classical” bildungsroman was an attempt to demonstrate the optimistic possibilities of individual’s integration into the developing capitalist order (Moretti 16). The “neoliberal bildungsroman” now indicates a literary response to “the moment of the multinational network, or what Mandel calls ‘late capitalism’” (“Cognitive”

¹ Moretti does not refer to “modernity” in terms of the aesthetic movement of modernism, but rather the rapidly developing conditions of the industrial revolution and Europe’s embrace of capitalism towards the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth.
Though the tradition of the bildungsroman has persisted to varying degrees since its inception, we might ask why there is a rise in a contemporary reemergence of its popularity, carrying with it a distinct ironic tone seen in both A Young Man’s Guide and The White Tiger. As the nature of capitalism is shifting once again, we may be witnessing yet another artistic reconfiguration of “youth,” one that considers the neoliberal order.

Literary critic and German scholar Tobias Boes argues that the bildungsroman, or “formation novel,” “stages the development of an individual toward a normative ideal” (5). Boes’s emphasis on a normative ideal compliments Moretti’s theory of the “formation-socialization” quality of a bildungsroman (44). Moretti argues that “It is not enough that the social order is ‘legal’; it must also appear symbolically legitimate,” and the bildungsroman attempts to present the symbolic order of modernity as such (16). Additionally, Moretti states, “One must internalize [social norms] and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter…the Bildungsroman…has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equaled again” (16). By taking up the tradition of the bildungsroman and adapting it to our current global context, Mountford and Adiga portray the development of an individual towards the “normative ideal” of a neoliberal subject. The protagonist of each book properly accepts and eventually embodies the social order to a degree of unification where the distinction between individual choice and ideological compulsion is indistinguishable. But whereas the classical bildungsroman, Moretti explains, exhibits the “force of conviction and optimistic

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2 It should be noted that the terms “late capitalism” and “neoliberalism” are intimately related, both describing the same set of economic policies initiated in the 1980s and still in practice today. “Neoliberalism” is the more recent term ascribed to the development in current policy, adding a political context to the dialogue instead of a strictly economic one. For a brief discussion of the shift in terminology, see Sherry Ortner’s “On Neoliberalism” in Anthropology of This Century, 1 (May 2011).
clarity,” Mountford’s and Adiga’s texts, at best, illuminate obscured morality and an ironic disposition.

Aside from an emphasis on individual development, “the Bildungsroman is a genre connected more than any other to the rise of modern nationalism,” establishing protagonists as representations of national identity, inviting the interpretation of these novels as national allegories (Boes 3). Mountford and Adiga also adapt this nationalistic quality of a bildungsroman, but to a different degree. Adiga’s protagonist, Balram Halwai, a murderous entrepreneur, can hardly be considered a positive portrayal of Indian nationalism, but perhaps serves as one indicative of neoliberalism’s destructive inevitability, as literary critic Betty Joseph argues in “Neoliberalism and Allegory.” In Mountford’s text, however, marginal characters come to represent the national identity of Bolivia, while the main character, Gabriel de Boya, embodies the historical trajectory of the United States, as critic Leerom Medovoi claims in “Love is Not a Game.” In both cases, the “neoliberal bildungsroman” attempts to address the conditions and demands of individual and national existence in the contemporary global socioeconomic paradigm.

Medovoi and Abdullah Al-Dagamseh are two critics who position A Young Man’s Guide and The White Tiger as indicative of a new development in postcolonial literatures/studies, towards a focus on neoliberalism. Medovoi argues for a reading of A Young Man’s Guide as “world-system literature,” which he defines as an attempt to address “the contemporary transition away from U.S. global dominance and toward an as yet unclear geopolitical alternative” (177). As we might well be witnessing this transition away from the United States as empire, other nations, like rising India, are seeking to become the new neoliberal powerhouse, while others, like Bolivia, are searching for sociopolitical alternatives. Regardless of which route
nations take, neoliberalism still reigns as the dominant ideological mode that produces a
hegemonic global subjectivity in order to continue its existence, as reflected in Mountford’s and
Adiga’s novels. Medovoi states, “‘world-system literature’ designates a mode of writing that not
only seeks to map the vagaries of global power and wealth, but also symptomatically expresses a
subjective relation toward those efforts” (191). Al-Dagamseh, who contends that The White
Tiger is a piece of “world bank literature,” compliments Medovoi’s notion by arguing, “As an
approach, world bank literature serves not only to connect the historical, political, and economic
forces and conditions surrounding the production of literary texts, but also to treat narratives as
historical documents which represent the socio-economic and political consciousness of the post-
World War II era.” As a result, A Young Man’s Guide and The White Tiger are both attempting
to map the relationship between our ideological environment and the production of new
subjectivities in relation to the conditions of citizenship under neoliberalism.

By employing the form of a bildungsroman, Mountford and Adiga present us with the
formation and development of neoliberal subjectivity, as the protagonists learn how to properly
function as a normative ideal in the hegemonic global order. What we learn from their formation
is that the normative ideal of neoliberal subjectivity is quite shocking and altogether unappealing,
as Balram’s and Gabriel’s life become overrun by obsessive self-interest satisfied through
subterfuge where criminal behavior—even radical violence—is utilized to promote one’s own
wealth accumulation. Medovoi argues that “neoliberalism is more than just a set of economic
policies associated with ‘late capitalism,’ as David Harvey has described them, but also a project
for a new model of subjectivity that amounts to a decisive rearticulation of Adam Smith’s homo
economicus” (187). Furthermore, Medovoi states, “the neoliberal homo economicus is an
entrepreneurial subject, a competitive self whose goal is to amass human capital, thereby turning
himself into an ever greater revenue stream,” as both Gabriel and Balram effectively do (187).

This new mode of subjectivity perceives the world entirely through an economic perspective. The aforementioned David Harvey, a leading Marxist geographer and prominent scholar of neoliberalism, argues alongside this notion: “Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (A Brief History 3). The ideology is so dominant that neoliberalism has subverted religious doctrine as a guiding principle of life, creating an atmosphere of “‘free market fundamentalism,’” to which Balram and Gabriel readily subscribe (A Brief History 7).

This new mode of subjectivity, however, has been forcefully crafted, rather than naturally developed. Medovoi notes, “Human beings do not naturally behave as one would expect from the neoliberal homo economicus. Rather, neoliberalism calls for the creation, by ‘artificial’ means, of the social and institutional conditions that would lead human beings to do so” (187).

The neoliberal project, then, is much more than economic; it is an endeavor to completely refashion the subjective experience of the individual in order to sustain the system—if the wheel is going to be reinvented, then there must be roads to drive on. But these new individuals are troubling specimens, embodying neoliberal practices and ideology to a horrific degree. These characters, formed to be ideal neoliberal subjects are, as Al-Dagamseh quoting György Lukács states, “‘the product of a particular social, political, [and economic] environment.’” By presenting the formation of neoliberal subjects, Mountford and Adiga simultaneously portray both the transformation of these individuals and the system that guides their development.

The bildungsroman is intended to be an educational experience for the reader, because, “As a rule, the classical Bildungsroman has the reader perceive the text through the eyes of the
protagonist: which is logical, since the protagonist is undergoing the experience of formation, and the reading too is intended to be a formative process” (Moretti 56). For Moretti, the plot of the classical bildungsroman serves as a “‘ring,’” or “‘network’” where the protagonist, by the novel’s end, attaches himself (as the protagonist is typically male) to the greater realm of social belonging and community, epitomized by a wedding (19). For the classical bildungsroman, “Marriage [is] a metaphor for the social contract,” promoting a sense of pacified youth now matured, settled, and upholding the social order (Moretti 22). Moretti exemplifies this notion by stating how the classical bildungsroman attempts to demonstrate the necessity of “the stability of social relationships” (55). The “neoliberal bildungsroman,” however, provides an ironic rendering of the classical bildungsroman’s focus on upholding the social contract.

The irony of the “neoliberal bildungsroman” is established through the experience of the reader: neither A Young Man’s Guide nor The White Tiger present admirable characters worthy of reproducing their formations within ourselves. With neoliberalism’s profound obsession with the individual, personal self-interest is satisfied at no expense for the protagonists of these two novels. Both characters prove to be socially destructive, isolated bachelors who are severely detached from other people, but perfectly in sync with the demands of the social order. Whereas the classical bildungsroman presents a largely positive model for readers to follow, the “neoliberal bildungsroman” inverts this intention by presenting a largely negative model for readers to avoid. Thus, the “neoliberal bildungsroman” ironically echoes the classical bildungsroman by flipping its narrative aim. A Young Man’s Guide and The White Tiger ultimately warn against the detrimental effects of embracing neoliberal subjectivity.
Forming the Neoliberal Subject in *A Young Man’s Guide to Late Capitalism*

Peter Mountford’s debut novel chronicles the life of twenty-seven-year-old Gabriel de Boya, a hedge fund employee, and his stay of just more than a month in Bolivia during the 2005 election of Evo Morales and the Bolivian gas conflict. Gabriel is sent to the country by the hedge fund, a relentless corporation known as the Calloway Group, to uncover Morales’s plans for the nation’s economy in order to seek out reasonable market opportunities. If Gabriel can deliver the desired information in a prompt amount of time, he will be given a handsome bonus and secure his position as an analyst for the Calloway Group. In order to do so, Gabriel embarks upon a socially destructive course, betraying both his mother and his lover, while also attempting to commit securities fraud to advance his own personal investments.

The novel quickly establishes itself as a bildungsroman, placing Gabriel in a liminal state between his transition from naïve youth to mature adult. The third-person limited omniscient narrator first presents Gabriel as standing in front of the bathroom mirror, noticing: “Puberty had hit him young, at ten, but full-blown manhood seemed to be still in the offing” (Mountford 2). Not only is the novel a coming-of-age story, but also a “guide” for young men (with all of its patriarchal implications) through the system of late capitalism, as Gabriel’s path demonstrates the trajectory of integration into the neoliberal order. The novel as “guide” indicates a particular shift in the development of the bildungsroman, as fictional stories utilize pseudo-objective forms to didactically, albeit ironically, educate readers about the necessary traits for success under neoliberalism. Medovoi, who provides the only scholarship to date on *A Young Man’s Guide*, argues:

As a ‘guide to late capitalism,’ the novel invokes the tradition of travel literature, but in order to present itself as a text that delineates not a place, but a system…The novel is
therefore concerned…with what Frederic Jameson famously has called the ‘cognitive mapping’ of the world-system, and most particularly of the forces that financial markets have come to exert upon our subjectivities. (178)

By working for a hedge fund, Gabriel is explicitly directed by the financial markets, as he is sent by the Calloway Group across the globe, following the trail of regional economic interests. The entire development of his character is driven by the economic forces of neoliberalism, from his birth to the present. For example, his mother, the unnamed, single parent and prominent Latin American anthropology professor at Pomona College, is a political exile from General Augusto Pinochet’s Chile, fleeing to Soviet Russia in the 1970s where Gabriel is conceived.

This small detail about Gabriel’s mother as exile is not to be overlooked, as it ties Gabriel’s entire history to the development of neoliberalism. Pinochet’s CIA-backed military coup of September 11, 1973, brought about what Medovoi refers to as “an advanced experiment in neoliberalization, akin to what postcolonial critics mean when they speak of European colonies as having once served as ‘laboratories of modernity.’ We might say that Chile served as the first ‘laboratory’ of neoliberal postmodernity” (190). Of the coup, journalist Naomi Klein writes, “in all, more than 3,200 people were disappeared or executed, at least 80,000 were imprisoned, and 200,000 fled the country for political reasons” (93-94). Gabriel’s mother is one of these 200,000, and her father one of the 3,200 murdered by Pinochet’s regime. Pinochet also enacted an economic and ideological revolution, under the advisement of Milton Friedman, the father of neoliberalism, and his ideological inheritors, the “Chicago Boys” (Klein 94). As a result, the neoliberal experiment was conducted, interpreted as successful, and then imported back to the United States where it has since unleashed itself upon the world (Medovoi 190).
Not only is Gabriel’s existence a product of economic and ideological conflict, but his conscious perception of the world is also informed entirely by economic interests, indicating his proper development as a neoliberal subject. This ideological reconfiguring of subjective experience seeks to indoctrinate an economic lens over the eyes of the individual, whereby nothing in the world—not even people or personal relationships—escapes the possibility of being viewed as a monetizable commodity. The narrator, largely a reflection of Gabriel’s own consciousness, describes Gabriel’s ethnic composition as “a complex product of the Cold War, born in the United States of Soviet and Chilean stock” (49). The words “product” and “stock” allude to Gabriel’s personal investment with neoliberalism as he continuously thinks in economic terms—punning with the word “stock,” a reference to his career at the hedge fund, which comes to dominate his entire identity. The competing ideologies of the mid-to-late twentieth century serve as the foundation for Gabriel’s being, with neoliberal capitalism resting into place as the final victor. As the world gave way to the global, hegemonic order of neoliberalism by result of the disintegration of the USSR, so too does Gabriel’s Russian father disappear from the picture. Neoliberalism itself becomes the paternal influence lacking in Gabriel’s lifelong development.

Gabriel’s youthfulness is consistently noticed by other characters throughout the text, further indicating his liminal position. Not surprisingly, the first external observation of his youth comes from a veteran of neoliberalism, Grayson MacMillan, an IMF representative stationed in Bolivia. Grayson, a physical embodiment of the abstract ideological paternal figure, comments, “‘Well, you’re extremely young” (15). Gabriel’s mother also serves as a persistent reminder of his youthfulness, as her love is described as “generally suffocating” and “swaddled in condescending innuendo” (45). Parental influences aside, Gabriel’s relationships to the two prominent female characters of the text, Fiona Musgrave and Lenka Villarobles, not only add to
the motif of Gabriel as a young man, but also come to represent the ideological choice that will solidify his transition into adulthood: the choice to either accept or reject neoliberalism.

Fiona is an analyst for the *Wall Street Journal* covering Bolivia’s election and Lenka is Evo Morales’s press secretary; as someone interested in the economic future of Bolivia, we can see why Gabriel might be attracted to each woman. Fiona is, for Gabriel, his most intimate tie to neoliberalism while in Bolivia, and the cold, business-like subjectivity of autonomous neoliberal subjects is reflected in their relationship. Fiona tells Gabriel, “‘Look, there are protests in Sopocachi today, and the traffic will be awful, so if we’re not going to fuck right now, I should get dressed,’” and we might well imagine the overall lack of romance in this situation (10). Even their flirtations are drenched with economic implications: “That seemed to be the nature of the transaction… it was his job—put bluntly—to extract information from her at any cost” (19, emphasis mine). Juxtaposed to Fiona is Lenka, who provides a much needed critique of neoliberal subjectivity for Gabriel, as she “didn’t respect people who would work for the sole purpose of making heaps of money… It seemed to require a base value structure, something that was, if not outright corrupt, at least a little cold and nihilistic” (176). For Gabriel, Lenka embodies a completely alternative lifestyle to neoliberal subjectivity, and briefly, it seems as though Gabriel might choose against neoliberalism in preference for love—he even entertains the idea of living permanently with Lenka and her family in Bolivia (227).

Despite whatever connection Gabriel might have to each woman, his choice to embrace neoliberal subjectivity blatantly emerges throughout the narrative, and his self-obsessed desire for wealth proves to be ultimately destructive. Gabriel loses Lenka in his mad dash for financial success, but she does not escape without harm. By becoming a neoliberal subject, Gabriel must join the tradition of capitalism, following Moretti’s claim that one intention of the bildungsroman
is “The attempt to join modernity and tradition” (28). After consistently pestering Lenka for information about Evo’s intentions for the nation’s gas supply, she finally agrees to ask the president-elect for Gabriel. After Lenka reveals this, Gabriel’s libido is sparked, only now with an entirely different tone: “He had never ravaged anyone before, to the best of his knowledge. He hadn’t quite known what it meant. But now he did know, and he planned to ravage her that night” (179). Gabriel’s perception of sex devolves from passionate love into “ravaging,” as Lenka’s new economic utility excites Gabriel as never before.

“Ravaging,” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, means “to devastate, lay waste (land, a country, etc.), as by deliberate destruction or plunder. Later more generally: to cause severe and extensive damage to.” The use of this word intimately ties Lenka to Bolivia itself and the brutal consequences of capitalist exploration in the region. Earlier in the novel, the narrator describes one of the many historical exploitations of the Bolivian land and native peoples, known as “El Saquero—‘the sacking,’” where Spanish conquistadors raided the natural resources of the land (67). The narrator states, “By the time the Spanish ceded control, in 1825, the mountains of Bolivia were honeycombed with mineshafts. Little of value remained” (67). Furthermore, what truly connects Gabriel’s “ravaging” of Lenka to this event is the narrator’s final description of El Saquero as “The plundering of Bolivia” (67). Once Gabriel catches a flashing glimpse of the information Lenka has to offer, like the conquistadors blushing before the glittering gold of the Choqueyapu River, he “ravages” her as the Spanish “plundered” Bolivia.

Gabriel’s acceptance of neoliberal subjectivity perceives Lenka in the only way that it can, and she transforms from someone he once loved into an objectified commodity. Once the

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3 This notion is altered when considering Gabriel. The classical bildungsroman joins modernity (capitalism) with pre-capitalist tradition, but Gabriel functions within the sphere of neoliberalism—there is no longer any attachment to pre-capitalist tradition. As a result, the young man unites modernity with postmodernity, monopoly capitalism with multinational, late capitalism.
needed resources are extracted, the commodity no longer has any economic use. Medovoi argues: “[Gabriel] makes the neoliberal choice,” as he chooses profit over all else (189). In addition to manipulating Lenka to achieve his own self-interested goals, he cheats on her with Fiona, claiming “it was necessary,” with no justification for this whatsoever (121). However, Gabriel does not even choose to pursue a life with Fiona. Instead, he makes the ultimate neoliberal choice: to live a life perpetually alone, with no distractions from his wealth accumulation.

Viewing Lenka as a commodity is the beginning of Gabriel’s complete embrace of neoliberal subjectivity. Medovoi provides an excellent account of Gabriel’s formation as a neoliberal subject, describing Gabriel’s unabashed embracement of “game theory” as a life philosophy (186). Game theory, the subject of Gabriel’s undergraduate research, Medovoi states, “becomes a procedure for rationally calculating a course of action that maximizes one’s self-interest inside a competitive scenario that includes a careful spelling out of the distribution of information” (186). Though Gabriel is initially weary of game theory’s effectiveness in describing real-life situations, “he fully embraces it when it is actually time to act. In the final instance, Gabriel is a good neoliberal subject” (Medovoi 187). Medovoi contends that game theory is a “neoliberal parable” for Gabriel which, like other parables “produce ‘morals’ that prescribe behavior” (187). The neoliberal morality that Gabriel encompasses is a transvaluation of core beliefs we might deem vital to the human condition, such as simply viewing other individuals as living beings with personal histories and emotions instead of as commodities. But

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4 I believe Gabriel is not alone in this transformation. Perhaps one sign of neoliberalism’s success with regard to reconfiguring its subjects is the recent appearance of the non-profit organization “The Foundation for a Better Life,” which operates under the simple domain of values.com. The Foundation’s goal is to remind individuals that to lead a more genuine, happy existence, one must care for others and not perpetually obsess with self-interested desires. I believe the Foundation’s mere existence indicates the success to which neoliberalism is reconfiguring subjectivities. Ironically, the Foundation seeks to spread its message by means of advertising.
Gabriel effectively uses game theory to make the pivotal choice that then directs the remainder of his life trajectory, as he manipulates both his mother and his lover for his selfish pursuits. His use—and therefore acceptance of—game theory solidifies his formation as a neoliberal subject, and ushers him into independent adulthood, but with disastrous consequences that affect those closest to him.

By the narrative’s end, Gabriel is sufficiently transformed into a neoliberal subject, and we are left with an unfortunate example of this ideology’s effects on an individual. Gabriel loses everyone he holds dear through his actions in Bolivia. The epilogue takes place four years later in Argentina on the Fourth of July, 2009, and Medovoi notes “The financial crisis of 2008 has already stuck…the military gambles in Asia failed [the War on Terrorism], but the financial bubble, which had made such a regime seem economically viable, has popped. The lies, we might say, have been revealed” (189). By this point in time, Gabriel is no longer a young man: “He was anything but a kid…almost all traces of youth had been rubbed out of him” (286). His formation is complete, the bildungsroman is over, and Mountford gives us a glimpse into the life of a full-fledged, (dis)functioning neoliberal adult. The irony of the novel is prevalent once again, as Mountford sets the epilogue on the Fourth of July and Gabriel can finally celebrated the independence he earned through his dedication to subterfuge. He has not returned to Bolivia since 2005, nor is he allowed to (270). He has not talked to his mother in four years, as she released him from her life, writing in an email, “The fact is, we are both adults now, Gabo,” asking him not to reply until he leaves Calloway—which he shows no intention of doing (274). Medovoi remarks, “[Gabriel] lives in pursuit of money even more fully then before, so much so that he has never even bothered unpacking his things in his apartment in New York, so transient is he, flowing like capital itself, at home nowhere and with nobody” (189). He fully embraces the
neoliberal lifestyle, and his identity is overtaken by his career as he becomes nothing more than a walking representation of the Calloway Group and all it stands for.

Gabriel’s perpetual loneliness and inability to settle down embodies the exact opposite ending of a classical bildungsroman. Moretti contends that in the classical bildungsroman, “Time must be used to find a homeland. If this is not done, or one does not succeed, the result is a wasted life: aimless, meaningless” (19). Gabriel has no sense of home, nor is he married; rather, he is self-condemned to “relentless loneliness” (284). The aim of his final development as a neoliberal subject directly subverts the old order of the classical bildungsroman. Gabriel has no sense of connection to any person; he remains perennially alone and chained indefinitely to the ever-fading trail of capitalist interests.

Only four years later (keeping in mind he was twenty-seven at the novel’s start) Gabriel’s “hair had thinned on top and was streaked with gray. He had lost even more weight. He had permanent dark bags under his eyes. All of this he blamed on a combination of circumstances, including perpetual jet lag, unpredictable diet, [and] the fact the he could never get accustomed to a bed” (284). The Calloway Group proves to be the vampire it is, sucking the life out of its faithful employee one day at a time, turning him into a lifeless capitalist zombie of sorts. Medovoi claims that the “utopian possibility” of A Young Man’s Guide rests in the possibility of a restructured, global alternative to neoliberalism (191). However, Medovoi also asserts that the novel cannot imagine such a historical moment, and “ends instead with a numb tragedy. Gabriel is left, by the novel’s end, to represent nothing more than the declining power of a United States that can no longer pretend that its greatest opportunities still lie ahead” (191).

Perhaps the “utopian moment” fails after Gabriel rejects the possibility of living with Lenka in Bolivia under the leadership of a president who remains dedicated to the well-being of
the community of a nation, not the individual. But Mountford does not span the length of a novel to present an inescapable, universal tragedy of the individual doomed to the domination of neoliberalism. Medovoi claims, rightfully so, that Gabriel represents the declining United States—the foremost supplier of neoliberal ideology. But Gabriel does not represent the ultimate fate of every individual or community under the order of neoliberalism. The United States as empire is failing, providing the world with the same choice that Gabriel has to make: to accept or reject this disastrous ideology. Though Gabriel fails (ironically by financially succeeding) to make a choice we might find acceptable, another hero emerges from the text that we might imagine as an example of overcoming neoliberalism: Bolivia.

**National Development and Allegory**

Medovoi asks “should we not consider whether Mountford’s novel is at heart an allegorical narrative?” (Medovoi 190). Medovoi presents *A Young Man’s Guide* as an allegory for United States’ power, tracing the global development of neoliberalism. I want to argue, alongside Medovoi, that the novel is indeed allegorical, but in another sense: *A Young Man’s Guide* presents the reader with a bildungsroman of both its protagonist and its setting, Bolivia. In his controversial essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Frederic Jameson claims that:

> all third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel [in our case, the bildungsroman]. (69)

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5 This essay sparked a vigorous debate upon its initial publication, with critics even accusing Jameson of Orientalism. This paper is not concerned with a rigid assessment of Jameson’s claims, but uses the essay as a starting point for interpreting the national bildungsroman of these novels. However, one defender of Jameson, Ian Buchanan, claims that the essay’s “poor reception” is the result of misreading and misunderstanding (173).
Though the novel is written by a first-world citizen and does not take place in the third-world but rather in “the socialist bloc of the second world,” as Jameson describes it, A Young Man’s Guide still functions allegorically, perhaps indicating a shift in geopolitical conditions since Jameson’s original observations in 1986 (“Third-World” 67).6

Jameson argues that “third-world texts…necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (“Third-World” 69). As Gabriel’s private individual destiny serves as an allegory for United States’ power, Bolivia’s own public history is embodied in the inhabitants of its citizen’s in Mountford’s novel, particularly Lenka. There is an intimate connection between the Bolivian people and the country itself throughout the narrative, as the distinction between the two begins to blur. The geography of the country is written on the faces of its inhabitants, as Gabriel observes a man’s face near the beginning of the text: “It was a face like the countryside itself, bare, brown, ragged with canyons and cliffs” (38). The president himself is also associated with the land: “[Morales] was genuinely of the earth, as connected to terra firma as a person could be” (241). The narrative is also deeply imbedded with Bolivia’s history of colonialism and struggle for freedom: chapter two is titled Plaza Murillo, named for Pedro Murillo—a Bolivian nationalist who was hanged for designing plans to overthrow the Spanish in 1808; Fiona asks Gabriel to meet him “at the lamp post in Plaza Murillo where Presidente Villarroel had been hanged,” revered by many Bolivians as a political martyr (27); a brief history of the exploitation of the land by the Spanish (66-67); Che Guevara’s

6 Jameson contends that third-world texts function allegorically “because of that world’s specific entry into capitalism without western cultural markers such as the private-public divide” (Joseph 68). Perhaps, by result of neoliberalism’s attempt to privatize everything, the first world has lost this distinction as well, as Slavoj Žižek argues briefly in “Slavoj Žižek on The Act of Killing and the modern trend of ‘privatising public space’” in New Statesman 12 July, 2013. Might the erasure of public space in the first-world allow for a reemergence of allegory? Or might the notion of exiting capitalism embody allegory just as much as the coercive compulsion to enter it?
inability to spark a revolution in Bolivia and subsequent murder, compared with Tupac Katari’s quartering (109-110)—just to name a few. The final scene before the epilogue is a party to celebrate Morales’s victory as the first indigenous Bolivian elected president; at last the colonists have been ousted, affirming the observation earlier in the text: “And yet now it finally looked like the country was resting control of her fate from others, striking out for victory” (110). Mountford’s novel, then, is as much about Gabriel’s maturation and quest for independence as it is about the colonial history of Bolivia and its own fight for freedom, culminating in a rejection of neoliberal economics.

Lenka eventually rests into place as the individual whose private destiny becomes an allegory for Bolivian politics and history. The descriptions of the destruction caused by El Saquero are met in the same chapter with Gabriel’s observations of Lenka’s cesarean scar and traumatic birthing experience: “The scar was crude and jagged and puffy…By the time they cut her open, she had been in labor for ten hours and had taken not so much as an aspirin for the pain” (74-75). Lenka remarks, “‘I remember it looked like a bomb had exploded in me,’” further emphasizing the pain and violence of the incident (75). The narrative deliberately places Lenka’s recollection of her labor alongside the descriptions of capitalist exploitation of Bolivia, further establishing a connection between the two. Lenka’s body itself looks like the scarred land of her native country, and the comparison between them culminates in Gabriel’s “ravaging.” If we are to understand Gabriel as an allegory for the neoliberal history of the United States and Lenka as Bolivia, their personal history together then unfolds as a microcosm for the macro-history of Bolivia’s encounter with this economic ideology.

Klein provides a detailed account of the neoliberalization of Bolivia, beginning in 1985, leading the journalist to contend: “Bolivia provided a blueprint for a new, more palatable kind of
authoritarianism, a civilian coup d’état, one carried out by politicians and economists in business suits rather than soldiers in military uniforms” (193). Mountford’s novel pays a passing notice of these events through Gabriel’s encounter with the future Finance Minister appointed by Morales, Luis Alberto Arce Catacora (currently still serving under Morales today). Gabriel compares Catacora’s master’s thesis of 1986 to its “extensive addendum in 2003,” noting: “From what [Gabriel] could tell, the first paper showed a somewhat standard devotion to Milton Friedman, the second demonstrated a sharp departure…[Catacora] had, by then, been present for several miserable new chapters in the country’s history. He had seen Friedman’s ideas backfire, spectacularly” (108). Gabriel and Lenka’s relationship follows the same historical trajectory of manipulation and exploitation, culminating in an expulsion of Gabriel by Lenka, accompanied by Morales’s removal of the American ambassador in 2008 for “‘fomenting subversion and national division’” (270). As Gabriel solidifies his position as a neoliberal adult, Bolivia too matures. As Morales remarks in the text, “For too long we have been the food of the globalization animal,” indicating the country’s affirmative move away from ideological hegemony (265).

Lenka’s embodiment of Bolivia’s “coming-of-age” signifies a type of anti-Gabriel, and the simultaneous bildungsroman narratives are antithetical; as Gabriel fully embraces neoliberal subjectivity, Lenka and Bolivia flat-out reject it. Applying the phrase “coming-of-age” to the entire nation of Bolivia in the text is not meant to delineate a patronizing assessment of the country and its previous history as infantile or insignificant; nor is it an attempt to reconcile a sense of “prehistory” and “progression.”7 Rather, it is meant to indicate the country’s admirable

7 Though the success of Morales’s ideological revolution is subject to much debate, I abstain from passing judgment and present the results of the election in the novel as they are: prescriptively ideal. The parameters of this paper do not allow for a further analysis of Bolivia’s contemporary political situation, however, it seems appropriate to mention some criticism of Morales. Harvey writes, “according to [Jeffrey] Webber [Morales] effectively abandoned the class-based revolutionary perspective that emerged in 2000-05 in favor of a negotiated and constitutional compromise with landed and capitalist elites…The result, Webber argues, has been a ‘reconstituted neoliberalism’” (Rebel Cities 142).
movement away from neoliberal capitalism and towards a sociopolitical alternative—a necessary
gesture to sustain global stability. But while Bolivia is a marked example of a rejection of
neoliberal ideology, indicating one potential path in the wake of declining American hegemony,
another option still presents itself: the choice to replace the United States as the dominant
neoliberal force, as presented in Adiga’s *The White Tiger*.

*The White Tiger* unfolds through eight installments of a lengthy email written by Balram
Halwai to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. Balram is inspired to write the Premier upon
hearing of his upcoming visit to India to learn about entrepreneurialism. Balram is, as we come
to understand, a murderous madman determined to achieve economic success at no expense, and
he claims that after reading his letters, “You will know everything there is to know about how
entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of
man” (Adiga 4). Once a peasant boy doomed to a feudal existence in rural India, Balram casts
off his fate and enters the booming metropolises of New Delhi and then Bangalore in the hunt for
financial liberty, thereby turning himself into a caricature with a single-minded goal: accumulate
wealth. He earns the nickname the “White Tiger” while a young boy in grade-school, eventually
embodifying the notion of a predatory capitalist beast by murdering his employer to acquire the
needed capital to start a business: White Tiger Drivers—a taxi service providing late-night
transportation for call center workers (30). Balram claims persistently throughout the text to be
writing his own narrative, but eventually the man comes to embody not just an individual, but a
concept: India’s rapid embracement of neoliberal policy, beginning in 1991, and continuing
strongly today as the country seeks to establish itself as a prominent global player, proudly
plonking across the multinational plains.
Much of the scholarship surrounding Adiga’s 2008 Man Booker Prize\textsuperscript{8} winning novel alludes to two pieces of Indian propaganda: an advertising campaign in 2007 by *Times of India* and the “India Shining” slogan of the Bharatiya Janata Party throughout the 2004 national elections. Critic Betty Joseph contends that both of these appeals to affirming the narrative of rising India are instances of what she calls “neoliberal allegory, where a dynamic new India with high rates of economic growth seemingly repairs the split geography of uneven development, class divisions, and political interests by unleashing the forces of entrepreneurship and competition” (69). Joseph’s article, “Neoliberalism and Allegory,” is a reassessment of Jameson’s 1986 essay and a “refashioning of allegory from a national to a neoliberal frame” (68). She stands as a reasonable critic of Jameson, and Joseph reads *The White Tiger* as demonstrating allegory’s shift from “putting the individual’s story in terms of a national story,” to a story where personal narrative represents contradictory discourses within neoliberalism (72). While I agree with many of Joseph’s claims about both allegory and *The White Tiger*, I believe Adiga’s novel still reflects some of Jameson’s original assertions—Balram himself asks: “Am I not a part of all that is changing in this country?” (273).

Jameson contends that allegory arises out of the use of western machineries of representation by third-world authors. Critic Ines Detmers contends that Balram’s narrative is “a sardonic act of self-revelation, a form not without literary precedents…[which] blends the classical narrative of emotional emancipation and intellectual development of the *bildungsroman* with elements of the popular rags to riches success story” (541). Though Adiga may not be an exact embodiment of a concept like “third-world author” (though raised in Mangalore, he

\textsuperscript{8} Adiga’s novel has received much criticism from Indian nationals who contend that *The White Tiger* is a slanderous piece of propaganda. Incidentally, the novel has also been charged with stylistic deficiencies. As Merritt Moseley writes, “Perhaps it is a measure of the success of the Indian novel in English that its practitioners, like the English themselves, can now hope to win the Man Booker Prize with an utterly ordinary novel” (160).
emigrated with his family to Sydney, eventually attending Colombia University in New York), his protagonist indubitably is, and Balram authors his own narrative while playing with Western literary conventions.

Balram progressively aligns his identity with the notion of Indian entrepreneurship, eventually subsuming the social and political conditions of a nation in the midst of an economic revolution. Sundhya Walther, PhD candidate in English and South Asian Studies, contends, “Balram is not a real subaltern at all: he is, in fact, an animal figure, an embodiment of the predatory power of contemporary India and global capitalism” (579). Walther demonstrates the novel’s commitment to the form of a fable, utilizing animality and animal imagery “as a metaphor for the inhumanity of India’s economic growth and as a way to conceptualize the ruthlessness of emergent social structures in this context” (580). However, Balram’s narrative and its historical allusions reach beyond the emergent conditions of a neoliberal India, stretching back to colonial oppression and even to the ancient implementation of the religious caste system. Whereas Gabriel in *A Young Man’s Guide* attempts to join modernity by engaging with and exploiting tradition, Balram must overcome tradition in order to integrate into (post)modernity. Thus, Balram’s personal narrative once more embodies the historical trajectory of India, from a rural religious dominance to a booming technological mecca determined to absorb the digital information industry.

Remnants of the caste system perpetually hold Balram and his family in a subjected position, fixed within a rigid hierarchy. If Balram is going to ascend the economic ladder, then he must additionally transcend, or perhaps abolish the ancient hurdles that obstruct his quest for success. One of the most central metaphors of *The White Tiger* is “The Great Indian Rooster Coop,” which is Balram’s attempt to explain the “perpetual servitude” of “99.9 percent” of
India’s population (149). According to Balram, the majority of Indian citizenry sits in a state not unlike a rooster in coop, obediently in a cage and offering no resistance when death comes to them by the hands of an unapologetic superior. Effectively, the Rooster Coop simultaneously represents both the rigorous caste system and centuries of colonial rule that has kept an innumerable amount of Indians in a marginalized, subaltern position of imposed inferiority. The Coop has a rigid hold on the lived social structure of Balram’s society, and Balram blames “the Indian family” for sustaining the oppressive order (150). Furthermore, Balram states, “only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature…a White Tiger. You are listening to the story of a social entrepreneur” (150).

In order for Balram to break free, he must subvert the entirety of the social order and embody a new, self-obsessed notion of identity, not unlike Medovoi’s and Harvey’s descriptions of reconfiguring subjectivity to fit the dictates of neoliberalism.

This notion of a “social entrepreneur” is indicative of both the personal transformation of Balram himself, but also the radical market liberations of India in 1991 that spawned the social changes The White Tiger deconstructs. As Al-Dagamseh contends, “Adiga exposes and challenges the dehistoricized, decontextualized, and liberal representation of success stories and neoliberal rationality constructed by the World Bank.” Amitava Kumar, literary critic, cultural theorist, and editor of World Bank Literature, writes, “In 1991, the Indian government adopted the Washington Consensus and its IMF-sponsored program of ‘Stabilization and Structural Adjustment’ in response to a short-term, but serious balance-of-payment schedules” (xx). As a result, India’s markets were flung open to international investment, and by 1997 “multinationals

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9 Klein discusses the formation of the Washington Consensus, which she calls “The colonization of the World Bank and the IMF by the Chicago School...It was a list of economic policies...made up [of] nothing less than Friedman’s neoliberal triumvirate of privatization, deregulation/free trade and drastic cuts to government spending” (204).
headed in New York, London, or Tokyo were already setting up shop [in India]” (Kumar xx). Balram expresses an intense excitement for the outsourcing of technology to India, stating, “General Electric, Dell, Siemens—they’re all here in Bangalore. And so many more are on their way. There is construction everywhere” (273). Balram also proudly claims, “And these [technology] entrepreneurs—we entrepreneurs—have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now” (2-3). Balram’s shift from rural peasant to megacity entrepreneur mirrors the path of India’s development in recent history.10

Many critics contend that Balram is indeed indicative of the national situation. As Weihsin Gui states, “The White Tiger was received by Western readers as either an accurate portrayal of India’s corrupt and abject social reality that produces a ruthless homo economicus like Balram, or as an alarming wake-up call to the West about India’s rise as a global superpower literally driven by entrepreneurs like Balram” (180). The debate surrounding the text does not seem to center around whether or not Balram embodies India’s national situation, but rather to what extent that he does.

**Balram and the “Neoliberal Bildungsroman”: Form, Function, and Character**

Balram informs us that his bildungsroman is a particular type; *The White Tiger* is a “Narrative of the modern entrepreneur’s growth and development” (194). Balram’s embodiment of a concept, Indian entrepreneurship in the twenty-first century, is solidified by his actual name, “Munna,” which “just means ‘boy’” (10). Balram, or Munna, or boy, then comes to represent a generalized, universal character—an allegorical type of sorts—who develops not as a person, but as an entrepreneur. As Gabriel’s narrative functions as “a young man’s guide to late capitalism,”

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10 Again, we can see how “national allegory” is a difficult subject to deal with rhetorically. It is quite easy to deconstruct the comparison between India—a nation deeply rooted with colonial oppression—and a rural peasant. However, a central motif of the novel is the cognitive remapping of rural and urban spaces, as both India and Balram transition from one to the other, leaving the rural behind in a sea of socioeconomic chaos.
Balram’s story might as well be titled “an Indian boy’s guide to neoliberal entrepreneurialism in rising Asia.” Additionally, Balram presents his literary package to the Chinese Premier as a pseudo-self-help, how-to manual—the type of book that floods the streets of Bangalore being peddled by young boys and street vendors; but Balram tells us, “Don’t waste your money on those American books. They’re so yesterday…I am tomorrow” (4). Once more, the “neoliberal bildungsroman” employs the form of an “objective” manual to educate readers, which Balram states as his direct purpose for writing to Wen Jiabao.

Another common characteristic of the two novels is blending historical moments with fictional narratives. Gabriel’s bildungsroman functions around the 2005 election of Evo Morales, and Balram’s letter “coincides with Mr. Jiabao’s actual state visit to India in 2005, when in a surprising departure from normal protocol, the premier stopped to visit IT companies in Bangalore before going to the nation’s capital, New Delhi” (Joseph 92). An investigation into the formation of seemingly historical, objective narratives as a fundamental trait of the “neoliberal bildungsroman” might prove to be beneficial in mapping the productive forces shaping this emergent subgenre of literature, but is beyond the scope of the current essay.

Balram consistently references stages in his own development throughout the text, humbly claiming, “The last stage in my amazing success story, sir, was to go from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur” (256). Al-Dagamseh notes, “As in a Bildungsroman, Balram—marginalized by the local and global economy—develops and integrates into business society.” Gabriel’s development in A Young Man’s Guide is marked by an internal ideological compulsion manifested outwards—as he is a middle-class American citizen born and bred under neoliberalism—and like he states of germs in Bolivia, “Sooner or later, the germs found a way in,” neoliberal subjectivity slowly grows within him, taking over his character (158). But Balram
is not the ideal candidate for embodying neoliberal subjectivity, and instead of manifesting the ideology from the inward-out, it works its way into him through indoctrination by the beneficiaries of the neoliberal order that surrounding him. As Al-Dagamseh states, “the narrative invites readers to see that colonialism and colonial relations never left India and it is carried out by the local elites who are supported by global aid and loans,” indicating an inversion of Bolivia’s end in *A Young Man’s Guide*.

While the end effect of Gabriel’s narrative is a demonstration of the negative consequences of embracing neoliberal subjectivity, Balram’s own story pushes us towards parody as his embodiment of this ideology undermines the system itself, pointing out its inherent biases and contradictions. Joseph claims, “In channeling entrepreneurial success through one of its illegitimate interceptors [i.e. Balram], neoliberal ideology is hence parodied as Balram, an avid ‘reader,’ imitates his employers’ games assiduously—political graft, money laundering, bribery, extortion, and finally murder” (89). Furthermore, Joseph claims that Balram essentially functions as a ventriloquist dummy: “Adiga brilliantly satirizes neoliberalism through ventriloquism. When the White Tiger is the mouthpiece, we hear neoliberal entrepreneurial shibboleths as criminality” (72). Balram effectively begins to parrot the beliefs of his employer, Mr. Ashok, and Balram eventually self-identifies with the charges this neoliberal aficionado throws against him, notably of being “a half-baked fellow” (8). Additionally, Balram’s mantra repeated throughout the text is an interjection uttered by Mr. Ashok’s American wife, Pinky Madam, about Balram himself: “What a fucking joke” (5). Balram comes to fully embrace neoliberal subjectivity in his thoughts and in his actions by absorbing it from the outside. “I absorbed everything,” Balram states, “that’s the amazing thing about entrepreneurs. We are like sponges—we absorb and grow” (60). But the retroactive nature of Balram’s bildungsroman
prevents us from truly witnessing a shift in psychological development as we do in *A Young Man’s Guide*—the focalizer of this novel is already indoctrinated within neoliberal subjectivity, and therefore already recalls his formation in this light.

Though Balram’s development is skewed by an already developed neoliberal adult, there still remains two pivotal scenes within the novel that demonstrate his mental and then physical embrace of neoliberal subjectivity. Writing in “Creative Destruction and Narrative Renovation: Neoliberalism and the Aesthetic Dimension in the Fiction of Aravind Adiga and Mohsin Hamid,” Gui claims, “Adiga invites readers to examine the novel through the lens of a classic *Bildungsroman*...but turns instead towards a transformative principle when [Adiga] interweaves a key element of the Gothic tale into the trajectory of Balram’s growth and development” (179). This Gothic element is the ancient, decaying Black Fort that overlooks Balram’s home village of Laxmangarh. The mysterious Black Fort instills fear within Balram as a child, but serves as a place of revelation for him as a young man becoming an adult. Balram returns to his village after earning himself employment as a driver under Mr. Ashok’s family (who also stems from the same village). When they return to Laxmangarh, Balram ascends the hill that leads to the Black Fort, stands atop the structure, spits repeatedly and then decides that in order to be free, to be an entrepreneur, he must murder his master. Balram then states, “Eight months later, I slit Mr. Ashok’s throat” (36). Gui contends that “within the neoliberal logic of creative destruction living like a man requires Balram to destroy another man’s life in order to creatively take on the other man’s name” (182). Balram’s adoption of neoliberal subjectivity requires he *act* like a neoliberal agent as well, which he performs through the murder of Mr. Ashok.

The murder of his master is a particularly symbolic enactment of Balram’s transition into neoliberal adulthood. Though this self-described entrepreneur must transgress India’s historical
tradition, he does, like Gabriel, join the tradition of capitalism—specifically neoliberalism. By the time Balram decides to murder Mr. Ashok, his master is experiencing personal turmoil and moral disaster: his wife has left him and returned to America after killing a peasant in a drunk driving accident; his family’s shady coal business is under fire from local and national politicians, demanding increased payoffs; he has begun drinking heavily and reluctantly sleeping with prostitutes; and his entire life becomes overrun with familial errands that entail corruption. Though no admirable character, the reader cannot help but feel some sort of sympathy for Mr. Ashok, as he is helplessly caught up in the schemes of neoliberal capitalism which he does not necessarily wish to be a part of. On what will be Mr. Ashok’s last drive to deliver a political bribe, Balram pulls over and stabs him with the broken shards of a whiskey bottle, first shoving them into his scalp, then slitting his throat. Balram steals the money and uses it to flee to Bangalore, buy a Macintosh laptop, and begin his taxi service, carrying the slogan “We Drive Technology Forward” (258). What is perhaps one of Balram’s most memorable statements follows soon after this episode: “Yes, it’s true: a few hundred thousand rupees of someone else’s money, and a lot of hard work, can make magic happen in this country” (258). Balram’s destruction of his master ushers him into economic adulthood, ending the bildungsroman.

This violent act of murder and theft is directly connected to a phenomena particular to neoliberalism. Balram performs an act of what Harvey calls “‘accumulation by dispossession,’” which employs “Both legal as well as illegal means—such as violence, criminality, fraud, and predatory practices,” and we see how Gabriel fits this description as well (The Enigma 48-9). Klein defines the same set of policies with a different terminology: “I call these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, ‘disaster capitalism’” (6). Balram’s final action serves
as an appropriate synthesis of the two terms, as well as encompasses a slight inversion of events. Though both “accumulation by dispossession” and “disaster capitalism” involve attacks on the public sector—which Mr. Ashok cannot represent in any sense—Balram’s decision to murder the man closely aligns our humble entrepreneur with these neoliberal practices: during Mr. Ashok’s own personal catastrophe, Balram attacks him to dispossess Mr. Ashok of his wealth and use this newly acquired capital as a market opportunity to jump start his own private business endeavors. But, like Gabriel, joining the tradition of capitalism does not necessarily signify success, as Balram also falls victim to neoliberal subjectivity’s dehumanizing effects.

Much like Gabriel by the end of *A Young Man’s Guide*, Balram too is a socially defunct, isolated individual self-condemned to perennial loneliness. Gui contends, “The joke is on those readers who mistake the semblance of Balram’s narrative for a celebration of entrepreneurial subjectivity and miss how, although he lives ‘in the Light’ and lifted himself out of ‘the Darkness’ of rural India (11). Balram is isolated in his ‘150-square-foot office’ with only his chandelier for company” (180). He lives perpetually obsessed with his wealth accumulation, driven by the incessant desire to accumulate more and more. Balram remains at the office of his business most of the time, securing his position as an entrepreneur, always readily available to defend his capital—which entails continually bribing the police, and at one point the family of a young man killed by one of his drivers. Balram’s success is quickly realized as not a blessing, but “The entrepreneur’s curse. He has to watch his business all the time” (5). Balram gives himself over to neoliberal subjectivity, and we are left again with yet another example of this ideology’s disastrous effects on the individual.

**Conclusion: An Investigation of Form**
Renowned Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton states, “In selecting a form, then, the writer finds his choice already ideologically circumscribed…The languages and devices a writer finds to hand are already saturated with certain ideological modes of perception, certain codified ways of interpreting reality” (26-27). Both *A Young Man’s Guide* and *The White Tiger* exercise an experimentation with the form of a pseudo-self-help/how-to manual through the scope of a bildungsroman. Mohsin Hamid’s *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) embodies this new development in form to the greatest extent yet, as *The New York Times* literary reviewer Parul Sehgal writes, “[Hamid’s novel demonstrates a] marriage of these two curiously compatible genres—self-help and the old-fashioned bildungsroman” in a way that “parodies a get-rich-quick book and gestures a new direction for the novel.” What other novels might be considered a “neoliberal bildungsroman”? Certainly the form extends to other cultural productions, such as television, movies, and perhaps even music. An investigation into the production of this new form might help to expand the genre itself, as well as map the global perceptions of and reactions to the manifestations of neoliberal ideology.

Perhaps we are indeed on the cusp of a global shift. What might literature have to say about the ambiguous future of the global economy? David Harvey writes: “The world is in a position to reject that imperialist gesture [of spreading US ideology] and refract back into the heartland of neoliberal and neoconservative capitalism a completely different set of values: those of an open democracy dedicated to the achievement of social equality coupled with economic, political, and cultural justice” (*A Brief History* 206). Though literature cannot correctly predict which choice nations will make during this global shift, it can, however, continue to depict the subjective identities formed under a globalized ideology.

Works Cited


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