

Entrepreneurial Avowal: Confession as Symbolic Capital and Moral Revaluation in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is frequently discussed as a satire of caste hierarchy, corruption, and the violent promise of social mobility in post-liberalisation India. This article relocates the centre of analysis from Balram Halwai's ambition to the form through which he makes his rise intelligible: the seven nights of letters addressed to the Chinese Premier. It argues that Balram's narration is an entrepreneurial avowal - a confession that acknowledges wrongdoing while refusing repentance and institutional judgement. Bringing Michel Foucault's account of avowal into conversation with neoliberal governmentality, Ulrich Bröckling's entrepreneurial self, Wendy Brown's economisation of political and moral life, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, and James Phelan's narrative ethics, the article develops the concept of confession as symbolic conversion. Balram turns stolen money into economic capital, knowledge acquired in servitude into cultural competence, a fugitive identity into an entrepreneurial brand, and murder into a founding story of risk and innovation. Close readings of the absent addressee, the 'original listener,' the Rooster Coop, the murder of Ashok, the name Ashok Sharma, and the Bangalore taxi business show that the confession continues the work of self-making after the crime. Yet Adiga's irony prevents Balram's moral vocabulary from becoming the novel's final judgement. The narrative grants him voice without granting innocence, and mobility without equating it with emancipation. The article therefore, distinguishes moral relativism from moral revaluation: Balram does not prove that moral standards disappear; he strategically reranks loyalty, betrayal, violence, and responsibility according to mobility, risk, and return. *The White Tiger* finally exposes the narrative labour through which neoliberal success converts structural injury into personal legitimacy, while leaving its human costs outside the entrepreneur's account.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga; avowal; confession; neoliberal subjectivity; symbolic capital; self-fashioning; moral revaluation; narrative ethics; caste.

Introduction: India's economic liberalisation is commonly narrated through the vocabulary of opening, competition, innovation, and opportunity. In these accounts, the entrepreneur becomes the exemplary citizen of the new economy: a person who refuses inherited limits, treats uncertainty as opportunity, and converts private initiative into social advancement. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* enters this triumphant language and disturbs it from within. Balram Halwai calls himself an entrepreneur, but the capital that launches his business is taken from the employer he murders.

His success cannot be separated from the violence that finances it, the caste order that restricts legitimate mobility, or the corrupt state practices that allow his new enterprise to function. The novel therefore asks not simply whether social mobility is possible, but what kinds of moral and narrative work are required to make a violent ascent appear deserved.

The problem becomes more complex because Balram does not merely commit a crime and then disappear into a new identity. He tells the story of his transformation in a sequence of letters to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, who is expected to visit Bangalore to learn about Indian entrepreneurship. The situation is deliberately improbable. A wanted murderer appoints himself as the unofficial instructor of a world leader. Political rank is reversed through narrative performance: Balram cannot command the Premier, but he can decide what India the Premier is allowed to see. From the beginning, the letter is both confession and sales presentation, a disclosure of crime and a demonstration of expertise.

Balram's early declaration, 'I am tomorrow' (Adiga 6), gives the confession its temporal logic. He treats his past not as a burden requiring atonement but as the raw material of a successful future. Servitude, interrupted education, humiliation, theft, and murder are rearranged into stages of entrepreneurial development. The statement is comic because Balram's authority is self-appointed; it is disturbing because the novel repeatedly confirms that his methods fit the actual rules of the economy more closely than official accounts of merit and legality do. His story is an autobiography, but it also resembles a business case study whose central lesson is that mobility requires the ability to recognise and exploit the gap between public values and operative practices. This article calls Balram's narrative an entrepreneurial avowal. The term avowal is drawn from Michel Foucault's analysis of first-person truth-telling. An avowal does more than report a fact. It binds a speaker to an act and helps constitute the identity of the person who claims it. In conventional legal or religious settings, the person who confesses submits to a judge, priest, institution, or moral law. Balram changes that arrangement. No recognised authority demands his truth, Wen Jiabao never answers, and Balram controls sequence, emphasis, tone, and explanation. He speaks as the accused and simultaneously acts as his own interpreter. This control allows him to acknowledge murder while refusing the identity that law and conventional morality would assign to him.

The central claim is that confession functions as symbolic capital. Pierre Bourdieu uses the language of capital to show that resources do not operate only in economic form. Knowledge, recognition, credibility, social connections, names, and legitimate authority can also be accumulated and converted. Balram acquires economic capital through theft, but money alone cannot make him the person he wishes to become. He must also become recognisable as a businessman, a source of knowledge, and a representative of modern India. The letters perform this conversion. They transform knowledge gained while serving into cultural competence, crime into evidence of courage, and the nickname 'White Tiger' into a brand of rarity and exceptional escape. Foucault's account of neoliberal governmentality clarifies why this conversion takes an entrepreneurial form. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he describes the neoliberal subject as an 'entrepreneur of himself' (226): a person encouraged to treat capacities, relationships, risks, and life choices as investments in human capital. Wendy Brown and Ulrich Bröckling extend this insight by showing how competition and value enhancement spread beyond the marketplace into education, citizenship, personal conduct, and moral judgement. Balram is an extreme fictional version of this subject. He turns incomplete schooling into adaptability, servant invisibility into informational advantage, and social stigma into a story of exceptional intelligence. Even failure and injury must become assets. The article also revises the language of moral relativism proposed in the research focus. Moral relativism is a philosophical position concerning the dependence of moral truth on frameworks or standpoints. The discussion proceeds from the structure supplied in the research plan. It first reviews scholarship on class and ambition, violence and caste, neoliberalism, and ethical interpretation. It then develops an interdisciplinary framework combining Foucault, Brown, Bröckling, Bourdieu, moral relativism, and narrative ethics.

The methodological section explains the use of close textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and contextual reading within post-liberalisation India. The main analysis examines the letter to power, confession without repentance, listening as capital, the internal government of the Rooster Coop, murder as narrative investment, caste-coded renaming, and the reproduction of hierarchy in Bangalore. The argument throughout is that Balram's confession succeeds as self-fashioning but fails as moral closure.

2. Review of Literature: 2.1 Class, Ambition, and the "Condition of India": Early influential readings of *The White Tiger* place the novel within the uneven geography of the so-called New India. Ines Detmers describes it as a 'condition-of-India novel' whose movement between Laxmangarh, Delhi, Gurgaon, and Bangalore maps a national modernity built from unequal spaces. The contrast between Light and Darkness is not a simple opposition between progress and backwardness. Urban prosperity depends on labour, resource extraction, and deprivation located elsewhere. Balram's movement is therefore socially structured before it becomes an individual achievement.

Studies of ambition have often interpreted Balram's rise through the tension between aspiration and structural restriction. This approach correctly refuses to treat ambition as an isolated personality trait. The narrator's desire for mobility is produced by interrupted education, caste-coded labour, indebted family life, corrupt elections, and an economy in which service appears hereditary. Yet thematic accounts of ambition can leave the form of his self-presentation underexamined. Balram does not simply possess ambition; he learns how to narrate it as foresight, intelligence, and historical necessity.

Recent spatial scholarship has made this structural account more precise. Swatee Sinha reads the novel through caste-regulated internal labour migration, showing that movement does not erase caste but reorganises it in urban employment. Rakibul Hasan Khan's environmental reading links human inequality to the extraction and ecological damage built into post-liberalisation development. More recent work on the Capitalocene and urban ecology similarly indicates that the novel's shining cities are sustained by infrastructures that distribute pollution, exposure, and mobility unequally. These readings widen the field beyond individual morality, but they also make a narratological question more urgent: how does Balram turn his passage through these unequal spaces into evidence of personal exception?

2.2 Violence, Caste, and Subaltern Mobility

The question of subaltern agency has produced sharply different interpretations. Megha Anwer cautions against the simple alternatives of praising the novel as an authentic exposure of India or rejecting it as an orientalist performance of poverty. Her emphasis on internal slippages is important because Balram's voice never remains in one social position. He speaks as servant, fugitive, employer, national commentator, and entertainer for an international audience. The instability of the voice means that agency cannot be measured only by whether he speaks; it must also be examined through the forms of authority he adopts when he speaks. Alison Graham-Bertolini argues that the murder of Ashok does not produce genuine freedom because Balram is reinscribed within the exploitative capitalist order he claims to resist. David Huebert, by contrast, emphasises the novel's refusal to condemn him unequivocally, describing a morally ambiguous relation between techno-capitalist empowerment and criminality. The disagreement is productive. Balram's structural explanations make the murder intelligible, while his calculation and willingness to risk his family's lives prevent explanation from becoming innocence.

Liani Lochner's account of precarity is especially relevant to the present study. She argues that neoliberal discourse makes capital the norm of social intelligibility: subjects are recognised when they can perform the identity of self-ownership and value. The poor, by contrast, remain socially unreadable or are recognised only as labouring bodies. Balram writes himself into visibility, but the process of becoming legible requires him to adopt the very norms that excluded him. The present article extends this insight by asking how confession itself becomes the practice through which such recognition is produced.

2.3 Neoliberalism, Entrepreneurship, and Self-Making

A substantial body of criticism approaches the novel as a critique of neoliberal entrepreneurship. Michael Walonen argues that contemporary South Asian fiction challenges the cultural myth of the self-made entrepreneur by revealing illegality, nepotism, externalised costs, and the loneliness hidden beneath success stories. In *The White Tiger*, the route from feudal or caste-bound service to capitalist ownership is real, but it is available only to the exceptional subject willing to reproduce violence in another form. Alexander Adkins describes the novel's 'neoliberal disgust,' showing how Balram internalises a calculating and often misanthropic model of human conduct. David Huebert's concept of techno-capitalism similarly highlights the relation between new economic opportunity and moral compromise. Florian Vlad adds a dialogic account of the epistolary form, identifying the competing discourses that meet in Balram's letters: the development report, the self-help manual, the political speech, the picaresque confession, and the entrepreneurial success story. These studies establish that neoliberalism is not only a background condition. It supplies the narrator's categories of personhood. The present argument builds on this scholarship but narrows the object of analysis. Entrepreneurship is not examined only as Balram's occupation or ideology. It is examined as a rule for narrating the self. His past must be organised like a portfolio: each injury must demonstrate resilience, each observation must become knowledge, and each transgression must produce a return. Confession becomes entrepreneurial because it treats the moral past as material for value enhancement.

2.4 Ethical Readings and Narrative Form

Ethical criticism of the novel often asks whether Balram is a victim, villain, antihero, or representative rebel. Such categories are understandable, but they can reduce a formal problem to a verdict about character. James Phelan's work on character narration offers a more useful distinction between the narrator's purposes and the author's larger design. Readers evaluate not only the acts reported but also the selection, sequence, tone, omissions, and appeals through which those acts are made meaningful.

Balram's confession is persuasive because he often tells truths that respectable discourse conceals. He exposes the class basis of law, the hypocrisy of employers, the violence of family duty under conditions of collective punishment, and the gap between the official economy and the economy of bribery. These disclosures create ethical credibility. At the same time, the narrative excludes or compresses the perspectives of Ashok, Balram's family, the child killed by the company vehicle, and the workers employed in Bangalore. The authority of confession therefore depends on a distribution of speech. The research gap lies at this intersection of neoliberal subject formation and narrative ethics. Scholarship has examined what Balram's rise means for caste, class, capitalism, and morality; fewer studies explain how the act of confessing performs the rise in the present tense of narration. The letters do not merely recall a transformation that has already happened. They continue it by producing Balram as an expert, a brand, and a teacher. This article calls that ongoing process entrepreneurial avowal.

2.5 Distinction from the Authors' Earlier Study

The authors' earlier article, 'Ambition and Moral Transgression in Neoliberal India,' treated ambition as an ethical paradox shaped by structural inequality. The present article is not a revised version of that thematic argument. Its research object, theoretical framework, and central claim are different. Ambition is no longer the principal category; confession is. The earlier study asked why mobility produces moral compromise. This article asks how a confessional narrative converts compromise into symbolic legitimacy. The difference can be stated in concrete terms. The present article centres the epistolary addressee,

Foucault's avowal, neoliberal governmentality, Bröckling's entrepreneurial self, Bourdieu's linguistic and symbolic markets, and Phelan's narrative ethics. It analyses the temporal and rhetorical construction of Balram's identity rather than applying general ethical theories to the murder.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Foucault: Confession, Avowal, and the Scene of Truth: In ordinary usage, confession suggests that a hidden truth already exists inside a person and is released through speech. Foucault challenges this simple model. In *The History of Sexuality*, he describes modern subjects as a ‘confessing animal’ (59), but his point is not that confession naturally expresses an inner self. Foucault’s lectures in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling* use the term avowal to clarify this relationship. Avowal is first-person truth speech that changes the status of the speaker. The accused does not merely supply information; by saying ‘I did it,’ the speaker connects an event to an identity within a legal or moral order. The truth of the act and the truth of the person become linked. This makes confession productive rather than simply descriptive. Balram’s letters preserve the productive force of avowal while disrupting its institutional structure. He admits theft and murder, but no court demands the admission.

The Premier has no jurisdiction over the case and never responds. Balram therefore controls both the statement and its interpretation. He can name himself as murderer while presenting murder as evidence that he ceased to be a servant. The confession does not submit him to a truth regime; it attempts to build a new one. This distinction also separates Balram’s speech from repentance and from parrhesia. Repentance accepts an existing moral standard and asks to be restored to it. Balram contests the standard of loyal service itself. Parrhesia, in Foucault’s later account, involves risky truth-telling directed toward another for ethical or political transformation. Balram’s letters contain risk, but they are written from the protected position of a successful fugitive to a silent addressee. His truth-telling is less a courageous service to a community than a controlled performance of self-authorisation.

3.2 Neoliberal Governmentality and the Entrepreneurial Self

Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism explain how economic reasoning becomes a model of subjectivity. The neoliberal subject is not merely a seller of labour. He is encouraged to understand himself as an enterprise composed of capacities, choices, risks, and expected returns. Education becomes investment, health becomes asset management, and conduct becomes a project of value enhancement. The phrase ‘entrepreneur of himself’ (Foucault, *Birth* 226) identifies a person who is simultaneously producer, investor, and product. Wendy Brown shows how this rationality extends market measures into political and moral life. Citizenship, equality, public responsibility, and democratic judgement are translated into competition, efficiency, and capital value. Ulrich Bröckling describes the entrepreneurial self as an imperative rather than an achieved identity. The subject must continuously improve, adapt, distinguish, and accept responsibility for outcomes, even when structural conditions distribute opportunity unequally. Balram’s narrative follows this imperative in a distorted but revealing form. He lacks credentials, property, linguistic polish, and inherited networks. He therefore builds a portfolio from observation, secrecy, mobility, audacity, and violence. He converts educational deprivation into adaptability and describes entrepreneurs as products of ‘half-baked clay’ (Adiga 8-9). The phrase rejects deficiency by turning incompleteness into flexibility. What formal institutions did not provide becomes evidence that he learned directly from the world.

Neoliberal self-fashioning is especially visible in the treatment of risk. Balram presents the murder not as a moral collapse but as a calculated crossing of a line that ordinary servants cannot cross. The act carries enormous costs, many of them borne by others, but his later success allows him to narrate risk retrospectively as rational.

3.3 Bourdieu: Symbolic Capital, Linguistic Markets, and Recognition

Bourdieu’s theory of capital helps explain why possession is not the same as legitimacy. Economic capital can purchase goods and influence, but social life also depends on cultural competence, networks, recognised names, and authority.

Symbolic capital is the form resources take when they are perceived as legitimate and worthy of recognition. A stolen red bag has economic value; it does not automatically confer the status of entrepreneur. Balram's letters perform a conversion among forms of capital. Knowledge acquired through service becomes cultural competence; access to elite conversations becomes informational advantage; Ashok's name and the surname Sharma provide symbolic respectability; the taxi company produces economic capital; and the confession converts the whole sequence into a coherent public identity. The narrator's claim to teach a Premier places his language within an imagined global market where truth about India can itself be exchanged for attention and distinction. Bourdieu's account of linguistic markets is also useful. Speech has force because speakers possess or construct authority in relation to an audience. Balram has no official title that authorises him to explain India, yet he builds authority by combining intimate knowledge of servant life with access to elite hypocrisy. His willingness to disclose what polite discourse hides becomes a source of credibility. The confession creates its own market by inventing the listener who supposedly needs precisely the knowledge Balram sells.

3.4 Moral Relativism, Moral Revaluation, and Narrative Ethics

Moral relativism questions whether moral truth can be stated independently of a cultural, historical, or conceptual framework. Baghramian and Coliva show that relativism includes several positions and should not be reduced to the slogan that anything is permissible. *The White Tiger* does not construct a philosophical proof that universal moral standards are impossible. It stages conflict among moral vocabularies that carry unequal social power. Balram's account relativises conventional duties by placing them within structural inequality. Loyalty cannot be judged apart from the employer's capacity to sacrifice the servant; family duty cannot be judged apart from collective retaliation; legality cannot be judged apart from bribed police and class privilege. This contextualisation is ethically necessary. Yet Balram also performs a more active operation: he revalues conduct according to the identity he wants to produce. Actions formerly called betrayal, theft, and murder become rupture, investment, and innovation. Narrative ethics prevents this revaluation from being mistaken for the novel's final judgement. Phelan's rhetorical approach distinguishes the narrator's communication from the authorial design that organises the reader's response. Balram seeks admiration, intimacy, and understanding. Adiga grants him a compelling voice but surrounds it with irony, silence, and contradiction. The reader is asked to understand why Balram speaks as he does without being required to accept his moral account.

4. Methodological Orientation

This study uses qualitative close textual analysis, interdisciplinary theoretical interpretation, critical discourse analysis, and contextual reading within post-liberalisation India. The primary text is the 2008 Free Press edition of *The White Tiger*. The analysis concentrates on the formal and rhetorical features of Balram's seven-night letter: the absent addressee, acts of disclosure, self-naming, changes in temporal perspective, shifts between self-accusation and self-praise, metaphors of confinement, entrepreneurial vocabulary, and the management of the reader's sympathy. Close reading is necessary because the argument depends on how Balram tells the story, not only on the events he reports. Short phrases such as 'I am tomorrow,' 'original listener,' 'guarded from the inside,' and 'not to be a servant' are interpreted in their immediate narrative settings and within the larger pattern of self-fashioning. The study avoids long quotation and instead analyses recurring words, reversals, and narrative positions.

Critical discourse analysis is used in a limited literary sense. It examines how the languages of entrepreneurship, national development, loyalty, servitude, criminality, family obligation, and freedom compete within the confession. Balram borrows the vocabulary of market success and uses it to classify his past.

Contextual reading situates this struggle within an India where liberalisation, caste hierarchy, informal labour, political corruption, and uneven urban development coexist rather than succeed one another in a clean historical sequence. The approach is interpretative rather than empirical. Balram is not treated as a representative sociological sample of poor or caste-marginalised Indians. Foucault, Brown, Bröckling, and Bourdieu are not applied as rigid templates. Their concepts are used to clarify textual operations: avowal as identity-producing truth speech, neoliberalism as the enterprise-form of the self, symbolic capital as recognised legitimacy, and narrative ethics as the distinction between a narrator's justification and a novel's ethical design.**5. Discussion: 5.1 A Letter to Power: The Entrepreneurial Construction of an Addressee**

The choice of Wen Jiabao is the first entrepreneurial act of the confession. Balram identifies an imagined demand - a foreign leader's desire to understand Indian entrepreneurship - and presents himself as the person uniquely able to satisfy it. The letter therefore begins like a market intervention. He defines the problem, discredits official suppliers of knowledge, and offers his own life as a superior product. The addressee also places Balram's private crime within a transnational narrative of Asian modernity. India and China appear as competing postcolonial powers, and Balram treats entrepreneurship as India's exportable advantage. His satirical praise of Indian entrepreneurs depends on the coexistence of high technology with inadequate water, sanitation, transport, and public services. The contradiction is not incidental. It reveals an economy in which private initiative is celebrated precisely because public institutions fail.

When Jiabao never replies. This silence gives Balram complete control, but it also makes the confession dialogic in a particular way. He invents the objections of a powerful listener and answers them before they can be spoken. Every possible accusation becomes another opportunity to explain his intelligence. The absent Premier works like an ideal client: prestigious enough to raise the value of the presentation, silent enough not to interrupt it. The night-time setting strengthens the performance. Balram writes under a chandelier after business hours, when the public identity of Ashok Sharma can temporarily give way to the secret history of Balram Halwai. The chandelier is both comic decoration and symbolic proof of arrival. It provides the stage on which a fugitive performs legitimacy. Confession does not strip away the successful identity; it displays the hidden labour through which that identity was built.

5.2 Confession without Repentance: Balram's Counter-Tribunal

A conventional confession places the speaker before an authority whose standard is accepted in advance. Balram reverses this arrangement. He admits the act but puts the social order on trial. The letters become a counter-tribunal in which the servant's experience judges the morality of masters, police, politicians, employers, and family structures. Instead of asking whether he has obeyed the law, he asks what authority a corrupt law possesses over those it exposes to sacrifice.

This reversal explains why confession and remorse remain separate. Balram does not conceal the murder, but neither does he seek reintegration into the moral world that names him criminal. He presents that world as already compromised. The Stork family's wealth rests on extraction and bribery; the household is willing to use Balram as the legal substitute for Pinky Madam; elections and police procedure serve wealth. The confession therefore claims that respectable morality has violated its own terms before Balram violates them openly. Yet the counter-tribunal is not impartial. Balram decides who may speak, how long each event receives, and which consequences count as necessary. Ashok cannot answer the reduction of his death to a turning point. Balram's family appears mainly as the potential cost of escape. The victims of the Bangalore taxi accident enter the story through compensation and police management. The confession reveals injustice, but it also reproduces a hierarchy of narrative value. The productive ambiguity lies here. Balram's accusation against the system is often correct, but correctness does not settle the moral meaning of his response.

Structural explanation and personal responsibility coexist. Adiga resists the easy alternatives of condemning the individual and excusing the structure. The counter-tribunal exposes the failures of official justice while also exposing the self-interest of the alternative judge.

5.3 The “Original Listener”: Servant Invisibility as Informational Capital

Balram’s claim that he is an ‘original listener’ (Adiga 39) is central to the economy of the confession.

The phrase appears modest because he denies originality of thought, yet it asserts a different kind of intelligence. Listening is a servant’s compulsory condition. He is physically close to power but socially disregarded. Employers speak in the car as though the driver were part of the machinery. Balram converts this enforced invisibility into an information system. His education occurs in spaces not recognised as schools: the tea shop, the garage, the servants’ quarters, the driver’s seat, hotel entrances, political offices, and city streets. He learns the difference between official rules and operative rules because the elite forget that he is present. Ashok speaks the language of sympathy while participating in bribery; politicians speak of democracy while selling access; employers praise loyal servants while preparing to sacrifice them. Listening teaches Balram that moral vocabulary often functions as management. Neoliberal self-fashioning turns this knowledge into human capital. The servant’s wound becomes the entrepreneur’s competence. Balram does not possess degrees, but he claims a practical education in incentives, weakness, corruption, and opportunity. His incomplete schooling is described through ‘half-baked clay’ (Adiga 8-9), a figure that converts institutional failure into adaptability. What would ordinarily mark exclusion is red escribed as freedom from obedient formation. The confession completes the conversion. Private listening becomes public explanation. Balram presents himself as the only person capable of interpreting both the elite world inside the car and the servant world outside it. His authority does not arise from moral purity; it arises from crossing positions. This is why the letters can be simultaneously subaltern testimony and entrepreneurial branding.

5.4 The Rooster Coop as Internal Governmentality

The Rooster Coop is frequently treated as a metaphor for poverty or class oppression, but its deeper force lies in its account of internal government. Balram’s roosters witness the destruction of others yet do not escape. The image joins material coercion to family obligation, caste expectation, debt, fear, and collective punishment. Servitude is stable because freedom has been made morally and emotionally costly. The claim that the Coop is ‘guarded from the inside’ (Adiga 166) shifts attention from visible force to self-regulation. Servants monitor one another, repeat the language of loyalty, and suppress conduct that might endanger families. In Foucauldian terms, power becomes effective when subjects carry its rules through ordinary conduct. The master’s command matters, but the anticipated consequences of disobedience govern more continuously. This internal government complicates simple accounts of choice. A servant’s refusal is never individual in its effects because the family may be punished. The Coop therefore makes loyalty appear as virtue while distributing risk downward. When Balram is prepared to accept legal responsibility for Pinky Madam’s accident, the household converts trust into legal disposability. His later betrayal emerges from a world in which the morality of service has already been weaponised. Confession is necessary because physical escape does not automatically remove the values of the Coop. Balram must red escribe family loyalty as imprisonment and employer trust as an extraction mechanism.

The narrative is the site where he attempts to free himself from inherited moral categories. At the same time, his solution is exceptional and individual. He does not make collective escape possible; he accepts the possible destruction of others as the cost of becoming the rare animal outside the cage. The metaphor thus contains a neoliberal tension.

It exposes structural domination, but it also makes freedom the achievement of the exceptional risk-taker. Ordinary people remain in the Coop because they will not impose catastrophic costs on their families; the White Tiger escapes because he can. The language of exception can therefore reproduce the entrepreneurial myth even as the novel criticises it.

5.5 Murder as Rupture, Start-up Capital, and Narrative Investment

The murder of Ashok is the point at which Balram's narrative must perform its most difficult conversion. The act is planned, financially motivated, and connected to the likely punishment of his family. It cannot be reduced to immediate self-defence. Balram therefore places it within a longer history of structural violence and presents it as the visible eruption of a violence ordinarily hidden in service, law, and property. His justification proceeds by weakening the moral authority of the victim, closing legitimate routes of mobility, and adopting the language of entrepreneurial risk. Ashok is kinder than other members of his family, but kindness does not alter ownership or legal vulnerability. Balram states that his own corruption followed Ashok's: 'all these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr. Ashok' (Adiga 167). The line distributes responsibility through imitation while preserving Balram's claim to conscious choice. The objects of the murder undergo economic and symbolic conversion. The stolen red bag becomes start-up capital; the broken bottle becomes the instrument of market entry; flight becomes mobility; anonymity becomes flexibility. Because Balram survives and establishes a business, he can narrate the crime retrospectively as a successful investment.

Outcome gives the decision a return that did not exist at the moment of action. Confession is what converts the material sequence into identity. Without the story, the murder remains an offence followed by theft. Through avowal, it becomes the founding episode of a self-made entrepreneur. Balram repeatedly links innovation to the willingness to cross a line others cannot cross. The crime creates scarcity, and scarcity creates distinction. Like the white tiger, the entrepreneur becomes valuable because he is rare. The moral danger of this account is not merely relativism. It is the marketization of judgement. Costs are acknowledged but externalised. Ashok's death, the possible destruction of Balram's family, and the corruption of law are treated as expenses against the return of freedom. The confession speaks confidently from the successful future, while those who paid the costs remain outside the speaking situation. Adiga's narrative structure does not erase Balram's argument. It allows readers to see why a world without credible legal or moral routes to freedom can make violence appear rational. But it also shows that rationality from the entrepreneur's position is not justice. The murder produces mobility for one person and leaves the structure of disposability intact.

5.6 Renaming, Caste-Coded Legitimacy, and the Brand "Ashok Sharma"

Balram's names record the stages of his social production. He begins as Munna, a generic 'boy' without an individual name. The school inspector calls him a white tiger and gives symbolic rarity to a child whose education will soon be interrupted. In Bangalore, he becomes Ashok Sharma, taking the first name of the man he killed and adding a surname associated with social respectability. The entrepreneur is not discovered beneath the servant; he is assembled through appropriation. The new name converts several forms of capital at once. Ashok's money provides economic capital. The surname Sharma offers caste-coded legibility in a social field where names carry assumptions about status. Bangalore offers urban anonymity and a business environment in which the identity can circulate through police relations, technology firms, drivers, and clients. Balram does not merely hide. He manufactures a person capable of owning, signing, employing, and instructing.

Bourdieu's theory helps explain why the name becomes effective. Symbolic legitimacy does not depend on an authentic inner essence. It depends on recognition within a field. Ashok Sharma becomes real because institutions accept the name and because money, business performance, and police access support it.

The counterfeit identity produces genuine effects. Yet the name also exposes the limits of the self-made ideal. Balram's new self is built from materials taken from others: the employer's money and name, the knowledge gained in service, the language of business culture, and the corrupt networks already operating in the city. His originality lies in conversion, not creation from nothing. The confession acknowledges the borrowed materials but arranges them into a destiny of personal exception. The restricted disclosure of the secret gives the brand additional value. Clients and police know Ashok Sharma; the Premier and reader are invited to know the hidden Balram. This asymmetry creates intimacy and distinction. Balram appears more authentic because he reveals the counterfeit basis of respectable identity, even while the revelation strengthens his authority as a narrator.

5.7 From Servant to Employer: Reform, Repetition, and the Limits of Mobility

Balram insists that he treats his drivers better than the Stork family treated him. He uses the language of employees rather than family servants, compensates after an accident, and imagines future educational projects. These differences matter. His business is not an exact repetition of the household, and the novel does not deny the reality of individual improvement. At the same time, the enterprise depends on bribed police, vulnerable labour, replaceable drivers, informal negotiation, and unequal access to law. When a company driver kills a cyclist, Balram manages the case through money and influence. His statement that he complains about police 'the way the rich complain; not the way the poor complain' (Adiga 266) marks a complete shift of class position. The institution has not changed; his relation to it has.

The result is a combination of reform and reproduction. Balram may be a less cruel employer, but he does not create a structure in which workers possess secure rights or collective power. The Rooster Coop is not dismantled. One rooster becomes an owner of vehicles and gains the power to command. Freedom appears as ownership because the social imagination of the novel offers few alternatives between serving and employing. This outcome confirms the critiques of Walonen and Lochner. Individual mobility can be real without becoming collective emancipation. Neoliberal success celebrates the person who crosses the boundary and treats those left behind as evidence that others lacked initiative. Balram's confession partly resists this myth by showing the violence and borrowed resources behind success, but it also depends on exceptionality for its own prestige. Confession allows Balram to manage the contradiction between victimhood and ownership. By narrating past oppression, he retains the authority of the injured servant while enjoying the privileges of the employer. He can criticise the system as someone who suffered under it and defend it as someone who now understands how to use it. The double position gives the voice its force and its ethical instability.

5.8 Irony, Moral Revaluation, and the Reader's Complicity

Balram's voice is compelling because it is comic, energetic, observant, and willing to expose hypocrisies that respectable accounts suppress. Readers may experience recognition and pleasure before judgement. Adiga uses this attraction as an ethical device. The novel demonstrates how a persuasive narrative can make violence appear necessary without making that appearance final. The letters invite the reader into the place of the absent Premier. We receive confidential information, learn the hidden rules of the household and city, and are encouraged to admire Balram's intelligence. The pleasure of disclosure creates complicity. It can make us forget who is denied comparable narrative space: Ashok, the threatened family, the dead cyclist, and the drivers whose work sustains the business. These silences are not accidental gaps that a more reliable narrator would simply fill. They are part of the economy of self-fashioning.

Balram admits what strengthens the account of exception and compresses what might redistribute sympathy. His lack of remorse is not evidence that the novel endorses murder. It is the condition through which the novel examines a subject who has converted ethical injury into confidence.

The distinction between moral relativism and moral revaluation becomes clearest here. Balram shifts moral standards according to position, but Adiga does not grant him absolute control over value. The form of the novel produces a second level of judgement through repetition, irony, and the return of structural patterns. Balram calls bribery practical when he pays it, but the reader remembers his earlier anger at the same system. He claims escape, but the business reproduces vulnerability. The narrative therefore measures his account against consequences he cannot fully absorb. The final desire to know, even briefly, what it means 'not to be a servant' (Adiga 276) preserves the legitimacy of his longing while exposing the narrowness of the available freedom. The desire is understandable; the route makes another person's death its price. A clean verdict would weaken the novel's critique. Condemning Balram alone would make the structure innocent, while celebrating him would accept the entrepreneurial morality he has learned. Entrepreneurial avowal consequently has a double effect. Within Balram's project, it converts crime into symbolic capital and constructs the self-made businessman. Within Adiga's design, the same confession reveals the stolen name, borrowed knowledge, externalised costs, and corrupt institutions required to produce that identity. The confession succeeds as branding and fails as moral closure.

6. Conclusion

The White Tiger is not only the story of a servant who becomes an entrepreneur. It is a study of the narrative labour required to make that transformation appear coherent, modern, and legitimate. Balram's letters to Wen Jiabao operate simultaneously as confession, business lesson, counter-history, political satire, and advertisement for the self. Their importance lies not in revealing a pure inner truth but in producing the person who speaks.

Foucault's account of avowal clarifies how Balram binds himself to theft and murder while refusing the institutional meaning of criminal confession. He occupies the roles of accused, witness, prosecutor, and judge. Neoliberal governmentality explains why the resulting identity takes the form of an enterprise: incomplete education, servant invisibility, risk, mobility, and even violence are treated as assets. Bröckling and Brown help show that this enterprise-form extends beyond business into moral and political judgement.

Bourdieu's theory of capital makes the process of conversion visible. The red bag provides economic capital, listening provides cultural and informational competence, the name Ashok Sharma provides symbolic legitimacy, and the letter constructs a linguistic market in which Balram can sell his truth as expertise. Confession is capital because it gives recognised form to resources whose origins would otherwise remain criminal, stigmatised, or socially invisible.

The analysis also demonstrates why moral revaluation is more precise than a simple claim of moral relativism. Balram does not live without moral language. He actively changes the meaning and rank of actions according to the demands of mobility. Loyalty becomes captivity; betrayal becomes independence; murder becomes rupture; bribery becomes business procedure. The novel, however, does not fully accept these conversions. Its irony, silences, and repeated structures expose the people and costs excluded from the entrepreneur's account. The new reading is therefore fundamentally different from a thematic study of ambition and transgression. Its principal object is the confessional form and its power to produce legitimacy. Balram's ascent is not complete when he reaches Bangalore or opens the taxi company. It must be narrated, named, and recognised. The seven-night letter is the final stage of the enterprise because it converts a fugitive history into a public theory of success. Adiga's ethical achievement lies in refusing both absolution and simplification. Structural violence explains Balram's choices without erasing agency; personal responsibility condemns the harm without making the structure innocent.

The reader is placed inside this unresolved relation. We are drawn to the truth of Balram's social criticism while confronting the violence of the identity built from it. In this sense, the novel's darkest insight is not simply that success may require crime.

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