

## Balram Halwai as a Modern-Day Ubermensch in Arvind Adiga's the White Tiger

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### Abstract

This essay uses Nietzsche's Philosophy of Ubermensch as a theoretical framework to examine the act of crime and its artistically justification through the figure of Balram Halwai in Arvind Adiga's novel The White Tiger. In his masterwork, Nietzsche proposed the fictitious Ubermensch. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, who is anticipated to emerge in the future and will have certain distinctive qualities such as "will to power and achievement," "creation of new principles and master morality," and "transcendence over society." Using the Content Analysis Technique of Qualitative Research Methodology, which is thought appropriate for the particular descriptive nature and scope of this study, the character of Balram is examined as a fictitious Ubermensch via the prism of these characteristics. According to this argument, Balram's emergence as a prime example of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Ubermensch who rejects the conventional moral code and creates his own, in which crime also appears to be justified, is justified by his embodiment of these qualities.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche, Ubermensch, crime, Balram Halwai, Arvind Adiga, The White Tiger, moral code, and social hierarchy

### Introduction

Humans have an inherent inclination to rise in society, something they strive for throughout their lives. Every person aspires to be considered one of the great men, whether they become great by being wealthy and famous (Puzo, 1969, p. 180). Even though it appears to be a positive attitude, this propensity occasionally goes too far and becomes a terrible evil. Since it is well known that "behind every great fortune there is a crime," such a predisposition can bring a person to materialistic success in life, but it can also land him in the criminal world (Puzo, 1969, p. 1). According to Merriam-Webster, a crime is an illegal act for which a person could be punished by the government. Another way to describe it is as an act that violates public rights and duties (Blackstone, 1765). Another detailed definition of crime, however, states that it is an act that is harmful and unethical and is viewed as bad by the community since it goes against the moral standards of a society (Garofalo, 1914, p. 59). Another way to define a crime is as an action that poses a real or perceived risk to the community, as determined by those with the power to punish such behavior and influence others to follow their rulings (Gillan, 1945, p. 9). Therefore, everything that is not valued by society or by any state legislation is considered a criminal. The same is true for a criminal, who is viewed as special and socially abnormal due to his actions that go against the accepted moral code of that community.

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There are many characters in literature that are portrayed as criminals in one way or another, yet they are typically given the proper penalty because of poetic justice, which can be either natural justice or some kind of governmental or societal mechanism. Fiction occasionally depicts criminals moving freely through society. Balram Halwai from Arvind Adiga's Man Booker Prize-winning book *The White Tiger* is one example of such a character. Throughout the book, he kills his own boss, Mr. Ashok, and bribes the police, but he is never apprehended. He puts his entire family at risk and uses a special justification for all of his horrible deeds. He is the type of person who, in his pursuit of success as a businessman, would not bother to break any moral or legal rules. We view such a character through the lens of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* theory because of the criminal's departure from the standards and ideals of a community.

According to the story of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche foretells the coming of an *Übermensch*—an amazing person. The term is used in German and can be translated as "superman" or "overman," but in this study, the original term is used to preserve its meaning. According to Nietzsche's theory, such a person will eventually come to prominence. An *Übermensch* is a person who makes every effort to rise in society and lead a life beyond that of a typical human being. He must reject and transgress the moral standards of his community and the state in which he resides in order to achieve this. When he deviates from this, he creates his own moral code, according to which he acts and bases his decisions on his own standards, which has an impact on other people's life.

The *Übermensch* is an unexpected figure with remarkable traits and perceptive ideas. His exceptional character has the power to persuade and guide others to the new world, where his own well-established, cutting-edge moral code rules. Nietzsche elaborates on his claim that he will serve as a human role model and the dawn of new life in the following words:

I tell you that man is something that can be conquered. How have you managed to defeat him? You want to be the ebb of this massive flood and even return to the beasts rather than defeat man? All beings have so far created something greater than themselves. To man, what is the ape? An embarrassing embarrassment or a laughing stock. And for the overman, man will be just that: An embarrassing disgrace or a laughing stock. Look, I'm teaching you how to use the Overman. The meaning of the earth is the overman. Nietzsche (2010), page 6.

### Literature Review

The most discussed topic in studies on Adiga's book *The White Tiger* thus far is Balram's personality and actions. The present investigation also pertains to a novel facet of Balram's personality. Nonetheless, this section covers the earlier pertinent literature about this character that is now available. First, Maji (2015) contends that Balram chooses to rebel against all state, religious, and social institutions in order to attain freedom from the coop (p. 351). His act of rebellion elevates him to the level of an *Übermensch*. According to Mondal (2015), Balram's last remaining choice was to defraud his superiors and murder Mr. Ashok so that he may have a successful life. He puts his plans into action and runs away to Bangalore, where he establishes his own company. Throughout the book, readers are never shown Balram's remorse for his crime. He even defends it by saying that his

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desperation was the reason (p. 14). Traditional culture does not accept such a ridiculous argument, implying that he must be viewed as an *Übermensch* or other unusual entity.

Jadhav (2014) expresses empathy for Balram and supports him as a man who endured a lot in life and chose to live with a criminal record rather than pass away like his father, who passed away in the hospital while awaiting a doctor (p. 38). He desired to break free from that cage and live like a white tiger rather than depart this world without a distinct personality (p. 40). Balram is desperate to succeed, so he goes to great lengths to perpetrate a horrible act. He is a modern-day *Übermensch* since he genuinely desires complete independence from the constraints of social and religious morality.

Sebastian (2009) compares the personalities of Balram and his master, Mr. Ashok, and finds that Balram is a real Indian hero who doesn't care to kill someone to get what he wants (p. 230). Choudhury (2014) asserts that Balram is a highly inventive and driven individual who achieves his goals and rises in society. For his successes and accomplishments, he made enormous sacrifices (p. 153). According to Singh (2009), Balram's involvement in a variety of immoral acts stems from his resentment of the wealthy individuals in his immediate vicinity (p. 98). Balram's criminal deeds are clearly justified in the story, which portrays him as a resolute individual who rises from Munna to Ashok Sharma (p. 102).

Following Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Balram emerges as a half-backed guy who ends up becoming an exceptional figure. In her comparative study of Raskolnikov and Balram, Priyanka (2015) deems Balram to be an overman or an unusual man (p. 157). Balram rises to the top of the social hierarchy because he does not think or behave like commoners (p. 162). These articles extensively analyze Balram because of his unique qualities, which also appear to be present in Nietzsche's hypothesized *Übermensch*. Like Balram, the *Übermensch* is a renegade figure who disregards societal and religious norms.

"The superman is precisely the one who knows that God is dead and that religion no longer controls us," according to Nietzsche (1974). Since one organizes a part of the universe for oneself, he is aware that his species does not require God for purpose and can exist peacefully in a meaningless universe (p. 585).

### **Methodology, Research Technique and Theoretical Framework**

The "Content Analysis Technique of Qualitative Research Methodology" was used in this study since it is thought to be appropriate for its particular descriptive nature and breadth. Content analysis is strongly advised in qualitative research methodologies for studies that are merely descriptive (Kumar, 2011). Additionally, researchers can more effectively examine textual information found in books, newspapers, and other sources by using the content analysis method (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). In order to qualitatively assess the application of Nietzsche's Philosophy of *Übermensch* in the chosen novel, this study employs the descriptive method's ability to accommodate qualitative methods. To obtain a profound understanding of this research, a content-based qualitative analysis

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technique is utilized, in which the novel's content is taken into account when interpreting its features. These characteristics are shared by the novel's target character, Balram, and Nietzsche's suggested *Übermensch*. To arrive at the findings of the suggested idea, content is qualitatively evaluated rather than text-focused.

In his book, Nietzsche brings the concept of the *Übermensch* to life. As a result, Spoke Zarathustra first addressed Zarathustra through the character before expanding on it in his other writings. The researcher developed the theoretical framework for this study by compiling all the potential characteristics of the *Übermensch* from his book and other publications. According to Copleston (1963), Nietzsche's *Übermensch* will use his might and cunning to upend the established table of values and establish his own moral code (p. 415). In a similar vein, Hill (2007) contends that the condensed version of Zarathustra implies that an *Übermensch* is a person with the capacity to create his own morality and the will to power to affirm, regenerate, and integrate (p. 124). According to Mercier (2002), an *Übermensch* is a person who will use his authority and be despised by others, but he will become deaf and blind as a result and keep trying to accomplish something in life at all costs (p. 93). This succinct overview of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* develops the theory of *Übermensch* by emphasizing his key characteristics, such as his thirst to power, rejection of traditional norms, creation of a new morality, reassurance, and achievement. The protagonist of Adiga's book *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai, is the subject of this hypothesis. Therefore, the *Übermensch* thesis is also embodied in the theoretical framework for this study. Balram Halwai's character examines all of the fundamental characteristics of the *Übermensch* as outlined by Nietzsche, including rejecting all societal and religious norms, establishing one's own space, and adhering to one's own master morality. By putting Balram in the context of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* theory, his rationalization of criminal behavior is clarified.

### Analysis and Discussion

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a long letter sent by Bangalore businessman Balram Halwai to Chinese Prime Minister Mr. Jiabao, who is scheduled to make an official visit to India soon. This book tells the tale of Balram, a poor Laxmangarh resident and the son of an auto mechanic. The book chronicles his journey from an impoverished youngster and an ignorant driver to a prosperous and well-known Bangalore businessman. Balram is shown as a unique person who aspires to transcend the world of poverty and gloom and seeks some true independence from social constrictions. In a nutshell, this book is a historical exploration of Balram's journey from the world of darkness to the world of light. Through his letters written in seven nights, Balram, who comes from the world of darkness, has creatively and successfully exposed the repulsive realities of Indian existence. He describes all of the hardships and tribulations he has endured throughout his life as a result of his poor social standing, projecting the prevalent social ills such as poverty, corruption, exploitation, and caste or class distinctions.

It is fascinating to read about Balram's entire journey of metamorphosis from a small country child to a successful Bangalore businessman. By murdering his own master, he undergoes this

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metamorphosis and joins the ranks of people he formerly viewed as corrupt. Balram is a driven individual who murders Mr. Ashok, his former driver, to maintain his sense of self, high status, and rich existence in society. In order to gain a better understanding of Balram's criminal nature, the researcher will examine him from start to finish using *Urbarmensch* traits like achievement, uniqueness, rejection of traditional morality, creation of new values, master morality, and extraordinary ideas.

In his letter to the Chinese prime minister at the beginning of the book, Balram lists himself among the great people of the modern world. It is clear from his comment that he has no complaints against great men because he believes that he is one of them (Adiga, 2008, p. 3). He describes himself as "a man of change and action" (p. 5), once more asserting that he is a superior human being. By claiming to be a guy who lives for the future and not the past, he once again displays his superiority (p. 6). To support his assertions, he tells a tale about his brilliance and individuality. When a school inspector comes to test his students' knowledge, Balram makes a good impression by accurately answering every question. Balram's honesty, wit, and intelligence are praised by the inspector, who calls him a white tiger in comparison to other students who are called thugs and stupid (p. 35). The protagonist is introduced in this way, setting the stage for his growth into an outstanding person who resembles Nietzsche's *Urbarmensch*. Given his exceptional character and individual individuality, Balram could be considered a potential *Urbarmensch* of 21st-century literature.

As we move on to Balram's philosophy and ideology, which are essential to this essay, he views his master, Mr. Ashok, as a corrupt individual who has no right to be here on Earth. As far as he is concerned, Mr. Ashok should only be killed and his fortune taken away. Balram believes that unless he enters this immoral and corrupt environment, neither he nor anybody else can succeed in the corrupt and dark society of today. He frequently displays disdain toward the situation of the underprivileged members of his society who are unable to escape the bonds of slavery and poverty and achieve greater rank. He chastises them for living in poverty from birth to death. He refers to them as "forever servants," unable to shake the stigma of slavery from their innate tendencies (p. 298). He views these individuals as weak and pitiful, who don't even try to improve their standard of living and flee such a horrible existence.

According to Balram's philosophy, these individuals lack the strength of willpower, and their cowardice prevents them from displaying courage. However, he believes that his strength of will, like that of a future *Urbarmensch*, and his ability to break free from the cage of roosters place him in a higher position than other of similar class or creed. By rising to a high position in society and earning a self-made man, he proclaims his accomplishment in breaking out of this coop and shouts with pride that he has done so (p. 320). He further celebrates his triumph by claiming that he is now the master of drivers, having previously been a driver of a master (p. 302). Once more, he possesses the qualities of an *Urbarmensch*—willpower, daring, and achievement—which serve as the foundation for his crime and its defense.

Balram immediately rejects his society's moral code and creates his own, in which killing Mr. Ashok is

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the only way to accomplish his goal and realize his ambition of being wealthy. In reality, he wants to shift from the world of darkness to the world of light in order to seek upward social mobility. After killing Mr. Ashok, he himself becomes one of his type, but he also acquires a unique personality of a different kind. Following his murder, he claims to have changed his identity to Ashok Sharma, a North Indian businessman who now resides in Bangalore (p. 302). Balram therefore thinks that he must kill Mr. Ashok first in order to get out of the cage of roosters and earn a prominent position in the black society. He can only get a new world where darkness would vanish in this manner. As a result, Balram is portrayed as a murderer and an unethical person who even dared to use his own moral system's precepts to defend his crime of killing his teacher.

Balram is a free spirit with unique ideas who makes his own decisions about his life and is not constrained by the moral standards of his community. First of all, he disobeys his family's judgments regarding his future. They planned to hire him to do confectionery work, but he runs away and works as a chauffeur in Delhi instead. As he exemplifies the power of free will and strives for complete independence in his life, free from the constraints of religion and society, he is following in the footsteps of an *Urbarmensch*. He purposefully exposes the terrible face and hypocrisy of Indian society, which is suffocated by vices including poverty, dowries, corruption, and prejudice based on caste and class.

In reality, Balram represents the resentment, retaliation, rage, and protest of the disadvantaged class through his persona. To achieve independence and success in his life, he is constantly willing to reject the conventional moral code and adopt any new one (Chopra, 2011). Balram makes the decision to assassinate Mr. Ashok in order to rise to the top of the social ladder. He uses the fact that history is replete with instances of strong people being caught with blood on their hands as justification for his crime. To accomplish the goal they have set for themselves, they will kill anyone without hesitation. He asserts that all of these great and influential men—including India's prime minister—are complicit in the act of murder. Bronze statues of offenders will be erected in front of Delhi's Parliament by the government and populace (Adiga, 2008, p. 318). By claiming that such offenders are valued in this nation rather than reprimanded, he bolsters his argument.

Balram argues that his murder of his master was sufficient to gain him the opportunity to become a powerful man, even as he justifies his immoral criminal act (p. 318). He appears to have a very conceited opinion of himself, believing that, like Nietzsche's *Urbarmensch*, he has the power to eradicate all problems from society and bring about a radical transformation. He asserts that people such as himself are humanity's only chance to open the rooster coop and release everyone from the shackles of religious, societal, and state moral standards (p. 320).

It is important to observe that Balram's motivations and ideas are constant, and his thoughts are unaffected by the crime he did. He doesn't behave like a typical person who fears loneliness in such circumstances and feels bad about committing such a crime. His unwavering personality is similar to that of a dependable *Urbarmensch*, a person who doesn't care about other people's life. Balram's lack of shame or fear indicates that he is driven and aspires to be a prosperous and successful member of

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his community. Balram avoids shame and despair because he does not linger in the past or dwell in the present; instead, he looks forward to a bright future. His assertion about his own personality, that he is the type of person who searches for future while others see today, demonstrates this mentality (p. 319).

Balram claims that killing his master is the first step towards achieving his goals and carrying out his plans in order to enter his bright future. As he notes: "It may turn out to be a decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals," Balram demonstrates that he is the true inventor of a new moral code akin to an *Übermensch*. For a new India, a new Bangalore. I can then say that I contributed to the creation of the new Bangalore in my own small manner (pp. 317–318). Bangalore, where Balram upholds his own standards and beliefs, might be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of the new moral code he developed. He has faith in his ability to eradicate society's ills and transform it by establishing his own new moral code.

Shortly after murdering Mr. Ashok in Delhi, Balram makes his getaway and arrives in Bangalore, where he thrives as a taxi driver and rises to prominence in the corporate world. Throughout the entire book, there is not a single moment in which he regrets or feels bad about killing his master; instead, he is content to feel what it's like to be a servant (p. 321). Additionally, he defends his crime by claiming that wealthy and powerful men who take advantage of the poor should face consequences. Even if he chooses to murder Mr. Ashok and embezzle his fortune, he still has little regard for his family because Mr. Ashok's father and other relatives will undoubtedly seek retribution. Declaring himself an unusual guy who dares to flee the coop of roosters at the expense of his family members, who are anticipated to be beaten, persecuted, and destroyed by Mr. Ashok's family members, he turns into a true *Übermensch* and justifies his act of murdering (p. 176).

All of the aforementioned evidence demonstrate that Balram is an *Übermensch* because he fights independently, has a strong will, and is unaffected by the opinions of others. A person becomes an alien or stranger in his own culture when he affirms his willpower in this way. Balram completely succeeds in asserting his independence of will without any obstacles erected by his society's conventional ideals and conventions. Balram's character exemplifies the strength of willpower needed to completely control his desires in order to inspire others. Despite having the courage to kill his boss and put his family in danger, Balram is a remarkable human being who never lets fear of punishment or remorse stop him from being a successful and affluent businessman in society. He represents a real and potential *Übermensch* who sacrifices his willpower to satisfy his cravings.

Novelists who were influenced by Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ideology have produced a plethora of such characters in literature. Although Arvind Adiga's Balram is the most recent development of a fictional *Übermensch*, all such characters are incomplete representations of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* since they lack one or two characteristics. The criminal nature of Balram in *The White Tiger* is justified by the fact that all of his ideas and deeds are similar to those of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is an exceptional person who disavows the traditional moral framework of society, which he referred to as "slave morality" or "herd morality." He then develops

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what he calls "master morality," a brand-new set of moral principles. The *Urbemensch* tries to improve human standards by persuading people to adopt his principles in order to prosper in life after breaking free from the constraints of cultural or religious morality. After that, he becomes an inspiration to those who aspire to live a free life. In the book, Balram is called a rare white tiger; implying that he is the one with the strength to escape the domain of evil and enter the world of light. His acts then demonstrate these objectives, leading scholars to pronounce him a real potential fictitious *Urbemensch* of the twenty-first century, as Nietzsche had said would happen in this century.

### Conclusion

Balram's pre-crime predicament implies that individuals like him must act and think in order to advance in life and get a higher social status. Like *Urbemensch*, they must maintain a positive outlook on life and adopt a life-affirming philosophy, but they must stay inside their own morally upright circles and avoid stepping over other people's boundaries. Such behavior has to be prohibited since it could lead to horrible crimes like the one committed by Balram in the book. Any such person who aspires to emulate Nietzsche's *Urbemensch* may choose to take actions that benefit humanity and contribute to the development of a good outlook on life in society. Although engaging in illicit activity can lead to one's own achievement, it can also be fatal for others and cause social unrest.

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