

# Tobias Smollett's Interpolated Narratives: Marginal Voices within Mainstream Novels

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## ABSTRACT

Tobias Smollett's works accord a high prominence to interpolated narratives of various kinds, and these are often given special revelatory significance. This is especially the case in the two female narratives in *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle*, namely "Miss Williams' Tale" and "The Memoirs of a Lady of Quality," respectively. This paper focuses primarily on these two narratives, and, in comparing contents and narrators, it attempts to explain their contested positions in terms of a timely engagement with contemporaneous developments concerning norms of self-governance and self-censorship, particularly for women. Where the main narratives of Smollett's two novels can be seen as conventional in terms of form, attitudes, and content, this paper argues that these interpolations are radically focused on giving a minority report on British society in the eighteenth century from the perspectives of women of very different classes and characters. They go beyond conventional romantic literature, and, in illuminating an area of society by turns isolated and reduced, display a nascent liberal feminism in their point of view.

**KEYWORDS:** Smollett, interpolated narrative, romance,  
minority report

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## I. Interpolating Traditional Voices into a Modern and Evolving Form

Tobias Smollett's novels are largely of and about their times. The author was a literary craftsman rather than an artist, or a sharply reflective mirror rather than an inspirational lamp. His works seem to be conventional, eighteenth-century, realist novels, with heroes and villains imbued with attitudes which do not step a great distance beyond the mainstream currents of their century in novels that "break less new ground" than those of his more celebrated contemporaries (Fowler 195). Smollett wrote variously for the nascent eighteenth-century literary market as journalist, historian, critic, political hack, and novelist. His novels may be appreciated for the quality of execution rather than originality of form, Smollett being more of a literary follower than leader, whose skill set him above the "mediocre" offerings available from circulating libraries (Watt 290); for Smollett wrote in what sold, quixotic adventures, the epistolary novel, and the travel novel, for example. While the writer was no dilettante, he was a generic tourist of sorts, willing to try his hand at what worked, without revolutionizing it or creating a new genre himself. Recently this quality was attributed to the "generic amalgamation" favored by writers of the period, and their tendency toward literary "hybridization" of traditional forms (Blackwell 145). If Smollett was a man for the times, then the same should apply for his artistic works. However, it is this paper's contention that despite this apparent conventionality in both genre and content, the author does retain some space for minority reports from the period, sharply at odds with the frames of reference that central plots and protagonists leave largely unchallenged. In this respect Smollett's interpolated narratives allow a conventional realist author to include elements associated with romance.

Conventions concerning romance and early realism exist in conflict through the generic flux of the developing eighteenth-century novel. Practitioners of the newly emerging realist genre sought to distinguish their work by exclusion of old romantic elements. The fact that even the term "novel" was just one amongst a few—"adventures," "history," and "memoirs" being several—demonstrates this generic instability and the challenge of differentiation. Michael McKeon indicates that booksellers readily categorized romances, novels and histories together in the preceding century (26). Romance "was almost any sort of adventure story, be it of chivalry or of love . . . principally a form of entertainment" with "elements of fantasy, improbability,

extravagance and naivety” (Cuddon 614-15). Narrative elements might include quests, male or female protagonists, distant, exotic, or fantasy settings, and supernatural occurrences (Logan 721). Though stretching back well beyond the novel, the genre of romance was significant chiefly in its modern form and contemporary context where the “simple abstraction” was defined in an “overwhelmingly trivializing or pejorative way” (McKeon 27). The realist approach to literature could not include romance’s adherence to ideas rather than material objects as a basis for truth and so the “anti-individualist” and “idealizing forms” (3) vitiated the genre. Romance was epistemologically compromised because it elevated “unreal” above real things, or unchangeable ideas above tangible objects, whereas realism’s focus on quotidian, concrete reality made it a reliable truth-telling genre.

Interpolation is a real asset to Smollett’s novels. As a conventional realist, perhaps Smollett must toe the line on representation and not write “a trashy piece of fiction fit only for servants and females” (Eagleton 11), as epitomized by amatory fiction, the straw-man version of romance popular a generation before. However, maintaining a fixed, consciously disenchanting, empirical realist stance, the author would lose divergent perspectives, particularly female ones, since his realist novels tend to have only heroes. He would also lose the possibility to reflect a worldview which retains enchantment and subtle shades of emotion. Considering the hyperrealism of Smollett’s sensory imagery and description, as well as the reflexive and stark emotional responses of his protagonists, an alternative point of view is a welcome and enriching addition for his reader. Without the device of interpolation, his novel could brook no disruption from a second narrator, especially one who was prone to a clandestine, confounding, or dissenting point of view. A pioneer of defiantly chaotic narrative, Laurence Sterne, emphasized the strengths of the interpolated narrative: “Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading” (qtd. in Sandy 463). Gerald Sandy traces the literary feature back to antiquity, and, crucially, outlines its strengths then and subsequently for the writer: the interpolated voice “offers qualities of perspective, authenticity, and variety” (463). It is a narrative feature which maintains heterogeneous form. If it is employed, the novel genre does not need to eclipse or challenge the undisciplined, idealistic narratives of romance. Instead, it can include them: Andrew Roberts explains that “Because the novel continued to draw on other forms, the establishing of boundaries implies the possibility of their

transgression. Thus, the fact that many writers have contrasted the romance and the novel tells us, not how different these forms are, but the extent to which they interpenetrate” (1).

However, the perceived association of the new novel with romance led to bad press, and perhaps unwillingness to be associated with the older genre is understandable, therefore. According to David Blewett, the eighteenth-century novel/romance “acquired a bad name” in the criticism of novelists themselves, with Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Tobias Smollett all aspersing romance to varying degrees (xviii). Johnson’s dictionary definition of “a tale of wild adventures in war and love” (“Romance,” def. 1) is characteristically dismissive and pejorative. Metaphors tend to preserve inference, and in this case the tropes and symbols as inherited from traditional “romance” lived on in the new form. The perceived dominance of women writers as well as readers, and the propensity to enhance fantastic, magical or mysterious elements to the detriment of sound social and commercial (and male) realities garnered acerbic criticism from some writers and critics. Because they “paint beauty in colours more charming than nature; and describe happiness that man never tastes,” Oliver Goldsmith advised his nephew to eschew reading romance and novels (qtd. in Schmidt 14).

Conservatives just did not like novels or their literary forbears, romance being the key line of inheritance. Given the genre’s inherent tendency towards inclusivity and change, it would inevitably be understood as a threat by “thus-far-and-no-further” paternalist conservatism that favored exclusivity and stasis. Novels were earmarked for vituperation, for, according to Margaret Doody, they were seen as being foreign and subversive in the English age of selective enlightenment:

Novels had become an important site of the debate upon ideas and behavior . . . the new *History of the Novel* . . . had raised the form into public awareness as a strong literary and thus social force. Such a sharp consciousness of the form was probably bound to cause unease in members of a newly emerging structure of power that was developing a social and intellectual culture sympathetic to the aims of a new capitalism but also a new domination of the world through science and conquest. (262)

This may be why, out of the wide array of interpolated narratives which Smollett the literary craftsman used (Schmidt 25), only those two narrated by female characters left such an abiding legacy of controversy. At one level perhaps attention focuses on them because they reveal a secret face of female existence, or at least one denied in androcentric writing. However, it is not just that the women give of themselves through their narratives, or that they affectively refuse to conform to the perniciously encroaching convention of self-censorship in order to maintain respectability. Nor is it that the generic form tends to emphasize intimate and clandestine narration; it is the existence of the narratives per se which constitutes a threat. The first, at a length of little over a chapter in *Roderick Random*, is surprisingly brief to have attracted such attention from his peers, while the second, a novella-sized digression through the rarefied heights of British society, focusing upon the scandal surrounding the collapse of a marriage at the center of the social establishment, is sufficiently honest, concupiscent, verifiable, and salacious to guarantee critical attention, the so-called “Memoirs of a Lady of Quality” included in the following novel, *Peregrine Pickle*.

Women experienced the sharp end of a jarring century that included socioeconomic dislocation from a population explosion, urbanization, the industrial revolution, and capitalism. This last was particularly detrimental to women because the developing idea of “the male breadwinner” led to women’s “gradual relegation to jobs with the lowest pay and status” with associated declines in parity and movement as they were more restricted to home (Barker and Chalus, Introduction 5). Of course, such a view is necessarily generalized, and the pre-capitalist period was no “economic idyll for women” (Barker 125). However, examples of female work success are exceptions rather than the rule and tend to come from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Moreover, capitalism did nothing to improve, and indeed even exacerbated, one invidious hangover from centuries before: legal coverture, or “the condition or position of a woman during her married life, when she is by law under the authority and protection of her husband” (“Coverture,” def. 9a). It is noteworthy that the Marriage Property Acts of the next century, often decried as a male money-grab, were actually designed to ameliorate the situation of women who had hitherto lost their property upon marriage (MacDonald 621). Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* thoroughly traces how surveillance, containment and control inculcated enlightenment docility into the (preponderantly male)

populations of school, barracks, hospital and prison; yet there were surely fewer more “docile bodies” (135) than women corralled financially and socially into shrinking circles, subject to traditional forms of discrimination as well as new constraints. Women’s financial independence was limited and conditional, and, for both of Smollett’s narrators, contingent upon men of varying shades of inadequacy, whether fathers or husbands. Miss Williams sees her work opportunities dwindle to prostitution or domestic service; and Lady Vane experiences the “protection” of being under coverture through her constant, frequently unsuccessful struggle to keep her property out of Lord Vane’s hands.

There might be a second reason why Smollett’s women’s narratives stood out at the time and continue to have impact in his posterity. Male identity in its literary manifestation looked to be in an increasingly parlous situation. As Margaret Doody explains, from a feminist perspective, the early novel was deemed a threat to men and manliness in general: examples of the genre were seen to “weaken male fiber,” thus rendering readers “effeminate” (266). Doody does concede that, negatively perhaps, there is something of the feminine in the representation of novel characters, in their apparent proximity, their “captive” and “scrutinized” state, their lack of “grandeur,” their exposition of “inner emotion,” and an identity which is antithetical to “glory and civic virtue.” Indeed, their femininity constitutes an implicit threat to the basis of the ordered, rational, mutually exclusive, readily packaged, and consumable society-in-the-making, for “novels connect what should be separate: history and lies; intellect and the boudoir; aristocracy and the bourgeoisie; authority and women” (266), all of which Lady Vane manages to accomplish in her “Memoirs.” The imperiled condition of the eighteenth-century man is evident not just at the level of the fragility of the social construct, but at the personal level of self-identity as well. Smollett, among other authors, is vulnerable to the charge of being what Doody refers to as a “female impersonator,” and, in her view, early unrefined feminist criticism might follow the same line of attack, but in doing so it misses the bigger point. Doody asserts that there is a very good reason that the eighteenth-century male writer should utilize a female narrator:

Men are supposed to be rational and successful. Failure is for failures. Inner perturbation, dreams, nightmares, and anxieties are to be permitted only to weak and villainous—and preferably lower-class—males. In the eighteenth century, it is the male sex

that is perilously in danger of becoming the sex without a psyche . . . But women can be intelligent, sensitive, and benevolent beings who encounter undeserved hardship—without looking merely stupid. Women are not supposed to be in charge of fate. (279)

Male identity is constrained so tightly by its corset of prohibitive dignity that its literary character has no path to development. In short, women are just more interesting, more necessary, and more literarily fruitful than their stentorian, authoritative, but eternally wooden counterparts.

Henry Fielding's use of interpolated commentary, or counter-narrative, in *Tom Jones* underlines what can result when male characters monopolize action, narrative, and point of view. Where critics have noted the anarchic chaos of the episodic free-for-all that emerges from a Smollett novel (Beasley 118-19), Fielding has been lionized for the "architecture" of his work in *Tom Jones* (Schmidt 195). Smollett suffered by comparison with Fielding from the publication of his first novel, which was erroneously attributed by some, including Lady Montagu, to the pen of the latter on its first publication (Lewis 88). What may on the surface appear to be artistic deficiency in Smollett, or an unconscious failure of control, obscures a crucial difference of approach between the two authors. Smollett is near to his subject, perhaps sometimes, as Jerry Beasley notes, near to the point of reader discomfort. Powerful evocations of sight, smell, sound, and taste mean the reader can feel they are assaulted by a narrative which magnifies and emphasizes the senses. However, this is not accidental, but deliberate, sustained and purposeful. Smollett leads the reader into experiential reality, of concrete phenomena sensually perceived, regardless of adverse consequences and the risk of disorder. Fielding adopts an antithetical stance, of selected sensations rendered through the wry smiling lips of reason, in his "merry and merciless" approach to writing (Schmidt 192), or what Ian Watt coined to be an "ironigenic" stance (qtd. in Grant 75), a key part of which being the bisection of the novel between a narrative of a storyteller and the metanarrative of a literary commentator. Fielding's interpolation is not only architectural; it is hierarchical, in a way that the interpolated life of Miss Williams and memoirs of Lady Vane are not. There exists no privileging of one narrator over another; instead, the women jostle for attention with *Random's* first-person voice and *Pickle's* third.

Fielding's approach entails two pervasive effects. First, the reader is kept at one remove from the events of the story through the constructed ideological figure of a commentator. Second, the author has created a narrative structure which ensures that control is maintained on his own rather than his reader's side, determining both the action (production) and its reception (criticism). When Fielding's intrusive narrator apostrophizes the "critic" or "reptile," he is doing more than satirically targeting literary criticism; he is making an assertion of his control over both the story's action, and its subsequent interpretation. The narrator lays claim to arbitrary power vastly exceeding that available to traditional, testimonial, narrative literature. In memoirs, in popular personal testimonies and confessions of the condemned criminal such as those of the Newgate ordinaries, and even in the best-selling early epistolary incarnations of the novel, control is surrendered at the point of publication, cast to the vagaries of the nascent commercial literary market. The narrator or the author must publish and be damned, or not, for the work is no longer within their purview. Fielding's narrative interpolations are radically different, for he will not surrender that power over reception, providing one literary ancestor of the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent narrative giant of the ensuing century. Where Fielding's version of interpolation looks forward to its own redundancy in the literary future, Smollett's is of a traditional sympathy: his voices stand up for multiplicity and the literary past. Miss Williams and Lady Vane constitute different, independent, uncensored, disruptive, problematic and occasionally subversive voices. These underscore the individual, testimonial unreliability of the text and so allow the reader full latitude in directing their criticism or empathy where they will. Smollett's women have much to say about their respective environments and conditions at the middle and the top of the social structure. Their vehicle, the interpolated narrative, encourages controversy and debate to engage the reader's creative and critical imagination, without shutting things down with singular truth claims and assertions of absolute right which can happen under the singular rule of a narrator who will brook no insurrection or ambiguity.

## **II. Miss Williams: View from the Middle**

Random first encounters Miss Williams about halfway through the first of the novel's two volumes. Initially, she seems to be just another danger of



London, a prostitute and predatory fortune-hunter whose clutches the hero counts himself lucky to escape. Shortly afterwards, Random has lost his job, fled his lodging, and is hiding out in a low-end boarding house when he recognizes her voice coming from the adjoining room. Random and Miss Williams bond in adversity—his indigence and her sickness—and she turns out to be the first serious, rounded female character that the hero encounters. The interpolated narrative gives the backstory to her current situation. In both historical and recent criticism, Miss Williams’s interpolated narrative has seemed an uncomplicated example of tale-telling employed as a blunt moral tool. Miss Williams admits as much at the beginning: “I addicted myself too much to poetry and romance” (Smollett 123). She seemingly falls under the enchantment of Johnson’s “tale of wild adventures and love.” She is also an exemplary instance of why Oliver Goldsmith exhorted his young relative to stay away from romance. The heroine’s abjectly reduced and “miserable” condition is thus framed within a fable of morality to support Samuel Johnson’s view that the romance was edifying only for “the young, the ignorant, and the idle” (qtd. in Doody 277). Paul-Gabriel Boucé is similarly dismissive. For the critic, her narrative comes during a natural lull in the action of the novel: it is a “pause” during which a hefty dose of moral education can be poured over a hero’s narrative that barely troubles itself with shared values or rules to pursue the greater good:

. . . it is appearances, reinforced by emotional and intellectual vanity, that precipitate Miss Williams’s moral and physical downfall. The story itself is not very original. Flattered, seduced, rejected, and abandoned, Miss Williams becomes a prostitute without being completely degraded, however low she has fallen. Finally, this interpolated story is a warning to Roderick who starts comparing his lot with that of Miss Williams. Her naivety and the strength of her passions have earned her a real descent into Hell. (Boucé, *The Novels of Tobias Smollett* 111)

This view comes perilously close to Miss Williams’s own bouts of self-recrimination and its passive endorsement of the sexism and misogyny that put her into the “Hell” of Bridewell to begin with. Miss Williams resorts to familiar moral precepts when plunged into moments of self-doubt, apostrophizing and

ultimately aspersing those qualities in herself that such precepts deem responsible for adverse results. In short, she blames herself for a predicament that others have engendered, such as when she laments, “Had I been born ugly,” or when she launches into the self-flagellation of the anaphora beginning with the loaded term of “cursed” (126).

It is during one such bout of self-recrimination that the true villain of the romantic piece emerges. Her beauty, her intelligence, her devotion to literary pursuits, her precocious and trenchant nature, her impetuosity, and her self-esteem all pale into insignificance compared with the consciousness of the manifest unfairness of the social system within which she is constrained. Such is the preposterous nature of her world that she should decry, “Cursed be my good sense” (Smollett, *Random* 126). For all this, it is a male education which she received in the country with only her father and rural gentry for company, one which pays scant regard to issues of gender, with “a good library” (123) but no mention of any female companionship at all. Ironically, it is only when she comes to an urban environment that the unusually unisex or asexual aspect of her education should stand out from the crowd of women who either received none or insipid, shallow, ersatz versions. In this, she is a really exceptional character, for even at the apex of the class system where cost represented no bar, just how to educate girls was a vexing question since, “Their learning could have no direct practical application: all academic institutions and other professions were closed to them, as were the informal centers of debate, discussion and enquiry that grew up around specialist clubs, societies and coffee-houses” (Hadlow 308). Miss Williams does not appear to have problems with practicalities. The successful result of Miss Williams’s extraordinary education is clearly illustrated when she is able to adopt the male-oriented, legal language and assertive tone in response to a confused and frustrated bailiff, who is stymied by her challenge to his prerogative, and astonished that a woman should be able to out-argue him so effectively (Smollett, *Roderick Random* 134).

It is, therefore, not her female perspective which is at fault when she embarks upon her voyage through the urban modernity of the mid-eighteenth century, for the error lies in that patriarchal, male-dominated education and discourse that she received under the care of her rural father. Her educated status means that she does not balk at the challenge of an officious bailiff, but literary tropes are quite another matter. She is rendered impotent in the face of the consciously and deviously romantic figures she encounters in the city, their

romantic identities emphasized by anachronistic, literary nomenclature. “Lothario” and “Horatio” are doing little more than playing their dramatic parts: first, there is the assiduous lover who promises safety, protection, companionship and a marriage, all of which turn to bitter ashes. Then along comes the putative avenger, the “man of honor” (Smollett, *Random* 130) to right the wrong done to her by her erstwhile protector. That Smollett is sending the conventions up is even more obvious when the reader discovers they are colluding, creating a stereotypical romantic scenario to seduce the gullible romantic neophyte. In the ensuing dramatic action, the predators, and indeed associates, Lothario and Horatio, play their parts to the hilt, with the result that the story becomes choked by its own extreme romantic tropes, but this is accomplished consciously and deliberately, rather than being the tired repetition of a threadbare form as implied in Bouc e’s critique of the plot. It is highly emphatic of the intentional pastiche of the romantic triangle that while the two supposed suitors overlay their respective roles in accordance with Johnson’s “wild-adventures” characterization (“Romance,” def. 1), Miss Williams does not follow the script. Where the reader expects a plaintive heroine, what they get is an angry one who is determined to put a corrupt and effete world to rights in a direct analogy with the novel’s full-time hero’s predilection for physical chastisement of wrong- and evildoers who are roaming free amidst the nefarious corruption, nepotism, and hypocrisy that afflict eighteenth-century London. Her anger is palpable as she charges up the staircase of Lothario’s London residence with blade in hand ready to dispense justice and a good dose of revenge, which could not be further from literary convention: “I pulled a poignard from my bosom where I had concealed it, and rushing out, flew up the stairs like a fury, exclaiming, ‘Where is this perfidious villain? Could I once plunge this dagger into his false heart, I should then die satisfied’” (Smollett, *Random* 127). In her rage, she even fears that, without the fortuitous miscarriage brought on by the pursuit of Lothario, she might have been driven to the infanticide of the child of his that she was carrying, which finally abolishes the archetypal figure of a passively-suffering, viciously-wronged, tragic heroine. The stilted and melodramatic diction that she employs is still reminiscent of romance, however (128).

Whatever role Miss Williams may choose to play, whether the avenging hero, the romantic heroine, or the female adventurer, the reality is that she is not stuck in an obsolete fairytale or a current genre of novel, but in Hanoverian

urban Britain. She cannot return home as prodigal son, marry happily as a virgin heroine, nor can she hazard everything in a duel with Lothario, so she has only one financial option still open to her for means which, interestingly, is not first broached in London, but in the fashionable resort of Bath: prostitution. She rationalizes the choice in that it is not only necessary, but also a form of revenge to use men for advantage as they have used her for pleasure. There is also an implicit criticism of the power distribution of gender in the fact that, to play the male role adequately, she must also play the prostitute. Indeed, her final resolution to “quit that way of life” and the financial independence that it offers is also a determination to give up that financial freedom associated with the male role.

A narrative which started out as an abstract romance, then developed into a dramatic one, finally descends to the acutely pathetic, painful, hazardous, subsistence-level existence of a common prostitute, devoid of the glamour or intrigue of the courtesan: “I was almost every night engaged with company, among whom I was exposed to every mortification, danger and abuse, that follow from drunkenness, brutality and disease” (135). Even this is tolerable as compared with what follows, however, namely the internment in the Bridewell, to which imprisonment she is condemned by the flight of a cheating customer rather than by the venality of her own trade (136). She, like the novel’s hero to whom she is telling her story, is rescued by the fortuitous intervention of an avuncular savior. Thanks to his help, she is able to get out of the trade and follow the new path—entering into the spirit of marriage as a business to grab a spouse: she determined

. . . to take lodgings in a part of the town where I was unknown, and pass for an heiress, by which artifice I might entrap somebody to be my husband, who would possibly be able to allow me an handsome maintenance, or at worst screen me from the dread and danger of a prison . . . I made my first appearance in a blue riding habit trimmed with silver; and my maid acted her part so artfully, that in a day or two, my fame was spread all over the neighbourhood, and I was said to be a rich heiress just arrived from the country. This report brought a swarm of gay young fellows about me; but I soon found them out to be all indigent

adventurers like myself, who crowded to me like crows to carrion, with a view to preying on my fortune. (139)

One such hungry crow, Random himself, is struck by the “candour and good sense” of the life story (141). However, it is a narrative which has greatly outgrown the initial premise of a morality tale on the recklessness that may be inspired by the insidiously feminine romantic genre and all other attendant dangers. The first-person narrative returns to Random at the same time as he ties Miss Williams into the plot thematically, comparing his situation with hers. In Random’s highly imperfect, proto-feminist fashion, he is outraged by seeing, from a female point of view, reflections of the injustices that he has encountered; and he is able to comprehend the profound unfairness which is manifest in both perspectives. However, any dramaturgical impact is limited by Miss Williams riding off into the sunset to get a situation (as a lady’s maid), which she accomplishes with economy of plot by becoming maid to Random’s innamorata. None of the exigencies she faced, the problems she surmounted, or the abuse she suffered has been redressed or resolved, however. Miss Williams’s world will never be fair, but by the end of her narrative she has internalized that knowledge sufficiently to adopt a role which will allow for some limited success: in short, she settles. Random never has to settle for second best, or least worst, in such a fashion because he is not tied by the same unrelenting code or restrictions. However many iniquities he encounters, as a gentleman, and as a man as well, that oppressive edifice which Miss Williams attempts to negotiate but can never pass guards his privileged space. All is not well with Miss Williams’ world, and there are no signs of improvement, even if she has reached a private and workable emotional equilibrium in herself by a determination to abolish the threat from her past by fastidious self-censorship, docility, and service in her future.

### **III. Lady Vane: No Room at the Top**

At the level of plot, the two stories show a similarly quasi-tragic structure, which is largely episodic and passes from initial euphoric (and romantic) success to failure, before it reaches a new reality. Both begin as romances, or stories informed by the romances their narrators have read, implicitly acknowledging the popularity of amatory fiction, but they end in very different

generic garbs. Like Miss Williams, Lady Vane enters during a pause in the narrative flow, three quarters of the way through the novel. More importantly, her entrance, similar to that of Miss Williams, also occurs when the hero really needs the influence of a strong, female character. Bereaved of his mentor, Commodore Trunnion, Pickle's dysfunctional courtship of Emilia seems to have crossed over into harassment and near-assault. Without Lady Vane's interpolation, Pickle is in danger of transforming from roguish hero into the antihero of his narrative; with it, he has space and cause to rein in his baser instincts.

In terms of character, Lady Vane differs from Miss Williams in two ways while she crucially resembles her counterpart in one. Lady Vane is of a much higher class, with the result that her indiscretions become the stuff of social legend near the apex of the political nation, which though it was beginning to open up to the moneyed "middling men" was still an inaccessible clique whose walls were hard to breach (Porter 85-88). In Lady Vane's narrative, Queen Caroline and leading ministers and lords in King George's government feature with a prominence and familiarity which neither Smollett nor his eponymous hero Peregrine Pickle could plausibly claim for their own. Lady Vane thus offers a handy conduit into the dizzy heights of the socio-political elite of Hanoverian Britain. More importantly for her narrative, she sees herself as, and so she is, beyond the horizon of respectability which is so coveted and needed by women lower down the social scale, who without its carapace would face the threat of financial and personal ruin. Contemporary reactions to publication of the "Memoirs" include some barbed references to the consolations of wealth (Kelly 76). Unwittingly perhaps, Lady Vane condemns herself with her own snobbery during one of her numerous flights to France from husband number two, Lord Vane. She bemoans the exigencies of her unfortunate fate, reduced to travelling not in a private coach but in a "Voiture" or common one: "my fellow passengers, who being the lower sort of people . . . delight in exaggerating dangers, entertained me all the way with an account of all the robberies and murders which had been committed on that road" (Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle* 440). Her class has big implications for her interpolated narrative vis-à-vis that of Miss Williams. The deleterious effects of being the object of scandal amongst one's peers, undesirable as these are to Lady Vane, pale into insignificance next to the ruin which is wrought on Miss Williams's life by her loss of personal standing. Miss Williams asserted with force that her

fate could befall any woman in the country, though this does not seem to apply in the case of Lady Vane, who can evince passionate, indignant, and rebellious sentiments without any serious ill effects. Affronted by a lady of the French court who is pimping for a prince of the blood, Lady Vane responds, "I would rather give myself to a footman, than sell myself to a prince" (402). It should be noted, perhaps, that she fails to live up to her convictions in this respect. Prostituting herself, here as elsewhere, always remains only a metaphorical proposition for the Lady of Quality; she never has to deal with the grubby realities in the back bedrooms of city inns as experienced by Miss Williams.

This difference in class masks a second even greater difference in view of character. Lady Vane is unlike any other female character in Smollett except perhaps those in *Humphrey Clinker*. Smollett's usual heroine is whitewashed, morally cleansed to the point of limpidity, she lacks definition, reality and credibility, and she can even appear to be a mere moral exemplum, a cipher to propel the story onwards, with as little significance in her own right as one of Alfred Hitchcock's McGuffins. Lady Vane was and is real. As a historical figure, Lady Vane's life was scandalous, concupiscent, and salacious to a degree that would have excited the most jaded gossip columnist. Her story was simple: a first marriage to an impoverished lord who was in need of her bourgeois lucre, his early death, and a second to a very rich peer of the realm, Lord Vane, who was an establishment figure in all senses. The first marriage had been so happy that she is able to boast, "I had been spoiled by the behavior of my first husband . . . who never quitted me for the sake of any amusement" or "the most urgent business" (Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle* 406). The second is enormously inferior in personal, moral, and physical senses. This last failing seemed to be the prime cause of the very public breakdown of the marriage and a string of equally public affairs with a succession of the great and the good. One commentator infamously joked that Lady Vane was at least a nationalist and patriot in that she only conducted extra-marital relationships with British citizens.

The narrative as included in the novel ends before the relationship did in the 1760s, but the details, people and places are verifiable to a degree. Smollett introduced an exchange of correspondence between Lady Vane and an anonymous lord in the second edition of the novel, in which she gives reasons and explains her desire for publication. Lady Montagu, first among Bluestockings, wrote in 1752 that the "memoirs contain more Truth and less

malice than I ever read in my Life.” She suggests that the narrative is a cooperation between Smollett and Lady Vane:

Her Style is clear and concise, with some strokes of Humour which appear to me so much above her I can’t help being of opinion the whole has been modell’d by the Author of the Book in which it is inserted, who is some subaltern admirer of hers. I may judge wrong, she being no acquaintance of mine, tho she has marry’d two of my relations. (qtd. in Kelly 88)

O M Brack, Jr. also asserts that the interpolation bears the hallmarks of Smollett’s style, and that through his version of Lady Vane’s tale “he tried to assist her in telling it her own way” (61). The most important thing, as noted by Boucé in *The Novels of Tobias Smollett*, is the earthy realism of a female voice that will not be censored (137). The best “female impersonator” may be able to accomplish verisimilitude for an eighteenth-century aristocrat, but Smollett is not ordinarily that writer. His best females share his class and experiences, or, if they do not, they tend to seem quite bland. Certainly, nowhere else in Smollett is a female narrator able to characterize her spouse’s sexual inadequacy as forcefully or precisely as this:

I began to sweat with anguish at the thought of being subjected to his pleasure: and when, after a long hesitation, he ventured to approach me, I troubled as if I had been exposed to the embraces of a rattle-snake. Nor did the efforts of his love diminish this antipathy; his attempts were like the pawings of an imp, sent from hell to teize and torment some guilty wretch. (Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle* 385)

No other female voice has this lightness of touch, nor does any show the devastating acerbity of including the detail of “a long hesitation.” The faint suggestion of his impotence is unmistakable symbolism when Lord Vane subsequently storms the bedchamber of his fugitive, errant wife with his sword drawn, though Lady Vane is careful to note that the aforementioned lord does not know how to handle it (427). One implication, which is followed up later, is his cowardice in the shape of an aversion to duels, so he never had need to



learn to handle his weapon in any case, but the more vernacular reference of “sword” cannot be missed. By contrast, Miss Williams’s narrative, be it ever so biological, and concerned with the grossest vulgarities of her clients, never comes close to being related in such vivid colors.

Despite the substantial differences in character, style, and identity between the middle-class Miss Williams and the aristocratic Lady Vane, the stories nevertheless follow a similar arc, which seems to suggest shared life challenges, and perhaps a common source of social coercion and oppression. Where Miss Williams is forced to have recourse to prostitution for subsistence, Lady Vane is better placed to weather the storm of marital collapse than perhaps any other woman in the kingdom, but she faces a storm nonetheless. What Smollett appears to present is two faces of the marriage trap: the first of the “ruined woman” who is abandoned in the social wilderness, unmarried and unmarriageable; and the second, unhappy and unfulfilled, but compelled to stay and to suffer for the sake of financial support. Marriage as the ticket to security may seem a fraught prospect indeed; but, however tenuous or unpredictable, when the only game in town is crooked that is the one she must play. Despite the social gulf that separates the two female narrators, therefore, the commonality of experience of the marital trap draws them together.

It is within this extraordinary unequal context that the bizarre mechanics of the marriage between Lady Vane and Lord Vane must be understood. Any definition of marriage as partnership would immediately dispel it as a viable proposition. When looked at as a deed of ownership, or a contractual claim, however, the marriage can, and indeed must, endure. Lord Vane regards Lady Vane as his property and he will not give her up. Lady Vane’s infidelities are legion, and it is a case of mistaken priorities to attempt to defend her, as Boucé does, on the grounds of her individual faithfulness to a succession of different lovers (138). Such a critical position is as preposterous as it is redundant. There is no need for such a defense. By any emotional or physical yardstick the marriage is defunct; and Lady Vane’s behavior goes beyond any bounds as a faithful partner. She is not faithful, and she is not a partner. In explaining her initial mortification after his first sexual foray, she acknowledges the sole reason for the durability of the marriage. Lord Vane may be an “imp” in the bedroom, but he is at least a moneyed one: “Whatever deficiencies I had to complain of in my new spouse, he was not wanting in point of liberality” (385). Likewise, her idyllic but short-lived first marriage to “Lord W \_\_\_” was initially

opposed by his family but his mother is able to perform a pragmatic about-face even after the couple's elopement, for the same lady "hearing I was an heiress, readily forgave her son for marrying without her knowledge and consent, and favoured us with a very cordial reception" (377). Money overcomes all obstacles, be they ever so large; so it can come as no surprise that the extensive fortune of Lord Vane, and his willingness to lay out large sums, can compensate for some lewd, fetishistic or incompetent sexual fumbling.

After a very public affair with "Mr. S\_\_\_," a flight to Europe, and an attempt at a legal separation on Lady Vane's side, she explains that they are still able to "patch up" an agreement over cohabitation (exclusive of access to her bedchamber), which should beggar belief, were it not for a candid acknowledgement of pragmatism and expediency as her only motives. She agreed to the reconciliation on the advice of her lawyer "with a view to obtaining the payment of my pin-money [expenses], which I had never received since our parting, but subsisted on the sale of my jewels, which were considerable, and had been presented to me with full power of alienation" (397). She has, after the exhaustion of her disposable goods, little other financial option than to settle with Lord Vane unless she wishes to explore the less salubrious expedients to which "the lower sort" like Miss Williams might have recourse. As the marriage reels from the revelation of one affair after another, and as Lady Vane makes repeated midnight escapes from her husband's residence, so the marital leash starts to tighten into a garrote. Lord Vane, smarting from her dalliances and her flights, goes after what will hurt her most, not her property exactly, but his that she has been using. In one instance, to her impotent outrage, he actually takes possession of the house where she has been hiding as well as of all items of furniture within, in a pointed and effective barb at her illusory sense of monetary independence (433). What began as an unhappy marriage has turned into a cold war over property, which Lord Vane is destined to win, because she has no more chance in a legal dispute with her husband than any other item of his property would. One could facetiously suggest that the furniture he seized might just as well sue for restitution.

Lady Vane disparages money, for example in her admonition of the Dutch: "I did not much relish the people of Holland, because they seemed entirely devoted to self-interest, without any taste for pleasure or politeness; a species of disposition that could not be very agreeable to me, who always despised money" (437). As far as she "despises" money, establishes an artificial

dichotomy between money and “benevolence of heart,” and in short tries to appear above its vulgar concerns, the reality is that her narrative exhibits an obsession with it well in excess of the Dutch she casually deprecates. As refrain or complaint, references to money or the lack thereof feature directly in more than half a dozen lengthy sections and indirectly in many more on nearly every page of the Memoirs. Indeed the narrative has to concentrate on this aspect, for the marriage is Lady Vane’s business with emphasis on the latter noun. Therefore, it is clear that a narrative which sedulously elevated romance and love at the outset, to the exclusion of any other elements, closes unambiguously with the focus on financial settlement. There is a happy ending of sorts to her Memoirs, contingent and provisional, which is a restive balance of power between Lord and Lady Vane; the war between them is not over, but it is at least suspended with an indefinite armistice, with both sides knowing the other’s respective strengths and vulnerabilities. They are not a couple, but they are, according to Lady Vane’s thinking, at least now equals. While resumption of sexual relations is off the negotiating table, this seems less of a problem than it at first appeared; Lord Vane covets her companionship more than her corporeal form, though he will never renounce his ownership delusion. The two characters, in the narrative at least, have made the best of a bad bargain, with Lady Vane even acknowledging some of her husband’s virtues amidst his general “consistent inconsistency” and persistent incorrigibility. It is undoubtedly a poor deal, but the origin of that impoverishment may be less to do with the individuals concerned and more to the flaws in the cultural attitudes to men and women in the marital institution. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the outlook for Lady Vane is better than for Miss Williams; certainly the former needs no help from her editor or coauthor to achieve a satisfactory, if indeterminate, closure, as Miss Williams needs her author to find her a husband. In this respect, there does seem to be some hint of more radical progress in the interpolated female narrators from his first to his second novel. Miss Williams, despite a resolution of sorts, leaves open the dire possibility that she has not escaped the fetters of convention, but that she has only found a position where they chafe a little less. She may still be stuck, circumscribed and restrained by the romantic narrative she has constructed for herself. In this light, her apparent expression of defiance may be seen as ultimately shriveling into one of surrender or at least subordination to the requirements of the novel plot and social mores in general. This interpretation is impossible concerning Lady

Vane's interpolated narrative. She leaves generic, tropic, and social bonds irrevocably broken. When her narrative is finished, she can never be drawn back into the plot by a dexterous author's conveniently placed literary device. Likewise, her mode of personal expression breaks the mold; no female character in the rest of Smollett's oeuvre expresses herself as strongly or idiosyncratically, not, that is, until the trio of strong female correspondents in *Humphry Clinker*, who may owe their vivid depictions in no small part to the author's joint enterprise with Lady Vane.

#### **IV. Romances of an Archaic Bent with a Modern Twist**

Both interpolated narratives acknowledge the success of female narrators in the amatory fiction of the latter seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, as a skillful literary craftsman, Smollett was doing more than accurately reproducing a familiar, though outdated subgenre of romance. The span of the differences between the two female narratives stands out. There are so many between the two women, both "ladies" in conventional class terms: Miss Williams is middle class and descending, while Lady Vane is at the upper end of upper class; Miss Williams falls for one duplicitous lover, while Lady Vane falls for a succession of them; Miss Williams experiences the extreme depredations of a fall from social respectability, while Lady Vane only thinks she does; and Miss Williams, despite the depth of her sufferings, remains always rather generic, never able to step outside her type, while Lady Vane has agency, volition and a fiercely individualistic way of expression in both. In one crucial aspect, there is commonality: in neither case does a wrong-headed devotion to romance lead to sin and ruin in the fashion expected in a moral fable. Things are just not that simple.

Smollett's interpolated voices begin their addresses in one generic form, but, while keeping faith with associated tropes, they end in another, closing off the sensibility of romantic tragedy. The interpolations may bring traditional narrative features into a modern realist form, but realism in turn obtrudes on these romantic narratives. Both the rather blandly sketched figure of Miss Williams and the fuller, invidious one drawn of Lady Vane invoke romance at the beginnings of their respective adventures and promise the reader a rewarding if rather prurient foray into a secret world. From a simplistic point of view, the reader may thus see the episodes as exercises in tradition, literary

forms of expression now obsolete given another airing by a literary, as well as social, conservative. This would be to misread Smollett artistically as he so often has been misinterpreted in politics. The women undergo early transports of romance, experience vicissitudes in fortune and relationships, but they never complete the arc towards tragedy largely because of the aforementioned obsolescence. Instead, the narratives end in a stark modernity unmitigated by romance, demonstrating the value of the interpolated narrative and Smollett's unique contribution of modern twist for a traditional form. Smollett has been able to repurpose traditional narrative modes to allow for the inclusion of influential female points of view into the otherwise firmly androcentric perspectives of two conventional, contemporary novels; without them, neither *Random* nor *Pickle* need ever trouble themselves with introspection, reflection or internal struggle. These stories begin as romances—obsolescent, archaic, largely irrelevant, or misleading—but they do not end that way. They not only relate two women's perspectives of society during a transformative century, but also enhance and enrich the modern literary form, and the main narratives, into which they are interpolated.

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