

# 司摩利特的十八世紀黑社會文學所呈現 的義與利兩種友誼基礎

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## 摘要

本文探索司摩利特於一七四九年至一七五三年間撰寫的三本小說中，所描繪的友誼與其動機，尤其側重其中兩本：《藍登傳》與《費迪南德·法頓伯爵的歷險記》，分析小說主角(或稱反英雄)如何結交，又如何產生最深刻的情誼。本文透過敘事進程，比較兩種友誼，及其基礎與改變。

本文也探討司摩利特為何特別喜歡用黑社會作背景來描寫友誼，特別是傑克·雪柏德和強納生·威德這兩個真實犯罪人物的文學發展角度。司摩利特和其他作者廣泛利用此二人，在作品中多有直接或間接指涉。結果這兩名被處絞刑的重犯，竟超越其糾纏不清的真正歷史定位，成為真、假友誼的文學象徵。

**關鍵詞：**司摩利特、友誼、忠、利、平等、犯罪

投稿日期：2019/12/27；接受日期：2020/04/21

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## **Loyalty, Venality and Equality as Bases of Friendship in Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom***

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines depictions of friendships and allegiances and their motivations in Tobias Smollett's peripatetic trilogy of early novels between 1749 and 1753, paying special attention to two, and to the bonds forged between the eponymous heroes of *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and their two closest associates, "Hugh Strap" and "Ratchkali," respectively. The paper compares the two friendships, their bases, and changes in both through the narrative progress. In Smollett's novels, an important, modern emphasis on equality emerges from that century's complex, multi-faceted and at times quite alien conceptualization when set against modern definitions of friendship. The paper also looks at why the criminal underworld and criminality generally should be particularly appealing to Smollett as the setting for those friendships. Of particular interest from the perspective of literary development are the real criminal figures of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, who were widely used directly and indirectly by Smollett among others, and as a result these two executed felons transcended their actual, intertwined historical identities to become literary symbols.

**Keywords:** Tobias Smollett, friendship, loyalty, venality, equality, criminal

**Submitted: 2019/12/27 ; Accepted: 2020/04/21**

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Friendships are fundamental to character development, relationships, and the furtherance of plot, so they “form an essential part of the social landscape of the novel” (Tadmor 245). This paper examines depictions of friendships and allegiances and their motivations in Smollett’s peripatetic trilogy of early novels between 1749 and 1753, paying particular attention to the first and the third works, and to the bonds forged between the eponymous heroes (or anti-heroes) of *Roderick Random* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and their two closest associates, “Hugh Strap” and “Ratchkali,” respectively. Though an unusual example of the Smollett oeuvre in terms of its trickster hero and its sidekick pairs rather than single characters, *Peregrine Pickle* shares many of the features of friendship with its predecessor, *Random*. The hero’s associates are tied to him by bonds of loyalty; they serve rather than share in his experience and journey; and, while occasionally they rise to equal prominence in the plot, the same cannot be claimed with respect to their social status. *Fathom*, by contrast, marks a departure in its introduction of real equality between characters, beginning a trend which persists until his last work, *Humphry Clinker*, which is the rationale for the paper’s focus to be largely on *Random* and *Fathom*. The paper also speculates on the reason why the criminal underworld and criminality generally should be particularly appealing to the author as the setting for those friendships, a sphere which is largely absent from *Pickle* but very prominently featured in the other two novels.

Smollett did not need to invent his underworld; evidence of its existence in eighteenth-century Britain was abundant. Moreover, criminality did not just occur in eighteenth-century literature as a matter of course or verisimilitude; its prominence accords it the status of a trope across a spectrum of genres of the period (Jones 141). Comparing the great and the good to “gangsters” was an effective way to show the “hollowness” of the ruling class and their titles in “upside-down world” satires such as *The Beggar’s Opera* (Porter 26), and a little less overtly in *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great*. Criminal conspiracy, conversation, association and industry figure prominently in paintings, poems, plays, journalism, and early novels. In the case of the last, the relationship is particularly close. Daniel Defoe and John Gay may stand out at the top of the canonical hierarchy, but there was plenty of room for expansion at the bottom, too. Criminal biographies abounded, the pulp bestsellers of their day, as evidenced by the longevity and success of *The Newgate Calendar*, mixing salacious confessions with specious moralizing. Even more significant than that publication’s contemporary influence on popular culture was its role in the emergent forms of the novel. Criminal biographies of notorious executed felons were more than a factor in the development of the genre; for they had a symbiotic relationship with novels that meant authors like Defoe could consciously exploit purportedly “real” narratives in their fictional accounts (Rawlings 30), even giving rise to the distinct subgenre of “Newgate novels” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Two such exemplary, emblematic, infamous, interconnected, and heavily referenced figures were Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild (Hibbert 83-84). “Gentleman Jack” Sheppard caught more than the popular imagination as the archetypal sympathetic criminal. George I, not usually known for any

interest in Britain at all let alone in its criminals, commissioned the most renowned portrait artist of the day to depict the condemned Sheppard shortly before execution, and James Thornhill's sketch poignantly emphasizes the childish innocence and vulnerability, which, in combination with his derring-do in escaping from the same monarch's jails, in large part endeared him to the populace too: "Very slim and scarcely more than five feet four inches in height, it was difficult to believe the stories of his amazing strength and endurance that made him the most famous criminal of his time" (Hibbert 11). An impressive count of opportunistic thefts and burglaries, two trials, and four escapes from custody, the last from a specifically reinforced cell, elevated him to the status of a criminal legend. After his execution, biographies of his short, exploit-rich life were rushed out, Defoe's being the most famous, but, as Christopher Hibbert notes, the author's narrative was only one of the ten which were available upon and after Sheppard's death (11). Sales of biographies were testament to his popular attraction, yet the reason for public sympathy owed more to his perceived character than the fascinating contrast between a waifish, unimposing appearance and spectacular deeds:

But in a selfish age of violence and cruelty he was neither violent nor cruel, and in an underworld of informers, spies, crimps and thief-takers he was faithful to friends to the point of chivalry. Throughout the agonies of his imprisonment he remained cheerful and uncomplaining and always, in good times and in bad, he was generous and brave. His intelligence was unquestionable; his technical skill outstanding. (13)

The other figure of the pair exaggerated Sheppard's faithfulness and loyalty by his emphatic venality, and an ultra-Hobbesian devotion to "extreme individualism" which beat its own distinct path to the gallows (Rawlings 33). Though he did not spawn so many putatively autobiographical narratives as Sheppard, Jonathan Wild lurks in many narratives as a literary and cultural bogey-man, and is the central figure in Henry Fielding's satirical first novel, *Jonathan Wild the Great*, the author having witnessed Wild's actual execution in the 1720s. Ironically perhaps, Jonathan Wild, "thief-taker and anti-hero" (Cannon 981), lay on the other side of the judicial divide, though as a self-professed "thief-taker" his qualities were ideally suited to the "age of violence and cruelty" from which Sheppard seemed so distanced. Wild knew the criminal underworld because he was a formative and integral part of it. Starting as a dealer in stolen goods, he had very quickly moved on to more lucrative, less risky extortive schemes, and he made the most of the information he received through criminal ventures to accumulate cash and cultivate his public reputation for locating malefactors and restoring stolen property to the rightful owners. By the 1720s, he was the nation's "Thief-Taker General" with offices near the Old Bailey, and his dreams were big—an organized criminal underworld business, insuring its survival by occasionally sacrificing or "peaching" on low-value felons to a judicial system hungry for prosecutions (Hibbert 79). Wild's criminal network was the

instrument which led to Sheppard's capture, but it was partly Sheppard's capture which ultimately led to Wild's execution in the year after Sheppard's. Wild, like Sheppard, had a coterie of trusted associates around him, but loyalty for Wild was underwritten by the threat of what he could do to a refractory criminal, not by any affection for his character or mutually affirmed loyalty (Hibbert 80). Whereas Sheppard's legacy was one of faithfulness to his friends, Wild's was truth to his word, for good or ill; and eighteenth-century sympathy lay with the former, even if the eighteenth-century practical reality supported the latter figure.

Sheppard and Wild are closely related as literary points of reference to different strands in the cultural zeitgeist and its orientations towards friendship. Their abstracted, simplified, and unrealistic forms could and did function as symbols, handy resources up for appropriation in literary texts and other artistic works. So eager is William Ainsworth to bring the pair together for comparison in his adventure novel of Sheppard's life that he introduces Wild in its second chapter, while Sheppard is still an infant, one and a half decades before they really encountered each other. Another interesting example of such cultural reference occurs in *Roderick Random*. Early in the narrative, Hugh Strap, a close or "select" friend of the hero, is asking locals if they have seen Random. One mordant Londoner responds that he has just observed the hero going "towards Tyburn in a cart, if you [Strap] make good speed, you may get thither time enough to see him hanged" (94). Here, the author is making a pointed and incisive reference to a specific picture, Hogarth's illustration of "The Idle 'Prentice" Jack Sheppard on his last journey from Newgate prison to hang at Tyburn (Basker xl). Smollett habitually alludes to William Hogarth's work, so it comes as no surprise that the writer would refer to a new picture by the artist which was put on public display during the time of his writing the novel. However, this picture is not contemporary; Hibbert shows that the work actually hints at Jack Sheppard (12). For Smollett then, Sheppard is still effective and relevant as a symbol in the popular consciousness, which is demonstrated by the fact that Sheppard is still being artistically employed in the 1740s, some two decades after his death. In using an image of Sheppard's last journey to refer to the probable fate of Random, Smollett is making an implicit connection between the two figures which is heavily significant of Random and the nature his connection with Strap. Sheppard, and Wild, may function as widely recognizable opposite poles of reference in depicting two species of eighteenth-century friendship for Smollett as they did for Fielding, Defoe and others before. One pole is based primarily on altruism, mutual support and disinterested service; and the other more on self-interest in the shape of gain in terms of money, power, or status. Smollett's friendships are built largely upon foundations of either mutual loyalty or individualistic venality, and the emphasis of the Sheppard image from *Random* clearly indicates that loyalty exerts the greater pull in the novel.

Shades of actual friendship in the period did not quite fall into the neat dualism of the literary manifestations of Sheppard and Wild. Eighteenth-century protestations about true and false friends should not be taken at face value, because what seems to be a clear line between disinterested

friendship and its ersatz, corrupt facsimile is more often a veiled attack by a reactionary Tory sympathizer on a venal, self-serving and progressive Whig (Jones 11). In other words, evocations of friendship are frequently the political constructions of discontented figures excluded from the Whig establishment led, until the 1740s, by Robert Walpole. False friends or selfish and ungrateful ones may be conscious or unconscious representations of adherents to the venal and corrupt party in power by adherents to the party out of it, as they are in the satires of Alexander Pope (Jones 11), whom Smollett consciously emulated in his early “satirical apprenticeship” to novel-writing in the two poems, *Advice* and its sequel *Reproof*, published shortly before *Random* (Korte 239). A modern definition of friendship does not allow it to be a political ploy: “a friendship is judged to be a social bond, elective rather than compulsory, which is in its ideal forms motivated by a significant moral or affective element quite apart from the material rewards which may or may not accompany it” (Jones 16-17). The problem when it comes to friendship in the eighteenth century, however, is that it does not recognize any privileged ideal form which transcends other contractual, financial, or political motivations and obligations. Private and “select” friendships existed, but that did not mean they could also involve a necessary material reward or other compulsory requirement. This was equally true in the case of Smollett as an archetypal eighteenth-century man of letters in life as well as art; he endeavored to use personal connections to obtain paying jobs abroad or pensions several times, but he just was not very good at it (Lewis 228). In Thomas Turner’s eighteenth-century diary, the friends mentioned included not only private friends, but also neighbors and blood relations (addressed and regarded as friends). Family, by the same token, also included people who would be very unlikely to be regarded so now, because servants and household staff, whom Turner called his “family,” could and did change all the time. Interestingly, that century’s inclusive attitude to family persists in Margaret Mitchell’s Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind*: Scarlet is outraged that a Yankee should have the effrontery to refer to Peter as a “slave” when he is in her mind “family.” Both “friends” and “family” then have undergone semantic reduction over time: “Just as ‘family’ was an inclusive term that could embrace various household members, so could ‘friends’ and ‘relations’ refer to various kin: parents, siblings, in-laws, and others” (Tadmor 26). These flexible definitions seem indeed to be shared by Smollett, too. At the end of *Random*, Strap is absorbed into the family as overseer of the newly-bought family estate, cementing his move from erstwhile friend to firmly-established family member (by virtue of his being Random’s servant); geographical proximity underscores the close relationship as Strap and his new wife now reside less than half a mile from the family pile in a family property (435). Random by contrast is free to enjoy the friendship of his newly-returned prodigal father, who is entirely absent from the book except for its opening and several closing chapters. This mutability is a long way from the perspective of the social sciences which “define friendship as a voluntary relationship, often among peers, and essentially non-kin” (211). It is interesting to note a modern definition would have Strap as a friend and then a servant to Random, implying perhaps that Random in some way breaks

the bonds of friendship. However, a contemporary eighteenth-century definition would rather have Strap as oscillating between the statuses of friend and family member, putting a very different complexion on the relationship and on Random's moral standing, or the lack of it. Smollett's contemporary definition of friendship was at once more elastic and inclusive than a modern one; it covered "kinship relationships, social relationships, occupational relationships, and even political connections and patronage," which meant that "literary texts also dwelled upon such ties" (237).

The frequent overlap of personal and public iterations of friendship by such a wide-ranging definition could lead to charges of a betrayal of private or "select" friendship where none existed because the relationship was not private, but only appeared to be. In his diary, Thomas Turner focuses on a favorite and specific example from his reading of Smollett's second novel, *Peregrine Pickle*. For Turner, friendship was general and particular, private and public, consenting and required, and perhaps also venal and loyal. Yet Turner and Smollett both single out false friends for particular vilification, which is likely a strong indication that Smollett's second novel, like his first, still favors loyalty as an ideal foundation for friendship. In Volume Two, a government minister with calculated and deliberate forethought betrays a friend during an election campaign (233). Turner responds to the loss of a friendship by a premeditated act of disloyalty with vicarious distaste and tangible sorrow, though he fails to see a politically-motivated connection for what it is even with his multi-faceted understanding of friendship.

Just as neat dualisms were not sufficient unto the day of the eighteenth century, clear exclusive differentiation between altruistic and egotistical motivations for human bonds, between loyal and venal, or between true and false friendship did not really suffice in its literature either, as Smollett's characters demonstrate. It is not so much that the works are confused about what constitutes friends and friendship; it is rather that there cannot be for Smollett a dichotomous choice between apparently opposed underlying reasons for them. Random and Fathom as novel heroes do not make a conscious and irrevocable choice between loyalty and venality; they do not overcome one to favor the other, but the qualities do exist in an uneasily shifting, jostling balance through the works. The fact that both are essential for survival and success in criminal society means that it is in that marginalized underworld where Smollett's characters can encounter the two motivations in their most intense forms. Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild live on in the character pairings of Random and Strap as well as Fathom and Ratchkali. Admittedly, perhaps, the association of Fathom with the spirit of Jonathan Wild is never made explicit as it is with the image of Sheppard in *Random*. However, Fathom's compulsive scheming for advantage in the shape of power or fortune, his mantle of "politician," his mistreatment of the novel's heroine, and above all his "middleman" strategy to play characters off against each other do much to cast the shadow of Jonathan Wild the "fence," or receiver of and dealer in stolen goods, since these forms of behavior all have direct parallels in Wild's real history. All four characters in the novel pairings display a willingness to make friends, but what drives that willingness alternates

between friendship for gain and friendship as disinterested allegiance regardless of gain. Sheppard made money with and for his friends; Wild made money out of them, but mundane pecuniary interests underpin idealized transcendent mutual loyalty in both. The challenge for Smollett's characters is to develop friendships which ideally overcome venality while also pragmatically acknowledging its abiding influence.

### ***Roderick Random: tensions between loyalty and venality***

Like Thomas Turner, Hugh Strap is clear about his definition of friendship, which is a selfless, altruistic, loyal form of friendship based wholly on service. Only on one occasion does Strap show any hint of venality in order to help Random out of his desperate financial situation with a shady money-making scheme of duping a rich heiress into marriage. Even in this act, Strap's sacrifice of principle has a clear moral dimension of providing support for a friend in dire need. Strap is the alpha and omega of disinterested friendship in the novel. He is the first friend (by a modern definition) that Random encounters while at school early in Volume One and he occupies the last page and paragraph of the novel in Volume Two. He disappears from the action for short periods, and notably for the lengthy space of one hundred and fifty pages, during which time his place is filled by series of minor, temporary, and expedient allies such as Wagtail, Jackson and Banter. These characters, by contrast, are friends only in the contemporary venal sense and come and go with alacrity as scenery and stops change in the peripatetic novel. In fact, apart from the narrator and hero Random, Strap is the only character who is not ephemeral, who accompanies the hero through most but not all of his adventures, and who is present throughout the hero's development, such as it exists. Basker et al. (xli) hold Strap to be an approximation of Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote*, which does suit the comic romance of the novel but also misses the mark on its characters. First, to see Strap as a faithful servant diminishes the voluntary nature of his help; and second, more importantly, it obscures significant changes in the relationship from Strap's point of view, changes to which the narrator, Random, seems oblivious. Strap is loyal, he is faithful, but in the early parts of the novel he is certainly not a servant like Panza. Strap's "service" is by choice for a friend and not out of duty for a master. In the beginning this attitude is reciprocated by Random, who appreciates Strap for his loyalty rather than fealty or deference, and so Strap remains a friend in the modern definition and cannot be regarded as a member of Random's family by an eighteenth-century definition. Random's emphatic use of "we" in an early chapter underscores their partnership (37).

Strap's perspective and feelings toward Random are consistent, but it is interesting that Random changes towards Strap, albeit unconsciously. The temptation to see the school friend and supporter as a servant emerges from the oscillating nature of Random's view of his sidekick. Strap is at various junctures a friend-in-adversity, a bank, an accomplice, a valued servant, and burdensome emotional baggage depending on the condition of the hero at the time and on the environment through which



they are navigating. In London, which he views as at best a moral vacuum and at worst “the devil’s drawing room” (95), Strap is first a crutch Random can rely on for financial and other support, then a friend, then a moralizing pedant, and finally an obstacle to progress through the venal institutions of government and the navy, whose mechanisms rely on patronage for fuel and the bribery for lubrication. This last environment, where all relationships are of necessity venal, being forged, maintained and motivated by mercenary considerations, is the one where Strap must leave an increasingly ungrateful, embittered, but not yet fully developed hero.

Strap’s early connection with the hero emphasizes his disinterested perspective and unimpeachable altruism. Random is orphaned, dispossessed, reviled and sent away to a brutal school, where he identifies with Strap and they quickly bond, as equals. To make the honest nature of Strap’s attachment clear, Smollett provides him with a moral opposite, Gawky, and then the reader compares “these two champions”: Random recalls, “I had once saved Gawky’s life . . . I had often rescued him from the clutches of those whom his insufferable arrogance had provoked . . . I had many times saved his reputation and posteriors . . . he had a particular regard for me and my interests” (16). Gawky has practical reasons for keeping up the relationship, just as he later has them for breaking it. Strap, on the other hand, is a precise opposite: “The attachment of Strap flowed from a voluntary, disinterested inclination, which had manifested itself on many occasions in my behalf . . . by saving my life at the risk of his own” (16). Before London tests their relationship to breaking point, Random and Strap have several brushes with the underworld, the most dramatic and memorable being with a highwayman, who is definitely more akin to Jonathan Wild than Jack Sheppard. Indeed, even in London, the pair dwells at the margins of criminality or under its depredations: Strap apostrophizes, “We have not been in London eight and forty hours, and I believe we have met with eight and forty thousand misfortunes.—We have been jeered, reproached, buffeted, pissed upon, and at last stript of our money; and I suppose by and by we shall be stript of our skins” (72). Mutual loyalty stops them from descending to its center, functioning as a final defense against the vortex of extreme and acquisitive self-interest drawing them in. It is interesting that the only times that the hero is fully subsumed by the venal underworld, when recuperating with Miss Williams and when interned in debtor’s prison, Random is without the counterweight of Strap to stabilize him. Strap’s influence is vital. Almost immediately after bemoaning their straitened circumstances in London, Strap reaffirms his complete loyalty to his friend, who is no longer in possession of sufficient funds to purchase the navy job. Strap, ever the model for unselfish devotion, promises Random anything to help him succeed, assuring the hero that, “I’ll beg for you, steal for you” (73).

On Strap’s side things do not change, but “the devil’s drawing room” permeates Random’s feelings for his friend. The ubiquitous venality begins to soak through, and the growing irritability he shows towards Strap is a warning sign. After Random’s ambition of obtaining a navy warrant comes to nothing, Strap reaches out to a local schoolmaster, a “kinsman” and “family friend,” one of a

number he has spread through the novel, who knows of an available apprenticeship with a “French apothecary.” Strap’s tortuous explanation of the background situation elicits a new anger and callousness from Random: “D—n your relation and pedigree,—if the school-master or you can be of any advantage to me, why don’t you tell it, without all this preamble” (96). Gone is the emphatic “we” of pre-London chapters, and now the reader is struck by the hostile “you” which replaces it. Strap is stung too, less by ingratitude and more by his friend’s first derogation of Strap’s family background: “Surely, our pedigree is not to be d—n’d, because it is not so noble as yours.—I am very sorry to see such an alteration in your temper of late” (96). Strap acknowledges, for the first time, some class difference in family (though, as Random has been disowned by his grandfather, this no longer should apply) but what is clear is that at this point in the narrative this remains a dispute between friends, not the rebellion of an indignant servant against his master.

Random’s immediate expression of regret and apology for his outburst make little difference; this dispute comes only two chapters before Strap’s long disappearance from the text. The plot only confirms that London has cleaved the close mutual relationship of Random and his select friend. In a very rare moment of introspection, just before Strap leaves, Random acknowledges his changed feelings for his friend and their unpleasant bases:

In spite of all the obligations I owed this poor honest fellow, ingratitude is so natural to the heart of man, that I began to be tired of his acquaintance; and now, that I had contracted other friendships which appeared more creditable, I was even ashamed to see a journeyman barber enquiring after me with the familiarity of a companion . . . I now began to look upon myself as a gentleman in reality. (108)

Random is variously honest and self-deceiving in his analysis. He accepts his own sin of ingratitude, the ersatz nature of his new friends, and his own shame about Strap’s roots, but he is not a gentleman; he is simply maintaining the appearance of one. Despite his condescension, Random and Strap remain equal before Strap’s long departure for France to be a (real) gentleman’s *valet de chambre*, and there is neither arrogance nor presumption from Strap when he sees himself as “a companion” to Random. Demonstrably, so far he has been.

The balance of power between the characters is transformed in their reunion a hundred and fifty pages later. London, the British Navy, and the French army have all worked their influences on Random. It is perhaps significant that the bond cannot be renewed amidst the self-seeking corruption of Britain but in the community of France. Here, as in *Travels*, nearly two decades later, the narrator takes pains to illustrate French chivalry, kindness and altruism even in adverse circumstances. What is more portentous is that Random now controls the situation. It is a surprise reunion scene, a favorite feature in the Smollett novel, and one the author even played out in reality by visiting his mother in disguise after years away from Scotland (Lewis 160). Random is the instigator of the practical joke

and Strap its victim. Strap's joy at seeing Random is ineffable, but his clownish reactions demean him and elevate Random (252). From this meeting onwards, power resides with Random, the tug-of-war between them is over, and, after initially playing the make-believe servant to Random's counterfeit gentleman, Strap is now really going to inhabit his part.

Strap's significance and relevance are likewise reduced, as is his presence. Absences from the text, while shorter, become more frequent. The chief reason for his presence at this point is that, due to his service to the French gentleman, he now has "some interest" which can extricate the hero from French military service (254). Apart from being an occasional bank or guarantor, Strap's main roles are to be an emotional valet towards Random and to extricate his new master from the various scrapes into which greed and mendacity, as well as a slew of criminal or quasi-criminal associations, put him, up to and including the criminal capital of London's Marshalsea prison (372). Random's ungrateful behavior over the apprenticeship stood out before Strap's long absence, but after the reunion Random's abuse of his friend is less exceptional. Strap becomes more of a metaphorical punching bag upon which an impotent Random can exorcise his frustrations. One evening Random returns to his lodgings and "vented [his] fury upon Strap," pinching his ear, laughing at his reaction, before becoming "sensible" of his abuse and asking "pardon for the outrage [he] had committed" (357). Crucially, he no longer refers to Strap as a friend but as "my faithful valet," which represents only a small change in the narration, but a hugely significant one for the bond between them. From this point, the relationship's sinuous path becomes straighter and more simplistic. When his hopes are dashed by incarceration in debtor's prison, Random evokes Strap as "my honest friend," (372) because he needs help getting out. A friend for Random is now someone who can be useful and influential; he must provide service but it only seems to flow in one direction. On Strap's side, however, nothing has changed in the quality of friendship; he remains as true to his friend as he was when he promised Random his all. In the novel's last reversal of fortune for the hero, when Random's father returns rich, landed, and able to make Random into the gentleman that he has always believed himself to be, Strap's demotion could not be clearer. Random magnanimously introduces Strap to his father to "one of my best friends" but by the end of the page Strap is giving his master a valedictory shave (398). When he is invited in to dinner by the reunited father and son, Strap knows his place and gives the standard servile polite rejection of "I know my distance" to endorse the new establishment (417). Strap is wise to social reality. The level of sincerity of the invite is fairly clear as Random and his father go to dine leaving Strap in charge of the bags (420). Controversially, the plot also sidelines Strap by marrying him off to Random's wife's maid, Miss Williams, who was also the prostitute that Random met immediately after his separation from Strap in London. Loyalty may seem to have prevailed over the venality of "the devil's drawing room," but the relationship has changed irrevocably. Now, Strap could not be standing in the drawing room without a tray in his hands. Loyalty endures but at the cost of equality. Strap, as a servant and spouse of a servant, has crossed

over. He has married into the “family” in an eighteenth-century understanding of the word, and he is a friend in neither its period nor current senses; so the selfless loyalty Strap feels toward Random is neither valued nor reciprocated to the degree it was before the pair’s residence in London.

Loyalty and venality are more complex elements in the novel than its opening third promises, where they are manifested as a dichotomous choice. There is a massive preponderance of the former quality on Strap’s side, a good part on Random’s, but honest friendship without pecuniary interest transforms speedily when things get impecunious. Strap becomes useful as a tool, servant, or aide for the hero’s advancement, notwithstanding Random’s fleeting expressions of guilt or regret. The novel concludes with a much less clear outlook on the unselfish foundation of friendship than was present at its beginning.

### ***Ferdinand Count Fathom: loyalty, venality and equality***

*Fathom* is close to Smollett’s first novel with respect to its preoccupation with friendship, but radically different in the treatment of it. If criminality intensifies and clarifies conflicting bases for alliances, then setting has a profound effect on the novel. As Jones shows, criminal worlds were of marked appeal in the eighteenth century as microcosms or metaphors of the political establishment, or “Robinocracy,” in which venality and self-interest were laid bare without blurred lines of emotional attachment (141). Politicians and criminals were motivated by money, but both needed loyalty to lay hold on and keep it; and it is interesting that in the novel, Ferdinand Fathom is frequently described to be a “consummate politician” (73), whose sophisticated organizational flair places him nearer to Wild than Sheppard. Random never fully enters the criminal underworld, uncomfortably skirting its edges, whereas Fathom never leaves, except for a spectacularly implausible Damascene conversion near the end, after which he disappears from the narrative completely. Smollett’s first and only anti-hero inherits his venal tendencies from a mother who is a battlefield looter by trade, and occasional murderer who assists wounded soldiers on to the next world whether they ask for a quick end or not (52). The practical self-interest of Hobbes or Mandeville runs in Fathom’s blood, together with a healthy strain of amorality. This places Fathom closest to the picaro figure in *Gil Blas*, the picaresque Spanish novel that the author translated. Unlike a picaro, or rogue, however, Fathom is self-aware; his criminality is not simply a reflexive action to “the sordid and vicious disposition of the world” around him (*Random xxxv*); it is a conscious choice.

Fathom, by the good graces of his deceased father, enters the household of an aristocratic family, headed by the count de Melvile, in the capacity of companion/friend to their son, but he never attains the higher status of an adopted child. Loyal, altruistic friendship with the son and heir is an irrelevance for Fathom, however, who sees that future success hinges on wheedling his way into the family’s good graces by any means so that “if he did not eat with the count, he was every day regaled with choice bits from his table: holding, as it were, a middle place between the rank of a relation, and

a favoured domestic” (59). In other words, he has become “family” in the sense that Thomas Turner used the word. “Middle” is an apt choice, for Fathom finds power and space in acting as a middleman in two essential relationships in the novel, between the count and his son, and between the son and the son’s lover. In the first, he opts to play the cuckoo in the nest, inveigling himself into the son’s place in the count’s affections. The narrative is neither moral nor immoral, such that Paul-Gabriel Boucé labeled such debate endless, tiresome and sterile (*Fathom* 15). Fathom only chooses the best path to suit his talent, which the narrative shows to be dissimulation, to seem rather than to be a friend to the holder of the purse: “that pliant genius found means to retain the friendship by seasonable compliances and submission; for, the sole study, or at least the chief aim of Ferdinand, was to make himself necessary and agreeable to those on whom his dependance (sic) was placed” (61). Since “self-love” leaves no space for “the least particle of social virtue,” general or communal good has no meaning in Fathom’s heroically individualistic world.

Fathom’s path to self-realization does include friends, and real ones, just not the count’s son. Discrediting the heir in the count’s eyes increases the “vagrant swallow” Fathom’s stock with the family in general and the count in particular (64). Simultaneously, Fathom wants to get into the good opinion of the count’s other heir, his daughter, with a view to transforming a subservient family position into an equal married one. His plan requires a “confederate,” and Fathom’s first meaningful and genuine connection with any other character, the daughter’s maid. The relationship is a partnership, but it is neither open nor equal. Fathom still hides his full motives from the maid who mistakenly believes that Fathom is emotionally attached and sexually attracted to her. Fathom does nothing to disabuse the maid of her mistake, and he plays his romantic part insofar as it maintains the political alliance. Dissimulation is once more the foundation of the bond, but at least here both characters knew they inhabited a world in which “the sons of men preyed upon one another, and such was the end and condition of their being” (84). The maid’s error is that she fails to apply the rule to their own private circumstances. This relationship immediately precedes Fathom’s most influential and important one: he encounters not just a like-minded individualist, but also an equal, who sees the world the same way, and becomes the only person whom Fathom sees as a real friend, the “Tyroleze” (85):

Similar characters naturally attract each other, and people of our hero’s principles are, of all others, the most apt to distinguish their own likeness wheresoever it occurs, because they always keep the faculty of discovering in full exertion. It was in consequence of this mutual alertness, that Ferdinand and the stranger, who was a native of the Tyrol, perceived themselves reflected in the dispositions of each other, and immediately entered into an offensive and defensive alliance. (84-85)

The meeting echoes that of Strap with Roderick. Both characters are set side-by-side for comparison, and in both similarity is illuminated by the inclusion of an opposite, Gawky and the count's son, respectively. Like a microcosm of Jonathan Wild's city-wide organization, the two "knights errant" (122) can enter into a criminal conspiracy to divest, defraud or ruin the unwary in self-interested adventures, first through the Continent and then Britain.

Fathom's particular understanding of friendship as an association and venture for gain leads to a curious trope regarding names in the novel. Shortly after their first meeting Fathom "determined to accommodate himself with the company and experience of the Tyrolese, whom, under the specious title of an associate, he knew he could convert into a very serviceable tool, in forwarding the execution of their projects" (124). Seeing Ratchkali, initially referred to only as "the Tyrolese," as "a tool" proves to be a salutary and edifying misattribution, which costs Fathom dear, after which the anti-hero is careful to see Ratchkali for the equal that he is. It also reveals that when Fathom looks at people, ironically, given his self-interested character, he sees not individuals but only types: predator, prey, associate, rival, enemy, or "tool." This carries over into one feature of the narrative; names are withheld from the reader, because they are unimportant to Fathom as the focalizing character. That this could be an oversight is impossible given its prominence. It takes a chapter to find out that the maid is named Teresa, several more to find out that the count's son is called Renaldo, and, in the most egregious example, the reader has to wait until some hundred pages after his introduction to find out that Fathom's closest ally in terms of nature and aptitude is called Ratchkali (196). The "consummate politician" (73) sees a type before he sees the person, a necessary skill for the arch manipulator. He "dived into the characters of mankind, with a penetration peculiar to himself" (69), but he makes a cardinal error in misjudging Ratchkali to be anything less than an absolute equal. One of their adventures has the pair deserting the French army, accompanied by some liberated loot, and camped for the night near Strasbourg (129-30). Fathom is thinking about deserting his associate and holding onto the whole share, but he hesitates, not out of loyalty to his friend, but through underestimation of Ratchkali, who gets his revenge in first "taking it for granted, that in so doing, he only precluded Ferdinand from the power of acting the same tragedy upon him, should ever the opportunity concur with his inclination" (130).

Fathom's equanimity in adversity underlines the two "friends'" natural proximity to each other. He is neither rancorous nor hateful after losing the loot; he "bears his fate like a philosopher" who has been "foiled at his own weapons" (136). Fathom merely counts it as a lesson and moves on to trick the next suitable mark, a proud Castilian with a large trove of family jewels, into parting with his portable wealth. Possibly in another ironic nod to Random and Strap, Fathom and Ratchkali have a surprise reunion some seventy pages later in England, but neither falls into Strap's uncontrolled paroxysms of emotion. Fathom is not shocked, though his "eyes were suddenly encountered by the apparition of his old friend the Tyroleze, who perceiving himself fairly caught in the foil, made a

virtue of necessity, and running up to our adventurer with an aspect of eagerness and joy, clasped him in the arms, as some dear friend, whom he had casually found after a most tedious and disagreeable separation” (196). Ratchkali is playing the part of Strap and Fathom responds in kind because he understands the feint, such bonhomie being utterly alien to both. Neither is angry or nurses any grudge, mainly because both recognize the virtue or renewing their association and each knows the other to be the ideal partner. The “new alliance” is equally welcome to both characters; each is in sore need of “an auxiliary” to prosecute his scheme and will find no better match. Surely this can be, in Hobbesian England, grounds for friendship, as shared love of profit must be less likely to subside than a duty of loyalty. It is with huge symbolism that at this moment of shared recognition Ratchkali’s name is finally released to the reader.

In the most ironic reversal of fortune of his many experiences as anti-hero, Fathom is out-fathomed in England, gulled by a couple whose dedication to self-interest exceeds both Ratchkali and the main character (234). Ratchkali deserts Fathom one final time, fearing the expropriation of their amassed wealth; and Fathom, in perhaps the most implausible vault-face in Smollett’s oeuvre, undergoes his Pauline conversion, bereft of his conspirator and associate, and beset by creditors, litigators, and an angry, vengeful count. His subsequent long anaphoric admission of guilt is in essence his valedictory address to the novel. The anti-hero disappears from his own narrative. After he has been stripped of his partner and only friend by any definition, he becomes an irrelevance. Ratchkali goes and so does he, unmentioned for the next fifty pages. The novel implicitly answers the question over loyalty, venality and the preponderance of the qualities. Fathom’s abrogation of venality immediately precedes (and it could be seen to necessitate) his departure. Without his self-interested venality, Fathom has nowhere to go except out of the novel. Fathom’s only subsequent appearance, apart from a fleeting mention of his ill health and a sixty-pound per-annum settlement that the very forgiving Renaldo allows him, is an indirect reference in Ratchkali’s last speech, who is now imprisoned and doing hard labor (381). With some pathos, Ratchkali admits his chief regret was his decision to abandon Fathom in favor of another confederate by whom he was subsequently betrayed, as a result of which he is now incarcerated (382). He notes that the habitually dissimulating and venal Fathom never committed an act of disloyalty against him, something which jars with Fathom’s anti-heroic status.

## Conclusion

*Random* and *Fathom* appear to reward virtue (loyalty) and punish vice (venality) in conventional morality-tale fashion. *Random* and *Strap* end happily ensconced in a steady state of rural landed security and fulfillment. *Fathom* and *Ratchkali* suffer their equally steady states of deprivation and internment, respectively. However, that represents only the view from a distance. The criminals *Ratchkali* and *Fathom* come to tough ends, but not necessarily just ones. The defining feature of the

friendship between Random and Strap is certainly loyalty, but this is only unambiguously true if viewed from Strap's perspective. In one of Random's extremely rare introspective episodes, he acknowledges placing his own interest and convenience above the needs of his friend. In contrast, the prevailing characteristic of the friendship between Ratchkali and Fathom is venality, their relationship being by turns inimical and cooperative, depending upon the available opportunities for gift, fraud, and larceny. Here too, there is an ambiguity, as acknowledged by Ratchkali, that Fathom exhibited a passive form of loyalty by never taking the opportunity to betray or steal from Ratchkali, although Fathom was tempted to do so. In this grey area both relationships could be said to show some similarity; loyalty and venality must coexist in the contemporaneous cultural and temporal settings of Smollett's novels. Jones explains the popularity of the criminal setting in the context of eighteenth-century art and literature in terms of both metaphorical value and immediate verisimilitude. Criminals at the bottom in England, in the "diabolical" London underworld, were seen as analogous to and reflective of rulers at the top, the so-called "Robinocracy" under Robert Walpole, fueled and lubricated by access to favors and the money it generated; so by means of the corrupt milieu that undermines both character pairings, whose collapses occur by unhappy chance in Britain, Smollett may be heaping some much-deserved metaphorical opprobrium on a rival faction of the political class.

Criminality was also a commonly encountered and powerful influence on and obstacle to urban society, but there is a special significance for the trope of criminality in the novels here. In its embodiment of the contradictory demands of naked self-interest and an intense need for cooperation in its business, the criminal underworld marks the apex of conflict between disinterested loyalty and pervasive venality, where friendships are forged, tested, and proven. However, the crucial difference between the central relationships in the novels lies in the degree of equality they exhibit. Jack Sheppard did not win popular acclaim over Jonathan Wild because the former was perceived to be the kinder or gentler of the two; he did so because the relationships he fostered with his accomplices were based on equal unwavering partnership, not fear of reprisal or arrest. The only relationship which can truly make a claim to be equal is Fathom's and Ratchkali's, since Fathom acknowledges Ratchkali's equality in criminal enterprise, and even admits to his slight superiority in some areas. Equality then, perhaps more than either loyalty or venality, determines the nature of friendship in these Smollett novels. While it may be true that Fathom and Ratchkali's friendship is ultimately broken up by legal suits, it would be erroneous to see that between Random and Strap as enduring. Fathom and Ratchkali are tested to destruction by circumstances; their relationship is fractured by forces from without but their regard for each other stands until and even after they are split by arrest. Random and Strap's friendship can be pronounced dead at the moment that Strap becomes a Quixotic page to his Scottish feudal master; so this is the only friendship to implode of its own accord, which markedly qualifies the neat and satisfactory resolution of the novel and its apparently ringing endorsement of loyalty.

The choice between unselfish loyalty and selfish greed looks much less clear by the end of



*Fathom*. Smollett's third novel mixes the two motivations such that they cannot be separated out from each other, in the way that the selfless loyalty of Strap permits in *Random*. In assiduously consulting their own venal self-interest, Fathom and Ratchkali look out for each other in a remorselessly hostile world. Fathom and Ratchkali's bond is surely broken, but when this happens, there is still a friendship to break, a relationship between equals where mutual respect, albeit of criminal abilities, flows freely between them. Random and Strap's apparently happier end obscures the loss of status and importance that Strap undergoes; in being absorbed into Random's feudal family, he gives up Random's friendship passively, where that between Fathom and Ratchkali needs to be torn away. Without external tribulations, Fathom and Ratchkali's bond of friendship would still be viable, but with success and a supportive plot resolution, Random and Strap's cannot endure. Ratchkali may finally be broken but he is not diminished as is the case with Strap. Perhaps, in this curious paradox of a happy ending haunted by a sense of failure and an unhappy ending buoyed by the ghost of success, Smollett is offering an alternative, more modern moral view which relies on the inherent need for equality in friendship, regardless of its variously loyal or venal foundations.

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