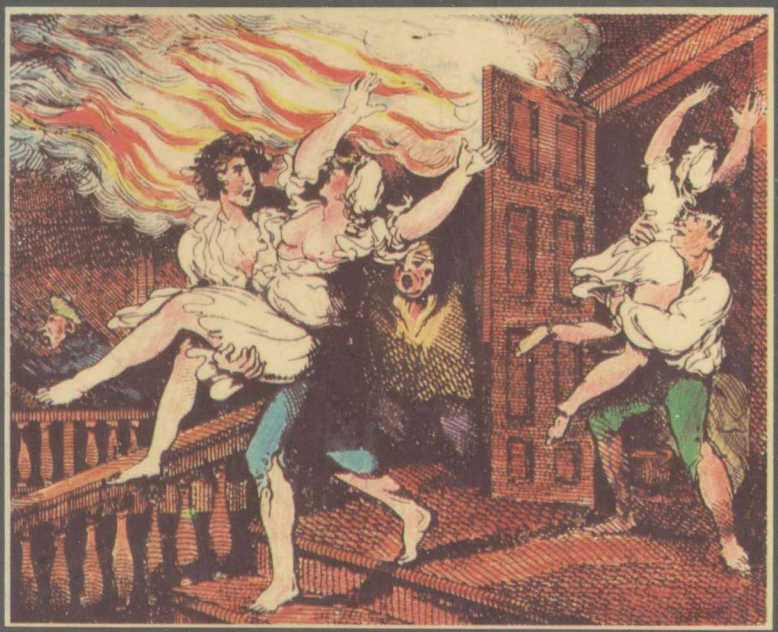
THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

TOBIAS SMOLLETT

THE ADVENTURES OF PEREGRINE PICKLE



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TOBIAS SMOLLETT

The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle

in which are included

Memoirs of a Lady of Quality

Edited with an Introduction by
JAMES L. CLIFFORD

Revised by
PAUL-GABRIEL BOUCÉ

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INTRODUCTION

Peregrine Pickle, Tobias Smollett's second novel, has never been as popular as his first, *Roderick Random*, or his last, *Humphry Clinker*. Although he clearly intended it to be a more extensive and finished work, with wider appeal, various circumstances combined to defeat his ambition. The novel received little contemporary acclaim, and has ever since had a mixed reception.

Just when it was begun is not certain. After the appearance of *Roderick Random* in January 1748, Smollett may at once have thought of writing a second novel, but more likely the real impetus was provided in February 1749 by the spectacular success of Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Copy for the first volume was probably completed by June 1750, when Smollett moved into his new house in Chelsea.[1] Then during the summer of 1750, Smollett journeyed, like Peregrine in the novel, to Paris and the Low Countries. Could the expedition have been designed to gather local colour for the novel? Many have thought so. If not specifically so planned, the trip did provide much material for his second volume.

In Paris Smollett undoubtedly visited most of the places described in the novel. We know that he met an English painter—vain, ostentatious, and ignorant—who provided some qualities for the character Pallet, that he saw something of his future biographer, Dr. John Moore, and that he became acquainted with some exiled Scots. After a short visit to the Low Countries, he was back in London by September, concentrating on the concluding portions. Thomas Birch wrote to his patron, Philip Yorke, on 10 November:

> The Author of Roderick Random is printing another Sett of Adventures which, I presume, are of the *low* kind, if Mr. Fielding will allow me the Use of that Word; for the name of the Hero of this new piece is Jeremiah Pickle.

Working at top speed, Smollett still had to put together the last two volumes. From references in Richardson's letters it seems evident that at least the first three volumes were in print by December.

[1] For biographical details see the standard authority, Lewis M. Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (1949). Other works mentioned will be found listed in the select bibliography which follows.

On 23 January 1751 the *General Advertiser* carried the announcement that the whole work would speedily be published.

Rumours had been flying about London of the inclusion in Smollett's new novel of some scandalous recollections of a well-known lady of fashion, more noted for her amours than her probity. For rival journalists such an opportunity was too good to miss, and Dr. John Hill dashed off a competing publication—*The History of a Woman of Quality: or, The Adventures of Lady Frail*—advertised as 'by an Impartial Hand'. This was published on 8 February. The day before, on the 7th, Smollett had inserted in the *General Advertiser* a warning to unsuspecting readers, appended to an advertisement of his own coming work.

> That the publick may not be imposed on, we are authorized to assure them, that no Memoirs of the above Lady, that may be obtruded on the World, under any Disguise whatever, are genuine, except what is comprised in this Performance.

But it was not until 25 February that *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* finally appeared, in four compact volumes, at the price of 12*s*. bound, or 10*s*. 6*d*. in boards.

In addition to Hill's rival memoirs, Smollett was plagued by quarrels with the booksellers, perhaps because of his insistence on keeping exclusive copyright for himself. Although there was a Dublin piracy the same year, and French and German translations two years later, the overall sale was disappointing.

It was the sensational 'Memoirs of a Lady of Quality' which kept alive whatever interest there was in the new novel. In March two pamphlets appeared: *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Lady V—ss V— Occasioned by the Publication of her Memoirs in the Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, a severe attack on the lady by a near relation of one of Lord Vane's henchmen, insisting that she had omitted all the worst parts of her conduct; and *A Parallel Between the Characters of Lady Frail and the Lady of Quality in Peregrine Pickle*, pointing out the chief resemblances between the two, and inferring the truth of the more damaging points made in Hill's version. Not until July was there any reasoned defence. In *An Apology for the Conduct of a Lady of Quality, Lately Traduc'd under the Name of Lady Frail . . . In a Letter from a Person of Honour to a Nobleman of Distinction*, which purported to include further anecdotes 'never before made publick', Lady Vane was absolved of crude sensuality. Her troubles, the writer insisted, were caused by the ill-usage of her husband and her own indiscretions.

Readers were divided, both as to the ethics of publishing the memoirs and as to their style. Lady Luxborough commented to the poet William Shenstone:

> Peregrine Pickle I do not admire . . . but the thing which makes the book sell, is the History of Lady V—, which is introduced (in the last volume, I think) much to her Ladyship's dishonour; but published by her *own* order, from her *own* Memoirs, given to the author for that purpose; and by the approbation of her *own* Lord. What was ever equal to this fact, and how can one account for it?

When her correspondent apparently objected to her taste in reading, Lady Luxborough added:

> As to Peregrine Pickle, I hired it, and that merely for the sake of reading one of the volumes, wherein are inserted the Memoirs of Lady V—; which, as I was well acquainted with her, gave me curiosity. The rest of the book is, I think, ill wrote, and not interesting.

Samuel Richardson, perhaps not an unbiased witness as a rival novelist, called it 'the very bad Story of a wicked woman'; and Mrs. Delany found it 'wretched stuff'. Thomas Gray wrote to Horace Walpole: 'Has that miracle of *tenderness and sensibility* (as she calls it) lady Vane given you any amusement?' 'Peregrine, whom she uses as a vehicle, is very poor indeed with a few exceptions.'

On the other hand, a few did find something to praise. In the March issue of the *Monthly Review* there was a long, favourable analysis by John Cleland, author of *Fanny Hill*, who seriously discussed the new fiction and its connexion with biography. Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the 'Queen of the Blue-Stockings', wrote to her sister: 'I recommend to your perusal "The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle". Lady Vane's story is well told.' And Lady Mary Wortley Montagu commented:

> I think Lady V's memoirs contain more Truth and less malice than any I ever read in my life. . . . 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.

What struck most observers was the astonishing fact that a lady should actually publicize the story of her own infidelities. Horace Walpole, who had years earlier characterized the Lady

as 'Liquorissa', at once passed on the news to Sir Horace Mann:

> My Lady Vane has literally published the memoirs of her own life, only suppressing part of her lovers, no part of the success of the others with her: a degree of profligacy not to be accounted for; she does not want money, none of her stallions will raise her credit; and the number, all she had to brag of, concealed!

For the remainder of the year, as Fred W. Boege has shown, Lady Vane continued to be a sure target of poetasters and periodical satirists. In the *General Advertiser* of 16 March and in both the *London Magazine* and the *Universal Magazine*, there were harsh verses by Richard Graves entitled 'The Heroines: or, Modern Memoirs', where Lady Vane is yoked with two other recent female writers.

> Not so of modern wh—s th' illustrious train,
> Renown'd Constantia, Pilkington, and ——,
> Grown old in sin, and dead to am'rous joy,
> No acts of penance their great souls employ;
> Without a blush behold each nymph advance,
> The luscious heroine of her own romance;
> Each harlot triumphs in her loss of fame,
> And boldly prints and publishes her shame.

Even by the end of 1751 there were references in the periodicals. One jingling set of verses ended:

> Let me, mamma, now quit this chain,
> And but for this once try;
> I'll have my lords as well as V—e,
> Or know the reason why.

But the Lady of Quality was not the only source of controversy. Many readers were offended by various personal attacks on well-known people. It is possible for us to see that Smollett's vicious slaps at Garrick, at Lord Chesterfield, Lord Lyttelton, and the actor Quin, were motivated by the long years of frustration over his play *The Regicide*. And we can properly evaluate his hearty dislike of Fielding and Akenside. There is some evidence that Smollett thought Fielding in *Tom Jones* had plagiarized from *Roderick Random*, and Akenside's pompous manner, together with his scornful attitude toward Scotland, must have irritated the thin-skinned expatriate. Here was an opportunity to repay old scores, one that Smollett could not resist. The result was such characters

as Mr. Gosling Scrag, Mr. Spondy, the physician met at Paris, and the other fairly obvious satirical portraits.

Other readers deplored the blatant vulgarity of many of the episodes. In the *Monthly Review* Cleland cited as instances Peregrine's chastisement of his tutor and an episode where the youth had bored holes in his aunt's chamber-pot, but defended their inclusion as part of the picaresque tradition. Not many were so ready to excuse this side of Smollett's work.

Evidently Smollett himself had some qualms, for almost seven years later, near the end of 1757, he set to work to expurgate his own work—to take out or soften the bitter personal attacks, and to remove some of the 'low' passages. By this time he had become reconciled to Garrick, and Fielding was dead. His resentment over other slights had cooled. To reprint the original version as it stood would have been embarrassing. So he omitted the ridicule of Garrick's acting, the sneers about Fielding's marrying 'his own cook-wench', and the cruel parody of Lord Lyttelton's elegy to his wife. Deleted, too, were the perforated chamber-pot episode, a long tasteless intrigue of Peregrine with a nun, and some of the horse-play and amorous philandering on the Continent. There were also a few changes in the memoirs of Lady Vane, made, it appears, at her ladyship's request. The revision was almost entirely a matter of excision, new transitions to cover the large omissions, and some breaking up of long sentences and changing of words and phrases. In all, the rewritten version was some 79 pages shorter —now 106 chapters rather than 114.

Undoubtedly the new edition—the one universally read since 1758—is a better-written work, which did present Smollett to the world in a somewhat more appealing guise. Yet because the original version represents the essential early Smollett in all his acerbity and violence, the decision has been made to reproduce it in this series. No cuts have been made, and the text is given just as it was presented to readers in 1751.

In the two centuries since its appearance the reputation of *Peregrine Pickle* has undergone strange variations. Because attention at first fastened almost exclusively on its sensational aspects, the genuine merits of the novel were obscured. There was little comment on Smollett's vigorous style and his remarkable skill in characterization. Yet *Peregrine Pickle* continued to be read, and by the turn of the century it was accepted as a masterpiece, even if a scandalous one. The author of *The Lounger's Common-Place Book* thought Smollett superior to Richardson and

Fielding, and insisted that *Peregrine Pickle* was the best of his novels.

Many of the great Romantics—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, and Lamb—were youthful admirers of Smollett (De Quincey alone disagreeing), the perpetual argument being over his place compared to Fielding's. Coleridge and Hazlitt preferred Fielding; Keats, and Lamb, for the greater part of his life at least, backed Smollett. It was with the greatest difficulty that Hazlitt was able to convert him. Scott, perhaps for patriotic reasons, was in the Smollett camp, as was Dickens later on. The question of who was adjudged the greater is of little importance to us today; what is interesting is the fact of the intense rivalry, that the two could be rated so evenly, and that Dickens, as is reported, could actually have preferred *Peregrine Pickle* to *Tom Jones*. And even those who rated Fielding higher were admirers of his rival. Reminiscing once over events twenty years past, Hazlitt wrote: 'I knew Tom Jones by heart, and was deep in Peregrine Pickle.' To this he added, 'I do not think any one can feel much happier—a greater degree of heart's ease—than I used to feel in reading Tristram Shandy, and Peregrine Pickle, and Tom Jones.'

It was another displaced Scot in the next generation who continued the affectionate praise of Smollett. With deep emotion Carlyle once confessed, 'I remember few happier days than those in which I ran off into the fields to read "Roderick Random". . . . To this day I know of few writers equal to Smollett.'

True, the tone of much of this praise is retrospective—remembering boyish enthusiasm. Smollett, one gathers, was the author for young readers, and often there is a slight suggestion that his novels are a little 'off-beat', not quite good form. The immorality and sordidness of much of *Peregrine Pickle*, even in the cleaned-up version, was becoming more and more offensive to nineteenth-century taste. As early as 1812 John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* could comment 'In Tom Jones, Peregrine Pickle, and Amelia, we have a most accurate and vivid picture of real life; but it is, if we may venture to say so, *too* real . . . we are convinced that the gay immoralities, the criminal levities, and the rewarded dissipation of Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle have contributed to inflame, and we will venture to add, to debauch many a youthful imagination.' Two years later Croker added, 'We do not believe that any man or woman was ever improved in morals or manners by the reading of Tom Jones or Peregrine Pickle.'

Judged by such standards, it was inevitable that Smollett's fame should decline. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was at rock bottom. 'Peregrine Pickle', one writer commented, 'is an ill-conditioned Tom Jones and more dissolute.' Another insisted, 'As a novelist, Smollett's reputation, once very high, is growing less every year with the best portion of the reading world, and must continue to do so as a love of moral purity shall continue to increase.'

Happily Smollett can today be judged more objectively. Our concern is not so much with his vulgar brutality, but with his claims to serious purpose. Is *Peregrine Pickle* anything more than a mere succession of sensational episodes? Does it have any depth and subtlety? These are the questions which now are being raised.

That Smollett was a moralist is today generally accepted. Even Henry James, not too sympathetic to Smollett's type of fiction, saw clearly that his aim was 'to instruct and to edify', as well as to amuse. But what of his method?

It has been customary to sneer at Smollett's lack of artistic form, to describe his novels as haphazard, to say that they represent nothing more than a sequence of farcical adventures, strung together with clever journalistic skill, and interspersed with tasteless jokes and amorous scenes. But this apparent formlessness, critics now insist, was quite deliberate. Underneath there is more structure than has hitherto been realized.

That Smollett was consciously experimenting with earlier techniques is obvious, but it is not easy to decide which ones, or in what combination. Was Smollett essentially producing a realistic *Bildungsroman*, the story of a young man's acquisition of experience, enlivened with some satirical touches? Or was he trying to combine the literary tradition of the Spanish picaresque with that of formal Latin satire? Or was he really using the structure of melodrama, with comic overtones? Among recent scholars who have studied *Peregrine Pickle* there is no general agreement; each tends to stress a different approach, or a special combination of factors.

In describing his first novel, *Roderick Random*, Smollett wrote to a friend that it was 'intended as a satire upon mankind'. But could this have been merely to claim more serious purpose than was actually there? Certainly by the time he came to his third major work of fiction, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, he was ready to attempt a definition.

A Novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient. But this plan cannot be executed with propriety, probability or success, without a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue of the labyrinth, and at last close the scene by virtue of his own importance.

The disorder, the aimless ramblings, the revolting episodes, according to the author himself, are all there in order to create the illusion of life. This is realism with a serious moral tinge.

Still the question may be asked—why choose such a loose narrative form for his serious social commentary? A simple answer might be that it was what he knew best. One must remember that in 1748 he had completed an English translation of Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, and was working on another of *Don Quixote*. He was saturated with picaresque theory. Moreover, he must have seen that this kind of narrative was admirably suited for satiric and comic effects. From the beginning, picaresque fiction was intended as a protest against the unreal conventions of aristocratic romances. Instead of a hero of good birth and noble sentiments, the chief character, the traditional picaroon, was often a bastard or a scheming servant. Throughout his endless wanderings, his assumption of one role after another, his sufferings at the hands of capricious fortune, he learned to see through the normal hypocrisy and self-deception of mankind. He came to have few illusions and rarely any twinges of conscience. Instead, he tried to get what he could out of the world as he found it.

The early picaresque narratives were only incidentally satirical. Though sordid and unromantic, life was still to be enjoyed. The typical picaroon rarely became misanthropic. The earlier writers saw no reason to be over-depressed by the natural depravity of man, or to moralize about it. But Smollett had been nurtured on the serious satires of Pope and Swift, and was incapable of writing a simple story without serious overtones. Vice was something to be exposed, using all the weapons of wit and rhetoric at one's command. Among his earliest published compositions, which preceded *Roderick Random*, were a number of Popian satires in heroic couplets. In *Advice* and *Reproof* he had castigated society, and lashed out at individual sinners. Is it too much to think that in turning to prose fiction he carried with him some of the same aims and techniques, and that he deliberately chose the picaresque form because it so easily allowed him to do so?

One might point out that the Latin *satura* was ostensibly a medley or ragout. Although carefully planned to attack some one vice, it was often on the surface a rambling assembly of vicious types. Thus essentially it had something of the same loose structure as picaresque fiction. As Smollett must have seen, there was no reason why the two could not be effectively combined. The well-known brutality and tastelessness, so Ronald Paulson argues, 'the cracked skulls, the excremental, and the gratuitously cruel', in Smollett's novels may thus be explained as the natural result of just such a fusion.

Moreover, the vulgarity and harshness, according to this interpretation, may also be traced to Smollett's literary ancestors. Satire, as understood in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, involved punishment. 'I'll send abroad a satire with a scourge', George Wither exclaimed. 'Not one shall 'scape him that deserves the lash.' The traditional satirist was always full of rage, continually talking of whipping his enemies, achieving revenge by metaphorically beating and purging evil-doers. Could Smollett's heroes, then, be essentially fictional representations of the satiric persona, with the physical punishment of sinners as their principal function? The vicious practical jokes, the chastisement inflicted by Peregrine on those he dislikes, are part of his literary heritage. Much that has disturbed later readers could thus be explained by an analysis of Smollett's satiric intention.

It is well to remember, too, that Smollett's indecent humour is that of an extrovert—never erotic or sniggering. He is scarcely ever pornographic or sensual. Many of his violations of good taste, like those of Swift, have to do with the waste products of the body, with human needs which are in themselves not considered shameful. Like Rabelais, he merely finds comedy in places where society prefers to draw the curtain.

According to this kind of analysis, *Peregrine Pickle* has a serious purpose. Moreover, so Rufus Putney shows, it follows a clear-cut plan. What Smollett intended was to satirize a major element of eighteenth-century life—high society. In *Roderick Random* he had given a realistic picture of poverty and ordinary existence. In his second novel he meant to show the shams and false pretensions of the aristocratic and wealthy. He stressed the hollowness of titles, the triviality, the affectation and meanness of the upper classes. To bind all this together according to his general theory, he must have a central character, who would for a time be an active participant in the *beau monde*. Peregrine is designed specifically for this

purpose. He is given most of the vices being satirized, but at the same time it is always clear that he is naturally generous and good-hearted. If he is often capricious, cruel, proud, and dissolute, he is also basically benevolent and well-meaning. Within him there is a constant warfare of conflicting passions. He reacts to powerful inner drives, at first to passion, pride, and self-love, and only gradually to reason and benevolence.

The plot, says Putney—and he rightly insists that there is a well-designed plot—is essentially one of conflict and final reformation. Not only is there the ancient traditional device of a spectacular rise and fall, having the usual ending with reversed fortune, but there is a carefully worked out progression of events. The episodes are not thrown together in a loose fashion just as they came into the author's mind. There are gradations, slow changes of value, differences of point of view. Peregrine's faults progress gradually from mere high spirits, to venial crimes, and only at last to viciousness and debauchery. His disintegration of character does not come all at once. Each section of the novel has a specific satiric purpose, and the action serves to reinforce one basic moral lesson.

Given an excellent upper-class education and all the money he needs, Peregrine is enabled to move easily in fashionable life in London, Bath, and the Continent. His natural uncontrolled pride and his strong passions lead him into one rash act after another. For a time he is successful, triumphant over all his rivals, but the false values of the aristocracy eventually force him into one unforgivable act. From then on everything goes wrong. Although for a time he still seems to be on the heights, soon one disaster after another plunges him into the depths. Everything appears to be lost.[1] It is at this point, when his disillusionment and bitterness have taken over completely, when he has apparently lost any desire to live, that he is saved by the loyalty of Pipes, Hatchway, and his other devoted companions. Although the fashionable world may be corrupt, there is still love and affection among true friends. Thus Peregrine is taught by adversity and is forgiven. Then like Tom Jones, having achieved some wisdom, he receives his reward.

These critics thus assume a purpose which is based on a pessimistic view of mankind. But not all of *Peregrine Pickle* is satiric. In places, for the most part in the love scenes, Smollett appears almost to adopt the popular contemporary cult of sensibility. In others he resorts to pure melodrama. Of course, melodrama has often been successfully joined with satire. There is the same

contrast of opposing forces: bad men are shown triumphing over good. But there is a basic difference. Unlike satire, where the fictional assumption is that folly and vice are triumphant, melodrama makes clear that the villains are ultimately punished and there is restitution to those who have suffered; and this violent turn of fortune can only be secured through powerful wrenching of probability and distortion of character. Nevertheless, melodrama can arouse a powerful response in the ordinary reader, who, almost against his will, becomes emotionally involved in what appears to be an ill-balanced struggle. With each succeeding atrocity, his sympathy for the victims increases, and his indignation builds up to such a point that he is ready to accept almost any favourable resolution.

Is *Peregrine Pickle*, then, fundamentally a melodrama? The well-meaning characters do eventually triumph. The evil conspirators are punished or displaced. All ends happily. It is true, also, that the book includes a large number of 'good' characters—Trunnion, Hatchway, Pipes, and the heroine Emilia. There is no doubt that melodrama does play a significant part in the structure of the novel. But is it the dominant factor?

It is well to remember that formal satire also contains some elements of praise, designed as contrast to the harsh attack. Pope had his share of benevolent characters in the *Moral Essays*, though they tend to be forgotten in our shocked fascination with Sporus and Atossa. Perhaps the crucial point is the overall impression left on the reader. In *Peregrine Pickle*, is it optimistic? Is there any convincing suggestion that the bulk of mankind is really virtuous and that right will always prevail? Generations of readers have not found it so. Many, even, have thought Smollett's view of mankind almost as disillusioned as that of Swift. His virtuous characters, it has been argued, are meant to be exceptions. They are a few admirable 'sports' in a degraded world.

To sum up: Is the basic pattern of *Peregrine Pickle* satire, realism, or melodrama? Or a combination of all three? The most sensible answer is to say that Smollett was not a careful rhetorician, working within well-defined limits. A gifted story-teller, he took what he wanted from many diverse techniques, not always caring whether they were completely fused. What gives Smollett his own particular flavour is the mingling in his novels of so many diverse traditions—the picaresque, classical formal satire, comedy, melodrama, the new sensibility, and at times stark realism. Yet his fertility is so great, his vigour of presentation so appealing, that

the reader simply does not care. The story drags him headlong through every slough and side road.

How, then, explain the inclusion of Lady Vane's memoirs and the account of the Annesley case? Neither is essential to the story of Peregrine and his progress. Why should Smollett break his narrative twice with interpolations of this sort? At the time there were rumours that he was well paid by Lady Vane for publicizing her story. Yet there is no conclusive evidence that Smollett ever received anything from the Lady of Quality. Indeed, it is more likely that he had somehow met her and been impressed by her story. To him she may have symbolized the rebel condemned by society. Her very frankness in admitting her many affairs, and her insistence that it was love which had been her undoing, evidently made an immediate appeal. From his point of view her error had not been criminal sensuality, but rather a daring nonconformity which flouted the rules of society. Certainly Smollett's attitude throughout is that of respectful admiration.

Who wrote the memoirs? No one seems to know. Did Smollett write them down from Lady Vane's dictation? Or were they the lady's own composition, corrected, possibly, by someone else? From stylistic evidence alone it seems likely that, whatever the source, the final version was done by the same hand that shaped the rest of the novel.

There remains the question of why Smollett should have inserted a memoir of this sort, extending to some 50,000 words, in the middle of his novel. To delay the unfolding of the plot for so long a time has seemed to most critics a mistake. There was ample precedent to support him. The long autobiographical digression was a recognized part of the classical epic formula. Smollett's innovation was merely to bring in the true story of a real lady of fashion.

His rival Fielding had successfully followed the same older tradition, with the history of Leonora in *Joseph Andrews* and the episode of the Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones*. Modern commentators make the point that Fielding used the interpolated story of the Man of the Hill in a very special way. In this disillusioned account we are shown the evil world of London in microcosm. This is a warning of what may happen to Tom should he fail to allow reason and benevolence to curb his passions. Similarly, if Smollett's chief purpose in *Peregrine Pickle* is to expose the vices and depravity of aristocratic society, then the inclusion of an actual case history may be allowed. But his attitude towards Lady Vane is ambivalent.

Although a rebel, she is also an integral part of the society which he deplores. He admires her too much to allow her story to become a bitter epitome of the hypocrisies of high society. His rage and disgust are held in restraint, so that for many later readers the mood of the memoirs does not seem to fit effectively into the serious framework of the novel. On the other hand, the story of MacKercher and the Annesley case, which represented just the kind of injustice which would have aroused Smollett's intense partisanship, does appear to have a functional value. Here, Smollett believed, was an actual instance where blatant injustice had triumphed, where truth had been overridden by the power of entrenched position. Coming as it does at the place in the narrative where Peregrine has reached his low point, disillusioned and in prison, the digression helps to emphasize the hopelessness of his position. Right does not always triumph. The fact that Peregrine is himself speedily rescued from despair merely means that his is a special case.

The problems of structure have their fascination, but for most of us the chief pleasure in reading *Peregrine Pickle* comes from its wealth of colourful characters. As a creator of vivid eccentric types Smollett is unsurpassed. Although his heroes are often mere bundles of obvious antagonisms—on the one hand energetic and uninhibited, sexually loose, and quick to seek revenge; and on the other hand lonely, alienated outcasts, with instinctive benevolent feelings—and his heroines largely stereotypes, some of his minor characters have the stamp of genius. The nautical trio of Commodore Trunnion, Hatchway, and Pipes, the malcontent Cadwallader Crabtree, and a host of lesser worthies, once met will never be forgotten. That they have at times the sharpness of caricature must at once be admitted. And that they owe much to their literary ancestors, that whole troop of gulls and braggarts and sharpers of Elizabethan comedy, is also obvious. Smollett carries on the 'humour' tradition of Ben Jonson, with the same stress on one dominant trait, the same tortured wrenching of personality, the same kind of over-emphasis. Crabtree is a descendant of the ancient family of malcontents and railers, and Trunnion's last moments, which V. S. Pritchett calls one of the great scenes of English literature, may well have been modelled on Falstaff's end.

But to stress literary indebtedness can be as unrewarding as to seek originals for characters in fiction. Of course we have ample evidence that Smollett often had living models. He was quite willing to flay unmercifully well-known contemporaries. It is also true that he may have known about the house built like a ship by

Admiral Daniel Hore, at Hull near Warrington, where the inmates slept in hammocks, and nautical language was invariably used. And he may have known personally Captain John Bover, the supposed original of Jack Hatchway, and Thomas Smale, of Pipes. But these individuals can have provided only incidental hints. Like Dickens with Mr. Micawber, Smollett could compound genuine human traits with powerfully overwrought 'humours' to form memorable characters which both embody and transcend life itself. Distortion is an artistic device which is readily acceptable today. We understand better how over-emphasis and twisting shapes can suggest deeper meanings. Artistic distortion, then, rather than caricature, may be a better term to use for Smollett. What he does with his creations is to suggest the comic vagaries of life—not so subtly as Sterne, but with inexhaustible fertility.

Smollett is at his best in the early portions of the novel, with nautical characters and with broad comical scenes. Witness Commodore Trunnion's tacking against head winds in his slow progress to his wedding. Or his ludicrous battle with an attorney, when he picks up a whole turkey to use as a weapon. It is Smollett's ability to stir up irrepressible laughter that should be stressed. If our response may often be a guffaw rather than a smile, the reason is the farcical nature of much of his comedy. But this, too, has therapeutic value. A London physician of the eighteenth century is reputed to have had a 'pleasant habit of writing on his prescriptions: "*Recipe* every day for a few hours several pages of Peregrine Pickle" ' (Knapp, p. 315).

Nothing has yet been said about Smollett's manner of writing, yet in the long run it is his robust style which carries the reader along. Nevertheless, Albrecht Strauss has shown how difficult it is to isolate the qualities which give it such undeniable vigour. At times Smollett can be pompous and ridden with clichés. He can use trite eighteenth-century diction and hackneyed periphrasis. In his early novels the sentences often run on and on with turgid elaboration, particularly when the subject is romantic love or elevated pathos. These, however, represent only occasional lapses. For the most part his style has the easy rhythm of speech, the colloquial touch of everyday affairs. Once he has the bit firmly in his teeth, with an open road ahead, and a practical joke or a comic scene to describe, Smollett's verve is irresistible. Few writers have had such gusto, such enormous creative energy.

Although the writing is largely free from abstract ideas, this does not mean that Smollett's work lacks serious purpose. He merely