

## THE NARRATOR AND NARRATING STRATEGY IN SMOLLETT'S NOVEL 'THE ADVENTURES OF FERDINAND, COUNT FATHOM'

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### Summary

The aim of this paper is to investigate Smollett's narrative strategy used in his third novel "The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom". Despite the similarity to the previous texts, there is a certain novelty in "Ferdinand Fathom" which is connected with the narrative possibilities Smollett resorts to. Retaining the genre-forming motive of adventures, the special correlation between name and surname, Smollett changes the title of the novel, introduces composite and multi-level literary frame. It is the place where the reincarnation of the biographical author into his intratextual counterpart takes place. Smollett chooses a special narrator who is emotional, moralizing, full of naive pathos. He comments a lot, does not hide in the background, and is somewhat similar to the intellectual authors of Fielding and Sterne. He tells the story of an adventurous hero who is longing for destruction and enrichment. Designed to evaluate the hero's actions, he becomes his memoirist.

**Keywords:** story teller, author, reader, framework components, narrative intonation, chapter headings.

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### 1. Introduction

In each of his novels, Tobias Smollett, lauded for "vivacity and elegance of expression" (R. Anderson), "vivid narrative style", "vivacious prose" (D. Hannay), "indefatigable vivacity" (E. Baker) solves the task of constructing a story based on many artistic objectives. Curiously enough, while his narrative strategy has not been thoroughly investigated, Smollett has not ceased to be praised for the art of fabulation. He is still regarded as the "master of narrative" (D. Hannay) (G. Saintsbury), "prince among story-tellers" (E. Baker), and his works are viewed as the ones that are full of "inexhaustible source of narrative possibilities" (G. Saintsbury). The article is aimed at examining the narrative strategy Smollett uses in "Ferdinand Fathom", mainly through the frame components presented in the novel as well as the narrator himself and his communication with the reader. Such methods of research as biographical, artistic, and comparative are used.

### 2. Composition and reception

"The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom", the third novel by Tobias George Smollett published two years after "Peregrine Pickle" (1751), appeared in print in 1753, during a "period of great tension" to its author (Bouce, 1990: 14). By that time, Smollett had already gained the reputation of an accomplished writer of the highly acclaimed "Roderick Random" and the less successful but hotly debated "Peregrine Pickle". He became famous for his satirical attacks on Chesterfield, Garrick, Queen, Littleton and scandalous "Memoirs of a Lady of

Quality". Smollett's professional activity was also intense. Enlisted in the Royal Navy as surgeon's second mate he took part in the battle of Cartagena (1741), the events he then recounted in his debut novel. Having received the doctorate in medicine (June 1750), Smollett reviewed the famous treatises by W. Smellie (December 1751) and J. Pringle (July 1752), worked on the highly praised (in the "Monthly Review") scientific work "An Essay on the External Use of Water" (March 1752).

Living in Chelsea from June 1750, Smollett combined medical practice with a literary one. He declared himself not only as an active participant in the Paper War, who wrote the pamphlet "Hubbakkuk Hilding" (January 1752) lacerating Henry Fielding, but also as a talented translator of Lesage's "The Devil upon Crutches" (1750), Voltaire's "Micromegas" (1752). Smollett's rendition of "Don Quixote", highly appreciated by readers and critics, was published in 1755 (*Giddings, 1995: 19*).

From now on, Smollett was regarded as a prominent figure in the cultural life of the capital city. Watching his literary success, Londoners did not show indifference to a very unpleasant episode in the life of the novelist: a scandalous trial initiated by Peter Gordon, who refused to pay his debts to Smollett. "Ferdinand Fathom" is believed to have been written precisely in 1752 and published shortly after the end of the trial (*Bouce, 1990: 14*).

Although "Ferdinand Fathom" was conceived to please the readers' tastes, and the writer attentively followed the changes in the world of fiction, feeling himself involved in the creation of a "new type of writing" (Richardson), the contemporaries were very reserved in the praise of Smollett's novel, however their interest in it never faded. The ambiguous review by R. Griffiths, which appeared in the "Monthly Review" in March 1753, became 'a pattern for much subsequent criticism' (*Bouce, 1990: 15*). The novel was in oblivion until George Coleman included it, along with "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle", into the list of successful book titles to the preface of the play "Polly Honeycombe". The readers who were keen on politics and sensational events of the time (the mysterious disappearance of Miss Elizabeth Canning) did not display any interest to "Ferdinand Fathom" either. Recalling the novels that preceded "Ferdinand Fathom", they would chide Smollett, who had lost his "special gift for invention" (Lady Mary Montagu), for the failure. They were displeased by the unexpected choice of the hero, who did not evoke any sympathy (*Giddings, 1995: 119*) and at times seemed repulsive and frightening (W. Scott).

Despite the similarity to the previous texts, there is a certain novelty in "Ferdinand Fathom". Retaining the genre-forming motive of adventures, the special correlation between name and surname, Smollett changes the title of the novel, introducing hero's status, social disguise, so important for the character who is rootless, has lots of disguises but does not have a genuine face.

The attitude to the name is special in "Ferdinand Fathom". The character is born in a carriage crossing the border of Holland and Flanders (Belgium) to a young English woman, "numbered among the baggage of the ... army, which she ... accompanied" (*Smollett, 1990: 46-47*). He is treated kindly by her numerous admirers, sergeants of the British army, each of whom secretly considers himself to be his father. Being granted by a stepfather (a German trooper) by a happy chance, he acquires the sonorous name Ferdinand de Fadom, and uses it successfully (*Smollett, 1990: 50-51*).

### 3. Framework components

The allusion to the play "to be and to seem" is preserved in the dedication, a preliminary statement to the novel by Smollett, who realizes the change in his aesthetics. The in-text

counterpart of the biographical author writes a message to the patron, intrigues the readers with a riddle about the identity of the addressee. Smollett's closest friend and colleague, John Armstrong and even Smollett himself, who is indulged in "self-analysis" (*Spector, 1968: 89*), conducts "a curiously ambivalent dialogic monologue" (*Bouce, 1990: 15*), are named as possible recipients of the dedication addressed "To Doctor" (Latin "doceo"). The reference is understood not in direct, but symbolic meaning ("the one who teaches, explains, notifies"), and is considered as "the mask behind which the author is hiding" (*Galkina, 2011: 79*).

Dedication becomes a valuable document that sets out Smollett's concept of the novel. However, this is not an entirely complete version. In author's introduction to "Roderick Random", Smollett declares the novel's legitimacy as a genre. Separating it from romance, he presents novel as "a modern cultural product of the Enlightenment" (*Smollett, 2012*), and five years later in "Ferdinand Fathom" enlarges and clarifies his own understanding of the genre, giving a clear definition of the kind of the narrative form that he has always strived for (*Smollett, 2014: xxvii*).

Responsible for the construction of the artistic world, the author creates a multi-level frame of the novel. To the second volume of "Ferdinand Fathom" he prefaces the epigraph from Juvenal (Satire 10), preferring angry, accusatory poetry, in contrast to the soft Horatian lines in "Roderick Random", "Peregrine Pickle", and "Humphrey Clinker".

Through the framework components, the author demonstrates his position, talks about a change in aesthetic preferences to readers, who, however, expect "familiar" texts full of comic and moral descriptions. Later, critics who overestimate the novel will notice a turn from verisimilitude evident in "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle" to allegory and grotesque, convention and tendentiousness. Smollett reacts to the cultural phenomena of his time. Declaring the practice of writing flattering dedications as unnecessary and unjustified (*Richetti, 1999: 159*), he refers to the topic of patronage, played out in the plot, in the situation where patron Count Melville, and his son Renaldo do not stay indifferent to the fate of the orphaned Ferdinand Fathom. The rootless character finds support and protection from a generous, complacent Colonel and his family. However, such kind attitude harms both the count and his relatives, they are being cheated by Ferdinand. Humiliated and unsatisfied with "a middle place between the rank of a relation, and favored domestic", Fathom takes revenge for the good by responding with the evil (*Smollett, 1990: 59*). The topic of patronage, declared in the novel, becomes not only formal, but also serves as criticism, denunciation of sentimentalism. Smollett creates a text that ridicules naive sensibility, which is helpless and unprotected against the evil. He deliberately replaces a sensitive person with a villain as a warning to 'the inexperienced and unwary' (*Smollett, 1990: 44*).

#### 4. Narrator, strategy of narrating the story

Smollett chooses a special narrator who is emotional, moralizing, full of naive pathos and is regarded as the forerunner of Matthew Bramble. He is energetic, endowed with character, talkative, he comments a lot, does not hide in the background like his predecessor (in "Peregrine Pickle"), and is somewhat similar to the intellectual authors of Fielding and Sterne. And although there are no chapters which he devotes to himself, it is obvious that a "personally unmarked" storyteller is included in the process of novel writing and is more active. He does not often distinguish himself from the audience, prefers to emphasize the contact with the reader, using the pronoun "We". The author-narrator does not accept vice, being on the side of the good he is helpless before the evil and is therefore comical. He tells the story of an adventurous hero who is longing for destruction and enrichment. Designed to evaluate the

hero's actions, he becomes his memoirist, anatomizes the circumstances of the character's birth, a cruel reality that Fathom is destined to face from infancy.

Performing in the role of an accuser, the narrator appeals to the audience, he extensively comprehends the character, closely follows the hero, and is indignant about the negative acts he angrily comments about ("consummate politician"; "our crafty adventurer"; "our lover"; "this accurate observer"; "our projector") (*Smollett, 1990: 73, 83, 99, 208, 214*). Wishing to protect and warn those who are easily taken in ("such monsters ought to be exhibited to the public view"), the narrator turns to the interlocutors as he is looking for like-minded people, trying to expand the circle of readers, realizing how they differ in temperament ("my delicate readers", "any reader of sensibility", "unconcerned reader"), education, erudition ("refined reader", "courteous reader") (*Smollett, 1990: 48, 45, 250, 267, 309*). Narrating about Ferdinand Fathom, he actively communicates with the readers, referring to them dozens of times (20 in the first volume, 16 in the second), preferring to call himself "We" (28 times), sometimes "I" (6 times). By introducing high rhetoric of appeal ("believe it, O reader!") he encourages to believe, imagine ("... the reader will easily conceive the transports of that lady, when she read ..."; "The reader must appeal to his own heart, to acquire a just idea of Renaldo's feelings") and guess what is happening (*Smollett, 1990: 399, 115, 294*).

Highly educated, having encyclopedic knowledge, the narrator is familiarized with the histories of European states, he widely quotes ancient poets, satirists, writers (Petronius, Ovid, Lucian, Catullus, Juvenal), continental authors (Cervantes, Lesage), mentions his senior contemporaries (Swift, Shaftesbury) (*Bouce, 1990: 480*), includes into the novel the texts of famous national authorities, such as Samuel Butler (chapter 39), Joseph Addison (chapter 31), John Armstrong (chapter 20), William Congreve (chapter 63), Thomas Gray (chapter 17), Robert Dodsley (chapter 50), and most of all William Shakespeare. He often likens Ferdinand Fathom to literary characters such as Iago, Richard III, Maxwell, Don Juan, bonds the hero with famous historical figures (Prince Eugene of Savoy, Duke of Marlborough, Julius Caesar, Scipio Africanus the Younger).

Having called himself the memoirist of the hero, the narrator chooses a special strategy of telling the story. He does not describe everything (especially when it comes to the feelings of the characters) ("His feelings are not to be described ..."; "Here let me draw the decent veil, that ought to shade the sacred mysteries of Hymen ..."), intrigues the reader, often withholds information (about the history of the Castilian, Don Diego) ("He ... communicated some circumstances, which shall appear in due season"), resorts to flashbacks explaining the current situation (especially in the final chapters 57-67) ("He then proceeded to unfold his misfortunes as they have already been explained in the first volume of these memoirs ..."; "He then proceeded to inform him of all the particulars which we have already recorded ..."; "... we have already described ..."; "As we have already dwelt circumstantially on the passion of love ...") (*Smollett, 1990: 408, 429, 404, 385, 391, 420, 433, 442*). Most of all, the narrator of "Ferdinand Fathom" tends to assessments of the hero's behavior as well as lengthy discussions on the role of morality in society. He not only tells the reader about the life of the hero, but also captures the manners of the epoch, which are often disappointing ("The gradations towards vice are almost imperceptible, and an experienced seducer can strew them with such enticing and agreeable flowers, as will lead the young sinner on insensibly, even to the most profligate stages of guilt"; "... the seeds of virtue are seldom destroyed at once") (*Smollett, 1990: 219, 60, 63, 202*). A lot of lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, merchants, and politicians violate the rules of morality.

Acting as the organizer of the artistic world, the narrator registers the time of the story (in the mean time, meanwhile, while, in short, after all), explains to the reader the switch from

one storyline to another (“We shall therefore, leave her in this comfortable situation, and return to our adventurer”; “But, let us return from this comparison ...”, “... but to resume the thread of our story ...”), introduces conjunctive remarks into the narrative (certain it is, nay, over and above, in all probability, in a word) (*Smollett, 1990: 221, 140, 76, 47, 55, 64, 159, 83*). Unlike “Launcelot Greaves”, where it was important for the narrator to highlight the beginning and the ending of a chapter due to the novel’s serial publication, in “Ferdinand Fathom” the narrator sets the goal to capture the reader’s attention, explain and connect events. He is more interested in elaborating the beginning than the ending of the novel’s chapter.

From time to time the composition of the narrative becomes more sophisticated as the story of Ferdinand Fathom is being interrupted. The reader is obliged to listen to the insert-stories of introductory characters, who share their experiences. The interpolated narratives (12 in total) belong both to the heroes (the story of a noble Castilian, Minikin’s stories about the fate of prisoners, Ratchkali’s, Major Ferrell’s, the story of Valentine and Charlotte), and to the author himself (the story of Elinor, Celinda’s seduction). On one hand, they serve as occasional pauses in the story of a cosmopolitan protagonist, who is constantly changing his spatial coordinates, on the other hand, they provide the formation of a multilayered textual structure of the novel.

### 5. Internal chapter headings

The text of “Ferdinand Fathom” is voluminous. One of the forms of linking episodes, which are joined according to the principle of chance, is internal table of contents. The narrator distributes the material, assigns it to different chapters, which he connects by the “arch of headings”, thus creating a guide to the novel. Smollett retains his usual headlining practice. The titles in “Ferdinand Fathom”, like those in “Roderick Random” and “Peregrine Pickle”, highlight significant moments in protagonist’s life.

Sometimes the position of the narrator becomes an important feature of the headlines, in which he mentions readers (8 – Their first attempt; with a digression which some Readers may think impertinent), reminds of conventions of the world, with the patterns of beginning, movement, and result (64 – The history draws near a period, 65 – The longest and the last), designates the genre (61, 65 – ‘these memoirs’), calls the story about the hero an ‘important story’ (1 – Some sage observations that naturally introduce our important history).

However, the difference in chapter titles is quite noticeable in “Ferdinand Fathom”. They are short to balance and make up for the talkativeness of the narrator. Chatting in the text of the novel, tending to speak in long phrases, creating “unhurried narrative intonation” (*Pakhsaryan, 2006*), the author prefers lapidary, descriptive, quotation subheadings, nominative subtitles (2 – A superficial view of our hero’s infancy, 5 – A brief detail of his education, 28 – Some account of his fellow-travelers, 37 – Fresh cause for exerting his equanimity and fortitude). They are not so much a “summary”, a contracted text listing events, types of human behavior and geographical locations (as in “Roderick Random”, “Peregrine Pickle”). They turn out to be the headlines that reveal the key turns of the protagonist’s life, fixing his experience as an adventurer (7 – Engages in partnership with a female associate, in order to put his talents in action, 11 – Fathom makes various efforts in the world of gallantry, 13 – He is exposed to a most perilous incident in the course of his intrigue with the daughter), the anatomy of his pranks and the psychology of his character (27 – A flagrant instance of Fathom’s virtue, in the manner of his retreat to England, 48 – Count Fathom unmasks his battery; is repulsed; and varies his operations without effect).

## 6. Conclusions

Being always on the move with narrative experiments, Smollett resorts to new, unexpected version of the narrative organization. The reincarnation of the biographical author into his intratextual counterpart, who is responsible for the construction of the artistic world inhabited by the heroes, takes place in the space of the literary frame. Composite and multi-level, it includes the title of the novel, the chapters headings, the initial and final fragments of the text and the “territory” of communication with the reader. Uniting the work, manifesting himself in the frame of the text the narrator of “Ferdinand Fathom” is thus presented as a personally marked, emotional figure who becomes the memoirist of a ruthless hero.

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