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'The pamphlet on the table': The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves

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11

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‘The pamphlet on the table’: *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*

Abstract

This essay explores how a work of fiction appeared in a magazine and how the work of a magazine appeared in a fiction. The fiction is *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760–1) by the eighteenth-century Scottish writer, Tobias Smollett. The magazine is one of his periodical projects, *The British Magazine*, which ran for eight years from 1760. In part, then, the essay is interested in foregrounding and backgrounding these two contexts: it is interested in how fiction was created in the expanding print culture of the mid eighteenth century; it also suggests how that same print culture was supported by a fiction.

The essay is intended to complement approaches to Smollett which see him working for the most part as a novelist. In the eighteenth century, Smollett was best known as a historian, critic and translator; he worked tirelessly on vast publishing projects, often issued in instalments. The essay first establishes this context – the culture of periodical writing that marked the Enlightenment period – and then provides a short

reading of *Launcelot Greaves* as part of it. Informing this reading is Smollett's interest in Miguel de Cervantes's great work *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615); this might be thought of as providing another context for understanding the ambitions of Smollett's writing. The essay therefore raises questions about the kind of work in which Smollett was engaged – and perhaps the kind of stories we tell ourselves about what writing is and what it does.

*

Over a period of two years, from around January 1760 to December 1761, the Scottish writer Tobias Smollett (1721–71) could be found working on a prose narrative: *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*. Despite this extended time frame (and the short length of the completed text), it has often been seen as one of his most careless and rushed works. Walter Scott, for example, later described Smollett as residing in the Scottish borders and writing piecemeal: 'when post-time drew near, he used to retire for half an hour, to prepare the necessary quantity of copy, as it is technically called in the printing-house, which he never gave himself the trouble to correct, or even read over'. Scott's erroneous account, which has been seen as damaging the reputation of Smollett's work, has nevertheless inspired many attempts to reclaim the latter as a 'significant achievement' – in other words, to present it as deserving of a place in the history of the novel. In such a history, Smollett is perhaps best known for *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (his first novel, published in 1748) and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (his last novel, published in 1771). Placing *Launcelot Greaves* in this context, however – or, indeed, trying to fit Smollett's other writing into it – does not really help us to understand

Smollett's significant achievements. Instead, in this essay, I want to consider Smollett's writing as part of a different history, one that can be glimpsed in Scott's anecdote about the 'post-time' and the 'printing-house'. This is the history of 'communication at a distance': the proliferation of print and other forms of mediation in the mid eighteenth century that gave rise to the event we know as the Enlightenment. In this history, *Launcelot Greaves* is not so much a novel as an example of periodical writing. I want therefore to explore its relationship to the *British Magazine* – the periodical, owned by Smollett, in which the narrative was first published in instalments. In exploring this relationship, my interest is not just in the way *Launcelot Greaves* appears in the periodical, but also in the way the periodical appears in *Launcelot Greaves* – or, to put this slightly differently, how the narrative opens up a space for the *British Magazine* itself.

An article in *The Public Ledger*, published about a month after the first number of the *British Magazine*, suggests some of the ways that *Launcelot Greaves* was (literally and metaphorically) bound up with the writing of a periodical. The article purports to be a letter describing 'a WOWWOW in the country' (a 'Wowwow', we are told, is 'a confused heap of people of all denominations, assembled at a public house to read the newspapers'). After some discussion of events relating to the 'present war', the author of the letter describes how 'we should certainly have had a war at the *Wow-wow*, had not an Oxford scholar, led there by curiosity, pulled a new magazine from his pocket':

He then read the adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves to the entire satisfaction of the audience, which being finished, he threw the pamphlet on the table: that piece,

gentlemen, says he, is written in the very spirit and manner of Cervantes, there is great knowledge of human nature, and evident marks of the master in almost every sentence; and from the plan, the humour, and the execution, I can venture to say that it dropt from the pen of ingenious Dr. —. Every one was pleased with the performance, and I was particularly gratified in hearing all the sensible part of the company give orders for the British magazine.

The article is designed to promote the publication of Smollett's new magazine; however, it is notable that it does so by drawing attention to 'the adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves'. Curiously, the situation that is described here (a gathering at a public house) resembles the scene which opens the first few instalments of *Launcelot Greaves*: characters gather for conversation in a 'little public house on the side of the highway'. It is as if the narrative of *Launcelot Greaves* provides a setting for things that are otherwise outside it: 'the pamphlet on the table', for example, is the *British Magazine* (containing the narrative of *Launcelot Greaves*) but it is also part of the fiction of the 'Wowwow', a fiction into which the character of Launcelot Greaves might, at any moment, step. For readers of the *Public Ledger*, the *British Magazine* is both inside and outside a fiction. In this respect, the whole work might be said to be written in the 'very spirit and manner of Cervantes', and I shall consider Cervantes's influence on Smollett's writing later in the essay.

A monthly repository

The British Magazine or Monthly Repository for Gentlemen & Ladies began publication

on 1 January 1760. In February, a copy of a royal licence was printed on its cover. Unlike the licences for other magazines (for which the bookseller usually owned copyright), this was designed to protect Smollett's interests as author and editor. Taking its text from Smollett's letter of petition, the licence describes his 'great Labour and Expeuce in writing Original Pieces himself, and engaging learned and ingenious Gentlemen to write other Original Pieces'. Despite the involvement of numerous 'gentlemen', and the reprinting of the work of numerous others, it makes sense to read the *British Magazine* through the royal licence – that is, as an expression of Smollett's own particular kind of creative labour. A few years earlier, in 1756, Smollett had co-founded the *Critical Review*, a review journal which aimed to present the 'Progress or Annals of literature and the liberal arts' through 'a succinct and faithful Detail of all the Performances on the Subjects of Theology, Metaphysics, Physics, Medicine, Mathematics, History, and the Belles Lettres; which shall occasionally appear at Home or Abroad' (as well as accounts of art and architecture). In his proposals for the *British Magazine*, Smollett described the aims of his new 'set of gentlemen' in a similar way:

... they resolve to exert all their faculties, in ransacking the stores of amusement, collecting the flowers of genius, cropping the buds of improvement in learning, arts, and sciences, and uniting pleasure with instruction, so as to exhibit their work a delightful repository for every species of literary entertainment.

Smollett continued to contribute to the *Critical Review* as he worked on the *British Magazine* – and, in fact, many of the 'gentlemen' involved in the project, including the

co-founder of the *Critical Review*, the printer Archibald Hamilton, were the same. To this work of compilation, Smollett also brought an interest in narrative. As he started work on the *British Magazine*, his *A Complete History of England, from the Descent of Julius Caesar, to the Treaty of Aix la Chapelle. Containing the Transactions of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Three Years* (originally published in four quarto volumes in 1757–8) was coming to the end of its highly successful publication in weekly instalments (from March 1758 to April 1760); in May 1760, Smollett was to start the weekly publication of its continuation: *Continuation of the Complete History of England* (1760–5), which eventually brought his historical narrative up to date. On the cover of the first number of the *British Magazine*, Smollett advertised how ‘The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves, and the History of Canada, will be continued through the successive Numbers ... until the Designs of both shall be compleated’. This drew attention to one of the innovations of the *British Magazine* – the publication of an extended work of original prose fiction, published in instalments (following the approach of his popular *Complete History*) – but it also highlighted one of the risks of periodical writing. Although Smollett might have been relatively confident that he would complete the design of *Launcelot Greaves*, his experience of writing ‘continuations’ of the *Complete History of England* would have told him that a history of Canada was never going to end. Smollett’s ‘great labour’ on the *British Magazine* might best be understood as managing this relationship between continuation and completion, between the magazine’s various parts and what it might be seen to offer as a whole.

Smollett began the *British Magazine* with a dedication to William Pitt (1708–78). In 1757, Smollett had started his *Complete History* in the same way, at that time

appealing to what he called Pitt's 'permanent qualities: qualities that exist independent of favour or of faction'. In 1757, Pitt had been on the ascendant, joining forces with the Duke of Newcastle (1693–1768) to lead the country during what became the Seven Years War; by 1760, Pitt was enjoying widespread popularity after a series of military victories. Smollett's dedication, however, tempers lavish praise with some well-timed 'buts': 'We admire that resolution and conduct which you have so conspicuously exerted, amidst the tempests of war and the turmoils of government', he says, 'but we wish to see you adorned with the garlands of peace ...'; 'War, at best, is but a necessary evil', he writes (in a subtle rephrasing of the popular view of the 'just and necessary war' (p. 13), as proclaimed by Launcelot in the February instalment of *Launcelot Greaves*), 'but peace is the gentle calm, in which the virtues of benevolence are happily displayed; in which those arts which polish and benefit mankind will lift their heads, and flourish under your protection'. For Smollett, the *British Magazine* is offered as a way 'to collect and keep alive the scattered seeds of literary improvement; until the genial warmth of your [Pitt's] patronage shall invigorate the bloom, and call them forth to a more perfect vegetation' – or, we might say, until Pitt comes to his senses and brings the continental war to an end. In this respect, the *British Magazine* is presented as a repository for learning in a time of war; it is also an argument for peace. With this in mind, we might revisit the 'Wowwow' described in the *Public Ledger* upon the publication of the *British Magazine*. At the public house, the confused heap of people are themselves on the edge of war; it is the reading of *Launcelot Greaves* that brings 'general satisfaction' to everyone. Notably, the Oxford scholar who throws the pamphlet on the table refers to *Launcelot Greaves* as 'that piece' – a mundane phrase which, in this context, is unusually resonant. *Launcelot*

Greaves is, of course, a piece in the *British Magazine* (one of the ‘Original Pieces’ that the royal licence was designed to protect), but it also invokes a *peace* of a different kind (one that also needs government protection). We might say that the ‘pamphlet on the table’, tossed down with a flourish at the end of a public reading, is itself an offer of such a piece/peace.

By focusing on the wrappers of the magazine, its royal licence, title and dedication, I am considering what Gérard Genette has called the ‘paratext’ – that is, features that enable the *British Magazine* to be received as a magazine (or book) and understood in a certain way. Another example of the paratext is the engraving in the first collected volume of the *British Magazine* which shows ‘Genius . . . pouring down Flowers’ which are collected by ‘Taste’ and made into a garland for ‘Literature’. Appropriately enough, Literature, in the form of a gentleman, is seen sitting in the porch of the Temple of Taste, reading the *British Magazine*. The image of the *British Magazine* as a pamphlet on the table of a public house, during a ‘Wowwow’ is – as I have meant to suggest – a similar allegorical and paratextual image. One question arising from the ‘Wowwow’ is whether the pamphlet on the table is the paratext for *Launcelot Greaves* (as a piece within the *British Magazine*) or whether *Launcelot Greaves* itself forms part of the paratext for the magazine. Certainly, the whole point of the description of the ‘Wowwow’ was to promote the *British Magazine* by way of *Launcelot Greaves*; the physical position of the story (in the first year, usually the leading article of the magazine) can be considered as paratext. Furthermore, as already noted, the (fictional) setting of the ‘Wowwow’ coincides with the opening chapters of *Launcelot Greaves*, in which characters gather to converse and relate stories at a public house. The impression that

Launcelot Greaves creates a setting for reading the *British Magazine* is strengthened by the temporal effects of its publication in instalments. At the end of the first chapter, for example, the conversation in the public house is ‘suspended by a violent knocking at the door’ (p. 9). The reader is told to ‘wait with patience’ for an explanation; meanwhile ‘a personage of great importance’ is ‘forced to remain some time at the door’. In fact, this personage (no less, it turns out, than Launcelot himself) is kept at the door for a whole month – plenty of time, we might say, for those inside to read the rest of the magazine. A similar joke can be found in Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, which was published in long (mostly two-volume) instalments from December 1759 (just before the first issue of the *British Magazine*) to 1767: in this work, Mrs Shandy was to be kept peering through a keyhole for about two years. For Smollett, two years turned out to be about the length of time that he could keep Launcelot engaged in his adventures. The text of his story thus offered the readers of the *British Magazine* an ongoing sense of completion or coherence; as we shall see, it also provided a ground or setting for how its pieces might be read.

The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves

In the second chapter of *Launcelot Greaves* (published in the second number of the *British Magazine*), we are told that the ‘hero of these adventures makes his first appearance on the stage of action’ (p. 9). He does so in two ways: first, he steps through the door of the public house (outside of which he had arrived, as we have noted, a month previously); he also appears in an accompanying engraving – what is usually referred to as the first example of an illustration in a serial work of fiction. Curiously, the two

appearances are somewhat different: in the text, Launcelot is an ‘apparition’ stepping into the public house and addressing himself to the spectators that had gathered there (Fillet, a surgeon; Captain Crowe and his nephew, Tom Clarke, an attorney; Ferret, referred to as a ‘shew-man or a conjurer’ (p. 14); as well as the landlady and Dolly, her daughter); in the illustration, however, Launcelot is a knight on horseback, accompanied by his squire, Timothy Crabshaw. Taken together, this double appearance signals the way in which the story of *Launcelot Greaves* engages with its own telling. Shortly after Launcelot’s appearance, Ferret comments:

What! (said Ferret) you set up for a modern Don Quixote? – The scheme is rather too stale and extravagant. – What was an humorous romance, and well-timed satire in Spain, near two hundred years ago, will make but a sorry jest, and appear equally insipid and absurd, when really acted from affectation, at this time a-day, in a country like England. (p. 15)

Ferret might as well be one of the readers of the *British Magazine*, reacting to the presence of the illustration; he establishes a form of metafictional commentary upon the whole work. Launcelot defends himself (and, to some extent, Smollett’s writing of the story) by observing that he has not been ‘visited by that spirit of lunacy so admirably displayed in the fictitious character exhibited by the inimitable Cervantes’ (p. 15). Launcelot’s view is that he is neither fictitious nor mad; nevertheless, he is clearly both. Although some critics have used this scene to suggest that Smollett is not following in Cervantes’s footsteps, J. A. G. Ardila reflects that Launcelot’s ‘words and gestures attest

to his very insanity’ – an insanity Cervantes used to uncover darker social and political realities. Even though Launcelot has not mistaken the ‘public house for a magnificent castle’ (as Don Quixote was known to have done (p. 15)), as the story unfolds – first as an interpolated tale told by Clarke at the public house and then (from the sixth instalment) as a series of adventures along the ‘great northern road’ (p. 3) – the way the events double up as literary imitations and fictional recreations would have become clear. Like Don Quixote, Launcelot takes a squire (the farmer Timothy Crabshaw) and idealises his lost love (Aurelia Darnel); in an inspired moment on horseback, he also begins ‘to think himself some hero of romance’ (p. 119). Launcelot later gives up the role of ‘knight-errant’ for that of a ‘plain English gentleman’ (p. 150) but he continues to find himself in a series of quixotic adventures with an ambiguous relationship to reality – that is, to the people and events in a world outside (his) fiction.

For the reader of the *British Magazine*, the story of *Launcelot Greaves* presents an image of their relationship to the text (especially if they happen to be taking part in a ‘Wowwow’). Launcelot and Ferret comment on the kind of story they are part of; Clarke’s tale is interrupted and we might say ‘reviewed’ (‘Ferret interrupted the narrator by observing that the said Greaves was common nuisance’ (p. 41)). Smollett’s own intertitles, prefacing each instalment of the narrative, similarly offer editorial comment (the third chapter is seemingly one ‘*Which the reader, on perusal, may wish were chapter the last*’ (p. 20)). Smollett creates a similar metafictional situation later in the story when, after Launcelot is imprisoned in a madhouse, Crowe and Clarke attempt to locate him by placing an advertisement ‘in the daily papers’ (p. 183). The text of the advertisement, like the text of Aurelia’s reprinted letters (pp. 108, 124) – or even the way that Ferret seems to

be quoting from *Yorick's Meditations upon Various ... Subjects* (1760) a couple of months after it was reviewed in the *Critical Review* – remind the reader that they are also inside an issue of a miscellaneous magazine. The discourses at work in the text – for example, the predominance of legal and medical language – might be recognised as examples of the editing and reprinting of other texts (such as Giles Jacob's *A New Law-Dictionary* (1729) and William Battie's *Treatise on Madness* (1758)) as well as having a connection to voices and articles in the wider magazine (as an example, we might consider how the third chapter of *Launcelot Greaves* is followed by a letter from a reader about 'leasehold tenures'). In a similar way, the two illustrations that accompanied the publication of the story (the second showing Launcelot's presence at a county election in Chapter 9) not only disclose the pictorial qualities of Smollett's writing – the reader is presented with a textual version of William Hogarth's *Four Prints of an Election* (1755–8) – but also suggest the wider practice of illustration at work in the magazine. The engraver of the illustrations for *Launcelot Greaves*, Anthony Walker, also provided an illustration of 'a People of America called the Natches' for the March 1760 issue; other articles were frequently illustrated.

This brief account of *Launcelot Greaves* is intended to suggest that it is as much made up of pieces (as much a 'repository for every species of literary entertainment') as the magazine that surrounds it. The collection of voices in the narrative reaches its noisiest in the madhouse. On his first night here, Launcelot's 'ears were all at once saluted with a noise from the next room', beginning 'Bring up the artillery – let Brutendorf's brigade advance' (p. 175). A second voice soon joins in: 'Assuredly, (cried another from a different quarter) he that thinks to be saved by works is in a state of utter

reprobation' (p. 176). We are then told:

This dialogue operated like a train upon many other inhabitants of the place: one swore he was within three vibrations of finding the longitude, when this noise confounded his calculation: a second, in broken English, complained he was distorted in the moment of de proshection – a third, in the character of his holiness, denounced interdiction, excommunication, and anathemas; [...] A fourth began to hollow in all the vociferation of a fox-hunter in the chase; and in an instant the whole house was in an uproar — (p. 176)

The uproar of the madhouse is an extreme version of other uproars within the text.

Examples of this include the mixing of discourses (to those already mentioned, we might add Crowe's seafaring words) and the county election, which begins with Launcelot being similarly 'disturbed by such a variety of noises, as might have discomposed the brain of the firmest texture' (p. 67); we might also note the general 'agreeable medley of mirth and sadness, sense and absurdity' which Smollett hopes, in an editorial intertitle, readers will enjoy (p. 121). In the madhouse, order is achieved by 'the sound of one cabalistical word, which was no other than *waistcoat*' (p. 176). In the magazine, Smollett is similarly tasked with keeping the piece/peace. To this end, Smollett interrupts his story ('that the reader may have time to breathe and digest what he has already heard' (p. 41)) and notifies 'those who have favoured us with their Correspondence' that he is in the process of selecting and arranging their 'original Pieces'. He might also be said to make use of a 'cabalistical' word. In the issue for April 1760, readers were presented with a rebus, the

answer to which (provided in the next issue) was a fragmentary composition of Launcelot's name:

Our Knights were accustom'd to combat with *Lance*,
But what *Lot* they might share, was still subject to chance:
The Coachman does *Ge* to his horses exclaim,
And *R*, from its jar, we the dog-letter name.
You'll find, if you stand there, rain fall from the *Eaves*:
This, all put together, forms *Launcelot Greaves*.

The notion that 'Launcelot Greaves' somehow gives order to discordant elements reflects Smollett's frequently-cited theorising about the novel form. In his dedication to *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, Smollett describes a novel as a 'large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groupes' in which a principal personage serves to 'attract the attention' and 'unite the incidents'. In the diffused picture of *Launcelot Greaves*, or even amongst the 'confused heap of readers' at the 'Wowwow', which it incorporates, the figure of the knight emerges when it is 'all put together'; similarly, in the repository of the magazine, the narrative itself provides its own cabalistical utterance, quietening the unruly voices. After all, Smollett eventually manages to bring two years of instalments to end in harmony – the noise (which, pointedly, Aurelia is 'uninfected by the rage for' (p. 193)) resolves into a 'rustic epithalamium' (p. 197) – even if it might have required some brusque editorial interventions along the way (such as when Smollett decides to tell the reader that Miss

Meadows is Aurelia all along (pp. 108–9)).

A principal personage

In the second part of Cervantes's *El Ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la mancha* (published in 1615, ten years after the first), Don Quixote visits a print shop and comes across a book containing the story of his adventures. This moment has fascinated many readers, including Jorge Luis Borges who saw it as joining 'the world of the reader and the world of the book'. Borges locates his fascination and unease in the implication that 'if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious'. Although Launcelot does not (quite) come across the book in which his story has been written, he is nevertheless led to reflect on some of his own fictional qualities. We might say, following Borges, that if Launcelot can be part of the world of the reader, then we, as one of his readers, can be just as fictitious. We see this idea at work in accounts of Smollett's involvement in periodical writing. In *The Battle of the Reviews*, a satirical pamphlet published in 1760, describing a war between the critics at the *Monthly Review* and *Critical Review*, Smollett is cast in the role of 'Sawney Mac Smallhead'. At the end of one of the battles, he is captured – an event which results in the setting up of the *British Magazine*:

Sawney ever since has left off the Trade of Reviewing, thinking, Cobler like, he should make both Ends meet better by laying up all the loose Hints that occur to him in a Sort of Repository, which he is now compiling and digesting in Conjunction with his old Crony *Timothy Crabshaw*.

For the writer of *The Battle of the Reviews*, Smollett is a kind of Launcelot Greaves (alongside the printer Archibald Hamilton as Timothy Crabshaw); the disputes between the two review periodicals, and, indeed, the cobbling together of articles in the *British Magazine*, are part of his quixotic adventures. The pamphlet thus uncovers more unrest behind the publication of *Launcelot Greaves* – but it also discloses a story which can make sense of it. In this respect, Smollett can be seen as the principal personage of a fiction which holds a ‘large diffused picture’ together.

Smollett might well have regarded himself as such a Cervantean figure. At the end of November 1760, in an event that almost seems to have been predicted by *The Battle of the Reviews*, Smollett was imprisoned in the King’s Bench Prison for libel. Smollett is likely to have written parts of *Launcelot Greaves* and conducted work on the *British Magazine* during his three months of imprisonment – certainly, the account of the King’s Bench in Chapters 20 and 21 of *Launcelot Greaves* (published in July and August 1761) is influenced by his experience. In prison, Smollett could not have avoided the idea that he was following in Cervantes’s footsteps. He had already spent many years working on a translation of *Don Quixote* (published in 1755); notably, Smollett had inserted a footnote to comment on the ‘strong presumption, that the first part of Don Quixote was actually written in a jail’. Some of the wider practices of the *British Magazine* – such as the mixing of fiction and topical issues, as well as its grand aims and royal licence – might be seen as Smollett’s ongoing response to Cervantes’s writing. The author of the account of the ‘Wowwow’ saw Smollett’s writing in this way. Similarly, a couple of years earlier, in another pamphlet, commenting on the beginnings of the *Critical Review*, the physician

and political writer John Shebbeare (1709–88) addressed Smollett as follows:

Then, like a true Champion, the Knight of *La Mancha*, you arrive to rescue the Charms of Literature from the avaritious Hands of the hireling Necromancers in the *Monthly Review*. What an Advantage it is in a Critic to have transcribed Don *Quixote*, tho' it may prove a great *Loss* to the Bookseller who *hired* him.

In *The Battle of the Reviews*, Shebbeare is credited with the capture of Sawney Mac Smallhead. He is also present in *Launcelot Greaves* in the shape of Ferret (whose character is developed in Chapter 10). Notably, Shebbeare's comparison of Smollett with the 'Knight of *La Mancha*' resembles Ferret's initial outburst upon meeting Launcelot at the public house ('What! [...] you set up for a modern Don Quixote?'). This perhaps hints at the way that Smollett is able to come face to face with his own fictionality: as the 'principal personage', emerging out of the voices of the *British Magazine*, Smollett might be said, like Launcelot, to have donned his armour ('greaves' is a term for a piece of armour (p. 129)) and ridden out 'in preservation of the peace' (p. 16).

Conclusion

In *Launcelot Greaves*, Smollett tried something new. Interestingly, the *Journal Encyclopedique*, which summarised and translated parts of *Launcelot Greaves* for its readers in France, perceived the need to explain its method: 'Cet ouvrage n'est point achevé', it observed, 'chaque mois, les Auteurs du *Magasin Britannique* en donnent un chapitre' ['This work is not complete: each month, the authors of the *British Magazine*

provide one chapter’]. Although some magazines began to experiment with serialising original works of fiction, it was not until the nineteenth century that the practice became established. Describing *Launcelot Greaves* this way, however, risks separating it, as a form, from the writing of the *British Magazine*. When the *Journal encyclopédique* reprinted summaries of its instalments, they disrupted the temporal effects; similarly, when *Launcelot Greaves* was published as two volumes in 1762, its qualities as periodical writing were obscured (and, noticeably, it didn’t sell very well). To read *Launcelot Greaves* as a novel only is to miss the extended noise, ‘Wowwow’ or ‘repository’ of which it was a piece (and in which it aspired to be the peace).

To read *Launcelot Greaves* outside the *British Magazine* is also to miss the *British Magazine* in *Launcelot Greaves* – that is, the way the fiction provided a ground for the work of the magazine. We started by noting Walter Scott’s anecdote, which presented Smollett as hurriedly writing copy before post-time. Scott probably made that story up – but, as we have seen, Smollett would not have had a problem with being fictitious. The journey of his ‘necessary quantity of copy’ out into the world is the very image of the Knight of La Mancha, adventuring along the Great North Road.

11

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‘The pamphlet on the table’: *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*

Critical Reflections and Further Study

What is this essay about? For me, it is partly about the stories we tell ourselves. In researching Smollett's work, I became interested in the way that he was sometimes presented as a Don Quixote figure – and intrigued by the possibility that he might have seen himself that way, given his translation of Cervantes's work and the chivalrous language he used to describe his periodical projects. I was reminded of Jorge Luis Borges's short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*' (see *Further Reading* below) about a writer whose ambition was 'to produce a number of pages which coincided – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes' (p. 37). Might Smollett be best understood as a kind of Pierre Menard? Were there moments in his life of writing when he thought that he had succeeded in coinciding line for line, so to speak, with the work of someone else?

This is an interesting question to ask of Smollett because much of his writing proceeds through quotation. The essay mentions his *Complete History of England*, which, we might say, involved the task of 'coinciding' with other histories by Paul de Rapin (1661–1725) and David Hume (1711–76); his periodical works, including the *British Magazine*, were another kind of 'repository' of quotations, extracts and 'Original pieces'. The works of his that have been called novels might also suggest some of the ways in which Smollett was attempting to reproduce – not copy – other people's words. We might think of his insertion of the 'Memoirs of a Lady of Quality' into *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) or the way *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) is assembled from the words of his characters (in epistolary form) and snippets from his historical research. Smollett's relationship to other texts raises a question about the kind

of writing in which he was engaged – and the kind of stories we tell ourselves about what writing is and what it does. (Smollett’s novels and translations are available in critical editions from Georgia University Press; his historical writing is included in Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Gale); the *British Magazine* is part of the British Periodicals database (ProQuest).)

In this essay, I was less interested in Smollett’s place in a history of the novel than in exploring a broader notion of a history of writing. Behind this idea is the work of Clifford Siskin and William Warner. In *This is Enlightenment* (see essay, note 3), they locate the Enlightenment as an event in a history of mediation: it is conceived as an effect of ‘proliferating mediations’ (p. 11), the interrelated practices of writing, reading and print in the eighteenth century. In this respect, the *British Magazine* provides the very image of the Enlightenment: a repository of mediations which is itself part of the surrounding proliferation. In the essay, I wanted to explore how *Launcelot Greaves* might be read as part of this context; however, I also became interested in how the narrative discloses a myth that seems to support it. Another way of putting this is to say that Cervantes helped to create the idea of a shared enterprise or, in Benedict Anderson’s phrase, an ‘imagined community’ (see *Further Reading*). Yet another way (and one that informs the essay) is to consider *Launcelot Greaves* as the poetic ground for the work of the *British Magazine*. This notion derives from Heidegger’s idea that art opens up (or reveals) the world – a world that can then be examined – but, in the essay, it is explored tangentially through the idea of paratext. Paratextual elements, according to Genette in *Paratexts* (see essay, note 13), surround and extend a text in order ‘to ensure the text’s presence in the world’. They include ‘an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations’ but

also ‘practices and discourses’ beyond the text itself. For this reason, Genette refers to ‘paratexts’, somewhat ambiguously, as ‘thresholds of interpretation’ (pp. 1–2). In a book about contexts, then, it seems relevant to consider what comes into focus when reading *Launcelot Greaves* in the *British Magazine*: the magazine, its parts, a narrative or Smollett himself.

There are other contexts that might be explored further. Charlotte Lennox (1730–1804) established her periodical, *The Lady’s Museum* (1760–1), just as Smollett began to publish the *British Magazine*. Notably, it had been preceded by her novel, *The Female Quixote, or The Adventures of Arabella* (1752) – and the magazine was described as being by ‘the author of the Female Quixote’. Mayo, in *The English Novel in the Magazines* (see essay, note 10), considers the ‘withdrawal’ of Smollett and Lennox from ‘magazine writing’, along with that of Oliver Goldsmith (1728–74), who had attempted his own weekly magazine, *The Bee*, in 1759, as a ‘portentous sign of the fate of miscellanies and miscellany fiction for the next half century’ (p. 274). Even so, there is a question as to how far the work of these writers should be distinguished from the work of the magazines. Finally, the influence of Cervantes might be considered more broadly: a key figure in this regard is Henry Fielding (1707–54), from whom Smollett took some hints about the ‘Art of dividing’. Smollett was clearly interested in the notion that, as Fielding put it in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), ‘those little Spaces between our Chapters may be looked upon as an Inn or Resting-Place, where he [the reader] may stop and take a Glass, or any other Refreshment, as it pleases him’ (see ‘Of divisions in Authors’ in Book 2, Chapter 1); he was probably also influenced by Fielding’s play *Don Quixote in England* (1734).

Further Reading

- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006)
- Borges, Jorge Luis, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (1941), in *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Penguin, 2000), pp. 33–47
- Brack, Jr., O. M. (ed.), *Tobias Smollett, Scotland's first novelist : new essays in memory of Paul-Gabriel Boucé* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007)
- Heidegger, Martin, 'The origin of the work of art' (1971), in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013), pp. 15–86
- Powell, Manushag N., *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2012)
- Wiles, R. M. *Serial Publication in England before 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1957)

Notes