

**First Steps and False Starts: The Child in
Eighteenth-Century Fiction**

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要約

最初の歩み、誤った出発：18世紀小説における子供

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ロマン派よりはるか以前、ルソーよりも前に、子供（時代）に対する関心が、イギリス小説において着実に高まっていた。ロックの教育論やシャフツベリーの人間の生来の善に関する論がこの関心を高めていた。そのうえ、子供の登場人物は大人のふるまいを計りにかけたり、読者の同情をかったりするのに役立っていた。

リチャードソンが思春期の少女の感情を分析するのに余念がなかったことはよく知られているが、小説のなかで、子供のもつ躍動感の魅力を初めて発揮したのも彼であった。フィールディングの子供の描き方の評判は概してよくないが、彼の主要な小説はすべて、親と子供の、なんとかお互いを理解し、うまく関係を取り結び、気遣っていこうという奮闘ぶりを描いている。彼がジョゼフ・アンドルーズと純粋なアダムズ牧師とを——子供と墮落以前のアダムとを結びつけたことは、ヴィクトリア朝にとって重要な遺産となった。

スモレットとスターンの登場で、若い主人公たちの扱いが我々を失望させるようなふたりの小説家に出会うことになる。トリストラム・シャンディーの懐胎、誕生、幼年期をめぐる状況にばかり注意を向けるスターンや、放浪者ピックルの子供時代を丹念に描いてゆくスモレットは、子供の心の動きを深く洞察したり、子供の性格形成過程を描き出すのに失敗している。

逆説的なことだが、若者たちに途方もない肉体的・精神的な抑圧を課した19世紀が、同時に、子供の豊かな内面生活が文学のなかで探求された最初の時代となるのであった。

At the beginning of *The Life of Captain Singleton*, Daniel Defoe gives a marvellously graphic account of child-snatching. The future Captain is abducted early in childhood while his nursemaid is at an inn, dallying with her sweetheart. After that, the lad is passed from hand to hand and parish to parish until, at twelve years old, he is taken to sea as a ship's boy. We can imagine what Dickens would have made of all this. But Defoe's assumption seems to be that, since his hero is still a child, these experiences simply pass over his head. By the time he wrote *Roxana*, however, only a few years later, Defoe had become so much more alert to children's sensibilities that the eponymous heroine is driven into a corner by the determined efforts of her abandoned daughter to trace her. Though this girl is now old enough to be described as a 'wench,' we feel that the voice of the child is beginning to be heard in English fiction. Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding both have more to say about the early years of life than Defoe. In the mainstream novel, however, it wouldn't be until the next century that child characters could really come into their own.

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Richardson, who lost eight children, including all six of his sons, found an outlet in his writings for his parental love, as well as for his more questionable interest in the susceptible young virgin. That parental love encouraged him to see the child in an almost Wordsworthian way, and though his insight into adolescence is much more important in terms of his art, the two may be usefully connected.

In the first place, it's important to realize just how young his heroines are, even if it gives grist to the mill of those who accuse Richardson of being voyeuristic, prurient, psychologically abnormal in some way. At least it exonerates the characters themselves from the charges of duplicity levelled at them from Fielding onwards. His first heroine, Pamela, is "hardly thirteen years old" (2: 102) when Mr B- starts to notice her. At that point she has just left her family and been put into service as his mother's waiting-maid. She is still only fifteen when we are allowed in on her correspondence with her parents. Her creator draws various lessons from the novel for "the minds of YOUTH OF BOTH SEXES" (1: 450)—words strongly echoed by Anne Brontë in her perface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (30) and holds Pamela up to "*children*" as an example of a dutiful daughter (1: 452). Indeed, Richardson makes her so young that he feels the need to explain that she is "above [her] years" in understanding and judgement (1: 5) and is careful to give adequate reasons for her unusually mature abilities—her education by her father and then by her lady. The whole interest of *Pamela* depends on her being this young, yet imbued with pious sentiments; this young, yet attractive enough to appeal to a man of the world. Caught in such complicated cross-fire, what else could she be but bewildered, unable to fathom her growing feelings for her would-be seducer? Critics love to seize on her words after release from her long confinement at B- Hall: "I think I was loth to leave the house. Can you believe it?—What could

be the matter with me, I wonder? I felt something so strange at my heart! I wonder what ailed me!" (1: 217), but these are naive self-questionings, not determined self-delusions. As the portrait of Emily Jervois in *Sir Charles Grandison* also demonstrates, Richardson delights in showing "[y]oung creatures exposing themselves when they are between girls and women" (*Sir Charles Grandison*, 3: 52). Soon after realizing that love "has crept, like a thief" upon her (1: 220), Pamela is a new bride of sixteen or seventeen, trembling with what can only be seen now as "over-nice modesty" (1: 315), and the tension in the book subsides. Finally, the dutiful *child*... spotless *virgin*, and . . . modest and amiable *bride*" (2: v) becomes a self-assured adviser of other young girls, and instructor of her own growing brood. A new generation of children steps in.

Clarissa's few added years and her consciousness of virtue, as well as the pride she takes in it, make Richardson's next heroine more a "Young Lady" than a girl—and that is how she is described in the subtitle. Impossible, for instance, to imagine Pamela speaking her mind about a would-be suitor in his presence, as Clarissa does when her mother and sister try to force Mr Solmes on her. And this episode is recorded in one of the earliest letters. However, the dividing line is by no means distinct. Clarissa describes herself as a child at the beginning, and despite her hard usage is much concerned with her duty as a daughter: "I am convinced that whether the parent do his duty by the child or not, the child cannot be excused from doing hers to him" (1: 280). The Jane Austen of *Persuasion* would have approved. But after all, Clarissa, like Pamela, hardly knows her own deepest feelings, and dies while still in her teens without ever having accommodated herself to the world, the first casualty in the novel of the saintly early death-bed syndrome already rampant in Puritan tracts.

Closer in age to Pamela, and evidently less mature, Emily Jervois is Richardson's best portrait of an adolescent. Like Pamela, she is forced to confront her previously unsuspected emotions, but since she knows that her guardian's heart is elsewhere, she must suffer from this half-acknowledged passion. Just at the stage when Pamela's worst problems are over, hers begin. It's through this struggle to restrain her "infant love" (*Sir Charles Grandison*, 3: 67), without the support which marriage gives Pamela, and without withdrawing from the world like Clarissa, that she grows up. She manages, for instance, to hold back from throwing her arms round Sir Charles, though her emotions are written on her face (3: 127), and later still, tussles hard with her dismay on being informed that his marriage to Harriet Byron will soon take place (6: 23–5). Courageous without knowing it, Emily sets a better precedent than Clarissa for the young characters of the next era. It was natural that the later women novelists, in particular, should have been so drawn to Richardson's work—though we may find it hard to believe today that George Eliot actually wished the seven-volume *Sir Charles Grandison* to be longer than it already is !!

The second part of *Pamela*, with its new set of young folk (Sally Goodwin, Mr B's illegitimate daughter, together with his and Pamela's own brood) and Pamela's eight-letter commentary on Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, shows just how important childhood was to Richardson and his contemporaries.



Pamela tells a nursery tale, by Joseph Highmore (1692–1780), one of 12 illustrations to the novel.

Pamela's "*frequent lyings-in*" (2: 428) are accepted as a matter of course by a virtuous young woman brimming over with maternal affection, and breast-feeding by the mother, not by the usual wet-nurse, is strongly recommended: "where there is good health, free spirits, and plentiful nourishment, I think it an indispensable duty" (2: 228), says Pamela. Note, however, that she is unable to prevail over her jealous husband and the custom of her time in her new social milieu. Trollope would be taking up the same cause exactly a century later: "Ladies Arabella. . . are gifted with the powers of being mothers, but not nursing mothers," he comments drily in *Dr Thorne*. "Nature gives them bosoms for show but not for use" (29). But in all other respects, Pamela is able to demonstrate new ideals of parenthood which seem to go underground in the Victorian age. She absolves little Sally from the guilt of her birth (something Esther Summerson's aunt in *Bleak House* can never do), and loves her for herself; she notes new teeth and other infant milestones with pride; she frets over her eldest son, Billy, when he catches smallpox, and contracts it from him; and she begins educating her children in the nursery, believing with Locke—and later Maria Edgeworth—that the process should start in infancy and focus on the child's moral development.

Some of her differences from Locke, such as her scruples about the use of dice in teaching the alphabet, are trivial; but her genuine delight in her children's liveliness introduces a new note. Thus she concurs with Locke, and foreshadows Blake, in criticizing swaddling practices—she pities the "miserable little pinioned captive" on its

nurse's lap (2: 375)—but goes a good deal further than Locke in insisting that playthings should not be limited. A maid might be worn out by the child's activities, she argues, only because she is "not so much *alive* as the child" (2: 407); as for child, he or she is sure to benefit from such stimulation. Here, and in Pamela's effusions about the five children born to her before the end of the novel, Richardson underlines the appeal of the child's vitality for the first time in the novel. Although only Sally Goodwin and Billy speak, each of these five is named, and hints of their distinct characters are given: "my sparkling-ey'd Pamela. . . , my sweet-natured promising Jemmy" (2: 462), and so forth. We leave their mother "watching the sweet dawns of reason" in them, and "delighting in every bright emanation of that ray of divinity, lent to the human mind, for great and happy purposes, when rightly pointed and directed" (2: 412). The proviso recalls Locke's educational theory of controlled empiricism, and looks forward ominously to the stern moral ethos of the next century; but the overwhelming impression is that this author sees young children not simply as parental charges and responsibilities, but as a source of joy and inspiration.

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Henry Fielding is not usually praised for his depiction of childhood. Yet it was Fielding who established in the novel an ideology of childhood which later writers could build on, as well as the whole paraphernalia of lost identity, missing parents, family estrangements and family reunions which the Victorian novelists, with varying degrees of subtlety, were to latch on to for their plot structures. The discovery of the little foundling Tom Jones, asleep in Squire Allworthy's bed "in all the beauty of innocence" (56), brings us several steps nearer to Rousseau than Pamela's kindness to Sally Goodwin; and Fielding was the first to carry over features of childhood into the characterization of adults—with positive results. "Young readers" are warned in *Tom Jones* that "goodness of heart, and openness of temper" are not enough for them to achieve success in this world (141–42), but Dorothy Van Ghent's words about Tom himself are patently true and have a wide application to Fielding: "in the long run, good nature does infallibly lead to good fortune, bad nature to bad fortune" (79).

By now, the belief of Locke's tutee, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, that men are endowed with a natural impulse for virtue, had gained ground. Richardson claimed that his father was "personally beloved" by Shaftesbury's grandfather (Richardson's *Selected Letters*, 228), and shows a general familiarity with the third Earl's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711); Fielding is known to have possessed a copy of the book and had evidently read it closely. Fielding had also been reading "with care and admiration" the work of latitudinarian divines who followed the ideas of Pelagius (Battestin, xxv). The British-born Pelagius, who rejected the concept of original sin, was excommunicated for his unorthodox beliefs in 418 A. D.

There's nothing in Fielding of Locke's concept of the child as a *tabula rasa*, to be written on by experience and trained up to virtue by reason. To this novelist, childhood is the period during which "natural goodness of heart" (*Tom Jones*, 131) either flowers or is shed. In some cases there may indeed be what Joseph Andrews calls in the earlier

novel “a mischievous wicked inclination” (179) from the start. In others, “natural goodness” may be replaced by hypocritical notions of “virtue and religion” such as those flaunted by Messrs Thwackum and Square in *Tom Jones* (130): the bringing up together of the generous-spirited Tom Jones and the duplicitous Master Blifil foreshadows the juxtaposition of good and bad children in many Victorian novels—only there it will be the *good* child who is conventionally pious, and the *bad* (the Becky Sharps of this world) who express their honest desires. Parson Adams blames public school for spoiling some children, while Joseph Andrews insists that other kinds of schooling may prove just as pernicious, a view which studies of education even in the next century tend to corroborate. But what Fielding chiefly focusses on is the beguiling heresy of infant purity. Though we only get a few glimpses of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones before they reach an age when their thoughts turn to love, those glimpses are vivid ones, especially in Tom’s case: his escapade with the gamekeeper produces a whole series of revelations about his adventurous, resolute, generous and affectionate nature. All Tom’s traits are established when he is still a young lad, as are those of his nauseating foil, Blifil. To some extent this illustrates that “conservation of character” (366) which Fielding advocates later in the novel; but it also indicates the importance of childhood to him.

When “natural goodness” is there and remains there, the character never quite grows up. Attempts are sometimes made to trace a process of growth in Joseph Andrews, but although he is twenty-one by the time Lady Booby dismisses him, he is still a “beautiful youth” (220) to her, and a “brave lad” (259) to the protective Parson Adams, at the end of the novel. As for Tom Jones, he spends “whole hours” (781) playing with Mrs Miller’s small daughter, during the period of his entanglement with Lady Bellaston; to Mrs Miller, as to his uncle, Tom is “my dear child” (855), and Sophia herself is willing to forgive Tom, at least for his energetic high spirits. Of course, the author was bound to draw attention to Joseph Andrews’s lack of years and experience, in what began as a parody of *Pamela*. And the result in that novel is not quite satisfactory: in his concern for his chastity, Joseph is at once somewhat more than a child, and somewhat less than a man. He is simply not as credible as the more impulsive and passionate Tom Jones. As if to compensate for Joseph’s lack of virility, his beloved Fanny, who is his junior by two years, has a more robust presence than Tom’s Sophia. A plump young milk-maid who leaves in the middle of her milking to go to Joseph’s aid, she is sexually mature: Spenser in his “Epithalamion” didn’t paint a more joyful picture of the bridal chamber than Fielding does at the close of *Joseph Andrews*. But she does epitomize the uninhibited, undiluted, unforced response to life.

Those well past childhood, as well as those still very close to it, can remain children at heart in Fielding. In this he is more a forerunner of Dickens than Rousseau. Joseph’s mentor, Parson Adams, is over fifty years old, a respected clergyman proud of his abilities as a scholar and teacher, a husband and father who can with some justice be described as “a man of good sense, good parts, and good nature.” Yet he is “at the same time as entirely ignorant of the ways of this world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be” (5), and consequently one of the great comic figures of our literature. From the

beginning of his adventures on the road, when he reckons his sermons will fetch a small fortune, until he hopefully assumes the pedlar acquired a marriage licence before going to bed with his mistress, his naivety knows no more bounds than his generosity of spirit. His eldest girl is already more worldly-wise than he is, and grumbles at the extra strain put on family finances by Fanny and Joseph's being lodged with them; but the identification of both Adams and Joseph with childhood is complete when the two of them reward his son, Little Dick, for his "intended liberality" towards Fanny: "father, rather than poor Fanny shall be starved, I will give her all this bread and cheese" (260-61).

Fielding is also the first to distinguish between childlike and childish behaviour in his fiction, though he doesn't castigate the latter sternly, like the later Dickens, or George Eliot. The effect is still, though only just, comic. In *Tom Jones*, Squire Western's volatile, ungovernable temper makes him an ogre, but not an unforgivable one. We know, and Sophia Western knows, that behind his tantrums over her refusal to marry Blifil, lies a desperate attachment to "his daughter, whom he loved so tenderly, that the least apprehension of any harm happening to her, threw him presently into agonies" (744). By a father like this, Sophia is not going to be called on to suffer as Clarissa does. Richardson and Fielding portray scenes of parental tyranny "very differently" (Watt, 268) because the outcomes of these scenes are to be entirely different, too.

True affection between parent and child is something Fielding delights to depict. It's painful to read Parson Adams's famous defence of his uncontrolled passions when his son Jacky is thought to have drowned, knowing that in the very month *Joseph Andrews* was published, Fielding lost his first-born daughter Charlotte: "Boy," says the parson to Joseph,

... it doth not become green heads to advise grey hairs.—Thou art ignorant of the tenderness of fatherly affection; when thou art a father thou wilt be capable then only of knowing what a father can feel. No man is obliged to impossibilities; and the loss of a child is one of those great trials where our grief may be allowed to become immoderate. (249)

Joseph and Mrs Andrews quickly put in their claims on behalf of romantic and marital love, but there's a weight of conviction here which Johnson (for all his strictures on Fielding's easy-going morality) echoes in *Rasselas*, when the philosopher isn't able to cope with his daughter's death (Ch. 18). It's not surprising, then, that the first sentimental scene of a child on his sick-bed should occur in *Tom Jones*, when little Tommy Anderson comforts his mother thus: "I shan't die, God Almighty, I'm sure, won't take Tommy away, let heaven be ever so fine a place, I had rather stay here and starve with you and my mama than go to it" (637; much more human sentiments than those expressed early in the next century by the little victims of Mrs Sherwood's holy deaths).

By the time Fielding's next and, at the time, most widely read novel was published in 1751, he had lost another small girl, and was watching three of his children grow up. The youngest, named Sophia after Sophia Western, was one year old. *Amelia* centres on family life. Amelia herself is what Mrs James, with her "shudder" at the thought of children (2: 143), is not: a perfectly virtuous woman. Setting "an excellent example... to

all mothers" (1: 174) in attending to, playing with and disciplining her little ones, she is another Pamela. Indeed, she is Pamela under more adverse conditions, coping with poverty and masculine enticements as well as her husband's indiscretions. Only her eldest boy speaks, but he is a spirited lad who raises the emotional pitch of her trials by expressing his filial affection (a useful technique soon to be employed in Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, when Dr Primrose's two small boys willingly share a dark prison cell with their 'papa'). And the children's presence is constantly felt in the novel. It's from the nursery that Amelia emerges cheerfully on the night of the masquerade, at which her friend Mrs Atkinson has taken her place: the contrast between motherly Amelia, with her "naked human virtue" (Wendt, 134) and Defoe's Roxana, who depends on disguise and doesn't even want her own offspring to penetrate it, is dramatic. Like Pamela, Amelia is a standing rebuke to Defoe's selfish mothers.

Joseph Andrews, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* all involve parents and children and their struggles to know, relate to and care for each other properly. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the heroes' and Fanny's very earliest experiences, though we come to hear of them only later, are part of the actual mechanics of the plot. Child-snatching and -substitution are found to have set in motion the train of events which bring Fanny and Joseph together, and then threaten to separate them. And while Squire Allworthy is as good as a father to Tom Jones, discovering his parentage and gentle birth is vital to Tom's happiness and to the whole happy ending of the novel. That Amelia turns out to be the heiress of her mother's fortune after all is equally important in the later novel. Soon, some such "sudden expedient for great riches" would grace the last pages of all the novels in the circulating libraries, as Fanny Burney complained to Samuel Crisp in 1782 (*Diary and Letters*, 2: 81). Incest had already been introduced to the novel by Defoe, when Moll was married to her own brother, but there's something new in the way Fielding uses it to give a faintly titillating aura to his protagonists' more rumbustious amours—though Fanny and Joseph are not, as it was once feared, siblings, nor is Mrs Waters Tom's mother. But Fielding left a more significant legacy to the novel than devices which would one day prove cumbersome, and a motif that the repressed Victorians would unconsciously exploit: his association of Joseph with innocent Parson Adams, the child with the prelapsarian Adam.

Eager to instruct us in "the ART of LIFE" (*Amelia* 1:4), Fielding didn't fail to attach significance to the beginning of life's journey. What is needed now is only (but it's a vital element) more inwardness in the presentation of the child character, that is, more particularization of the child's-eye view of life. Then the child will be able to take the role of a major character in his or her own right.

This wasn't to be achieved in the eighteenth century. But there were two important false starts in this direction, in Tobias Smollett's pictures of Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle growing up, and the commentary woven by Laurence Sterne around the early years of Tristram Shandy. Smollett's detailed tracing of Peregrine's childhood, in particular, and Sterne's preoccupation with the conception and birth of his young hero, are unprecedented.

David Copperfield remembers having "been Tom Jones. . . for a week together" in his childhood (106); but it was figures from Smollett such as Tom Pipes, Peregrine's attendant and confederate, and Strap, Roderick's school-fellow, who peopled the world outside his bedroom window. The situations of both Roderick and Peregrine would be bound to strike a chord in David's heart, as in the young Dickens's — as well as Thackeray's, whose experience at Charterhouse was little better than his contemporary's at Warren's blacking warehouse. Roderick's mother dies when his grandfather, furious at his youngest son's secret marriage to her, ejects her from the house soon after childbirth; Roderick's father, devastated by his bereavement, falls from delirium into depression, and then mysteriously disappears. The child, a "friendless orphan," is then exposed to "the selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind" (5). The next chapter heading starts: "I grow up—Am hated by my Relations—Sent to School—Neglected by my Grandfather—Maltreated by my Master. . ." (12). Peregrine's beginnings are scarcely more auspicious. His father is ineffectual, and his mother quickly sets up a regime of ice-cold baths for her infant, whom she later loses interest in and eventually repudiates: he is eleven when, seeing him on his return from boarding-school, she declares him to be an impostor and sends him packing.

But these companions-in-misery for budding young Victorian authors don't have sensibilities like theirs. In fact, they don't have any at all. With the connivance of his uncle, Rory executes a "Project of revenge" (23) on his master, Mr Syntax, before leaving school, while Perry, much the more mischievous of the two, has been tormenting people with practical jokes even from his cradle: in his tenth year his machinations against *his* schoolmaster, Mr Keyystick, lead to the collapse of his whole school system. Answering persecution with persecution is one thing, and all this reminds us of the public school rebellions which continued into the next century. But what are we to make of Perry's merciless teasing of his uncle, Commodore Trunnion? No less generous and affectionate than Thomas Bowling, his counterpart in *Roderick Random*, or, say, David Copperfield's Aunt Betsey, Trunnion feels as if "all the devils in hell had conspired against his peace" (1: 72). Perry's pranks have always been supposed to appeal to what a contemporary reviewer termed "the juvenile part of mankind" (Kelly, 62); but they make nonsense of Smollett's claim that there's a "fund of good-nature and generosity in his composition" (1: 50).

In fact, the adventures of both boys are purely picaresque, and don't develop their characters even as much as Tom Jones's do. If "they never become the vicious and indiscriminate confidence men which they have every native skill to become" (Stevick, 65), the considerations which hold them back are Smollett's, not theirs. Dickens, at least, came to realize the questionable nature of the entertainment this novelist provides: David Copperfield's early love of Smollett has its repercussions when the lad is obliged to tell Steerforth stories in his sleepless hours—"We seem, to me, to have been months over Peregrine" (146), David recalls wearily. There is that in Steerforth which finds answer in Smollett. Dickens identifies it later, in a letter to Frank Stone, as a want of "tenderness" (see Kelly, 367).

Unlike Fielding, Smollett never had any kind of success as a dramatist. His one play was not performed. But he was influenced, as Dickens, Thackeray and Reade were also to be, by the larger-than-life characters of the popular stage. (Reade's first work, incidentally, was a stage version of *Peregrine Pickle* brought out on the centenary of the novel's publication.) Relating Smollett's methods to the dramatic conventions of the time, as well as the picaresque tradition, may explain his heroes' lack of depth, and the fact that they seem to be brought up so painstakingly only to take their author's own vicarious revenge on society, even on such undeserving butts as Trunnion. However, it's unfortunate that difficult childhoods which ask for sympathetic understanding quickly become no more than points of departure for the soaring trajectory of his satire "against the sordid and vicious disposition of the world" (*Roderick Random*, 5). Yet, to be fair, schoolboy naughtiness was something quite new in the novel, and the very crudeness of Smollett's characterization would come in handy for Dickens, when the later writer wanted to present the child's exaggerated perspective of the adult world.

Only two years after Tom Jones's first appearance in 1749, Smollett takes more than twenty chapters to get the still very youthful Peregrine to Oxford. A decade or so later, and we are nearly a third of the way through Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* before the young hero is even born. It's tempting to suggest that only Victorian modesty about pregnancy could save the child from disappearing off the last page; but Sterne is unique. He deals with birth as no writer before him, and only a handful after him, has done.

Compare the whole brouhaha of Mrs Shandy's delivery with the accounts of Pamela's and Amelia's deliveries. Fielding's Captain Booth is in the room with Amelia, supports his wife and feels her pains. But Sterne gives us a sense of the whole long-drawn-out process. There's a real air of expectancy even before the mud-splattered, ham-fisted Dr Slop enters the Shandys' back parlour in Chapter 10 of Book II. The purpose of his visit is never far from our minds, even though we know he spends exactly two hours and ten minutes downstairs with the waiting menfolk; he starts to talk about advances in obstetrics in Chapter 18 of the same book, and in the next chapter we learn of Walter Shandy's own researches into birth management, and his unsuccessful attempt to get his wife to have a Caesarian, so as to spare their second child the risk of cerebral trauma. By the time the doctor goes to join those ominously "trampling in the room above" (120), we know that he will bungle the delivery: his tussle with the knots on his bag, and his unsuccessful demonstration of the forceps on Uncle Toby's fists, make us tremble for the infant's tender anatomy. But Tristram is born more or less intact on November 5, 1718, the event carefully slotted into the "progressive" movement of the narrative (*Tristram Shandy*, 53) by the long and detailed preparation for it, and its immediate consequence—the curate "in the dressing-room, with the child upon his arm, waiting for the name" (208).

We can better gauge the uniqueness of all this by comparing it with such future treatments of the same event as the unutterably gloomy child-bed of Dickens's Mrs Dombey, and the totally unexpected, and equally gloomy, birth of the second Catherine Linton in *Wuthering Heights*. These tell us at least as much about the Victorian frame of

mind as about the social realities of the time—though there were some brave souls who “had no idea of minimising the great common experiences of life” (Mrs Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere*, 258). F. R. Leavis’s well-known dismissal of Sterne from the company of those major novelists who promote “awareness of the possibilities of life” seems particularly rash in this context (*The Great Tradition*, 10).

To some, the delay in Tristram’s appearance only suggests that his childhood as such is not Sterne’s true subject, and much has been made of the child’s elusiveness and relative unimportance to the novel as a whole. If the novel isn’t about him, then it must be about something else: Ian Campbell Ross nominates Uncle Toby, Trim, and their passion for war-games (xx); Van Ghent, the activity of creation itself (87). Sterne’s harshest critics are those who locate the heart of the novel in his own ego. To Graham Greene, in (appropriately enough) *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*, the whole production is “the last word in literary egotism” (60).

Yet the milestones of Tristram’s christening, accidental circumcision by the nursery sash-window and ‘breeching,’ as well as his father’s losing race to educate his young son by means of a weighty *Tristrapoedia*, are all described with the same sort of detail which prepared us for his birth. Among the trivial events which conspire to finish off Dr Slop’s work on the new-born’s ‘nose,’ for instance, are the maid’s having forgotten to leave a chamber-pot under Tristram’s bed, and Sussanah’s having encouraged the five-year-old to urinate from the window-seat. The incident occurs in Book V, but its aftermath continues into Book VI, for Walter Shandy, having made a hasty inspection of the damage, settles down to read on the subject of circumcision. Not until he has reassured himself that the child is none the worse for it, is medical treatment administered. And even then the treatment is further delayed when Sussanah, pretending modesty and refusing to look at the proceedings, sets Dr Slop’s wig alight with her candle. The two end up throwing the poultice at each other over their long-suffering patient. At this point, Walter decides that Tristram should be removed from “these women’s hands” (303) and have a tutor. This is a fair sample of how the first six of the nine books proceed, with everything impinging on poor little Tristram in the end, albeit by a very round-about route. “Heaven has thought fit to draw forth the heaviest of its artillery against me,” moans his father, after the blunder over Tristram’s christening, and “the prosperity of my child is the point upon which the whole force of it is directed to play”(215).

Sterne certainly brings out the young child’s vulnerability, then, but not in the way Richardson brings out the adolescent girl’s. It would be useless to pretend what Tristram is a hero in the usual sense. He never speaks, although at the time of his contretemps with the windowpane he is quite “old enough to have told the story. . . and young enough . . . to have done it without malignity” (282). We don’t even know what expression crosses his face as his attendants let fling with the poultice. Apart from the implication here that his extreme youth guarantees innocence, we know less about him in general than about the other child in the family, his elder brother Bobby. This “lad of wonderful slow parts” (112) is sent to Westminster School before Tristram is born, and dies there unexpectedly. The only incident we *know* leaves a permanent mark on

Tristram is his uncle's kindness to a fly, observed when the boy is ten: "I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression" (82), he comments. If a man's fate hangs on trivialities, so, it appears, does his philosophy of life.

Smollett and Sterne are both interested in childhood. Both see children as the butts of fate. The instruments of that fate are their families. Smollett uses the family in much the same way as Fielding, as a context which provides problems and solutions: Roderick Random's father will turn up again, as the wealthy Don Roderigo, when he is most needed. Sterne, however, explores the intricacies of the Shandy household with much more minuteness, showing how one generation's natures and 'hobby-horses' can affect the next. Smollett's children, from an early age, begin to hit back at the world which abuses them; Sterne's gentler humour allows him to smile on those who never grow up. Uncle Toby, "who, of all things in the world, troubled his brain the least with abstruse thinking" (136) and is constantly engaged in his war-games, is like a little boy with sets of tin soldiers. That there is something endearing about such over-grown children, and that they are excellent sources of good-natured, sympathetic humour, can now be taken for granted in the novel, at least for the next few decades.

Yet, in the end, Tristram is more disappointing than Smollett's child characters. From Smollett, we might expect no more than Roderick's "boldness of temper" (14) and Peregrine's mischievousness. But that Sterne, with his interest in the consciousness, should fail to give more than the slightest hint about Tristram's developing personality, is puzzling. We don't seem to have come far from the time when Defoe suggested that troubles pass lightly over children. It's left to the Victorians (notably Edward Bulwer-Lytton in *The Caxtons* and George Meredith in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*) to show how disastrously an adult's system of childrearing and sense of special destiny for his child could affect the child's character. Of course, Tristram is very young. Like Victorian youngsters, many eighteenth-century children went out into the world earlier than their modern counterparts; but before puberty, at any rate, their responses to life counted for little. The important exception was the concern of the Church for their spiritual health, but even here the Religious Tract Society, which produced most of the early reading material for their conversion, wasn't founded until 1799. To the extent that Smollett and Sterne each in his own way advances the importance of childhood, without allowing his child characters to come into their own, they are both very much of their age. It's paradoxical that the nineteenth century, which placed such tremendous physical and psychological burdens on its young, was also the first in which the rich interior life of the child would be explored and presented in literature.

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