

**Self-Censorship and Secret-Sharing in the Eighteenth-Century Peripatetic Novel:
Smollett's Interpolated Voices**

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Abstract

Tobias Smollett's eighteenth-century peripatetic works accord a high prominence to interpolated narratives of various kinds, and these are often fortified with special significance as revelatory vehicles with implicit truth-claiming testimonial legitimacy. None is more controversial, however, than the two female narratives in his first two novels, *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle*, namely "Miss Williams' tale" and "The Memoir of a Lady of Quality," respectively.

This paper will focus primarily though not exclusively on these two narratives, and, in comparing contents and narrators, it will attempt to explain their contested positions in terms of a timely engagement with contemporaneous developments concerning self-governance and self-censorship, to which keeping secrets and breaking them can be both an adjunct and a threat. The literary and cultural spread of the secret existence coincides with a concomitant emphasis on conformity as a tool to assert power and inculcate docility, as noted by both Michel Foucault and Roy Porter, among others. Codes to follow constitute a relentless, incessant and intensified form of discipline as compared with rules to obey, thereby forcing the independent freethinking subject into secrecy. Miss Williams and "the Lady of Quality" are hemmed in by codes of conduct that they cannot and will not live up to, measures that demand strict moral observance while at the same time robbing the women of agency and independence to achieve it.

This paper will argue that these narratives are not just lone female voices in an increasingly androcentric century, but that they go beyond conventional romantic literature, and, in illuminating an area of society by turns isolated and reduced, display a nascent liberal feminism in their point of view.

Keywords: Smollett, interpolated narrative, Foucault, discipline, secrecy, eighteenth century