

struggle of body and spirit which is the adventure from which no man or woman dare escape. Whoever reads the story of Pilgrim finds himself there.

It is from this representation of the struggle of the individual against great odds that the modern novel really develops. The sensations, the thoughts, and the behaviour of the individual adventurer in his conflict with life are a source of perpetual fascination to man as a social being. This is true both of adventurers in actual fact and of adventurers in fiction, though it is to be noted that the reader as a general rule prefers adventures in fact to adventures in fiction. This preference is of the utmost importance for we owe to it that close association between the arts of the journalist and the novelist which has done so much to develop the novel form.

Daniel Defoe was the first great English journalist to leave his mark upon the English Novel. Defoe had the newspaperman's sense of "news." Most of his major novels are an exploitation of current news and rumour. It is well known how he was led to write "Robinson Crusoe" because of the wide public interest in the story of Alexander Selkirk. Defoe would seize upon any object of sufficient notoriety and project it into a narrative of his own. Thus, Moll Flanders, who was a well-known criminal figure of the time, was taken by him as the subject of a novel which was written in the first person and which purported to be her story extracted from her own memoirs. It was not, of course, but Defoe succeeded in writing a vividly realistic story of the more sordid side of London life in the early eighteenth century.

But perhaps the most interesting example of Defoe's exploitation of "news" from the point of view of the modern reader is that given by the "Journal of The Plague Year." In the year 1720 Londoners were disturbed by the report of an outbreak of plague in Marseilles. To people for whom the plague of 1665 was comparatively recent history the news was sufficiently grave to cause considerable anxiety, and the plague became a general subject for public discussion, particularly in the newspapers. Defoe, who had written several articles upon the subject, in 1722 published a journal which the reader was to suppose to have been written by a London saddler who had remained in the City throughout the visitation of 1665. This was the "Journal of the Plague Year" which has since come to be known as one of the greatest English masterpieces of prose narrative. In it Defoe draws a picture of the City of London ravaged by a plague which threatens its whole population with extinction. He marks every advance of the pest with the cold statistics of the mortality bills and illustrates in his unemotional yet powerfully realistic way the heroism of a city which never ceased in its struggle against what appeared to be a remorseless and almost overwhelming enemy, and which at no time relaxed its sense of civic and social responsibility. The story is a noble one, and for the modern reader it reflects an image of the City of London that is significantly in keeping with his knowledge of the City which withstood the agony of the German blitz.

In his narrative style and in his treatment of character Defoe continued the work that Bunyan had begun. Defoe's main object as a novelist was to tell the story of an adventurer. "Robinson Crusoe" is such a story and it is important to observe the close parallel that exists between Crusoe and Pilgrim. When Crusoe is wrecked on the island his resources are no more than the minimum required for his subsistence. He is poor and alone in his struggle with the elements; and the charm of the book rests mainly upon that condition.

But the story of the lonely adventurer could be exploited in many ways. It could be used for the purpose of moral instruction, or it could become the weapon of the satirist. Throughout the eighteenth century we find novelists reflecting moral and satirical judgment upon society through the experiences and opinions of their fictitious adventurers,

Typical of these, and exceedingly great among them, was Tobias Smollett. Smollett was a Scot who combined an extreme sourness of temper with a robust sense of humour. To him we owe that popular character of fiction, the typical English tar, who first appeared in "Roderick Random" which Smollett published in 1748. The novel is largely autobiographical, particularly that part of it which deals with its hero's adventures as a surgeon's mate in the Royal Navy. Smollett was himself a surgeon's mate in the Navy and was present at the Battle of Cartagena. In the novel he describes the battle with tremendous power and speaks with scathing criticism of the conditions under which the English sailor had to fight and of the putrid state of affairs in the cockpit where the wounded were treated and nursed.

It is in the work of Smollett and that of his even greater contemporary Henry Fielding that we observe two powerful influences which were to do much in the shaping of the form and matter of the English Novel. From Spain came the two great adventurer characters of the simpleton and the rogue. From the latter comes the form of novel known as the picaresque (from the Spanish *picaron*, a rogue). It was a form most highly perfected by the Frenchman Le Sage whose novel "Gil Blas" was the chief source of influence in this country. Fielding's "Jonathan Wild" ranks among the finest examples of the picaresque novel. Smollett's "Ferdinand Count Fathom" is another, and the characterisations of Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle distinctly show the influence of Le Sage. The simpleton made himself felt in this country chiefly through the work of Cervantes. His Don Quixote is a foolish, simple soul, vain, trusting, sentimental and romantic, though not without a strong element of personal courage. His influence upon the English Novel has been lasting and deep, having a marked culmination in Mr. Pickwick. Think of Pickwick and you have an English middle-class Don Quixote sharing most of the personal characteristics of his chivalrous predecessor. Pickwick, of course, is an example of the gentlest form of humorous characterisation, and Dickens teaches us much in his presentation of this popular character. When you laugh at Pickwick you laugh at characteristics which do not necessarily provoke you to laughter in the course of everyday life. Frequently the opposite is the case. Try and think of Pickwick as a next-door neighbour and see if you would laugh at him and love him as you do when you are reading the "Pickwick Papers." Pickwick is a fussy, ceremonious, nosy old busybody, prone to manifestations of extreme perversity and stupidity. But as Dickens presents him you do not label him, in the granite-like terminology of twentieth-century morals, as "anti-social." You laugh at him, and in your laughter, love him. What is the secret? Well, I fancy it is the fact that Pickwick feels an honest joy in being alive. His zest for living makes him a kind, lovable soul, so that while you laugh at his follies you love the man. Nor is Dickens alone in the presentation of the lovable soul with "anti-social" characteristics. The great Fielding's Squire Weston in "Tom Jones" is just such a character, and if you want an example from the drama, try Bottom the Weaver in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." This is a form of humour which is perhaps the most profitable of all forms at the present time.

The name of the "Pickwick Papers" reminds us once again of the debt which the English novelist owes to journalism. For the "Pickwick Papers" represent a series of reports on the activities of members of the Pickwick Club and are in fact essays in mock journalism. This idea was not new. Addison and Steele had perfected it in "The Spectator" as early as 1710, and had invented characters sufficiently vivid to live with their readers. Sir Roger de Coverley of course is the most vivid of these.

But neither the adventurer nor the clubman, whatever characteristics were given them could entirely create the illusion of human character in depth. Something more had

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)