

## ***Ferdinand Count Fathom's* Narratives of Conflict: Fathom vs. Monimia**

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Chung, Ewha. "Ferdinand Count Fathom's Narratives of Conflict: Fathom vs. Monimia." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 49.4 (2023): 163-182. This paper analyzes Tobias Smollett's third novel, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), by using Michael McKeon's theory in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987). The novel, according to McKeon's theoretical analysis, focuses on conflicts that attempt to define truth and virtue, and these conflicts not only form a dialectic of genre formations but also expose how the internal structures of the novel unfold its own narrative of history and record how a character struggles to prove his/her version of truth and virtue. In this paper, I look at how these conflicts are enacted in Smollett's novel and how they narrate Fathom's licentious schemes against the heroine, Monimia, who struggles to defend her virtue and prove her narrative to be true. By exposing the intricate details of how Fathom manipulates the narrative of truth and abuses the virtue of vulnerable women, Smollett traces Fathom's ultimate downfall and emphasizes Fathom's agonizing acknowledgment of his past guilt. Smollett's novel, thus, emphasizes instabilities in the narration of truth and virtue portrayed through the conflict between Fathom and Monimia and, further, probes questions defining innocence and guilt not only by delineating Fathom's despairing moment of guilt and repentance but also by allowing Monimia to forgive Fathom with grace and mercy. (Sungshin Women's University)

**Key Words:** Tobias Smollett, Ferdinand Count Fathom, Michael McKeon, Monimia, virtue

## I. Narratives of Conflict in *Fathom*

Tobias Smollett's third novel, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), is considered to be not only his least successful work but also, as Simon Dickie (2015) argues, Smollett's "most confounding" novel (103). Dickie claims that licentious Fathom and moral Renaldo—the two male protagonists—serve not as heroes but rather as targets mocked by Smollett's "intolerance of sentimentalism," which criticized the contemporary literary taste for emotional insincerity, even faulting Renaldo as the dupe of his own sentimental folly (259). Richard Squibbs (2018) further explains that "*Fathom* works more narrowly as a satire upon the poor taste of England's sentiment-addled reader" and if we focus on "what Smollett was trying to do in writing it," *Fathom* turns out to be "a more successful novel than it is usually given credit for being" (537). Squibbs goes as far as to state that according to Smollett, "England's middle to upper classes were . . . reading themselves into a disabling state of smug, national self-satisfaction" (527). Philip Stevick (1971) convincingly claims that however evil and devious Fathom is in the novel, he is "still outmatched by the pettiness, dishonesty, arrogance, bigotry, and callous selfishness of English society" both in England and Europe (124). In an attempt to account for *Fathom* being criticized as unsuccessful, John McAllister (1989) explains that *Fathom* suffers from "difficulties as products of complexity, not incoherence" (319).

However, according to Paul-Gabriel Boucé (1976), *Fathom* is a novel consisting of disconnected series of events "without any transition brought about by the unfolding of the story," which revolves around the two male protagonists (149). In response to Boucé, Jerry Beasley (1984) attempts to analyze the incoherence in *Fathom* as a series of "canvases," which requires the reader to seek meaning not in the pictorial canvasses themselves but in their disorderly "juxtaposition" (169). William Gibson (2007) states that although Smollett defines the novel in the "Dedication" of *Fathom* as "a large diffused picture" held together by a "uniform

plan," *Fathom* nevertheless "departs the most from this rule" (68). Lee F. Kahan (2008-9) also analyzes the novel's unity and points out that *Fathom* is "devoid of any uniform plan that could render coherent its variety of incidents [surrounding Fathom and Renaldo]" (230). In a comparison of the two male protagonists, Mark Blackwell (2011) argues that Fathom's "outlaw status serves to justify Smollett's most ruthless subordination of principal character to plot" (431). In fact Blackwell claims that Fathom is transformed not only from the "title character" to a "minor figure" at the end of the novel but also "his centrality [is] usurped by the once secondary Renaldo" (431). Such literary criticism concerning Smollett's *Fathom*, I argue, stems partly from the particularly emphasized focus on the episodic conflict between the two oppositional male protagonists: the immoral anti-hero, Fathom, and the moral hero, the young Count, Renaldo Melvil (Renaldo).

In contrast to the focus on the two male protagonists, however, analysis of the novel's heroine, Monimia, has often been neglected and seen as insignificant in critical readings of Smollett's female characters. Robert D. Spector (1994) outlines how "the forces shaping Smollett's novels led naturally to the minor roles played by caricatured women in his writing" (6). Robert Day (1982) claims that Smollett's heroine is in the novel only as a foil for the hero, and her "side of the sexual equation is not well sustained . . . either by her perpetual presence or by her vitality as a character" (226-227). What is paradoxical about such readings is that although Monimia suffers as a victim of Fathom's evil schemes, she nevertheless outsmarts his malevolence and serves to protect Renaldo, the novel's moral hero, from being reduced to a "dupe" of Fathom's villainy (367). Capable of unveiling Fathom's licentious schemes, Monimia upholds virtue, her "soul was perfect: her virtue was impregnable" (265), whereas Renaldo and his father—the honorable senior Count Melvil—are incapable of "penetrating" beyond Fathom's "film [of evil lies]" (367) and, therefore, are subject to betrayal and suffering.

Although seldom acknowledged as a pivotal character, Monimia, in the second half of the novel, is the only character who is capable of perceiving Fathom's true

nature as a reprobate. She must endure his villainy because Fathom realizes that he cannot dupe her with his “film [of lies]” (367). Hence, the heroine is forced to literally stage her own death and be buried alive before she is free of being raped and forced into marriage by Fathom. More revealing than Fathom’s narrative of debauchery and deceit, then, is Monimia’s ingenious understanding of how Fathom abuses truth as an “imposter” (367) and distorts her virtue with his villainy to feed his most base desires. My paper then does not aim to challenge or readdress previous critical works and their interpretations. Rather my purpose is to reincorporate Monimia’s role as an equal if not more significant character, who successfully prevails through the tests of truth and virtue, while she unveils Fathom’s immoral deceit and later even graciously grants mercy upon his final request to be forgiven.

By applying Michael McKeon’s (1987) theoretical paradigm to Smollett’s novel, *Fathom*, I examine how the conflicts presented in the novel enable characters to narrate their version of truth and virtue and further record the contemporary moral dilemmas in Smollett’s contemporary Britain. McKeon’s analysis examines instabilities of class and social identity, and he outlines how the “emerging novel internalizes the emergence of the middle [and lower] classes and the concerns that it exists to mediate” (22). McKeon’s approach does not look at history from an external perspective of the novel but rather examines how the embedded developing structures—the conflicts—of the novel unfold its own history and record the rise of the middle and lower classes. As McKeon explains, the novel embodies conflicts which he identifies as “Questions of Truth” and “Questions of Virtue” (22). These instabilities reinforce Monimia as a significant character when applied to Smollett’s novel, *Fathom*, which records the heroine’s struggle to defend her innocence and her narrative of truth against the manipulative villain, Fathom.

Although Monimia is forced to stage her own death to escape rape, she is rewarded a moral victory over Fathom, who ultimately acknowledges his moral failure with penitent guilt. Whereas Fathom, in Stevick’s terms, is capable of duping

“the pettiness, dishonesty, arrogance, bigotry, and callous selfishness of English society” (124), he is reduced to a penitent pauper on his deathbed at the end of the novel. Hiding in the shadow of a staged death, ironically, Monimia is rewarded a “new-found power,” in McKeon’s terms, “manifest discursive and imaginative empowerment” (380). This new-found power enables Monimia to send a letter of enlightenment to Renaldo from her grave and forgive the dying Fathom. Monimia’s “manifest discursive and imaginative empowerment” (380), as McKeon explains, is a discourse that cannot be measured as material gain but rather concludes with the heroine’s sympathetic “requittal of one’s persecutor” (380), while her aggressor’s transformation results in a confession of various crimes.

Fathom, according to McKeon’s theoretical paradigm, abuses his “manifest material and social empowerment” (381), while he continues to cheat people to illegally accumulate wealth and social privileges. But Fathom’s duplicitous scheming ultimately leads to the utter loss of all his fortune—his manifest material and social empowerment—because he loses the power to narrate truth and virtue. Douglas Brooks (2020) outlines how Fathom’s fall is set symbolically in contrast to the reappearance of Monimia and is emphasized with increasing “allusions to Providence” (138), especially in connection with Monimia, who is resurrected from the graveyard and appears in front of Renaldo in Chapter 63 of the novel. As Kahan explains, “Fathom’s defeat within the novel foreshadows his near disappearance from the novel in the last nine chapters,” and Fathom is forced to become “the object of information rather than its purveyor” (252).

The novel’s ending, then, exposes the moral dilemma and individual’s struggle that involves social and personal narratives of truth and virtue and further questions the terms of innocence and guilt. My paper focuses on Monimia in order to analyze the characters and their lives of struggle making judgments about the characters and society involved within the narrative. Is it a sense of justice or sentimentalism that propels Monimia to record Fathom’s villainy and expose his distorted narrative of truth and virtue? In other words, can Monimia be seen as the heroine, who starts

out as a victim but gains discursive and imaginative empowerment because she is not duped by Fathom's manipulative film of lies that threaten her virtue and identity. After narrowly escaping rape and forced marriage, Monimia reaches out to her lover, Renaldo, to warn and protect him from Fathom's vice and abuse. Derided and duped by "the voice of a traitor," Renaldo confesses, "I [have] nourished a serpent in my bosom" as he "shudders in horror and dismay" (370). Renaldo learns from his mistakes and searches for "congruous, consistent and distinct" narrative qualities that Kahan explains are necessary to "testify" and verify the narrative's "internal value" (253). From the letter of his imprisoned sister and rebirth of his supposedly dead lover, Monimia, Renaldo learns how to recover the truth and believe in virtue that has been deliberately abused and distorted by his former confidant, Fathom. Like the scattered pieces of a puzzle, Renaldo puts together the episodes of his antagonist's past evil wrongdoings and completes what Kahan terms as a "coherent narrative" (253).

## II. Renaldo's Trust vs. Fathom's Dupery

The first five chapters of the novel begin by introducing Fathom, whose mother could not confirm nor be concerned about identifying the biological father of her son. As Fraser Easton (2020) explains, Fathom's mother was a "grotesque caricature of petty criminality and self-serving opportunism" (455). According to Easton, Smollett "discredits" Fathom's mother's "valour and industry by portraying her murdering injured [dying] soldiers for their valuables" (455). Thus, when Fathom is later orphaned at the age of nine, he exhibits shrewd cunning skills, similar to those of his mother, which enable him to swindle his way into the world and thrive through theft and deceit. Although Fathom is introduced into the world with the social disadvantages of obscurity of birth and want of title, he attempts to overcome his disadvantages with deceitful schemes and debauched villainy throughout his

adventurous life. Fathom's first, great break away from his bleak upbringing begins with his mother's and his own fortunate coincidence of saving the life of the respected and honorable Hungarian aristocrat, Count Melvil, who recognized the orphan Fathom "not only as the son of a person of whom he owed his life, but also as a lad, who merited his peculiar protection and regard by his own personal virtue" (59). Being fortunate enough to enter the prestigious Melvil household "holding, as it were, a middle place between the rank of a relation, and favoured domestic" (59), Fathom gains the opportunity of forming a "mutual friendship and intimacy" (60) with Renaldo Melvil, the Count's son and heir.

In contrast to Fathom, Renaldo Melvil represents the epitome of good breeding and exemplifies how privileges such as social title, education, and wealth can be put to the enhancement of society. Renaldo enacts the role of a gentleman, who avenges the women—mother, sister, and future wife—in his life. By narrating Renaldo's deeds of honor, the novel revolves upon a cycle of women as daughter, sister, sister-in-law, wife, and heiress as the central paradigm, which also emphasizes how Renaldo serves to protect each heroine who must preserve her virtue and prove the truth of her narrative in order to maintain her social identity. In striking contrast, Fathom seeks to gain access to social title, wealth, and satiate his lustful desires, by manipulating and seducing innocent young women for his debauched aspirations and selfish needs to enter into high society.

Early in his life, Fathom learns how to manipulate the truth about his virtue by abusing the power which is largely defined as "the ability to make others accept one's version of events as authoritative," what McKeon terms as "Questions of Truth" (359). Even during his early education at the academy, Fathom shows no talent or interest in learning but begins to master skills in manipulating the truth of his identity and virtue solely for the purpose of, according to McKeon, "manifest[ing] material and social empowerment" (380). Whereas Renaldo's ambition was "to eclipse his rivals at school, and to acquire an influence and authority," Fathom's "chief aim" was "to make himself necessary and agreeable to those on

whom his dependence was placed” (60-61). The author explains that Fathom was talented and would have succeeded, had it not been for a “most insidious principle of self-love” that “left no room in his heart for the least particle of social virtue” (61). Fathom’s disguise and manipulation of truth and virtue reaches a climax when he is caught cheating at school for having plagiarized and copied Renaldo’s translation homework of Caesar’s commentaries. When summoned by his patron, Count Melvil, Fathom emotionally performs and deftly manipulates both the truth of the situation and disguises his virtue. Fathom “very wisely fell upon his knees, and while the tears gushed from his eyes, acquitted the young count [Renaldo] of the imputation,” but the old Count—upon witnessing the “poor orphan”—“suspected that Fathom was over-awed by the fear of giving offence” and that the school scandal was “an instance of the young count’s insolence, and Fathom’s humility and good sense” (62-63).

Renaldo, from a “generous sensibility,” obeys his father and “looked upon the poor boy [Fathom] as the innocent cause of his disgrace, and redoubled his kindness towards him” (63). Just as his father, Count Melvil, Renaldo is also “duped” into completely trusting Fathom to the extent of “being extremely happy in the thought of having found a friend who could amuse and protect [his lover]” (265), during his absence while abroad. Renaldo, then, blindly gives Fathom legal control over his money and “entrust[s] him with” Monimia, “the inestimable jewel of his [Renaldo’s] heart” (261). Upon his father’s—Count Melvil’s—death, Renaldo is forced to return to Hungary to reclaim his stolen title as Count Melvil and protect his remarried mother and imprisoned sister from his evil step-father. During the process of solving his financial problems and having to return to his home in Hungary, Renaldo emotionally bonds with and relies on Fathom to handle his finances in England and mediate his relationship with Monimia. Fathom seizes the offer and abuses his empowerment, by creating gossip of Monimia’s plausible inconstancy and thereby destroying her narrative of virtue in the eyes of her lover, Renaldo. Fathom’s newly acquired power, in McKeon’s terms, is generally defined as the “ability to make



others accept one's version of event as authoritative" (359). Kahan convincingly sums up Fathom's power and authority by explaining how it "previously enabled Fathom to convert garbage into gold," while again "proves equally capable of accomplishing the reverse [as in the case with Renaldo and Monimia]" (248).

Under Fathom's power to make others accept his narrative of events as authoritative, Renaldo, then, proceeds to respond emotionally as the cuckolded lover, while his violent outbursts fuel Fathom's manipulation and devious schemes to proceed to forcefully take Monimia as his lover. Although Fathom is fully aware of "the mutual sentiments of the two lovers [Renaldo and Monimia]," he nevertheless gazes upon Monimia "with such violence of desire" that is destructive to the peace of his generous patron [Renaldo]" (264). With Renaldo's endorsement, Fathom "ingratiated himself with the fair Monimia," and, in response, she began to regard Fathom "as the confidant of her lover" (265) and even sought his advice about her relationship with Renaldo. Fathom's dupery is successful to the extent of his being entrusted by Renaldo with both the financial means and authority of mentorship over Monimia, who is seen in social terms as a foreigner and orphan. Having fled her native country with her mother to seek political asylum from a vengeful father, Monimia is stripped of her aristocratic family name, social power, and inheritance and left to rely upon her ability to prove herself virtuous without access to what McKeon defines as "manifest material and social empowerment" (22). Fathom utilizes false appearances, fraudulence, bribery, and disguises in an attempt to destroy Renaldo's love of and trust in Monimia.

Renaldo, though hesitant at first, accepts Fathom's narrative of Monimia's unfaithful change of heart and eventually asks Fathom to watch over his fickle beloved Monimia during his business visit to Europe. As double testimony to Fathom's success, Renaldo believes Fathom's narratives of Monimia's unfaithful fickleness of heart, while Monimia is shocked yet convinced by Fathom's narratives of Renaldo's betrayal and debauchery. Renaldo's and Monimia's belief in Fathom's narratives serve as testimony of the absolute power and authority he wields with his

distorted narratives of the lovers' virtue, which escalate into his bold attempts of rape and his association with a crooked accomplice, Madame la Mer. Fathom's struggle to convince others of his version of truth against the orphan, Monimia, and his absent benefactor, Renaldo, serves to exhibit how instabilities of conflict can be manipulated to create a film under which Fathom can successfully disguise himself.

Ironically, it is the prey of Fathom's numerous schemes and disguises, the most susceptible young female victim, who is able to see through the film of lies and perceive the truth behind Fathom's distorted narrative of truth and his pretentious virtues. In contrast, the male characters—the senior Count Melvil, Don Diego (Monimia's long lost father), and Renaldo—although endowed with title, wealth, education, and social experience, are exposed as even more susceptible victims whom Fathom strategically dupes and betrays. Without doubt, Fathom seduces women and even reduces one victim to madness with his debauched betrayal and abandonment. Yet, it is two women, Monimia—"the inestimable jewel of his [Renaldo's] heart" (261)—and Renaldo's sister—Mademoiselle Melvil—whom Fathom fails to dupe and who both expose his evil nature and even succeed in redeeming him to his final stage of a reformed penitent. Unlike Fathom, who forfeits his claim to "manifest material and social empowerment" and loses—in McKeon's terms—"the ability to make others accept one's version of events as authoritative" (359), Monimia succeeds in preserving and proving her virtue with the help of a newly founded community of people who believe in her virtue and innocence. According to Benedict Anderson (1993), we can define Monimia's religious, non-blood-related network as a "sacred community" (8) in which members bond under a common moral purpose and united action. By using Anderson's definition of community, Monimia creates a growing network in which "stretchable nets of kinship [blood-related relationships] and clientship [non-blood-related relationships]" (8) unite into domesticated communities, sharing common interests in religious education and protecting themselves from immoral fraud and contamination.

Monimia's decision to relinquish hopes of marrying the man of her heart leads to

the heroine's deteriorating health, her determination to embrace an early death, and renouncement of any claims to marriage and secular happiness. When Monimia realizes that she cannot compete with Fathom nor can she prove her narrative of truth or her version of virtue, she relinquishes life in the secular world. Rather than plead her case against Fathom in court or in public, Monimia relies upon a small group of followers, her sacred community, who not only believe in and promote Monimia's version of events but also shield her from Fathom's debauched desires and fabricated narratives. Frustrated by the loyalty of Monimia's sacred community, Fathom then proceeds to abuse his patriarchal rights by claiming to be Monimia's legal husband. Completely helpless and vulnerable, Monimia writes to Renaldo to inform and caution him of Fathom's evil duplicity and explain why she has resigned to seek peace in the afterlife.

Because Monimia is concerned with matters of "guilt" and "innocence," innocence here would refer to her own version of virtue, she also wishes to avoid the threats implicit in Fathom's "version of events" (McKeon 359). Monimia realizes that she is no match for Fathom and his malvolent schemes because he is seen as a gentleman with social identity and access to legal means that she lacks as a young female orphan left abandoned in a foreign country. Hence, Fathom's claims to be the wronged husband of a wife, who is immorally infatuated with a debauched lover, further threatens Monimia's status both morally and socially, and she is ultimately forced to seek—in McKeon's terms—a "new found power" (381) through death and a letter to her lover, Renaldo. Monimia relinquishes her hopes for retrieving family name, aristocratic title, and inherited wealth—manifest material and social empowerment—and willfully seeks an early death with her virtue intact, thereby seeking "manifest discursive and imaginative empowerment" (McKeon 380). In conclusion, this reading provides a non-material yet inevitable motive for Monimia to aspire peace in the afterlife where her narrative of truth and virtue is safe and unquestionable. Monimia, therefore, decides to completely surrender any claims to her previous life; that is, she surrenders manifest material and social

empowerment as the only means of proving the truth about her innocence.

The key scene which accounts for Monimia's decision to relinquish manifest material and social empowerment rings loud and clear in Chapter 44 when Renaldo's company of English acquaintances strongly "disapproved of Renaldo's attachment to the fair beggar [Monimia]" and even went as far as to question the sincerity of that "intimate union of hearts which subsisted between the two lovers" (267). In the eyes of society, though beautiful and accomplished, Monimia is seen as a "gentle-hearted, orphan [foreigner]" (267), who lacks family name, social title, inheritance, and even parents. When Renaldo leaves the country to return to Hungary and his mother and sister, Fathom boldly approaches Monimia and proposes marriage by informing her that he was "the only person who was able and willing to raise her above dependence and that if his protection should be withdrawn, she must be exposed to the utmost extremity of distress" (302). When Monimia refuses his proposal with "inflamed" "indignation," Fathom attempts to rape Monimia and declares his intention by stating, "Madam all opposition is vain: what you have refused to my intreaties, you shall yield to my power; and I am determined to force you to your own advantage" (303). Monimia, however, retaliates by snatching up Fathom's sword and pointing the blade to his breast as she cries out, "Villain! the spirit of my father animates my bosom, and the vengeance of heaven shall not be frustrated" (303). Fathom is "awe-struck at the manner of [Monimia's] address" (303) and hastily retreats without any further comment. Monimia, then, begins to seek the help of her sacred community and is determined to relinquish any future hope of empowerment.

When Fathom is confronted and ousted by Monimia's sacred community, which consists of a merchant's widow, Madame Clement, a physician, the village clergyman, and a money-lender Joshua Manassach, he backs off and simply waits until Monimia dies and then proceeds to leave for his next adventure as soon as possible. Fathom's lack of any substantial emotional response or depiction of frustrated desire is too obvious to gloss over without questioning the nature of his

intent to pursue Monimia. Fathom's desire and lust for Monimia, then, using McKeon's terms, "expresses [Fathom's] will to repossess what his behavior announces he has lost to her, both his honor and his externalized conception of honor, which is now internalized in [Monimia's] virtue" (367). Fathom loses the terminological dispute because the immediate society—consisting of Madame Clement, the physician, clergyman, and money-lender—believe in Monimia's narrative of truth and her version of honor, which serves to undermine Fathom's disguised desires and licentious attempts to possess Monimia through his maliciously false claims of being her legal guardian and husband. Even during his most lecherous attempts to seduce Monimia, Fathom is obsessed with being seen and treated as a gentleman of honor. Therefore, he proceeds with caution and refrains from outwardly expressing his debauched desires in his attempts to separate Monimia from Renaldo and ultimately claim her for his own selfish desire. Adamant about his facade of title and significance, Fathom elaborately orchestrates himself as the legal yet wrongfully rejected husband, who has conducted himself as a true gentleman despite the fact that his beautiful yet unfaithful wife continues to carry on an illegitimate romantic attachment with a debauched lover, Renaldo. Although selfish in its inception, to use McKeon's words, Fathom's scheming "ability to make others accept [his] version of events as authoritative" (359) is convincing and often works to his advantage throughout the novel. Even the sympathetic and kind-hearted Madame Clement cautiously hesitates in her efforts to protect the woeful Monimia because although she suspects foul play from Fathom, she nevertheless knows that the legal claim of a husband, however debauched he may be, carries both authority and power over his wife.

Madame Clement first must distinguish the truth from the conflicting narratives between Monimia and Fathom before she is able to assist and defend Monimia. Although the widow "saw truth and conviction in every circumstance of [Monimia's] tale," she nevertheless acknowledges that Fathom also narrates a very "plausible story of . . . [their] marriage at the Fleet" and of how Renaldo "seduced the affection of

his unfortunate woman [Monimia]" (307-308). As Kahan claims, Madame Clement refrains from "acting on her sympathy for Monimia" and decides to "seek further corroboration" with a physician and money-lender "of her acquaintance" (251). After weighing evidence and comparing several accounts of Monimia and Fathom, Madame Clement concludes "that Fathom was the very traitor he himself had described; and that he had, by abusing the confidence of both, effected a fatal breach between two innocent and deserving lovers" (307-308). Through the intervention of the sacred community, Fathom blatantly fails and is exposed of his attempts to ruin Monimia, which marks the beginning of his downfall. According to Brooks, the second half of the novel, Volume II, "abounds in references to Fathom's decline" (137) with Chapter 54's title, "His eclipse, and gradual declination" (336). Brooks further explains how Fathom's demise is again emphasized in Chapter 63, when Madame Clement follows up on Fathom "in all the course of his fortune, from his first appearance in the medical sphere to his total eclipse" (395). Brooks concludes that the rise and fall of Fathom's fortunes—from good to bad—"comes equivocally in the centre [of the novel] as marked by the volume divisions" (137). Fathom then disappears from the novel completely, the titular antagonist is removed from the spotlight of the novel's finale where all the characters have their true identities revealed and are brought together in peace and harmony.

### **III. Monimia's Virtue vs. Fathom's Debauchery**

The central scene in Monimia's character development, which involves her transformation from the material world to the spiritual world becomes most apparent in her letter addressed to Renaldo, which is to be delivered after her death. The letter, however, reaches the hero not after her death but after the heroine's staged death. Because Monimia and her supporting group of friends and benefactors stage her faked death to prevent Fathom from seducing the heroine, Monimia's conversion

transforms the heroine's image of an innocent maiden fleeing her potential rapist persecutor to the image of a devout Christian aspiring to become a martyr preparing for eternal peace and safety in the afterlife. According to McKeon, Fathom can be seen as much a victim of Monimia's staged death scene as she is of his villainy, but what remains unquestionable is the fact that Monimia's narrative of truth does not require the excessive fabrication which Fathom's requires to be accepted as "authoritative" (380). Rather Monimia's virtue becomes a symbol of social virtue within a network of people who come together for the sole purpose of protecting and supporting the heroine in her most challenging moment.

Renaldo is completely duped by Fathom's film of disguises and makes the mistake of placing Monimia under Fathom's protection, while he returns to Hungary upon his father's death to save his mother and sister, and reclaim his inheritance and title. Fortunately, however, with the help of a wealthy widow, Madame Clement, and a network of benefactors, Monimia escapes Fathom's lecherous attempts to destroy her virtue. Together they fabricate the heroine's rapidly declining health, sudden death, and final burial performance. At the end of the novel, however, Monimia is resurrected from her grave to be reunited with Renaldo, who later returns to England to avenge, grieve, and mourn over the death of his beloved.

Just after Fathom attempts to rape Monimia, she defiantly argues with Fathom and claims that he cannot threaten her to accept his proposal of marriage. Fathom then demands that Monimia comply and "yield to [his] power" because he is "determined to force her" to marry him for the sake of her "own advantage" (303). In fact, Fathom tries to physically restrain Monimia against her will and force her to accept—in McKeon's terms—his "version of events" (359). The two types of force depicted in Fathom's proposal scene include, according to John Bender (1987), "compelling someone to consider"—which is forcing another person to accept a different narrative of events—and "punishment worse than death"—which is physically forcing someone in order to extract a course of action against one's will (149). Again, forcing someone to accept a different narrative of events can be seen as a

demand for information to verify a narrative of events as authoritative, and this act can be defined as, according to McKeon, a quest for truth (22). The second act of forcing another person to make a promise against one's will can be interpreted as extracting through force a course of action, which can be manipulated as innocent or guilty. According to McKeon, this course of action concerning the verdict of innocent or guilty can be defined as a quest for virtue.

My reading of the novel then centers on what I identify as—using McKeon's terms—the two “conversion experiences” (375) which brings about the novel's conclusion. First, Fathom realizes that in attempting to rape Monimia he has forfeited all opportunities of possessing her and claiming victory because she has willfully forced herself into an early grave; second, Monimia comes to terms with the fact that she cannot prove Fathom's narrative to be illegitimate nor can she protect her virtue in the secular, legal world (McKeon 381). In the novel, Fathom's conversion experience—complete with his near-death, crumpled, hand-written letter of confession—signals his final awakening acknowledgment of having forced Monimia into an early death, which has been seen as Monimia's final victory over Fathom. According to Elizabeth Durot-Bouc e (2007), Smollett denounces “moral depravity through his picture of a totally villainous adventurer” and further creates a “human devil who pursues a deliberate fathoming of abjection without the slightest trace of remorse, at least before his rather improbable conversion” (169). In comparison, Monimia's conversion experience necessarily requires the heroine to relinquish all hopes in the secular world and seek “manifest discursive and imaginative empowerment” in the afterlife (McKeon 380). The heroine's success can only be revealed with her letter to Renaldo, which bears the truth about Fathom and how both she and Renaldo have been duped by Fathom. Summing up Fathom's conversion, John Skinner (1996) explains that as Renaldo's own narrative is resolved, “Fathom's true nature is revealed, before—in the final chapter—he is moved to remorse and deathbed repentance” (127).

What is more revealing, however, is ‘how’ and ‘why’ Fathom reacts to



Monimia's early staged death, which results in his frustrated attempt to rape and marry her. Rather than feeling rage for his thwarted efforts and unsatiated desire, Fathom simply accepts the fact that the beautiful Monimia is sure to die and even begins to prepare for her funeral expenses, which is, as McKeon puts it, "not strictly sexual but political" (359). Fathom's intense and sudden need to control and possess Monimia then stems from his "artful politician [desire]" (274) to steal and possess what his legitimate mentor's son, the young Count Renaldo Melvil, most values and desires, that is the virtuous Monimia. Therefore, Fathom's attempt to rape Monimia does not originate necessarily from sexual desire but rather from a desire to control the narrative conflict concerning the meaning of the terms virtue and honor. Thus, Fathom can relinquish his pursuit of Monimia because she is destined to an early death, which means that neither man wins. Fathom easily accepts the fact that neither he or Renaldo will ever be able to possess Monimia, which means that neither man can claim victory and neither can claim—in McKeon's terms—"manifest social and material empowerment" (380).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Monimia is a pivotal character in the novel because she aims to redeem, forgive, and enhance Fathom's chances to adhere to a virtuous and penitent life rather than curse, oust, or leave Fathom in utter despair. Monimia's victory does not relate to the material and social empowerment of the patriarchal system because she personally refuses to pass judgment on and socially refrains from enforcing any form of punishment for Fathom. The heroine is successful, then, because both she and Fathom—as innocent victim and criminal aggressor—can each pursue happiness with hope in the future. Just as Fathom is shocked by his former victim's generosity, he is also grateful to learn that Providence has granted him a second chance at life and spiritual redemption.

Much like Monimia's redeeming relationship with Fathom, her letter to Renaldo is written with the purpose to enlighten and caution its reader—the hero—rather than blame and deem him guilty of contributing to her death. Monimia's letter does not throw Renaldo into despondency nor does it serve to terminate her relationship with the hero. Renaldo does not abandon Monimia in death but returns to her burial site to bare his soul to her spiritual being and to beg her spirit to forgive him for his mistaken trust in Fathom. Renaldo does not see Monimia's death as defeat, rather the hero expresses remorse and grief for his mistakes and never once evades responsibility for the tragedy of his beloved. Renaldo's return, then, vindicates Monimia's struggle to protect her virtue, while it also confirms she faithfully loved the hero. When Renaldo claims to be "totter[ing] on the edge of wretchedness and woe, without one friendly hand to save me from the terrible abyss," he encounters Monimia's reappearance—her resurrection from the graveyard—in shock and cries out, "Mysterious powers of providence! this is no phantome!" (400). Monimia's words, then, enable Renaldo to aspire for spiritual reunion with his beloved and not sink into utter despair and self-destructive guilt. The heroine, as in her relationship with Fathom, serves to enhance Renaldo's spiritual faith and enhance his hope for possible happiness in the future.

Most movingly Monimia is capable of responding to and forgiving her father's, Don Diego's, guilty consciousness, by blessing his desire to remarry and fulfill his duties to both his family and country. Although Don Diego confesses to having committed an unforgivable crime of punishing a most loyal wife and innocent daughter, submitting both to extreme grievous suffering and even causing his wife's early death, Monimia does not stand to judge her father nor does she object to his pursuit of matrimonial happiness with the widow, Madame Clement. Monimia's pivotal role, then, serves to free her father of guilt-ridden inhibition and actively reclaim his fame, title, and countrymen. The heroine not only forgives her father but also encourages her father to forgive Fathom and allow him an opportunity to adhere to a life of penitence and moral awakening. Reaching a moral and spiritual height

of excellence, Monimia is capable of redeeming her aggressor, saving her despairing lover, and enabling her father a second chance to pursue and live his life to its fullest. Far from the role of damsel in distress, who is tragically seduced and left to die in shame, Monimia shines as a heroine who acts upon her beliefs and dares to challenge social prejudice against women; she actively protects herself and those whom she loves; and, she leads the misguided debauched into redemption. Far beyond the protagonist hero, Renaldo, and the antagonist villain, Fathom, Monimia's character serves to reverse deception and clear the film from our eyes, which enables the reader to identify and judge for ourselves about the narratives of truth and virtue.

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