

The Picaresque in the 18th Century English Novel



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The word picaresque is of Spanish origin meaning cunning, crafty, scoundrel, fraud. The picaresque was one of the most typical representatives of the 16th century Spain becoming the principal hero of the picaresque novels of those times. It is no wonder that he was presented to the reader with all his negative features and moral falls, unhappy adventures and failures. The confronted difficulties and dangers overcome by the picaresque-hero followed one single aim-to be fed up, and the highest point of happiness was to eat as much as you like. But the demands of picaresque have been changed in the course of time. At the end of the 20th century they gradually began aiming at a comfortable, aesthetic and labeled lifestyle. Their intentions, actions and wanderings changed greatly from physical into mental, the place of their actions became the sofa and the coach, their position from vertical "inductive" into "deductive" horizontal. It is worth mentioning that the most optimal and efficient variant to realize their plans was the so-called profitable marriage. The well-known Spanish writer Mateo Aleman (1548-1609) in his picaresque novel "The Life and Adventures of Gusman de Alfarache", touches upon this problem. The hero of this novel while hunting for adventures (sudden wealth, reckless and perverted life, cadging.) reaches Madrid as a merchant who has gone bankrupt and tries to settle down by means of marrying a wealthy woman. Soon it turns out that this woman in her turn considered him to be well-to-do and in order to settle her material bad state she had to swindle pretending to have money. Such a fibula can be observed also in the works of the English writer Daniel Defoe- one of the founders of illuminative realism of the 18th century. The heroine of the novel *Moll Flanders* suffering a number of humiliating failures and moral degradation-deceived love, unhappy marriage, depravity, theft-moves to a new environment acting a sanctimonious role of a widow. Moll confesses the reader that her final aim was to procure a wealthy husband in that way and advises the reader to act likewise never yielding to the wish of a man before marriage. As in the case of *Gusman de Alfarache*, *Moll Flanders's* husband had married her on the same purpose not having a single penny in his pocket. But in this novel the heroes are divorced with repentance as their self-interest to each other is combined with sympathy and the wish to live the rest of their life together. If these characters had a tender affection for each other and were frank, the picaresque-heroes coming to replace them lacked the vital features of sincerity and respect.

In the period of the early Spanish Renaissance, the picaresque novel was making

its primary steps towards the foundation of the realistic novel. The first picaresque novel earning worldwide fame is "The Life, Fails and Unhappiness of Lasarillio from Tormes" published in 1554. Though the author of the work was unknown, it became popular finding a warm response not only in Spain, but beyond the borders. It was soon translated into many languages. The peculiarities typical to the picaresque novel can be also found in the works of Servantes, later Swift, Defoe, Lesage, Fielding and later in the works of many other writers. It should be noted that if in the works of the writers belonging to Renaissance or Illuminative period the picaroon-hero was courageous enough to confess lie and falsification, the 20th century hero would hardly act likewise throwing up the cards. In case of adversity and unplanned resolution, he would rather escape leaving his "minion of fortune" to grope along in darkness and uncertainty, than demolish the reputation of a sham well-bread, intelligent and a wealthy young man. Then, physically and materially perverted and broken up picaroon-hero would tempt his fate once again. Since the 16th century such a picaroon has undergone a gradual development, finding his reverberation in the works of the greatest writers.

Both the authors of the early picaresque novel, and those of the later works with similar thematic tendencies try to show the reader the real picture of their times, morals and manners, the true nature and actual strivings of a man; the social and public incentives which sometimes create a deadlock and desperate situation for an irreproachable and honest man spurring him picaresque deeds.

The picaresque subject found an immense reflection especially in the 18th century English Illuminative novel. Later it also found its proper place in the 19th and 20th century fiction with a new plot and fibula, with new solutions.

Even the main hero of the unfinished poem "Don Juan" written by Byron in 1824 and the heroes of Charles Dickens carry some characteristic features of a picaroon-hero. The literary tendency of the mentioned authors seems to differ from those of Spanish Renaissance. Modern heroes mostly tend for free and unconstrained life: life where they can make their dreams and passions come true. But generally the unexpected turning points of their lives lead them to different dangerous situations teaching a good lesson for smart ones and becoming a fate for the rest. Even Don Juan has to learn how to struggle with new situations and surroundings wearing a new mask like a Spanish picaroon.

The picaresque found its more direct and immediate response in the 18th century English novel: "The History and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders" (1721), "The Story of Captain Singleton" (1720), "The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honorable Colonel Jack" (1722) by Daniel Defoe, "Gulliver's Travels" (1726) by Jonathan Swift. Henry Fielding in his work "The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling" wishes to portray his time, the social environment, which can make one become a thief, robber, fraud, an immoral, greedy; resort to different indecent, impertinent means to reach their aim. If the 16th century Spanish picaroon testing all the possible means was seeking "to eat his fill" and live a well-to-do life, Moll Flanders, the 18th century representative, did her utmost to become a rich and respected woman. Another hero, Don Juan incarnating the 19th century, can't be enchained even by the most affectionate

strings of love and seeks to adventurous and extremely interesting life. In "The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling" (1749) the main hero, Tom is a foundling and lives in the house of wealthy Mr. Allworthy enjoying his love and trust. This fact rouses envy in everybody. But, inconsiderably, he makes mistakes one after the other: he has a hand in robbery to help the gardener's family, makes pregnant his daughter, sells the "Holy Bible" to save the friend's family from starvation, and commits different offences. Soon the wheel of Fortune turns against him. If a real picaroon would do everything in his power to earn back his former status and huge heritage, Tom has no such aspirations and leaves considering himself "clipped wings" and undeserved to be justified. He loved Sopia, the girl in the neighborhood, whose big downy everybody was well aware about. The author shows how easily Blifil, Tom's stepbrother, attains his previous purpose inducing even Mr. Allworthy who instead of resting upon his right mind very often follows people's advise and makes a wrong decision. He is too simple-minded to make unbiased and objective decisions in the environment crammed with vindictive, revengeful, envious and gossiping people. As for Tom, during his roamings he lives a life full of adventures and sometimes helping others he even jeopardizes his own life. If he were able to realize that too much charity and compassion harm sometimes, he would possibly avoid many problems not exposing to danger his life and the life of his beloved. He was not an egotist, but gave much trouble and pain to Sophia. If the author didn't regard him with favour, the despised and neglected kindness wouldn't triumph. Surely, his good and noble cause didn't go to pot, he obtained justice, but ingratitude won a victory over thankfulness.

In the above mentioned work by Henry Fielding we can see the exposed and unmasked England of that period with its morals and manners. And here Tom sometimes seems too right and artless to be real, though we can sometimes observe in the novel his minor human sins as well. Let's call them manly sins- yielding to temptation and seduction of women. At the end of the novel it turns out that Blifil who seemed to be honest, noble and well-bread, is a real picaroon ready to attain his abominations and groveling, while the considered foundling Tom is not an evil-doer, he is a true philanthropist and the true heir of Allworthy's estate.

Thus, in the course of the 16th-21st centuries it is not the nature of the picaroon that has gone paramount changes, but the thickness of his mask: actually it has become much thicker than before, concealing and hiding the real face beyond recognition. Very often the one who seems to be honest and endowed with all the characteristic features peculiar to the "positive hero", in fact is a scoundrel, a picaroon, while the considered picaroon can turn out to be a good person. (H. Fielding "The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling"; Sheridan Richard Brinsley "The School for Scandal"). If one of the necessary and indispensable conditions of the Spanish picaroon is the low social state and low origin, the 18th century picaroon only sometimes ignores the distinctive social layers. But today, the genetic, racial and all other similar barriers have fundamentally been destroyed, putting an end to the early torments and anxieties of discrimination. Now, in this matter one can draw a breath easily anticipating from any man to be a picaroon.

References:

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2. Fielding, Henry (1749) *The Hiostory of Tom Jones- a Foundling*. Illustrated Modern Library.
3. (1933) *The Complete poetical Works of Byron*. Massachusetts: Cambridge Edition.

Պիկարոյական թեման 18-րդ դարի անգլիական վեպում

Պիկարոյական վեպը վաղ վերածննդի շրջանում իսպանական ռեալիստական վեպի հիմնադրման առաջին քայլերից էր: Պիկարոյական թեման ավելի ուղղակի և անմիջական արծագանք գտավ 18-րդ դարի անգլիական վեպում: Թե Դանիել Դեֆոն իր «Մոլ Ֆլենդերս», «Նավապետ Սինգլթոն» և այլ ստեղծագործություններում, թե Ջոնաթան Սվիֆտը իր «Գուլիվերի արկածներում», թե Յենրի Ֆիլդինգը իր «Թոմ Ջոնսի ընկեցիկի պատմությունում» ցանկանում են մատնանշել իրենց ժամանակների ու բարքերի իրական պատկերը, մարդու իրական ձգտումներն ու դեմքը, այն սոցիալական ու հասարակական դրդապատճառները, որոնք երբեմն անելանելի իրավիճակներ են ստեղծում մարդու համար և խթանում պիկարոյական գործողությունները, ստիպում նրան դառնալ զոդ ու խաբեբա: