

QUIXOTISM AND SATIRE IN SMOLLETT'S 'THE ADVENTURES OF SIR LAUNCELOT GREAVES'.

КІХОТИЗМ ТА САТИРА У РОМАНІ «ПРИГОДИ СЕРА ЛАНСЕЛОТА ГРІВЗА» СМОЛЛЕТТА

Zhaboriuk I.A.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-9479-4029

PhD, Associate Professor,

Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Philology and Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages
South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University after K.D. Ushinsky

This article is an attempt to explore the Cervantes –inspired elements in Smollett's *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*. *Launcelot Greaves* does not belong to Smollett's best novels. However, it also does not deserve the emphatically negative attitude repeatedly expressed by critics who considered this novel artistically unsuccessful and its protagonist "a pale copy of the great image created by Miguel de Cervantes." To accept such an assessment as unquestionably correct would, in our view, be a mistake. First, despite the conventional nature of the plot conflict, *Launcelot Greaves* is not devoid of certain, even significant artistic merits, which will be discussed below. Second, in terms of ideological content, the novel represents an example of genuinely topical Enlightenment prose.

Unlike Don Quixote, who attacked imaginary injustices generated by his sick imagination while the real world was full of other, more serious and dangerous injustices, Launcelot directs his assault against entirely real injustices, produced by the existing social order and reality, which in Smollett's time could be "destroyed" only in the imagination of a "madman" The use of mad quixotic heroism to expose the social and moral shortcomings of the age.

The "Cervantean" character of *Launcelot Greaves* is already indicated by the presence of a typical Quixotic situation: the "madman" Launcelot is depicted by the writer surrounded by a "sober inhuman world." But the matter is not limited to this. The very interpretation of Launcelot's character is very close to that given by Cervantes to his hero. Like Don Quixote, Launcelot is a kind, honest, faultlessly just "madman," deeply convinced that, having donned knightly armor and fighting alone, he can put an end to social injustice. In Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, the influence of Miguel de Cervantes is especially noticeable.

Although *Launcelot Greaves* is not usually regarded as one of Smollett's finest works, it also does not justify the strongly negative judgments of critics who describe it as an artistic failure and saw its hero as merely weak imitation of Cervantes's famous creation. In our opinion, accepting such criticism without question would be unfair.

Key-words: plot conflict, significant artistic merits, Don Quixote, novel, episodes, protagonist, judgments of critics, satirical condemnation, character.

Ця стаття є спробою дослідити вплив творчості Сервантеса на Тобаяса Смоллетта, зокрема на його роман *Пригоди сера Ланселота Грівза*. *Ланселот Грівз* зазвичай не відносять до найкращих романів Смоллетта. Однак він, також, не заслуговує на різко негативне ставлення, яке неодноразово висловлювали критики, вважаючи цей твір художньо невдалим, а його головного героя – «блідою копією великого образу, створеного Мігелем де Сервантесом». На нашу думку, беззастережно приймати таку оцінку було б помилкою. По-перше, попри певну умовність сюжетного конфлікту, *Ланселот Грівз* не позбавлений окремих, навіть значних художніх переваг, про які йтиметься нижче. По-друге, з ідейного погляду роман є прикладом справді актуальної просвітницької прози.

На відміну від Дон Кіхота, який боровся з уявними несправедливостями, породженими його хворобливою уявою, тоді як реальний світ був сповнений інших, значно серйозніших і небезпечніших вад, Ланселот спрямовує свою боротьбу проти цілком реальних суспільних пороків, породжених існуючим соціальним ладом і дійсністю, які за часів Смоллетта могли бути «знищені» лише в уяві «божевільного». Використання образу божевільного кіхотського героя дає змогу викрити соціальні та моральні недоліки епохи.

«Сервантесівський» характер *Ланселота Грівза* виявляється вже у наявності типової кіхотівської ситуації: «божевільний» Ланселот зображений письменником серед «тверезого нелюдяного світу». Проте цим справа не обмежується. Саме трактування характеру Ланселота дуже близьке до того, яке Сервантес дав своєму героєві. Подібно до Дон Кіхота, Ланселот є добрим, чесним, бездоганно справедливим «божевільним», глибоко переконаним, що вдягнувши лицарські обладунки й борючись самотужки, він зможе покласти край соціальній несправедливості. У романі Тобаяса Смоллетта *Пригоди сера Ланселота Грівза* вплив Мігеля де Сервантеса особливо помітний.

Хоча *Ланселот Грівз* зазвичай не вважають одним із найкращих творів Смоллетта, він також не виправдовує різко негативних суджень критиків, які називали його художньою невдачею, а героя – лише слабким наслідуванням знаменитого персонажа Сервантеса. На нашу думку, беззастережно погоджуватися з такою критикою було б несправедливо.

Ключові слова: сюжетний конфлікт, значні художні переваги, Дон Кіхот, роман, епізоди, головний герой, судження критиків, сатиричне викриття, характер.

Problem statement. In the novel *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* by Tobias Smollett, the Cervantean element is particularly evident. *Launcelot Greaves* does not belong to Smollett's best novels. However, it also does not deserve the emphatically negative attitude repeatedly expressed by critics who considered this novel artistically unsuccessful and its protagonist "a pale copy of the great image created by Miguel de Cervantes." To accept such an assessment as unquestionably correct would, in our view, be a mistake. First, despite the conventional nature of the plot conflict, *Launcelot Greaves* is not devoid of certain, even significant artistic merits, which will be discussed below. Second, in terms of ideological content, the novel represents an example of genuinely topical Enlightenment prose.

Statement of Objectives. The present article aims to examine the interplay between quixotism and satire in *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, focusing on how these elements contribute to the construction of the protagonist and the social critique embedded in the narratives.

The plot scheme of *Launcelot Greaves* largely resembles that of *Don Quixote*. The protagonist of the novel, the young and wealthy squire Launcelot Greaves, being under the irresistible influence of Cervantes's brilliant creation, decides to devote his life to the struggle against injustice, pursuing the noble aim of protecting the poor and oppressed from the despotism of the rich and powerful. Having established, in his own estate, patriarchal arrangements which he considers just, and thereby somewhat improving the condition of his tenants, Launcelot conceives plans to accomplish something similar on a nationwide scale. Like his ideological inspirer *Don Quixote*, Launcelot dresses himself in knightly armor and, together with his servant, sets out along the roads of England with the noble purpose of rooting out evil and defending virtue. The image of *Don Quixote* became a symbol of the contradiction between idealism and reality, which influenced the development of British literature and cultural self-awareness.[1].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Scholars of Smollett's work, as a rule, tend to underestimate the significance of *Launcelot Greaves*. Unlike *Don Quixote*, who attacked imaginary injustices generated by his sick imagination while the real world was full of other, more serious and dangerous injustices, Launcelot directs his assault against entirely real injustices, produced by the existing social order and reality, which in Smollett's time could be "destroyed" only in the imagination of a "madman". The use of mad quixotic heroism to expose the social and moral shortcomings of the age [2, p.207]

There is also a love intrigue in *Launcelot Greaves*, but it too, unlike the love intrigue in *Don Quixote*, is not fictional but entirely real. Launcelot loves the good-natured and modest Aurelia, who has lost her parents; the girl returns his affection. But the path to their happiness is blocked by Aurelia's uncle – the heartless egoist, self-seeking, and cunning intriguer, Squire Daryell. Seeking to prevent a marriage undesirable to him, he hides Aurelia from Launcelot, attempting to marry her off to a wealthy gentleman. The trials connected with the love story of Launcelot and Aurelia give the novel greater entertainment value and the necessary plot completeness. The novel ends with a happy resolution: having suffered cruel blows of fate and realized the futility of his quixotic aspirations, Launcelot eventually marries Aurelia and finds peace of mind in a secluded family life.

Main material presentation. The "Cervantean" character of *Launcelot Greaves* is already indicated by the presence of a typical Quixotic situation: the "madman" Launcelot is depicted by the writer surrounded by a "sober inhuman world." But the matter is not limited to this. The very interpretation of Launcelot's character is very close to that given by Cervantes to his hero. Like *Don Quixote*, Launcelot is a kind, honest, faultlessly just "madman," deeply convinced that, having donned knightly armor and fighting alone, he can put an end to social injustice. In Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, the influence of Miguel de Cervantes is especially noticeable. Although *Launcelot Greaves* is not usually regarded as one of Smollett's finest works, it also does not justify the strongly negative judgments of critics who describe it as an artistic failure and saw its hero as merely weak imitation of Cervantes's famous creation. In our opinion, accepting such criticism without question would be unfair. To begin with, despite the somewhat conventional plot structure, the novel possesses a number of clear and even considerable artistic strengths. Furthermore in terms of its ideas and pitethemes, the novel stands as an example of truly relevant Enlightenment prose.

Like Cervantes's hero, Launcelot evokes in the reader both admiration and compassion. But, unlike *Don Quixote*, Launcelot is a madman not in the literal but in the figurative sense, since he fights not with "windmills," but with entirely real "monsters," embodied in the figures of evil and cruel characters: a venal judge, demagogues, corrupt politicians, and other representatives of an unjust social order.

Like Cervantes, Smollett needed the mask of "madness," first, in order to show the tragic position of a hero who does not wish to reconcile himself with "normal" reality, and second, to subject this

very reality to satirical condemnation. The character of Launcelot Greaves, despite his comic appearance, serve as symbols of criticism and hypocrisy [2, p.206].

The satirical strain in the novel is quite palpable, especially in the episodes revealing the true nature of parliamentary elections, the judicial system, and social practices. Smollett, like Cervantes, employs irony satire, and elements of absurdity to criticize society.[3, p.453]

In certain parts of the novel, the satire acquires a sharply political coloring. Smollett convincingly and truthfully shows the deep contradictions between the formal principles of England's political system and the actually existing order.

The motif of sympathy for the common people sounds particularly strong in *Launcelot Greaves*. Scenes depicting the suffering of poor and destitute individuals are marked by considerable dramatic intensity. Appealing to the reader's feelings and contrasting humanity with cold calculation, Smollett thereby not only calls bourgeois "common sense" into question, but also contributes to strengthening the position of sentimentalism in English literature.

In *Launcelot Greaves*, Smollett for the first time abandoned the plot-compositional principles of the picaresque adventure novel. Following Cervantes and drawing on the experience of Fielding, he structures his work according to the compositional scheme of the "novel of the high road." The novel is based on the motif of travel, which allows the writer to present a broad panorama of social life.

Thus, the novel *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* represents an important stage in Smollett's creative evolution. It testifies to the writer's striving to move beyond the picaresque novel and create a work of a new type – a didactic Enlightenment novel with a clearly expressed Cervantean element. Despite certain artistic shortcomings, the novel is of considerable interest both as an attempt to create a positive hero and as an important step on the way toward the writer's mature realism. The image of Don Quixot became a symbol of the contradiction between idealism and reality.[1] To accept such an assessment as unquestionably correct would be a mistake. Despite the conventional nature of the plot conflict, *Launcelot Greaves* is not devoid of certain, even significant artistic merits. In terms of ideological content, the novel represents an example of genuinely topical Enlightenment prose.

The plot scheme of *Launcelot Greaves* largely resembles that of *Don Quixote*. The protagonist of the novel – a young and wealthy squire, Launcelot Greaves – being under the irresistible influence of

Cervantes's brilliant creation, decides to devote his life to the struggle against injustice, pursuing the noble aim of protecting the poor and oppressed. Having established just arrangements in his estate and improved the position of his tenants, he strives to implement something similar on the scale of the entire society.

Like Don Quixote, Launcelot sets out on a journey, seeking to eradicate evil and defend virtue. However, unlike Don Quixote, he fights not imaginary but quite real injustices. The novel also contains a love line: Launcelot loves Aurelia, a virtuous and modest girl, and at the end of the novel attains happiness after passing through trials and disappointments

The novel *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* represents an important stage in Smollett's creative evolution. Despite certain artistic shortcomings, it is of considerable interest as an example of an Enlightenment novel with a pronounced Cervantean influence. Smollett uses the genre to criticize idealism, replacing the philosophical depth of Quixote with a sarcastic satire of society [4, p.171]

The influence of Cervantes is also manifested in the structure of the novel and the typology of the characters. As in Don Quixote, Smollett employs the motif of the "madman," through whom the author subjects social vices to satire. At the same time, Launcelot's "madness" has a figurative meaning and is used to illuminate real social problems embodied in the figures of evil and unjust rulers, tyrants, corrupt officials, and demagogues.

The novel is distinguished by a more rigorous structure than Smollett's earlier works. There are no accidental episodes; the narrative is subordinated to the overall logic of plot development and to the theme of social justice. In *Launcelot Greaves*, the political coloring of certain scenes is particularly noticeable, for example, the confrontation with Judge Gobble and other representatives of authority, which emphasizes the connection between artistic fiction and real social criticism.

The moral and ethical dimension of the novel is also important. If in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* the determining role is played by satire aimed at condemning human deceit and greed, then in *Launcelot Greaves* the central place is occupied by the affirmation of a positive ideal. The author shows the impossibility of realizing Quixotic illusions while simultaneously emphasizing the nobility, virtue, and generosity of spirit of the protagonist.

Thus, Smollett's early novels, including *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *Launcelot Greaves*, represent characteristic examples of Enlightenment literature. They address problems relevant for their time, pre-

dominantly of a moral and ethical nature, using the device of contrastive opposition between good and evil, human nobility and baseness. These works paved the way for new artistic trends in eighteenth-century English literature, laying the foundations for the development of the novel as a genre combining social criticism, Enlightenment aims, and a realistic artistic manner.

Thus, the novel begins directly with the exposition of the conflict. However, the novel also contains an exposition, the role of which is played by a retrospective account by one of the characters about Launcelot's youth, his love for Aurelia, and the conditions he encountered in his ancestral estate.

The main events forming the basis of the novel's content take place on the "high roads" and country lanes of England, where the writer sends his hero, making him a direct and indignant witness of many social crises. It should be noted that the road in *Launcelot Greaves*, unlike the road in Smollett's earlier novels with its intricacy and sharp turns, is marked by a clearer direction and does not go beyond the boundaries of the "native country."

Submitting to the author's will, Launcelot travels approximately the same route that had previously been taken by the hero of the picaresque novel Roderick Random, but naturally in a different role and under different life circumstances.

In comparison with Smollett's previous novels, *Launcelot Greaves* is distinguished by greater compositional orderliness. It completely lacks accidents that fall outside the plot framework. The plot is built on material consisting of events complete in their meaning – an undeniable result of the influence of Fielding, justly considered an outstanding master of the comic epic.

The growing influence of Fielding is also felt in the strengthening of the author's presence in the narrative. Unlike *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, *Launcelot Greaves* contains no direct statements by the author himself. Nevertheless, his attitude toward the depicted events and characters is manifested very clearly thanks to the sparse but expressive scenes contained in the narrator's commentary. Most often this is achieved with the help of evaluative epithets in phrases such as "poor widow," "honest sailor," "kind heart," and the like when referring to positive characters, or such as "vile crime," "heartless villain," committing "inhuman deeds," when negative characters are characterized.

There is yet another noteworthy feature in *Launcelot Greaves* that testifies to the intense creative searches of its author – namely, the writer's suddenly emerging interest in the depiction of the material

world. If in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* Smollett for the first time turned to landscape, then in *Launcelot Greaves* his attention is drawn to the interior. Already on the first page of the novel we encounter a detailed description of the interior of the kitchen of the "Black Lion" inn, distinguished by great expressiveness.

With the help of characteristic, purely everyday realistic details (red fireplace candles, brightly polished pewter and copper utensils, the cheerful fire in the hearth around which the inhabitants of the inn have gathered, and so on), the writer not only gives a clear idea of the setting but also creates a particular mood that prepares the reader for the events that unfolded that evening in the inn kitchen. The detailed depiction of the circumstances in which the characters act, and the concretization and typification of their environment, would later become one of the leading principles of realist literature.

Thus, like Smollett's early novels, *Launcelot Greaves*, in terms of its ideological content, is a characteristic example of Enlightenment literature. [.5]. In them the author raises and attempts to resolve problems relevant to his time, predominantly of a moral and ethical nature, using the device traditional for Enlightenment writers – the contrastive opposition of good and evil, selflessness and acquisitiveness, human nobility and human baseness.

However, the ways of resolving these problems in the novels under consideration are different. In *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, the determining factor is satire – passionate and uncompromising satirical condemnation of human egoism, hypocrisy, and greed embodied in the image of the novel's protagonist. In *Launcelot Greaves*, on the contrary, the affirmation of a positive ideal is paramount, although the satirical strain in it is also very strong. This novel represents an attempt to solve seriously the problem of the positive hero – an attempt that is noble but not entirely successful. Being a realist, Smollett in fact showed the inadequacy of his hero's Quixotic illusions, although the writer himself to a certain extent shared them.

Although close in their ideological orientation, the novels *Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *Launcelot Greaves* differ sharply from each other in structural terms. The structural organization of *Ferdinand Count Fathom* is based on plot-compositional principles characteristic of the picaresque adventure genre. In this sense, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* repeats, with certain modifications, the plot-compositional patterns of the writer's earlier novels.

Conclusions. In *Launcelot Greaves*, Smollett departed from this scheme. Written under the influence of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Fielding's

“comic epics,” *Launcelot Greaves* represents a distinctive variant of the “novel of the high road” of the Cervantean type.

Both novels bear the imprint of the author’s intense creative searches and are distinguished by the writer’s innovative approach to solving the ideological and artistic tasks he set himself. Unfortunately, certain artistic losses were also inevitable. Among the most vulnerable aspects of *Ferdinand Count Fathom* are the well-known eclecticism of its artistic structure, the overuse of authorial didactic reflections, and the pronounced schematic treatment of positive characters. The artistic merits of *Launcelot Greaves* are weakened by the conventionality of certain episodes and the insufficient motivation of the behavior of some characters.

However, one cannot ignore the artistic achievements the writer attained in the novels under consid-

eration. In a number of cases they amount to genuine artistic discoveries. In them Smollett appears as an innovator, in particular as one of the first among English novelists to introduce into the artistic fabric of the novel realistic descriptions of nature and of the material world – the objects surrounding human beings.

With his novels, the writer paved the way for new artistic directions in the English literature of his time, facilitating the transition from Enlightenment realism to more complex forms of artistic representation of reality. The experience Smollett gained while working on the novels *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* and *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* enabled him to create his final and most significant work – the novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*.

СПИСОК ВИКОРИСТАНИХ ДЖЕРЕЛ:

1. Paulson, Ronald. *Don Quixote in England*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. 12 p
2. Rawson, Claude. “Quixotic Satire in Smollett.” In *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, 201–223. London: Allen & Unwin, 1985. 23 p.
3. Folkenflik, Robert. “Smollett and Cervantes.” *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 21, no. 3 (1981): 451–468. 18 p.
4. Prescott, Laurence E. “The English Quixote: Smollett’s *Sir Launcelot Greaves*.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 2 (1980): 163–181. 19 p.
5. Maynadier, G. H. Introduction to *Sir Launcelot Greaves*. Project Gutenberg / scanned editions. 12 p.



Стаття поширюється на умовах ліцензії відкритого доступу CC BY 4.0

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 30.04.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 22.05.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026