

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE

TOWN AND COUNTRY MANNERS

Introduction

Fielding was greatly concerned with manners, that is the more superficial aspects of civilisation, such as styles of living, codes of conduct, modes and customs, in general social behaviour. In his most extensive description of the manners which he considered necessary in ordered society, the "Essay on Conversation", published in *The Miscellanies*, 1743, Fielding, asserting that society was formed, not for mutual plunder, but for the common good,¹ describes "conversation", or communication between people, as: "the noblest privilege of human nature, and productive of all rational happiness".² This social felicity depends upon general "good-breeding", a quality consisting not in forms, but in essentials, being "not at first confined to externals, much less to any particular dress or attitude of the body; nor were the qualifications expressed by it to be furnished by a milliner, a tailor, or a periwig-maker: no, nor even by a dancing-master himself", but being rather "the art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to the ease and happiness of those with whom you converse".³ Thus Fielding defines good-breeding, the first principle of good manners, as the outward manifestation of good nature, in his estimation the most fundamental moral principle. When he turns specifically to the social skills he asserts that, although "all mere ceremonies exist in form only, and have in them no substance at all",⁴ as these ceremonies are a kind of good-breeding imposed by tradition, they should generally be observed. He then outlines appropriate public behaviour for the various levels of society, giving the landed classes precedence

¹For Fielding's position with regard to the current interpretations of human nature and society, see Chapter Four.

²"An Essay on Conversation", Henley XIV, p 247.

³*Ibid.*, p 248f.

⁴*Ibid.*, p 252.

over the moneyed:

Men are superior to each other in this our country by title, by birth, by rank in profession, and by age; very little, if any, being to be allowed to fortune, though so much is generally exacted by it, and commonly paid to it.¹

He stipulates that birth alone is not a sufficient entitlement to superiority:

that is a poor and mean pretence to honour, when supported with no other. Persons who have no better claim to superiority, should be ashamed of this; they are really a disgrace to those very ancestors from whom they would derive their pride and are chiefly happy in this, that they want the very moderate portion of understanding which would enable them to despise themselves.²

He further stipulates that: "The qualities of the mind so, in reality, establish the truest superiority over one another".³ As a result of blindness to this fact,

men who excel others in trifling instances, frequently cast a supercilious eye on their superiors in the highest. Thus the least pretensions to pre-eminence in title, birth, riches, equipages, dress, & c; constantly overlook the most noble endowments of virtue, honour, wisdom, sense, wit, and every other quality, which can truly dignify and adorn a man.⁴

He concludes his essay with two maxims:

First, that every person who indulges his ill-nature or vanity, at the expense of others; and in introducing uneasiness, vexation, and confusion into society, however exalted or high-titled he may be, is thoroughly ill-bred. Secondly, that whoever from the goodness of his disposition or understanding, endeavours to his utmost to cultivate the good-humour and happiness of others, and to contribute to the ease and comfort of all of his acquaintance, however low in rank fortune may have placed him, or however clumsy he may be in his figure or demeanor, hath, in the truest sense of the word, a claim to good-breeding.⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, p 257f.

² *Ibid.*, p 265.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 263.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 277.

Following traditional values, Fielding believed that the governing landed classes should display the insignia of their superior rank by plain and genteel living and dignified conduct, and that the mercantile classes should not be prompted by wealth, nor the labouring classes by insubordination, to emulate their superiors but, rather, should live and behave with industry, patience and humility. He regarded the life-styles and behaviour of the various classes as an index of the strength of the stratified system, and claimed to see in contemporary society a disintegration of the traditional manners which he believed to have prevailed in England's past and, therefore, by extension, the disintegration of the old social structure itself. He set about reforming the age with a vigorous satirical campaign, a prominent strategy in which was the conventional contrast between town and country. He represents London as a chaotic centre in which traditional manners are being undermined by extreme wealth and corrupting foreign influences. He portrays the upper classes dwelling permanently in Westminster as having adopted forms rather than essentials as the insignia of their superior rank, and as having abandoned traditional plainness of living for luxury, ostentation, frivolous diversions and French and Italian foppery, and exchanged dignity of behaviour for a supercilious contempt for all those outside the circle of the *beau monde*. By these means they enabled themselves to be vulgarly emulated by the mercantile and labouring classes, who only had to adopt the outward show and insolence of their superiors in order to become "people of fashion". This emulation of genteel living by the middle and lower classes, which Fielding and his conservative contemporaries regarded as rebellious insubordination (see *Inquiry*), really amounted to an improvement in the living conditions of these people who, through increased economic prosperity, were able to enjoy some of the material benefits previously possessed only by the very rich. Fielding, in line with the critics and satirists of the time, argued that such phenomena heralded an age of anarchy. This was an exaggeration, for whilst the old ways were changing, the reigning spirit of the age was not one of decay, but one of growth and improving standards. Nevertheless, to Fielding, London, in which all changes became

immediately visible, was a centre of disintegration and, whilst he portrays its alleged disorders as spreading out into the country, he presents rural England as the only stronghold of traditional manners and the old hierarchy. Although he constantly portrays the traditional boorishness of the fox-hunting squirearchy as being as irresponsible as the transgressions of the town, he habitually idealises those gentry who retain the traditional plain life-style, dignified behaviour and old English hospitality long celebrated by conservative writers. Such are presented as exemplary patterns according to which the conventional ways should be strengthened and maintained.

An important aspect of good manners for Fielding was emotional integrity, the unashamed expression of the sympathetic and benevolent feelings, as described in his many definitions of good-nature:

What by this name, then, shall be understood?
 What? but the glorious lust of doing good?
 The heart that finds its happiness to please
 Can feel another's pain, and taste his ease:
 The cheek that with another's joy can glow,
 Turn pale and sicken with another's woe;¹

He considered that such spontaneous philanthropy was essential to the maintenance of traditional stratified society because such a system readily became unjust and could only be maintained if all its members cared for one another openly and personally, in a close-knit network of loving community relationships. He often portrays this to some extent feudal ideal in miniature form, as a married couple and their children, living in a "family of love".² With the conspicuous exception of the Heartfree family in *Jonathan Wild* and possibly the Booth family in *Amelia*, he never posits this "family of love" in London, which he generally represents as a cold world of excessively refined manners and emotional hypocrisy. Rather, he habitually places it in the country environment, and offers it as a model for humane society.

¹"Of Good-Nature", Henley XII, p 258f. Fielding was by nature warm-hearted and thoroughly in accord with the Latitudinarian Divines who stressed the importance of free emotional expression. (See R.S. Crane, "Suggestions Towards a Genealogy of *The Man of Feeling*", *ELH* 1, 1934, pp 205-230, p 209.)

²*Champion*, February 26th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 222). And see below, p 67, the discussion on *The Modern Husband*. *JA* IV, xv (Henley II, p 207).

As stated above, in his early writings Fielding's presentation of the contrast between town and country manners is largely rhetorical, although the social importance of the contrast is clearly visible. This social importance is consistently expressed in his ballad operas, dramatic burlesques and *The Champion*, but in the *genre* mainly concerned with manners, the genteel comedy, its consistent expression is hampered by the derivative quality of the writing. With the exception of *The Modern Husband*, his town and country characters are relatively lifeless and unimpressive, and the conventional attractiveness clinging to the town, and boorishness to the country, sometimes obliged him to dismiss his preference for the latter over the former. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding, liberated from these restrictions, combines materials from life and literature to vitalise his characters, thereby rendering them impressive representatives of rural and urban manners. He emphatically associates modern degeneracy with the town and traditional integrity with the country, and convincingly establishes the latter as a viable alternative to the former. Confronted as London magistrate with what seemed to him the irrevocable disintegration of traditional society, Fielding, in *Amelia* and *The Covent Garden Journal* attributes unprecedented importance to manners, representing the emulation of the upper by the lower classes as heralding the collapse of civilisation. He largely abandons rhetorical strategies in favour of a harshly realistic presentation of the appalling social consequences which he pessimistically ascribed to changing manners in London, and alongside this, his conventional idealisation of traditional manners in the country, far from being a viable alternative to the town, is a refuge from it.

Section One: The Early Works

Fielding's most extensive presentation of the contrast between town and country manners in his early writings is in the genteel comedy. This is a *genre* in which the contrast had featured prominently since the Restoration Period, being presented not only from a comic perspective but also, as John Loftis observes, from a social perspective, reflecting the superficial rivalries between various groupings in town and country, which resulted from increased economic activity in contemporary society.¹ As the comedies were written by and for the courtiers of Charles II, the manners of all groupings are portrayed from their viewpoint. In a spirit of revenge against the City of London, which had largely supported Oliver Cromwell against Charles II, the dramatists satirised the increasingly wealthy mercantile classes as vulgarly and ineptly aspiring to the genteel manners of the landed classes, representing the London merchant as a ridiculous stereotype character, usually outsmarted by adroit gentlemen from Westminster. Although themselves belonging to the landed classes, these dramatists also ridiculed country-dwellers. As Loftis observes, the contrast between court and country manners in Restoration Comedy seems to have reflected rivalry between the upper and lower echelons of the English landed classes, between the nobility and the squirearchy. The nobility, who kept pace with fashionable town society by spending the annual "season" there, away from their country estates (on which most presumably dwelt for some part of each year), are never portrayed as rustics, always as Londoners, whereas the squirearchy, most of whom dwelt permanently in the country and travelled only occasionally to the town and were, therefore, relatively out of touch with current trends there, are

¹J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, plff.

I am largely indebted to Loftis for many of the ideas, expressed in the following pages, on Restoration Comedy in relation to Restoration and eighteenth-century society. Where the debt is specific rather than general I have noted it.

always portrayed as socially maladroit rustics and treated with contempt.¹ In Restoration Comedy, it is the idle and sophisticated manners of the court circle which, although satirised when taken to foppish extremes, are celebrated and admired. These judgements, entrenched in the characterisation, dialogue, plotting and *milieux* of comedy, were carried by literary momentum into the eighteenth century, where accelerating socio-economic and ideological changes put pressure on dramatists to modify them. The demand for more respectful dramatic treatment by the mercantile classes, who constituted an increasingly important remunerative part of the audiences, encouraged dramatists to acknowledge that many of the wealthier merchants, greater numbers of whom were living in fashionable Westminster or on elegant country estates, were truly genteel in their manners. By the 1720s, Whig panegyric on great merchants was being voiced in comedy,² and the conventional contempt was thereafter largely reserved for smaller traders remaining in the City of London.³ Growing nationalism and opposition to foreign, particularly French, manners (foreign influences were most apparent amongst the *beau monde* in town), led to a greater idealisation of traditional English ways which remained most visibly in rural areas.⁴ By the 1730s, traditional rural manners were often

¹J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 68ff.

²Those supporting the merchants spoke out against the harsh dramatic stereotype, for example, Joseph Addison in *Spectator* 34, and *Spectator* 446.

³See J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 122.

⁴The Augustan Age was one of extreme nationalism. Although French and Italian cultures were widely accepted in England, some feared that these were taking precedence over English culture. It was a rhetorical commonplace for writers to champion English manners as opposed to foreign manners. Despite this, and other factors, there was no sustained reaction against the harsh treatment of country dwellers in comedy until the 1730s (see J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 100). Probably the only plays portraying country manners sympathetically prior to the 1730s were George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, 1706, and *The Beau's Stratagem*, 1707, and Charles Johnson's *The Country Lasses*, 1715, and *The Cobbler of Preston*, 1716.

portrayed in comedy as being superior to the modern, cosmopolitan manners of Westminster. Of great importance in modifying the old cynical judgements of human nature of Restoration Comedy was the growing acceptance of human optimism, as promulgated by the Latitudinarian Divines, the Earl of Shaftesbury and others, who asserted that Mankind was basically good and, therefore, not in need of severe correction. This inspired dramatists to modulate harsh satire into comedy, and to treat London merchants and country squires more sympathetically. The new ethical forces, coupled with the widening social basis of theatrical audiences, meant that the sophisticated code of the aristocratic court circle could no longer be confidently celebrated on the stage and it was increasingly toned down. Despite these changes the old judgements on town and country still prevailed in comic drama in the late 1720s, when Fielding began writing, mainly because Restoration comedies remained standard *repertoire* in the theatres, and because most playwrights and players were derivative rather than original in style.

Fielding did not write genteel comedy to reform society. He was a professional dramatist, who, although complaining of the restrictions placed on writers by the expectations of the audience,¹ was ready to cater to popular demand, in the current models. He was not so slavishly imitative, however, as to neglect his own viewpoints which are clearly visible in the contrast between town and country manners in his comedies. The *genre's* conventional satire against socially pretentious "citts" accorded with his views for, although acknowledging the merchants' importance to the nation, he believed they should keep their place. Rivalry between the cities of London and Westminster in his comedies, however, is a minor theme only and does not extend beyond cliché in the dialogue.² As Loftis observes, the central social antithesis in Fielding's comedies is that between Westminster and the country,³ and here Fielding's attitudes were at variance

¹See, for example, the Prologue, *The Universal Gallant*. Henley XI, p 78.

²Scattered throughout Fielding's genteel comedies are conventionally contemptuous references to the city of London. For example, *Love in Several Masques*, I, i, I, ii and II, i (Henley VIII, pp 16, 20, 30). *The Temple Beau*, I, vi (Henley VIII, p 117). *The Modern Husband*, II, vi (Henley X, p 35). *The Universal Gallant* I, i (Henley XI, p 88).

³J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 116.

with those in his model. Inherent in the *genre* was a celebration of the modern, sophisticated town manners which Fielding, in the bulk of his writing, portrayed as being irresponsible, and also inherent was satire against the traditional country manners which, excepting the boorish squirearchy, he always portrayed as being ideal. In his comedies, Fielding tried to effect a compromise, to use the old form, particularly as developed by William Congreve, with its inherent preference for town life, to express his own preference for country life. This generally results in a conflict between the style of the *genre* and the thrust of the message, a conflict which, on the whole, undermines the success with which Fielding uses the country-city contrast in this *genre*, to present his own judgements on contemporary manners.

This conflict is immediately apparent in the many debates on town and country in Fielding's first genteel comedy, *Love in Several Masques*, produced at the theatre in Drury Lane in 1728. Extreme exemplars of town and country manners are contrasted in Lord Formal and Sir Positive Trap, and both are conventionally satirised, Formal for his excessive formality and French foppery, and Trap for his stupidity and family pride. Trap, however, is also mocked through his preference for simple rural manners over sophisticated urban manners. See, for example, the following conversation in which Trap praises his family's prudent women. He is challenged by two town fops for preferring the traditional English domestic virtues, retained by women in the country, over the degenerate ways of women in eighteenth-century London, a preference which Fielding himself constantly expressed throughout his writings.¹

¹Throughout his writings, Fielding often idealised traditional English domestic customs retained by women in the country as opposed to the allegedly degenerate manners in eighteenth-century London. We see this, for example, in his descriptions of the Clergyman's wife, *Champion*, February 26th, 1739-40, Mrs Wilson in *JA*, and Amelia in *Amelia*.

SIR POSITIVE TRAP. They are none of our fidgeting, flirting, flaunting lasses, that sleep all the morning, dress all the afternoon, and card it all night. Our daughters rise with the sun, and go to bed with him: The Traps are housewives, cousin. We teach our daughters to make a pie instead of a curtsy, and that old English art of clear-starching, instead of that heathenish gambol called dancing.

LORD FORMAL. Sir, give me leave to presume to ask your pardon.

SIR APISH SIMPLE. Why, sir father of mine, you will not speak against dancing before the ladies. Clear-starching, indeed! you will pardon him, madame? Sir Positive is a little *a la campagne*.

SIR POSITIVE TRAP. Dancing begets warmth, which is the parent of wantonness. It is, sir, the great grandfather of cuckoldom.

LORD FORMAL. O, inhuman! it is the most glorious invention that has been conceived by the imagination of mankind, and is the most perfect mark that distinguishes us from the brutes.

SIR POSITIVE TRAP. Ay, sir, it may serve some, perhaps; but the Traps have always had reason to distinguish them.

LORD FORMAL. You seem to have misunderstood me, sir: I mean the polite world from the savage.¹

This conflict between urban medium and rural message is even more apparent in the debates between Merital, Malvil, Lady Matchless and Vermilia for the town, and Wisemore for the country. Wisemore, formerly a town rake, after three years in rural retirement has returned briefly to London on business and is greeted by his former friends:

WISEMORE. Mr Merital, Mr Malvil, your humble servant; I am fortunate, indeed, at my first arrival, to embrace my friends.

MALVIL. Dear Wisemore, a thousand welcomes; what propitious wind has drove thee to town?

WISEMORE. No wind propitious to my inclination, I assure ye, gentlemen; I had taken leave of this place long ago, its vanities, hurries, and superficial, empty, ill-digested pleasures.

¹ *Love in Several Masques*, III, vii (Henley VIII, p 49f).

MERITAL. But you have seen your error, and, like a relenting nun, who had too rashly taken leave of the world, art returned to enjoy thy pleasures again.

WISEMORE. No, 'tis business, business, gentlemen, that drags me hither; my pleasures lie another way, a way little known to you gentlemen of the town.

MALVIL. Not so little known as you imagine, Ned, nor have you been supposed alone these three years in the country. 'Tis no secret that you have had the conversation of

WISEMORE. The wise, the learned, the virtuous. Books, sir, have been mostly my companions, a society preferable to that of this age. Who would converse with fools and fops, whilst they might enjoy a Cicero or an Epictetus, a Plato, or an Aristotle? Who would waste his afternoon in a coffee-house, or at a tea-table, to be entertained with scandal, lies, balls, operas, intrigues, fashions, flattery, nonsense, and that swarm of impertinences which compose the commonplace chat of the world? Who would bear all this, did he know the sweets of retirement?

MERITAL. Let me survey thee a little that I may be certain you are my old friend metamorphosed, and no apparition.

WISEMORE. Look ye, sirs, of all places in the world my spirit would never haunt this. London is to me what the country is to a gay, giddy girl, pampered up with the love of admiration; or a young heir just leapt into his estate and chariot. It is a mistress, whose imperfections I have discovered, and cast off. I know it; I have been a spectator of all its scenes. I have seen hypocrisy pass for religion, madness for sense, noise and scurrility for wit, and riches for the whole train of virtues. Then I have seen folly beloved for its youth and beauty and revered for its age. I have discovered knavery in more forms than ever Proteus had, and traced him through them all, till I have lodged him behind a counter, with a statue of bankruptcy in his hand, and a pair of gilded horns in his pocket.

MERITAL AND MALVIL. Ha, ha, ha.

WISEMORE. I know the folly, foppery, and childishness of your diversions -- I know your vices too.

MALVIL. And hast practised them, to my knowledge.

WISEMORE. So much the more have they contracted my hate. Oons! If I do not get out of this vile town in three days, I shall get out of the world in four.¹

Wisemore, as his name indicates, represents wisdom in the play, and his judgements on country and city herald those of Fielding's mature writings. As a character, however, and therefore as a spokesman for the country, he is relatively unappealing for, although he bears down his town opponents by sheer force of his urban denunciation, he is always at a distinct disadvantage in repartee with these witty Londoners. These, being modelled on the Mirabels and Millamants of genteel comedy, are all urbanely attractive and, moreover, they display the good-nature, good manners and commonsense which Fielding, in his mature writings, never significantly attributes to city-dwellers. Although these Londoners themselves see the shortcomings of town life, as represented by the fops, and although they often defend Wisemore as "a man of admirable sense"² against such scornful criticisms of him as "a queer bundle of rusticity"³ and "one of those barbarous insects the polite call country 'squires'",⁴ they themselves continually celebrate the town and ridicule Wisemore and the country. Whilst they do this in dramatic *cliche*, they outwit Wisemore, whose Juvenalian urban satire is out of place in the urbane form of genteel comedy. In the town-country dichotomy then, we find ourselves attracted to the Londoners who continually satirise Wisemore's rural values, which are meant to govern our reaction to the play.

Similar criticisms can be made of Fielding's presentation of town and country manners in the second comedy which he produced, *The Temple Beau*, performed at the Goodman's Fields theatre in East London, in 1730. Despite James Ralph's compliment to the mercantile audience in the prologue: "Convince that town, which

¹ *Love in Several Masques*, I, ii. Henley VIII, p 19f.
See also, IV, ii. Henley VIII, p 63.

² *Ibid.*, I, iv (Henley VIII, p 23).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, ix (Henley VIII, p 54).

boasts its better breeding,/That riches ... are not all that you exceed in,"¹ the play's most important statement concerning social issues is this one by the harshly satirised Sir Avarice Pedant, who inadvertently attributes the age's alleged degeneracy to commercial activity:

Learning is a fine thing, indeed, in an age when of the few that have it the greater part starve. I remember when a set of strange fellows used to meet at Wills' coffee-house; but now it's another Change Alley. Every man now who would live, must be a stock-jobber.²

This socially conservative judgement was a prominent one in Augustan literature as many writers, including Fielding, represented 'stockjobbing' as the most disruptive aspect of current economic activity, regarding the quick wealth and poverty which it occasioned as undermining the traditional social structure.³ There is no exposition of it, however, in *The Temple Beau*. The most important development in the play is the first appearance in Fielding's writings of the Latitudinarian figure of the instinctively benevolent 'good-natured man', in this case, Veromil, who is a country gentleman. Although more appealing, because less abrasive than Wisemore, Veromil represents the rural values less vigorously, and is generally at a disadvantage in repartee with his town opponents who, whilst being less attractive than Wisemore's, nevertheless, in accordance with the conventions of genteel comedy, occupy the centre-stage, thereby hampering any extensive idealisation of the country.

¹ Prologue, *The Temple Beau* (Henley VIII, p 103).

² *Ibid.*, V, xv (Henley VIII, p 177).

³ Many writers represented stockjobbers as parasites feeding on the nation's economic prosperity and disrupting social stability. For a typical view, see Richard Steele, *The Englishman* (first series), No. 4, October 13, 1713. Loftis points out that many Whig dramatists distinguished between merchants and stockjobbers. (*Comedy and Society*, p 94ff) Fielding often satirised the stockjobbers and their activities. See *The Modern Husband*, II, vi (Henley X, p 35); *The Fathers or the Good-Natured Man* IV (Henley XII, p 203); *The Author's Farce* III, i (Henley VIII, p 232f.). He portrays the dramatic stereotype of the stockjobber in Mr Stocks of *The Lottery*. In *The Champion*, February 16th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 207), he describes the stockjobbers as disrupting social stability by plundering the gentry of their estates.

The derivative style in *The Wedding Day*, written about 1730, and produced at Drury Lane in 1743,¹ hinders Fielding's consistent dramatisation of that issue to which he frequently attributed the alleged degeneracy in contemporary manners, the neglect of traditional education for the young. He considered the maintenance of ordered society to depend greatly upon parents educating their children to fulfil the traditional class obligations. He continually charged the upper classes with replacing instruction in traditional manners, morals and cultural standards, and the salutary disciplines of Classical and Christian teaching, with an early initiation into the fashions and follies of the town or the brutal sports of the country, thereby depriving the nation of future strong leadership.² In *The Wedding Day* he presents one such irresponsible parent in Mr Mutable, a country squire, who thus describes his education of his son:

MR MUTABLE. My son says true, my lord. I have lived most of my time in the country, the greater my misfortune, and my father's crime, my lord. But, I thank my stars, my son cannot charge me with stinting his education. Alas! my lord, it must be done betimes. A man can never be sent into the world too soon. What can they learn at schools or universities? ... No, no, I sent my boy to town at sixteen, and allowed him wherewithal to keep the best company. And, I thank my stars, I have lived to see him one of the finest gentlemen of his age.³

¹In the Preface to his *Miscellanies* Fielding describes *The Wedding Day* as the third play which he wrote (Henley XII, p 239).

²Fielding constantly censured what he saw as the faulty education of the young in town and country. *The Champion*, January 29th, 1739-40. *JA*, III, vii. (Henley I, p 275f.) *TP*, XIII, January 21-28, 1746. *CGJ*, 42, May 26, 1752; *CGJ*, 55, July 18, 1752; *CGJ*, 56, July 25, 1752. He portrays the disastrous consequences of such faulty education in the town careers of Mr Wilson in *JA*, and the Man of the Hill in *TJ*. His views on the importance of education to society are summed up in these words from two classical authors quoted by Fielding in *JJ* 22, April 30, 1748 (Coley, p 257): "No Man can doubt (says Aristotle in his *Politicks*) but that the Education of Youth ought to be the principal Business ... of the Legislature; and that great Mischief arises to the Polity of those Cities where this is neglected" (VIII, i (1337^a 11-13). "Those who do not rightly instruct and educate their Children, do not only an Injury to their Children, but to the Public". (Possibly altered from *Verrine Orations* II, iii, pp 69, 161. Coley n.4.)

³*The Wedding Day* II, v (Henley XII, p 90).

Millamour, the disguised "lord" to whom Mutable speaks, thus pronounces Fielding's judgement on the social significance of such education:

It is owing, Sir, to such wise parents as you that the present age abounds with such fine gentlemen as it does. Our dull forefathers were either rough soldiers, pedantic scholars, or clownish farmers. And it was as difficult to find a fine gentleman among us then as it is a true Briton among us now.¹

Millamour, however, is a poor spokesman for Fielding's viewpoint for, although declaring himself an Arcadian swain,² he is a town predator, modelled very much on Congreve's Mirabel, and the only alternative to his ruthlessness in the play is the good-nature of Heartfort, who, unlike his counterparts in Fielding's mature writings, is not a country-dweller, but another town rake. The play's only rural representative is Mr Mutable, a conventionally boorish country squire. Thus Fielding's imitative style in this comedy, which owes more to Congreve than any of his other comedies, prevents his consistently using the town-country contrast to develop the judgement on contemporary manners stated only briefly in the dialogue.³

Fielding's most extensive dramatic portrayal of the faulty education of youth, critical of both town and country, is in *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*, written in the 1730s and produced posthumously by Garrick and Sheridan at Drury Lane in 1778.⁴ The play presents three different fathers who educate

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, III, x (Henley XII, p 114).

³ Some of the faults in *The Wedding Day* could be attributed to the difficult circumstances under which the play was written and the fact that it had to be performed without serious revision. See Fielding's Preface to the *Miscellanies* (Henley XII, p 240f).

⁴ Cross, *op.cit.*, III, p 106f. According to Cross, the play was written between 1733 and 1736 (p 103). Fielding completed it in 1743 but produced *The Wedding Day* instead and the manuscript of *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man* was then taken out of England and not discovered until many decades later. Because of the posthumous production, many features of the play must be attributed to Garrick and Sheridan.

their offspring incorrectly. Mr Valence, a town gentleman, instructs his son and daughter in greed, a project in which he is thoroughly successful. Sir Gregory Kennel, a country squire, educates his son by sending him on the "tour of Europe", from which young Kennel returns home complete with French fashions and habits, and a contempt for all things English. He is a typical product of the tour as Fielding saw it, generally regarding it as a futile and even damaging educational exercise.¹ Mr Boncour, the "good-natured man", another town gentleman, educates his son and daughter by indulging their extravagant town tastes, with the inevitable results. In this play Fielding uses young people to exemplify the degeneracy of manners in eighteenth century London. They are vain, ignorant, foppish and insolent. The degeneracy which they represent, from the traditional manners of the past, is clearly established in this conversation between the young Boncours and their uncle, Sir George:

SIR GEORGE BONCOUR. Upon my word, sir, you have a very pretty house here, completely finished and furnished - when I was a young fellow we had not half so good a taste.

YOUNG BONCOUR. No, sir, the age is improved since that time - when a knight of the shire used to jog to town with a brace of geldings, and a single liveryman; and very prudently take a first floor in the Strand, when, if you asked in the shop for Sir Thomas, a dirty fellow behind the counter called out, Maid, is Sir Thomas above? - I dareswear, uncle, in your time, many a tradesman hath had half a dozen men of fashion in his house.

SIR GEORGE BONCOUR. If he had nine men of fashion in his house, he had fewer in his books, I believe.

MISS BONCOUR. And once in seven years came up madame in the stage-coach, to see one comedy, one tragedy, go once to the opera, and rig out herself and family till the next general election - ha! ha! ha!

¹Fielding deplored the tour of Europe as a futile educational exercise. *JA* III, vii (Henley I, p 275f.). *TP* X, iii, January 21-28, 1746; *TJ* VIII, xv (Henley IV, p 147ff.); *CGJ* 42, May 26, 1752 (Jensen II, p 4). Pope describes a typical product of the tour as many Augustans saw it in *The Dunciad* IV, ll. 282-335 (*op.cit.*, p 781ff.). Sir Gregory educates his youngest son in the rural sports, which Fielding also deplored as educationally futile.

SIR GEORGE BONCOUR. Well, Miss Malapert, and what do you think you have said now? why, nothing more than that your grandmothers had ten times as much prudence as yourselves.

enter SERVANT hastily

SERVANT. Sir, I ask pardon. I thought your honour had been gone.

MR BONCOUR. Speak out, sir.

SERVANT. Sir, there be below Monsieur de Pannier, with a new suit; and Monsieur de la Mouton Maigre, with some embroidery for your honour.

SIR GEORGE BONCOUR. There is another virtue of the age! If you will be extravagant, can't you let your own tradesmen reap the benefit of it? is it not enough to send your money out of your own family, but you must send it out of your own country too?

YOUNG BONCOUR. I consider nothing farther than who serves me the best.

MR BONCOUR. I must join your uncle here, George,-- I am afraid it is fashion rather that guides you to the choice; but were it otherwise, every man ought to have some partiality for his own country; it is a laudable prejudice, without which no people ever were or can be great.

SIR GEORGE BONCOUR. It ever was the characteristic of this nation - but now a passion for French dress and fopperies is as prevailing as the use of their frippery tongue - Ah! there was a time, when we found the way to be understood in France without the help of their language ...¹

Sir George's condemnation of the replacement of past simplicity and plainness with modern luxury and sophistication, particularly in houses, furniture, equipages, dress and diversions, is a constant refrain throughout Fielding's writings.² So, too, is Sir George's condemnation of his nephew's taste for French fashions. Thoroughly English and fervently nationalistic, Fielding continually represented French customs, accomplishments, cuisine, language and dress, so popular with the English *beau monde*, as being effeminate

¹*The Fathers* I, ii (Henley XII, p 164f).

²See also *CGJ*, 54, July 11, 1752.

Many other relevant passages have been and will be cited throughout this thesis.

foppery, alien to, and inferior to, the sturdy spirit of England.¹ Throughout the play, Sir George censures the neglect of traditional education for the young people as being socially destructive and, at the end, Young Kennel and the young Boncours are reformed according to his recommendations. Whilst Fielding's social perspective on manners is firmly established in the relationships between Sir George and the young folk, the town and country environments are not clearly polarised in these relationships. The town is, indeed, unequivocally condemned in the play, but the only rural representative is Sir George Kennel, a conventionally boorish country squire, whose ideal is "an Englishman that will drink, for as long as he can stand, for the good of his country",² a traditional way of thinking which Fielding never proposed as a viable alternative to the alleged decline in contemporary London. Contrary to his general practice, Fielding does not link his spokesman in the play, Sir George Boncour, with the country environment. Sir George is a man of both town and country, and in censuring modern London, he does not so much champion rural England as Old England. In the presentation of manners in this comedy then, the contrast is not so much that between country and city, as that between past and present. These antitheses are always combined in Fielding's later writings, as the old ways are portrayed as being driven out of the town and preserved only in the country, which is offered as an ideal pattern according to which the traditional system should be reinforced.

Of all his genteel comedies, Fielding's most consistent and impressive dramatisation of the contrast between town and country manners is in *The Modern Husband*, produced at Drury Lane in 1732.

¹Fielding often represented the popularity of French manners and culture amongst the English *beau monde* as being socially disruptive. The relevant passages will be noted in appropriate places throughout this thesis. Much of Fielding's opposition towards France was nationalistic; his father Edmund Fielding had fought with the Duke of Marlborough against the French earlier in the century. Throughout Fielding's lifetime there was much political tension between France and England. Fielding constantly represents France as England's political and cultural enemy.

²*The Fathers* V, iv (Henley XII, p 222).

The play depicts a sordid *beau monde* in London in which Mr and Mrs Modern connive at prostituting Mrs Modern in order to keep pace with town fashion and, as their name indicates, their conduct is represented as being a modern phenomenon. Prominent amongst the causes assigned to this modern phenomenon is the socially conservative judgement ascribing alleged degeneracy to commercial activity. Mr Modern originally lost his property in the "South-Sea bubble" and similar financial disasters.¹ The judgement is made explicit in the following conversation between Mr Bellamant, a country gentleman, and Mr Gaywit, a gentleman from the town:

MR GAYWIT. A very innocent affection, truly,
to destroy a lady's fame.

MR BELLAMANT. Why, ay, for we are come to an age,
wherein a woman may live very comfortably without
it; as long as the husband is content with his
infamy, the wife escapes hers.

MR GAYWIT. And I am mistaken, if many husbands
in this town do not live very comfortably by being
content with their infamy, nay, by being promoters
of it. It is a modern trade, unknown to our
ancestors, a modern bubble, which seems to be in
a rising condition at present.

MR BELLAMANT. It is a stock-jobbing age, everything
has its price; marriage is a traffick throughout;
as most of us bargain to be husbands, so some of
us bargain to be cuckolds; and he would be as much
laughed at, who preferred his love to his interest,
at this end of the town, as he who preferred his
honesty to his interest at the other.²

Within the play, however, there is no dramatisation of modern corruption as caused by commercial activity. Rather, it is here that Fielding dramatises, for the first significant time in his writings, his most frequently and emphatically enunciated diagnostic judgement on modern corruption, attributing this to an alleged irresponsibility amongst those members of the landed classes permanently dwelling in London. Such are represented

¹*The Modern Husband* I, iv (Henley X, p 17).

The "South Sea bubble" referred to the explosion on the Stock Market of the South Sea Company in the early 1720s.

²*The Modern Husband* II, vi (Henley X, p 35).

This was the judgement stated in *The Temple Beau* V, xv (Henley VIII, p 177).

here by Mr and Mrs Modern, Captain Bellamant, Lady Charlotte Gaywit and, particularly, Lord Richly, the latter being one of many corrupt noblemen in Fielding's works.¹ Although resembling the conventional town fops of genteel comedy, Richly is no mere rhetorical figure. His degenerate manners are portrayed as being symptomatic of more fundamental moral disorders. Fielding believed that the maintenance of stratified society depended largely upon the appointed leaders, on the landed classes' using their wealth and power to maintain traditional standards and promote the public welfare. He thus represents Richly's idle and debauched life-style, his contempt for traditional values and institutions and his predatory attitude towards his fellow man as being socially destructive. Richly's main transgression, therefore, as with all members of the *beau monde* in Fielding's writings, is his lack of charity, a moral transgression which will be fully discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

A contrast to Lord Richly is established in the play in the character of Mr Bellamant, a country gentleman who values the traditional standards. Despite being temporarily corrupted by Mrs Modern, Mr Bellamant conducts himself with the honour, dignity and benevolence which Fielding always represents as being abandoned by the nobility in London, and preserved only by the gentry in rural England. Thus the encounters between Lord Richly and Mr Bellamant, which display few of the superficial contrasts between town and country manners conventional to genteel comedy, dramatise the most profound social significance of the town-country dichotomy as this occurs within Fielding's writings. Here is expressed Fielding's judgement that the age's much lamented degeneracy was caused by an irresponsibility amongst the nobility dwelling permanently in London, and that the non-foxhunting gentry remaining

¹Many have noted that Fielding attributed the alleged degeneracy of the age to the upper classes. "It was against the vices of the fashionable that Fielding usually directed his criticism. On them he placed responsibility for the general degradation of the age." (G.E. Jensen, "Fashionable Society in Fielding's Times", *PMLA* 31, 1916, p 79.) See also Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, p 197f.; John Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 118.

in the country possessed the qualities necessary for strong social leadership. (It must be stressed that this was a subjective viewpoint. Although many of the nobility were dissipated, many made great contributions to society and there seems to be little evidence that the gentry were greatly different. The fact that the nobility's cosmopolitan activities were most visible at court, in the nation's capital, and least visible outside it, facilitated Fielding's condemnation of the town as a centre of disruptive social change, and his idealisation of the country as the only stronghold of traditional standards. As the encounters between Richly and Bellamant are more concerned with profound moral and social issues than with manners, they will be fully discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, "Town and Country Morals".)

On a more superficial, yet still socially significant level, Mr Bellamant's traditional rural manners are contrasted to degenerate town manners in this conversation with his son, Captain Bellamant, a town spark who, like many of the London-dwelling landed classes in Fielding's writings, believes that the essence of a gentleman consists in external ostentation rather than innate good-breeding:

CAPTAIN BELLAMANT. I am surprised you should call the expenses of a gentleman extravagance.

MR BELLAMANT. I am sorry you think the expenses of a fool, or fop, the expenses of a gentleman: and that race-horses, cards, dice, whores, and embroidery, are necessary ingredients in that amiable composition.

CAPTAIN BELLAMANT. Faith, and they are so with most gentlemen of my acquaintance; and give me leave to tell you, sir, these are the qualifications which recommend a man to the best sort of people. Suppose I had stayed at the university, and followed Greek and Latin as you advised me; what acquaintance had I found at court? what bows had I received at an assembly, or the opera?

MR BELLAMANT. And will you please to tell me, sir, what advantage you have received from these? Are you the wiser, or the richer? What are you? Why, in your opinion, better dressed. Where else had been that smart toupet, that elegant sword-knot, that coat covered with lace, and then with powder? That ever Heaven should make me father to such a dressed-up daw! A creature who draws all his vanity from the gifts of tailors and periwig makers!

CAPTAIN BELLAMANT. Would you not have your son dressed, sir?

MR BELLAMANT. Yes, and, if he can afford it, let him be something fine; but let him dress like a man, not affect the woman in his habit or his gesture.

CAPTAIN BELLAMANT. If a man will keep good company, he must comply with the fashion.

MR BELLAMANT. I would no more comply with a ridiculous fashion than with a vicious one; nor with that which makes a man look like a monkey; than that which makes him act like any other beast.¹

Fielding constantly censured this adoption of forms as the symbols of superior social rank, as being socially disruptive and as contributing to the disintegration of boundaries between the various classes, for the lower classes only had to adopt the foppery of their superiors in order to become "people of fashion". Within the many contrasts between town and country manners in *The Modern Husband*, this issue is very prominent.

Another major issue on which Fielding focuses the country-city contrast in *The Modern Husband* is that of emotional integrity, always, for him, an important aspect of good manners. This theme had been prominent in his earlier genteel comedies as, indeed, it was prominent in the *genre* when he adopted it and, as with most of the moral issues in the *genre* at this time, its judgements were in a state of ambivalence. Written in an atmosphere dominated by cynical interpretations of human nature, Restoration Comedy largely displayed a cold, aloof approach to human relationships. The extremely polite town sophisticates, when not preying upon one another, kept one another at a distance by means of wit, raillery and similar verbal weaponry. The warm spontaneous expression of the feelings was usually associated with the country and mostly (although not always) ridiculed, for comic or satiric purposes. In the comedies, this emotional cynicism is most apparent in the treatment of marriage. Fashionable London society, the nation's major marriage market, made immediately

¹*The Modern Husband* II, ii (Henley X, p 27f).

visible the predominantly materialistic nature of marriage in contemporary society. This worldly approach to wedlock, which discouraged all feelings hindering the union of estates, was celebrated in Restoration Comedy in which love was all too frequently presented as sexual exploitation, and marriage, financial exploitation. The heroes and heroines are, in general, adroit town-dwellers, skilled in outwitting others in both ventures. Their victims are often naive country-visitors who, being ignorant of the "way of the world", and usually valuing the feelings, fall prey to the town predators.¹ From the turn of the century, however, this cynicism was being modified, as the growing spirit of benevolence, in its exaggerated literary form of sentimentalism, encouraged dramatists to place a high premium on emotional sincerity.² As the wit tradition was gradually modified by the sentimental tradition in comedy,³ the cold refinement of town manners was increasingly presented as being unnatural and insincere, and the warm spontaneity of country manners, as instinctively honest and generous.⁴ Human relationships, particularly marriage,

¹In George Etherege's *Love in a Tub*, Sir Nicholas Cully, a boorish country baronet is married off to the tarnished mistress of the play's hero. In William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, Marjorie Pinchwife is easily seduced by the hero Horner.

²"Sentimentalism" was the product of many influences. Many critics claim it to be a predominantly middle-class inspiration. John Loftis, however, describes it as a classless phenomenon, resulting from the widespread influence of the sympathetic interpretations of human nature promulgated by the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Latitudinarian Divines. (*Comedy and Society*, p 127ff.)

The benevolent principles of the Latitudinarian Divines seem to have been the main driving force behind the rise of sentimentalism. See R.S. Crane, "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of The Man of Feeling", *ELH* I, 1934, pp 205-230.

³Under the impact of sentimentalism there was a reaction against wit in literature. See R.S. Crane, *op.cit.*, p 209; John Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 28 ff. Increasingly, critics objected to cynicism in comedy. For example, Richard Steele in *The Spectator* 51, April 28, 1711, and *The Spectator* 65, May 15, 1711.

⁴Sentimentalism did not always entail sympathetic treatment of the country in comedy. For example, in Richard Steele's sentimental comedy, *The Tender Husband*, 1705, the country is satirised in the boorish Humphrey Gubbin.

were treated less cynically and more sympathetically. The value of love was stressed, and marriages founded on love were early associated with the country environment. For example, in what might perhaps be termed the first "sentimental comedy", Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, 1696, Lovelace and Amanda, following their reconciliation, retire to marital happiness in the country: for *The Relapse*, 1698, John Vanbrugh returns the couple to the treacherous environment of London. In the early eighteenth century, these trends strengthened. In *The Drummer*, 1716, probably written by Joseph Addison, there is a conscious reaction against marital cynicism in comedy, as stated in the epilogue:

Too long has Marriage, in this tasteless Age,
With ill-bred Raillery supply'd the Stage;
No little Scribler is of Wit so bare,
But has his fling at the poor Wedded Pair;
Our Author deals not in Conceits so stale....¹

The play portrays a happily married couple living in peace and quiet on their country estate, far from the corrupting world of the town. This contrast is also presented in Addison's essay, *The Spectator*, 15, which compares the unhappy marriage of convenience of Fulvia and her husband, in the town, and the happy, loving marriage of Aurelia and her husband in the country. This antithesis became commonplace in literature and on the stage. When Fielding began writing genteel comedy in the late 1720s, however, the attitudes were somewhat ambivalent, as the old form could not easily accommodate the new ethical forces at work. Fielding's loyalties were divided. He was by nature urbane, and approved of wit, but intensely disliked cynicism and cruel raillery.² He was by nature warm-hearted and approved the open

¹John Loftis attributes the play to Addison. *Comedy and Society*, p 97.

²Fielding describes the wit tradition in English literature as having declined from Elizabethan and early seventeenth century days. (Preface to Fielding's and William Young's projected translation of Aristophanes' *Plutus*, *The God of Riches*, Henley XVI, p 62.) Whilst generally approving wit, he disapproved strong raillery. ("Essay on Conversation" Henley XIV, p 274) He frequently asserts that wit must be used in the service of morality. For example, *CGJ*, 10, February 4, 1752, and *CGJ*, 18, March 3, 1752. Ian Donaldson points out that Fielding, although attracted to Congreve, objected to Congreve's extreme wittiness and sophistication. (*The World Upside-Down*, p 149.)

expression of the feelings, but was not an unqualified sentimentalist.¹ He thus stood between the wit tradition and the sentimental tradition and, like many of his contemporaries, he tried to effect a compromise between the two, with mixed success. His difficulties were compounded by his adopting the comedies of Congreve as his major models in the *genre*, for Congreve himself, in *The Way of the World*, 1700, was not completely successful in reconciling the old with the new. He modifies his earlier dramatic contempt for rusticity by allowing the spontaneity of Sir Wilful Witwoud, a country squire, expose the over-sophistication of the Londoners, but the play to a large extent remains a splendid celebration of urbane aloofness. He tones down the licentiousness of his earlier comedies, and tries to recommend good manners through the character of Mirabel, but Mirabel has much of the conventionally ruthless town predator of Restoration Comedy, and Millamant much of the conventional town wit. The couple are certainly presented as being genuinely in love but remain to some extent cynical about marriage. In spite of the undercurrents of affection between them in the previous scene, they draw up a contract for the ideal town match, one of economic convenience and emotional aloofness.² Fielding constantly deplored such marriages. In his "Modern Glossary" in *CGJ*, 4, January 14, 1752, he defines contemporary marriage as he saw it, as: "A kind of Traffic carried on between the two Sexes, in which both are constantly endeavouring to cheat the other, and both are commonly Losers in the End".³ Whereas

1

What Fielding thought of sentimental comedy may be deduced from a remark of Abraham Adams in *JA* in which the Parson describes some passages in Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* as being fit for a sermon. (*JA*, III, xi, Henley I, p 301.) Fielding valued laughter in comedy.

2

Ian Donaldson claims that Congreve in *The Way of the World* attempted to meet the new demand for moral sincerity in comedy with mixed success. Donaldson points out that the idealisation of sophisticated town manners through Mirabel and Millamant is not comfortably achieved. Fielding was aware of Congreve's difficulties in reconciling the old form and the new ethical forces, not only from Congreve's comedies which he imitated but also from Congreve's quarrel with Jeremy Collier. Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 1698 and Congreve's *Amendments to Mr Collier's False and Imperfect Citations*, 1698, were in Fielding's library.

I. Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down* p 119ff.

3

Jensen I, p 156.

Congreve's young characters are economically prudent about marriage, Fielding's always protest against the intrusion of materialistic considerations into their relationships.¹ Although Fielding represents the worldly attitude towards marriage as being concentrated in the town, the marriage market, he also portrays it as prevailing amongst the country squirearchy, of whom Sir Positive Trap of *Love in Several Masques* is representative in his opinion: "I hope to see the time, when a man may carry his daughter to market with the same lawful authority as any other of his cattle".² Throughout Fielding's writings, those who protest against this viewpoint and advocate the supremacy of love in marriage are almost invariably country-dwellers, and their emotional integrity is portrayed as being a virtue of the rural environment. In his early genteel comedies, however, the contrast between these benevolent rural-dwellers and their cynical town opponents is not as consistently drawn as in his ballad operas, journals and later novels. In *Love in Several Masques*, for example, Helena, who protests at having been brought to town by Sir Positive Trap and Lady Trap to be married to Sir Apish Simple, "To be sold! to be put up at auction! to be disposed of, as a piece of goods, by way of bargain and sale", and declares that she will marry one "whose merit is his only riches, not whose riches are his only merit",³ is indeed, a country-dweller. But although, in her, Fielding, as with his later practice, unites generous and sentimentalist attitudes towards marriage with a rural upbringing, when compared to the later heroines (for example, Sophia Western and Amelia Booth), Helena is a poor representative of bucolic simplicity and benevolent good-will. Her lover, Merital, excuses her country education by describing her urbanity:

¹ John Loftis compares Congreve and Fielding on this issue in *Começy and Society*, p 117f.

² *Love in Several Masques* II, vi (Henley VIII, p 37). Similar views are expressed by Sir Harry Wilding of *The Temple Beau*, Mr Mutable of *The Wedding Day*, Sir Gregory Kennel of *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*, Sir Thomas Loveland of *Don Quixote in England*, and most vociferously by Squire Western of *TJ*.

³ *Love in Several Masques* II, v (Henley VIII, pp 34, 35).

Then my mistress is made up of natural spirit, wit, and fire; all these she has improved by an intimate conversation with plays, poems, romances, and such gay studies, by which she has acquired a perfect knowledge of the polite world without ever seeing it, and turned the confinement of her person into the enlargement of her mind.¹

In London, Helena, unlike the later heroines, instinctively adapts to the town, displaying great skill in that urbane accomplishment which Congreve highly valued, but which Fielding generally regarded as signifying ill-nature: witty raillery. Thus while herself protesting at worldly coldness and advocating the benevolent affections, Helena rallies Lady Trap, her rival with Merital, on the old lady's ugliness and advancing years. She does this in a taunting manner of which Sophia Western is incapable when in a similar situation with Lady Bellaston in *Tom Jones*.² In Fielding's mature writings, benevolent country girls never use raillery, an urbane skill which he gave his first country heroine in order to meet the demand for urbanity in genteel comedy. Moreover, Merital wins Helena, not by the operations of benevolence, but by a cunning trick, conventionally used by adroit town gentlemen in genteel comedy. Thus, in a different sense, "the way of the world" still triumphs. In the play, this conflict between urbane medium and rural medium characterises, to a great extent, the debates on marriage between Lady Matchless, Vermilia, Merital and Malvil for the town, and Wisemore for the country.

Although Lady Matchless really loves Wisemore and finally marries him, throughout the play, in true town fashion, she continually rallies against love, marriage, and her faithful Wisemore who, having rejected the town for the country, represents emotional sincerity as being a rural virtue. These rural virtues, along with their advocate, are constantly ridiculed by the Londoners,

¹*Ibid.*, I, i (Henley VIII, p 17).

²Helena rallies Lady Trap. II, v; V, ii.

See Fielding's disapproval of witty raillery in his "Essay on Conversation" (Henley XIV, p 274). He particularly disliked raillery from women. ("To A Friend On The Choice Of A Wife" Henley XII, p 269f.)

A major virtue attributed to Sophia Western is her inability to rally. (*TJ*, XVII, iv. Henley V, p 255f.)

as in Merital's description of Wisemore: "'Tis the ghost of a departed beau, in the habit of a country squire, with the sentiments of an Athenian philosopher, and the passion of an Arcadian swain."¹ At the end of the play, love triumphs. Wisemore wins Lady Matchless, Merital, Helena and Malvil, Vermilia. It is not made clear, however, whether any of the Londoners is converted to a country life, with which, at the ends of Fielding's novels, worthy couples are rewarded for defeating town adversity, retirement with the beloved being portrayed as the greatest possible happiness on earth.

In *Love in Several Masques* then, whilst the significance of the town-country contrast within the issues of emotional and marital integrity as developed in the novels, is emerging, its consistent presentation is hampered by Fielding's derivative style. The same comment can be applied to the presentation of these issues in *The Temple Beau*. Although Veromil, the hero championing emotional integrity, is a country gentleman who censures the town, his lady-love, Bellaria, is a town-bred girl, and her sentimental attitudes towards marriage are attributed to her town education.² Unlike the heroines of genteel comedy, however, Bellaria never rallies against love and marriage. Throughout the play, she and Veromil display their mutual affection in an emotional manner unimaginable of Mirabel and Millamant. Moreover, following their triumph over difficulties in London, Veromil and Bellaria retire to the country, presumably to live there happily ever after, thereby establishing the victory of country over city. Moving even closer to the concluding rural retirement of the novels is the fact that Veromil's and Bellaria's victory in London is achieved, not by a series of tricks as for the lovers in *Love in Several Masques* but, rather, by the imposition of Divine Providence. This, with a series of coincidences, restores Veromil's estate, which had been fraudulently appropriated by his brother, and in so doing establishes the country estate as the providential reward for virtue. In *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*, romantic notions about marriage are equated

¹*Love in Several Masques*. II, xi (Henley VIII, p 42). Similar sentiments about rural virtue are expressed by Malvil. (*Ibid.*, IV, iii. Henley VIII, p 66.)

²See II, vii (Henley VIII, p 124).

with the rural environment, in Miss Valence's words: "I hope you do not expect me to have the romantic ideas of a girl of fifteen, to dream of woods and deserts; you would not have me live in a cottage on love?"¹ Within the play there is no rural alternative to the emotional cynicism of the town. In the genteel comedy, it is only in *The Modern Husband* that Fielding consistently and emphatically focuses the town-country contrast on the issue of emotional sincerity in marriage and human relationships in general. In this play, Mr Boncour's assertion in *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*, "Raillery, Sir George, may exceed the bounds of good nature as well as good breeding",² is fully dramatised through the Londoners, who are very proud of their wit, which they themselves equate with ill-nature, as in the following conversation:

LORD RICHLY. Very true! no one makes a compliment but those that want wit for satire.

MR GAYWIT. Right, my lord. It is as great a sign of want of wit to say a good-natured thing, as want of sense to do one.

LADY CHARLOTTE GAYWIT. Oh! I would not say a good-natured thing for the world! Captain Bellamant, did you ever hear me say a good-natured thing in your life?

MR GAYWIT. I am afraid, Lady Charlotte, though wit be a sign of ill-nature, ill-nature is not always a sign of wit.³

Throughout the play, the Londoners continually rally and insult those outside their fashionable circle, as announced by Mrs Bellamant to her husband, "Oh, my dear! I have been in such an assembly of company, and so pulled to pieces with impertinence and ill-nature. Welcome, Welcome! the country! for sure the world is so very bad, those places are best where one has the least of it."⁴ A major target of the town-dwellers' scorn is the idea of love in marriage. Lord Richly indulges a predatory taste for married women,

¹*The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*. V, ii (Henley XII, p 216).

²*Ibid.*, II, ii (Henley XII, p 186).

³*The Modern Husband* II, vii (Henley X, p 38).

⁴*Ibid.*, II, i (Henley X, p 26).

Mr and Mrs Modern connive at sordid prostitution, and Captain Bellamant and Lady Charlotte Gaywit draw up a treaty for the ideal town match, one of mutual disdain.¹ In contrast to these cynical relationships is the warm, loving marriage of mutual esteem of Mr and Mrs Bellamant from the country. In the opposition between the Londoners and the Bellamants, Fielding, for the first significant time in his writings, fully polarises the town-country contrast on the issue of emotional sincerity in marriage. The polarity is firmly established in this conversation, in which the town-dwellers ridicule Mrs Bellamant's description of that couple's marital happiness in the country:

LORD RICHLY. Well, madam, you have drawn a most delightful sketch of life.

MRS MODERN. Then it is still life; for I dare swear there never were such people breathing.

MRS BELLAMANT. Don't you believe then, madam, it is possible for a married couple to be happy in one another, without desiring any other company?

MRS MODERN. Indeed, I do not know what it may have been in the plains of Arcadia; but truly, in those of Great Britain, I believe not.²

The polarity is also firmly established in this conversation between Mrs Bellamant and her step-daughter, Emilia:

MRS BELLAMANT. What think you now, Emilia? has not this morning's ramble given you a surfeit of the town? After all the nonsense and ill-nature we have heard to-day, would it grieve one to part with the place one is sure to hear 'em over again in?

EMILIA. I am far from thinking any of its pleasures worth too eager a wish and the woman, who has with her in the country the man she loves, must be a very ridiculous creature to pine after the town.

MRS BELLAMANT. And yet, my dear, I believe you know there are such ridiculous creatures.

EMILIA. I rather imagine they retire with the man they should love, than him they do: for a heart, that is passionately fond of the pleasures here, has rarely room for any other fondness. The town

¹*The Modern Husband*, V, x (Henley X, p 86f).

²*Ibid.*, IV, vi (Henley X, p 70).

itself is the passion of the greater part of our sex; but such I can never allow a just notion of love to. A woman that sincerely loves, can know no happiness without, nor misery with, her beloved object.¹

Such an ideal rural marriage is that of the Bellamants, which is portrayed as being exemplary, and which serves as a model for that of Gaywit and Emilia, who, although displaying the wit obligatory in genteel comedy,² assert sentimental views towards marriage and eventually embrace a country life. In Mr and Mrs Bellamant's, Gaywit's and Emilia's final retirement to marital happiness in the country we glimpse, for the first time in Fielding's writings, the ideal of the "family of love", a married couple and their children living harmoniously together and extending their benevolence to all around them. We get the suggestion in Gaywit's proposition to his future father-in-law, Bellamant, as they prepare to depart London: "My Bellamant! my friend! my father! what a transport do I feel from the prospect of adding to your future happiness! Let us henceforth be one family, and have no other contest but to outvie in love."³ This extended family of love, in rural retirement, enthusiastically proposed by Gaywit, is our first glimpse of Fielding's ideal model for a responsible civilisation.

Although the town *milieu* of genteel comedy precluded elaborate idealisation of country over city in *The Modern Husband*, (and although in many ways Fielding accepted the limitations of the *genre* and exploited stereotyped situations for solely comic purposes), this play represents Fielding's most consistent and convincing use in the *genre* of the town-country contrast to express his own views on contemporary manners.

In general, although Fielding complained (prologue to *The Miser*⁴) that genteel comedy lacked realism and gave little scope for the analysis of character or society, he himself makes little real attempt at contemporary relevance in his comedies.

¹*The Modern Husband* II, i (Henley X, p 25).

²Amelia is described as being a wit. *Ibid.*, II, vi (Henley X, p 36).

³*The Modern Husband* V, scene *the last*. Henley X, p 96.

⁴Henley X, p 181.

Consciously innovating in *The Modern Husband*, however, a play avowedly "written on a Model I never yet attempted",¹ Fielding promises in the prologue to portray contemporary society, and particularly London's *beau monde*, authentically:

In early youth our author first begun
To combat with the follies of the town;
Her want of art his unskilled muse bewailed,
And, where his fancy pleased, his judgement failed.

At length, repenting frolic flights of youth,
Once more he flies to nature and to truth:

(And, vicious as it is, he draws the town;)²

Although the play's characters resemble the stereotypes of Fielding's earlier comedies, they are more three-dimensional and dynamic and, therefore, represent their rural and urban environments more impressively, rendering these environments more convincing in the moral significance assigned to them. Also contributing to Fielding's successful didactic use of the town-country contrast in *The Modern Husband*, is his resolution of that conflict between urbane medium and rural message, discussed above. With the exception of Gaywit, Fielding's concession to the form in which he was writing, the town wits are all unattractive and their cynicism towards rural virtue is self-condemnatory. The country visitors are not dull and insipid, but forthright and vigorous, representing the rural virtues attractively and convincingly. Moreover, unlike their counterparts in the earlier comedies, these latter have no conspicuously boorish country squires acting as a liability against their idealisation of rural life.³ In *The Modern Husband*, Fielding focuses the town-country antithesis on the social themes stated only briefly in his earlier comedies and fully elaborated in his novels. Extravagant, sophisticated and insolent town manners are

¹Letter from Fielding to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in Lord Wharncliffe, "Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu", cited in Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 118.

²Henley X, pp 9 and 10.

³The only country squire in *The Modern Husband* is Mr Woodall. The scene in which Fielding contrasts him with Lord Richly and other Londoners (I, ix), has few features in common with similar encounters between squires and town dwellers in Fielding's earlier comedies, concentrating mainly on Richly's immorality.

emphatically portrayed as being symptomatic of more fundamental moral disorders, and therefore as contributing to the disintegration of traditional English society. Plain, dignified, hospitable country manners are portrayed as being morally and socially responsible and are offered as a pattern according to which the old values should be reinforced. Despite his success in *The Modern Husband*, however, Fielding was, on the whole, unsuccessful in genteel comedy in adapting the country-city dichotomy to serve any didactic purposes and, probably because he was writing derivatively in a *genre* carrying judgements contrary to his own, he was unsuccessful in genteel comedy generally.¹ It remained for Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan in *The School for Scandal* to reconcile more fully the wit and sentimental traditions, and to reverse the Restoration judgment on the town-country contrast, in stage comedy.

* * * * *

¹Henley claims that Fielding failed in genteel comedy because he was too derivative. ("Essay on Henry Fielding". Henley XVI, p xviiff.)
 George Sherburn considers that Fielding failed in high comedy because he found nothing comic in high life. G. Sherburn, "Fielding's Social Outlook", *PQ* January, 1956, pp 1-23. Reprinted in J.L. Clifford (ed.) *Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism*, New York and Oxford, 1959, p 260.
 A.D. McKillop claims that Fielding failed in high comedy because he was writing in a *genre* which had lost its vitality and which therefore gave him no scope for the analysis of profound issues. A.D. McKillop, *The Early Masters of English Fiction*, Lawrence, 1967, p 99.
 All of these explanations have some truth in them, but Fielding's derivativeness is the most plausible explanation of his failure. Although some critics claim that Fielding modified his *genre* to serve his purposes, for example, John Loftis (*Comedy and Society* p 114), and Winfield S. Rogers, (*op.cit.*, p 25ff), with the exception of *The Modern Husband* he made little attempt to do so in genteel comedy.

Genteel comedy confined Fielding to Westminster and to portraying the manners of the upper classes and the squirearchy. Farce, burlesque, ballad opera and low life literature enabled him to move through town and country and to portray the manners of the lower classes,¹ thereby giving him greater scope to explore the social significance of these issues of manners in relation to town and country life. Prominent in his low life plays is rivalry between the cities of London and Westminster, and London comes off the better. Although the London merchant is conventionally ridiculed through the stereotype characters of Politic in *The Coffee-House Politician*; or, *The Justice Caught In His Own Trap* and Mr Wisdom in *The Letter Writers*; or, *A New Way to Keep a Wife At Home* the mercantile classes are not generally satirised. The most harshly satirised London middleman in Fielding's plays is a gentleman, Mr Stocks of *The Lottery*, 1732. Fielding's satire is mainly directed against the upper classes, who are portrayed as being chiefly responsible for the age's alleged degeneracy, by abandoning true gentility of manners for outward show and insolence, thereby enabling themselves to be emulated by those below them. A major strategy in low life literature, and particularly ballad opera, that of inverting the social pyramid, allowed Fielding to dramatise fully this disintegration of boundaries between social classes. This tactic of "appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or *e converso*",² a favourite with the Scriblerians, early caught Fielding's imagination, becoming a major technique in his general analysis of contemporary society. Its effect is to belittle those very accomplishments by which the *beau monde* distinguishes itself from the vulgar. Fielding feels that when the

¹ John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* which absorbed many elements from older forms parodied the pastoral tradition's idealisations of humble country life with an idealisation of low life in town. Hence the terms "town pastoral" or "Newgate pastoral" attributed to this play. It served as a model for many ballad operas portraying the lower classes in town and country.

² Fielding in the Preface to *JA* describes himself as "appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or *e converso*". (Henley I, p 19.) Satire against high life was conventional to low-life literature. See Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 109ff.; F.W. Chandler, *Romances of Roguery*. New York. 1899. p 48. Fielding's major source for this tactic was *The Beggar's Opera*. He uses it extensively in *JA*. (See W.R. Irwin, *op.cit.*, p 93.) It became a major technique in his social criticism. (See Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, Ch. 8.)

upper classes place the sign of superior rank in forms rather than essentials, the lower classes have only to adopt the dress and impudence of their superiors in order to become "people of fashion". In *Jonathan Wild*, a prose work greatly influenced by John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, Fielding, like Gay, satirises high life, (and particularly Walpole's court circle in London's West End,) by paralleling their activities with those of disreputable low life characters in London's East End. The whole portrait of Wild's career in the East End underworld expresses Fielding's contempt for "greatness", as pursued in Westminster. In Wild's and Laetitia Snap's vulgar emulation of genteel manners, and particularly in their fashionable marriage of convenience, Fielding satirises upper class sophistication. In his farces and ballad operas, Fielding often belittles aristocratic sophistication by portraying its easy emulation by servants. A common type in his plays is the "livery beau", the footman who imitates his master's foppery, for example, Thomas of *An Old Man Taught Wisdom*; or, *The Virgin Unmasked*, Drury Lane, 1734, and John of *Don Quixote in England*, produced at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, 1734. John, visiting the country with his master, poses as "Lord Slang", on the basis of his fancy livery, and explains to the ignorant Squire Badger, the situation in town:

JOHN. What do you see in me that should make you ask me my master's name? I suppose you would take it very ill of me, if I were to ask you what your master's name is. Do I look so little like a gentleman to stand in need of a master?

SQUIRE BADGER. Oh, sir, I ask your pardon; your dress; sir, was the occasion of my mistake.

JOHN. Probable enough; among you country gentlemen, and really in town, gentlemen and footmen dress so very like one another, that it is somewhat difficult to know which is which.¹

¹*Don Quixote in England* II, x (Henley XI, p 44.)
 The "livery beau" is a common type in Fielding's writings, e.g. Brazen in *The Wedding Day*, Ramilie in *The Miser*, Risque in *The Letter Writers* and Rakeit in *The Intriguing Chambermaid*.
 The "livery beau" was a common satirical target in ballad opera. (See E.M. Gagey, *Ballad Opera*, New York/London. p 135.)

Once his simple rural manners are tainted by this town air, Joseph Andrews becomes one such livery beau.¹ Fielding also satirises London's *beau monde* by paralleling its activities amongst low-born country-dwellers. In the petty affectations of the servants in Sir Owen Apshinken's country house in *The Grub Street Opera*, produced as *The Welsh Opera* at the Little Theatre in 1730, Fielding ridicules the activities of King George's courtiers and Sir Robert Walpole's ministers in Westminster. The following conversation between Robin, the butler, and Sweetissa, the chambermaid, is a typical hit at the alleged degradation of the ruling class:

ROBIN. When I was in London, I might have had an affair with a lady, and slighted her for you.

SWEETISSA. A lady! I might have had three lords in one afternoon; nay, more than that, I refused a man with a thing over his shoulder like a scarf at a burying for you; and these men, they say, are the greatest men in the kingdom.²

Fielding achieves more telling satire against the *beau monde* by portraying its emulation by innocent country girls, for example, Chloe in *The Lottery* and Lucy in *Miss Lucy in Town*. These two, fascinated by stories of London, travel to the capital with the ambition of discarding their rural simplicity for town sophistication, which they believe to consist in constantly visiting such sights as the Tower, the Crown, the Abbey, Parliament House and Bedlam. Their ignorance is quickly corrected by the corrupt Londoners: Chloe's, by the Stocks brothers, from whom she buys a sham lottery ticket, and Lucy's, by Mrs Midnight and Tawdry, in whose East End brothel she and Thomas, the footman she had married in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom*, take lodgings on their arrival. Thus Mrs Midnight, who plans to sell Lucy's "pure country innocent flesh and blood"³ to the highest bidder, explains to her the essence of the character to which she aspires:

Fine ladies do every thing because it's the fashion. They spoil their shapes, to appear big with child because it's the fashion. They lose their money at whist, without understanding the game; they go to auctions, without intending

¹JA, I, iv.

²*The Grub Street Opera* I, xi (Henley IX, p 232).

³*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 45).

to buy; they go to the operas, without any ear;
and slight their husbands without disliking
them; and all because it is the fashion.¹

Lucy unwittingly pronounces judgement: "I find there is nothing in a fine lady; anybody may be a fine lady if this be all."² Chloe's and Lucy's initiation into the mysteries of fashionable town society provides a satirical survey of its follies. Thus Fielding reverses the Restoration convention of "country girl come to town" for, unlike their counterparts in Restoration Comedy, Fielding's country girls, although imposed upon, are never sullied by the Londoners. Both are rescued from the town predators and returned to the country, for which Thomas, after having viewed London's corruption, acts as advocate:

THOMAS. Come, madame, you must strip yourself of your puppet-show dress, as I will of mine; they will make you ridiculous in the country, where there is still something of Old England remaining.

WIFE. What I did, was only to be a fine lady, and what they told me other fine ladies do, and I should never have thought of in the country; but if you will forgive me, I will never attempt to be more than a plain gentlewoman again.³

On viewing Thomas' conversion from modern town foppery to traditional English plainness retained in the country, Lucy's father, Goodwill, states the argument behind Fielding's inversion of high and low life:

Henceforth I will know no degree, no difference between men, but what the standards of honour and virtue create: the noblest birth without these is but splendid infamy; and a footman with these qualities, is a man of honour.⁴

Thomas himself had made a similar egalitarian statement when summing up the *beau monde* in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom*:

¹*Miss Lucy in Town*. (Henley XII, p. 41.)

²*Ibid.* (Henley XII, p 38.)

³*Ibid.* (Henley XII, p 62.)

⁴*Ibid.* (Henley XII, p 62f.)

Your daughter has married a man of some learning, and one who has seen a little of the world, and who by his love to her, and obedience to you, will try to deserve your favour. As for my having worn a livery, let not that grieve you; as I have lived in a great family, I have seen that no one is respected for what he is, but for what he has; the world pays no regard at present to anything but money; and if my own industry should add to your fortune, so as to entitle any of my posterity to grandeur, it would be no reason against making my son, or grandson, a lord, that his father, or grandfather, was a footman.¹

Despite egalitarian statements such as these and his persistent inversion of high and low life, Fielding was not, as some represented him, a social saboteur.² He was just the contrary and, like most contemporary dramatists, inverted the social pyramid, not to sabotage, but to endorse it.³ Whereas the aristocratic town fops of Restoration Comedy are satirised as comic types, those of Fielding's plays, Lord Formal, Lord Richly, Lord Pride, Lord Puff, Lord Place, Lord Dapper and Lord Bawble, are satirised as degenerate representatives of their class. Whilst Fielding ridicules low life in town and country for emulating Westminster, his main target is Westminster. What he particularly deplored was not the stratified social system as such but injustice, whereby the great practised openly, with impunity, transgressions for which the poor were punished. He most vigorously voices his argument that the great escape censure, not because of superior virtues but because of superior rank and wealth, when he introduces *Jonathan Wild*, in the preface to his *Miscellanies*:

But without considering Newgate as no other than human nature with its mask off, which some very shameless writers have done, a thought which no price should purchase me to entertain, I think we may be excused for suspecting, that the splendid palaces of the great are often no other than Newgate

¹*An Old Man Taught Wisdom; or, The Virgin Unmasked.* (Henley X, p 348f.)

²Colley Cibber represented Fielding as a social saboteur. (See R.W. Lowe, *op.cit.*, p 287.)

³J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 120f. As Ian Donaldson observes, Fielding broke away early from the Scriblerian tactic of portraying society in a state of irrevocable chaos. (*The World Upside-Down*, p 197.)

with the mask on. Nor do I know anything which can raise an honest man's indignation higher than that the same morals should be in one place attended with all imaginable misery and infamy, and in the other, with the highest luxury and honour. Let any impartial man in his senses be asked, for which of these two places a composition of cruelty, lust, avarice, rapine, insolence, hypocrisy, fraud and treachery, were best fitted; surely his answer must be certain and immediate; and yet I am afraid all these ingredients, glossed over with wealth and a title, have been treated with the highest respect and veneration in the one, while one or two of them have been condemned to the gallows in the other.¹

This argument, prominent in *The Beggar's Opera* and in the satirical campaign against Walpole, rings throughout Fielding's ballad operas, as in this song:

Great courtiers palaces contain,
 While small ones fear the gaol,
 Great parsons riot in champagne,
 Small parsons sot on ale;
 Great whores in coaches gang,
 Smaller misses,
 For their kisses,
 Are in Bridewell banged;
 While in vogue
 Lives the great rogue,
 Small rogues are by dozens hanged.²

He supports this argument, not only by mirroring the *beau monde's* manners in humble life, but also by contrasting these to superior manners amongst the lower classes in town and country.

¹Henley XII, p 243.

Count LaRuse elaborates this point in *JA*, I, v. (Henley II, p 17f.)

²*The Grub Street Opera*. Air XXXV. II, v. (Henley IX, p 247.) The song also occurs in *Tumble-Down Dick; or, Phaeton in the Suds*. Air II. (Henley XII, p 16.) The argument is common in Fielding's plays, for example, *The Grub Street Opera* II, ii (Henley IX, p 239), *Eurydice* (Henley XI, p 274). It was a satirical strategy directed against Sir Robert Walpole by his opposition who claimed that he used criminal methods with impunity. See, for example, *The Beggar's Opera* (G.C. Faber, (ed.) *The Political Works of John Gay*, (London, 1926, p 531), and Jonathan Swift's *Blueskins' Ballad* (H. Williams, (ed.), *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, Oxford, 1937, III, p 1113).

It is not one of Fielding's favourite techniques, in his ballad operas, to represent the middle and lower classes, in London's East End, as having superior manners to the *beau monde* in the West End, but he uses it in a few instances. In *The Intriguing Chambermaid*, Drury Lane, 1734, the idleness, extravagance and insolence of two courtly parasites, Lords Pride and Puff, are unfavourably contrasted to the industry, sobriety and dignity of Goodall, a worthy London citizen who, like Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild*, displays the manners appropriate to his rank, making conspicuous the absence of this virtue in Westminster. Less honourable superiority is granted to the City of London in *Miss Lucy in Town*, in which rivalry between the cities of Westminster and London is dramatised in the encounters between Lord Bawble and Mr Zorobabel. Lord Bawble asserts the superiority of the court to Mrs Midnight:

Why, thou old canting offspring of hypocrisy,
dost thou think that men of quality are to be
confined to rules of decency, like sober
citizens, as if they were ashamed of their
sins, and afraid that they should lose their
turn at being Lord Mayor?¹

but Mr Zorobabel assures the bawd that her East End brothel is superior to similar establishments at the West End:

I know a woman of fashion at St James end of the
town, where I might deal cheaper than with
yourself; though I own, indeed, yours is rather
the more reputable house of the two.²

Mrs Midnight and Tawdry themselves attribute declining business in their brothel, to competition from Westminster, of the kind dramatised in *The Modern Husband*:

¹*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 42).

A similar contempt for tradespeople is expressed by Lord Place in *Pasquin* II, i (Henley XI, p 180) and Lords Pride and Puff in *The Intriguing Chambermaid* II, viii (Henley X, p 316).

²*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 45).

MRS MIDNIGHT. Very well. They spend so much money in show and equipage, that they can no more pay their ladies than their tradesmen. If it was not for Mr Zorobabel, and some more of his persuasion, I must shut up my doors.

TAWDRY. Besides, ma'am, virtuous women and gentlemen's wives come so cheap, that no man will go to the price of a lady of the town.

MRS MIDNIGHT. I thought Westminster Hall would have given them a surfeit of their virtuous women: but I see nothing will do; though a jury of cuckolds were to give never such swinging damages, it will not deter men from qualifying more jurymen. In short, nothing can do us any service but an Act of Parliament to put us down.¹

More substantial criticism than this is achieved by contrasting Westminster with the country. Although the simple rustics are lightly ridiculed for emulating the *beau monde*, the weight of the satire falls against the way of life to which they aspire. The ballad opera, which absorbed many conventions idealising country life from older forms, for example, pastoral and *beatus ille* poetry, and rural songs and ballads, enabled Fielding to represent the country as being superior.² Always in the foreground is a contrast between the natural innocence and simplicity of the country, and the unnatural sophistication of the town. Also prominent is a contrast between humble country-dwellers who retain the traditional, substantial manner of living, and the *beau monde* who do not, a contrast symbolised by that between the robust, healthy constitutions of the rustics, and the puny physiques of the town-dwellers. This antithesis is dramatised in *The Grub Street Opera* in which Mr Apshones, a vigorous rural tenant, objects to the proposed marriage between his daughter Molly and the fragile town fop, Master Owen Apshinken:

I had rather have a set of fine healthy grandchildren ask me blessing, than a poor puny breed of half-begotten brats that inherit the diseases as well as the titles of their parents.³

¹*Ibid.*, Henley XII, p 35.

²See E.M. Gagey, *op.cit.*, Chs. 5 and 6, for a discussion of ballad opera and the conventions it absorbed.

³*The Grub Street Opera*. II, vii (Henley IX, p 250).

Apshones voices Fielding's general opinion of puny London *beaux*:

Angels! baboons! these are the creatures that resemble our *beaux* the most. If they have any sweetness in them, tis from the same reason that an orange hath. Why have our women fresher complexions and more health in their countenances here than in London, but because we have fewer *beaux* among us.¹

A contrast between feeble town-dwellers and sturdy country-dwellers, often represented as a contrast between Italianised Londoners and hardy Britons, is prominent throughout Fielding's writings, culminating in that between Beau Didapper and Joseph Andrews.² Accompanying and supporting this contrast is that between the wholesome, substantial, traditional fare consumed in the country, and the fashionable but insubstantial French and Italian cuisine of the town, an opposition dramatised in Miss Lucy's arrival in town:

WIFE. Ay, pray, John, take care of the great cake and cold turkey, and the ham and the chickens, and the bottle of sack, and the two bottles of strong beer, and the bottle of cyder.

JOHN. I'll take the best care I can: but a man would think he was got into a fair. The folks stare at one as if they had never seen a man before.³

Fielding often represents the traditionally abundant English dinner-table as being replaced by the polite stinginess of the Continental, as in this conversation between Lady Apshinken and Susan the cook over a proposed dinner for the tenants, in *The Grub Street Opera*:

¹*The Grub Street Opera*, II, i (Henley IX, p 235). The freshness of country complexions is a constant refrain throughout Fielding's ballad operas, for example, *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (Henley X, pp 331 and 333), and *The Lottery*, II (Henley VIII, p 277).

²The contrast is explicitly expressed in the meeting between "Lord Lace" and Lovemore in *The Lottery*, II (Henley VIII, p 282) and in Sweetissa's words to Marjorie in *The Grub Street Opera* I, v (Henley IX, p 220).

³*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 37).

LADY APSHINKEN. This sirloin of beef may stand, only cut off half of it for to-morrow - it is too big for one dish.

SUSAN. O dear madame! it is a thousand pities to cut it.

LADY APSKINKEN. Pshaw! I tell you no polite people suffer a large dish to come to their table - I have seen an entertainment of three courses, where the substance of the whole would not have made half a sirloin of beef.

SUSAN. The devil take such politeness, I say.

LADY APSHINKEN. A goose roasted - very well; take particular care of the giblets, they bear a very good price in the market. Two brace of partridges - I'll leave out one of them. An apple-pie with quinces - why quinces, when you know quinces are so dear? - There; and for the rest, do you keep it, and let me have two dishes a day, till it is out.

SUSAN. Why, madame, half the provision will stink at that rate.

LADY APSHINKEN. Then they will eat the less of it. - I know some good housewives that never buy any other, for it is always cheap, and will go the farther.

SUSAN. So, as the smell of the old English hospitality used to invite people in, that of the present is to keep them away.

LADY APSHINKEN. Old English hospitality! Oh, don't name it, I am sick at the sound.

SUSAN. Would I had lived in those days! - I wish I had been born a cook in an age when there was some business for one! before we had learnt this French politeness, and been taught to dress our meat by nations that have no meat to dress.
Air XLV. *The King's Old Courtier*.

When mighty roast beef was the Englishman's good,
It enobled our hearts and enriched our blood,
Our soldiers were brave and our courtiers were good,
Oh the roast beef of England,
And old England's roast beef!

But since we have learnt from all-conquering France,
To eat their ragouts as well as to dance,
Oh what a fine figure we make in romance!
Oh the roast beef of England,¹
And old England's roast beef!

¹*The Grub Street Opera*, III, iii (Henley IX, p 258f).
The same song occurs in *Don Quixote in England*, Air V, I, vi (Henley XI, p 26).

As Fielding, in the country estate of Sir Owen and Lady Apshinken in Wales, allegorically represents King George's and Queen Caroline's court in Westminster, Lady Apshinken's rejection of traditional abundance for modern politeness dramatises the Opposition's accusation that Walpole's political supremacy was corrupting and ruining the nation.

In presenting the upper classes as mainly responsible for the age's alleged degeneracy, Fielding concentrates on the great in Westminster, and idealises the English country gentry as an alternative. One group of traditional-minded country gentlemen, however, he never represents as ideal models for social leadership, that is the fox-hunting squirearchy whose brutality he presents as being as irresponsible as the vices of the court. In *Don Quixote in England*, Quixote, sojourning with Sancho at an English country inn, has flashes of lucid sanity in which he exposes the English country-dwellers, and particularly Squire Badger, as being madder than himself, as in this conversation:

DON QUIXOTE. There is now arrived in this castle one of the most accursed giants that ever infested the earth. He marches at the head of his army, that howl like Turks in an engagement.

SANCHO. Oh lud! oh lud! this is the country squire at the head of his pack of dogs.

DON QUIXOTE. What dost thou mutter, varlet?

SANCHO. Why, sir, this giant that your worship talks of is a country gentleman who is going a courting, and his army is neither more nor less than his kennel of foxhounds.

DON QUIXOTE. Oh, the prodigious force of enchantment! Sirrah, I tell thee this is the giant Toglogmoglogog, lord of the island of Gogmogog, whose belly hath been the tomb of above a thousand strong men.

SANCHO. Of above a thousand hogsheads of strong beer, I believe.

DON QUIXOTE. This must be the enchanter Merlin, I know him by his dogs. But, thou idiot! dost thou imagine that women are to be hunted like hares, that a man would carry his hounds with him to visit his mistress?

SANCHO. Sir, your true English squire and his hounds are as inseparable as your Spanish and his Toledo. He eats with his hounds, drinks with his hounds, and lies with his hounds; your true arrant English squire is but the first dog-boy in his house.

DON QUIXOTE. 'Tis pity then that fortune should contradict the order of nature. It was a wise institution of Plato to educate children according to their minds, not to their births; these squires should sow that corn which they ride over. Sancho, when I see a gentleman on his own coach-box, I regret the loss which someone has had of a coachman: the man who toils all day after a partridge or a pheasant, might serve his country by toiling after a plough ...¹

Not only the country squirearchy but also the country clergy are portrayed as being socially irresponsible. Puzzletext in *The Grub Street Opera* is lazy, selfish and hypocritical like the country clergy of Restoration Comedy. The following conversation between Rakel and Commons in *The Letter Writers* is typical of Fielding's dramatic presentation of the country clergy:

COMMONS. Captain Rakel, your servant.

RAKEL. Jack Commons! - My dear rake, welcome to town: how do all our friends at quarters?

COMMONS. All in the old way. I left your brother officers with two parsons and the mayor of the town as drunk as your drums.

RAKEL. Mr Mayor, indeed, is a thorough honest fellow; and hath not, I believe, been sober since he was in the chair; he encourages that virtue as a magistrate, which he lives by as a publican.

COMMONS. Very fine, faith! and if the mayor was a glazier I suppose he would encourage breaking windows too.

RAKEL. But prithee, what hath brought thee to town?

COMMONS. My own inclinations chiefly. I resolved to take one swing in the charming plains of iniquity; so I am come to take my leave of this delicious lewd place, of all the rakes and whores of my acquaintance - to spend one happy month in the joys of wine and women, and then² sneak down into the country, and go into orders.

¹*Don Quixote in England*, I, ii. (Henley XI, p 17f.)

²*The Letter Writers*, I, ii. (Henley IX, p 162f.)

Despite the liability of the fox-hunting squirearchy, and hypocritical clergy, Fielding in his ballad operas represents the country as retaining the traditional values necessary for responsible civilisation.

Prominent in Fielding's ballad operas is a sharp polarisation of the town-country antithesis on the issue of emotional honesty in marriage. It is in the presentation of this issue that we first encounter Fielding's use of the pastoral tradition, a tradition which exists in his writings mainly as mock-pastoral. The ballad operas consciously presented a sturdy, masculine, English alternative to the currently popular, effeminate, Italian opera, to which Fielding, Gay and others objected on conservative aesthetic and nationalistic grounds.¹ Ubiquitous in Fielding's plays are rollicking songs burlesquing the extravagant idealisation of country love in the pastoral arias of Italian opera.² There is an example of this in the lengthy singing contest for Lucy in *Miss Lucy in Town*, between Signor Cantileno, who begins with:

Brightest nymph, turn here thy eyes,
Behold thy swain despairs and dies

and Mr Ballad, who begins with:

Turn hither your eyes, bright maid,
Turn hither with all your charms;
Behold a jolly young blade,
Who longs to be clasped in your arms:
To sighing and whining,
To sobbing and pining,³
Then may we bid adieu.

Fielding dramatises the popular satirical contrast between the impotent, effeminate swains of Italian pastoral opera, and the robust masculine lads of English ballad opera. In giving the country-bred Lucy's preference to Mr Ballad, Fielding assigns the victory to English vigour, which he usually associates with the country environment. Although he ridicules pastoralism, an air

¹See J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 134.
According to E.M. Gagey, the English ballad opera presented a masculine alternative to the effeminate Italian opera (*op.cit.*, p 4).

²Prime examples of this mock-pastoral activity occur throughout *Eurydice* in songs by Orpheus. Air III (Henley XI, p 279f.).

³*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 50f).

of bucolic simplicity nevertheless clings to the robust, emotional sincerity of his country-dwellers, and is offered as an alternative to the emotional cynicism of the town. This contrast is drawn by Lucy herself after her initiation into London's sophistication:

How happy are the nymphs and swains,
 Who skip it and trip it all over the plains:
 How sweet are the kisses,
 How soft are the blisses,
 Transporting the lads, and all melting their misses!
 If ladies here so nice are grown,
 Who jaunt it and flaunt it all over the town,
 To fly as from ruin
 From billing and cooing,
 A fig for their airs, give me plain country wooing.

and again:

Welcome again, ye rural plains;
 Innocent nymphs and virtuous swains:
 Farewell town, and all its sights;
 Beaux and lords, and gay delights:
 All is idle pomp and noise;
 Virtuous love gives greater joys.¹

In these plays the town marriage of convenience is always censured, as in this description of it to Chloe in *The Lottery*:

JACK STOCKS. Oh! it is the town way of wooing;
 people of fashion never see one another above
 twice before marriage.

MR STOCKS. Which may be the reason why some of
 'em scarce see one another above twice after
 they are married.²

The loving marriage in a humble cottage, far from such cynicism, is frequently idealised as the alternative to it, as in this song from Molly and Owen in *The Grub Street Opera*:

MOLLY. Oh, think not the maid whom you scorn,
 With riches delighted can be!
 Had I a great princess been born
 My Owen had dear been to me!

¹*Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 40) and (Henley XII, p 63). The romantic effect of the rural landscape is frequently described; for example, *The Grub Street Opera*, II, ii (Henley IX, p 238).

²*The Lottery*, II, (Henley VIII, p 281). Similar views on marriage are expressed by town dwellers in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (Henley X, p 348) and *Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 48).

On others your treasures bestow,
 Give Owen alone to these arms;
 In grandeur and wealth we find woe,
 But in love there is nothing but charms.

OWEN. In title and wealth what is lost,
 In tenderness oft is repaid;
 Too much a great fortune may cost,
 Well purchased may be the poor maid.
 While fancy's faint dreams cheat the great,
 We pleasure will equally prove;
 While they in their palaces hate,
 We in our poor cottage may love.¹

This ideal, which he frequently ridicules by *reductio ad absurdum*,² Fielding never puts to the test. His lovers never retire to a humble rural cottage, always to a large country estate, thereby ratifying a social system founded upon the supremacy of landed property. By effecting the settlement into the estate with marriages founded on love rather than mercenary considerations, Fielding exploits the illusion that such a society rested upon moral, rather than materialistic, values. As in his genteel comedies, then, he again uses the symbol of the loving marriage in rural surroundings to endorse his feudal ideal as an alternative to the social change represented by London.

In ballad opera, Fielding more consistently and convincingly focuses the town-country contrast on the issue of manners than in the genteel comedy. The topical realism of the ballad opera enabled him to vitalise his rural-urban environments with contemporary relevance which renders these two environments convincing in the moral significance assigned to them.³ As the ballad opera absorbed

¹*The Grub Street Opera*, Air LXII, III, xv (Henley IX, p 275). This sentiment is frequently expressed throughout Fielding's ballad operas; for example, *Don Quixote in England*, Air II, I, ii (Henley XI, p 18); *The Miser*, IV, i (Henley X, p 188); *The Grub Street Opera*, Air XXII, II, i (Henley IX, p 236). These *beatus ille* love songs were commonplace in contemporary literature. See Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *op.cit.*, p 143f.

²The notion of happiness remote from civilisation is often ridiculed by Fielding; for example, *The Author's Farce*, II, i (Henley VIII, p 213); *The Author's Farce*, Airs XI and XII, III, i (Henley VIII, p 242f).

³Although ballad opera absorbed many conventions from other forms, relevance to contemporary life was one of its essential characteristics. It presented a great variety of characters, manners, *milieux*, and activities in the language of the day (Gagey, *op.cit.*,

many conventions from older *genres*, it enabled Fielding to include many fresh elements in his portraits of town and country. City satire, the pastoral and *beatius ille* traditions, and the urban paintings of William Hogarth, particularly "The Harlot's Progress" and "The Rake's Progress", are always in the foreground, adding to the environments' richness and effectiveness.¹ Moreover, the judgements on country and city in the ballad opera were more flexible than in the genteel comedy, and did not conflict with Fielding's own. Although the term "town pastoral" sounds appealing, the portraits of London life in the *genre* were usually grim.² London life in Fielding's plays is always sordid, degrading and vicious. Ballad opera, as we have seen, generally portrayed the country sympathetically. Although Fielding lightly ridicules his rural-dwellers for their rustic naivety, he nevertheless represents their simplicity as being superior. All this adds up to a consistent and convincing didactic use of the town-country contrast in his ballad operas, the most successful in his dramatic writings.³

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p 27ff). Gagey describes Fielding's ballad operas as robust, original and realistic. (Gagey, *op.cit.*, p 139.) Fielding's ballad operas featured some current scandal. This was noted of *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, Drury Lane, 1732 (*Grub Street Journal* 127, June 8th 1732). Objections to current scandal caused problems with the production of *Miss Lucy in Town* (Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 369). Fielding, however, always subordinates his contemporary fact to ulterior rhetorical purposes (see Gagey, *op.cit.*, p 73).

¹Fielding's ballad operas are Hogarthian in their portrayal of London. Many elements in *The Lottery*, *The Covent Garden Tragedy* and *Miss Lucy in Town* derive from *The Harlot's Progress*. Some elements in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* derive from *The Rake's Progress* (see R. Etheridge Moore, *Hogarth's Literary Relationships*, Minnesota, 1948, p 96ff.)

²The term does not disguise the grim portrait of London life in this play and its imitations. (J. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, p 106.)

³Fielding is equally successful in his dramatic burlesques in which the alleged degeneracy of manners is largely attributed to Sir Robert Walpole's supremacy. These plays will be discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Fielding's poetry offers little that is new on manners and the country-city contrast. "To Celia", beginning with the lines "I hate the town",¹ published in the *Miscellanies*, 1743, is a trifling denunciation of London's follies. In *The Masquerade*, published in January, 1728, Fielding satirises that archetypal symbol of town deception in his writings, the masquerade.² In "Part of Juvenal's Sixth Satire, Modernized in Burlesque Verse", Fielding satirically catalogues the degenerate manners of the age, as represented in London. In this poem, he offers, for the only significant time in his works, an idealisation of Man, living in a state of nature as an alternative to the corruptions of civilisation:

DAME Chastity, without dispute,
Dwelt on the earth with good King Brute;
When a cold hut of modern Greenland
Had been a palace for a Queen Ann;
When hard and frugal temp'rance reign'd,
And men no other house contain'd
Than the wild thicket, or the den;
When household goods, and beasts, and men,
Together lay beneath one bough,
Which man and wife would scarce do now;
The rustic wife her husband's bed
With leaves and straw, and beast-skin made.³

Fielding's alternative to degenerate urban manners is normally relatively simple, yet well-civilised rural manners, of which there is no significant presentation in his poetical writings. His most elaborate and consistent use of the town-country contrast to analyse contemporary manners in his early writings is in *The Champion*, February 26, 1739-40, in which he expounds the Horatian doctrine of the "golden mean" and, in so doing, assembles almost all of the country-city motifs used throughout his works. The essay contrasts two married couples, living in town and country respectively, the

¹Henley XII, p 285f.

²Fielding satirises London's masquerade in *The Author's Farce*, III, i (Henley VIII, p 251); *Eurydice*, I, I (Henley XI, p 273); *Miss Lucy in Town* (Henley XII, p 38); *Champion*, February 19, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 207); *TJ*, XIII, vii, *Amelia*, X, ii and X, iv.

³Henley XII, p 303.

former representing everything that Fielding deplored about eighteenth-century London, and the latter exemplifying his ideal rural alternative. The town couple, preferring modern fashion and luxury to traditional simplicity, live beyond their means in an extravagantly furnished mansion, constantly besieged by unpaid tradespeople. Their sophisticated behaviour contravenes every rule of good-breeding outlined by Fielding in his "Essay on Conversation". Instead of receiving and entertaining their guests warmly and courteously, they do so coldly and indifferently, putting everyone ill at ease. This ill-natured inhospitality extends to their dinner-table, which is fashionable and stingy, rather than simple and substantial. Their marriage of convenience which has produced three sickly children, almost unknown to them, is found upon mutual infidelity, rather than love. Their emotional bankruptcy extends into their social relationships. They treat their guests and servants with insolence rather than benevolence, and are therefore despised by everyone. In contrast to this portrait of "splendid misery" in town, Fielding presents a portrait of "humble happiness" in the country.¹ The clergyman, his wife and children live according to the doctrine of the golden mean, prudently, yet comfortably within their income, in a simple house, themselves producing most of their simple household goods. Their behaviour confirms every rule of good-breeding in Fielding's "Essay on Conversation". They welcome and entertain their guests warmly and spontaneously, with good-humour and generosity. This goodwill extends to their dinner-table, which is plain and substantial. The couple's marriage, which has produced several healthy children, whose upbringing is personally attended to by their parents, is founded upon mutual esteem and love. The family's loving relationships extend into the surrounding neighbourhood, such that the whole parish is made by their example, "the family of love".² Thus the family's simple life and loving relationships exemplify the manners which Fielding regarded as

¹Henley XV, p 219.

²Henley XV, p 222.

necessary in a responsible civilisation, manners which he represents as being traditionally English, and as being driven out of eighteenth century London and preserved only in rural England. Although he assures us in his preamble that his portraits of town and country are "taken from the life, and the latter without the least embellishment",¹ these portraits are thoroughly conventional, being drawn from the traditions of urban satire and the *beatus ille* creed. Fielding, however, in the relatively new and flexible form of the journalistic essay, and in his best literary medium, prose, assembles these familiar materials freshly and vigorously. Avowedly using wit in the service of morality, like Addison and Steele in their essays,² he modifies the motifs to serve his didactic purposes, polarising town and country into sharp oppositions to present his own views on contemporary manners. Of particular interest here is his first significant use of the *beatus ille* creed which, although thoroughly orthodox in contemporary terms, stressing contentment and fulfilment through the course of the happy day, reveals his own interpretation, as he modifies the idealisation of retirement with an insistence on charity, an essential characteristic of the rural ideal throughout his writings.³ This *Champion* essay then, written in 1739-40, summarises and moralises his dramatic presentation of manners and introduces his elaborate narrative presentation of them in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.

¹Henley XV, p 219.

²Fielding claimed he would use wit in the service of morality like Addison and Steele. (*Champion*, January 3, 1739-40. Henley XV, p 136; *Champion*, January 10, 1739-40. Henley XV, p 148) Fielding contrasts town and country for moral purposes in many *Champion* essays, for example, February 7 and 9, 1739-40.

³Fielding always modifies the retirement creed with an insistence on charity. See J.L. Duncan, *op.cit.*, section 2, and M.C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, p 46.