

## Section Three:

## The Final Works

Fielding was appointed Justice of the Peace for the City and Liberty of Westminster on October 25, 1748, and on January 11, 1749, he had his jurisdiction extended over the county of Middlesex.<sup>1</sup> This made him the principal magistrate in London at that time.<sup>2</sup> During these closing years of his life, he continued to spend some time in the country. There is evidence that he was still visiting Ralph Allen at Prior Park.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1752, he purchased a small farm at Fordhook, in Ealing, six miles from Hyde Park.<sup>4</sup> This place, remarkable for its dry soil and clean air, which he describes in the preface to his *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, became his principal country residence for the remainder of his life. It was not only a retreat from the town, as the farm at East Stour had been, during the 1730s, it was also an investment, but little is known of Fielding's activities as a farmer at Fordhook. Despite his visits to Ealing, however, Fielding, at this time, was predominantly a town-dweller. His activities mainly centred on his courtroom in Bow Street, Covent Garden. Here, he was largely confined to viewing the most depressing aspects of London life, the unemployment, poverty and crime, problems which resulted from the system's incapacity to cope with socio-economic change, but which Fielding interpreted as resulting from the wilful abandonment, by all social classes, of the values which had governed the old system. In his legal and sociological pamphlets, *Amelia*, his *Covent Garden Journal* and *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, he campaigned for reactionary reform. He chiefly blamed the upper classes for what he saw as the degradation of the age, but realised that they would

<sup>1</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, II, pp 96-98.

<sup>2</sup>Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 36.

<sup>3</sup>In a letter of 1751 by Reverend Richard Hurd, describing a meeting with Fielding at Prior Park. (Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 310).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, II, p 290.

never be restrained by laws and attempted to reform them by satire. As discussed in our previous chapter, in his *Covent Garden Journal* he censures their manners and morals, their political, social and cultural behaviour, and exhorts them to return to traditional ways.<sup>1</sup> In his legal and sociological pamphlets he advocates harsh repressive measures to prevent the middle and lower classes from emulating the vices of the great. In *A Charge Delivered To The Grand Jury*, published in 1749, he represents London's "masquerades, balls, and assemblies of various kinds, fairs, wells, gardens, etc" as "tending to promote idleness, extravagance, and immorality, among all sorts of people."<sup>2</sup> He asserts that "this fury after licentious and luxurious pleasures is grown to so enormous a height, that it may be called the characteristic of the present age."<sup>3</sup> In the *Charge*, and most particularly, in the *Inquiry*, he advocates the suppression of London's pleasure resorts, in the interests of public virtue. It is in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* that he advocates his harshest measures for keeping the lower classes in their traditionally subordinate place. In these later writings, Fielding the London magistrate is everywhere present, describing the social problems before his eyes and urging reactionary remedies.

It is in this period, too, that *Amelia* was written. In dedicating *Amelia* to Ralph Allen, Fielding claims the same didactic function for this novel as for *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, stating that the novel is "sincerely designed to promote the cause of virtue".<sup>4</sup> *Amelia* also contributes greatly to Fielding's programme of social reform. Fielding himself claims this function for the novel when he states that his aim is to "expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public and private, which at present infest the country".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a summary of this satire against the *beau monde* see *CGJ*, II, January 7, 1752.

<sup>2</sup>Henley XIII, p 214f.

<sup>3</sup>Henley XIII, p 215.

<sup>4</sup>Henley VI, p 12.

<sup>5</sup>Henley VI, p 12.

The main business of *Amelia*, with regard to both these claims, is the relationship of Booth and Amelia to one another and to contemporary society, particularly London society. The London in which Booth and Amelia are put through their trial by adversity is portrayed very much by Fielding the magistrate, the social reformer. Booth and Amelia run the gauntlet of all the town vices (and many more) encountered by Fielding's earlier rural protagonists, but the dangers of these vices, and the hardship and suffering occasioned by their indulgence, are dwelt on at length and evoked with a harsher realism than in the earlier novels. Booth himself is in peril both from the villainy of the world at large and from the weakness of his own nature. The benevolent qualities, which he shares with Tom Jones, do not work nearly as strongly as they do for Tom in evening out the damaging effects of his impulsive imprudence. We judge Booth and his actions more harshly than we do Tom and his, largely because the effects of his follies are presented more starkly. Amelia is at the centre of the novel which bears her name and this, plus Fielding's breaking with the dramatic conventions in giving us a hero and heroine already married, enables the consequences of Booth's imprudence to be shown with damaging effect, through what happens to Amelia as wife. Amelia is more to the fore than is Sophia in *Tom Jones*, and her danger, as a virtuous woman, from the machinations of villains is also presented with stark realism. What enables Booth's and Amelia's situation to be felt so acutely is that their main problems are economic. Fielding constantly emphasizes the fact that it is chiefly their financial distress which makes them vulnerable to the traditional town predators. Like Wilson and Tom Jones, Booth and Amelia learn that the upper classes in London prey upon, rather than promote, the meritorious but, because of their family commitments, their dependence upon the great (represented most notably in the novel by Colonel James and the nameless peer) makes their position more precarious. In telling their story then, Fielding is very much concerned with social injustice. The ruling classes in *Amelia* are more irresponsible and vicious than ever before in Fielding's writings. So, too, are their pimps and retainers, represented largely by Captain and Mrs Trent,

Mrs Ellison, and to some extent, Mrs James and Miss Matthews. All these people attempt to lure Booth and Amelia to their destruction by using the traditional temptations of the town, the taverns, gambling dens and masquerades, against which Fielding, as magistrate, directed much of his reforming energy. Booth and Amelia suffer the humiliating experiences of the cheap lodging, the pawnbroker's shop and the bailiff's house. They also become victims of common urban crime. They are robbed of their last possessions and experience the violence of London's streets and parks. Booth witnesses at first hand the mal-administration of justice in the town, as exemplified in Justice Jonathan Thrasher's courtroom and in Newgate prison. Thus, the London of *Amelia* comprises not only the glittering *beau monde* of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* (a London of which we receive only fleeting glimpses in *Amelia*), but also the violence, crime, poverty and unemployment with which Fielding became acquainted as magistrate.

The destructive effects of this environment are graphically illustrated in the story of Mr and Mrs Bennet, narrated by Mrs Bennet. This story occurs, as is Fielding's custom with such interpolations, at the novel's midpoint, in Book Seven. Like Booth and Amelia, Mr and Mrs Bennet were a young married couple who came to London from the country. They believed that the ruling class would recognise their merits and provide them with employment, only to discover that money and interest rather than merit and virtue were the criteria on which such employment is provided. Innocent and naive, they reduced themselves to poverty by spending their money on the town diversions. Obligated to take refuge from their creditors in the verge of the court, they lodged in the house of Mrs Ellison, to whom they had been recommended by their first landlady who, like Mrs Ellison, served as bawd to the nameless peer. The peer, finding Mrs Bennet to his liking, sent Mr Bennet out of town for a few days with promises of employment. He then enticed Mrs Bennet to the masquerade and afterwards drugged and seduced her.

The Bennets were rendered utterly miserable as Mrs Bennet, infected with venereal disease by the peer, in turn infected her husband. He was cured by his surgeon, but died within ten weeks of a polypus of the heart, and Mrs Bennet was reduced to economic difficulty and despair. This story is narrated to Amelia as the same net closes around her and Booth. It provides an ominous lesson to those who come to London from the country, hoping to succeed on their merits amongst the great. It also, with its Richardsonian echoes of drugged rape and the aristocratic villain's use of disguise, lays emphasis on the particular problems the vices of the *beau monde* pose for the young, virtuous woman. Fielding uses this additional emphasis on Amelia's harassment, and the trickery involved, to give more bite than in earlier novels to his portrayal and condemnation of the degeneracy of town values. Booth and Amelia learn their lesson the hard way. Their story begins when Booth arrives in London from Wiltshire to take refuge from his creditors in the verge of the court. He takes lodgings at Mrs Ellison's home in Spring Gardens, and one night, returning home from a coffee-house, he rescues a gentleman being assaulted in the streets. He is arrested and tried before Justice Thrasher, then committed to Newgate, where he meets Miss Matthews, a former acquaintance, who seduces him. After he is discharged from Newgate, with the aid of Miss Matthews' money, he returns to Mrs Ellison's house with Amelia, who is just arrived in town from Wiltshire. The couple then begin the task of finding Booth employment, believing that the brave service he gave to his country several years earlier at the Siege of Gibraltar, together with his benevolence, his integrity and his other virtues, would recommend him to the great. They apply principally to two great men, Colonel James and the nameless peer, both of whom wish to seduce Amelia and therefore pretend a willingness to find Booth a position. Beneath this pretence of friendship, these two weave several insidious plots around the young couple, subjecting them to more exquisite torments than any suffered by innocent rural characters in London in Fielding's previous writings. Colonel James attempts to corrupt the couple by introducing them to the fashionable diversions of the town. When this fails, he attempts to have Booth sent abroad and Amelia to his country house. This plan is thwarted,

not by the ingenuity of Booth and Amelia, but by the chance intervention of Dr Harrison. James' plotting then becomes nastier, as he makes his wife his pimp, and this plot is only abandoned because James takes up with Miss Matthews again, losing his interest in Amelia. A more pernicious plot is instigated by the noble lord, who has rooms in Mrs Ellison's house in Spring Gardens for the purpose of preying upon distressed couples obliged to take refuge in the verge of the court. According to their arrangement, Mrs Ellison introduces the disguised peer to Amelia at the oratorio, and the peer, finding Amelia to his liking, invites her to the masquerade. It is at this point that Mrs Bennet intervenes and tells Amelia her story. The two women arrange for Mrs Bennet to attend the masquerade disguised as Amelia and to quash the peer's affections. Mrs Bennet betrays the plan, however, by soliciting from the peer a commission for her husband, Sergeant Atkinson, thereby encouraging his lordship to hope for favours from Amelia. This hope dies when Mrs Atkinson confesses her stratagem to the lord. The nobleman then turns to another of his retainers, Captain Trent, who had earlier, and premeditatedly, lent Booth fifty pounds at the gaming table in the King's Arms. On the noble lord's instructions, Trent has Booth arrested for the debt and confined to the bailiff's house, thereby leaving Amelia virtually defenceless. This plot is thwarted only by the intervention of Providence in the form of Robinson's repentance and confession, which restores to Amelia the estate misappropriated by her sister, thereby enabling the Booths to discharge their debts, solve their problems, and retire from London to Wiltshire. In presenting these plots against Booth and Amelia, Fielding, as he promises in the novel's dedication, exposes the "private vices" which "at present infest this country". In so doing, he makes explicit his judgement that the private vices of the upper classes are chiefly responsible for the "public vices", which he also undertakes to expose. By using their wealth and power to feed their own lusts, the ruling classes corrupt the system. They promote into positions of responsibility only those able to serve the vicious inclinations of the great, rather than those who are prepared to serve society. As always in Fielding's writings, the abnegation of responsibility by the great is symbolised by the inhospitable doors and hostile porters of their town houses,

at which Booth dances attendance, with the same success as Captain Merit in *The Modern Husband*, Wilson and Tom Jones. This is his reception at Colonel James' door:

... the colonel was as inaccessible as the best defended fortress; and it was as impossible for Booth to pass beyond his entry as the Spaniards found it to take Gibraltar. He received the usual answers; first, that the colonel was not stirring, and an hour after that he was gone out. All that he got by asking further questions was only to receive still ruder and ruder answers, by which, if he had been very sagacious, he might have been satisfied how little worth his while it was to desire to go in; for the porter at a great man's door is a kind of thermometer, by which you may discover the warmth or coldness of his master's friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the novel, we see James conferring positions of importance on his footmen.<sup>2</sup> The social significance which Fielding attributed to such behaviour is fully elaborated in a conversation between Dr Harrison and another nobleman, which takes place as the high-born predators close in around Booth and Amelia. Harrison asks the peer to find Booth a position. The peer refuses to do so unless Harrison uses his influence to corrupt an election in his favour. The conversation begins when Harrison asserts that merit should be the only criterion for conferring public office:

"This is all mere Utopia," cries his lordship: "the chimerical system of Plato's commonwealth, with which we amused ourselves at the university; politics which are inconsistent with the state of human affairs."

"Sure, my lord," cries the doctor, "we have read of states where such doctrines have been put in practice. What is your lordship's opinion of Rome in the earlier ages of the commonwealth, of Sparta, and even of Athens itself in some periods of its history?"

"Indeed, doctor," cries the lord, "all these notions are obsolete and long since exploded. To apply maxims of government drawn from the Greek and Roman histories to this nation is absurd and impossible. But, if you will have Roman examples, fetch them from those times of the republic that

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* V, i (Henley VI, p 225).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* XI, i (Henley VII, p 244). See also *CGJ*, II, January 7, 1752 (Jensen I, p 144).

were most like our own. Do you not know, doctor, that this is as corrupt a nation as ever existed under the sun? And would you think of governing such a people by the strict principles of honesty and morality?"

"If it be so corrupt," said the doctor, "I think it is high time to amend it: or else it is easy to foresee that Roman and British liberty will have the same fate; for corruption in the body politic as naturally tends to dissolution as in the natural body."<sup>1</sup>

Harrison then points out the social danger when the great neglect men of merit and promote those of none:

"Now to deny a man the preferment which he merits, and to give it to another man who doth not merit it, is a manifest act of injustice, and is consequently inconsistent with both honour and honesty. Nor is it only an act of injustice to the man himself, but to the public, for whose good principally all public offices are, or ought to be, instituted. Now this good can never be completed nor obtained but by employing all persons according to their capacities. Wherever true merit is liable to be superseded by favour and partiality, and men are intrusted with offices without any regard to capacity or integrity, the affairs of that state will always be in a deplorable situation."<sup>2</sup>

Harrison points out a further danger in the failure to promote the meritorious:

"But, my lord, there is another mischief which attends this kind of injustice, and that is, it hath a manifest tendency to destroy all virtue and all ability among the people, by taking away all that encouragement and incentive which should promote emulation and raise men to aim at excelling in any art, science, or profession."<sup>3</sup>

Harrison concludes his case, with a pragmatic argument, pointing out that the ruling classes would have "universal discontent and grumbling"<sup>4</sup> on their hands if they manned the system with people without capacity. To convince his country readers that London,

<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* XI, ii (Henley VII, p 248f).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* XI, ii (Henley VII, p 250f).

<sup>3</sup> *Amelia* XI, ii (Henley VII, p 251).

<sup>4</sup> *Amelia* XI, ii (Henley VII, p 251).



the centre of power, really is as corrupt as revealed in this conversation on social philosophy, Fielding, in the ensuing chapter, describes the history of Captain Trent, pimp to the peer who tries to destroy Booth and Amelia. Trent's history illustrates the kind of qualities which are necessary to get on in the system. After an early career of fraud and treachery, Trent made his break into the *beau monde* by prostituting his wife to the peer, just as Mr Modern did his to Lord Richly in *The Modern Husband*, a play from which *Amelia* seems to take many of its features. After this *amour* is over, the Trents set up a bawdy house in the service of the peer in the west end of the town. Thus established in the system itself, Trent, according to his commission, tries to persuade Booth to prostitute Amelia to the peer, explaining that a beautiful wife promotes a man farther than merit:

"You know best what friends you have to depend upon; but, if you have no other pretensions than your merit, I can assure you you would fail, if it was possible you could have ten times more merit than you have."<sup>1</sup>

Trying to find employment in London, continually let down by Colonel James and the peer, Booth, in a desperate last bid, gives fifty pounds to a "little great man", who promises him a position in the services. In describing the manner in which the predator received the money, Fielding uses the author's knowledge that Amelia had raised the sum by pawning her last possessions in order to bitterly denounce such people and their practices:

The great man received the money, not as a gudgeon doth a bait, but as a pike receives a poor gudgeon into his maw. To say the truth, such fellows as these may well be likened to that voracious fish who fattens himself by devouring all the little inhabitants of the river. As soon as the great man had pocketed the cash, he shook Booth by the hand, and told him he would be sure to slip no opportunity of serving him, and would send him word as soon as any offered.

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<sup>1</sup>*Amelia* X, vii (Henley VII, p 224).

Here I shall stop one moment, and so, perhaps, will my good-natured reader; for surely it must be a hard heart which is not affected with reflecting on the manner in which this poor little sum was raised, and on the manner in which it was bestowed. A worthy family, the wife and children of a man who had lost his blood abroad in the service of his country, parting with their little all, and exposed to cold and hunger, to pamper such a fellow as this!

And if any such reader as I mention should happen to be in reality a great man, and in power, perhaps the horror of this picture may induce him to put a final end to this abominable practice of touching, as it is called: by which, indeed, a set of leeches are permitted to suck the blood of the brave and the indigent, of the widow and the orphan.<sup>1</sup>

When confined in the bailiff's house, Booth continues to have faith in this man, on which pitiful hope Fielding comments:

Thus did this poor man support his hopes by a dependence on that ticket which he had so dearly purchased of one who pretended to manage the wheels in the great state lottery of preferment. A lottery, indeed, which hath this to recommend it - that many poor wretches feed their imaginations with the prospect of a prize during their whole lives, and never discover they have drawn a blank.<sup>2</sup>

Angered by the neglect of Booth, and his friend, Bob Bound, another military man who gave good service to his country, Amelia asks:

"...what are our great men made of? are they in reality a distinct species from the rest of mankind? Are they born without hearts?"<sup>3</sup>

As portrayed in the novel, the great men in Westminster certainly are so. As a result of the aristocracy's irresponsibility and lack of benevolence, injustice permeates the entire system. Corruption extends through all levels of London society. Fielding dramatises this point in the novel's opening scenes. Shortly after his arrival in town, Booth rescues a gentleman being assaulted in the streets, and, together with the victim, the assailants and the other witnesses, is carried before Justice Jonathan Thrasher.

<sup>1</sup>*Amelia* XI, v (Henley VII, p 267f).

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia* XII, ii (Henley VII, p 297).

<sup>3</sup>*Amelia* X, ix (Henley VII, p 236).

In portraying Thrasher's treatment of these people, Fielding presents London's legal system as being in a state of utter corruption and even of breakdown, in that the institutions seem disconnected from the people and the justice they are meant to represent. Thrasher, a type of the "trading justice", uses his position to serve his own interests. He extorts bribes, corrupts juries and exploits the underprivileged. When Booth and his party are brought before him, Thrasher acquits the assailants, in return for a fee, and commits Booth and the victim, who have no money to support their case, to Newgate prison. Booth is taken on a guided tour of Newgate by one of its inmates and witnesses at first hand the victims of Thrasher's iniquity, people for many of whom the only crime was poverty and distress. Throughout *Amelia* Fielding makes explicit his judgement, that the sufferings of those in Newgate, portrayed in the novel's opening scenes (scenes which will be more fully analysed in our final chapter), dwelt on, and paused over, so that they set the tone for much of the rest of the novel, are the direct result of the ruling classes' failure to govern society responsibly. Due to the aristocracy's private and public vices, then, London society in *Amelia*, from top to bottom, is a sink of iniquity and injustice.

In this corrupt urban environment, Amelia, who suffers the most exquisite agonies, is not morally endangered. Steadfastly religious and prudent, she remains uncorrupted. As with Sophia Western, it is only her person which is imperilled. With Booth, it is otherwise. Booth, like Wilson and Tom Jones, possesses the basic Fielding virtue, benevolence, but like Wilson and Tom Jones, he lacks prudence. He is therefore represented as having basic integrity but also a flaw which must be corrected. Booth's moral condition is extremely unstable. Although rejecting Bernard Mandeville's cynical judgement, that all men act from purely selfish motives, Booth subscribes to Mandeville's view that all men act "entirely from their passions".<sup>1</sup> Early in the novel he puts forward the view of the ruling passion in relation to the necessity of human actions:

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* XII, v (Henley VII, p 313). Earlier in the novel Booth actually embraces Mandeville's doctrine of the ruling passions (*Amelia* III, v, Henley VI, p 127 ).

He did not believe men were under any blind impulse or direction of fate, but that every man acted merely from the force of that passion which was<sup>1</sup> uppermost in his mind, and could do no otherwise.

Fielding believed that virtue and religion should be the major motivations and inducements to moral action.<sup>2</sup> He therefore represents Booth's belief, that virtue and vice were not absolute but only relative qualities, as being morally dangerous. It is as a result of his holding this position that Booth refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions. He attributes his difficulties, Fielding tells us, largely the products of his own imprudence, to outside forces, particularly Fortune:

In short, poor Booth imagined that a larger share of misfortunes had fallen to his lot than he had merited; and this led him, who (though a good classical scholar) was not deeply learned in religious matters, into a disadvantageous opinion of Providence. A dangerous way of reasoning, in which our conclusions are not only too hasty, from an imperfect view of things, but we are likewise liable to much error from partiality to ourselves, viewing our virtues and vices as through a perspective, in which we turn the glass always to our own advantage, so as to diminish the one, and as greatly to magnify the other.<sup>3</sup>

Fielding emphatically rejects this whole position:

I question much whether we may not, by natural means, account for the success of knaves, the calamities of fools, with all the miseries in which men of sense sometimes involve themselves, by quitting the directions of Prudence, and following the blind guidance of a predominant passion; in short, for all the ordinary phenomena which are imputed to fortune, whom perhaps, men accuse with no less absurdity in life than a bad player complains of ill luck at the game of chess.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Amelia* I, iii (Henley VI, p 26). See also, III, v (Henley VI, p 127), VIII, x (Henley VII, p 113) and X, ix (Henley VII, p 237).

<sup>2</sup>During these years Fielding still denounced deists and atheists; for example, *Amelia* I, iii (Henley VI, p 25), *CGJ*, VIII, January 28, 1752 and *CGJ*, IX, February 1, 1752. For a discussion of Fielding's ethics in *Amelia*, see A.R. Toward, "Fielding and Dr Samuel Clarke", *MLN* 70, 1955, pp 267-269.

<sup>3</sup>*Amelia* I, iii (Henley VI, p 25).

<sup>4</sup>*Amelia* I, i (Henley VI, p 13f). For a discussion of the theme of Providence and Fortune see D.S. Thomas, "Fortune and the Passions in Fielding's *Amelia*", *MLN* 60, 1965, pp 176-187.

Fielding believed that people were born with basic characters, but that reason enabled people to conquer their weaknesses and fashion their own destinies. Like Wilson and Tom Jones, then, Booth must acquire wisdom. He must learn to accept responsibility for his own actions, and to govern these actions by the rules of virtue and religion. He must learn that Christian Providence, rather than pagan Fortune, is the most active force in the lives of Man. As with Wilson and Tom, Booth is put through a trial by adversity. As with Tom, his trial begins in the country. Under great difficulties but with the assistance of Dr Harrison, he courts and marries Amelia in Wiltshire. He then travels to the Continent and is wounded at the Siege of Gibraltar. When he and Amelia return to England they discover that Amelia's sister has inherited her late mother's estate. Miss Harris refuses to provide for them and so Booth becomes a farmer in Dr Harrison's parish, with great success, whilst Harrison is there to advise him. Harrison, however, is obliged to travel abroad and Booth is left to manage for himself. As with Wilson before him, Booth realises the full significance of being left without proper counsel:

"By this means I was bereft not only of the best companion in the world, but of the best counsellor; a loss of which I have since felt the bitter consequence; for no greater advantage, I am convinced, can arrive to a young man, who hath any degree of understanding, than an intimate converse with one of riper years, who is not only able to advise, but who knows the manner of advising. By this means alone, youth can enjoy the benefit of the experience of age, and that at a time of life when such experience will be of more service to a man than when he hath lived long enough to acquire it of himself."<sup>1</sup>

For want of his "sage counsellor", Booth "now fell into many errors."<sup>2</sup> Within four years he was completely ruined and obliged to escape his creditors by fleeing to London and taking refuge in the verge of the court. London then, becomes the main scene of his trial by adversity. Lacking moral energy, and believing all

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* III, xii (Henley VI, p 167f).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* III, xii (Henley VI, p 168).

actions to be determined by immediate circumstances and predominant passions, he is totally at the mercy of this pernicious environment. Shortly after his arrival, his good nature involves him in a street brawl and, as outlined earlier, he is carried before Justice Thrasher and committed to Newgate. Here he meets Miss Matthews, and commits his first moral transgression in the town, by allowing himself to be seduced by her. He temporarily escapes Miss Matthews' clutches on his release from Newgate but, in the midst of the town temptations, Booth's moral lassitude together with his increasing financial distress, involve him in further difficulties. Believing Colonel James and the noble lord to be benevolent and responsible, he falls into every snare which they invent for his destruction. James' plan to have Booth sent abroad is thwarted by the chance intervention of Dr Harrison, who returns from overseas, learns of Booth's extravagances from the Wiltshire farmers and follows him to London. He enters the lodging in Spring Gardens whilst the family is absent and discovers some trinkets which the nameless peer gave to Amelia's children. Believing these to be evidence of further extravagance, Harrison has Booth arrested for debt owed to himself, and confined to the bailiff's house, at the point where he was to be sent overseas by James. When Harrison learns the facts of the matter, he has Booth released, but the young man's lack of moral drive soon has him involved in more difficulties. He is lured to the masquerade at Ranelagh by Miss Matthews, who renews her conquest of him and attempts to destroy his marriage by informing Amelia of the relationship. He allows himself to be drawn into play by Captain Trent at the King's Arms, and loses fifty pounds. By pawning the family's last possessions, Amelia scrapes together fifty pounds, which she gives to Booth to pay the debt, but Booth, without proper inquiry, gives the money to the "great nan" in exchange for a commission, which never comes. At this point, Amelia's maid steals off with the family's clothing. Amelia then pawns her last treasure, a jewelled portrait, and hurries home to prepare Booth's favourite supper, whilst Booth, attending an assignation with Miss Matthews, is arrested on the suit of Captain Trent and again confined to the bailiff's house. Thus, like Wilson and Tom Jones, Booth reaches the nadir of his

career in a London prison. Like Wilson and Tom Jones, he realises that his sufferings have been the results of his own imprudence, rather than the tricks of Fortune. Once he realises and admits this, his trial by adversity is over. In addition, after reading Dr Barrow's sermon, "The Duty And Reward Of Bounty To The Poor", Booth realises the folly of his having subscribed to the doctrine of the passions, and becomes a committed Christian. As with Wilson and Tom Jones, once he repents and submits himself to the will of Heaven, Providence steps in and resolves his problems. In a series of coincidences, Amelia's estate is discovered to have been misappropriated by her sister, and is immediately restored to her. Vice is punished, virtue is rewarded. Miss Harris is banished overseas, where she lives in great misery. The peer, Mrs Ellison, Captain Trent, Colonel James and Miss Matthews are all thwarted in their plots against the Booth family. Booth is released from prison, pays his debts, and the family retires to Wiltshire. In portraying Booth's progress through London society, then, Fielding, as with Tom Jones, achieves the two-fold task of surveying the corrupt urban environment, whilst using this environment to dramatise the education of his hero. The two themes are united. Harrison's assertion (cited earlier),<sup>1</sup> that the system's failure to reward merit deprives the people and, therefore, society, of all incentive to achieve excellence, is clearly dramatised in Booth's career. Booth's moral energy, already sapped by his belief in the doctrine of the ruling passions, is further depleted by the corruption of the system. Although aware of the enervating social consequences of such corruption,<sup>2</sup> Booth fails to apply his observation to his own case, and allows himself to sink into further lassitude. Whilst succumbing to the temptations of the town, however, he never submits to the reigning values of the system. After his acquisition of wisdom he cannot remain in London. He retires to establish his ideal of order in the country. His progress then, is identical to that of Wilson and Tom Jones:

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p 237.

<sup>2</sup>See *Amelia* VIII, vi (Henley VII, p 91f).

it is in the manner of its presentation that it differs from theirs. Wilson's brief, cautionary story, told after the event, is important in its application to the comic optimism of *Joseph Andrews*. Tom's progress is a quest, the tone of its telling beautifully managed by Fielding to suggest an optimistic view of the possibilities of human happiness, given the ordered nature of the world and man's natural goodness. Booth's story takes much of its tone from its city setting and from the sense of corruption and breakdown present there.

In portraying Booth's progress, Fielding makes greater use of classical models than he had done in his earlier novels. Booth's career resembles that of Umbricius in Juvenal's Third Satire. Like Umbricius, Booth tries to gain advancement in the system, on his merits. Like Umbricius, he refuses to be corrupted by the men in power and, after much suffering, rejects the town for a life governed by the traditional values in the country.<sup>1</sup> Booth's career also resembles that of Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*, a work which Fielding himself describes as the major model for *Amelia*.<sup>2</sup> Like Aeneas, Booth is turned away from his original home, and seeks to find a new foundation for his progeny. Some of Booth's experiences in London resemble obstacles encountered by Aeneas in the classical world. His seduction by Miss Matthews in Newgate is similar to Aeneas' affair with Dido, in Carthage. Like Aeneas, he achieves a moral victory over his own weaknesses, and eventually establishes a secure home for himself and his progeny in the West. In portraying Booth's town career and subsequent rural retirement, Fielding, to some extent, uses the Christian heroic ideal, as he had done in his earlier novels. Although not a committed Christian, Booth subscribes to general Christian principles. Like the journeys of Joseph, Adams and Tom Jones, his progress through London society represents something of a moral pilgrimage, which concludes with his total commitment to Christianity, and retirement to the country.

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of these issues, see R. Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, p 161f.

<sup>2</sup>*CGJ*, 8. January 28, 1752 (Jensen I, p 186). See Lyall H. Powers, "The Influence of the *Aeneid* on Fielding's *Amelia*", *MLN* 71, 1956, pp 330-6.



Fielding's alternative to London then, continues to be the country, which he is still idealising during these later years.<sup>1</sup> The rural ideal is established in several places in *Amelia*, in Booth's, Miss Matthews' and Mrs Bennet's descriptions of their earlier lives in Wiltshire and Essex, and in Booth's description of Dr Harrison's life in his parish. In describing their rural happiness, Booth, Miss Matthews and Mrs Bennet concentrate on the idyllic qualities of a country life. It is in Booth's description of Dr Harrison's parish that the rural ideal achieves, in the early chapters of the novel, the social significance which it had in Fielding's earlier novels. After describing Harrison's plain and simple manner of living Booth goes on to describe the parson's management of his parish:

"All his parishioners, whom he treats as his children, regard him as their common father. Once in a week he constantly visits every house in the parish, examines, commends, and rebukes, as he finds occasion. This is practised likewise by his curate in his absence; and so good an effect is produced by this their care, that no quarrels ever proceed either to blows or lawsuits; no beggar is to be found in the whole parish; nor did I ever hear a very profane oath all the time I lived in it."<sup>2</sup>

Thus Harrison is presented as a responsible social leader in the old feudal ideal. His parish, like that of the clergyman in *The Champion*, February 26, 1739-40, and Parson Adams' parish in *Joseph Andrews*, is a microcosm of traditional moral and social order. It is order in which all classes are bound together out of a sense of duty for religious authority and the social hierarchy, as well as a benevolent concern for the common welfare. At the end of the novel, Booth and Amelia achieve the same kind of order on their estate in Wiltshire.<sup>3</sup> Again, as in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* it is a pattern which Fielding presents for emulation.

<sup>1</sup>See *CGJ*, 33, April 25, 1752, *CGJ*, July 11, 1752 and *CGJ*, 58, August 8, 1752.

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia* III, xii (Henley VI, p 164).

<sup>3</sup>*Amelia* XII, viii (Henley VII, p 338).

The rural ideal in *Amelia*, however, is not as successful as that in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* for several reasons. It is not as extensively or attractively presented. Booth, Miss Matthews and Mrs Bennet all describe their retirement in conventional *beatus ille* terminology, but their happiness is not as convincingly demonstrated as is Mr Wilson's. Booth's attempt to use conventional *beatus ille* procedures to describe his and Amelia's rural happiness is constantly undercut by Miss Matthews' newly-acquired town cynicism, as in this passage:

"I scarce know a circumstance that distinguished one day from another. The whole was one continued series of love, health, and tranquillity. Our lives resembled a calm sea --"

"The dullest of all ideas," cries the lady.

"I know," said he, "it must appear dull in description, for who can describe the pleasure which the morning air gives to one in perfect health; the flow of spirits which springs up from exercise; the delights which parents feel from the prattle and innocent follies of their children; the joy with which the tender smile of a wife inspires a husband; or lastly, the cheerful, solid comfort which a fond couple enjoy in each other's conversation? All these pleasures and every other of which our situation was capable we tasted in the highest degree."<sup>1</sup>

The scorn with which Miss Matthews interrupts Booth's idyllic description prevents our warmly responding to the life being described. This contrasts to the effect achieved by Parson Adams' approving remarks on Mr Wilson's rural retirement. In *Tom Jones*, the portrayal of Mr Allworthy's rural retirement had been made attractive by extensive description of the surrounding landscape, which itself had contributed greatly to the moral excellence of Allworthy's life. In *Amelia*, the landscape of retirement is not important. It is during these later years that Fielding expresses his preference for seascapes:

For my own part, I confess myself so entirely fond of a sea prospect, that I think nothing on the land can equal it; and if it be set off with shipping I desire to borrow no ornament from the *terra firma*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Amelia* III, xii (Henley VI, p 167).

<sup>2</sup>*Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (Henley XVI, p 248ff).

During these years, he continues to describe landscapes, in *The Covent Garden Journal* and *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*,<sup>1</sup> but concentrates on practical, rather than aesthetic features of the rural scene. In *Amelia*, he stipulates that his morally virtuous characters do appreciate the beauty of the landscape,<sup>2</sup> as was almost obligatory in contemporary retirement literature, but he does not present such appreciation as having any significant effect on them, as in Mr Allworthy's case. The only notable landscape in *Amelia* is the description of the countryside around Dr Harrison's house but Fielding's treatment of it is brief, as he characteristically concentrates on the moral and social aspects of retirement. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the concluding rural ideal had been made convincing by elaborate preparation earlier in the novels, in the description of Mr Wilson's and Mr Allworthy's ways of life respectively. In *Amelia*, the concluding rural ideal is not convincingly prepared for. Booth, Miss Matthews and Mrs Bennet all describe their rural happiness in flashback, when they are in distressing circumstances in London. Booth and Miss Matthews paint their earlier rural felicity in the horrifying environment of Newgate, and Mrs Bennet paints hers in the terrible shadow of her husband's death and her own seduction at the hands of the noble lord. In all three cases, these characters had ruined their earlier bucolic peace by their own folly. All three had plunged themselves into distressing circumstances which had driven them to town, where their rural innocence made them vulnerable to predators, and subjected them to further distresses. Even the rural ideal achieved by Dr Harrison is not stable. Whilst Harrison is in his parish all is well but, as soon as he leaves it to go abroad, his parishioners become vindictive and conspire against Booth and Amelia, forcing the couple to flee to London and further hardship. The rural ideal in the earlier chapters of *Amelia*, then, is fleeting and precarious. The nightmarish world of London simply destroys or

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<sup>1</sup>CGJ, 33, April 25, 1752 (Jensen I, p 326f).

<sup>2</sup>See Booth and Amelia in Wiltshire (*Amelia* III, ii, Henley VI, p 112).

trivialises the idyllic visions which the characters, often nostalgically, try to establish as an escape from their dreadful urban distresses. In the midst of their economic hardships in the town, Booth and Amelia often idealise the humble cottage life.<sup>1</sup> At the height of her anguish, Amelia even declares that she could be happy in the life of the labourer's wife:

"I am sure I could be happy in it.... And why not I as well as a thousand others, who have not the happiness of such a husband to make life delicious? why should I complain of my hard fate whilst so many who are much poorer than I enjoy theirs? Am I of a superior rank of being to the wife of the honest labourer? am I not partaker of one common nature with her?"<sup>2</sup>

Fielding, as always, does not put his idealists to the test. At the end of the novel, Booth and Amelia do not retire to a humble cottage, but to a large estate. Like Joseph and Fanny, and Tom and Sophia then, they are rewarded for their moral triumph in London, not only with the intangible, but also with the tangible things of life. Thus, Fielding again gets the best of two worlds: love triumphs, but the materialistic demands of the system are still met. By making the country estate seem the reward bestowed on the virtuous by Providence, Fielding again fosters the illusion that traditional English society, founded on the supremacy of the country estates, was founded in natural and moral law, ordained by God. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding had successfully manoeuvred us into accepting this illusion, but he is not so successful in manoeuvring us into this position in *Amelia*. There is, indeed, nothing new in the conclusion of *Amelia*. Booth's sudden reformation is no more miraculous than Wilson's or Tom's. The immediate intervention of Providence to unravel the hero's problems with a series of coincidences is no more marvellous than in the earlier novels. All these contrivances are thoroughly successful at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, however, because Fielding, throughout these novels, is in complete control of what he creates.

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* II, vi (Henley VI, p 91) and III, vii (Henley VI, p 139).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* XII, viii (Henley VII, p 333).

The same contrivances are irksome at the end of *Amelia* because Fielding, throughout this novel, does not display the same artistic assurance or control of what he is creating.

In *Amelia*, Fielding changes his artistic procedure, but not with complete success. Broadly speaking, the old stylising and the new realistic techniques, which he had successfully combined in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, separate and become more extreme. This is not to say that *Amelia* is a complete failure. It has strengths as well as weaknesses, but there are tensions and conflicts which tend to counteract Fielding's didactic intentions. These conflicts and tensions can be attributed to a loss of control of his medium on Fielding's part. It has been generally accepted by his critics that during his last years he underwent some form of disillusionment, probably the result of increasing age, illness, poverty and his depressing experiences as London magistrate. C.J. Rawson, amongst others, argues that Fielding lost confidence in the Augustan world view, that all of the facts of life were an integral part of benevolent cosmic order, a view which was at this time performing its "dance of death".<sup>1</sup> Fielding's confidence in this vision of order had enabled him to create its artistic embodiment in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, novels in which he organises all of the facts of life into elaborately contrived emblems of cosmic order. In *Amelia*, although disillusioned, he strives to maintain a belief in cosmic justice. The result, as C.J. Rawson demonstrates, is an oscillation between a loosening up and an overtightening of his grip on the raw materials of reality. In his disillusioned state, he presents many harsh realities apparently outside the control of any benevolent cosmic order, yet still strives to organise these realities with his old formalising techniques, thereby asserting the continued existence of such order. These conflicting techniques seriously impede Fielding's convincing didactic use of the country-city contrast in *Amelia*, the successes and failures of which will now be examined in detail.

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<sup>1</sup>For an extensive discussion of Fielding's disillusionment during these years, see C.J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, p 491ff.

As a result of experience as a magistrate, Fielding claimed to see in London's social problems overwhelming evidence of the disintegration of traditional English society. This, coupled with the increasing pessimism and severity of his outlook on life during these years, led him to perceive the need for reactionary reform as being more urgent than ever before. His approach to literature became more pragmatic. To some extent, he abandoned the traditional, formalising techniques, and the ironic undercutting, with which he had earlier advocated the maintenance of traditional society, in favour of the more direct techniques which were currently undermining the old methods. According to the new techniques, which were largely the products of the new social system, a valid artistic apprehension of life could best be achieved, not so much by an artificial portrayal, based on literary models, of the universal aspects of human experience, as by an authentic representation of the unique aspects of individual human experience. As stated above,<sup>1</sup> this led Fielding away from fiction towards fact, away from literature towards history. This was no radical change. He had defined *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* as being "history". During his later years, however, Fielding actually expressed a preference for history over the epic, and, indeed, over literature in general.<sup>2</sup> Fielding's decreasing interest in fiction, and his increasing interest in fact, are immediately visible in *Amelia*, as has been noted by many critics.<sup>3</sup> In this novel, he does present an authentic historical account of his own times. Whilst *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* give us a vivid picture of life in eighteenth-century England, particularly rural England, *Amelia* is more detailed in its social history. The two earlier novels give us little idea of the socio-economic upheavals taking place amongst the lower classes in mid eighteenth-century London. *Amelia*, through its prison scenes particularly, portrays these disturbances.

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<sup>1</sup>See p 41.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p 42.

<sup>3</sup>See R. Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, p 157ff.

Although the London section of the story of *Tom Jones* is partly set in Mrs Miller's house and the prison, for the most part it is dramatised against the glittering background of Westminster drawing-rooms, portrayed largely according to literary convention. The story of Booth and Amelia, on the other hand, is dramatised against the squalid background of urban crime, poverty and unemployment, with which Fielding was currently dealing as London's principal magistrate. In *Amelia*, we see more clearly the workings of the political and social systems, as concentrated in London, and we receive a more vivid picture of this system's failure to cope with changes currently taking place in contemporary society. In the novel, however, Fielding is not only concerned with the public aspects of contemporary history. As Ronald Paulson observes, Fielding in *Amelia* changes from using history as "satire", as he had done in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, to facilitate a generalised examination of the public realms of contemporary reality, to using history as "novel", to facilitate a more detailed examination of the effects of the public realms on the private experience of the individual.<sup>1</sup> Thus, whilst the action of *Amelia* is firmly anchored in place and time, as was the action of the earlier novels (taking place in Wiltshire, on the Continent and in London, seven years after the siege of Gibraltar of 1727), it is not as firmly linked with public historical events as that of *Tom Jones*. Fielding mainly focuses his attention on his characters. The authenticity with which he portrays their experiences, particularly their London experiences, has been seen as being autobiographical in nature.<sup>2</sup> However this may be, Fielding in *Amelia* is mainly concerned to present a more authentic and particularized account of human experience than he had done previously. In this the influence of Richardson is obvious. During these years Fielding frequently praised *Clarissa*.<sup>3</sup> Many features in *Amelia* indicate

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<sup>1</sup>R. Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, p 150ff.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the autobiographical interpretations of Booth's and Amelia's rural and urban experiences, see Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 328ff.

<sup>3</sup>Fielding wrote a commendatory letter to Richardson on *Clarissa*. E.L. McAdam, Jr., "A New Letter from Fielding", *Yale Review*, xxxviii (1948) pp 300-310. See also *JJ*, 5, January 2, 1748 (Coley, p 118), *JJ*, 14, March 5, 1748 (Coley 182) and *CGJ*, 10, February 4, 1752 (Jensen I, p 193).

some debt to *Clarissa*, such as the naming of the novel after the heroine, the focusing of attention on her sufferings, the dark, oppressive urban environment in which she is threatened and the high moral tone in which her story is told. The nameless peer, in some respects, resembles Lovelace, and his plot to drug and seduce Amelia resembles Lovelace's plot against Clarissa. The greatest influence exerted by Richardson over Fielding in *Amelia*, however, is in the area of narrative technique. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding, in a highly schematic and generalising manner, had presented the external aspects of character and action. In *Amelia*, he presents, in the manner of Richardson, a more circumstantially detailed account of the unique and internal aspects of character and action. In *Amelia*, as in *Clarissa*, life and literature come close together. Fielding himself announces this new Richardsonian technique in the opening chapter of *Amelia* where, instead of outlining the artifices with which he will portray life, as he had done in the introductory chapters of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, he describes art and life as being essentially the same creative process:

Life may as properly be called an art as any other; and the great incidents in it are no more to be considered as mere accidents than the several members of a fine statue or a noble poem. The critics in all these are not content with seeing anything to be great without knowing why or how it came to be so. By examining carefully the several gradations which conduce to bring every model to perfection, we learn truly to know that science in which the model was formed: as histories of this kind, therefore, may properly be called models of HUMAN LIFE, so, by observing minutely the several incidents which tend to the catastrophe or conclusion of the whole, and the minute causes whence those incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all arts, which I call the ART OF LIFE.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* I, i (Henley VI, p 14).



Here then, Fielding asserts the artistic validity of minutely recording the intricacies of human nature and human action. Whilst some of the characters in *Amelia* bear resemblance to the stereotypes of literary tradition, or carry some satirical or allegorical significance, many are individualised, rounded and complex.<sup>1</sup> As we receive more details about them and their circumstances, and the responses to the situations in which they are involved, we come closer to their experiences than we had done to the characters' experiences in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. We had noted in our discussion of these two novels that the greater degree of realism in the portraits of country and city, when compared to those of Fielding's dramatic writings, had enabled the reader to identify with the characters' experiences of these two environments and to accept the moral conclusions to be drawn from these experiences. The even greater degree of authenticity in *Amelia* enables the reader to identify even more easily with the characters' experiences of the rural-urban environment. The increased circumstantial detail, then, gives the novel great strength but, as we shall see below, it also creates many problems which ultimately work against Fielding's didactic aims. Our attitude in this novel towards the country, which is portrayed only briefly and in flashback, is not greatly affected, but our attitude towards the city changes radically. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding had always kept us at a distance from his protagonists' sufferings in London by carefully selecting and arranging into a series of formal patterns the harsh realities of urban life which confronted them. In *Amelia* he presents these harsh realities less selectively, more directly, and this immediately involves us in the protagonists' experiences of them. A measure of the new technique in *Amelia*, and its significance, can be taken by comparing the descriptions of the prisons in which Booth, Wilson and Tom Jones reach the nadir of their town careers. There is no physical description of Wilson's and Tom's

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Coolidge, *op.cit.*, p 163ff.

places of imprisonment, but Booth's is described in stark detail:

... the windows ... were well fortified with iron bars, but the walls had not the least outwork raised before them; they were, indeed, what is generally called naked; the bricks having been only covered with a thin plaster, which in many places was mouldered away.<sup>1</sup>

Fielding had never bothered with this sort of thing before. His tendency to do so throughout *Amelia* makes the urban environment more depressing than it had ever been in his earlier novels. In presenting the harsh facts of London life in *Amelia*, Fielding no longer always preserves authorial distance but frequently moves in at close range. He even seems to participate in the agony suffered by Booth and Amelia in the town environment. He sets this tone in the novel's opening chapter, where he tells us:

... the distresses which they waded through were some of them so exquisite, and the incidents which produced these so extraordinary, that they seemed to require not only the utmost malice,<sup>1</sup> but the utmost invention, which superstition hath ever attributed to Fortune.<sup>2</sup>

In describing these "exquisite distresses" throughout the novel, Fielding piles on little facts and little details asking us to examine both them and their painful ramifications. He often steps in to emphasize the pathos and thus to drive home his point, as in this comment on one domestic scene in which Amelia is home, cooking Booth's favourite supper, whilst he is away gambling:

And here we cannot help relating a little incident, however trivial it may appear to some. Having sat some time alone, reflecting on their distressed situation, her spirits grew very low; and she was once or twice going to ring the bell to send her maid for half a pint of white wine, but checked her inclination in order to save the little sum of sixpence, which she did the more resolutely as she had before refused to gratify her children with tarts for their supper from the same motive. And this self-denial she was very probably practising to save sixpence, while her husband was paying a debt of several guineas incurred by the ace of trumps being in the hands of his adversary.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* VIII, i (Henley VII, p 67).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* I, i (Henley VI, p 13).

<sup>3</sup> *Amelia* X, v (Henley VII, p 214).

As A.D. McKillop observes: "Fielding's reference to this 'little incident', shows that he was conscious of innovation here."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes Fielding describes Booth's and Amelia's experiences in London with his old rhetorical devices, but slips into his new narrative technique to involve us in their sufferings. For example, he describes the manner in which the "great man" receives, from Booth, the fifty pounds which Amelia raised by pawning the family's last possessions, with his old rhetorical style:

The great man received the money, not as a gudgeon  
doth a bait, but as a pike receives a poor gudgeon  
into his maw,

but he slips into his new technique to underline the anguish of the situation:

Here I shall stop one moment, and so, perhaps,  
will my good-natured reader; for surely it must  
be a hard heart which is not affected with  
reflecting on the manner in which this poor little  
sum was raised, and on the manner in which it was  
bestowed. A worthy family, the wife and children  
of a man who had lost his blood in the service of  
his country, parting with their little all, and  
exposed to cold and hunger, to pamper such a  
fellow as this!<sup>2</sup>

This sort of thing, which occurs often in the novel, means that the evils of London have an immediate and painful impact upon us. We, therefore, readily accept Fielding's harsh judgement against London. Through the characters' sufferings in it, we experience it as a centre of greater moral and social chaos than it had been in the earlier novels. (This has been noted by Robert Alter.)<sup>3</sup> Fielding had sought to expose vice in his earlier novels, but he had never before attempted actually to indict the social system. He came closest to it in *Jonathan Wild*, but his strategy of attack there was that of formal satire, through a generalising rhetorical design, and highly schematised narrative pattern. In *Amelia*, on the other hand, he tries to carry out the indictment through novelistic means, showing how the lives of particularised, credible individuals are entangled in the insidious mess of a pervasively venal social order.<sup>4</sup> Through the greater authenticity with which

<sup>1</sup>A.D. McKillop, *op.cit.*, p 139.

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia* XI, v (Henley VII, p 267f).

<sup>3</sup>See *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1968).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Alter, *op.cit.*, p 149.

London is portrayed in *Amelia*, then, we are made the more open to a persuasion of the need for reactionary reform of the kind which Fielding constantly advocates, as being more urgent than ever before. To this extent, Fielding is successful in using the realistic techniques of the new novel form to advocate the reinforcement of the old social system. All would be well if these newly adopted techniques were the only ones which Fielding uses in the novel, but they are not.

Despite his use of the new particularising techniques, Fielding remained conservative in himself and in his views to the end, and in his later writings he retained much of his old literariness. He uses many of the old formalising procedures and traditional stylising techniques of the earlier portraits of city and country. Booth's and Amelia's progress through London society, for example, is, in great measure, organised into a satirical survey of urban vice, in the conventional Juvenalian manner. All of the targets of Fielding's earlier city satire are paraded in summary review; the depraved *beau monde*, the groups of deists and atheists, Grub Street, the gambling dens, the debtors' prisons and the criminal underworld. The presentation of Booth's town career, like those of Wilson and the Man of the Hill, owes something to Hogarth's "The Rake's Progress". As discussed above, Fielding, in portraying Booth's town career and subsequent rural retirement, draws on the general moral frameworks of Juvenal's *Third Satire* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. In portraying the *beau monde* itself, Fielding uses some of the conventions of the genteel comedy. Many of the extremely polite scenes reflect the old stage traditions as Fielding himself had used them. There is, however, a more specific debt. In its plot of intrigue, its complex study of character and environment, its harsh moral tone, its dark oppressive atmosphere and bitter portrayal of the *beau monde*, *Amelia* seems to draw much from Fielding's own genteel comedy, *The Modern Husband*, which was produced in 1732, two years before the year in which the action of *Amelia* is set. Indeed, *Amelia* seems to use *The Modern Husband* as something of a blueprint. The

characters of the novel; the nameless peer, Captain and Mrs Trent, Colonel and Mrs James, and Booth and Amelia, in their essential features, parallel those of the play; Lord Richly, Mr and Mrs Modern, Captain Bellamant and Lady Charlotte Gaywit, and Mr and Mrs Bellamant. The dramatisation of the relationships as town vice preying upon country virtue also runs parallel to the action of the play. The plots used by the peer to destroy Booth and Amelia, particularly his enlistment of Captain and Mrs Trent, who serve him with discreet prostitution, are similar to those by Lord Richly and Mr and Mrs Modern against Mr and Mrs Bellamant. Of greater importance, the portrayal in *Amelia* of London's ruling classes as being socially destructive, and the idealisation of the landed gentry as retaining traditional moral and social values, represents a culmination of the social themes first significantly presented by Fielding in *The Modern Husband*. Similarly, the dramatisation of aristocratic irresponsibility as a neglect of the military, so prominent in *Amelia*, elaborates a theme which we first glimpsed in the relationship between Lord Richly and Captain Merit in *The Modern Husband*. The portrayal of the *beau monde* in *Amelia*, then, runs along familiar lines. In portraying the lower regions of London society in the novel, Fielding also seems to draw on another of his plays, *Rape Upon Rape, or, The Justice Caught in his own Trap*, produced in 1730. Booth's rescuing a man being assaulted in the streets, his being tried before a corrupt justice and confined to prison, shortly after his arrival in town, greatly resemble the fate suffered by Constant in the play. In portraying Justice Thrasher and his courtroom in *Amelia*, Fielding uses some of the conventions of comedy and farce with which he had portrayed Justice Squeezum and his courtroom in the play. Like Squeezum, Thrasher resembles the stereotype of the corrupt London trading justice : hypocritical, avaricious and ignorant of the law. In portraying the victims of Thrasher's corruption amongst the inmates of Newgate prison, Fielding again uses stylising techniques. To some extent, the portrayal of Newgate in *Amelia* is organised with the formalising procedures with which it had been presented in *Jonathan Wild*. Its various features are presented in a series of set pieces, which Booth surveys in quick succession, as he is taken on a guided

tour. All this indicates that Fielding in *Amelia* was trying to organise his portrayal of London with the old conventions with which he had done so in his earlier writings. It indicated that, whilst he wanted to urge his case for repressive reform by portraying London's social problems authentically, he still wanted to organise his portrayal of those problems so as to suggest that things were not completely out of control and could be remedied.

In *Amelia*, then, Fielding strives to maintain the artistic control which he had exercised throughout *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. He still tries to organise the raw materials of life, all "partial evil",<sup>1</sup> into a formal artistic design, so as to suggest that the world is governed by "universal good".<sup>2</sup> He is not successful in doing so. Disillusioned by increasing age and illness, and confronted as magistrate with social problems beyond the control of the traditional legal and social institutions, he lost confidence in the possibility of maintaining law and order and, therefore, in the view that all of the harsh realities of terrestrial life were ultimately referable to comprehensible and benevolent cosmic laws. C.J. Rawson argues<sup>3</sup> that the more Fielding experiences this disillusionment, the more desperately he strives to assert the concept of order; that in the novel there is a struggle between the brutal and intractable facts of life, and Fielding's Augustan need to assert order. The more acute his perception of chaos in human affairs becomes, the more desperate become his attempts to harness and organise that chaos into a formal design. Thus, the two creative techniques in *Amelia*, the literal and the literary, do not sit comfortably side by side, but exert enormous stresses and strains on one another as Fielding moves between the two. Under the impact of his disillusionment, and in order to elucidate their full horror, he presents the harsh facts of London life authentically and realistically. Then, as his need for order asserts itself, there is an overtightening

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* I, l. 292.

<sup>2</sup>*Loc.cit.*

<sup>3</sup>For these ideas I am indebted to C.J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, pp 491-507.

of his grip on the raw materials of life, as he still strives to bring London's disorders under his artistic control. The literary conventions with which he had organised his portrayal of London in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, however, lose their fluidity and flexibility in *Amelia*. They harden, stiffen and become brittle, as Fielding tries to impose them on reality. The formal presentation only highlights the harsh, brutal and intractable nature of the facts being formalised. Fielding's attempt to portray London's *beau monde* with the conventions of genteel comedy only highlights its depravity. The nameless peer, whilst resembling Lord Richly, is not a comic stereotype, but is governed by a seemingly motiveless and annihilating evil. He is never caught up in comic situations beyond his control, of the kind which humanise Lady Booby and Lady Bellaston. Indeed, he is not really presented as a character at all but, rather, is present throughout the novel as a ubiquitous spirit of diabolism. Similarly, Captain and Mrs Trent have none of the human failings of Mr and Mrs Modern, but are formidable representatives of destruction. The presence of Mrs James, and other glittering relics of genteel comedy, only deepen the sinister shadows which surround them. Similarly, Fielding's attempts to formalise his portrait of Justice Thrasher only highlights Thrasher's iniquity. Unlike Justice Squeezum, Justice Thrasher exceeds the bounds of the comic stereotype of the London trading justice. His comic ineptitude on minor matters only underscores his ruthless efficiency with regard to major concerns. Unlike his comic predecessors, he is never caught in his own trap, never brought to justice, but continues to prey upon the London poor. The series of set pieces in which Newgate is portrayed only underscores the horror of the disease, starvation, madness and death, which are being so formally presented. In the portrayal of London in *Amelia*, then, we see hardened and stiffened literary conventions, alongside evidence of an intractable human nature which is beyond the control of art. The conventions fail to bring the shocking realities of urban life under control. As these realities escape Fielding's formalising grasp, we see absurd, inexplicable evils never seen before in his writings, such as the sordid homosexuality in Newgate prison, the grotesque carnality of Blear-Eyed Moll, and the bewildering attack on Booth's

child in Hyde Park. The child's plaintive response: "I did not know that people might not walk in the green fields in London",<sup>1</sup> bears pathetic testimony to the vulnerability of rural innocence in this urban environment. It sums up Booth's and Amelia's situation. They are more vulnerable to, and less effective against, urban vice than Fielding's earlier rural innocents, and reduced to greater distress than any of these. London seems to overwhelm them. To go out of town decently at the end of the novel, Amelia has to redeem the family's clothes from the pawnbroker's shop: "when she packed up herself in the coach, she packed up her all".<sup>2</sup> The London of *Amelia* is intractable in its destructiveness. Fielding's attempts to bring it under his artistic control, and to use it to render the novel's ultimate Christian optimism, only emphasise its intractability.

In *Amelia*, then, Fielding's attempts to maintain the balance achieved in the earlier novels between the forces of good and evil (forces represented by the idealized country estate on the one hand and by the city on the other), are not successful. He is not able to balance realistic and stylizing techniques, nor is there any sense of balance between good and evil forces achieved by the novel's structure. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the didactic significance of the rural-urban dichotomies is summed up in interpolated episodes at the novels' architectural midpoints. In *Amelia*, the didactic significance of the country-city contrast is, indeed, summed up at the novel's architectural midpoint, in the story of Mr and Mrs Bennet, in Book Seven, but the tri-partite system of country-road-city used in *Tom Jones* is replaced by one of country-Continent-city, most of the action taking place in the city. The morally superior country environment is portrayed only briefly, and in flashback. As we receive little relief from the vicious world of London, the vice which it represents seems to be even more pervasive and destructive. Similarly, the balance and poise which had been maintained by the narrator in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, is lost in *Amelia*. In the earlier novels, the creator-narrator had been

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<sup>1</sup>*Amelia* IV, vii (Henley VI, p 212).

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia* XII, iii (Henley VII, p 305).



optimistic, and had always remained aloof from his protagonists' sufferings in London through his genial tolerance, ironic poise and witty insight. By these means he had contrived to suggest that those sufferings would have a happy outcome because virtue and benevolence always get their just reward. In *Amelia* he has lost confidence in the view that a benevolent Providence presides over the universe. He is therefore unable to imitate that Divine Creator in the novel. His presence throughout *Amelia* is characterised, not by discipline and strength but, rather, by bitterness, disillusionment, and even bewilderment. He does not remain detached from the protagonists' sufferings in London but, as outlined earlier, actually participates in their agony, and, therefore, so do we. The narrator no longer controls our responses in such a way as to suggest that he, like the Divine Creator, controls events. He often steps in with such admonitions as these: "though Fortune may make thee often unhappy, she can never make thee completely and irreparably miserable without thy own consent".<sup>1</sup> The "exquisite sufferings" of Amelia in London demonstrate the futility of such a viewpoint. Despite such orthodox statements as this one from Dr Harrison: "the nature of man is far from being in itself evil; it abounds with benevolence, charity, pity, coveting praise and honour, and shunning shame and disgrace",<sup>2</sup> it is Amelia's temporary lapse of faith in the goodness of humankind which carries the tone of the book: "I begin to grow entirely sick of it ... for sure all mankind almost are villains in their hearts."<sup>3</sup> And, while Amelia's lapse of faith itself might be temporary, the villainy which brought it about is presented to us so vividly and portrayed as being so extensive, that we cannot very readily subscribe to Dr Harrison's view.

Such feelings as Amelia's constantly undermine Fielding's attempt in the novel to use the country-city contrast to present the orthodox Christian comic vision of life, that is, that virtuous people, with the aid of Providence, can triumph over evil and achieve happiness in this world. The success of this view depends

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* VIII, iii (Henley VII, p 78).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia* IX, v (Henley VII, p 145).

<sup>3</sup> *Amelia* IX, v (Henley VII, p 144).

on whether the forces of evil, represented by the city, are felt to be convincingly defeated by the forces of good, represented by those dwellers in the country who are able to live out a believable social and moral ideal there. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* they are so. When the virtuous characters at the ends of these novels retire from the city to the country, the wicked city goes on being the wicked city, but we are left with the impression that its machinations have been defeated by the imposition of the Divine Providence, which, according to the laws of cosmic justice, has rewarded the virtuous and punished the vicious. In *Amelia* Fielding does not turn satire into comedy, chaos into order, as he had done at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The comic satire of the earlier novels set up optimistic expectations about the fate of the imperilled characters that the realism and harsh satire of *Amelia* do not set up. So, like Pope at the conclusion of *The Dunciad*, and Hogarth in "The Tail Piece", Fielding leaves society in a state of chaos. When Booth and Amelia, at the height of their anguish, are snatched away from London to Wiltshire, far from being left with the impression that the city has been defeated, we are left with the impression that the evil which it represents will continue to dominate human affairs. The conclusion of *Amelia*, then, is unsatisfactory because the solution which it offers for its protagonists' problems seems rather facile and not a realistic response to the deep-rooted social and ethical issues which the novel has raised. The reward of country estate to Booth and Amelia, for these reasons, is irksome to us. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the reward of the country estate to the virtuous had been thoroughly acceptable. It had been the natural outcome of the action of the novels. It had translated, into material terms, the belief in ultimate justice, so successfully maintained through both novels. In this, the conclusion of *Amelia* contradicts our expectations. Throughout the novel, we have seen no evidence that a Divine Providence will intercede to reward the virtuous, as it does so lavishly at the end. In the novel's opening chapter Fielding attributes an insignificant role to Fortune in the affairs of humanity but, throughout the novel, Fortune seems to play a greater rôle than Providence in shaping the lives of the protagonists.

With the strongly realistic temper of so much of the prose, too, the series of coincidences with which the estate is bestowed on Booth and Amelia seems to be a trick, which was not so in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. We are left with the impression that this lot got away by luck, rather than by the imposition of the Divine Providence, or, rather, that they got away because Henry Fielding tired of a world which he was not creating and could not control. Adding to this feeling of narrow escape is the fact that Booth and Amelia's country estate is not so much their reward for triumphing over London vice but, rather, the very means by which they escape from their urban persecutors. The conclusion does not answer the basic question raised in the novel. The question raised is this: how do virtuous and meritorious members of the landed gentry, who have no estate, earn an honourable living, according to traditional moral and social values, in a capital city which is governed by the values of a new socio-economic order? This question is never answered. Fielding, as George Sherburn observes, does not make society the scapegoat for the individual; if Booth cannot survive in London it is his own fault. But London society is so corrupt that only the vicious can survive in it. If Booth and Amelia are to survive in London, society must be just. Throughout the novel there is little possibility of this. The worthy justice who extends hospitality to Booth and Amelia at the end is an isolated case. He simply tidies things up. He does not effect any social reform. Fielding then, does not face the challenge which he himself put up: "Fielding simply turns his back on his larger theme and, content to make his worthy couple happy, lets them retire to Wiltshire and an untroubled country life."<sup>1</sup> As Malvin Zirker observes,<sup>2</sup> too, the literary convention of the rural ideal provided Fielding with an escape from the necessity of confronting socio-economic change in London. As Fielding's portrayal of

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<sup>1</sup>G. Sherburn, "Fielding's *Amelia* : An Interpretation" *ELH* III (1936). Reprinted in R. Paulson (ed.), *Fielding : A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, 1962, p 157.

<sup>2</sup>*Op.cit.*, p 139f.

London's chaos becomes more urgent so, too, his concluding rural ideal becomes more insistent. In the order created by Booth and Amelia in Wiltshire, every symbol of social solidarity is emphasized. Unlike the concluding rural ideal in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, however, which had been confidently presented as a pattern according to which society in general should return to the *status quo*, the rural ideal at the end of *Amelia* is not so much a viable alternative to London's chaos as a refuge from it. We are left with the impression of a disillusioned man insisting on an ideal which he knows can never be realised.

Thus, in *Amelia*, there is a greater insistence on rural order, alongside a more vivid picture of the forces of urban disorder, as these two symbolic environments are polarised farther apart than ever before in Fielding's writings. Fielding is no longer in artistic control. The change in his creative technique is not completely successful. The authentic portrayal of London's social problems does assist his didactic purpose, in urging his case for social reform. The realism with which these problems are portrayed, however, has the effect of convincing us that these social problems will never be brought under control in the manner Fielding envisages. His attempts to organise these problems artistically only emphasise their intractability. Thus, in the early works, it was the refining away of too much reality with literary conventions which undermines Fielding's didactic success in using the country-city contrast and, in *Amelia*, it is the failure of literary procedures to refine away enough reality, which undermines the success. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the successful combination of the new realistic and old stylising creative techniques had persuaded us that a compromise between the new and the old social systems, represented by town and country, could be effected and maintained. In *Amelia*, Fielding, disenchanted with life and literature, fails to combine the two techniques successfully, and, therefore, to persuade us that such a compromise could be effected or maintained.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE COMEDY OF TOWN AND COUNTRY

## Introduction

Although Fielding was a moral writer, he was also a comic writer. Not only did he create comedy from his use of the mock-heroic, he also portrayed the humorous side of life. It would be a mistake, therefore, to represent the town-country contrast in his writings as being only of didactic interest. The town-country contrast is a major principle in his portrayal of the comedy of the human scene.

When Fielding began writing, in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, comedy had taken on many meanings and many tasks. The complex situation, and Fielding's position, can be broadly summed up as follows. It had been generally considered that comic, or humorous behaviour, arose from either of two main sources; affectation, or uncontrollable eccentricity. In Elizabethan and Restoration Comedy, humorous behaviour arising from either of these sources was generally satirised, therefore one of the dominant forms of comedy of the period was satiric. Ben Jonson, Wycherly and Etherege wrote in this tradition (although it is generally agreed that the Restoration dramatists were not as harshly satiric in their comedy as Jonson was in his). During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the growing spirit of benevolism modified this situation. Although the temper of the age was moralistic, human nature began to be seen more as benevolent, than as depraved, as guilty of simple follies rather than odious vices and, therefore, not in need of severe censure.<sup>1</sup> Characters whose humorous behaviour arose from affectation were, indeed, still satirised, harshly by the Tories, but only lightly by the Whigs.

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<sup>1</sup>See Andrew M. Wilkinson, "The Decline of English Verse Satire in the Middle Years of the Eighteenth Century", *RES* N.S. 3, 1952, p 225.

There were, too, great changes in the treatment of characters whose humorous behaviour arose from uncontrollable eccentricity. Increasingly, eccentrics came to be regarded as lovable rather than satirically risible, and their eccentricities as entertaining and enjoyable, rather than objects of scorn. Increasingly, humours of eccentricity came to replace humours of affectation for comic purposes,<sup>1</sup> with the word "humours" here retaining something of its older connotation in its relation to eccentricity, and suggesting a predominant characteristic arising out of the physical nature of the person concerned. Humours of affectation, on the other hand, were regarded as acquired and could quite legitimately be satirically derided. Throughout the course of the eighteenth century, then, there was a transition from satire to comedy, a change of emphasis from comedy as a means to a didactic end, to an end in itself : sheer pleasure. As Ronald Paulson observes, however, the two antithetical interpretations of comedy continued to flourish side by side;

... causing a fearful confusion in the statements of intention among novelists. "Satire" and "comedy" can mean almost anything unless carefully pinned down to their context, and then the resulting definition may be at odds with the practice it attempts to describe in the novel itself.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his writings, Fielding argues, in one form or another, these two interpretations of comedy, and his comic precepts are sometimes at variance with his comic practice. In his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding admits burlesque in diction as being quite proper and even desirable up to a point in comedy because "it contributes more to exquisite mirth and laughter than any other; and these are probably more wholesome physic for the mind, and conduce better to purge away spleen, melancholy, and ill affections, than is generally imagined".<sup>3</sup> But, nonetheless, he distinguishes

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<sup>1</sup>For many of the ideas expressed here I am indebted to Edward N. Hooker, "Humour in the Age of Pope", *HLQ* 11, 1948, pp 361-385.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel*, p 70.

<sup>3</sup>*JA*, Henley I, i, p 20.

quite strongly between burlesque and comedy, and his view of the comic proper only admits burlesque incidentally, as entertainment. Comedy, in Fielding's view, does not arise from a distortion of reality, from the exhibition of what is unnatural, but from the realistic representation of real life. He defines the source of the ridiculous as being affectation, which arises from vanity or hypocrisy. He sees the task of the comic writer as being to expose and thereby discourage such affectation,<sup>1</sup> by arousing either mirthful or derisive laughter, depending on the gravity of the affectation which in part depends on whether its source be vanity or hypocrisy. In Fielding's work, the laughter is generally mirthful rather than derisive, for reasons which will be discussed below, but, nonetheless, the view of comedy which emerges in this preface, is one which defines comedy as being essentially satirical. In *CGJ* 55, July 18, 1752, Fielding changes his argument, and defines the source of the ridiculous as being uncontrollable eccentricity. He still claims a corrective function for comedy, however, defining the task of the comic writer as being to expose and thereby discourage such eccentricity.<sup>2</sup> To some extent, Fielding's comic practice, in portraying affectation and eccentricity, fulfils this didactic function but, in portraying eccentricity, or humour arising from character or nature, it does more than that. In his most memorable works, it portrays the eccentric, the incongruous and the humorous side of life, with great exuberance and enjoyment, independent of didactic significance. At its best, his comic practice outstrips his comic precept. In only one place does he offer a precept which matches his practice, and this is only a brief statement. In introducing us to the London episodes of *Tom Jones*, and particularly referring to the portrayal of the upper-class manners, he asserts that affectation, which evokes a satirical response, is no great resource to the comic writer, and that it is the various "callings" of low life which provide a great variety of humorous characters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henley I, i, p 21f.

<sup>2</sup>*CGJ*, 55, July 18, 1752 (Jensen 2, p 59ff).

<sup>3</sup>*TJ*, XIV, i (Henley V, p 94).

Throughout his writings his satiric and non-satiric interpretations operate on varying levels, with his comedy being at its best when the latter interpretation predominates.

In Fielding's genteel comedies, satire prevails over comedy. The humorous exemplars of town and country manners, the town fop and country squire, who had been conventionally and satirically contrasted in the *genre* since the Restoration Period, are all characters whose ridiculous behaviour arises from affectation or unattractive eccentricity, and they are therefore all satirised. As they are extremely dull and lifeless characters, being cut very much to the conventional pattern, their encounters are a dull affair, unlike similar encounters in Restoration Comedy. London was not Fielding's comic locale. It is in his dramatic burlesques and ballad operas, where he moves out into the English countryside and infuses his characters and *milieux* with real life, that he gives us a glimpse of the high-spirited comedy of the country which is to come in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In these two novels, the humorous presentation of the town is in accordance with the comic theory argued in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. The humorous behaviour of the town characters arises from affectation, deriving principally from hypocrisy and they are all satirised. Many of the country characters are also satirised for affectation but, on the whole, they are presented, as well, as entertaining and enjoyable eccentrics or, sometimes, as possessors of vigorous, straightforward, unaffected qualities that they do not attempt to hide. As such, they are infused with much robust vitality. The prevailing spirit is one of great delight and pleasure in their ridiculous behaviour and the incongruous situations in which they become involved. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* then, it is largely Fielding the satirist who portrays the town, and Fielding the comic artist who portrays the country. The clash between town and country, whilst serving the satirical purpose that it had done in the genteel comedies, is nevertheless a lively and boisterous affair, and productive of great comic laughter. Laughter almost completely disappears from Fielding's later writings. In the *Covent Garden Journal*, he insists that wit has no purpose but a moral one<sup>1</sup> and, in

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<sup>1</sup>CGJ, February 4, 1752. No. 10 (Jensen I, p 193ff).



his final writings, he practises what he preaches. Although it is in *The Covent Garden Journal* that he defines the source of the ridiculous as being eccentricity, far from outlining the manner in which this may be used by the comic writer, he actually advocates the re-education of the two great humour characters in England, the town fop and country squire, in the interests of more rigid and uniform social conduct. This is a proposition which, in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, he would have found repugnant. Whilst *Amelia* is technically a comic work, it is a dark comedy. There are no high-spirited adventures on the road. The action of the novel is largely confined to the evil world of London, over which Fielding the stern magistrate, rather than Fielding the light-hearted comic writer, presides, in a disillusioned condition, finding little to be laughed at or enjoyed.

## Section One: The Early Writings

In all but *The Modern Husband* and *The Universal Gallant*, which are serious studies of high life, the contrast between humorous exemplars of town and country manners is prominent in Fielding's genteel comedies, as it had been in the *genre* since the Restoration Period. But Fielding's town fops and country squires are mostly stale, stereotyped characters, with no original vitality, so their encounters are dull affairs, unlike the situation in much Restoration Comedy. Unlike the clashes between Lord Foppington and Sir Tunbelly Clumsey in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*, and Witwoud and Sir Wilful Witwoud, in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, the clashes between Lord Formal and Sir Positive Trap of *Love in Several Masques*, Young Wilding and Sir Harry Wilding in *The Temple Beau*, Young Mutable and old Mr Mutable in *The Wedding Day*, and Young Kennel and Sir Gregory Kennel in *The Fathers; or, The Good-Natured Man*, are not productive of great enjoyment or laughter. In the genteel comedy, then, Fielding's extremely derivative style prevents his exploiting the comic potential of the contrast between town and country. Also contributing to his failure is the fact that the genteel comedy confined him to Westminster, which always evoked his satire, and was therefore the most disadvantageous medium for his comedy.

It is in the dramatic burlesque and ballad opera that we first catch sight of the robust world of the English countryside in Fielding's writings, as in this conversation in *The Letter Writers*, produced in 1731:

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 two 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The Letter Writers* I, ii (Henley IX, p 162f).

This lively world is more extensively presented in *Pasquin*, produced at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, in 1736, in which the rehearsed comedy, entitled "The Election", contrasts the political corruption of the Court Party, represented by Lord Place and Colonel Promise, and the Country Party, represented by Sir Harry Foxchace and Squire Tankard. The corruption of the Court Party is presented satirically, excesses being derided, but that of the Country Party is presented comically, excesses evoking mirthful laughter. There is much high-spirited enjoyment in the rustic behaviour of the inhabitants in the country borough in which the action takes place. Fielding's most memorable dramatisation of this world on the stage, however, is in *Don Quixote in England*, produced at the Little Theatre, in 1734, a play which, in its characters, locale, boisterous spirits and debt to Cervantes, greatly anticipates *Joseph Andrews*. It is in this play that Fielding first introduces the strategy which he uses so successfully in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, that of placing a quixotic figure<sup>1</sup> into the world of eighteenth-century rural England and, from the ensuing collisions between the ideal and the real, deriving a telling satire as well as a rich comedy. As with Abraham Adams after him, Don Quixote in the play is impractical in worldly affairs. As with Adams, this involves him in many escapades, in which his innocence and good nature expose the hypocrisy and avarice of those around him. As with Adams, unworldliness also involves him in many uproarious episodes. He mistakes the inn at which he and Sancho sojourn for a castle, and the landlord, Guzzle, for a nobleman of unbounded hospitality. Guzzle's attempts to extract payment from Quixote result in much high-spirited comedy. His mistaking country gentlewomen for damsels in distress, and stagecoaches and their passengers for giants, involves him in many hilarious brawls which anticipate the great inn brawls of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Most amusing is his involvement with the mayor and electors of the country borough in

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<sup>1</sup>Winfield H. Rogers points out that "Fielding was interested from a very early date in the symbol of Quixotism and had connected it with that of good-nature" (*op.cit.*, p 41).

which the action takes place. The mayor and voters persuade Quixote to stand against Sir Thomas Loveland, in the current election, an invitation which Quixote interprets as a plea to defend the town from "The Knight of the Long Purse". As the ensuing comic episodes run their inevitable course, Quixote exposes the corruption of the rural electors. Also amusing is his encounter with Squire Badger of Somersetshire, who, together with his hunting companion, Scut, his horses and his hounds, comes to the inn to court his *fiancée*, Dorothea Loveland. After first mistaking Badger with his hounds for a giant, Quixote has a round of drinks, and conversation with the squire, with much comic misunderstanding and incongruity. Squire Badger is by far, the most memorable character in the play. He is a pure eccentric but, unlike the squires of Fielding's genteel comedies, he is not an unattractive eccentric. When Fielding first created Badger in 1728,<sup>1</sup> this trend of more attractive portrayal was gathering pace. Although some early country squires were attractive eccentrics, for example, Sir Wilful Witwoud and Sir Roger de Coverley, there was no sustained reaction against the harsh, satirical portrait of the squire until the late 1720s. After this time, their eccentricities (although satirised by Whig writers throughout the century), were increasingly portrayed as being enjoyable and lovable. Squire Badger is a splendid eccentric. In his ignorance, boorishness, rough Somersetshire dialect, and love of political controversy, rollicking songs, alcohol and fox-hunting, Badger serves as something of a blueprint for Squire Western in *Tom Jones*. Badger, however, differs from Western in one important aspect. Whereas Western detests London, Badger is fascinated by it, as it is presented to him by John, a foppish town footman, posing in the country borough as the courtier, Lord Slang. After hearing stories of the *beau monde* from "Lord Slang", Badger assures Sir Thomas Loveland, that if he were not engaged to Dorothea Loveland, he would go to London:

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<sup>1</sup>Fielding first sketched out the play when he was at Leyden University in 1728. Badger was present in this first sketch (Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 70f).

where women are, it seems, as plenty as rabbits in a warren. Had I known as much of the world before, as I do now, I believe I should scarce have thought of marrying. Who'd marry, when my lord says, here, a man may have your great sort of ladies, only for wearing a brodered coat, telling half a dozen lies, and making a bow.<sup>1</sup>

Released from his engagement to Dorothea, Badger departs for London. As he is duped by a town footman before he leaves his own territory, we need not know the fortunes of Badger's comic predecessors on the stage to know what awaits him on his arrival in the great metropolis. In *Don Quixote in England*, then, Fielding more fully than in earlier work exploits the comic potential of depicting country characters, customs and *milieux*. He infuses his rural world with rich and invigorating life. Most of the characters who are to become familiar rural types in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, are painted with the deft and vivid strokes which make up Fielding's comic characterizing technique in his two great comic novels.

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<sup>1</sup>*Don Quixote in England* III, v (Henley XI, p 54f).

Section Two: *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*

Whether or not Fielding would have gone on to improve in dramatic comedy is a debatable point, but the stage licensing act of 1737 deprived him of the opportunity of doing so. From the declining drama, he took the task of portraying the comic side of life in the novel.

Fielding harshly satirises his town characters in *Joseph Andrews* but, in the portrayal of the humorous or ridiculous side of country life, his practice departs from his satiric precept. Many of the country characters do affect to be what they are not and are therefore satirised, of which more will be said presently, but many of them are splendid eccentrics who are thoroughly entertaining in their behaviour, and the world which they inhabit is one of great exuberance and invigorating life. Much of the exuberance in the novel is created by the presence of that great comic figure, Parson Abraham Adams.

Adams himself is guilty of a few vanities - of his great learning and his ability as a schoolteacher, for example - and for these he is lightly ridiculed. In line with contemporary trends, however, he is a figure of comedy, rather than a butt of satire, one of the great comic heroes in English literature. His dominant characteristics are lovable eccentricities. He is awkward, untidy, absent-minded, impulsive, generous, and incredibly idealistic. As with Don Quixote, he derives his knowledge of the world from books, in his case, from the Classics and the Scriptures. He believes all humanity to be governed by the same staunch moral principles, and motivated by the same generous impulses, as himself. As with Cervantes (of whom *Joseph Andrews* is avowedly written in imitation), who sends his deluded Don Quixote onto the roads of sixteenth-century Spain, so Fielding sends his deluded Abraham Adams onto the roads of eighteenth-century England. In the new, broad form of the novel, which enabled him to introduce a greater variety of characters, scenes and episodes,

Fielding achieves a more telling satire and a richer comedy from the clash between his idealist and the real world, than he had done on first introducing Don Quixote in England, in his ballad opera of that name. The many collisions between Adams (together with Joseph Andrews and Fanny Goodwill, also good-natured and benevolent) and the real world serve the satiric function of exposing the avarice and hypocrisy of many rural types, such as squires, justices, parsons, surgeons, stewards, landlords and landladies, the most conspicuous being Parsons Barnabas and Trulliber, Mrs Tow-Wouse, Peter Pounce, and the unnamed squires who harass the trio on their journey homeward. In these encounters, Adams, like Quixote, is punished for his delusions, but the real world is satirised for falling short of his ideals. The clash between Adams and the real world, however, also produces a rich comedy. And, whilst many of the rural characters are satirised for their vices, the situations in which they become caught up are often extremely funny. In many episodes the satirical intent is subordinated to an invitation to laugh, such as in the incident with the practical jokes played on Adams by the perverse squire,<sup>1</sup> the trial of Adams and Fanny before the ignorant justice,<sup>2</sup> Justice Frolic's committal of Joseph and Fanny to Bridewell for stealing a twig which, had it been called a young tree, would have condemned them to the gallows,<sup>3</sup> and the night adventures in Booby Hall, involving the hilarious sexual and pugilistic scuffles between Beau Didapper, Mrs Slipslop and Parson Adams.<sup>4</sup> Many episodes become farcical and their effect is pure entertainment, episodes such as Parson Trulliber's thrusting Adams into his pig-pen,<sup>5</sup> the inn brawls in which Adams is doused with hogsblood,<sup>6</sup> and the contents of a chamberpot,<sup>7</sup> Adams' and Fanny's capture by the "birdbatters",<sup>8</sup> and the episode involving the sheepstealers.<sup>9</sup> Whilst some critics examining the moral basis of Fielding's art see most of these episodes as being satirical in intention,<sup>10</sup> on reading them, our moral judgements to a large extent are suspended. The comic practice in

<sup>1</sup>JA, III, vii and viii.

<sup>2</sup>JA, II, xi.

<sup>3</sup>JA, iv, v.

<sup>4</sup>JA, IV, xiv.

<sup>5</sup>JA, II, xiv.

<sup>6</sup>JA, II, v

<sup>7</sup>JA, III, ix.

<sup>8</sup>JA, II, x.

<sup>9</sup>JA, III, ii.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, M.C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, p 87.

such scenes is genuinely rich.<sup>1</sup> The comedy of character creates situations which give rise to the farcical elements Fielding is able to exploit so well. He delights in portraying the rough and tumble of rural life, the pageantry of rustic eccentrics, with their curious dialects, superstitions, customs and unsophisticated behaviour. As A.D. MacKillop observes, the parish, road, inn and alehouse provided Fielding with a better *milieu* for comedy than the drawing-rooms of Westminster, where he is too much preoccupied with the shortcomings of high life.<sup>2</sup> The high spirits which in general characterise the novel always diminish whenever town characters appear, or whenever the town environment is mentioned. The presentations of Joseph's and Wilson's London careers constitute the darkest moments of the novel. This dark tone returns when Lady Booby and Beau Didapper make their appearance in Somersetshire at the end of the novel. Again, as McKillop observes, they bring into the robust comedy of the countryside, the inferior, satirical comedy of the town.<sup>3</sup> Unlike their counterparts in Fielding's genteel comedies, however, they are caught up in extremely funny situations, particularly when they are in the country, the most notable being the night adventures in Booby Hall in which Beau Didapper climbs into bed with Mrs Slipslop, believing her to be Fanny, and Slipslop, believing him to be Joseph, gladly receives him. The chaos which ensues when they discover their mistakes is an extension of the rough and tumble inn sequences of the novel's comedy of the road, and a splendid example of farcical exploitation of mistaken identity. Slipslop screams for help and Adams comes to the rescue. He mistakes Beau Didapper for the lady in distress, allows him to escape, and attacks Slipslop. After Lady Booby has arrived on the scene with her candle and exposed the couple in bed together, Adams, in total confusion, sets out for his own chamber, but loses his way and spends the night in Fanny's bed, where he is discovered next morning by Joseph.

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<sup>1</sup>Ethel M. Thornbury, *Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic*, Madison, 1931, p 160. R.E. Moore claims that Fielding took his comic practice from the paintings of William Hogarth (*op.cit.*, p 132ff).

<sup>2</sup>*Op.cit.*, p 112.

<sup>3</sup>*Op.cit.*, p 113.



Whilst town and country are satirically contrasted in these episodes, the foppery and its immorality revealed and condemned, the prevailing tone is one of uproarious fun, taking its cue from the chapter heading:

Containing several curious night-adventures, in which Mr Adams fell into many hair-breadth 'scapes, partly owing to his goodness, and partly to his inadvertency.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, whilst satire and comedy are not mutually exclusive in *Joseph Andrews*, and in many ways are vehicles for one another, comedy predominates. The satiric presentation of the town is overwhelmed by the predominantly comic presentation of the country. The same is true of *Tom Jones*, where the contrast between humorous exemplars of these two environments is even more prominent.

In introducing us to the London episodes of *Tom Jones*, Fielding very much qualifies the theory of comedy which he had argued in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. Here, he claims that the affectations of high life are no great resource to the comic writer;

I will venture to say the highest life is much the dullest, and affords very little humour or entertainment. The various callings in lower spheres produce the great variety of humorous characters; whereas here, except among the few who are engaged in the pursuit of ambition, and the fewer still who have a relish for pleasure, all is vanity and servile imitation.<sup>2</sup>

In thus dismissing high life as lacking any discernible character because of its affectation, and in describing the unpolished eccentrics of low life as being the greatest comic characters, Fielding defines comedy as arising from the eccentric and the incongruous, or at least from qualities and characteristics which exist strongly enough to be laughed at in action. The statement is as much a criticism of the effete-ness of the upper classes as a definition of the comic, but it does give us a pointer to Fielding's feeling for comic character. This definition, at least, more closely matches his comic practice in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* than that argued in the preface to the earlier novel, although there the point

<sup>1</sup> *JA*, IV, xiv (Henley I, p 376).

<sup>2</sup> *TJ*, XIV, i (Henley V, p 94).

is made about the comic romance, or comic epic poem in prose, "introducing persons of inferior rank".<sup>1</sup> In *Tom Jones*, as in *Joseph Andrews*, the ridiculous behaviour of the town characters arises mainly from affectation, and is therefore satirised, but the ridiculous behaviour of the country characters, amongst whom the greater part of the action takes place, arises mainly from eccentricity or robustly deridable, generally entertaining, behaviour. The most notable case in point is Squire Western. Western is a pure eccentric. His behaviour is governed by various ruling passions: uncontrollable and conflicting ruling passions. He is reckless and violent, yet shrewd and cunning. He is warm-hearted and generous, yet calculating and materialistic. He is cruel and brutal, yet benevolent. Although representing a culmination of the traditional portrayal of the English country squirearchy, Western is no dull stereotype, as are the squires of Fielding's genteel comedies. In his boisterous spirits, rough Somersetshire dialect, and love of horses, hounds, rollicking English ballads and alcohol, he exhibits much vital originality. We had seen his blueprint in Squire Badger of *Don Quixote in England*, but the more extended form of the novel gave Fielding greater scope than the drama<sup>2</sup> to develop the character and portray its explosive vitality in action in many different situations, thereby making Western one of the most colourful figures in English literature. Western, however, is not completely lovable. Displaying the ignorance and irrationality so intensely disliked by the Augustans, Western's eccentricities are often destructive, and they are therefore satirised. Nevertheless, our response to him is more positive than negative; laughter prevails over satire. Accompanying Western throughout the novel is another figure, a type familiar in contemporary comedy and satire, Parson Supple. In return for his living, Supple

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<sup>1</sup>JA, Preface (Henley I, p 17).

These points are made in the passage clarifying the differences between the comic and the serious romance, not between high life and low life characters in comedy.

<sup>2</sup>Fielding was himself aware of the extended scope which the novel form gave over the drama, as he makes clear in his preface to JA: "Now, a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters" (Henley I, p 18).

submits to constant humiliation at the hands of Western, on whose dozing ears his Christian admonitions in church fall unheeded. Whilst he is ridiculed for this sneaking cowardice, he is not as severely satirised as the more selfish and hypocritical country clergy of *Joseph Andrews*. He is portrayed as being more sinned against than sinning, and his marriage at the end, to the tarnished Mrs Waters, passes a comic rather than a satiric judgement on him. Throughout the novel, he adds much to our enjoyment of the colourful rural environment. Although Squire Western, accompanied by horses, hounds and Supple, is the most explosive eccentric in the novel, he is not the only source of comedy in the rural scene. *Tom Jones* is thickly populated with colourful rustic characters. The inhabitants of Somersetshire, whilst being ridiculed for their boorishness, are a constant source of entertainment. The battle in the churchyard,<sup>1</sup> is one of the highlights of the novel. Whilst Fielding here engages in his favourite rhetorical exercise of mock heroic, he revels in the farce and the fun, presenting many of the individual members of the "Somersetshire mob" as colourful curiosities from the human scene. As in *Joseph Andrews*, he delights in the sheer pageantry of eighteenth-century rural England, its quaint dialects, superstitions, customs and personalities. There is, however, less enjoyment in this spectacle than there had been in the earlier novel. This is partly due to the fact that the novel's mobile protagonist, Tom Jones, is a vastly different character from Abraham Adams. There are, indeed, similarities in Fielding's use of these two characters. Like Adams, Tom is an innocent, Quixotic figure, who believes all humanity to be as benevolent as himself. As with Adams, Fielding sends Tom Jones, accompanied by his Sancho Panza, in this case Partridge, onto the roads of eighteenth-century England, and the ensuing collisions serve the satiric function of exposing the selfishness and hypocrisy of humanity, as well as the comic function of providing many laughable episodes. In most of Tom's adventures, as with those of Adams, laughter prevails over satire, for example, in his exposure of the philosopher Square, amongst other "female utensils", behind the *arras*, in Molly

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<sup>1</sup>*TJ*, IV, viii (Henley III, p 171ff).

Seagrim's bedroom;<sup>1</sup> his sexual encounter with Molly herself;<sup>2</sup> his adventures with Ensign Northerton;<sup>3</sup> and his involvement in the events at Upton Inn.<sup>4</sup> The episodes in which Tom is involved, however, are not as funny or incongruous as those involving Adams, partly because Tom is not as eccentric as Adams, partly because the plot of suspense in which he is caught up prevents the same picaresque rambling, but mostly because the narrator's attention is focused on his moral education. The events at Upton Inn demonstrate this point. The initial brawl between the landlord, landlady and Susan the chambermaid; Mrs Waters' mock-heroic conquest of Tom at the dinner table; the ensuing bedroom escapades in which Mr Fitzpatrick mistakes Mrs Waters for his runaway wife; and the final explosion on the scene of Squire Western and his party, all display Fielding at his best in the comedy of the road and the inn. Nevertheless, Tom's affair with Mrs Waters casts a shadow over the comedy. It causes Sophia great pain when she discovers the fact from Susan, the chambermaid, and it causes Tom even greater pain, later in London, when he learns that Mrs Waters is his reputed mother, Jenny Jones. Whilst we enjoy Tom's rustic adventures, then, we are constantly aware of his imprudence and its destructive effects. We cannot give ourselves up to as unrestrained laughter as in *Joseph Andrews*.

Ironically, it is in *Tom Jones*, where the town environment is darker, more sinister and more prominent than in *Joseph Andrews*, that we see some of the funniest episodes in Fielding's writings. Indeed, the town-country contrast provides greater comic entertainment in *Tom Jones* than in *Joseph Andrews*. A particularly entertaining episode is Partridge's visit to the playhouse. Jones takes Partridge along to Drury Lane theatre to see David Garrick as Hamlet, expecting "to enjoy much entertainment in the criticisms of Partridge, from whom he expected the simple dictates of nature, unimproved, indeed, but likewise unadulterated by art".<sup>5</sup> In his simple criticisms,

<sup>1</sup> *TJ*, V, v (Henley III, p 226).

<sup>2</sup> *TJ*, V, x (Henley III, p 257f).

<sup>3</sup> *TJ*, VII, xii-xiv (Henley IV, p 49ff).

<sup>4</sup> *TJ*, IX and X (Henley IV, p 154ff).

<sup>5</sup> *TJ*, XVI, v (Henley V, p 221).

Partridge makes a comic spectacle of himself. Particularly entertaining are his rustic responses to the action, such as his assessment of the gravedigger: "the fellow handles a spade as if it were the first time he had ever had one in his hand".<sup>1</sup> His experiences of the inferior strolling players of the country, coupled with his superstitions, prompt him to compliment, inadvertently, the acting skills of David Garrick whom, he asserts, does not act at all, but only behaves as anyone would on seeing a ghost. The presence of Squire Western in London creates even greater comic entertainment. Western explodes into the town world with all his fiery eccentricities and rustic maladroitness and immediately clashes with everyone he meets with. He is jolted through the streets and fleeced by the London chairmen, as he describes to Allworthy:

"d..n me," ... if I won't walk in the rain rather than get into one of their hand-barrows again. They have jolted me more in a mile than Brown Bess would in a long fox-chase."<sup>2</sup>

Here is his description of his meeting with his town relatives, who all advocate the proposed match between Sophia and Lord Fellamar:

"I went to zee Sister Western last night, according to her own appointment, and there I was had into a whole room full of women. There was my lady cousin Bellaston, and my lady Betty, and my lady Catharine, and my lady I don't know who; d..n me, if ever you catch me among such a kennel of hoop-petticoat b..s! D..n me, I'd rather be run by my own dogs, as one Acton was, that the story-book says was turned into a hare, and his own dogs killed un and eat un. Od-rabbit it, no mortal was ever run in such a manner: if I dodged one way, one had me; if I offered to cut back, another snapped me."<sup>3</sup>

Also entertaining is his clash with Lord Fellamar, which exhibits many of the features of the old squire-courtier clashes of stage comedy. Our entertainment here, however, is greatly diminished by the circumstances of the quarrel, which arises when Western bursts into

<sup>1</sup> *TV*, XVI, v (Henley V, p 224f).

<sup>2</sup> *TV*, XVII, iii (Henley V, p 253).

<sup>3</sup> *TV*, XVII, iii (Henley V, p 254).

Lady Bellaston's house just in time to rescue Sophia from Fellamar's violent hands. A more comic clash of this nature occurs between Western and Captain Egglane, Fellamar's second, who issues the squire with a challenge on behalf of his Lordship, only to be beaten off by abuse and a box on the ears. By far the most comically entertaining clashes between the country and the town in *Tom Jones*, are those between Squire Western and Mrs Western. What makes these collisions particularly enjoyable is the fact that Mrs Western's rigid town behaviour is constantly disrupted by the same violent eccentricities which govern her brother. The couple constantly quarrel about politics, Squire Western being a Tory Jacobite, and Mrs Western being a Hanoverian Whig. They also quarrel about Sophia's education, Western accusing his sister of making a Whig of the girl, on which the following altercation, typical of those between the pair throughout the novel, takes place:

"O! more than Gothic ignorance," answered the lady.  
 "And as for your manners, brother, I must tell you, they deserve a cane." ...  
 "It is impossible, it is impossible," cries the aunt;  
 "no one can undervalue such a boor." "Boar,"  
 answered the squire, "I am no boar; no, nor ass; no, nor rat neither, madam. Remember that - I am no rat. I am a true Englishman, and not of your Hanover breed, that have eat up the nation."<sup>1</sup>

Ian Donaldson observes that this exchange, like that which it resembles between Millamant and Sir Wilful Witwoud of *The Way of the World*, is not only comedy of entertainment, but also comedy of discomfiture, mutual discomfiture.<sup>2</sup> Ehrenpreis makes the same observation on the exchange between Captain Egglane and Squire Western.<sup>3</sup> Neither town nor country wins the debate. Western's rustic simplicity is attractive, yet he is humiliated. Town sophistication is ridiculed, yet remains dignified. In both exchanges, however, Fielding does exploit the full comic potential of the contest between town and country.

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<sup>1</sup> *TJ*, VII, iii (Henley III, p 343).

<sup>2</sup> I. Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, p 138. The lines referred to from *The Way of the World* are IV, i, 104-12.

<sup>3</sup> Ehrenpreis, *op. cit.*, p 72.

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, then, Fielding achieves the status of a truly great comic artist. His comedy does have lasting moral significance, but is not crushed by its didactic import. Satire does prevail over comedy in his portrayal of the town, but comedy prevails in his portrayal of the country. With his robust constitution, optimistic temperament and personal experiences, he infuses his rural environment with the invigorating life and boisterous spirits which have become his trademark, as opposed to the secret closets of Richardson, a contrast succinctly summed up by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "... how wholesome Fielding always is! To take up after Richardson is like emerging from a sick-room, heated by stoves, to an open lawn on a breezy day in May."<sup>1</sup>

Important in achieving the rich comedy of town and country in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are the comic elements of Fielding's narrative style. In the two novels, Fielding's use of wit, irony, parody, mock-heroic and similar devices, is varied and complex. He uses them to achieve his didactic aims, to establish his moral viewpoints, his attitudes towards character and action, and his detached and generalised presentation of life. He also uses these techniques, sometimes in conjunction with his moral aims, to bring amusement or to provoke laughter in his readers. In much of the witty banter and ironic playfulness, the town-country contrast is prominent. The following extract from *Tom Jones*, in which Squire Western abuses Tom for his romantic attachment to Sophia, is a good example. In it, Fielding uses wit and irony to satirise the shortcomings of both the country and the town, and at the same time, to juxtapose these two environments in such a way as to bring a smile to the face of his readers:

He then bespattered the youth with abundance of that language which passes between country gentlemen who embrace opposite sides of the question; with frequent applications to him to salute that part which is generally introduced into all controversies that arise among the lower orders of the English

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<sup>1</sup>S. T. Coleridge, from *Table Talk*, 1834, cited in Compton, N. (ed.), *Henry Fielding: Tom Jones A Casebook*, London, 1970, p 33.

gentry at horse-races, cock-matches, and other public places. Allusions to this part are likewise often made for the sake of the jest. And here, I believe, the wit is generally misunderstood. In reality, it lies in desiring another to kiss your a... for having just before threatened to kick his; for I have observed very accurately that no one ever desires you to kick that which belongs to himself, nor offers to kiss this part in another.

It may likewise seem surprising that in the many thousand kind invitations of this sort, which every one who hath conversed with country gentlemen must have heard, no one, I believe, hath ever seen a single instance where the desire hath been complied with ... a great instance of their want of politeness; for in town nothing can be more common than for the finest gentlemen to perform this ceremony every day to their superiors, without having that favour once requested of them.<sup>1</sup>

Although the satire is here explicit, the wit and irony are an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end. The same is true of Fielding's use of dialect, another device with which Fielding achieves a comic contrast between town and country. Squire Western's rough Somersetshire dialect adds much to the fun of the episodes in which he is involved. It contrasts with the sophisticated courtly language of his sister, Mrs Western, and this contrast adds much to the comedy of their encounters. This comedy is heightened by the fact that Mrs Western's courtly language is only a veneer over a temper which is as violent as that of her brother. Throughout *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, much comedy is created by Fielding's sudden switches in style, from his use of wit and irony of various kinds, to his use of dialect, and his use of that favourite mode of his, the mock-heroic. In some episodes the mock-heroic is used mainly to parody heroic diction, such as in the mock-pastoral introduction of Sophia Western.<sup>2</sup> In other episodes it is used to portray the farcical and brutal aspects of country life, such as in Joseph's battle with the dogs,<sup>3</sup> and the battle in the churchyard in *Tom Jones*.<sup>4</sup> Here it invites us to

<sup>1</sup> *TJ*, VI, ix (Henley III, p 307f).

<sup>2</sup> *TJ*, IV, ii.

<sup>3</sup> *JA*, III, vi.

<sup>4</sup> *TJ*, IV, viii.



laugh rather than pass judgement. In other episodes, it is used to undercut a character's pretensions about himself, such as in the episode in which Tom breaks his hyperbolic vows of constancy to Sophia by retiring into the bushes with Molly Seagrim.<sup>1</sup> In all of his mock-heroic episodes, Fielding is at his best when portraying the comedy of the country. Although he sometimes uses a mock-heroic style to portray the town, his use of it is not as extensive or as exhilarating as in his portrayal of the country. This is true of his comic technique in general, which is always at its best in the rural environment. The contribution which Fielding's comic narrative techniques makes to the comedy of town and country in these novels, of which I have been able to touch on only a few aspects, is an important one.

Thus, whilst many critics who have analysed the moral basis of Fielding's art warn of the critical dangers of revelling in the roast beef and cheery ale of old England, few of us can read *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* without succumbing to our sense of humour.

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<sup>1</sup>*TJ*, V, x.

## Section Three: The Later Writings

Laughter almost completely disappears from Fielding's later writings. Several statements which he made on wit and humour during these later years explain why this is so. He is more insistent than ever before that wit be used in the service of morality. In *CGJ*, 10, February 4, 1752, he praises Lucian, Cervantes and Swift for using wit "to expose and extirpate those Follies and Vices which chiefly prevailed in their several Countries", and censures Aristophanes and Rabelais for using it to ridicule "all Sobriety, Modesty, Decency, Virtue and Religion, out of the World".<sup>1</sup> A measure of his new sobriety can be taken from his endorsement of Richardson's views on wit and humour, as delivered in the preface to *Clarissa*:

... *pleasantry* (as the ingenious author of *Clarissa* says of a story) *should be made only the Vehicle of instruction* ... but when no Moral, no Lesson, no Instruction is conveyed to the Reader, where the whole Design of the Composition is no more than to make us laugh, the Writer comes very near to the Character of a Buffoon; and his Admirers, if an old Latin proverb be true, deserve no great Compliments to be paid to their Wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

This is a dismissal of his comic practice in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, in which many of the episodes seem designed purely to make us laugh. In *CGJ*, 18, March 3, 1752, he asserts that wit need not be scintillating, nor gravity dull, and claims to find more wit in the sermons of Dr Robert South than in the comedies of William Congreve, again dismissing what was his comic practice in his earlier writings.<sup>3</sup> In *CGJ*, 55, July 18, 1752, and *CGJ*, 56, July 25, 1752, he argues a theory of humour which contradicts that argued in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. He now defines the source

<sup>1</sup>*CGJ*, 10, February 4, 1752 (Jensen I, p 194).

<sup>2</sup>*CGJ*, 10, February 4, 1752 (Jensen I, p 193f).

<sup>3</sup>*CGJ*, 18, March 3, 1752 (Jensen I, p 243).

of ridiculous behaviour as arising from "a violent Impulse of the Mind, determining it to some one particular Point, by which a Man becomes ridiculously distinguished from all other Men."<sup>1</sup> He describes the two main humour characters in England as being the town fop and country squire but, instead of outlining comic principles for their portrayal, he sternly attributes their prevalence to the faulty instruction of the young, who have no restraints placed on their passions, and he advocates their total eradication by better education. In *The Covent Garden Journal*, Fielding practises what he preaches, there is much wit and humour, but these are almost invariably used in the service of morality. Fielding also practises his precepts in *Amelia*. In *CGJ*, 8, January 28, 1752, he describes *Amelia* as "my favourite child",<sup>2</sup> perhaps thereby rejecting his former exuberant spirits in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In *Amelia*, he does attempt to portray some characters according to the old comic conventions, for example, Justice Jonathan Thrasher and Blear-eyed Moll, but his attempts are unsuccessful. The only character approaching an eccentric is Colonel Bath, who occupies an insignificant place in the novel, and is killed off at the end. The evil urban environment of *Amelia*, in which most of the action takes place, takes us away from the "open lawn, on a breezy day in May", if not into a "sick room heated by a stove", then into an environment which is equally claustrophobic and oppressive. There is no comedy of the road in *Amelia*. Booth's and Amelia's family commitments, together with their need to shelter from their creditors in the verge of the court in London, prevent the kind of picaresque rambling around the countryside, which had involved Fielding's earlier protagonists in many comic episodes. Indeed, in *CGJ*, 24, March 24, 1752, Fielding rejects many of the road adventures in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which he had imitated in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, as being too grotesque and incongruous for serious literature.<sup>3</sup> In *Amelia*, then, there is no great pageantry of town

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<sup>1</sup>*CGJ*, 55, July 18, 1752 (Jensen 2, p 63).

<sup>2</sup>Jensen 1, p 186.

<sup>3</sup>*CGJ*, 24, March 24, 1752 (Jensen 1, p 279ff).

and country, no delight in the spectacle of the human scene. Whilst there is some wit and humour, it is always directed towards serious moral goals. In *Amelia*, we return to the sombre urban world of *Jonathan Wild*, but with important differences. In *Jonathan Wild*, the use of the mock-heroic had indeed been mainly to satirise social and political corruption rather than epic diction, and the irony had indeed sometimes been harsh, but it had always been under control, and sometimes displayed a playfulness, arising from Fielding's confidence that good would triumph, as it does at the end. In *Amelia*, this confidence is lost. Mock-heroic almost completely disappears. The irony is not playful but is harsh and bitter. On many occasions it slips out of control as Fielding, no longer confident that good will triumph, has lost his ability to present a lighter and light-hearted side of life.