

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE RURAL AND URBAN POOR

## Introduction

It was not so much his belief in the decreasing socio-economic and cultural supremacy of the landed classes which presented to Fielding the most disturbing evidence of a breakdown of traditional society, as the increasing unemployment and mobility amongst the labouring classes in both rural and urban England. To Fielding, the problems presented to society by the plight of "the poor" became the most important social issue of the day. As with his contemporaries, he failed to define whom he meant by "the poor", using the term generally throughout his writings to describe bankrupt members of the gentry and trading classes, craftsmen, mechanics, labourers, the unemployed and the destitute. In this chapter I shall be concerned with his treatment of the labouring classes, the unemployed and the destitute. As a writer, Fielding displayed little interest in the poor until he became involved in the law, as a barrister during the 1740s and as a magistrate during the late 1740s and early 1750s. His most extensive statements concerning them are to be found in the legal and social writings which he produced as magistrate. These will be fully discussed in the relevant section of this chapter, but first of all, the social philosophy contained in them must be briefly outlined.

Broadly speaking, in his social pamphlets, Fielding describes traditional English society as disintegrating in the mid eighteenth century, under the impact of socio-economic change. He claims that increased economic prosperity has encouraged many members of the landed classes to abandon their social responsibilities in favour of idleness and luxury, and that this has induced many members of the labouring classes to follow their example. To pay for these luxuries some resorted to begging and crime, with disastrous social consequences. He interprets this behaviour as a deliberate attempt on the part of

the poor to overthrow civil authority and established order.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the urban poverty and crime which Fielding, like his contemporaries, blamed on the poor themselves largely resulted from the failure of antiquated legal and social institutions to cope with social change. Many rural labourers were obliged to move to London, where some found work but where others found it easier to live by begging and crime.<sup>2</sup> The increase in urban poverty and crime concerned Fielding, both as magistrate and imaginative writer. As magistrate, he was severe on the poor, advocating, in his social pamphlets, harsh repressive measures for bringing them under control. As a writer, he was more lenient. In the imaginative writings which he produced both before and after commencing duties as magistrate, he certainly represents the poor as being guilty of many transgressions, but in general, he represents them as suffering many hardships in an unjust society. He does not, however, question the value of a hierarchical social system. He endorses it. In the vision of social order with which his novels conclude, the poor are represented as fulfilling their social obligations and as achieving happiness and security. This occurs in a system organised along traditional lines in which the poor remain subservient to the will of the upper classes who, in turn, care paternalistically for them. Fielding always presents his vision of ideal social order as a rural order. In doing so he draws on long-standing literary convention and also on the facts that, in contemporary rural society, the old social system changed less rapidly and less visibly than in the towns and that the poor were more firmly kept under control than in London. This vision of rural order is presented as a pattern in which English society in general is seen as returning to a *status quo*.

It is in his treatment of the rural and urban poor that, as Fielding's career progresses, we see the greatest displacement of literary convention by sociological authenticity. In his early writings, Fielding presents the lower classes mainly for the purposes of farce,

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<sup>1</sup> See particularly the introductions to the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the social changes taking place see Chapter One of this thesis (p 22 ff).

comedy and satire on high life. These rhetorical purposes determine the nature of the portrait, which is extremely limited and stereotyped, according to the conventions of current low-life literature. We do catch glimpses of the urban problems which concerned Fielding as magistrate, but these glimpses are fleeting and always subordinated to ulterior rhetorical purposes. In the portrayal of the lower classes in Fielding's early writings then, literary convention prevails over sociological authenticity. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding continues to portray the labouring classes for the purposes of farce, comedy and satire, along the conventional lines. In portraying the rural poor, however, he includes much by way of contemporary reality. His experiences as a barrister, riding the Western Circuit, are visible in these novels. We see many of the hardships suffered by the rural poor, particularly from the maladministration of those laws ostensibly designed for their welfare. Although Fielding declares realism to be the defining characteristic of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, however, his main aim in them is not sociological authenticity. The authentic details about the lives of the poor are always firmly contained within the novels' artistic designs. Moreover, the presentation of the hardships suffered by the rural poor is always eclipsed by the rural ideal with which both novels conclude. In this highly conventional rural ideal, the hardships suffered by the poor are dissolved into a vision of ideal rural order in which these people are cared for paternalistically by the landed classes, as Fielding believed they were, in a system organised along traditional lines.

After commencing duties as magistrate in 1748-1749, Fielding became more closely acquainted than ever before with the problems confronting the unemployed and destitute, particularly in London. This is immediately visible in the non-imaginative and imaginative writings which he produced from 1749 to 1754, in which he represents the need for social action as being more urgent than ever before and in which he, therefore, largely abandons his earlier rhetorical approach in favour of more realistic methods. His non-imaginative writings, particularly his social pamphlets, do have some conventional features of language, organisation and attitude, but in them he presents many direct reports of his personal observations on the social conditions of the poor in London. We certainly see more urban

poverty and crime than in the fleeting glimpses of these problems given in the early writings. The same is true of his novel *Amelia*, in which he adopts to an even greater extent than in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the realistic potentialities of the new novel form, and presents a starkly authentic account of the miseries and hardships suffered by the poor in London. Fielding, however, as we have seen, did not completely abandon his old literary techniques. Just as the more urgent wish for reactionary reform which resulted from his magisterial experiences led him to largely abandon his earlier rhetorical methods in favour of a more direct approach so, too, it inspired him to continue advocating the maintenance of traditional English society with traditional artistic methods. Thus, the depiction of the poor in *Amelia*, when compared to that in the early writings and in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, is on the one hand more authentic, and on the other hand more stylised, as Fielding tries to harness reality with the old formalising techniques with which he had earlier done so. No longer confident about life or literature, however, he is no longer able to create complete artistic order. Many shocking realities of urban life escape his formalising grasp, and this only serves to emphasise their intractability. This vivid picture of social breakdown in London is placed alongside an even more idealised vision of social order in the country. In the concluding rural ideal, every motif expressing social solidarity is emphasised. Fielding's failure to control the shocking facts of poverty and crime in London artistically, however, leaves us with the impression that social breakdown there will predominate, and that the social solidarity represented in the rural ideal can never again prevail over English society in general.

## Section One: The Early Writings

In his early writings, Fielding presents many fleeting glimpses of the serious urban problems which became his chief concern as London magistrate. One such problem presented is gambling amongst the labouring classes in London, which is introduced in the ballad opera, *The Lottery*. The state lotteries, which were run by the Corporation of the City of London to pay for public works, were drawn in November and December of each year at Guild Hall. As well as being sold by stockbrokers, lottery tickets were sold by milkmen, barbers, grocers and other small shopkeepers. This encouraged gambling amongst the labouring classes, many of whom spent their wages on tickets. Fielding always considered this a grave social problem. In *The Lottery*, as Fielding indicates in the prologue, "... we behold poor wretches horse away / The labour of a twelvemonth in a day".<sup>1</sup> In the second performance, on February 10th, 1732, a scene was added, portraying the actual drawing of the lottery in Guildhall.<sup>2</sup> The scene portrays many of London's poor being rendered destitute by their gambling.<sup>3</sup> In the *Inquiry*, Fielding the magistrate was to describe how many of these people turned to begging and crime to support their gambling. Although the problem of gambling amongst the labouring classes is presented realistically in *The Lottery*, it is not Fielding's chief concern in this play. That is with Chloe, the young country gentlewoman, come to town with the ambition of being a fine lady. The satire, then, is chiefly directed against the fashionable life to which she aspires - the problem of gambling amongst the lower classes simply forms part of the background to this conventional satire. It is Fielding the dramatist, writing within literary convention, rather than Fielding the social reformer, who presents this urban problem in the play.

The same is true of the presentation of prostitution amongst the lower classes in London in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* and *Miss Lucy in Town*, in both of which we glimpse some authentic facts about

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<sup>1</sup>Henley VIII, p 267.

<sup>2</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 117.

<sup>3</sup>*The Lottery*, Scene III (Henley VIII, p 288).

this urban problem which concerned Fielding as magistrate. The brothel run by Mother Punchbowl in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* could be meant to represent those run by "Mother" Needham and "Mother" Haywood<sup>1</sup> in Covent Garden. This was an area inhabited mainly by the upper classes but which, since Elizabethan times, had housed many members of the lower classes, who worked in the taverns, brothels, gambling houses, coffee houses and centres of entertainment frequented by the rich. Fielding, presiding over his court in Bow Street in Covent Garden during the late 1740s and early 1750s, suppressed many of these brothels and disorderly houses. There is some realism in the portrayal of prostitution in Mother Punchbowl's brothel in *The Covent Garden Tragedy*. The characters speak of their sordid business in the brothel, and their semi-criminal activities outside it, with a coarse realism. Fielding's main interest in the issue, however, is rhetorical rather than realistic. *The Covent Garden Tragedy* is a burlesque of contemporary heroic tragedy and, in particular, of Ambrose Philips's *The Distressed Mother*, an adaptation of Racine's *Andromaque*.<sup>2</sup> Many of the characters, speeches and scenes in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* parodically parallel those in *The Distressed Mother*. Satire against *The Distressed Mother*, and heroic tragedy in general, means that the portrayal of prostitution in *The Covent Garden Tragedy* is subordinated to other purposes. This can be demonstrated by quoting the speech in which the prostitute, Stormandra, refuses credit to her customer, Captain Bilkum. In Stormandra's words, we glimpse one of the most serious aspects of prostitution, that is, the involvement in the trade of innocent country girls travelling to London in search of employment. Many of these girls were preyed upon, *en route*, or on arrival, by pimps and bawds masquerading as employment agents.<sup>3</sup> This problem is graphically dramatised in the first plate of Hogarth's "Harlot's Progress", in which a country girl, arriving in London, is met at the stagecoach by a bawd. In writing *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, Fielding was influenced by this painting.<sup>4</sup> In *The Champion*, June 10th, 1740,

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<sup>1</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 129.

<sup>2</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, I, p 127f.

<sup>3</sup>M.D. George, *op.cit.*, p 120.

<sup>4</sup>R. E. Moore, *op.cit.*, p 96.

Fielding was to describe "The Harlot's Progress" as a serious didactic painting<sup>1</sup> but, in echoing its first scene in Stormandra's speech in *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, his main interest is literary satire:

And dost thou think I have a soul so mean?  
Trust thee! dost think I came last week to town,  
The waggon straws yet hanging to my tail?  
Trust thee! oh! when I trust thee for a groat,  
Hanover Square shall come to Drury Lane.<sup>2</sup>

The portrayal of prostitution in London's East End in *Miss Lucy in Town* is also rhetorical in nature. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Fielding's main aim in portraying the East End brothel of Mrs Midnight and Tawdry is to satirise certain establishments at the West End. There are, however, some touches of authenticity. The aspect of contemporary prostitution, so graphically dramatised in the first plate of "The Harlot's Progress", is more realistically reflected in *Miss Lucy in Town* than in *The Covent Garden Tragedy*, in the unscrupulous attempts of Mrs Midnight and Tawdry to sell the innocent Lucy, newly arrived in London, to their customers.

In *The Coffee House Politician; or, The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, we catch more than a fleeting glimpse of one urban problem which greatly concerned Fielding as magistrate, that is, the problem of the corrupt London trading justices. In the contemporary legal system, Justices of the Peace were generally paid by receiving fees for committing people to prison and also for bailing them out. This system encouraged justices to promote petty litigation. It led to privileged treatment of the rich and victimisation of the poor. Since Elizabethan times, such justices, known in London as "trading" justices, had caused much hardship and misery to the lower classes.<sup>3</sup> In *The Coffee House Politician; or, The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, Fielding extensively arraigns the maladministration of justice in London through Justice Squeezum who uses his office for his own benefit. Through Squeezum's activities, Fielding presents many

<sup>1</sup>*The Champion*, June 10th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 331).

<sup>2</sup>*The Covent Garden Tragedy*, II, i (Henley X, p 122).

<sup>3</sup>M.D. George, *op.cit.*, p 19.

realistic aspects of this social problem, such as the encouraging petty litigation, the fixing of trials, the fabricating of evidence, the tampering with witnesses and juries, the privileged treatment of the rich and plundering of the poor. Despite these many realistic features, Fielding's main concern in the play is not with sociological authenticity. Rather, it is with the long-standing comic convention of justice caught in its own trap. The play's action mainly revolves around the plot in which Squeezum is caught in his own trap and delivered up to that justice which he has so long abused. In the play, then, the problem of the maladministration of justice in London is given a comic treatment, in that all is set to rights at the end. It is also given a comic treatment in that it is presented in a light-hearted and humorous manner. Justice Squeezum is comically incompetent. His eventual downfall is brought about by his sexual ineptitude and his inability to control his wife. Moreover, his activities are presented farcically. No one suffers greatly as a result of his corruption. A comparison with Justice Thrasher in *Amelia*, here, is informative. Under the impact of his experiences as magistrate, Fielding, through Justice Thrasher in *Amelia*, presents a more harshly realistic presentation of the maladministration of justice in London. Justice Thrasher is never brought to justice but, at the end of the novel, continues to prey upon the London poor, on whom he inflicts many excruciating hardships. Whilst we see the beginnings of a realistic portrayal of this urban problem in *The Coffee House Politician; or, The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, Fielding's interest in the issue in this play is comic, rather than sociological.

Comedy also takes precedence over sociological authenticity in the fleeting glimpse which we receive of another urban problem which greatly concerned Fielding as London magistrate, that is, the problem of gin-drinking amongst the labouring classes in the metropolis. This issue is briefly introduced in *Tumble Down Dick*. Excessive gin-drinking amongst the labouring classes was one of the most critical social problems of the age.<sup>1</sup> The wholesale consumption of gin led to an enormous decline in the birth rate, an equally enormous increase in the death rate and an alarming degree of violence and

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<sup>1</sup>For information about this problem I am indebted to M.D. George, *op.cit.*, p 54f.



crime on the London streets. All this caused grave concern to the government and to social reformers. Measures were taken in 1729 to reduce the consumption of alcohol amongst the labouring people, but these were repealed in 1733, under pressure from the rural sector. This led to an immediate increase in disease, death, and related social disorders. Alarm at the sudden increase of gin-related problems led to the Gin Act of 1736. Notwithstanding the degree of public concern this indicated, many dramatists made light of the affair. The act produced a spate of satirical plays. Fielding contributed to the satire in one scene of *Tumble Down Dick*, in which the rakes and whores of King's Coffee-House rise and sing the following song in celebration of gin:

AIR III. *O London is a fine Town*

- 1 RAKE. O Gin, at length, is putting down,  
And 'tis the more the pity;  
Petition for it all the town,  
Petition all the city.
- CHORUS. O Gin, &c.
- 1 RAKE. 'Twas Gin that made train-bands so stout,  
To whom each castle yields;  
This made them march the town about,  
And take all Tuttle Fields.
- CHORUS. O Gin, &c.
- 1 RAKE. 'Tis Gin, as all our neighbours know,  
Has served our army too;  
This makes them make so fine a show,  
At Hyde Park, at review.
- CHORUS. O Gin, &c.
- 1 RAKE. But what I hope will change your notes,  
And make your anger sleep;  
Consider, none can bribe his votes  
With liquor half so cheap.
- CHORUS. O Gin, &c.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, this scene is not designed as a serious statement on the social problem of gin-drinking in London. We see nothing of the horrifying human and social consequences of gin-drinking, which concerned Fielding as magistrate. Indeed, we have to wait until his later writings before we see Fielding making any serious statement on the very grave situation of 1736. This is in *CGJ*, 49, June 20th,

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<sup>1</sup>*Tumble Down Dick*, Scene III (Henley XII, p 19).

1752, in which he records that the Gin Act of 1736 led to riots amongst the labouring classes who opposed it.<sup>1</sup> The scene in King's Coffee-House in *Tumble Down Dick* burlesques this situation. Thus, whilst making us aware of the orgy of gin-drinking in London during the mid 1730s, Fielding in this play draws this serious urban problem according to literary convention, convention which demanded a comic light-hearted treatment of the subject. As with the urban problems introduced into the plays discussed earlier, then, this problem is introduced into *Tumble Down Dick* for comic or satiric rather than realistic purposes.

In his ballad operas we do catch some glimpses of the social problems confronting the London poor, which later concerned Fielding as magistrate. Realism, in the sense of relevance to contemporary events, was an essential characteristic of the new ballad opera form, and Fielding's ballad operas display this realism.<sup>2</sup> Whilst his ballad operas give the impression of being closer in touch with the raw materials of life than his genteel comedies, however, they still have their conventions, and the portrayal of the lower classes in them is almost as stereotyped as the portrayal of the upper classes in his comedies. As with the other writers in the *genre*, he does introduce low-life characters, scenes and activities hitherto not extensively explored in literature, and he does throw some light on the lives of the lower classes, but the realism with which he portrays the conditions under which these people lived is limited when compared to that in his later writings. Although he does introduce many urban problems with a touch of Hogarthian type realism,<sup>3</sup> these are never extensively portrayed. Moreover, comedy, as well as satire, is a main reason for his introduction of these urban problems. Whilst his tone is often harsh, his treatment of the problems is generally lighthearted and farcical. There is little hint of the urgency with which he advocates social reform in his later writings.

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<sup>1</sup>CGJ, 49, June 20th, 1752 (Jensen II, p 31).

<sup>2</sup>E. M. Gagey, *op.cit.*, p 139.

<sup>3</sup>E. M. Gagey, *op.cit.*, p 76.

This is also true of *Jonathan Wild*, his most extensive portrayal of the lower classes in London in early writings. In *Jonathan Wild*, as in his ballad operas, he does present some glimpses of the urban problems of the age. In outlining the essential features of the career of the real Jonathan Wild, his establishing himself at the head of a gang, his robbing the public, his acting as receiver of stolen goods, his betraying members of the gang no longer profitable or controllable, and his final apprehension, trial and execution, Fielding accurately outlines the essential characteristics of the criminal gangs which operated in London during the early eighteenth century, gangs with which he became closely involved as magistrate. At least one historian has seen Fielding's presentation of Wild's activities as an authentic sociological account of the criminal world of London during the early eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> but its authenticity is limited. In presenting Wild's career and his gang, Fielding was drawing on long-established conventions.<sup>2</sup> As we have already seen, he took much from John Gay's ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera*.<sup>3</sup> He drew material from Hogarth's paintings.<sup>4</sup> He also drew on the conventions of the criminal biography, which was popular during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> These were produced in large numbers by pamphleteers, but mostly by the ordinaries of Newgate, who had the rights to publish the last hours of condemned criminals. They were short and sensational. All claimed authenticity, but generally followed the set pattern of outlining the criminal's birth, education and entry into crime, marriages and confederates, major crimes and encounters with the law, final crime, apprehension, trial and execution, and in so doing, generally embroidered fact with fiction. The execution of Jonathan Wild in 1725 produced a flood of such biographies, the most influential on Fielding being those of Daniel Defoe,<sup>6</sup> whom Fielding, in introducing his own *Jonathan Wild*

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<sup>1</sup> M.D. George, *op.cit.*, p 18. See also B.M. Jones, *Henry Fielding, Novelist and Magistrate*, London, 1933, p 88ff.

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Irwin, *op.cit.*, p 80ff.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. Irwin *op.cit.*, p 92.

<sup>4</sup> R.E. Moore, *op.cit.*, p 125f.

<sup>5</sup> W. R. Irwin, *op.cit.*, p 80ff.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild (1725)*. See W. R. Irwin, *op.cit.*, p 19.

in the preface to his *Miscellanies*, describes as "that excellent historian, who from authentic papers and records, &c., hath already given so satisfactory an account of the life and actions of this great man".<sup>1</sup> In his *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding does not so much imitate the conventions of criminal biography as parody them, his aims being ironic and satiric. Nevertheless, he follows convention throughout. He makes no attempt to record anew the facts of Wild's criminal career.<sup>2</sup> Fielding himself states that in the preface to his *Miscellanies*: "To confess the truth, my narrative is rather of such actions which he might have performed, or would, or should have performed, than what he really did".<sup>3</sup> In portraying Wild's gang and his criminal activities, then, Fielding's main aim is not sociological authenticity, but moral, social and political satire, and particularly, satire against Sir Robert Walpole and his government.<sup>4</sup> These ulterior rhetorical purposes determine the portrait of the criminal world presented. Although one critic claims that in portraying Wild's gang, Fielding displays a "close knowledge of the methods of the criminal classes",<sup>5</sup> and attributes Fielding's failure to modify his portrayal of the gang in the revised edition of 1754, in which satire against Walpole is toned down, to his having been convinced by his magisterial experiences of the existence of such gangs as he had portrayed them in the edition of 1743,<sup>6</sup> in both versions of *Jonathan Wild*, the portrait of London's criminal underworld is satirically stylised. Jonathan Wild's gang bears little resemblance to the desperate gangs with which Fielding became involved as magistrate and which he was to describe in his *Inquiry* and *Journal of A Voyage To Lisbon*. In *Jonathan Wild*, too, political satire, rather than sociological authenticity, determines the portrayal of another urban problem which greatly concerned Fielding

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<sup>1</sup>Preface to the *Miscellanies*(Henley XII, p 242).

<sup>2</sup>W.R. Irwin, *op.cit.*, p 92.

<sup>3</sup>Preface to the *Miscellanies* (Henley XII, p 242).

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter Six of this study.

<sup>5</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 88.

<sup>6</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 89.

as magistrate, that is, Newgate Prison. Newgate Prison, its inhabitants and their activities are portrayed mainly for the purposes of satirising Sir Robert Walpole, his government and opposition. The conflicts of interest between the debtors and the criminals, so seriously presented in the Newgate of *Amelia*, in *Jonathan Wild* takes the form of a mock election, which satirises political quarrels between Walpole and his opponents.<sup>1</sup> In the portrayal of Newgate we see none of the violence, drunkenness, disease, starvation, madness and death which William Booth witnesses at first hand on his tour of Newgate in *Amelia*. Too, little sociological authenticity is present in the treatment of another urban problem, glimpsed in *Jonathan Wild*, which is imprisonment for debt, a practice whereby debtors who could not meet their commitments were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Many families were rendered destitute as a result of petty litigation encouraged by unscrupulous bailiffs and attorneys. Fielding always objected to this method of dealing with debtors. In describing the conditions of Count La Ruse's residence in Mr Snap's house in *Jonathan Wild*, he makes a semi-serious statement on this problem.<sup>2</sup> His description of La Ruse's activities in Mr Snap's house, however, serves satirical, rather than realistic, ends. We see none of the miseries suffered by the debtors in *Amelia*. Satire also prevails over sociological authenticity in the treatment of another urban problem which we glimpse in *Jonathan Wild*, that is, public execution. Wild's eventual execution is presented as the apotheosis which concludes a brilliant career. Fielding describes the acclamation of the multitude as Wild is hanged, with satiric rather than sociological intent. There is nothing of the urgency with which he describes the inefficacy of the holiday at Tyburn in his *Inquiry*. In *Jonathan Wild*, other urban problems affecting the lower classes, which seriously concerned Fielding as magistrate, such as gambling, prostitution and receiving of stolen goods are also given satirical and lighthearted treatment.

In *Jonathan Wild*, then, although we glimpse many urban problems, we see little of the living and working conditions of the lower classes in

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter Six of this study.

<sup>2</sup>*JW*, II, i (Henley II, p 12); see also *Pasquin*, II, i (Henley XI, p 208).

London. Ironically, it is in *Jonathan Wild* that we see the most significant statement in Fielding's writings concerning the economic exploitation of the labouring classes in a hierarchical system. This is in Jonathan Wild's famous speech on "employing hands":

"Mankind are first properly to be considered under two grand divisions, those that use their own hands, and those who employ the hands of others. The former are the base and rabble; the latter, the genteel part of the creation. The mercantile part of the world,<sup>1</sup> therefore, wisely use the term *employing hands*".

Of this economic relationship he had earlier observed:

"It is true, the farmer allows fodder to his oxen and pasture to his sheep; but it is for his own service, not theirs. In the same manner the ploughman, the shepherd, the weaver, the builder, and the soldier, work not for themselves but others; they are contented with a poor pittance (the laborer's hire), and permit us, the GREAT, to enjoy the fruit of their labors. Aristotle, as my master told us, hath plainly proved, in the first book of his politics, that the low, mean, useful part of mankind, are born slaves to the will of their superiors, and are indeed as much their property as the cattle. It is well said of us, the higher order of mortals, that we are born only to devour the fruits of the earth, and it may be as well said of the lower class, that they are born only to produce them for us".<sup>2</sup>

In this speech, in which Wild justifies his manipulation of his gang, Fielding describes the injustice of the economic system in which the labouring classes were so thoroughly exploited. The speech, however, is not designed to criticise the system although it contains the substance of the social philosophy which Fielding was to expound in his social pamphlets. Rather, Wild's speech is designed to satirise Walpole's alleged exploitation and manipulation of his ministry. The harsh condemnation of the economic reality of the times, then, serves satirical rather than sociological ends. Indeed, throughout *Jonathan Wild* in general, Fielding's ulterior satirical purposes determine the presentation of lower-class characters, scenes and activities. Whilst touches of authenticity are added by the use of historical characters, such as Wild himself, recognisable criminal locations

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<sup>1</sup> *JW*, II, xiv (Henley II, p 47).

<sup>2</sup> *JW*, I, viii (Henley II, p 26).

and cant criminal language, the portrayal of London's criminal underworld is thoroughly conventional. For all its circumstantial detail, *Jonathan Wild* has an air of *abstract unreality*. Moreover, the conclusion of *Jonathan Wild*, as with *The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, is comic, in that Wild is eventually caught and brought to justice. As at the end of the play, a worthy judge sets all to rights. Vice is punished and virtue is rewarded. Thus Fielding turns satire into comedy.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion, coupled with the formal presentation of the book, leaves us with the impression that London's social disorders are under the control of the Divine Providence whose creative faculties Fielding is imitating. We do not get this impression in Fielding's later writings.

It is in *The Champion* that we see Fielding's first significant statement concerning poverty amongst the lower classes in London. By the time he began on *The Champion*, in November, 1739, Fielding had been studying law for two years. In *The Champion*, he devotes much attention to the discussion of legal issues.<sup>2</sup> His legal training acquainted him with the laws providing for and controlling the lower classes, and it is in *The Champion*, February 16, 1739-40, that he makes, for the first time, that harsh judgement on the poor which he was to maintain throughout his journalistic and legal writings. He asserts that the genuinely poor are few in number: "There are so few things absolutely necessary to the sustenance of life, that very few labour under a want of them".<sup>3</sup> He asserts that poverty amongst the lower classes is the result of their own idleness and insubordination, and that the greatest objects of charity "are certainly not to be met with in our streets; whose begging inhabitants deserve punishment more than relief".<sup>4</sup> In dealing with poverty in this paper, Fielding concerns himself with poverty amongst the upper classes: "distressed circumstances are, not being able to support the character in which men have been bred, and the want of conveniences to which they have been accustomed".<sup>5</sup> He describes the proper objects of charity as being

<sup>1</sup>I. Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, p 199.

<sup>2</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 76ff.

<sup>3</sup>*The Champion*, February 16th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 205).

<sup>4</sup>*Loc.cit.*

<sup>5</sup>*Loc.cit.*

those members of the gentry who have impoverished themselves by living beyond their means. In the sequel to this paper, *The Champion*, February 19th, 1739-40, he deals seriously with the problem of imprisonment for debt, again dealing with the upper classes, graphically describing the miseries which they suffered under this system.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in *The Champion*, Fielding mainly concerns himself with the cultural transgression of the upper classes. The attention which he directs towards the lower classes is directed mainly towards censuring them for emulating the fashionable vices, such as gambling.<sup>2</sup> *The Champion* is mainly a literary journal. It is not until his later journals, written at a time when he was more concerned with socio-economic issues, that he fully develops the ideas on urban poverty which he briefly introduces into his first journal.

Taken as a whole, then, the portrayal of problems confronting the poor in London in Fielding's early writings is scant and largely rhetorical in nature. We do catch glimpses of the urban problems which concerned Fielding as magistrate, but they are only fleeting glimpses. The chief *raison d'être* for Fielding's portrayal of the lower classes in London in his early writings is satire against the upper classes.

The same is true of his portrayal of the lower classes in the country. The only extensive portrayal of the lower classes in the country in Fielding's early writings is in *The Grub Street Opera*, in which the activities of the working people portrayed are designed to satirise the government and the Court in Westminster. In *The Champion*, February 12th and 14th, 1739-40, we do catch some glimpses of hardships suffered by the labouring classes in the country.<sup>3</sup> In *The Champion*, February 26th, 1739-40, we see Fielding's first use of his rural ideal, in which the rural poor are represented as being cared for paternalistically, and contented with their humble station in life, in a society organised along traditional hierarchical lines. These, however, are small beginnings. The most extensive portrayal of the lower classes in the country in Fielding's writings is in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, to which we now turn.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Champion*, February 19th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 212).

<sup>2</sup>*The Champion*, January 3rd, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 137).

<sup>3</sup>*The Champion*, February 12th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 193ff) and *The Champion*, February 14th, 1739-40 (Henley XV, p 198ff).



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

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding continues to portray the lower classes for the purposes of comedy and of satire against high life. Nevertheless, in these novels, there is an extensive presentation of social problems confronting the labouring people. Although the "city" action of both novels is confined mainly to Westminster, there is some presentation of social problems confronting the labouring people in the city. In Mr Wilson's story, we glimpse the problem of imprisonment for debt, but the attention is focused on Wilson, rather than on the other prisoners.<sup>1</sup> In *Tom Jones*, we see a shanghai gang, of the kind used during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to press into the fleet homeless men on the London streets.<sup>2</sup> In the story of the Man of the Hill, we once again see the criminal world of *Jonathan Wild*. All these glimpses are fleeting. Moreover, they are presented in relation to members of the gentry, rather than the lower classes. They do not add up to any significant presentation of problems confronting the urban poor. In the portrayal of the country, it is different.

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, there is an extensive portrayal of the social problems confronting the poor in the country. This can probably be attributed to his work as a barrister riding the Western Circuit in search of briefs.<sup>3</sup> Although there are no records of Fielding's work on the Western Circuit, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* display a considerable knowledge of the administration of law amongst the labouring people in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

In *Joseph Andrews*, working people living in the country suffer many hardships. Many have great difficulty in obtaining a secure living, for example, Joseph Andrews, Gamma Andrews, Fanny Goodwill, the pedlar and Parson Adams, who, although gentle-born, is of humble disposition and lives in poverty. Some of this hardship is represented

<sup>1</sup>JA, III, iii (Henley I, p 249).

<sup>2</sup>TJ, XVI, viii (Henley V, p 234); see B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 107.

<sup>3</sup>B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 79f.

<sup>4</sup>B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 80.

as being the result of socio-economic change. In outlining the difficulties which he had in earning a living, the poor pedlar describes how he recruited soldiers for the army in the clothing towns of Bristol and Frome, when the decline in the woollen trade led to much unemployment in these areas.<sup>1</sup> Throughout *Joseph Andrews*, the action of which is set in 1741, we receive the impression that life for the labouring people in the country is not easy. Numerous statements made by these characters indicate that the cost of living at the time was high, and that a livelihood was not something which could be taken for granted. In the novel, gaining and keeping a livelihood is the main business of the labouring people. Many are obliged to live by petty crime and are punished for it, such as the poor postilion, who assisted Joseph during his time of distress, and yet was himself later transported for robbing a henroost.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, many of the rural poor in the novel suffer at the hands of an unjust social system. Joseph and Fanny, both classified as orphans and burdens on the parish, are purchased and kept like slaves by Sir Thomas and Lady Booby, often being mistreated. Adams, despite his integrity and his learning, is unable to gain advancement in the ecclesiastic system because he lacks money and influence. As a result, he, his wife and six children live in more abject poverty than most of the labouring people. Throughout the novel, the upper classes are continually represented as failing to fulfil their social obligations to provide for the labouring people. Instead of providing the people with employment, the upper classes prey upon them. Particularly treacherous is the "promising" squire, who, under pretext of providing employment for the poor people of his parish, lures them to their destruction, solely for his own amusement.<sup>3</sup> Causing great hardship to the rural poor is the practice of absenteeism amongst landowners. Sir Thomas and Lady Booby neglect their social responsibilities when resident on their country estate, but when they are resident in London, which they seem to be for most of the time, the poor people on their estate suffer even more. Fielding describes Lady Booby's return to her parish after Sir Thomas's death:

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<sup>1</sup>JA, IV, xii (Henley I, p 369).

<sup>2</sup>JA, I, xii (Henley I, p 65).

<sup>3</sup>JA, II, xvii (Henley I, p 205).

She entered the parish amidst the ringing of bells and the acclamations of the poor, who were rejoiced to see their patroness returned after so long an absence, during which time all her rents had been drafted to London, without a shilling being spent among them, which tended not a little to their utter impoverishing; for if the court would be severely missed in such a city as London, how much more must the absence of a person of great fortune be felt in a little country village, for whose inhabitants such a family finds a constant employment and supply, and with the offals of whose table the infirm, aged, and infant poor are abundantly fed, with a generosity which hath scarce a visible effect on their benefactors' pockets.<sup>1</sup>

In *Joseph Andrews* the greatest hardships inflicted on the rural poor by an unjust social system are those inflicted by the maladministration of those laws ostensibly providing for their welfare. The main law in this connection was the Elizabethan Poor Law, which directed parish officers to collect a tax, to support the aged and the disabled, to provide employment for the able-bodied, and to apprentice orphans and parish children.<sup>2</sup> In general, this law was badly administered and often exploited by parish officers for their own gain. Fielding's work as a barrister would have acquainted him with this situation. In *Joseph Andrews* he represents this law as providing little relief for the rural poor. The general attitude of those obliged to support the poor is expressed by Peter Pounce, "the greatest fault in our constitution is the provision made for the poor".<sup>3</sup> In the novel, there is little evidence of parish relief being distributed amongst the poor. We see no relief being given to the aged and the disabled, no employment provided for the able-bodied and no apprenticing of orphans or parish children. Other laws relating to the control of the poor, which Fielding in *Joseph Andrews* represents as causing them great hardship, are the various Acts of Settlement and the Vagrancy Acts, which defined the conditions under which people belonged to a parish, and under which they could move from district to district.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*JA*, IV, i (Henley I, p 313f).

<sup>2</sup>Elizabethan Poor Law (43 Elizabeth C.2). For the background to this and related Laws I am indebted to M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 11ff.

<sup>3</sup>*JA*, III, xiii (Henley I, p 310).

<sup>4</sup>See M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 11ff.

These laws provided parish officers with the machinery to relieve their parishes of potential burdens, and to prevent newcomers from taking up permanent residence. As one contemporary observed, "it was often more difficult for a poor man to pass the artificial boundaries of a parish than the arm of the sea or a ridge of high mountains".<sup>1</sup> All people on the move, such as itinerant workers, pedlars, gypsies and strolling players, were defined as vagrants, as idle and disorderly persons, and were hounded from parish to parish. The rural poor were more vulnerable, because more exposed in their open environment, and were more easily harassed than the urban poor, who found easier concealment in the city. In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding portrays the rural poor as being harassed from parish to parish by unscrupulous parish officers, lawyers and justices. One such victim is Gamma Andrews, who sought parish relief whilst her husband was away at war:

"... times growing very hard, and I having two children and nothing but my own work, which was little enough, God knows, to maintain them, was obliged to ask relief of the parish; but, instead of giving it me, they removed me, by justices' warrants, fifteen miles, to the place where I now live."<sup>2</sup>

Others to suffer under the maladministration of these laws are Joseph and Fanny. Under pretext of ridding it of potential burdens, Lady Booby tries to remove Joseph and Fanny from her parish where they have a legal settlement. To effect this purpose she employs Lawyer Scout and Justice Frolick to corrupt the laws. Lawyer Scout's description of Justice Frolick indicates how easily this could be done, and how vulnerable the poor were under the system:

"The laws of this land are not so vulgar to permit a mean fellow to contend with one of your ladyship's fortune. We have one sure card, which is, to carry him before Justice Frolick, who, upon hearing your ladyship's name, will commit him without any farther questions ... the justice will stretch in [the law]

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<sup>1</sup>Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, cited M.R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 25, n 27.

<sup>2</sup>*JA*, IV, xv (Henley I, p 385).

as far as he is able to oblige your ladyship. To say the truth, it is a great blessing to the country that he is in the commission, for he hath taken several poor off our hands that the law would never lay hold on. I know some justices who make as much of committing a man to Bridewell as his lordship at 'size would of hanging him; but it would do a man good to see his worship, our justice, commit a fellow to Bridewell, he takes so much pleasure in it; and when once we ha'un there, we seldom hear any more o'un. He is either starved or eat up by vermin in a month's time."<sup>1</sup>

Scout's description of Justice Frolick is true of many country justices throughout the novel.<sup>2</sup> One commentator sees it as being true of country justices in contemporary society.<sup>3</sup> Throughout *Joseph Andrews*, Scout's and Frolick's attitudes are typical of attitudes towards the poor, who are considered to be burdens on society, whose laws are designed for their punishment rather than their relief. The general feeling is summed up by Peter Pounce, who is here ridiculed for expressing the same attitude on poverty and the poor which Fielding himself expressed in *The Champion* and was to express in his later journals and social pamphlets:

"... who are meant by the distressed? Believe me, the distresses of mankind are mostly imaginary, and it would be rather folly than goodness to relieve them.... How can any man complain of hunger, ... in a country where such excellent salads are to be gathered in almost every field? or of thirst, where every river and stream produce such delicious potations? And as for cold and nakedness, they are evils introduced by luxury and custom. A man naturally wants clothes no more than a horse or any other animal; and there are whole nations who go without them".<sup>4</sup>

In *Joseph Andrews*, then, Fielding's sympathies are with the poor. Whilst he represents many of these people as being brutal and selfish, he also represents many as being benevolent, such as Betty the chambermaid, the postilion, the pedlar, Joseph, Fanny and the gentle-born yet poverty-stricken Abraham Adams.

<sup>1</sup>JA, IV, iii (Henley I, p 323f).

<sup>2</sup>JA, II, xi (Henley I, p 172f).

<sup>3</sup>B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 82.

<sup>4</sup>JA, III, xiii (Henley I, p 310).

Through these, and other characters, Fielding, in *Joseph Andrews*, on the whole represents the poor as being the victims of an unjust society. Although he portrays society as being badly administered in the eighteenth century, however, Fielding never questions the value of the traditional hierarchical social system, with the landed classes at the top and the labouring classes at the bottom; rather, he endorses this. At the end of the novel, it is the landed gentleman, Squire Booby, who sets all to rights. Squire Booby provides economic security for Parson Adams, the pedlar, Gaffa and Gamma Andrews, as well as a handsome dowry for Fanny, on her marriage to Joseph, who is discovered to be the son of Mr and Mrs Wilson. In *Joseph Andrews*, then, Fielding represents the poor as achieving happiness and security only in a traditional stratified system in which they remain subordinate to the landed classes, who in turn care paternalistically for them. With different emphases, this is largely the case in *Tom Jones*.

The major difference between the presentation of the rural poor in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* is that, in the latter novel, Fielding has lost many of the sympathies which he displayed towards these people in the earlier novel. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding's presentation of the rural poor is harsh. There are few paragons such as Joseph Andrews and Fanny Goodwill. Most of the rural poor in *Tom Jones* "plunder and pillage their rich neighbors without any reluctance".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in *Tom Jones*, we get the impression that the labouring people in the country are mostly criminals and ruffians.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Fielding is harsher on the rural poor in *Tom Jones* than in *Joseph Andrews* because of the support which many of these people gave to the Pretender in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in *Tom Jones*, Fielding displays some sympathy for the sufferings of the poor, such as those of the Seagrim family,<sup>4</sup> the Partridge family,<sup>5</sup> and the Anderson family,<sup>6</sup> this last, although

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<sup>1</sup>*TJ*, XII, i (Henley IV, p 302).

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter Three of this study.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter Three of this study.

<sup>4</sup>*TJ*, III, viii (Henley III, p 134) and *TJ*, III, ix (Henley III, p 137).

<sup>5</sup>*TJ*, II, vi (Henley III, p 91).

<sup>6</sup>*TJ*, XIII, viii (Henley V, p 68f).

gentle-born, being poverty-stricken. Much of the poverty of these three families is caused by their own imprudence or the evil doing of others, but the graphic portraits which Fielding presents of them almost starving and freezing to death indicate that life at the time was not easy for the poorer people. Partridge's description of the difficulties which he had in earning a living, after leaving Mr Allworthy's district,<sup>1</sup> indicates that the economy of the times was harsh for those obliged to earn their keep by their own hands.

In *Tom Jones*, as in *Joseph Andrews*, much suffering is inflicted upon the rural poor by the inadequate dispensation of justice but, in *Tom Jones*, Fielding's presentation of this problem is less deliberate than in *Joseph Andrews*. In *Tom Jones*, the chief dispenser of justice is Mr Allworthy, who is manoeuvred into making judgements which inflict much misery on the poor, particularly on the Seagrim<sup>2</sup> and Partridge<sup>3</sup> families. Allworthy's administration of the law, for a variety of reasons, is inconsistent. He commits Molly Seagrim to Bridewell for giving birth to an illegitimate child,<sup>4</sup> but allows Jenny Jones to go free after she abandons Tom Jones, whom he believes to be her son, in his own bed.<sup>5</sup> Although Fielding frequently exonerates Allworthy from all blame, we cannot but see that many of the rural poor in the novel suffer greatly as a result of his judgements.

Nevertheless, Allworthy is effective as a landlord, benevolent to the poor, providing for them in a manner in which Fielding believed they should be provided for by the landed classes. In rearing Tom Jones, the foundling, in his own house, he overrides the ruthlessness of the Elizabethan Poor Law, whereby deserted and orphaned children had to be reared, educated and apprenticed by the parish. Most, of course, were neglected.<sup>6</sup> Ruthless characters in

<sup>1</sup>*TJ*, XVIII, vi (Henley V, p 318f).

<sup>2</sup>*TJ*, III, ix (Henley III, p 137).

<sup>3</sup>*TJ*, II, vi (Henley III, p 91).

<sup>4</sup>*TJ*, IV, xi (Henley III, p 185).

<sup>5</sup>*TJ*, III, vii (Henley III, p 36 ff).

<sup>6</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 13.

the novel, such as Mrs Wilkins,<sup>1</sup> and Captain Blifil,<sup>2</sup> advise Allworthy to hand Tom Jones over to the parish. Captain Blifil expresses the inhumanity of the system when he says:

"Though the law did not positively allow the destroying such base-born children, yet it held them to be the children of nobody: that the church considered them as the children of nobody; and that at the best they ought to be brought up to the lowest and vilest offices of the commonwealth."<sup>3</sup>

Allworthy, however, refuses to accept such advice and rears the illegitimate foundling, Tom Jones, whom he also believes to be humbly-born, as his own son. Throughout the novel, Allworthy is constantly represented as being charitable to the poor,<sup>4</sup> and a pattern for responsible and benevolent social leadership in the manner of the landlords celebrated in the English "Country House" poems as discussed above. Symbolic of this social benevolence are the open doors and hospitable tables of the country houses, to which all classes are welcome.<sup>5</sup> Thus the traditional hierarchical social system with the landed classes at the top and the labouring classes at the bottom, is represented as a natural and moral economy, ordained by God.

The poets' presentation of the hierarchical system as being a natural and moral economy largely rested upon their ignoring the issue of labour. They ignored the fact that the produce so benevolently shared by the landlord was produced by the labouring classes themselves. In most of the poems, the produce is represented as being the providential gift of Nature, unworked for by Man.<sup>6</sup> By these means the poets could idealise the landlord for benevolently sharing with the poor what Nature gave to his estate.

<sup>1</sup>*TJ*, I, iii (Henley III, p 24f).

<sup>2</sup>*TJ*, II, ii (Henley III, p 67).

<sup>3</sup>*Loc.cit.*

<sup>4</sup>*TJ*, I, ii (Henley III, p 22).

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup>R. Williams, *op.cit.*, p 30ff).



The labourers are thereby portrayed as having obligations to the landlords. Pope, who continued the ideal in the eighteenth century expresses the ethos when he says that on Burlington's estate, the "... chearful tenants bless their yearly toil,/Yet to their Lord owe more than to the soil".<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams points out that there was nothing natural or moral about the economy on the country estates. The labouring classes were thoroughly exploited. Their status was that of the working animal. They produced the wealth but received a pittance in return. The wealth resulting from the exploitation, rather than being shared with them, went into the creation of larger and more efficient estates, which often led to the eviction of many poor villagers, as graphically described in Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*. Much of the wealth produced in the country was invested in the stock and companies in London.<sup>2</sup> According to Raymond Williams, all this makes a mockery of the country-city contrast in many of the "Country House" poems. What went on in London was generated by the demands of the rural economy. "The greed and calculation, so easily isolated and condemned in the city, run back, quite clearly, to the country houses, with the fields and their labourers around them."<sup>3</sup> In describing the real business on which the landed classes went to London, Williams points out (with reference to the characters in Restoration Comedy) that the real contrast was between them and the labouring classes whom they exploited:

What they brought with them, and what they came to promote, rested on the brief and aching lives of the permanently cheated: the field labourers whom we never by any chance see; the dispossessed and the evicted; all the men and women whose land and work paid their fares and provided their spending money. It was no moral case of 'God made the country and man made the town'. The English country, year by year, had been made and remade by men, and the English town was at once its image and its agent (honest or dishonest, as advantage served). If what was seen in the town

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington*, ll.183-184, in J. Butt., ed., *op.cit.*, p 594.

<sup>2</sup>R. Williams, *op.cit.*, p 37ff).

<sup>3</sup>R. Williams, *op.cit.*, P 48).

could not be approved, because it made evident and repellent the decisive relations in which men actually lived, the remedy was never a visitor's morality of plain living and high thinking, or a babble of green fields. It was a change of social relationships and of essential morality. And it was precisely at this point that the 'town and country' fiction served : to promote superficial comparisons and to prevent real ones.<sup>1</sup>

In *Tom Jones*, there is no mention of the economic facts of life which we saw (with all its satirical overtones) in Jonathan Wild's speech on "employing hands". We do not see any production of wealth on Allworthy's estate. It is simply there. Fielding merely describes Allworthy's distribution of it to the poor. Indeed, Fielding presents the labouring classes on Allworthy's estate as being mainly selfish and brutal and little deserving such charity. In commending Allworthy's benevolence to them, he actually describes the poor as "those who had rather beg than work".<sup>2</sup> In general, he portrays the working people at Paradise Hall as failing to fulfil their social obligations, that is, failing to be subservient to the will of their landlord, who fulfils his social obligations by being charitable towards them. Fielding finally represents the ideal hierarchical system, which is established by Tom and Sophia on Mr Western's estate at the end of the novel. As with Squire Booby at the end of *Joseph Andrews*, Tom and Sophia provide for those members of the labouring classes who had suffered great hardship throughout the novel, such as Partridge and the Seagrim family. Tom and Sophia are benevolent to everyone on their estate:

And such is their condescension, their indulgence, and their beneficence to those below them, that there is not a neighbor, a tenant, or a servant, who doth not most gratefully bless the day when Mr Jones was married to his Sophia.<sup>3</sup>

In *Tom Jones*, then, as in *Joseph Andrews*, the labouring classes are all provided for and are represented as achieving security and happiness only in a social system organised along traditional hierarchical lines.

<sup>1</sup>R. Williams, *op.cit.*, p 54.

<sup>2</sup>*TJ*, I, ii (Henley III, p 22).

<sup>3</sup>*TJ*, XVIII, Chapter the Last (Henley V, p 373).

However, as in the plays and ballad operas, sociological authenticity is not Fielding's main aim in presenting the labouring classes in these novels. He mainly presents these people for the purposes of satire against high life, and comedy. These two rhetorical purposes again largely determine the portrait of low life. Although much social reality is included in the portrait, Fielding's satiric purpose often alienates our sympathies from the people whose hardships are being portrayed. This is particularly so in *Tom Jones*. Similarly, Fielding's comic purpose sometimes has the effect of muffling the severity of the injustice or the suffering depicted. In reading of the activities of Justice Frolick in *Joseph Andrews*, for example, we are chiefly interested in his comic behaviour, rather than in his unjust treatment of the poor. Finally, the comic conclusion of both novels, in which the miseries suffered by the rural poor are all dissolved into a vision of ideal rural order, leaves us with the impression that these hardships had all the time been under the control of the Divine Providence, whose intention it was to set them all to rights at the end.

This impression is greatly assisted by the artistic techniques with which Fielding portrays life amongst the rural poor in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. He combines the realistic techniques of the new novel form with traditional stylising techniques to present authentic yet formal portraits of the lower classes. He does present many harsh realities about life amongst the rural poor, but he always harnesses and organises these harsh realities into his novels' elaborate artistic designs. The fact that he has these harsh realities under his artistic control, gives the impression that they are under the control of the Divine Providence whose creative faculties he is imitating in writing these novels. The confidence with which Fielding controls all aspects of both novels makes his concluding rural ideal convincing. His successful combination of old and new artistic techniques persuades us that a compromise between the old and the new social system could be effected and maintained, that the poor in the eighteenth century could be adequately provided for in a system organised along traditional lines.

In his miscellaneous and journalistic writings of the 1740s, Fielding, as in his early writings, presents many glimpses of the serious urban problems which concerned him as magistrate, such as gambling amongst the lower classes, prostitution, imprisonment for debt and the gin orgy. In *The Jacobite's Journal*, he again expresses that harsh attitude towards the labouring classes in London, which he first introduced in *The Champion*, and which becomes so prominent in his legal and social pamphlets. In *The Jacobite's Journal*, 31, July 2nd, 1748, he asserts that the proper objects for charity are distressed members of the gentry rather than destitute members of the labouring classes. In excluding these latter, he expresses a viewpoint towards them which he had ridiculed Peter Pounce for expressing in *Joseph Andrews*:

For, in the first Place, such Poor have no Wants beyond those Necessities which would arise in a pure and simple State of Nature; and these are so few, and so easily supplied, that in a well-regulated Society, scarce an Individual, unless from Sickness, Lameness, Old Age, or Infancy, can be destitute of them. And for the Support of Persons under any of these Disabilities, so small a Fund is really necessary, that it can hardly be supposed, even if there was no legal Provision, but that a Nation, where Christianity is established, and where Good-Nature so remarkably flourishes, would voluntarily contribute what would be abundantly sufficient for their Sustenance and Preservation.<sup>1</sup>

This viewpoint, that the labouring classes are entitled to, and should receive only a subsistence standard of living, becomes prominent in the legal and social pamphlets which Fielding produced after commencing duties as London magistrate in 1749.

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<sup>1</sup>*JJ*, 31, July 2nd, 1748 (Coley, p 328f).

## Section Three: The Final Writings

In October, 1748, Fielding was appointed Justice of the Peace for the City and Liberty of Westminster, and in November of that year, was presiding over his court in Bow Street, Covent Garden.<sup>1</sup> It was common for the Bow Street Justice to have his jurisdiction extended over the County of Middlesex, and in January, 1749, Fielding, with the aid of the Duke of Bedford, met the necessary property qualifications and was appointed magistrate for the County of Middlesex. This made him the principal London magistrate at the time.<sup>2</sup> He became more closely acquainted than ever before with the social problems confronting the poor in London. This new interest is immediately visible in the imaginative and non-imaginative writings which he produced from 1749 to 1754. According to B.M. Jones, "it may be said that all Fielding's activities and writings after he undertook the office of magistrate were directed towards an efficient discharge of his duty and recommending the lines along which reform should move".<sup>3</sup> To use Jones' words, all of Fielding's final writings employ "different methods of expressing and emphasizing the same views".<sup>4</sup>

Fielding took up his duties as magistrate at a time when poverty and crime were on the increase in London, and when the national rulers were becoming increasingly alarmed at these developments. The alarm is expressed in the two speeches with which King George II opened the parliamentary sessions of January and November of 1750. As indicated by this extract from the King's November speech, the alarm was particularly raised on the issue of crime in London:

"I cannot conclude without recommending to you, in the most earnest Manner, to consider seriously of some effectual provisions to suppress those audacious Crimes of Robbery and Violence, which are now become

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<sup>1</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 96ff.

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

<sup>3</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 162.

<sup>4</sup>*Loc.cit.*

so frequent, especially about this great Capital, and which have proceeded in a great measure from that profligate Spirit of Irreligion, Idleness, Gaming and Extravagance, which has of late extended itself, in an uncommon Degree, to the Dishonour of the Nation, and to the great Offence and Prejudice of the sober and industrious part of my People".<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the speech from the throne a parliamentary committee was formed and sat from February to June 1750 to analyse the problems of poverty and crime in London and to enact legislation to control them.<sup>2</sup> The activities of the parliamentary committee inspired a spate of writing on the problems of poverty and crime, amongst which were Fielding's social pamphlets, *An Inquiry Into The Causes Of The Late Increase Of Robbers* and *A Proposal For Making An Effectual Provision For The Poor*. The *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, published in 1751 and 1753 respectively, together with *A Charge Delivered To The Grand Jury* and *A True State Of The Case Of Bosavern Penlez*, published in 1749, *A Clear State Of The Case Of Elizabeth Canning*, published in 1753, and passages from *Amelia*, published in 1751, *The Covent Garden Journal*, published in 1752, and *The Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon*, published in 1755, contain Fielding's major statements on the urban problems of the age. Of these, the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* are the most important. The position taken generally by Fielding's critics is that, because of his experiences as magistrate, Fielding presents an authentic account of many of the social problems confronting the labouring classes in mid eighteenth century London. It is further argued that, in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, Fielding presents radical measures for humane social reform, measures which influenced the legislation of the early 1750s and led to an actual improvement in the living and working conditions of the labouring people.<sup>3</sup> This view has been challenged by Malvin Zirker, who, in

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<sup>1</sup>Extract from King's speech, November 14th, 1750 cited M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 34.

<sup>2</sup>The principal laws enacted were The Act Against Robbery and Disorderly Houses, in 1752 (24 George II c 36), The Murder Act, in 1752 (24 George II c 37), The Gin Act, in 1751 (24 George II c 30) and the Gin Act, in 1753 (26 George II c 31).

<sup>3</sup>Jensen, I, p 20ff, Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 255ff and B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 235ff.

his study of Fielding's social pamphlets, claims that in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, Fielding does not present realistic accounts of the poor and their problems, nor radical measures for humane social reform, and did not influence the laws enacted during the early 1750s.<sup>1</sup> Whether Fielding was at the centre of affairs and influenced the legislation of these years is not the issue under consideration in this chapter. What is under consideration is whether or not Fielding, in his social pamphlets and his later writings in general, presents an authentic account of the poor and the problems in mid eighteenth century London. Is Fielding, in describing poverty and crime amongst the labouring classes, expressing his individual responses to what he saw as a London magistrate?

Zirker argues not. He maintains that the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* do not present authentic accounts of the poor and their problems in mid eighteenth century London, nor expressions of Fielding's individual responses to what he saw as magistrate.<sup>2</sup> He argues that the social pamphlets are simply products of the intellectual environment of the age, of which Fielding was a part. According to Zirker, the social pamphlet was a highly conventional form in English literature and had for centuries described the poor and their problems in well-defined conservative legal, religious, socio-economic and linguistical categories. He argues that Fielding's legal training in the poor laws, his Whiggish economic principles and conservative religious and social beliefs induced him to accept these categories without question. According to Zirker, the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* are derived from social pamphlets, legal tracts, judicial records, committee reports, religious sermons and economic treatises, literature in which Fielding himself acknowledges a wide reading:

... having read over and considered all the laws, in any wise relating to the poor, with the utmost care and attention; and having been many years very particularly concerned in the execution of them.

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<sup>1</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 37ff.

<sup>2</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 3.

To these I have likewise added a careful perusal of everything which I could find that hath been written on this subject, from the original institution in the 43rd year of Elizabeth to this day.<sup>1</sup>

According to Zirker:

Fielding was, in fact, writing within a tradition which had its conventions as surely as any literary tradition. Fielding, we might note, always did work within a tradition. His plays, essays, and novels contain myriad borrowing from earlier works, and much of his success lies in his ability to create a new synthesis of familiar elements. That a similar synthesizing process was operative in the writing of the pamphlets should not surprise us.<sup>2</sup>

Zirker puts forward the following arguments. Fielding's *Inquiry* and *Proposal* are thoroughly conventional in subject matter, format, attitude and language. In the pamphlet tradition Fielding's subject matter is poverty and crime amongst the lower classes, and like the pamphleteers, he divides his discussion of these problems into various sections dealing with causes and remedies.<sup>3</sup> Like the pamphleteers, Fielding fails to define exactly whom he means by the "poor", but uses the term generally to describe the labouring classes, the destitute and the criminal.<sup>4</sup> Like his contemporaries he believed that all these people were the property of society and had a socio-economic, religious and legal duty to be subservient to that society.<sup>5</sup> Like the pamphleteers, and particularly those writing in the eighteenth century, his attitude towards the poor is harsh.<sup>6</sup> In the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, like other social writers, he blames the increases in poverty and crime on the failure of the poor to be subservient.<sup>7</sup> Like the pamphleteers, he describes the poor in harsh, abusive language,<sup>8</sup> and advocates repressive measures for once again bringing these people under the control of the system.<sup>9</sup> Zirker argues that Fielding's acceptance

<sup>1</sup>*Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 143f.

<sup>2</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 7.

<sup>3</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 46ff.

<sup>4</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 6.

<sup>5</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 28f.

<sup>6</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 97.

<sup>7</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 76ff.

<sup>8</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 70ff.

<sup>9</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 117ff.



of all these conventions makes the portrayal of the poor in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* as formal and stylised as that in any other literary genre, and that this limits his range as a social critic. Zirker argues that, in order to accept the conventions, Fielding had to blind himself to what was everyday coming before him as a London magistrate, the fact that poverty and crime were not sins inflicted on society by the insubordination of the poor but, rather, hardships inflicted on the poor by accelerating socio-economic change and the inability of antiquated and unjust legal and social institutions to cope with these changes.<sup>1</sup> This latter, then, is the main argument with which I have to contend in putting forward my viewpoint that Fielding, in his *Inquiry* and *Proposal*, inspired by what he daily saw as magistrate, presents an authentic account of many of the social problems confronting the poor in mid eighteenth century London. We do not argue with Zirker's assertion that the social pamphlet had many methodological and linguistic conventions and that Fielding, in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, follows some of these conventions. We do argue with Zirker's assertion, however, that in order to accept the conventions which he does accept, Fielding had to blind himself to the phenomena daily coming before him as a magistrate. Further, we challenge the view that this renders his portrayal of the poor and their problems in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* so formal and stylised as to make these pamphlets mere rhetorical exercises in a literary convention, with no relevance to contemporary reality. We argue with the assertion that acceptance of current method necessarily blinds a writer to all aspects of contemporary reality. On the surface, this argument would seem to be self-defeating. If acceptance of current procedure precludes all reference to contemporary reality, few writers would be able to portray contemporary reality since all writing to some extent is conventional. On reading the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* we are aware that Fielding is organising his material along accepted lines, but we are also aware that we are reading about social problems

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<sup>1</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 99.

confronting the poor in mid eighteenth century London. Fielding was very much a writer of his times but he was not without scepticism or innovation. The "synthesizing process" which characterises Fielding's general artistic technique does not consist only, as Zirker implies, "in an ability to weld together old literary conventions", but also in an ability to weld together literary conventions and personal observations. As I have often had occasion to point out in this thesis, use of literary convention and use of personal observation to describe a particular object, are, as creative techniques, opposed to one another, but they are not mutually exclusive, in that they can exist side by side in the same work. In the highly formal and stylised portrayal of the London poor in Fielding's early writings, we sometimes catch glimpses of real, contemporary social problems, which Fielding may have taken from personal observations. Fusion of literary convention and personal observation into a compatible creative technique greatly contributes to the success of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Literary convention and personal observation also co-exist in *Amelia*, but not so comfortably. Something of the same happens in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*. In these pamphlets we see Fielding using both convention and personal observation to describe the poor and their problems. With regard to the presentation of the material, these two techniques exist comfortably together. Fielding often describes the poor and their problems in conventional legal, religious and socio-economic categories, but almost invariably illustrates his points with personal observations made as magistrate, observations which he frequently introduces with words such as, "the truth of this I have often experienced",<sup>1</sup> "I have plainly perceived",<sup>2</sup> "I myself once saw",<sup>3</sup> and "instances of this I see daily".<sup>4</sup> The stresses and strains of combining the two techniques occur when opposing attitudes are brought into play by these two procedures. When describing the poor in conventional categories, Fielding is harsh on them, blaming their problems on their own

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<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 72.

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 34.

<sup>3</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 96.

<sup>4</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 34.

insubordination. When describing his personal observations on their condition, however, he is often moved to compassion, and represents them as suffering many hardships beyond their control. This can be briefly demonstrated by citing some of the phrases in which he describes them. When describing them in their conventional categories, he uses such terms as "the rabble",<sup>1</sup> "the vilest materials",<sup>2</sup> and "the very dregs of the people".<sup>3</sup> When presenting his observations on their condition he uses such terms as, "miserable creatures",<sup>4</sup> and "wretches".<sup>5</sup> Zirker's argument, then, is extreme. Fielding's legal training and conservative social beliefs certainly did influence his response to what he saw as a magistrate, and his reading of pamphlets and tracts certainly did influence the manner in which he recorded what he saw, but they did not blind him to the miseries and hardships of the people daily coming before him, nor prevent his recording these phenomena realistically. Interestingly, Zirker observes that in *Amelia*, the broad form of the novel, with its richer conception of the individual, enabled Fielding to be more sympathetic towards the poor.<sup>6</sup> We cannot but ask ourselves how somebody as intelligent and as sensitive as Fielding, could, in the space of three years, be in one work sympathetic towards the poor and in other works blind to their sufferings. Although less dramatic, there is much authenticity and compassion in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*. By citing passages from them, I propose to substantiate the argument of this chapter, that is, that Fielding, in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* (and in his later writings in general), has progressed from the formal and stylised portrait of the poor which he had presented in his early writings, to a more authentic account of them and their problems, derived from his personal observations as a London magistrate. I also propose to demonstrate that he has

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<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 26.

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 26.

<sup>3</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 22.

<sup>4</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 97.

<sup>5</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 127.

<sup>6</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 138.

progressed from a comic and farcical presentation of urban problems to one which is concerned with the serious social consequences of those phenomena. The relative displacement of rhetoric by realism can be demonstrated by comparing specific urban problems briefly introduced into the early writings but extensively presented in the later writings.

The most important issue discussed in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, one which leads on to discussion of all other issues, is that of poverty amongst the labouring classes in London. Hitherto, the only extensive presentation of poverty in Fielding's writings had been that amongst the rural poor in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The only important statements on poverty amongst the urban poor had been those in *The Champion*, February 16th, 1739-40 and in *JJ*, 31, July 2nd, 1748 (cited above), in which Fielding had dismissed such poverty as being insignificant, and had blamed that which did exist on the poor themselves. This position is greatly elaborated in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal*, in which Fielding describes the stratified system in which the labouring classes worked to support the upper classes as being an ordained order.

To be born for no other purpose than to consume the fruits of the earth is the privilege (if it may really be called a privilege) of very few. The greater part of mankind must sweat hard to produce them, or society will no longer answer the purpose for which it was ordained.<sup>1</sup>

In both pamphlets, he represents many members of the labouring classes in London as deliberately abandoning their work to emulate the upper classes in idleness and luxury, thereby making themselves a burden on society.

For having nothing but their labour to bestow on the society, if they withhold this from it they become useless members; and having nothing but their labour to procure a support for themselves they must of necessity become burdensome.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 23; see also *Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 138.

<sup>2</sup>*Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 138; see also *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 22f.

In *CGJ*, 49, June 20th, 1752, he claims that the labouring classes exploit the Elizabethan Poor Law which levied a tax on other classes to provide for them, in order to abandon work and live off the rest of society.<sup>1</sup> Here he was referring to the fact that the provision for the destitute was the only part of the Elizabethan Poor Law to receive significant attention in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The provision which he and his contemporaries considered to be the most important, that is, the one providing employment for the poor, was generally neglected.<sup>3</sup> He represents all this as placing the labouring classes in a position of advantage over other classes, with disastrous social consequences. In several places in his later writings he represents the working classes as being engaged in a deliberate campaign to overthrow civil authority and established order.<sup>4</sup> He urges that this insubordination be crushed by forcing the poor back to work for subsistence wages, which would keep them under control.<sup>5</sup> In the *Inquiry* he advocates that this be done by a reinforcement of the employment provision of the Elizabethan Poor Law.<sup>6</sup> In the *Proposal* he advocates that the poor be forced into work-houses organised on a county, rather than on a parish basis, as was traditional.<sup>7</sup> The work-house ideal, which generally failed in practice, but which, in principle, remained popular with the pamphleteers, was a strategy for enforcing all of the legal statutes pertaining to settlement, removal, vagrancy and employment, which had been enacted to keep the poor under control.<sup>8</sup> In putting forward a blueprint for a work-house and house of correction in the County of Middlesex, Fielding describes how such a place would discourage the flow of vagabonds from the country:

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<sup>1</sup> *CGJ*, 49, June 20th, 1752 (Jensen II, p 34f).

<sup>2</sup> M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 48ff.

<sup>4</sup> *CGJ*, 47, June 13th, 1752 (Jensen II, p 26); *CGJ*, 49, June 20th, 1752 (Jensen II, p 31ff); *A True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez*, (Henley XIII, p 259ff).

<sup>5</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 44ff, and *Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 145ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 48ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 169ff.

<sup>8</sup> M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 117ff.

Some of these are at present drawn hither, from those counties where their labour is often wanted, by the great encouragement which this town affords to beggars and thieves. Others come up with honester views at first; in which, being commonly disappointed, they betake themselves to the same means of procuring the bread of idleness: but when, instead of such alluring prospects, a work-house or a Bridewell shall present itself to their eyes, this swarm, it may easily be supposed, will soon cease, and the two houses will be little filled with such vagabonds.<sup>1</sup>

On reading Fielding's work-house plan, I agree with Zirker's observation that, in it, Fielding is repressive in his attitude towards the poor. As Zirker observes, Fielding's work-house would be a prison camp, displaying no regard for the needs of the individual, an ironic scheme, considering that it was designed to maintain a social system which emphasised human relationships.<sup>2</sup> I do not agree with Zirker's argument, however, that Fielding, in dealing with urban poverty, was totally blind to the sufferings of the poor. Zirker writes:

Fielding's remarks about beggars provide us with a clearcut instance of his failure to recognise what everyday experience might have made clear to him, the mere inevitability of the wretched state of the poor. His failure seems readily explainable as a result of the power of public opinion ...<sup>3</sup> What is striking about his acceptance of this particular set of clichés is the blindness to experience that was necessary to make it possible.<sup>4</sup>

In his social pamphlets and later writings in general, there is much ambivalence in Fielding's treatment of the poor and poverty. His conservative social convictions and his humanitarian instincts pulled him in opposite directions. He often describes England as a just and

<sup>1</sup>*Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 174.

<sup>2</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 131.

<sup>3</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 96.

<sup>4</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 99.

charitable society, as being a country "where the poor are, beyond all comparison, more liberally provided for than in any other part of the habitable globe".<sup>1</sup> He often represents London's beggars as being cheats:

... for he is much deceived who computes the number of objects in the nation from the great numbers which he daily sees in the streets of London. Among whom I myself have discovered some notorious cheats, and my good friend, Mr Welch, the worthy high constable of Holborn division, many more. Nothing, as I have been well informed, is more common among these wretches, than for the lame, when provoked, to use their crutches as weapons instead of supporters, and for the blind, if they should hear the beadles at their heels, to outrun the dogs which guided them before.<sup>2</sup>

He often represents charity to beggars as being a public crime. "This Kind of Bounty is a Crime against the Public. It is assisting the Continuance and Promotion of a Nuisance."<sup>3</sup> When expressing his humanitarian principles, however, he often compassionates the poor, representing them as being the victims of an unjust social system.<sup>4</sup> When in this frame of mind, he represents the poor as being genuinely in need and as being culpably neglected, as in this passage from *CGJ*, 11, February 8th, 1752, in which he puts forward a bizarre, Swiftian plan to solve poverty by advising the poor to eat their children.

it will be attributed to my humane disposition that I have proposed to lessen the severity of that death which is suffered by so many persons who, in the most miserable, lingering manner, do daily perish for want in this metropolis.<sup>5</sup>

In this humanitarian spirit, he continues to assert the value of benevolence. In *CGJ*, 39, May 16th, 1752, he asserts that the haves

<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 45.

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 57. In *CGJ*, 54, July 11th, 1752 (Jensen, II, p 57), he represents begging as being largely unknown in Elizabethan times when the famous Poor Law was enacted.

<sup>3</sup>*CGJ*, 44, June 2nd, 1752 (Jensen, II, p 10). See also *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 58.

<sup>4</sup>*CGJ*, 27, April 4th, 1752 (Jensen, I, p 293ff).

<sup>5</sup>*CGJ*, 11, February 8th, 1752 (Jensen, I, p 203f).

have a moral, social and religious obligation to give to the have-nots :

those who want, have by the Laws of Nature, A Right to a Relief from the Superfluities of those who abound; by those Laws therefore it is not left to the Option of the Rich, whether they will relieve the Poor and Distressed, but those who refuse to do it, become unjust Men and in reality deserve to be considered as ROGUES AND ROBBERS OF THE PUBLIC.<sup>1</sup>

During this period of his life, Fielding himself continued to practise much charity.<sup>2</sup> In his later writings, then, we see Fielding expounding two different viewpoints on the poor and poverty. Which of the opposing viewpoints is presented depends largely on the immediate rhetorical needs of the moment in which Fielding is writing. When expounding his conservative social convictions, he is, as Zirker says, harsh on the poor, portraying nothing of their real misery. When expressing his humanitarian principles, he portrays the poor as suffering many hardships. Zirker, himself, then, only sees one side of the picture. Fielding was not blinded to the poverty of the labouring classes. In many places in his social pamphlets, he did record that the plight of the poor was miserable and helpless. In this passage, ignored by Zirker, Fielding charges his contemporaries with just the kind of blindness to reality with which Zirker charges him:

The sufferings of the poor are indeed less observed than of their misdeeds; not from any want of compassion, but because they are less known; and this is the true reason why we so often hear them mentioned with abhorrence, and so seldom with pity. But if we were to make a progress through the outskirts of this town, and look into the habitations of the poor, we should there behold such pictures of human misery as must move

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<sup>1</sup>CGJ, 39, May 16th, 1752 (Jensen, I, p 357).

<sup>2</sup>For contemporary accounts see CGJ, 40, May 19th, 1752 (Jensen, I, p 363; see note in Jensen, II, p 226f). Fielding supported London's hospitals, as in CGJ, 44, June 2nd, 1752 (Jensen, II, p 13). He put forward practical proposals for feeding the poor in *Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon*, Henley XVI, p 263f). He did not make his judicial position into a profitable trade: *Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon* (Henley XVI, p 189). He actually claims that he sacrificed his health in the public service: *Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon* (Henley XVI, p 190). Contemporary newspapers reported him as a benevolent magistrate: B.M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 120.



the compassion of every heart that deserves the name of human. What, indeed, must be his composition, who could see whole families in want of every necessary of life, oppressed with hunger, cold, nakedness, and filth; and with diseases, the certain consequences of all these - what, I say, must be his composition who could look into such a scene as this, and be affected only in his nostrils? That such wretchedness as this is so little lamented, arises therefore from its being so little known; but, if this be the case with the sufferings of the poor, it is not so with their misdeeds. They starve, and freeze, and rot among themselves; but they beg, and steal, and rob among their betters.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, Fielding accuses his contemporaries of seeing only one side of the picture, pointing out that if they made closer observations, they would see real distress and poverty amongst the poor, which must move them to compassion. In the passage, we see Fielding suspending the conventional harshness of the social pamphlet to express the natural sympathy which he felt from making personal observations on the sufferings of the poor. The presentation of urban poverty in the passage is certainly more extensive and realistic than that in the early writings, an obvious product of Fielding's experiences as a London magistrate.

This process of conventional harshness broken through by compassion arising from personal observation is also true of Fielding's treatment of crime amongst the labouring classes in London. When Fielding began work as magistrate, violence was a part of daily life in London, which afforded an excellent environment for the criminal, as Fielding himself observes in his *Inquiry Into The Causes Of The Late Increase of Robbers*:

Whoever indeed considers the cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast addition of their suburbs, the great irregularity of their buildings, the immense number of lanes, alleys, courts, and bye-places; must think, that, had they been intended for the very purpose of concealment, they could scarce have been better contrived. Upon such a view the whole appears as a vast wood or forest, in which the

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<sup>1</sup>*Proposal*, Henley XIII, p 141. See also *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 97.

thief may harbour with as great security as wild beasts do in the deserts of Africa or Arabia; for, by *wandering* from one part to another, and often shifting his quarters, he may almost avoid the possibility of being discovered.<sup>1</sup>

According to Fielding in the *Inquiry*, the London environment conspired with defects in the legal system to render apprehension and conviction of criminals almost impossible, which, in turn, emboldened criminals to more desperate deeds. Thus Fielding describes one of the most desperate gangs:

... there are at this time a great gang of rogues, whose number falls little short of a hundred, who are incorporated in one body, have offices and a treasury, and have reduced theft and robbery into a regular system. There are of this society men who appear in all disguises, and mix in most companies. Nor are they better versed in every art of cheating, thieving, and robbing, than they are armed with every method of evading the law, if they should ever be discovered and an attempt made to bring them to justice. Here, if they fail in rescuing the prisoner, or (which seldom happens) in bribing or deterring the prosecutor, they have for their last resource some rotten members of the law to forge a defence for them, and a great number of false witnesses ready to support it.<sup>2</sup>

Fielding says that, "having seen the most convincing proofs of all this",<sup>3</sup> he would like to put a stop to the practices. He saw that the police force of the day was ineffective, describing them in *Amelia* as those "poor old decrepit people who are from their want of bodily strength, rendered incapable of getting a livelihood by work", whose duty it was "to secure the persons and houses of his Majesty's subjects from the attacks of gangs of young, bold, stout, desperate, and well-armed villains".<sup>4</sup> During the period from 1749 to 1754, Fielding re-organised London's police force, turning it into a body of efficient thief-takers.<sup>5</sup> In the introduction of *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, Fielding

<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 83.

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 20f.

<sup>3</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 21.

<sup>4</sup>*Amelia*, I, ii (Henley VI, p 16).

<sup>5</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 250ff.

describes how he demolished the gang which terrorised London late in 1753, at a time when he was ordered to rest on account of his poor health:

But I had the most eager desire of demolishing this gang of villains and cut-throats, which I was sure of accomplishing the moment I was enabled to pay a fellow who had undertaken, for a small sum, to betray them into the hands of a set of thief-takers whom I had enlisted into the service, all men of known and approved fidelity and intrepidity ... and within a few days after £200 of it had come into my hands the whole gang of cut-throats was entirely dispersed, seven of them were in actual custody, and the rest driven, some out of town, and others out of the kingdom.... Mean while amidst all my fatigues and distresses, I had the satisfaction to find my endeavours had been attended with such success, that this hellish society were almost utterly extirpated, and that, instead of reading of murders and street-robberies in the news, almost every morning, there was, in the remaining part of the month of November, and in all December, not only no such thing as a murder, but not even a street-robbery committed.... In this entire freedom from street-robberies, during the dark months, no man will, I believe, scruple to acknowledge, that the winter of 1753 stands unrival'd, during a course of many years; and this may possibly appear the most extraordinary to those who recollect the outrages with which it began.<sup>1</sup>

This is a far cry from the satirically motivated, abstract presentation of London's gangs in *Jonathan Wild*. As principal London magistrate, Fielding, during the early 1750s had become thoroughly acquainted with the urban crime itself, as the record of the proceedings of his court in Covent Garden, in *The Covent Garden Journal*, indicates. Under the impact of these experiences, he presents a more authentic account of the reigning gangs of the day. As with his diagnosis of the causes of poverty, Fielding's diagnosis of the causes of crime runs along conventional lines. On the basis of this he advocates remedying the situation by punishment and is harsh with regard to penalties. He asserts that too much mercy is pernicious to society, rendering the law ineffectual.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon*, Henley XVI, p 188f.

<sup>2</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 121.

He advocates the death sentence for thefts of a few shillings.<sup>1</sup> He represents public executions at Tyburn as being ineffectual, as leading to the self-glorification enjoyed by Jonathan Wild.<sup>2</sup> He urges that the death sentence be rendered more terrible by being executed soon after conviction and in private. Thus Fielding in the *Inquiry* is harsh on the poor with regard to crime. Fielding, however, is not without compassion for the criminal. Even Zirker observes that Fielding exercised humanity as magistrate.<sup>3</sup> In the *Inquiry*, humanity and compassion often break through the harshness. Fielding actually points out that rehabilitation, rather than punishment, was the solution in some instances. Thus he advises against the house of correction for novices in crime, describing such houses as, "no other than schools of vice, seminaries of idleness and common sewers of nastiness and disease".<sup>4</sup> He questions the efficacy of imprisoning people in these houses:

What good consequence then can arise from sending idle and disorderly persons to a place where they are neither to be corrected nor employed; and where, with the conversation of many as bad, and sometimes worse than themselves, they are sure to be improved in the knowledge, and confirmed in the practice, of iniquity? Can it be conceived that such persons will not come out of these houses much more idle and disorderly than they went in? The truth of this I have often experienced in the behaviour of the wretches brought before me; the most impudent and flagitious of whom have always been such as have been before acquainted with the discipline of Bridewell; a commitment to which place, though it often causes great horror and lamentation in the novice, is usually treated with ridicule and contempt by those who have already been there.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of his personal observations as magistrate, then, Fielding urges that the circumstances of the individual criminal be taken into account and that the sentence be adjusted to suit these circumstances. His final statement on the issue of crime

<sup>1</sup>*Loc.cit.*

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 122.

<sup>3</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 59.

<sup>4</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 71.

<sup>5</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 72.

displays his real compassion for the people involved:

Upon the whole, something should be, nay, must be done, or much worse consequences than have hitherto happened are very soon to be apprehended. Nay, as the matter now stands, not only care for the public safety, but common humanity, exacts our concern on this occasion; for that many cart-loads of our fellow-creatures are once in six weeks carried to slaughter is a dreadful consideration; and this is greatly heightened by reflecting, that, with proper care and proper regulations, much the greater part of these wretches might have been made not only happy in themselves, but very useful members of society, which they now so greatly dishonour in the sight of all Christendom.<sup>1</sup>

Here Fielding's concern for the system is outweighed by his concern for the people themselves. He actually describes these people as being victims of social neglect and points out that proper care could have prevented their criminal activities and subsequent execution. Fielding, then, was not blind to the stark realities of criminal life in London. His awareness of the fact that many poor people were driven to criminal activity by poverty is apparent in his discussion of the contribution made to crime in London by the vagabonds, those destitute and homeless people (usually parish children and immigrants from the country or Ireland), who roamed the streets in search of bread, which many could gain only by stealing it. Throughout his social pamphlets, Fielding is harsh on the vagabonds, recommending that they be herded into work-houses. He is not, however, as Zirker claims, blind to the sufferings of the homeless and destitute. In this passage from the *Inquiry*, ignored by Zirker, Fielding, from his own personal observations on the miseries of the homeless, actually expresses surprise that there is not more crime than there is, given the enormous inducement of poverty:

Nay, I can add, what I myself once saw in the parish of Shoreditch, where two little houses were emptied of near seventy men and women; amongst whom was one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen, who had been carried off by an Irishman, to consummate her marriage on her wedding-night in a room where several others

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<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 126f.

were in bed at the same time.

If one considers the destruction of all morality, decency, and modesty; the swearing, whoredom, and drunkenness, which is eternally carrying on in these houses, on the one hand, and the excessive poverty and misery of most of the inhabitants on the other, it seems doubtful whether they are more the objects of detestation or compassion; for such is the poverty of these wretches, that, upon searching all the above number, the money found upon all of them (except the bride, who, as I afterwards heard, had robbed her mistress) did not amount to one shilling; and I have been credibly informed, that a single loaf hath supplied a whole family with their provisions for a week. Lastly, if any of these miserable creatures fall sick (and it is almost a miracle that stench, vermin, and want, should ever suffer them to be well) they are turned out in the streets by their merciless host or hostess, where, unless some parish officer of extraordinary charity relieves them, they are sure miserably to perish, with the addition of hunger and cold to their disease.

This picture, which is taken from the life, will appear strange to many; for the evil here described is, I am confident, very little known, especially to those of the better sort. Indeed this is the only excuse, and I believe the only reason, that it hath been so long tolerated; for when we consider the number of these wretches, which, in the outskirts of the town, amounts to a great many thousands, it is a nuisance which will appear to be big with every moral and political mischief. Of these the excessive misery of the wretches themselves, oppressed with want, and sunk in every species of debauchery, and the loss of so many lives to the public, are obvious and immediate consequences. There are some more remote, which, however, need not be mentioned to the discerning.

Among other mischiefs attending this wretched nuisance, the great increase of thieves must necessarily be one. The wonder in fact is that we have not a thousand more robbers than we have; indeed, that all these wretches are not thieves must give us either a very high idea of their honesty<sup>1</sup>, or a very mean one of their capacity and courage.

Here, Fielding can hardly be accused of being blind to the fact that many of the poor were driven to crime by real poverty. In his *Inquiry*, Fielding is certainly harsh on the poor with regard to crime, but as with his treatment of other issues, this conventional

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<sup>1</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 96ff.

harshness is often broken through by compassion arising from the personal observations which he made as magistrate on the sufferings of the destitute in London. We are certainly given a more authentic account of contemporary reality than in the early writings.

The relative authenticity with which Fielding portrays social problems confronting the poor in London in his later writings, when compared to his portrayal of these problems in his early writings, is clearly visible in his treatment of the orgy of gin-drinking amongst the lower classes. This gin-drinking amongst the poor was one of the major social problems of the age, aggravating all others. The situation was particularly appalling in the parish of St Giles, the scene of Hogarth's graphic painting on the horrors of alcoholism, "Gin Lane", published in 1751. New legislation was called for, and the strict provisions of the Gin Act of 1751 were enacted in June of that year. Fielding made his contribution to the call for legislation in his *Inquiry* (published in January 1751), in which he asserts that gin was a major cause of crime in London. Some critics see Fielding as having influenced the legislation which was enacted.<sup>1</sup> Zirker, on the other hand, asserts that Fielding in the *Inquiry* was simply mouthing commonplaces, conventionally lamenting the effects of alcoholism on society and the economy, and ignoring the misery which it inflicted on the poor themselves:

Fielding brought nothing new to the discussion of drunkenness. He had no observations to make, recommendations to offer, or opinions to deliver that can be said to be his alone.... All had been said before in pretty much the same way.<sup>2</sup>

According to Zirker, Fielding:

simply brought to bear on a nearly insoluble problem his minor authority as a justice of the peace and considerable prestige as a famous novelist. The blinding power of the clichés of his time together with the mercantilistic concerns of the results of inebriation could only lead to the question "how can we prevent the poor from drinking?" It was many years before anyone would ask, "why do the poor drink?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 174 and Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 276.

<sup>2</sup>M. R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 90.

<sup>3</sup>*Lcc.cit.*

The following passage substantiates Zirker's claim, that Fielding was concerned about the liabilities which alcoholism amongst the poor inflicted on society:

What must become of the infant who is conceived in Gin? with the poisonous distillations of which it is nourished both in the womb and at the breast. Are these wretched infants (if such can be supposed capable of arriving at the age of maturity) to become out future sailors, and our future grenadiers? Is it by the labour of such as these that all the emoluments of peace are to be procured us, and all the dangers of war averted from us? What could an Edward or a Henry, a Marlborough or a Cumberland, effect with an army of such wretches? Doth not this polluted source, instead of producing servants for the husbandman or artificer, instead of providing recruits for the sea or the field, promise only to fill almshouses and hospitals, and to infect the streets with stench and diseases?

In solem truth, there is nothing of more serious consideration, nor which more loudly calls for a remedy, than the evil now complained against. For what can be more worthy the care of the legislature, than to preserve the morals, the innocence, the health, strength and lives of the greater part (I will repeat, the most useful part) of the people?<sup>1</sup>

This conventional harshness and concern for the state, however, is broken through by compassion whenever Fielding describes his personal observations on alcoholism amongst the poor. This is apparent in this passage in which he points out that intoxication alone was often responsible for crime amongst the poor:

Many instances of this I see daily; wretches are often brought me, charged with theft and robbery, whom I am forced to confine before they are in a condition to be examined; and when they have afterwards become sober, I have plainly perceived, from the state of the case, that the Gin alone was the cause of the transgression, and have been sometimes sorry that I was obliged to commit them to prison.<sup>2</sup>

Here, then, Fielding is not blind to the misery inflicted on the poor by alcoholism, nor without compassion for the tragic circumstances in which it often involved them. He is certainly

<sup>1</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 35.

<sup>2</sup>*Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 34.



giving the problem a more serious and realistic treatment than he had done in his early writings. Under the impact of his experiences as London magistrate, then, rhetoric gives way to realism.

In discussing the authenticity with which Fielding portrays urban problems in his *Inquiry* and *Proposal*, I have dealt with his treatment of three issues, poverty, crime and alcoholism. In the social pamphlets, Fielding deals with other social issues concerning the poor, such as gambling,<sup>1</sup> and the emulation of fashionable diversions.<sup>2</sup> Although the presentation of these issues is less authentic than the presentation of poverty, crime and alcoholism, it is nevertheless more realistic, extensive and serious than the portrayal in the early writings. The main issues dealt with in the *Inquiry* and *Proposal*, however, are poverty, crime and alcoholism, which were the major social problems of the age, and my case, that Fielding, in his social pamphlets, presents a more authentic account of problems confronting the poor than in his early writings, has been demonstrated by an analysis of his treatment of these three issues. As Zirker argues, there is conventional harshness in Fielding's presentation of poverty, crime and alcoholism, but this harshness is often broken through by compassion on the many occasions when Fielding records the personal observations which he made on the sufferings of the poor as London's principal magistrate. The extent to which his magisterial experiences moved him to compassionate the sufferings of the poor is most visible in his later writings in his final novel, *Amelia*.

*Amelia* was published in December, 1751.<sup>3</sup> Presumably it was written during the same period as the *Inquiry*.<sup>4</sup> Many of the social problems discussed in the *Inquiry* are also discussed in *Amelia* so that many critics have seen *Amelia* as part of Fielding's programme for social reform.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the story of Tom and Sophia in *Tom Jones* is dramatised against a glittering Westminster background, drawn mainly from the conventions of genteel comedy, the story of

<sup>1</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 37ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Inquiry*, Henley XIII, p 21ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 304.

<sup>4</sup> Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 311.

<sup>5</sup> B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 160 and Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 312f.

Booth and Amelia is dramatised against a squalid background of urban crime and poverty, drawn mainly from Fielding's observations as a magistrate. In realising its didactic aim, "to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private, which at present infest the country",<sup>1</sup> the novel plunges straight into an *exposé* of social problems. The first problem exposed is that of the corrupt London trading justice, a problem which Fielding had dealt with in his comedy, *The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*. Just like Constant in the play, Booth, a benevolent country gentleman, newly arrived in London, rescues a man being assaulted in the streets, is arrested by the watch and carried before a corrupt justice, by whom he is tried and committed to prison. Here the similarities end. In the play, the treatment of the maladministration of justice in London is comic and conventional. In the novel it is more serious and realistic. In *Amelia*, the problem is dramatised through the character of Justice Jonathan Thrasher who, according to Fielding, "was never indifferent in a cause but when he could get nothing on either side".<sup>2</sup> In the scene in which Booth is tried, Fielding presents a vivid and extensive picture of Thrasher's corrupting the law to serve his own ends. One historian sees the picture as being an authentic representation of contemporary reality:

Fielding's Justice Thrasher (in *Amelia*) is not a caricature, it is a portrait (ironic but not exaggerated) of a type. His like is to be found in many formal reports of the Middlesex Sessions to the Lord Chancellor on the scandalous enormities of justices who were bringing the whole Bench into discredit.<sup>3</sup>

Fielding certainly had a sound knowledge of the contemporary situation. According to B.M. Jones,<sup>4</sup> when Fielding took up office in 1748, the position of Justice of the Peace for Westminster was held in disrepute. A practice had developed of allowing the justice to use the position to enrich himself and this meant that

<sup>1</sup>*Amelia*, Dedication to Ralph Allen (Henley VI, p 12).

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia*, I, ii (Henley VI, p 17).

<sup>3</sup>M. D. George, *op.cit.*, p 19.

<sup>4</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 114ff.

only inferior justices could be induced to accept the office. In the preface to *The Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon*, Fielding claims that he, unlike his predecessor, did not use the position to enrich himself. In making this claim he intimates that it was common practice for justices to prey upon the poor:

... my private affairs at the beginning of the winter had but a gloomy aspect; for I had not plundered the public or the poor of those sums which men, who are always ready to plunder both as much as they can, have been pleased to suspect me of taking: on the contrary, by composing, instead of inflaming, the quarrels of porters and beggars (which I blush when I say hath not been universally practised) and by refusing to take a shilling from a man who most undoubtedly would not have had another left, I had reduced an income of about £500 a year of the dirtiest money upon earth, to little more than £300; a considerable proportion of which remained with my clerk.<sup>1</sup>

Fielding, then, knew of the reality of the trading justices. His portrayal of the problem in *Amelia* is realistic. Justice Thrasher is more realistically and harshly presented than Justice Squeezum of *The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, or any of the justices of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*. In portraying Justice Thrasher, Fielding does not completely abandon literary convention. Thrasher's name, together with his ignorance and incompetence, indicates that he is meant to resemble the comic stereotype. Fielding generalises the portrait by refusing to name Thrasher's parish,<sup>2</sup> thereby preventing the identification of the justice with any living justice. According to C.J. Rawson,<sup>3</sup> there are tensions between these realistic and conventional elements in Fielding's portrayal of Justice Thrasher. Rawson claims that these tensions result from an oscillation between a loosening up and an over-tightening of Fielding's grip on the raw materials of life, as Fielding struggles between an awareness of brutal realities outside the Augustan concept of natural order, and a wish to formalise all realities into artistic emblems of that concept of

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<sup>1</sup>*Journal Of A Voyage To Lisbon* (Henley XVI, p 189f).

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia*, I, ii (Henley VI, p 14).

<sup>3</sup>C. J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, p 495ff.

natural order. The implications which Rawson's statements on Fielding's creative technique in *Amelia* have for this study have been extensively analysed in Chapter Four of this thesis. The same observations apply here. As Rawson argues, Fielding, shocked by Thrasher's brutalities, portrays them with harsh realism, yet tries to control them with a formality of presentation. Under the impact of his magisterial experiences, and a general disillusionment with life and literature, he is no longer in control of his material. Many of Thrasher's shocking brutalities escape his organising grasp. Moreover, Thrasher has none of the redeeming humanity and boisterous humour of Fielding's earlier justices. He is ruthless and inefficient. Unlike Justice Squeezum, he is not caught in his own trap, as was the tradition.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the worthy justice who convicts Squeezum at the end of *The Justice Caught In His Own Trap*, the worthy justice who intervenes at the end of *Amelia* does not catch Thrasher. Fielding introduces this worthy Justice (whom Cross sees as a half-serious portrait of Fielding himself)<sup>2</sup> as an instrument of Divine Providence, to set all to rights as instruments of Providence had done at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. This attempt to balance out Thrasher's evil, at the beginning of the novel, with a dispensation of good justice at the end does not succeed. Thrasher's corruption is too systematic and expresses too vividly a major theme pervading the entire novel, that is, the divorce between legal and social institutions and the human needs which they theoretically serve. Thrasher represents the system at its most corrupt and, despite the measure of order achieved at the end, this corrupt system still prevails. In Thrasher, then, Fielding gives a vivid picture of the maladministration of justice in London. In his portrayal of Thrasher's victims, he gives a vivid picture of the miseries inflicted on the London poor by the corruption of the judicial system.

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<sup>1</sup>I. Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, p 1ff.

<sup>2</sup>Cross, *op.cit.*, II, p 322.

Thrasher commits Booth, who is unable to pay bribes for his release, to Newgate Prison, where he finds as many wrongfully imprisoned as himself. Booth is taken on a guided tour by another inmate, Mr Robinson, and in describing his observations, Fielding continues his *exposé* of Thrasher's corruption and exposes another major social evil of the age, the corruption of the prison system, in which treatment of prisoners depended on their capacity to pay for services. In Newgate, Booth encounters many hardened criminals who enjoy privileges, and many poor people, committed for their poverty and living in great misery. In portraying this misery, Fielding gives the most realistic presentation of the poverty and sufferings of the urban poor in his writings. In these descriptions he obviously draws on the personal observations which he made as a magistrate. According to B.M. Jones, "it is clear that Fielding himself, unlike his brother justices, had inspected some of the prisons".<sup>1</sup> As well as being Fielding's most realistic presentation of the urban poor, it is also his most sympathetic. We had seen in the *Inquiry* and the *Proposal* how Fielding's compassion had often broken through the conventional harshness of the social pamphlet. In the novel form, with its richer and more complex conception of the individual in society, he was able to return to the more general sympathy which he had expressed towards the poor in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The following extracts on Booth's observations on Newgate demonstrate the degree of realism and sympathy in the presentation:

... A little farther they beheld a man prostrate on the ground, whose heavy groans and frantic actions plainly indicated the highest disorder of mind. This person was, it seems, committed for a small felony; and his wife, who then lay-in, upon hearing the news, had thrown herself from a window two pair of stairs high, by which means he had, in all probability, lost both her and his child.<sup>2</sup>

They now beheld a little creature sitting, (by herself), in a corner and crying bitterly. This girl, Mr Robinson said, was committed because her father-in-law who was in the grenadier guards, had sworn that he

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<sup>1</sup>B. M. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 219. See also p 210ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Amelia*, I, iv (Henley VI, p 26).

was afraid of his life, or of some bodily harm which she would do him, and she could get no sureties for keeping the peace; for which reason Justice Thrasher had committed her to prison.<sup>1</sup> .... When this bustle was a little allayed, Mr Booth took notice of a young woman in rags sitting on the ground, and supporting the head of an old man in her lap, who appeared to be giving up the ghost. These, Mr Robinson informed him, were father and daughter; that the latter was committed for stealing a loaf, in order to support the former, and the former for receiving it, knowing it to be stolen.<sup>2</sup> .... This [miserable object] was a wretch almost naked, and who bore in his countenance, joined to an appearance of honesty, the marks of poverty, hunger, and disease. He had, moreover, a wooden leg, and two or three scars on his forehead. "The case of this poor man is indeed unhappy enough," said Mr Robinson. "He hath served his country, lost his limb, and received several wounds, at the siege of Gibraltar. When he was discharged from the hospital abroad he came over to get into that of Chelsea, but could not immediately, as none of his officers were then in England. In the mean time, he was one day apprehended and committed hither on suspicion of stealing three herrings from a fishmonger. He was tried several months ago for this offence, and acquitted; indeed his innocence manifestly appeared at the trial; but he was brought back again for his fees, and here he hath lain ever since."<sup>3</sup>

This is a far cry from the stylised portrait of Newgate in *Jonathan Wild*, which was formalised to serve satirical purposes. In *Amelia* the portrait is harsh and realistic. In describing their "felonies" outside Newgate, and the conditions of their imprisonment inside Newgate, Fielding catalogues almost all of the problems confronting the poor in mid eighteenth century London, such as poverty, petty crime, prostitution, alcoholism and the maladministration of the legal system and the corruption in the prison system. The compassion which permeates the graphic detail of each description is born of anger as most of the inmates of Newgate are represented as being the victims of an unjust social system. In the *Inquiry*, Fielding had advocated the death sentence for thefts over one shilling.

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia*, I, iv (Henley VI, p 27).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia*, I, iv (Henley VI, p 27f).

<sup>3</sup> *Amelia*, I, iv (Henley VI, p 29).

In his description of the Daughter who stole bread for her father, who received it knowing it to be stolen, he represents the system as being unjustly harsh on benevolent individuals, as he had done with the postilion who was transported for robbing a henroost in *Joseph Andrews*.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, important differences in the presentation of these episodes in *Amelia* and *Joseph Andrews*. In describing the fate of the postilion, Fielding's tone is comic and detached. The incident is treated in a light-hearted manner. The brevity and lack of particularity suggest that all is under control. There is no attention to the emotional suffering of the individual. This is not the case with the daughter and her father in *Amelia*. In this incident, Fielding has lost his comic detachment and ironic poise. He is painfully involved in the sufferings of the people, dwelling on each detail with protesting outrage. As with the presentation of Justice Thrasher, there is an oscillation between a loosening up and an overtightening of Fielding's grip on the raw materials of life. Shocked by the horrors of Newgate, he presents them with harsh realism, yet still tries to bring them under control with a formality of presentation. According to Rawson there is "a painful determination to maintain some kind of organising grasp over it through pointed orderings of style".<sup>2</sup> To this end, the descriptions of the prisoners and their sufferings are presented in a series of set pieces. In some descriptions, such as that of Blear-eyed Moll, he even tries to hang onto his old mock heroics.<sup>3</sup> The disease, starvation, madness, grotesque savagery and merriment of the various prisoners, together with the explicit references to sordid homosexual and heterosexual activities are all brutal facts of life which escape Fielding's organising grasp. The unpredictable, incomprehensible incongruities all indicate a Fielding no longer controlling his material through witty insight, but helpless before a cruel situation. He is not able to set all to rights as at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.

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<sup>1</sup>*A Journey From This World To The Next* (Henley II, p 243). See also *JA*, I, xii (Henley I, p 65).

<sup>2</sup>C. J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, p 497.

<sup>3</sup>C. J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, p 400ff.

The measure of order achieved at the end of *Amelia* does not extend to Newgate Prison, the brutalities of which continue unchecked. In his presentation of Newgate Prison, then, Fielding, from his observations as a magistrate, presents an authentic account of a major social problem confronting the poor in mid eighteenth century London.

This oscillation between realism and an attempt to formalise characterises Fielding's presentation of other urban problems in *Amelia*, such as the problem of imprisonment for debt. In describing Booth's imprisonment in Mr Bondum's house, Fielding tries to maintain the ironic poise with which he had described Count La Ruse's imprisonment in Mr Snap's house in *Jonathan Wild*:<sup>1</sup>

... for the bailiff was reckoned an honest and good sort of man in his way, and had no more malice against the bodies in his custody than a butcher hath to those in his; and as the latter, when he takes his knife in hand, hath no idea but of the joints in which he is to cut the carcass; so the former, when he handles his writ, hath no other design but to cut out the body into as many bail-bonds as possible. As to the life of the animal, or the liberty of the man, they are thoughts which never obtrude themselves on either.<sup>2</sup>

As C.J. Rawson observes, Fielding's portrayal of Bondum's cruelties, as with those of Thrasher and Newgate, is harsh and realistic, but Fielding still tries to control the cruelty with a formality of presentation, portraying Bondum, as his name suggests, as something of the old comic stereotype. As with the presentation of Thrasher and Newgate, this does not succeed and the result is a harsh presentation of the cruelty of imprisonment for debt.<sup>3</sup> The same is true of Fielding's portrayal of other urban problems which form the background to the story of Booth and Amelia. As the action revolves around these and other gentle-born characters, we are often given glimpses of social problems confronting the poor. These are scattered throughout the novel as realistic observations, without being subordinated to any rhetorical design, yet Fielding does not completely abandon artistry. Confronted by the

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<sup>1</sup> *JW*, I, iv (Henley II, p 12).

<sup>2</sup> *Amelia*, VIII, i (Henley VII, p 69).

<sup>3</sup> C. J. Rawson, *op.cit.*, p 497.



disintegration of the social system which he revered, he presents London's disorders harshly and realistically, yet still strives to advocate the maintenance of the traditional system with traditional artistic methods by trying to formalise reality. At the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding had left London as he had found it, but its highly formal presentation left us with the impression that its chaos was under cosmic control. Moreover, at the end of both novels, all of the good characters had been taken away to the country where London could no longer harm them. This is not the case in *Amelia*. The Divine Providence which, at the end of the novel, intervenes with a series of coincidences to snatch Booth and Amelia away to Wiltshire, does nothing to rescue the many innocent poor people suffering at the hands of Justice Thrasher, Newgate Prison and an unjust social system. At the conclusion, London's disorders continue to inflict great misery on the urban poor. Thus we receive a graphic portrayal of contemporary reality to the end.

At the end of *Amelia* Fielding leaves the London poor to their fate but, as always at the end of his novels, his alternative to the chaos of London is the rural ideal. As at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the poor are represented as achieving security and happiness only in a system organised along traditional lines and achieved in a rural setting. This ideal had been portrayed earlier in the novel in Booth's description of Dr Harrison's management of his parish in Wiltshire:

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 law-suits; 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>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia*, III, xii (Henley VI, p 164).

This is an essentially Feudal ideal in which the poor are cared for paternalistically by the landed classes, to whom they are in turn subservient. Fielding's concept of what the poor should be is represented in the novel by Sergeant Atkinson and his mother, who dedicate themselves to Booth and Amelia. At the end of the novel, they are rewarded for their social virtues by being provided for on Amelia's estate in Wiltshire, and Atkinson, despite his low social origins, is married to Mrs Bennet. In describing Booth's and Amelia's arrival in Wiltshire following Booth's release from prison in London, Fielding draws on the "Country House" ideal which he had used at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* to represent provision for the poor by the landed classes as a natural and moral order:

About a week afterwards Booth and Amelia, with their children, and Captain Atkinson and his lady, all set forward together for Amelia's house, where they arrived amidst the acclamations of all the neighbours and every public demonstration of joy.

They found the house ready prepared to receive them by Atkinson's friend, the old sergeant, and a good dinner prepared for them by Amelia's old nurse [Atkinson's mother], who was addressed with the utmost duty by her son and daughter, most affectionately caressed by Booth and his wife, and by Amelia's absolute command seated next to herself at the table.<sup>1</sup>

Every symbol of social solidarity, family, community and hierarchy, is stressed. In the various tributes paid to old Mrs Atkinson, Fielding insists more emphatically on the solidarity between the social classes than he does at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. This seems like a desperate attempt to balance out the total lack of social solidarity prevailing in London throughout the novel. Amelia's absolute command that old Mrs Atkinson be seated next to herself at the table represents an insistent alternative to the total lack of concern displayed towards the poor by the upper classes in London. Compared to Fielding's earlier novels, then, there is a greater insistence on rural order alongside a more vivid picture of urban disorder, as Fielding struggles to maintain his old ideals in the face of a more uncompromising reality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Amelia*, XII, x (Henley VII, p 338).

In reality, as discussed in the Introduction to this chapter,<sup>1</sup> life for the poor in the country was not ideal. According to Malvin Zirker, Fielding, confronted with what he saw as the irrevocable disintegration of the traditional society, maintains his serenity by using the rural ideal of fiction to escape from the necessity of confronting the realities of socio-economic change in London.<sup>2</sup> According to Zirker, Fielding's real plans for the poor can be found in his social pamphlets, where it was not the country estate with its benevolent landlord but, rather, the county work-house and county house of correction which would provide for the poor by virtually imprisoning them and depriving them of the human relationships on which the Feudal system presumably relied.<sup>3</sup> This is the solution which Fielding offers in his social pamphlets, where, as magistrate, he knew that the poor could not be provided for in any rural ideal. But, in *Amelia*, he was able to return to the humanitarian ideals of his earlier novels. At the end of *Amelia*, however, the conventional vision of rural order achieved for the poor is not satisfactory. The presentation of social problems confronting the poor in London is too harshly realistic. The intractability of the urban chaos presented renders resolution by Fielding impossible.

In *Amelia*, then, Fielding is not successful in resolving social conflict as he had been in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In the optimistic atmosphere of these earlier novels, over which he presides with great confidence, the concluding rural ideal is made to seem a valid alternative to the chaos of London, which is always under Fielding's artistic control. As we have seen, in portraying society in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* Fielding had been very successful in combining traditional creative techniques with modern creative techniques and this had left us with the impression that a compromise between the old and the new social systems which had produced those artistic methods could be effected and maintained. In *Amelia*, however, he is not so successful in combining the traditional with

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p 359.

<sup>2</sup>M.R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 138f.

<sup>3</sup>M.R. Zirker, *op.cit.*, p 136.

the modern techniques and this, together with all of the other factors analysed above, leaves us with the impression that a compromise between the old and the new social systems could never be effected or maintained. The result is an authentic representation of contemporary reality in which irrevocable socio-economic change meant that the enormous social problems confronting the labouring classes in England, and particularly in London, could never be solved by a recourse to the old social system, but rather, by the long progression towards proletarian power which began in earnest after Fielding's decease.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to show that the contrast between the country and the city is a significant force in Henry Fielding's writings. At its simplest level it exists as a mere rhetorical figure which Fielding, believing in the neo-classical principle of literary imitation, frequently used because it was inherent in many of the forms in which he wrote. At its most memorable level it exists as a comic strategy which Fielding used to present the ridiculous and eccentric aspects of human life and social behaviour. At its most topical level in contemporary terms it existed as a vehicle for political propaganda which Fielding, as events and opportunities suited him, used to represent those in government at Court as being greedy, ambitious and treacherous, and those out of power away from the Court as being honest and patriotic. At its most profound level it existed as a polarising device by means of which Fielding drew sharp moral oppositions between what he considered to be the good and bad aspects about humanity and society. The innumerable themes, motifs, images and associations revolving around the country and the city since Classical times provided Fielding with a set of convenient antitheses to censure vice, which he generally represents as a lack of charity, and to commend virtue, which he generally represents as an active benevolence towards all people. The general movement of his major works consists of a journey by virtuous characters, from the relatively innocent rural environment to the vicious city where they triumph over evil and are rewarded with a retirement to the country which, although not idyllic, is represented as the only stronghold of virtue. In this movement, then, Fielding used the country-city contrast to express his Christian, comic vision of life, that is, that virtuous people, with the aid of the Divine Providence, can triumph over evil and achieve happiness in this world. In this connection, the country-city contrast enabled Fielding to extend his analysis of human morality to an analysis of social morality, both which moral worlds he considered to be interdependent. His condemnation of the city as the main source of uncharitable people and his idealisation of the country as the main source of benevolent people constantly

enlarged itself into a condemnation of London as a centre which had destroyed the traditional stratified system, which he believed to have been founded on social benevolence, and a corollary idealisation of rural England as the only stronghold of this quasi-Feudal ideal. At its most profound level, then, the rural-urban contrast exists in Fielding's writings, as I have argued, as a strategy which Fielding used to protest against social change and to advocate a return to what he considered to be the *status quo*. In using this antithesis, he was drawing on long-standing literary convention. The identification of social change with the urban environment and social stability with the rural environment early became conventional in literature because it reflected the dominant role of socio-economic development throughout the ages. The conventional contrast emerged early in English literature and was commonplace by the eighteenth century. In using the antithesis Fielding was also drawing on features of contemporary reality. The eighteenth century was a period of enormous socio-economic change and these changes were occurring more rapidly and more visibly in London than in the rest of the nation. In drawing on literary convention and contemporary reality to present London as a centre of social change and the country as a centre of social stability, Fielding did not use his materials to debate the issues equitably. His portrait of London is static and one-sided in that it generally displays the negative and ignores the positive aspects of urban life. His portrait of the country, on the other hand, is complex and three-dimensional, displaying the negative as well as the positive aspects of rural life. This is remarkable when we consider that as a Whig, as a writer and as an urbane man, Fielding would have admired much about London, and that, although country-born and country-bred and greatly relishing the rural environment, after reaching adulthood he never returned to it as a permanent place of residence. Indeed, there are ambivalences in Fielding's presentation of the relationship between country and city, ambivalences which are interwoven with his attitude towards social class. As a Whig he applauded commerce and the acquisition of political strength by the mercantile classes who were based in the City of London. He often censured the landed classes based at Court for denigrating the City of London. He often censured the Tory fox-hunting squirearchy of the country for making no contribution to

society comparable to that made by the merchants, yet constantly regretted socio-economic change as exemplified by the increase in mercantile activity in London and idealised the traditional stratified system dominated by the landed classes in the country as an alternative. In censuring the disintegration of boundaries between the social classes he did not see that he was deploring the inevitable social consequences of the economic progress which he applauded. The ambivalences in his presentation of country and city are not only interwoven with his attitudes towards social class, but are also manifestations of those mingled feelings of attraction and repulsion which the Augustans and other writers felt on responding to different aspects of the rural and urban environments. Ultimately we cannot know Fielding's real feelings towards country and city but we can see that he used these symbolic environments to facilitate discussion of abstract moral and social issues and that he selected and manipulated the evidence to support his arguments. Indeed, Fielding's one-sided presentation of London and his three-dimensional presentation of the country manoeuvres us into accepting his didactic use of these environments. The total condemnation of London gives us no choice but to accept it as a centre of vice, but the presentation of both negative and positive aspects of country life makes the rural ideal convincing. The main argument of this thesis has been that although Fielding's use of the country-city contrast remained consistent and orthodox throughout his career, the techniques which he used to present these environments did not remain static, but underwent a series of metamorphoses which nevertheless remained in step with current trends. Broadly speaking, Fielding progressed from being a largely rhetorical writer to being a relatively realistic one, from being a writer who drew his materials from literary convention to one who drew his materials from contemporary reality. The basis of my argument has been that these different creative techniques determine the success with which Fielding uses the country-city contrast to present his moral and social viewpoints, and to portray the comic side of human life and social conduct.

In this thesis I have consistently argued that Fielding, as a young writer, was largely derivative in style, and that in his writings, that is, those produced from the late 1720s to the early

1740s, the country-city contrast, with few exceptions, does not reach the proportions of the elaborate system for the analysis of character and society, or the portrayal of comedy and humour, which it becomes in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In Fielding's early writings, the country-city contrast is chiefly interesting in that it prepares us for what is to come in the mature writings. During the 1740s, Fielding, whilst producing much conventional writing of a miscellaneous and journalistic nature, reached his full maturity as an artist. It was during this decade that he produced his two masterpieces, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Consciously innovating in both novels, Fielding adopted into them the realistic techniques which, in contemporary literature, were increasingly undermining the traditional rhetorical techniques which had prevailed for centuries. On the other hand, he did not completely abandon his neo-classical principles, but took into his novels many old tasks and old procedures. The reigning principle of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* is still one of extreme literariness as Fielding continued to formalise the raw materials of life to serve pre-established artistic and didactic ends. This fusion of realism and rhetoric creates a dynamic artistic procedure in both novels. The infusion of realism renders the country and to a lesser extent the city, more vital, complex and three-dimensional environments than in the early writings. The generalising techniques of neo-classicism on the other hand, formalise the country and to a greater extent the city into highly schematic and allegorical environments. This process, whereby local and contemporary details about rural and urban life are constantly transformed into universal statements about human life and society, renders the rural-urban environments of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* thoroughly impressive and convincing in the moral significances assigned to them. Moreover, in his new species of writing, Fielding was able to escape pre-established attitudes towards country and city and polarise these two environments into sharp oppositions between good and evil and emphatically establish the victory of rural virtue over urban vice. Optimistic about life and literature during these years, Fielding was able to confidently imitate the Divine Providence by organising all aspects of terrestrial reality into harmonious artistic embodiments of cosmic order. Within this symmetrical design, the country and the city are



the twin geographical and ethical bases. By manipulating the action in and between these two environments and by emphatically establishing the victory of rural virtue over urban vice, Fielding was able to use the country-city contrast to realise his Christian comic vision of life, that is, that virtuous people, with the aid of Providence, could triumph over chaos and achieve order in this world. In both novels, the order which is created is a microcosm of traditional English society, which Fielding considered to be a terrestrial extension of cosmic order, and which he considered to be destroyed in London and retained only in remote parts of the country. When we see these rural-urban environments portrayed with a combination of the old literary techniques which had prevailed with the traditional social system for centuries, and the modern creative techniques which were gaining strength with the new social order, we are manoeuvred into accepting Fielding's argument, that a compromise between the old and the new social systems could be effected and maintained. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, this happy union between realistic and rhetorical creative techniques greatly contributes to the successful presentation of the comedy of town and country, which features many conventional characters infused with robust life, engaged in those humorous and incongruous episodes in the parish, in the alehouse and on the road, which have become Fielding's trademark.

During the final five years of his life, Fielding, increasingly troubled by illness and financial problems, again changed artistic procedure. Seeing the need for social reform as being more urgent than ever before he largely abandoned his earlier rhetoric in favour of a more direct approach. His social pamphlets, whilst not being without conventions, present contemporary urban problems with harsh realism. In his final novel, *Amelia* his artistic procedures underwent a radical metamorphosis. Broadly speaking, the realistic and rhetorical creative techniques, successfully combined in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, separate and become more extreme. On the one hand, confronted with the irrevocable breakdown of traditional society, Fielding abandoned traditional rhetorical methods in favour of the more direct and realistic procedures gaining strength with the new social order. On the other hand, reactionary up until

the end, he strove to maintain traditional standards and traditional artistic techniques. These formalising techniques, however, lose the flexibility and fluidity which had characterised their contribution to *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. They harden as Fielding became more insistent than ever before in his attempts to harness and organise reality with them. Thus, the portraits of the country, and to a greater extent the city, in *Amelia*, when compared to those of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are, on the one hand more authentic and on the other hand even more formal and stylised. There is a greater insistence on rural order alongside a more vivid picture of urban disorder as these two environments are polarised even farther apart than in the earlier novels. Whilst the country is under Fielding's artistic control, the city is not. In *Amelia* Fielding tried to maintain his position of omnipotence. He tried once again to imitate the Divine Providence and organise all aspects of terrestrial order into harmonious artistic embodiments of cosmic order. Because of his own disillusion, he was not successful in the attempt. We are left with the impression that the chaos represented by London will continue to dominate human affairs and that traditional English society, idealised in the country, can never prevail over society in general. Thus, Fielding's failure to combine successfully the old and the new creative techniques in *Amelia* leaves us with the impression that a compromise between the old and new social systems which gave rise to those techniques, could not be effected.

It is hoped that this thesis will provide a contribution to the understanding of the contrast between the country and the city in Henry Fielding's writings. As Fielding was a thoroughly orthodox writer in contemporary terms, and as each succeeding stage of his career moved in step with current trends, it is also hoped that a study such as this may contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the country and the city in Augustan literature in general.

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