FIELDING'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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Introduction

There are certain questions of background and technical practise to be considered before it is feasible to enter upon a discussion of the method used by Fielding to depict the web of event and character which resolves itself into so clear a picture of the eighteenth century. The first question is that of narrative. It would be beside the point at this juncture to go into the history of the narrative in English. It is only necessary to say that there was a thoroughly established narrative tradition before the time of Richardson and Fielding; there was no novel tradition, however. It is the work of Richardson and Fielding themselves which supplied the first structure of the novel.

Narrative in its fundamental form is simply the recitation of a series of causally connected events moving toward some preconceived end. The two essentials contained in the definition establish narrative as a form of art and distinguish it from the chronological record, between whose events there is no connection beyond that of time and whose nature forbids the selection of a goal. Bare as such a definition is, it yet contains the germ of those characteristics of setting, character and plot which may be made to intermingle and grow into a tissue representing life itself. The difference between mere story and the novel as we know it
seems to lie primarily in the end toward which events are made to progress. Given the requisites of characters and actions for them to perform, the author may manipulate them so that they illustrate a significant moment in time, as the short story does; or he may expand them until they include a representative variety of characters, the events in whose lives occupy enough time for the group to portray the life of an age or even to represent life in little. These are the two extremes to which narrative may run. The final impression they leave with the reader is, of course, the result of the method of presentation.

Narrative technique may be considered to be of two kinds, the particular or mechanical and the general. The first is concerned with such factors in composition as the use of setting, presentation of character and type of plot, and it is included in the general technique which determines the point of view from which the author is to present his material. Point of view determines the method of composition in any narrative. For upon it depends not only the mechanics of the story but also the attitude of the author, and the other types of composition which will be added to narration to complete the effect of picture or drama, character delineation or action. The relation of the author to the story may vary from extreme personal interest to utter impersonality. In the first case, the author tells the story in the first person and makes himself known as a definite person
whose impressions are being given. In the second case, the author approximates the playwright's function. He places his characters so that we can observe them and all their thoughts but he never appears. He merely supplies the stimuli which start the characters on certain processes of mental development or change. There is a middle position in which the author makes himself unobtrusively visible in the background and darts into the narrative from time to time to explain the actions of his people, give a personal opinion upon something in the story, and generally to manage the conduct of the tale so that all runs smoothly with no obvious gaps in sense or action. Fielding occupies such a middle position and it is the most common one in the presentation of the novel.

It is a truism that pure forms of composition are rare and although the novel belongs rightly to the province of narrative, its scope is so wide that narrative, in its case, must be reinforced with other forms, usually exposition and description. The number of times these last are called in will depend largely upon the point of view of the author. If the narrative is personal, with the author in the foreground, the effect is most likely to be pictorial; the scene will be unrolled before us; all its minute details will be displayed and we shall be told what happens, when and why. If the story is told in retrospect, the scene must
be described. The events, which we have not seen, must be explained and elaborated, and explanation and elaboration belong to exposition. If the novel is of the impersonal or dramatic type, the amount of description and explanation will be appreciably less because the reader will see the story as it happens and will draw his own conclusions as to motive and result. In any case, the point of view will have determined the composition.

In the previous paragraphs I have spoken of pictorial and dramatic novels as pure forms, but they are almost as rare as pure forms of composition, and, in the novel, one is far more likely to find a composite of picture and drama than either one form exclusive of the other. So it is with Fielding; his method is largely dramatic, but the general effect is pictorial.

The type of narrative presented by a writer is seldom the result of an entirely free choice. It is conditioned by limitations of personal interest and the degree of development of the form to be used. Nothing exists independently and no literary form, particularly no new form, can be considered apart from its antecedents or avoid being compared with the present. Men write of what they know and out of a literary heritage which inevitably affects them. Therefore, most forms will show the influence of previous types of composition. The more elementary the state of literary de-
velopment at the time of writing, the smaller will be the choice and the greater the possibility of a composite of several kinds. And although Fielding is said to have created a new genre, he is no exception to the rule. The novel left his hands a finished form, but an examination of his work shows that it still bore resemblances to many types of narrative which flourished before the novel was ever conceived. Hence, before it is possible to draw any conclusions about the actual technique in Fielding's novels, it is necessary to make a study of his literary origins. From remarks in the critical essays in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* and from some very decided characteristics in all the novels it seems safe to say that he was influenced predominantly by the epic and those forms growing out of it - romance and burlesque - by the English realistic tradition, and by the picaresque tradition which is, perhaps, the embryo of his comic epic in prose.

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1. See the preface to *Joseph Andrews* for his own explanation of this term.
CHAPTER II

EPIC, ROMANCE AND BURLESQUE

The history of the epic resembles the history of civilization. Its most dominant characteristic is the expression of the relation of man to fate, and as that relation or attitude changes with the material and intellectual development of humanity, literature must keep pace with it. Greece had its Iliad and Odyssey; Rome had the Aeneid; renaissance Europe had the hybrid or christianized epics of Ariosto and Tasso; while the Teutonic countries had the Scandinavian sagas, Beowulf, and finally Paradise Lost. It would seem that humanity everywhere recognizes its relation to destiny with the same cry. And everywhere as life becomes more complex, more intellectualized and less instinctive, the epic becomes less the product of mass consciousness working through the genius of one man and more the artistic expression of one aspect of life as seen by one group. It ceases to represent humanity and we see it unravelling like strands from a rope into pagan, Roman, romantic-christian until finally we see the attenuated thread of an epic from which human significance has quite departed. Despite these changes in purpose, however, epic structure remained the same, except for some minor pseudo-classical deviations, from the time that Homer first raised it and Aristotle commented upon it till burlesque and mock-heroic made the epic so ridiculous that no one cared to attempt it seriously.
Those characteristics of poetic construction which we recognize as epic are, briefly, the following: First, the fable or subject must be elevated and significant. This is obvious; since the ultimate meaning of the poem is humanity in relation to fate, the particular events chosen to symbolize the relation must be of commensurate dignity. A "conflict" has usually been considered the most suitable subject. Second, the human characters who play in the significant events must be of heroic proportions in order to preserve the probability of the narrative and also to keep a proper balance between the mortals who institute the struggle and the supernatural beings who take part in it with them. The introduction of the supernatural or the marvellous is rather an anomaly in the more sophisticated epics where the probability of the narrative has been restricted inversely as factual knowledge has developed and religion has become a system. It was natural enough, in the pagan epics describing a society where men and gods presumably lived on a familiar footing, for the inhabitants of Olympus to become embroiled in the mortal struggle, but their presence in the christian examples may mean little more than a device for increasing suspense and intensifying the conflict. This criticism does not apply to Paradise Lost because the subject of that poem is a fundamental part of the christian religion. There is, therefore, no impropriety in introducing supernatural beings who are recognizable and credible according to christian belief. The Renaissance and modern writers of epic accepted the convention
but it led them into a confusion they were continually ob-
liged to explain, and Fielding has something to say about it
in his remarks on the use of the epic pattern in the novel.
The last characteristic to be included in such a brief survey
of epic qualities is the general tone. Epic is like class-
cical tragedy in that it admits of no changes from high to
low in the atmosphere of the whole. The tone of dignity and
"high seriousness" which permeates the verse is achieved by
the significant theme, the heroic characters and, finally,
by certain technical expedients. Since it is not essential
that the action be concentrated as in tragedy, the progress
of the narrative is leisurely. According to Addison, all the
great epics have begun at a point where the culmination was
in sight. However, by the use of episodes and conversations
they included the background necessary for the proper under-
standing of characters and events. The looser structure also
permits extended descriptions, elaborate figures of speech
and accounts of battles all in the purposely rhetorical
language which was recognized as fitting for the decorative
portions of the poem. Lastly, the epic was required to end
on a note of success. It is conceivable that a modern epic,
granting the possibility of such a thing, would come to a
pessimistic conclusion. In fact, the two genuinely modern

   Oxford Press. 1908. See Davenant, Sir William. Preface
   to Gondibert. 1650. Hobbes, Thomas. Answer to the
   Preface to Gondibert, 1650. See also Literary Criticism
2. Fielding, Henry. Tom Jones. Constable & Co. 1898. V.II.
3. Addison, Joseph. Spectator no. 267. (pp. 201-212)
poems remotely approaching epic pretensions are both highly pessimistic in their expression of the relationship between man and the spiritual forces which ultimately control him. The Dynasts, Thomas Hardy's poetic drama, shows man as a puppet in the hands of an irresponsible master whose involuntary movements will sooner or later crush the figures in his control. The Waste Land of Mr. T.S. Eliot is an expression of the failure of mankind to correlate material and spiritual life. However, the conception of humanity and the universe which makes these poems germane to our age is the result of centuries of conflict between the mind and the spirit. If one considers that epic themes were concerned with the relation of man to spiritual forces, and that they were written in an age of faith - whether the faith was pagan or Christian does not matter - one can see that epic conclusions were bound to be happy.

The foregoing has been an attempt to state in definite terms the purpose and the classic structure of the epic in order to provide a background for the changing forms arising from it which must be considered before the relation of the epic to Fielding's narrative can be made clear. The present definition corresponds substantially to the Aristotelian concept in the Poetica. It is one of the phenomena of literary

1. The Waste Land, of course, is not an epic in anything but subject and, I am sure, was never intended to be considered in that light. I introduce it merely because it offers the possibility of an interesting comparison.

evolution that no sooner do similar tendencies coalesce into a coherent whole with recognizable characteristics that mark it as an individual form than that form disintegrates and loses its identity in bastard types which mingle the original with alien influences. The epic shows such a tendency in its gradual change from the Greek conception through the romantico-religious phase to the seventeenth century French imitation of actual models, which imitation practically destroyed all traces of the original epic mood.

One of the main factors in the disintegration of the epic and the origin of the novel is the development of the romantic narrative. The significance of prose romance in respect to the novel is that it carried a sort of plot, rudimentary at first but gradually becoming coherent, and attempted to portray events in the lives of a group of people. The events may be fantastic and the people may belong to no known category of the human race, but as long as the author makes his intention clear we can make shift to accept his premises on his own terms.

The heroic romances of seventeenth century France, while they cannot actually be called novels, have the essential elements of the novel and are important for their indirect influence upon the realistic narrative through satire and burlesque. The first example of the romance is L'Astrée (1608), the pastoral novel of Honoré d'Urfé. The type developed rapidly with the work of Madeleine de Scudéry, La Calprenède and Gomberville. The vogue was really short-lived, as literary
fashions go, and it is remarkable that in the space of seventy years these monumental growths of ready-made conversations, these accounts of irrational abductions and unimpassioned dalliance should have matured, decayed and then reappeared in the realistic and psychological novel. The main characteristics of heroic romance were the extraordinary nobility and delicacy of the characters and the multiplicity of the catastrophes they escaped. There was no recognition in them of the lower species of humanity who could not be expected to live in that particular kind of cloud-cuckoo land. And even in the noble and accepted type there was very little real characterization or natural action. The various episodes had usually no more connection than that they concerned the same people and sometimes not even that. Disaster overtook the heroic characters with monotonous regularity and each separate character had his or her complicated love intrigues to be unravelled and worked into the main plot, so that it is small wonder if these twenty-volume narratives rather suggest the collected volumes of a ladies' magazine than novels as we understand the term.

I mention these qualities at some length because Fielding evidently had them in mind when he was formulating his theory of the proper content and characterization of the realistic novel.

It is quite understandable that the definite characteristics of the heroic romance should provoke a satiric reaction. The romance was no sooner under way than another type of novel

appeared to glorify the low where the romance had over­
emphasized the sublime. The outburst of realism began very
soon after the publication of L'Astrée. In fact, Hylas, the
faithless, mocking shepherd of L'Astrée was taken as the model
for the hero of Prudent Gauthier's Morte d'Amour (1616).
Gauthier changed d'Urfès shepherd into a cynical seducer and
described him in a style which is a mixture of refined sensual-
ism and popular coarseness. More important than Gauthier is
Charles Sorel. La Vraie Histoire de Francion, published in
1623, is one of the earliest examples of the satiric reaction
to romance. Like La Morte d'Amour, it has some of the crudity
of the popular tales and it marks one of the first appearances
of the picaresque pattern in the French novel. Guzman
d'Alfarache and Lazarillo de Tormes had been translated into
French in 1600 and 1601, respectively. They were, therefore,
accessible for some time before Sorel wrote Francion. The
picaresque form is particularly suitable for the burlesque
into which realism soon resolved itself and happens to cor­
respond somewhat to the rambling structure of the romances to
be parodied. Realism and burlesque advanced side by side with
the heroic novel and related common events in the lives of
ordinary and often vulgar people. They emphasized the sensual
side of their characters and the comic adventures which befel
them, infusing a kind of rude vigor into them, so that, in
spite of the obvious structure adopted for the sake of bur­
lesquing the romance, it is possible to gather from them a

   pp. 23-35.
certain impression of reality. There was a period of transition between burlesque and pure realism. About the middle of the century writers of realism began to portray the intermediate level of society which had been ignored alike by burlesque and romance. In *Le Roman Bourgeois* (1666), Furetière deliberately chose to tell the story of two very ordinary girls of the bourgeois class. This novel has a better title to the term 'realism' than even *Le Roman Comique* because it describes a more representative phase of existence. In *La Princesse de Clèves* realism advanced a stage farther. Madame de LaFayette emphasized the actual feelings and thoughts of her characters rather than the external details of character and place with which previous narrators had been concerned. From psychological reality such as hers it was but a step to the sentimental interpretation of life as exemplified in the novels of Marivaux and Prevost.

It is, however, with the burlesques that the subject of this essay is most closely allied, for there is a very close resemblance between the mechanical features and the structure of the burlesque novels and the form which Fielding termed the "comic epic poem in prose". If Scarron's *Le Roman Comique* (1651–57) is taken as a representative burlesque, it will be found to contain a number of the features which later mark *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* as something new in the field of narrative.

At this point it becomes necessary to distinguish between two types of satire to which heroic poetry and heroic
romance were subjected. So far I have referred to the realistic novels as burlesques, but there are actually two methods of parodying elevated style, namely, burlesque and mock-heroic. The latter takes a commonplace subject and treats it with the language and conventions suitable to a heroic theme and the former uses mean dialogue and expressions to represent elevated events. In either case, there is a calculated lack of harmony between the subject and the presentation. It is obvious that it would be possible for a travesty such as Le Roman Comique to contain some examples of mock-heroic while still retaining its true form of parody, and there are similar examples of mock-heroic in Fielding. Le Roman deals with the adventures of a group of strolling players, and in natural and sometimes indecent language it carries them through a series of events approximating those in Le Grand Cyrus, satirically pretending the themes are of equal importance. In the course of the story Scarron describes ordinary events in the most grandiose terms and introduces figures of speech after the manner of the epic and romance, but he usually concludes these efforts with a commonplace comment on his rhetorical language which lowers the tone abruptly. For instance, the book begins with a poetical description of a sunset in the figure of Apollo’s chariot and Scarron concludes the metaphor thus: “Pour parler plus humainement et plus intelligiblement, il etoit entre cinq et six...” He pretends

that he knows no more about the outcome of the action than the actors themselves, and frequently digresses and takes the reader into his confidence about the construction of the tale, particularly in chapter openings and conclusions. Neither Joseph Andrews nor Tom Jones can be called a heroic burlesque. Fielding has expressly stated that he intended to admit burlesque in diction only and to exclude it from his sentiments and characters, but there evidences of mock-heroic similar to those in Scarron. In the first place, there are innumerable passages of fine language but almost all of them end with a sudden drop into the prosaic which renders them doubly ridiculous:

"Twelve times did the iron register of time beat on the sonorous bell-metal, summoning the ghosts to rise, and walk their nightly round.—In plainer language, it was twelve o'clock." 2.

Fielding also has the trick of commenting upon his chapter endings and will frequently link section after section with remarks which mock the reader and story alike:

"Then Joseph made a speech on charity which the reader, if he is so disposed, may see in the next chapter; for we scorn to betray him into any such reading without first giving him warning." 3.

And although he is very obviously controlling the course of the tale, once, at least, he pretends to declare that he cannot tell what will be the outcome.

Fielding approaches the burlesques in the matter of structure, but in that respect, his work is far superior to any of the French novels to which it can legitimately be compared. Until 1678, the date of La Princesse de Clèves, French realism employed the picaresque form almost exclusively and English realism had also adopted a modified version of it; so that it is quite comprehensible that Fielding's work should reveal some picaresque characteristics.
CHAPTER III
FIELDING AND THE PICARESQUE

The picaresque is essentially a primitive form of narrative and its genesis occurred at an early period in the development of prose. It seems to have had but two absolute requirements, the vagabond hero and episodic structure. There is practically no plot, if that term is taken to mean an interweaving of incidents so as to lead up to a climax, and the only unity lies in the presence of the hero who is concerned in all the incidents and whose life and character are revealed as the story progresses. He is usually a servant; at any rate he is employed in some lowly capacity which brings him into contact with different types of people and renders him obscure enough to be undetected in his tricks and villainies. He is usually a normal "average type" with a strong curiosity about life and a complete absence of responsibility and moral sense. Shrewd, unscrupulous and disillusioned both as to himself and the people whose unconscious weaknesses and vanities provide him with material for jokes which are practical in more senses than one, he moves from one adventure to another, never losing a chance to line his pockets at someone else's expense. His sense of humour is strong but coarse, and usually shows itself in the usage he accords the victims who have to satisfy both his greed and his sense of the comic. Like most people whose characteristics are rather strong than subtle, he delights in
physical action and thinks nothing of violence; but for all this he is not a villain. That is to say, he does not enjoy ill-doing for its own sake, nor does he go out of his way to find opportunities for it. If villainy falls in his way, he finds it, and if not, he goes along and waits for the next gullible member of humanity to present himself to be duped.

It is plain to see that a narrative depending for its unity and subject upon such a hero will be both leisurely and rambling in construction. Since it consists only of a succession of episodes in the hero's career it may go on indefinitely, as long as the reader's patience and the author's ingenuity endure, and the only law it must obey is that of interest. There is no point in describing a dull rogue and at least half the value of the picaresque lies in the gusto with which the travelling hero greets his circumstances. Cause and effect play no part in this type of story, and as there is little or no character development the order of events is arbitrary and might be transposed without doing violence to continuity. As a rule, the hero moves from place to place, either aimlessly, as his exploits oblige him to quit one place and depart hurriedly for another, or else on a regularly-planned journey; and the events have thus a certain relation from the point of view of place. However, the relation is slight and does not affect the internal nature of the narrative which remains episodic.

Although the simplicity of the episodic structure denies
the finer shades of character analysis and motivation to the picaresque novel, it does allow a wide variety of event and character type by which it may present a general picture of life. Whether the story is autobiographical or told in the third person, character and event must be seen in their connection with the hero. If they present a picture of man in relation to his time, as the greatest of the picaresques has done, it is almost bound to be satiric in tone.

The history of the picaresque tradition reaches back to the middle ages, but as a completed form it first saw the light in sixteenth century Spain where the incessant wars led to unsettled economic conditions particularly conducive to the kind of life the type portrays. The picaresque is simply the reverse side of the shield which bears the involved heraldry of the romances, and it is significant that these novels whose heroes flaunt their humble birth should have flourished so nearly contemporaneously with the Amadis and Palmerin cycles. The first notable example of which we have positive record is *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published by an unknown author in 1553, and the next is *Guzman d'Alfarache* by Mateo Aleman, 1599. There must have been a strong appetite for realism at the time, for both books were immensely popular and translated many times into both French and English. The form being once established and recognized, it

spread rapidly, and inevitably began to diversify itself and join with other types which found it convenient to use the picaresque structure while expanding the subject matter and character interest to produce a more cogent and pointed satire on contemporary conditions.

In this capacity it found its way into the French realistic narrative which had arisen as a protest against the exuberance of the heroic romances. The tone in some of the episodes and the structure of the novels of Scarron and Furetiere show that they were evidently familiar with the picaresque, but the aim of these two novelists was far more particular than that of the originators of the Spanish form. Le Sage, who appears to have been interested in the first rogue stories, translated Guzman and, in 1715, produced his own Gil Blas which is a reversion to the purer form. It has the original requirements of graceless and irresponsible hero and of journey form but it provides, as well, a vivid and penetrating satire on French life at the time and on humanity in general. "Cette fiction permet à Le Sage de faire aisément la satire de toutes les conditions humaines, aussi n'épargne-t-il personne, du bas en haut de l'échelle sociale, depuis les laquais jusqu'aux ministres et aux rois."

The picaresque affected the English prose narrative to

a certain extent but it was never lifted bodily into the English tradition, and until Smollett produced his Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle the English novel had held no example of the real picaro. It is rather strange that such should be the case because conditions in England were similar to those which had given the movement its impetus in Spain and there was already a body of literature of low life which might have been adapted to the picaresque. However, although Lazarillo de Tormes was translated in 1576 its influence seems to have been slight. Nash's Jack Wilton recounts the escapades of a scapegrace servant but it has a difference in tone which stamps it as something apart from the European rogue story. Wilton is not a villain; he does not cheat his master and, like the heroes and heroines of Defoe, he makes no difficulty about a hasty repentance and retirement into decent respectability. The whole tone of the novel is less truculent and more diluted with moral aphorism than any string of anecdotes of trickery should be. An examination of English prose from Nash to Fielding will reveal the fact that a use such as the above is about all that may be expected in the way of the picaresque. On first glance, it might seem that the vigor and salt of the Spanish narrative would have appealed to the nationality which produced and appreciated the Miller's Tale, but there was

1. Defoe's novels resemble the picaresques but his heroes and heroines lack the irresponsible gaiety of the true picaro. Their constant self-justification is quite foreign to the real vagabond hero.
evidently something in the English temperament, until the middle of the eighteenth century, at any rate, antagonistic to the sustained flight of social satire however sweetly coated with story. There is a literature of English roguery and it has certain picaresque characteristics but it has developed as a separate type, and since it is of particular significance in the ancestry of Jonathon Wild it will be discussed in a later section of this essay.

When the picaresque is mentioned, Don Quixote is often the first name to come to mind but actually it is no more picaresque than epic, and in its scope and ultimate meaning it is closer to the latter than to the former. It sums up Spain's contribution to civilization and takes the satire of romance and human gullibility in its stride in much the same way that Fielding gives a representative picture of human nature in general and contemporary England in particular, enlivened with satire on human folly and social abuse. Fielding was fully aware of his debt to Cervantes and it is possible that such use of the picaresque as we find in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones was taken from Don Quixote rather than from the English realistic tradition or the Spanish and French novels. At any rate, both Cervantes and Fielding use the episodic structure and the "travelling hero", and both have a certain resemblance to the picaresque

2. I borrow the phrase from Mr. Edwin Muir who uses it in his book, The Structure of the Novel.
in the tone of some of their episodes.

If Fielding had kept to his first idea of *Joseph Andrews* which was to make the story a burlesque of Richardson's *Pamela*, his narrative would probably have been considerably simpler than it is. However, in chapter III Parson Adams comes to life with such force and vigor that henceforth the story is more his than Joseph's and the latter is reduced to the role of the unconsciously comic mainspring of the plot.

It has been stated before that the picaresque is a narrative composed of a series of loosely connected episodes taken from the travels of a low-born hero. The formula need not be rigidly adhered to but may be extended to include novels in which there is a clearly articulated plot and a more complete development of character than the pure picaresque pretended to give. *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* belong to this latter type. Both are concerned with adventures which take the titular heroes on a journey through England and both heroes are exceedingly ordinary mortals, one being a foundling and the other a carefully neutralized opposite of the romantic hero and a male counterpart of the virtuous Pamela.

The plot of *Joseph Andrews* is simple enough. It begins as a relation of the struggles of that chaste hero to preserve his virtue from the onslaughts of predatory ladies and later recounts his efforts to overcome the obstacles which prevent his marriage with Fanny. The first complication
takes him to London and starts him on his journey back to the country and Fanny. In Joseph's journey Fielding's development of the picaresque method appears as well as certain examples of the original picaresque qualities. Joseph marches out of London one night and is no sooner started on his expedition than he is robbed and left in the ditch for dead. Hence comes a long train of circumstances and events all of which owe their origin to him but in many of which he does not appear. There is a succession of little episodes, each with its satiric character portraits: the arrival of the coach and the modest lady who observed the naked Joseph through the sticks of her fan, the visit of parson Barnabas, the Tow-mouse ménage, the debate between Adams and Barnabas over the doctrine of Whitfield and the attempt of Betty the chambermaid to seduce Joseph. However, each one of these is in some way connected with the one before and all arise because Joseph is ill at the inn. They serve to fill in the interval until he can reasonably be expected to continue his journey, and they reunite him with Adams as well as provide a number of excellent character sketches. Joseph and Adams take up their travels again, meet various old and new characters en route, all of whom are faithfully described, and fall into adventures with every stop they make. They continue in the same way until they have met and rescued Fanny, rejoined Mrs. Slipslop and Peter Pounce, and eventually they arrive at the parish at the same time as the Lady Booby her-
self and the story is back where it started. There has been no incident, as far as I know, in which Joseph has not appeared or been the original cause through a chain of cause and effect as he was in the first series mentioned and as he is again in the group following Adams' adventure with the hounds. This is a kind of compression of the picaresque method by which Fielding keeps his episodic structure but elaborates his incidents so that each one is logical in its own development as well as in its relation to the next.

In the matter of the picaresque hero, Joseph's only qualification is his low birth, otherwise he is the most exemplary creature conceivable and it would be straining the point to imagine that Fielding ever had the least idea of him as a pícaro.

It may also be straining a point to imagine that Fielding had the picaresque in mind at all, but whether the imitation was conscious or unconscious there certainly are resemblances in structure and in the tone of some of the episodes between the novels of Fielding and the picaresque narrative.

On the whole, the atmosphere of Joseph Andrews is a mixture of the satirically comic and the sentimental, but in several isolated instances the rough and tumble spirit of the older comedy breaks through and we get scenes of vivid clowning, usually in the fights in which Joseph and Adams become involved. There is a sort of Punch and Judy effect to these combats—lusty blows swinging from both sides, a great deal
of strength, very little discretion in the use of it, and no delicacy whatsoever in the choice of weapons. Such episodes as the fight between Adams and the innkeeper in which the former receives a pan of hog's blood in his face and the whole company takes to cuffing and hair-pulling reveal a type of vigorous but elementary humour in which the comedy is mostly derived from the physical misfortunes which overtake the characters. The fray in which Adams and Joseph defend Fanny from the base designs of the poet and the broken-down captain is an example of the same kind and emphasizes even more strongly the straightforward way in which realistic comedy at the time made use of certain physiological processes no longer consider proper to be mentioned. There is one other scene, not a fight, illustrating the sort of brutal humour, still with us in slapstick comedy, which can extract a hearty laugh from the sight of some unfortunate slipping on a banana peel. Adams finds himself short of money and resolves to borrow from the parson of the village. Parson Trulliber, a hearty gentleman who breeds pigs with more care and attention than he bestows on his cure, mistakes Adams for a buyer. This misunderstanding is typical of Fielding. He loved a scene in which all characters were working at cross-purposes and the humour arose out of their ignorance of each other's designs.

In this case, Adams is induced to step into the sty to examine the pigs and soon finds himself on his face in the mire. The misunderstanding goes on until he has experienced the parson's boorish manners at table, and when he makes known the purpose of his visit he is summarily ejected. The three episodes mentioned are the ones in which the tone of picaresque humour is strongest although there are any number of others in which it is present.

Tom Jones has very much the same proportion of picaresque qualities as Joseph Andrews although, on the whole, I think the influence of the picaresque has decreased as the epic principles upon which the book is admittedly built have appeared. The incidents are, if anything, even more closely interconnected than those of the first novel. The plot is more complicated, of course, and includes more sub-plots but it follows the same method of presenting one large episode from which a stream of smaller ones issues to lead up to another important one, and so on to the conclusion. Since the number of characters is greater, the introduction is longer and more time is spent establishing the milieu and the character of Jones. In Joseph Andrews the fact that the novel is a burlesque diffuses the interest and prevents Joseph from developing into the normal human male; and the real character interest lies in Adams. This mal-development makes for a certain amount of confusion which is absent in Tom Jones. The setting is clearly indicated, there is a.
sufficient number of different characters, all of whom will appear later from time to time, and there is no doubt about the temperament of Jones. All this is settled in six books of straightforward narrative and then the real action begins.

According to the picaresque tradition, the episodical method could not be used until Tom was started on his travels. It is significant that the use of interlocking incidents does not occur until that time. Like Joseph's, Tom's first adventure puts him to bed with a wound. As a result he meets Partridge who joins the story, later complicating matters considerably. The next incident is probably the most important one in the book, it being the one in which he meets Mrs. Waters and succumbs to her dubious charms thereby missing Sophia whose route crosses his at this point. The last misfortune involves the introduction of more characters and events as he tries to overtake her. This intrigue is given a prominence which at first glance seems disproportionate, because it is later to play such a large part in the denouement by revealing Tom's true identity. There are other similar episodes in his career. For instance, his encounter with the highwayman, which might have been merely an incident on the road, involved him with Mrs. Miller's private affairs and his generosity to the would-be robber stood him in good stead when that lady pleaded with Allworthy to be reconciled. His intervention in young Nightingale's troubles had the

same effect.

In Tom Jones there are two journeys running concurrently, Tom's and Sophia's, and the same method is pursued in both. Sophia's affairs are described with less detail and since the complication in her part of the story has already been introduced in the proposal to marry her to Blifil, she has fewer adventures. However, there is one incident of the same quality as the other main episodes in the narrative and that is the occasion on which she loses her pocket book and meets her cousin, Harriet Fitzpatrick. From this result her future meetings with Jones in London and her troubles with Lady Bellaston.

The interesting feature of Fielding's adaptation of the picaresque method, from the point of view of a study in technique, is the fact that while each episode is so complete that it could stand alone its presence is still necessary to preserve the symmetry of the whole. There are a few flaws in the general structure, however. A few minor events occur like those in the real picaresques. They happen to Jones but they have no bearing on the plot and the characters in them never appear again. Take, for example, the Quaker whom Tom meets soon after he leaves home. The only significance of his long story is that it almost exactly parallels that of Tom and Sophia but there is no real reason why it should be there. It is easier to imagine why Tom and Partridge are

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are thrown in with the gipsy troupe because the meeting gives Fielding a chance to satirize contemporary English laws and customs and to compare them unfavorably with those of a tribe of presumably uneducated wanderers. The most glaring flaw is the proposal of marriage made to Tom by the widow Hunt. It seems to have been inserted simply to show that Tom could say no to a woman. The incident may be justifiable because of the favorable light it throws on Tom's character, but it is poor economy to bring in a new character for one short event.

The picaresque element is not noticeable in the characterization of Tom Jones. There is, of course, a variety of types satirically presented but the main character from whom the episodes devolve is anything but a picaro. It is true he is no spotless hero but Fielding has taken care to offset his vices which are, after all, the humane vices of youth and good spirits, with such qualities of generosity and humility that he can in no way be said to possess the picaresque qualifications.

The tone of the complete narrative and of the individual episodes does not approximate the coarseness of the picaresque as closely as it does in Joseph Andrews. In spite of the epithets of 'coarse' and 'low' which have been flung at the book and which have arisen because it deals with

beings who have the weaknesses of real people, it is less frankly realistic than the first novel and the humour is derived from parody and ridicule rather than from physical misfortune. The scenes of action are just as vigorous but the atmosphere is less brutal.

In dealing with the picaresque qualities of Fielding's novels I have considered only Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. Amelia manifestly shows nothing of them and Jonathon Wild, which at first appears to show a great deal, later reveals a closer relation to a purely English form of narrative and it seems advisable to treat that novel separately.
CHAPTER IV
JONATHON WILD, THE ENGLISH REALISTIC TRADITION AND FIELDING'S SATIRIC METHOD

The satiric purpose and method of Jonathon Wild are an outer surface overlying the technical characteristics of the narrative and may be disregarded for the moment, to be considered later when the novel has been placed in its relation to contemporary and traditional forms.

The origin of Jonathon Wild lies in the stream of English realism which began with the Elizabethan criminal pamphlets and grew by accretion until it included not only low life but also the actual details and events in the life of a representative section of the community. In other words, it became the realistic novel. There are two lines of realistic development, the native and that which was influenced by the foreign picaresques. The latter has already been described as fully as need be in the preceding chapter and there is no need to say more than that before Smollett there was no class of really picaresque literature in English. There have been isolated examples but, for the most part, the picaresque will be found incorporated with other phases of realism, as it is in Jonathon Wild. Wild exemplifies the malicious side of the rogue hero and, inasmuch as the book deals solely with his exploits, I suppose it has some affinity with tales like Jack Wilton and The English Rogue. However, in Fielding's novel the end
toward which the closely-linked events are made to progress is too much in evidence and the weight too evenly distributed from one to the next for us to say that it has the structural resemblances to the picaresques which Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones possess. There is just one episode which might bolster up such a claim and that is the history of the Heartfrees. The introduction of these characters arises naturally because they simply furnish another instance of Wild's villainy and a contrast to it, but they receive a prominence altogether disproportionate to their importance. The history of the Heartfrees is quite complete and Mrs. Heartfree's moving tale of her seven amorous pursuers is reminiscent of the tribulations of the romance heroines. It is just possible that Fielding may have been poking fun at the extraordinary facility with which they aroused the most violent pangs in the bosom of every man who saw them.

It is possible to see in Jonathon Wild a continuation of the criminal tract and the rogue biography. The former had a thoroughly utilitarian origin, arising as it did out of the economic state of England late in the sixteenth century. The increase in robbery, vagabondage and petty crime cause by unsettled political conditions and foreign wars which had so diminished trade that a large part of the population was obliged to live by its wits alarmed and exasperated those in authority. In 1567 one Thomas Harman published his Caveat for Common Cursitors in which he explained that he had investigated the practises of the several
kinds of thieves and cheats and was prepared to publish his findings in order that the public might be warned. He gave his information in the form of the interviews he had with such cheats as he met and the Caveat really consists of a collection of little examples of criminal tricks. Harman described the different classes of vagabonds, male and female, and appended a vocabulary of their cant terms. This first pamphlet, which apparently had no ulterior purpose, very soon became the source book and Bible for a series of journalistic exposes of the Elizabethan underworld. There has been no reason to doubt that Harman's information was accurate and his purpose purely informative—the testy tone of the Caveat is sufficient proof of the latter—but in the tracts which followed it is difficult to discover where fact ends and invention begins. And the suspicions attending the authorship of some of them lead one to think that the hacks were puffing a profitable trade. In 1593 Robert Greene wrote the first of the Conny-Catching Pamphlets, The Notable Discovery of Cozenage, and followed it with four more in which he described the race of nips, foists, and prigs and gave examples in story form of the truly deplorable results of their contrivings. The pamphlets are said to have caused some confusion in criminal circles and to have brought forth a protest which Greene answered. There is a suspicion that Greene himself wrote the protest in order to be able to write the reply and if he did,

it is probably here that journalism took up the description of criminal life in good earnest. At any rate, the last of the series, The Blacke Bookes Messenger (1593), proves beyond a doubt that Greene had decided to capitalize his information. It is important also because it marks a new departure in this kind of fiction. The tract "Laying open the Life and Death of Ned Browne, one of the most notable cutpurses, Crosbiters, and Conny-catchers, that ever lived in England," is the first of a series of avowedly true biographies of notable criminals. Greene was followed by a steady stream of pamphleteers, all making good use of the ever popular desire to see the seamy side of life, and as the mere exposure of details soon lost its freshness, the tone of the tracts became more and more sensational, as it is in Dekker's work, for instance. The building up of an atmosphere and the tendency to emphasize individual characters provided a situation which positively invited fiction, and fiction eventually did enter, but just when it is impossible to say because the convention of insisting on the absolute truth of the narrative was so firmly established.

Defoe's work has generally been considered the landmark of the realistic novel but in his book, The Mary Carleton Narratives, Mr. Ernest Bernbaum has pointed out that the entry of fiction into the criminal biography was a far more subtle accomplishment than has hitherto been supposed. He

1. Title page to The Blacke Bookes Messenger. (1593). (1924)
says that the custom of discrediting Defoe's carefully accurate details has blinded us to the fact that there may be a considerable body of truth behind the stories and that Defoe's contribution may have been simply the selecting and ordering of material. Mr. Bernbaum's theory is that some time even before Defoe, realism combined the true events and details in the lives of certain rogues with the common devices of fictitious narrative and produced the novel. The difference between a novel and a biography is that in the former the material is manipulated and selected to produce an effect of unity and coherence somewhat approximating the mean probable course in life, while in the latter, chronology is all the writer needs to follow. Mr. Bernbaum has proved that as early as 1673 Francis Kirkman made use of several supposedly true biographies of Mary Carleton, the German Princess, and used his imagination to work the material into a coherent plot with proper motivation, character development and enough detail to give an air of reality. Fielding produced *Jonathon Wild* nearly eighty years later so that the changes it shows in the form are quite understandable.

Fielding's motive in writing an eighteenth century version of the rogue tract was very similar to that which actuated the first vehement exposers of vice. As his miscellaneous prose works show, he was particularly agitated about the lax attitude toward the increasing crime which he
attributed to the growing wealth of the nation and the consequent rise in the income of all classes. He was always anxious to shed light on practises which could be amended and in this mock-heroic biography of a thief and murderer he hoped to lay bare the springs of human nature which make crime possible. In Jonathon Wild he went a step farther in the evolution of criminal fiction. He took the name of an authentic rascal, executed some fifteen years before, and accepted the expedients of fiction to construct a narrative in which a careful appearance of truth is produced from sources which he acknowledged to be imaginary:

"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; and may, in reality, as well suit any other such great man, as the person himself whose name it bears." 2.

If we still ignore the satire of the book, this seems to be a higher development in realistic fiction than we have yet seen. Fielding's statement of his subject means that verisimilitude has taken its proper place in the arts of fiction; it is neither the end of narrative nor a false persuasion to accept fiction as fact, but merely one of the concomitants of a probable narrative which may have a general application.

Jonathon Wild opens in the conventional biographical

manner, with Fielding making fun of those biographers "who trace up their hero as the ancients did the river Nile". He traces Jonathon from his Saxon forbears to his parents and solemnly hints that even before his births there were indications that his would be an acquisitive nature. Once this anti-hero is established in his career of vice the aim and end of the novel is to intensify the blackness of his character and to show by a series of well-planned events that crime does not pay. The narrative shows a judicious mingling of the methods by which fiction induces the belief of the reader in palpably invented material and the inherited devices of the criminal expose.

In this rogue's progress, Fielding had two lines of probability to preserve and he was scrupulous to keep Jonathon in character, both as the scoundrel he is and the 'great man' he is supposed by inversion to be. He gives a sufficient number of his shady enterprises to justify Jonathon's perpetuation in a 'life' and includes his casuistical orations on greatness and the exhortations to his gang which prove him to be a politician of no mean ability. This, the greatest part of the book, openly fictional but within it the details have been as carefully authenticated as Defoe's. The characters are all named—as they frequently are not in

Fielding's other works; we are told the exact amounts Jonathon filched from most of his victims and even the name of the tavern to which he repaired with Miss Molly Straddle. Like the early pamphlets purporting to expose the vicious practises of the underworld, Jonathon Wild contains explanations of criminal jargon, although they are given in foot-notes and not as an appended vocabulary. Fielding sprinkles terms like 'prigs', 'bridle-cull', 'nubbing', 'the cheat', liberally over the story and from the accounts of Jonathon's swindles and instructions to his gang it is possible to gather a concrete impression of the organized crime with which Fielding as a justice of the peace was later to deal. In the preface, the author declared that he knew little of Wild's actual doings and did not propose to adhere to those of which he was cognizant, but he did include one which is known to be true; and that is the agency which Wild established for the reselling of stolen articles to their proper owners. When one considers this and the extortion levied on gang members, one cannot but feel that the eighteenth century rogue was not altogether unworthy of his racketeer progeny. Unlike many of the purveyors of criminal biography, Fielding preferred to keep Wild consistent to the end and did not make him suddenly recant at the gallows and urge the assembled crowd to avoid his evil courses. Instead, he gave them a hearty curse and swung out of this world with a stolen corkscrew in his hand.

It is the all-embracing satire of Jonathon Wild which
shows that the literature of roguery had reached a new level with Fielding. Hitherto it had been meant either for in-
formation or entertainment. In this novel it is put to a
purpose, made a lash to scourge political and social abuse.
Irony is the form of satire employed in Jonathon Wild. The
novel represents a topsy-turvy view of the usual conceptions
of greatness and worldly position and is intended, as
Fielding said, to unmask vice in high places by showing its
completely ridiculous aspect when carried to the same
lengths in proportionately low ones. In this novel Fielding
let himself go and allowed his excoriating satire full play
over the whole range of contemporary life, manners and
letters. The book is a perfect melange of sarcastic refer-
cences to social and literary folly, governmental cor-
rup tion and veniality in general; and what he could not
accomplish by means of his looking-glass methods in the
story itself he supplied in long personal comments through-
out it. If, as he said in the preface, he did not intend
to indict human nature through Jonathon, he nevertheless
succeeded in laying a welt on very nearly every group in
the society he knew; and perhaps the long history of the
Heartfrees may be a belated concession to his sense of the
innate virtue of the majority.

1. Fielding, Jonathon Wild. (1898). Preface to the
Miscellanies, 1743. p. xxl.
2. Ibid. p. xvi. "I solemnly protest I do by no means
intend in the character of my hero to represent human
nature in general."
In an article on the political satire in *Jonathon Wild* Mr. John Edwin Wells has worked out the references to what may be Sir Robert Walpole and his party through *Jonathon Wild* and his gang. He also points out that the contest between Wild and Roger Johnson in the prison may represent the overthrow of Walpole, and in this case, Wild would have to change his identity to represent Pulteney who was chiefly responsible for the downfall. It is not inconceivable that this change should take place at the end of a book whose implications are so shadowy at the best of times and if it does it has not diminished the value of the satire. Mr. Wells thinks, and it seems most probable, that Walpole was the butt in this novel. Fielding was no newcomer to the political lampoon. The list of his plays, all written before *Jonathon Wild*, shows an increasing tendency to flay the party in power for their rotten practises in the conduct of public affairs, and it was his play, *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, which provoked the Licensing Act of 1737. Since the act ruined his career as a playwright, he had thus a personal grievance as well as the urgent desire to fumigate some particularly noisome public evils.

The value of clothing an attack in the dress of a completely worked-out narrative is that so much more than one abuse may be pilloried, and the effect will be just so much

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stronger as one department of life after another adds its contribution of inadequacy. The objects of satire in Jonathon Wild are so many that it is impossible to mention more than a few of the most outstanding examples of the method. The different types of satire are, of course, scattered indiscriminately throughout the book, but for the sake of clarity, I have grouped them arbitrarily according to six classifications. The first is that with which the book begins, literary satire, and the subject is the thorough-going biographer who begins his life with the hero's first ancestor and whose purpose is merely to show off his own knowledge. It would have been interesting, had it been possible, to have seen Fielding's comment on Sterne's minute method. The next deals with a subject with which Fielding was deeply concerned, the laws for the imprisonment of debtors and their treatment after arrest. The third has to do with fashionable life. He had ever a wary eye open to note the empty folly of sophisticated society and he recorded his observations in the prevailing style. Nothing escaped him; he mentions the custom of travelling abroad for education, the current ideas of honour, which he reduces to an absurdity, the fashionable beaux and the idle officers who, as he says must have some use in the creation "as we are taught that nothing, not even a louse, is made in vain", and the habit of the polite world in which great men profess

the warmest friendship and gratitude to their wives' lovers.

The fourth type of satire in the present classification is the general type upon which the book is founded, satire of worldly greatness. Fielding makes some biting remarks on bribery and compares Wild's pursuit of greatness to that of the princes and leaders who plunge their countries into wars of aggression for the sake of personal glory. There is one reference in the next classification which militates against his statement that human nature was to be spared this ordeal by acid and that is the comment that Fielding makes in person after Heartfree has been arrested. "We cannot help mentioning a circumstance here, though we doubt it will appear very unnatural and incredible to our reader" that all Heartfree's neighbors turned against him and fell over one another in their efforts to show that they had suspected him for some time. This is an attitude that Fielding betrays often in his treatment of the mob. The three later novels all show it and the numerous examples lead one to believe that for all his protestations Fielding had rather a poor opinion of human nature in the mass. Jonathan Wild ends with a picture of the Ordinary of Newgate racing through the Office for the dying and leaping nimbly into a hackney coach to avoid the missiles intended for Wild. Some time before, this gentleman had tried his doubtful comfort on the condemned man but had desisted in favor of the punch bowl and

encomiums on his own sermons.

"Pugh! Never mind your soul, leave that to me; I will render a good account of it, I warrant you. I have a sermon in my pocket, which may be of some use to you to hear. I do not value myself on the talent of preaching...but perhaps there are not many such sermons." 1.

Fielding was zealous in the cause of religion, albeit in a somewhat sentimental fashion, but he was aware that the clergy of the established church were as guilty of ignorance, bigotry and greed as the temporal lords and he did not hesitate to apply his ridicule to them both in this and the later novels.

The subjects of satire in Jonathon Wild are not unique in Fielding and they occur again and again in the period. What is unique is the creation of a prose narrative to weld them into a whole. Fielding later used them himself in the three great novels. But in the case of Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Amelia the satiric interpretation of life had to be subordinated to the demands of narrative whose satiric purpose was only by the way.

Satire seems to have been one of the concomitants of realism from an early date. The picaresques are mainly satiric in their attitude toward society; the English literature of roguery has a fair proportion of it and Fielding, who represents the culmination of the realistic movement, made it the very skeleton of his work. It may be that because realism tends to emphasize the traits leading away from

perfection rather than to it that 'real life' has more often than not been the subject of acidulous comment.

The satiric method used in Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Amelia is very like that of Jonathon Wild but, of course, there is in the first three no overlying satiric conception as there is in the criminal story. Fielding keeps to his ironical presentation of the negative for the positive and, in accordance with his usual custom, reinforces indirect narrative with personal comment.

Since the aim of the comic prose epic, which form Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones evolved and Amelia accepted, is to give a picture of human nature, the range of satire in it is great and character receives perhaps a greater share of it than actual social abuses. These latter are not neglected, however, for Fielding was fully aware of the social problems of his day and if more proof than Amelia were needed the Covent-Garden Journal (1752) would supply it. This periodical is an interesting supplement to the three novels. It shows Fielding offering, with no recourse to the arts of fiction, opinions which correspond to those we can deduce from the narratives. They suggest that there was a social as well as a literary purpose in the evolution of the novel. In number eleven, February 8, 1752, he speaks of the condition of the poor and makes a proposal very much in the tone of Swift, that since the children of the English poor, having been nourished on gin, would make very unpalatable eating the number of the indigent might be reduced by offering
them up as religious sacrifices. The point of the article is that he feels that something more constructive than tearful maunderings ought to be done for this class, and when he satirically offers revolting and horrible suggestions he does it in the hope that they may bring home the need for sane and kindly ones. Similarly, in *Amelia* he offers a picture of the spineless Booth blessed in his personal relationships with a perfect happiness which many a better man never even glimpses. The relationship between Booth and Amelia provides an ironic frame for the novel. Within it Fielding includes many purely satiric attacks on the emptiness of fashionable life, current notions, the custom of duelling, and so on. *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* each have their share of social satire, the first in the pictures of Lady Booby, Beau Didapper and the parsons, Trulliber and Barnabas, and the second in Lady Bellaston and Mrs. Fitzpatrick and in the discourse between Tom and the Gipsy king in which the latter remarks that the Gipsies punish with shame but the English seem to reward for it.

Fielding has been careful to state so often that his strictures were not aimed at human nature in general, that we are constrained to believe him. But if he did not think that man was vile he was certainly awake to manifold absurdities in him upon which turned the ray of satire in an effort to burn them out. He seems to have had a tenderness for his principal characters, Sophia and Jones and Amelia, whom he called his favorite child, which exempted them from
his wit, but with the exception of the lay figures like Joseph and Fanny and Allworthy no single member of his creation escapes the play of his satire, sometimes tender and playful, sometimes biting, but always penetrating. With unerring aim he finds the weak spots in their armour and lays them low. If it is pride, as it is in the case of the amiable but pedantic Mrs. Bennet, he is careful to put her into situations where her learning plays her false. If it is selfishness, as it is in Squire Western, he gives plenty of instances of the squire's extreme concern for Sophia which was so great that "except in that single instance in which the whole future happiness of her life was conceived, she was sovereign mistress of his inclinations". And if the weak spot is avarice and pettiness, as he has made it appear in most of the minor characters, he has shown up the insufficiency of such a way of living by the ridiculous light in which he has placed the people who practise it.

There is a distinct development of satire in Fielding from the indiscriminate irony of Jonathan Wild to the subtle and more humane satire of the novels where the effects are accomplished both by the use of irony and the ridiculous which is the groundwork of the comic prose epic.

CHAPTER V

FIELDING'S OWN THEORIES OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NOVEL
AND HIS PRACTISE OF THEM

It is fortunate that Fielding had a flair for critical writing and that he possessed sufficient independence to indulge it; otherwise we should have been denied his lucid explanations of the principles upon which he based the novel. Granted that he began *Joseph Andrews* as a burlesque of *Pamela*, the ribald purpose survived only until the spirit of humane comedy entered, and from its advent Fielding was astute enough to see that prose narrative could be something more than caricature or vague romanticism. It is impossible from the material at hand, and it may be impossible in any case, to state definitely whether or not the preface to *Joseph Andrews* was written before or after the novel, but internal evidence plus the circumstances which led Fielding to write the book leads one to think that it was written after. The parody in the first few chapters is obvious but later it is allowed to dwindle as if Fielding had lost interest in it in favour of something more significant. It is after its disappearance that he makes his first remark on the theory of fiction. These remarks are scattered and few in number as if they had come to him as he wrote and as if the character of Adams

1. Fielding. *Joseph Andrews*. (1898). p. 1. n. Fielding refers to "these little volumes" and the note explains that the novel was published in two duodecimo volumes.
growing under his hand had suggested to him a method of depicting and reforming human nature by one process. Finally, the preface is such a coherent piece of close reasoning that it seems unlikely he would have written it deliberately for the literary practical joke that *Joseph Andrews* was intended to be, and it is even more unlikely that having evolved the theory he would have written a novel in which there is so much that must be judged by other standards. From the wording of the preface it seems to me that it might much more logically have been affixed to *Tom Jones*. For although even in this novel Fielding continued to develop his formula, his comments on the function of the historian have more the air of established convictions and the story seems to have been written according to them, not along with them. Evidently the idea of the "heroic, historical, prosaic poem", as he termed the novel, was not present in his mind before he wrote *Joseph Andrews* but grew out of the burlesque, was further developed in *Tom Jones*, and accepted as the authority for *Amelia*.

The author, in Fielding's time, felt no obligation to keep out of the picture; he could be as personal as he liked and no critic would rise up to tell him he was violating the objectivity of the narrative. Fielding profited by the liberty and, as his stories offered opportunities, he inserted explanations about what he had done and what he would do.

The prefatory chapters with which he usually began each book are particularly rich in critical material and from them and the preface to *Joseph Andrews* his theory of the novel is mostly drawn.

In his critical discussions Fielding makes it clear that the epic is the form upon which his novel is based, but he also refers to his novels as 'histories' and offers a new theory of that type of narrative. An examination of the passages relating to these two names will show that they are meant to be complementary, although not interchangeable, and that history is but one side of the epic. Epic determines the end of the novel, the effect it is to produce, and offers some mechanical aids; history provides the means by which the end is to be attained and the material to which the ornamental devices are to be applied.

An account of the various meanings of the word 'history' may, perhaps, add clarity to the explanation of Fielding's conception of it. According to the New English Dictionary, the meaning of history has undergone some changes. In its earlier use the word seems to have been applied indiscriminately to the relation of incidents, either true or imaginary, which might or might not be grouped in story form. Later, it came to be more particularly associated with accounts of fact, still retaining, however, its connection with narrative. The general meaning of history at the present time is that of a methodical record of events connected with a particular country, people, individual or object. We also
think of history as being accurate. History has apparently held this meaning for some centuries. In a chapter in *Leviathan* (1651) on "The Several Subjects of Knowledge", Hobbes says:

"The register of knowledge of fact is called history. Whereof there be two sorts: one called natural history; which is the history of such facts or effects of nature, as have no dependence on man's will; such are the histories of metals, plants, animals, regions and the like. The other is civil history; which is the history of the voluntary acts of men in commonwealths." 1.

It appears that Fielding agreed with the second definition of history. His agreement must be deduced from his remarks on biography, for he mentioned it only by the way. However, he did speak of "those eternal contradictions occurring between two topographers who undertake the history of the same country: for instance, between my Lord Clarendon and Mr. Whitlock". He seems to have taken it for granted that 'history' referred to past occurrences in the kingdom.

In the course of time history, as applied to story, acquired a connection with realism. That is, it was intended to denote the opposite of 'romance'. For example, in the French tradition, one of the earliest examples of the anti-roman is entitled *La Vraie Histoire de Francion* (1623). There is no suggestion in the novel that Francion was drawn from any person who ever lived; Sorel merely intended to present an account

which would reflect more truly than the romance had done the daily occupations of average men. He said in the introduction:

"Good comic or satiric novels seem more than any other to be a reflection of history, and since they take as their subject the common actions of life they approach more closely to truth." 1.

Defoe went even farther in his pursuit of realism than this early satirist. He also chose to describe events in the lives of middle-class or even low characters but he attempted to persuade his readers that his stories were true records of actual events in the lives of actual people. In the author's preface to The Fortunate Mistress; or a History of the Life of Mademoiselle de Beleau, known by the name of the Lady Roxana (1724) he says:

"He (the author) takes the liberty to say that this story differs from most of the modern performances of this kind... I say, it differs from them in this great essential article, namely, that the foundation of this is laid in truth of fact; and so the work is not a story but a history". 2.

Defoe, like Sorel, is pointing the difference between realism and romance.

The above examples will show, then, that by Fielding's time there were two types of story which might be entitled "a history". First, the tale approximating average life, and second, the tale based on supposedly authentic records. They might, of course, be combined into a narrative with the characteristics of both.

Fielding himself refers to the historians, or biographers

as he called them, who were so zealous to preserve the accuracy of their topography that they neglected to preserve the reality of their characters. The name of history was apparently being given to works in which the authors interpreted events, and the characters of the people who took part in them, to suit themselves but kept to actual accounts of times and places. Fielding offers the names of Clarendon and Whitlock as examples of historians who present the history of the same country but arrive at very different conclusions. The biographies of M. André Maurois are modern examples of the imaginative story based on actual fact.

Fielding's quarrel with the then current use of history arose from his apprehension that truth to nature was being sacrificed for truth to fact. He notes that there are wide differences in the characteristics and motives attributed by different authors to one and the same historical figure, and concludes that the authors have consulted their own impressions of this character more frequently than the book of human nature. Fielding propounds a new theory of history in which mere mechanical accuracy of time and place is to be subordinated to reality of character:

"Now with us biographers (historians in his later sense of the word) the case is different; the facts we deliver may be relied on, though we often mistake the age and country wherein they happened: for though it may be worth the examination of critics, whether the shepherd Chrysostom, who, as Cervantes informs us, died for love of the fair Marcella, who hated him, was ever in Spain, will any one doubt but that such a silly fellow hath really existed?" 2.

2. Ibid. Vol. II. p. 2.
At this point in his discussion Fielding makes a wide jump from the description of actual historical persons into the delineation of ideal character, that is, character which representative of essential traits in human nature. However, reference to the passage already quoted from Sorel will show that Fielding's theory of history bears the same relation to truth of character as Sorel's bears to truth of event.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above discussion of the definitions of history is that in Fielding's time the title "history" implied that the work which carried it was based on truth, either factual or ideal. Fielding adhered to ideal truth as a background for his histories. The difference between his use of the term and that of his predecessors and contemporaries is that he applied it most particularly to the presentation of character.

His first serious reference to history is in Book III of *Joseph Andrews.* The chapter heading runs: "Matter prefatory in praise of biography". The use of the term is rather confusing as it is opposed to a synonymous use of the words 'history' and 'romance' which are characterized as a species of writing which records persons "who never were, or will be, and facts which never did, nor possibly can, happen". The confusion is evidently due to a confusion in Fielding's own

1. See p. 52 of this discussion.
3. Ibid. Vol. II. p. 3.
mind. He had used biography in the same sense before but he was later to drop it in favour of his own kind of history. The discussion in Book III of *Joseph Andrews* elucidates the purpose with which Fielding wrote. His primary end was to convey those unvarying characteristics which make up human nature. This entailed the portrayal of a sufficient number of illustrative characters to make up a picture of life. "I declare here, once for all, I describe not men, but manners; not an individual but a species." In this connection it should be clearly understood that by 'species' Fielding did not mean type or humour in Jonson's sense. He was describing human beings who have one predominant trait, not traits which have been arbitrarily clothed in human flesh. According to Fielding, it is for history to present these characters, to make them universal so that they may be recognizable under any circumstances as human beings. He offers *Don Quixote* as an example of the higher reality in characterization and *Marianne* as one of those more circumscribed by time and place. This theory of the function of history is the chief contribution of *Joseph Andrews* to the pattern of the novel, that is, if the preface is taken as being subsequent to the story, as I think it is. The word history does occur with a more general sense in some few instances and occasionally it gives a hint of some of the characteristics it has besides those.

2. Ibid. Vol. II. p. 5.
relating to character, but it had not yet become a habit with
the author to use it in his comments on people and events and
he had probably not worked out the principle upon which it
was to operate.

An early statement in Tom Jones confirms the remarks
made in Joseph Andrews about the universal quality of his-
torical characters and begins an explanation of the kind of
individuals to be presented. "...for we do not pretend to
introduce any infallible characters into this history; where
we hope nothing will be found which hath never yet been seen
in human nature." Later, in an initial essay he points out
that as his purpose is to eradicate as many follies as he
can from human nature, he believes that a mixture of good and
evil in the separate characters will, by contrast, produce a
much better effect. In this connection Fielding is most scrup-
ulous to insist that the historian base his people on actual
human beings. He should observe as many persons as possible
in whom the trait he wishes to emphasize appears to be pre-
dominant. Characters representative of that trait should,
then, be made to conform to the average of the behaviour of
the real people observed. The historian should not trust to
his imagination for either creatures or events which nature
can so much more efficiently supply. This, taken in con-
junction with the earlier remarks in Joseph Andrews, should
be sufficient to decide what history was expected to convey

in the way of character.

*Tom Jones* elaborates another side of the theory of history. The chapter already referred to in *Joseph Andrews* is clear enough in its statement of the kind of characters history is to present, but it is shadowy as to the scope and kind of events in which the people so created are to move.

It was all very well to imply that Don Quixote and the characters he met, loose in the world of action, were the *ne plus ultra* of historical fiction; but the fact that a definite setting and series of circumstances had to be created for his own Joseph probably induced in Fielding the belief that there ought to be some rules as to what could and could not properly take place in this type of novel. *Tom Jones* provides the arbitrary but necessary set of rules. In a short but succinct essay early in the book, Fielding sets up his dictatorship over the reader; he declares that he has no intention of following those historians who allow chronology to overcome interest and he will present only such events as are of some importance to the conduct of the narrative. Interest will be his only criterion and, if years elapse with no change in the daily run of existence, they will be passed over as though they were a day and some event which takes, perhaps, an hour in time, will far outweigh them in the space accorded it. He developed this policy of selection. All through *Tom Jones* he is careful to explain that he has

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inserted this or that occurrence, trivial as it may seem, because his integrity as a historian of fact demands it or because without it something else will be incomplete or insufficiently motivated. For example, he has just described that most uninteresting but most life-like of interfering women, Mrs. Miller:

"As our history doth not, like a newspaper, give great characters to people who never were heard of before, nor will ever be heard of again, the reader may hence conclude that this excellent woman will hereafter be of some importance in our history." 1

He is equally solicitous about what he omits and frequently informs us that he is doing violence to his inclinations in suppressing certain passages but that his care for the entertainment of the reader and the dignity of history force him to it. In the example offered, Squire Western has executed a rapid mental somersault and convinced himself that it is useless to pursue Sophia any further and that he might as well join the hunt toward which Providence has undoubtedly led him. He meets the strange squire. And here Fielding steps in:

"The conversation was entertaining enough, and what we may perhaps relate in an appendix, or on some other occasion; as it nowise concerns this history, we cannot prevail on ourselves to give it a place here." 2

On another occasion he refers to a conversation on matters of fact, "a species of conversation, in which, though there is much of dignity and instruction, there is but little

entertainment. As we presume, therefore, to convey only this last to the reader, we shall pass by whatever was said."

References of this nature are so common in Tom Jones that it seems probable that Fielding had ceased to wonder at his newly discovered theory of the content of history and was utilizing it in that semi-facetious style which unblushingly offers so many tags and shreds of formal usage.

In spite of this apparent irresponsibility in the handling of the convention he had set up he was aware that he was proposing something quite new in the realm of narrative and now and then he pulls up short to offer some timely information about what he actually is doing. When he does it is interesting to note the change from mockery to authoritative criticism. The chapter on the qualifications of the historian contains one of his best serious definitions. He states the qualifications briefly under four headings. The first is genius, which comprises the ability to penetrate "into the true essence of all objects of contemplation". The second is the power to perceive the differences between them. The third is conversation with all ranks of life for the sake of experience in drawing them, and the fourth is the capacity to feel the emotions to be aroused. In the same section he offers an excuse for the critical prefaces saying, apparently seriously, that they are intended to distinguish true historical writing from false as he thinks that writers of

romance and the novel (sic) are usually lacking in learning and incapable of the observation and reflection necessary for the writing of essays. Fielding apparently had a low opinion of the romances. He referred to them by name—Clelia, Cleopatra, Astraea, Cassandra, The Grand Cyrus—as "voluminous works...which contain, as I apprehend, very little instruction or entertainment", and spoke scathingly of them as being remarkable only for the powers of invention they displayed, holding them up as the horrible example of what the history must not be. Still adhering to the belief that the novelist of character was in the same class as the historian of events, he warned the former against falling into the improbable since he had not the other's safeguard of authentic records.

With the mention of probability, Fielding begins to include certain of the terms which have been regarded as belonging to the epic under the heading of history, and it must be admitted that there seems to have been no clear division in his mind as to where history stopped and the epic began. But certain it is that he considered his novels both histories and epics and I have made the distinction already mentioned that epic comprises the sum total of the novel and history the parts; so that it is admissible to consider debatable questions like probability and the marvellous as belonging to history. Speaking of the laws of

1. Fielding, Joseph Andrews. (1898). p. 2. See also Amelia Vol. II. p. 343. "You may write it (romance) almost as fast as you can set pen to paper; and if you interlard it with a little scandal, a little abuse on some living characters of note, you cannot fail of success."
probability, Fielding says that although the poet and dramatist must observe them, the historian is not so rigidly bound because he is a narrator of fact, and if he has absolute and definite proof any event is admissible. In fact, the historian must relate facts as they occur, no matter how strange they may be. However, he should not test the reader's credulity too often. Startling and unique events should be introduced only when they are necessary to the course of the story; others equally true and equally difficult of belief but less necessary to the narrative may be omitted. Fielding also discusses the necessity of credibility in character, of approximating the action to be performed to the ability of the performer; for, as he says, what is probable for one man is the height of impossibility for another, and the author will have to call in all his resources in human nature to keep the proper balance.

In this same critical preface Fielding goes into the question of the marvellous and lays down the rule that it has no place in modern compositions. He even deprecates its use in Homer although he admits that since the Greeks presumably believed in their mythology the poet had some excuse for invoking the superhuman beings from it. However, says Fielding, since the heathen deities are incredible to modern man, it is ridiculous to introduce them, and all that is left of supernatural assistance is the service of ghosts. These

emanations of superstition he considers highly unsuitable to epic productions and he places them only one step higher in the catalogue of literary folly than the elves and fairies against which his forthright common sense rebelled. For instance, when Tom and Partridge come upon the Gipsy troupe Partridge greatly fears that they may be supernatural beings, but Fielding hastens to reassure the reader that he will not introduce "a set of beings which scarce anyone was ever childish enough to believe". This, he says, would be below the dignity of a historian who professes to draw his works from nature alone. He makes one more decided reference to his judgment on the marvellous. This is in a quasi-humorous preface in which he laments that Tom and Sophia are at such a pass that he despairs of bringing their affairs to a happy conclusion. He bewails the advantage held by the ancients, the Arabians and the Persians in having an accredited mythology upon which they could call at any time to extricate their heroes without outraging the credulity of the reader. He concludes sadly that the moderns will have to stick to natural means, but within them he is careful to point out that they may have as much of surprise and ornamentation as good taste will allow and he says that he himself has endeavored to make his history agreeable as well as instructive by using as many poetical devices as possible.

For all his critical prefaces and theoretical discussions, Fielding made no effort to draw the principles of the novel into one critique and for the sake of clarity it has been necessary to collect and separate those principles into the two classifications of content and diction. History comprises the former and the latter are based principally on the conventions of heroic poetry; the two together make up what Fielding termed his comic epic in prose.

The best definition of this form as a whole is to be deduced from the preface to Joseph Andrews. Here Fielding definitely states his affiliation with the epic and offers his work as a species of it. He enumerates the particulars of epic, fable, action, characters, sentiments and diction, and says that when a narrative contains all these and lacks only metre it seems fairer to refer it to the epic than to romance to which it has but the similarity of prose. He also speaks of the lost Homeric comic poem and concludes that there is justification for a light treatment in the epic manner. Having thus conjured up a reputable background for the form he was resolved to use, he elaborates the differences between it and serious epic. In fable and action it is light and ridiculous where the other is portentous and solemn; its characters are of low rank and homely manners, and its diction and sentiments follow the ludicrous instead of the sublime. It is in this last department that the modern reader of Fielding probably notices his technique most. For we are so accustomed to the novel as "a slice of life" that
we are apt to overlook the fact that it only became so because Fielding related it to a poetical form which also purported to interpret life as a whole, and that for the sake of consistency he was obliged to make the same distinction in tone as in content. Working upon his foundation, novelists have been able to discard the epic machinery and the satiric attitude, but for a writer of his time and literary background that would have been impossible. He could not convey even a backstairs view of the epic except through a method which would both show the comic and imply the deviation from the normal or serious. Accordingly he is careful to state that it is the ridiculous, not the burlesque with which he is concerned. Occasional burlesque is admissible in diction, but a deliberate distortion will not serve to portray even the comic side of characters who are to be a just imitation of life. Comedy of the ridiculous springs from the discovery of affectation in character, the difference between what people are and what they would be thought. This says Fielding, ought to convey greater pleasure than caricature. Caricature exhibits a perversion of the normal. The ridiculous points out the normal and offers a contrast between it and an exactly opposite state. He makes it clear that the accidents of nature are not in themselves ridiculous. But if the victims of poverty or deformity try to ape riches or agility, then they become objects of mirth. The same is said of vice. Fielding had strong reforming tendencies and he postulates a theory here which he frequently reiterates, namely, that the best way to
remove vice is to show it and its practitioners in the piti­less light of comedy and to suggest an agreeable alternative while exposing it. He was willing to admit, however, that human nature might require considerable persuasion to separate from its follies. Consequently, he laid himself out to make his work as entertaining as possible, using the comparatively unimportant epic devices like descriptions of battles, invocations and the like to contribute to the reader's diversion.

The details of epic construction in its serious form have already been discussed in this essay and it now remains to illustrate their use in the novels. Most of them Fielding used comically, but occasionally in Tom Jones when he speaks of Sophia it is evident that he thought the finest language no more than a just tribute to the memory of his first wife.

As I have said before, I do not think Fielding wrote the preface to Joseph Andrews until he had finished the novel and for that reason it does not seem fair to expect it to be a full illustration of the rules contained therein, particularly as the preface needs the elaboration of the critical discussions in Tom Jones to make it complete. Joseph Andrews is a partial exemplification of the principles of the comic prose epic. It has the technical expedients and one epic character, but the epic qualities are not, on the whole, as pervasive as those imposed by the burlesque of Pamela. As far as the details of the novels are concerned, the burlesque

1. See pp. 5-7 of the present discussion.
is negligible. Fielding was much too fond of action to keep Joseph in idle proximity to Lady Booby simply to increase suspense. Once he separated them the parody collapsed. The impulse to burlesque remained, however, and so did the group of characters it had prescribed in the first place. Adams is undeniably an epic creation; he dwarfs the little creatures who swarm about his knees. But merely because he appeared Fielding could not entirely alter the first conception of his novel and he had to continue the two lines of characterization according to the light in which they were conceived. Joseph, Fanny, Lady Booby and retinue owe their existence to the parody and they do not conform to the requirements of historic character. Some of the minor characters, Lawyer Scout, Beau Didapper and the inn-keepers, do, as Fielding said they were intended to, represent certain degrees of human viciousness and folly, but they are too sketchily drawn to have much personality -- the Tow-wouses are, perhaps, an exception -- and there are too few of them to make a complete picture.

Fielding said that even his inn-keepers had been given distinct personalities and it is true that no two are exactly alike, but it is the variety and the collected effect of the onetrait characters, not their single presences, that gives Tom Jones its flavour of reality. When we have seen all the hosts and post boys, all the lawyers and doctors and all the mincing

fops and fine ladies, then we feel that we know those classes in all their varieties but we do not take that impression from *Joseph Andrews*. It is thin in its human relationships and only Adams stands out, the symbol of humanity with its head in the clouds. He is the essence of innocent simplicity, and his pardonable pride in his learning and his retreat from philosophy in the face of sorrow are the amiable flaws that mark him as one of the race of men not heroes.

The mechanics of epic construction are more noticeable, I do not mean more frequent, in *Joseph Andrews* than in *Tom Jones* and that, I think, is due also to the absence of significant purpose. Fielding undoubtedly had the epic in mind as he wrote but he was thinking in terms of burlesque and paid more attention to the technical details which could so easily be misapplied to make the situation more ridiculous than to the ultimate meaning. He used the epic simile with its lofty tone and long periods, and substituted ignoble objects of comparison to equally ignoble situations to make a complete travesty of the device:

"As when a hungry tigress, who long has traversed the woods in fruitless search, sees within reach of her claws a lamb, she prepares to leap on her prey; or as a voracious pike, of immense size surveys through the liquid element a roach or gudgeon, which cannot escape her jaws, opens them wide to swallow the little fish; so did Mrs. Slipslop prepare to lay her violent amorous hands on the poor Joseph..." 3.

He addressed lengthy and grandiloquent invocations to love, to vanity, to the muse of biography; gave extended descrip-

tions with the usual discrepancy between the diction and the subject and even included a battle in the Homeric style. But these are the minor features of epic structure and their use was pretty well established in the burlesque tradition. However, there are others which are more important to the conduct of the narrative. There are two instances of the interpolated story, the History of Leonora, or the unfortunate Jilt, and the story of Leonard and Paul. Neither of these has anything to do with the plot but they are well worked in and they have the epic sanction. The long recital by Mr. Wilson of the sinful courses of his youth is slightly more justifiable because he is to appear later. When he does it is to bring about a 'discovery' in the accredited classic fashion and the old device of interchanged children is used again as Joseph reveals his strawberry mark.

Such conscious adherence to the rules, added to the masterly portrayal of character in Adams, is more than adequate preparation for the next novel where the rules are submerged in the epic proportions of the theme.

In Tom Jones Fielding has, with some few exceptions, carried out his own rules for the building of a novel. The ornamental portions are well-chosen; the characters are credible both as individuals and as representatives of their types; the plot is probable, and the details admirably fitted

2. Ibid. Vol. II. pp. 202-211.
3. Ibid. Vol. II. pp. 24-60.
to add to the pleasure which the whole must convey. And, finally, the result is as satisfactory a picture of human nature as a man of Fielding's temperament could make it.

The plot is remarkably coherent, considering the number of by-plays that cross and recross it. There are, of course, a few irrelevant episodes but the number is not great enough to disturb the continuity of the plot as a whole. The principle of selection upon which Fielding insisted so strenuously is as rigorously adhered to in the general structure as it is in the details. I have already given some examples of his humorous use of the convention of history which says that only events of some importance are to be included; it is unnecessary to say more than that he maintains that attitude throughout the book, leaving it to the reader to decide whether or not there is any significance in the remarks. There very often is. The elaborate time scheme upon which the books are based is one example. It will be found that the deliberately light tone of the brief remarks indicating how much time each section is to represent cover a carefully conceived plan to observe the principle of interest.

Fielding's discussions about probability and the marvellous are more interesting for their oblique reference to contemporary prose fiction than for their significance in his own work. He had no need to insist on a rule of probability and it would be ridiculous in the extreme to search

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1. See p. 29 of the present discussion.
2. See pp. 58-59 of the present discussion.
his flesh-and-blood realism for excursions into the supernatural.

Anyone seeking epic parallels will find them in plenty in *Tom Jones*. Freed from the restraint of burlesque Fielding dipped into his reserves of observation and experience and produced character after character living and distinct, each one the epitome of some trait so fundamental to human nature that we recognize him immediately. Nor was this a haphazard creation. All the facets of behaviour are represented; each main type is presented in comparison and contrast to its opposite. There is Tom Jones, the type of erring but well-meaning humanity and opposed to him is Blifil who is all bad and Fellamar who is bad because his education has made him so. And there is Sophia, who ought to be his feminine counterpart but who was too much idealized as Charlotte Fielding. Sophia, innocent, charming, simple, has her contrasts in Lady Bellaston and Harriet Fitzpatrick who represent respectively the female rake and the sentimentally vicious lady of fashion. There is Western, the irascible, bigoted but comically appealing country gentleman opposed to the pious and just but uninteresting Allworthy; and the two together form a contrast to old Nightingale and his brother, the shrewd and worldly city parents. The race of shrill-voiced, vituperative women is present in full cry. In good society Mrs. Western plagues the squire with her politics and learning. Backstairs the maids quarrel over precedence; Mrs. Deborah, aged fifty-three, retreats in horror from a bastard baby; the
Seagrim women bandy terms of whore and slut until Black George calms them with a switch, and Mrs. Partridge flays the pedagogue for his insufficiency. The minor feminine characters who should contrast with this group are rather neglected and there are only Mrs. Whitefield and Mrs. Miller to represent the 'good humoured' woman, full of piety and complacence. Perhaps Fielding thought Sophia a sufficient contrast to all the unattractive femininity he could imagine; perhaps he had not yet conceived the ideal of womanhood he was later to give in Amelia. Jenny Jones and Partridge have a double significance in the narrative. They are the male and female complicators who cause the tangle and who resolve it in the end. Partridge is the fool, with his basin and plasters instead of the cap and bells. He is present everywhere, full of ingenious curiosity and shortsighted selfishness, poking a disturbing finger into every pie. Jenny is rather a remarkable creation, not so much for herself as for an illustration of Fielding's tolerance of the sins of the flesh. Fielding treats this very human example of the woman whose impulses have got the better of her judgment with more consideration as a human being than was usual in his time, although one cannot but feel that it was perhaps a little unkind to give parson Supple no other prize than Jenny Jones for his well-preserved chastity.

The difference between the characterization, and, therefore, the epic quality, of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* is that the one is single and the other cumulative. *Joseph Andrews* has one great epic character and no more. *Tom Jones* has a variety of brief but precise personalities who together make up an effect of cosmic reality. The main characters, Tom and Sophia and Western, are real as human beings, it is true; they have good traits and bad, but their commonplace significance will not give them a place with Adams and Don Quixote.

The epic formula is not as apparent, although quite as frequent, in *Tom Jones* as it is in *Joseph Andrews*. The purely decorative features are made to serve two purposes, first, to heighten the effect of the ridiculous and second, to give dignity to serious descriptions, while the structural devices play very much the same part as they do in the conventional epic. The Homeric simile lends itself particularly well to burlesque and Fielding employed it so often that it would be impossible to include a complete list of its appearances. The following is a representative example:

"Not otherwise than when a kite, tremendous bird, is beheld by the feathered generation soaring aloft, and hovering over their heads; the amorous dove and every little bird, spread wide the alarm, and fly trembling to their hiding places. He proudly beats the air, conscious of his dignity, and meditates intended mischief.

"So when the approach of Mrs. Deborah was proclaimed throughout the street all the inhabitants ran trembling
into their houses." 1.

It is comic to describe Mrs. Deborah as a bird of prey and there is just enough truth in the description to bring out the ridiculous in the comparison. There are several battles in the classical style, complete with invocations, similes, personifications, personal combats and libations, and one of the most ludicrous is the solemn account of the array of weapons Mrs. Waters levelled at Jones and the description of the siege to subdue his virtue—the only fault is that the siege was so short. When Fielding approached Sophia he dropped all his ridicule and his sense of broad comedy and used all the arts of fine writing hitherto expended on burlesque:

"Hushed be every ruder breath. May the heathen ruler of the winds confine in iron chains the boisterous limbs of noisy Boreas, and the sharp-pointed noise of bitter, biting Eurus. Do thou, sweet Zephyrus..." 4.

and so on into a description of Sophia's appearance. There are others of the same sort. While they are undoubtedly overdrawn, they have a certain sincerity which is particularly evident since Fielding does not conclude them in the prosaic tone with which he usually finishes purple passages.

The interpolated tale of the Man of the Hill has absolutely no connection with the main thread of the narrative but

it is worked in very naturally and it is admissible according to epic practice. It might even be said that it has a faint relation to Jones, inasmuch as the old man's moralizing is meant as a warning to deter the young one from similar vicious conduct. The tale has the conventional elements of lengthy speeches in formal language and of forgotten and mistaken identities.

As a final vindication of his own and the epic principles Fielding brings Tom Jones to a successful conclusion and ends the book on the proper note of optimism with all the good characters suitably rewarded and the bad ones like Blifil and Square either dead or suffering well-deserved punishment.

In Amelia the superficial qualities of epic technique are omitted. Fielding had apparently gone beyond the boyish enjoyment of fun-making for its own sake, or else the mid-century sentimentalism had overpowered him. The tone of the book is elegiac rather than rollicking as it is in the earlier novels.

Amelia follows the principles of the comic prose epic as they are developed in the critical discussions in Tom Jones, the result, as far as character is concerned, being very much the same. No one stands out in an intensely human light but there is an infinite variety of types and the same contrast of dark and light within the one class. The social purpose which is so evident in Amelia circumscribes the characterization to a certain extent and imposes a greater number of foolish and downright wicked figures than is, perhaps,
consistent with a truly representative picture. However, within their limitations the *dramatis personae* give a more than adequate portrayal of a cross-section of society. It is difficult not to judge Booth and Amelia from our standards instead of the contemporary view of what should be the relations between a husband and wife in their social position, but unless we can accept what must have seemed a right and proper situation to Fielding both will be distorted; Amelia will be compliant and insipid and Booth an arrant scoundrel.

On the whole, the structure of *Amelia* is not as closely dovetailed as that of the other novels, probably because the story is stationary and the characters fewer. The journey form had provided a credible excuse for unrolling event after event and carrying everyone along to a grand explanation scene at the end. But in this novel Fielding had to resort to direct narration for much of the action and the result is loose. The most objectionable feature of the construction is the two long narratives told by Booth and Miss Mathews in prison. It seems to me that in his anxiety to establish the situation before beginning the action, Fielding forgot his rule of historical selection and gave a great many unnecessary details, particularly in the case of Miss Mathews. In any event, the method is cumbersome.

In concluding this chapter on the comic prose epic it should be pointed out that if the theory has been stressed more than its practise in the novels, that is because it grew out of them, not they out of it and because it is
important for its influence on the later novel. The principles of history and of epic have been collected from *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* so that it is unjust to judge either novel as if the author had had a completely preconceived scheme in mind when he wrote. If he had, he would probably never have produced a story with the freedom and freshness of *Tom Jones*. 

Chapter VI
Fielding's Method of Presenting Character, Setting and Plot.

In the foregoing sections of this essay I have attempted to show that certain factors in Fielding's literary background largely determined the kind of characters and plot he was to present. The conclusions drawn have, I think, been made authoritative by Fielding's own mention of the types I have referred to, that is, to the epic and the picaresque narrative. It has been shown, first, that the episodic structure and the broad comedy of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones are traceable to the picaresque tradition; second, that Jonathon Wild owes its characterization to the picaresques, its form and details to the realistic novel of crime; third, that the characterization and the purpose of Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Amelia are the result of Fielding's adaptation of the epic to prose narrative. In other words, the novelist's borrowings from epic poetry and picaresque narrative compelled him to present a broad view of human nature. Fielding's novels are, therefore, pictorial in effect. The fact that

1. I omit Jonathon Wild and the rogue biography because the latter is a specialized type of narrative and has not appreciably influenced Fielding's narrative method as a whole.

2. I have borrowed the terms 'pictorial' and 'dramatic' as applied to narrative technique from Mr. Percy Lubbock's book, The Craft of Fiction.
they are pictorial implies that the author's attitude toward them is personal, that his presence is apparent in the handling of the narrative. It now remains to show the effect which the author's position in regard to the story has had upon his particular technique, use of setting, method of presenting character and manipulation of plot.

However, before discussing in detail the actual technique of Fielding's novels it is necessary to explain just why he is so actively present at every turn of the narrative. The reason, I think, lies in his attempt to depict a representative picture of society. Such an undertaking implies a vast concourse of differentiated characters, each to be provided with suitable surroundings and occasions for action.

In order to keep such a picture within the bounds of comprehension the author was obliged to exercise an arbitrary authority. For the sake of brevity he had to tell where and when the events took place instead of leaving it to the characters to disclose their situations. For the same reason, he had to describe the dominant characteristics of his people. In a one-character novel it is possible for the author to remain behind the scenes and allow that character to reveal himself gradually through his conversation and his reactions to a variety of situations until he stands a complete personality before the reader. But where the novelist's aim has been to show enough personalities to illustrate the gradations of society, time and opportunity are lacking to
allow each one a thorough self-revelation. The author must employ some process of selection by which he decides upon the traits most necessary to be emphasized. Having established the character as a certain kind of person he should then let him display himself as often as the action will naturally allow. Multiplicity of character means multiplicity of event, for it is impossible to infuse an appearance of life into any work of art unless its people be represented as doing something. It is in this respect that the difference between picture and drama makes itself felt. In dramatic representation each event takes place before the reader's eyes; in panorama each event is described by someone either as it takes place or after it has happened. In the one case, the author is absent; in the other, he is the medium of communication unless the story is told in the first person by one of the characters, as it is in *Henry Esmond* for instance. It is a matter of taste, and, of course, of the efficiency of the artist, as to which is the more effective, but where action is the theme of the novel, the first is more likely to give an effect of thorough reality. However, purely dramatic presentation is feasible only when events are reasonably few and highly significant and when they are enacted by a group of characters of more or less equal importance. It would become confusing were it to be consistently applied to a wide circle of people some of whom play very trifling parts in the narrative and who are but
slightly connected with one another. Fielding wisely chose to mingle direct narrative and drama, preserving thereby the proper balance of importance between his minor and major characters. He personally directed the narrative at all times, although he could step back gracefully enough when he thought it practicable for his people to act or speak in their own personalities. He personally indicated the connection between the episodes and kept the various lines of action up to date, generally carrying the narrative along with him.

The above-mentioned circumstances will account for the number of times Fielding enters the story in a structural capacity, but they will offer no excuse for the other occasions upon which he is undeniably present. It is perfectly true that he is too often to be found holding up the performance while he gives personal opinions upon questions arising from it or airs certain of his prejudices. He had failed to perceive the limits of his function as controller. The purely objective attitude which banishes the author as a personality from the story had not come into being in Fielding's time. Also it must be remembered that the novel was new to him and that such prose narratives as had preceded his had allowed the author a very definite place. If we consider that Fielding naturally felt a desire to explain the new form he was inventing we can scarcely blame him for permitting himself a certain latitude of personal comment.
It is generally agreed that the absolute necessities of the novel are as follows: people, a series of actions working up to a climax, and a recognizable background against which people and action may move. No novel, of course, preserves an even balance between the three; it would not be interesting if it did. We have novels of character, novels of action, and, occasionally, novels of place, but no matter which element predominates it must have the help of the other two if the novel is to approach the level of human experience, in general or in a single instance. It is Fielding's particular glory that in his work all three are for the first time combined in proportions which unite, as he said, to form a realistic picture of life. There are plenty of examples before Fielding of narratives in which either plot, character or setting is emphasized; improper development of one or more of the other two prevents the narratives from coming under the heading of the novel as we know it. The character writers, for instance, and the essayists show real and living people in their natural surroundings, but they fail to provide them with plot. Defoe could describe any corner of the earth and make it appear in all its details, but he could not populate it with more than a few substantial characters, nor could he set them to a properly conceived action. Richardson provided some very real characters from the classes he knew and some doubtful ones from the social levels above him, but his settings are unconvincing and some
parts of his plots are as dubious as his gentlemen.

Fielding was not particularly concerned about verisimilitude in background. He seems to have taken it for granted, for he does not mention it in those passages on credibility in character where a discussion of it would most likely occur. His chief concern was that he should present people who approached the norm of human nature. Therefore he started his people on a train of events possible for them to accomplish making these events take place, as a matter of course, where they naturally would happen to people of the sort he was describing. His use of setting is almost unconscious and wholly business-like. He takes his characters and his reader through London and the parts of rural England that he knew, in the casual way that he might have taken a friend through his house. He saw no reason to comment upon the city or the country-side for their own sakes because he found nothing unusual about them. After he tells us where Jones went after he left Allworthy he gives names of towns and inns along the road, merely because that is the natural thing to do in recounting a journey. The use of setting is the same in all four novels. Jonathon Wild, being placed in London, has very little to say about background once the place has been named. In the story of her travels Mrs. Heartfree mentions her constantly changing surroundings but she does not dilate upon them. In Joseph Andrews Fielding
announces that Joseph worked for Sir Thomas Booby on his country estate and that is all we hear about the country until Joseph and Adams begin their journey back from London. Even then, the details are so few that the impression is of a conventional sort of rural scene. We know there are hills because Adams trips and rolls to the bottom of one; we know there are streams because he invariably wades through them, but beyond these meagre details we know nothing about the surroundings. Nor do we feel the lack; because if the information is sparse, it is accurate and sufficient. The concrete reality of the inhabitants of the deftly sketched inns and ale-houses is enough to leave us feeling that we have gone a journey in eighteenth century England.

In Tom Jones opportunities for enlarging upon background were more numerous than in Joseph Andrews but Fielding took no more advantage of them. In fact, he seems to have been afraid that he might fall into romantic description and pulls up short at the slightest suggestion of it. His description of Allworthy's house and grounds takes up less than two pages but he concludes it with his rather whimsical remark:

"Reader, take care. I have unadvisedly led thee to the top of as high a hill as Mr. Allworthy's, and how to get thee down without breaking thy neck, I do not well know. However, let us e'en venture to slide down together; for Miss Bridget rings her bell, and Mr. Allworthy is summoned to breakfast, where I must attend, and, if you please, shall be glad of
"your company."\(^1\)

It is obvious that he thinks time spent away from his characters is time wasted. There are any number of occasions upon which he might have taken the liberty to dwell on the beauties of nature but he never did so. Tom and Molly Seagrim repair to a copse for purposes of their own, but Fielding will not tell what the place looked like; neither will he describe the garden in which Tom and Sophia discovered their mutual love, nor the appearance of the moonlit hill on the road from Gloucester. These descriptions are unnecessary; therefore they are omitted.

'Verisimilitude of Background' in Fielding consists of an exact representation of actual places and things which must be described to make action credible. The novels are concrete and solid in every respect. Just as there is no abstract theorizing about the feelings of the characters, there is no romanticizing about their surroundings, no attempt to construct a background to agree with their states of mind.

In Amelia the scene shifts from London to Gibraltar and back again by way of France. But no one who is curious about the fort or Montpellier need go to this novel for information. Booth merely announces that he lived in one place or another;

that is all we hear about them. The London scenes are more precisely indicated than the others for two reasons. First, in *Amelia*, Fielding was anxious to show the deplorable state of the prisons and the laws against debtors. Consequently, he enlarged upon the disgusting condition of the prison into which Booth was thrown, describing the wretched inmates in some detail. For a similar reason he speaks particularly about the sort of life the prisoners lived in the bailiff's house and makes a point of describing the precincts of the court to which Booth was confined. Second, the most important part of the story takes place in London. Our feeling of pity and admiration for Amelia, which it is the secondary aim of the novel to arouse, is influenced by the miserable circumstances in which she is obliged to live and by the even more miserable situations in which she finds Booth. However, there are no pictures of London inserted simply for their intrinsic interest. Amelia goes to Vauxhall in company with Dr. Harrison and others, but Fielding declines to describe the place, getting out of the difficulty by saying:

"The extreme beauty and elegance of this place is well known to almost everyone of my readers; and happy it is for me that is so, since to give an adequate idea of it would exceed my power of description. To delineate the particular beauties of these gardens would, indeed, require as much pains, and as much paper too, as to rehearse all the good actions of their master...."

The above will serve as a fair sample of his method of indicating incidental setting.

In conclusion, it seems safe to say that setting in Fielding is entirely subordinated to action. It is indicated thoroughly and definitely when it is required to substantiate events or to throw character into relief, but it is never emphasized for its own sake. Although it is undoubtedly true that perusal of the three great novels leaves the reader feeling that he has seen the country inns and London of the eighteenth century, the impression is rather the result of the exact pictures of the people who inhabit those places than of any attempt of the author to describe them for themselves.

Fielding's people belong to the type usually to be found in the novel of character. They are static or flat. They do not develop; they unfold attributes they are known to possess from the first moment they appear, the aim of the novelist being to put them into new situations or to change their mutual relationships, always making them behave according to type. This is the showman's method of displaying his product from every conceivable angle until there can be no particle of the surface unexposed; it is less concerned with what lies beneath the surface. I suppose it would be asking too much to expect Fielding to have developed a method of psychological analysis; if he had we should probably know a great deal more about the hidden lives of
Adams, Tom, Amelia and all the others. As it is, we know them only in their relationships with other people or as they appeared to the world. The author, who is supposed to be able to see into their innermost beings, puts himself into the story as a character, a man of their world, seeing only what an unprejudiced observer would see had he the author's unlimited opportunities. Therefore, he tells us only such conventional details about them as that this one had a natural share of vanity, or that one suffered remorse with no accompanying strength of mind, or that another had a sense of humour. We see them displaying these traits in situations which approximate those in life, but we do not see their own mental processes as they experience the sensations aroused by the external stimuli supplied by the author.

Fielding's method of presenting character is dictated by his point of view in the novel. He has adopted the omniscient attitude by which he is able to see all, know all and control all without being obliged to account for his knowledge or justify his direction of the narrative.¹ This attitude places the author in the position of being, whenever he wishes, a character in the story or an impersonal

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¹ Fielding does so account and justify constantly but he need not have done so. His personal remarks as to how he obtained his information about characters and events add nothing to the essential reality of the stories.
controller. He is free to project himself into the narrative; he may speak familiarly to the reader, as Fielding does, or he may remain quite out of sight as a person, as Fielding also does, for long periods of time.

When applied to character the method of personal communication between author and reader results in a combination of direct and indirect presentation. Fielding's procedure is the same for both major and minor characters, although the presentation of the latter is necessarily more compact and rapid. The major characters generally appear first, except in *Tom Jones*, where the entrance of the hero had to be deferred until he was old enough to take part in the action. Fielding first describes their circumstances and their dominant characteristics. Soon after being formally introduced the people appear; the author steps back while they speak or do certain things which bear out his preliminary statements about them. From that stage the revelation of character proceeds by alternate passages of narrative and dialogue. Fielding was quite aware that to tell the reader that Tom Jones is a young rascal and bound to be hanged was not enough. Jones had to be exhibited in circumstances which would bring out all sides of his nature. It was impossible to allow him to act in person in each situation, but it was quite possible for Fielding to relate the most important details of the incidents in which he was reported to have taken part. As a general rule, when Fielding personally says
that one of his people has such and such a quality the
statement is either directly preceded or followed by an
incident to prove it. The incident may be in action and
dialogue or in narration, depending upon the importance of
the quality in the total make-up of the character and also
upon the point in the action at which it occurs. When the
persons of the novel reveal their most essential characteris­
tics they are allowed to speak and act in person for the
greater part of the incident; although the author may round
off the scene himself.

Description of one character by another is seldom found
in Fielding's novels. His people do, of course, make
occasional observations one about the other, but their
comments are too few and too closely connected with insigni­
ficant events to contribute much to the sum total of any
one's qualities. There is, however, a strong tendency toward
character contrasts. That is, one person is made to reveal
himself by his reactions to the behaviour of another.
Character contrast in Fielding is apt to become mechanical
because the scenes are obviously managed to put one person
at an advantage. For the same reason, the device is any­
thing but economical; unimportant persons have to be more
fully revealed than their positions in the story demand
before they can legitimately be contrasted with important
persons or give much information about them. For instance,
Sophia's reaction to Harriet Fitzpatrick's story shows her to be a much more admirable person than Harriet. But we are inclined to wonder why we must know so much about the latter when we have already seen instances of the modesty and prudence which she brings out in Sophia. Certainly, the plot does not necessitate our complete knowledge of Harriet's life. Evidently, character contrast of the sort in the example above is merely a rather clumsy expedient by which Fielding gives his opinion of character without commenting in person.

In order to choose representative examples of Fielding's method of characterization, I have divided the characters in each novel into major and minor classes, making an entirely arbitrary selection of the people to be discussed from each novel since it is impossible to deal with all of even the most important persons.

The general principles I have adduced regarding Fielding's presentation of character are not entirely applicable to Jonathon Wild. Jonathon is an ironic illustration for Fielding's thesis on worldly greatness; he was intended to give Fielding's impression of a certain type of corrupt humanity. Consequently, the novelist is more particular to describe and reiterate his qualities than he is in the case of characters in the other novels. The reader must be left in no doubt about Jonathon's significance. However,
although he does repeat frequently that all Wild's characteristics are part of his 'greatness', Fielding follows his usual method of describing actions and presenting them dramatically. He even includes two dialogues: one between Wild and Laetitia after their marriage, and one between Wild and the Ordinary of Newgate. Except, perhaps, the Heart-frees, none of the other characters in the novel are developed to anything like the same degree as Jonathon. The Misses Snap and the members of Wild's gang are described succinctly when they appear, the author supplying further information as it is needed.

In Joseph Andrews Parson Adams is, of course, the logical example of the major character. The construction of the novel being such that he is brought into contact with every other person at some time during the narrative, he is thus an agent in the general characterization as well as the first great illustration of Fielding's method. He first mentions Adams in Chapter II when Joseph is described; in Chapter III he gives a short account of the parson's abilities, disposition and material circumstances:

"He was, besides, a man of good sense, good parts, and good nature; but was at the same time as entirely ignorant of the ways of this world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be. As he had never any intention to deceive, so he never suspected such a design in others. He was generous, friendly and brave to an excess; but simplicity was his characteristic..."1

This pretty well establishes Adams as a type. He does not change from the fully developed character he is when first we meet him. He does, however, unfold the sides of his personality indicated in the preliminary description, disclosing some others not yet intimated. In Chapter V of Book III Adams and Joseph argue about the relative merits of public and private schools; Adams is not far into his remarks before we realize that when he speaks of the excellence of small schools and their masters he has himself in mind. This is a fine example of one of the innocent weaknesses of which the parson has several. Fielding makes this comment after Adams has briskly vanquished all Joseph's arguments:

"Indeed, if this good man had an enthusiasm, or what the vulgar call a blind side, it was this: he thought a schoolmaster the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest of all schoolmasters: neither of which points he would have given up to Alexander the Great at the head of his army."

The parson's defects all seem to be on side of vanity and over-estimation of his own powers, but they are common-place failings of a sort which serve rather to link him with the mass of humankind than to detract from his attractiveness as a person. Moreover, Fielding presents them in a ridiculous yet kindly light, whether he makes the comment himself or provides an opportunity for Adams to reveal himself.

To return to Adams’ entry into the novel. After describing him thoroughly, Fielding lets him disappear until the burlesque section of the tale is over and Joseph is on his way back to the country. Thereafter Adams is placed in a variety of situations which amply illustrate his courage, kindness and simplicity. He willingly offers Joseph his small stock of money although he has no prospect of getting more. He proves himself a valiant fighter in Fanny’s defense when he rescues her from the ravisher; his bravery also appears when he tries to save her from the designs of the wicked squire. These traits are illustrated both by the author’s comments and by direct action and speech.

Fielding was most anxious to emphasize Adams’ easy gullibility which continually exposes him to ridicule and ill treatment. Consequently, there are more examples of that quality than of the others, and in them Adams speaks more frequently in his own voice. We hear his own discourse— which he would surely never have given if he had had the least penetration into the character of the Reverend Barnabas—on the doctrine of faith as opposed to good works.¹ We listen to him unconsciously disclosing the fact that he is as willing as another to use his political influence—for the ‘right’ man.² His interjections during Mr. Wilson’s

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history show a complete innocence of worldly depravity, and
his naive remarks to Peter Pounce regarding that worthy's
wealth disclose a tendency to accept character at its surface
valuation. It is significant that although in these scenes
Adams proves himself to be unobservant of human nature and
as incapable of coping with duplicity as a man could well
be, he nevertheless gives an impression of simple dignity,
which is quite as strong as his laughable qualities. This
side of his character is illustrated even better by his
reply to Lady Booby's command that he forbid the banns for
Fanny and Joseph:

"'Madam,' answered Adams, 'I know not what your
ladyship means by the terms master and service.
I am in the service of a Master who will never
discard me for doing my duty; and if the doctor
(for indeed I have never been able to pay for a
licence) thinks proper to turn me out from my 2
cure, God will provide me, I hope, another.'"

It has been stated before that every character of any
importance in this book comes in contact with Parson Adams
sooner or later; some, indeed come in contact with him only.
It is patent that such a method of presenting character is
followed for two reasons. First, the unrelated characters
serve to illustrate some weaknesses which Fielding wished
to satirize in human nature. Second, they throw light on
Adams's disposition by their contrast to it. In each of

the examples cited below Adams accumulates more proof of piety and virtue as the people he meets show themselves to be petty, avaricious and ignorant.

The important characters receive a somewhat more extended treatment of their contrast to Adams, as they are also introduced through their contact with him. We first hear of Mrs. Slipslop as the medium of communication between Adams and Sir Thomas Booby. Fielding takes the occasion to tell us that Slipslop was opinionated, selfish and ignorant. Following his usual custom, he then allows her to demonstrate her characteristics in a short dialogue with Adams. In this, the introductory section of the novel, the author's plan is, apparently, to present the characters one by one, dropping them after their introduction until the action calls for them. Mrs. Slipslop reappears in Chapter VI of Book I. Fielding describes her appearance and her amorous inclinations, making no bones about the fact that he, personally, is in possession of all there is to know about the lady. He then steps back to allow her to make her unsuccessful assault on Joseph's virtue. Hereafter, Slipslop appears frequently and Fielding usually follows the direct method in making her display her own temperament, although he himself does not


entirely cease to comment.

I shall not discuss in detail the method pursued in the case of Joseph and Lady B., the other characters whom I have placed in the major category. The preliminary remarks on Adams contain succinct word-sketches of both of them; of Joseph as "this character of male chastity",¹ and Lady B. as, "a woman of gaiety, who had been blest with a town education, and never spoke of any of her country neighbors by any other appellation than that of 'brutes'".² After the initial descriptions, Fielding follows his general policy of emphasizing the qualities uppermost in the characters both by describing actions and by making them appear before the reader's eyes.

The number of minor characters who are presented more or less completely is so great that it is impossible to deal with more than a few of them. They are exhibited by the usual method of comment and example, the only difference between their presentation and that of the important personages being that the scenes they enact in person are generally longer and fuller but fewer in number. Each is revealed in one vivid scene with the addition of some brief and pointed remarks by the author; from that time on he expects the reader to take them for granted. Fielding seems

to have followed no principle in deciding which was to come first, the explanatory remarks or the character in action.

The Tow-Wouses, Betty, their maid, Parson Trulliber and Mr. Wilson are all plunged into action first and commented upon by the author afterward. Fielding describes Trulliber's appearance and occupation before the parson comes upon the stage, but he makes no comment on his nature. On the other hand, Beau Didapper, who represents the effeminate dandy, a favorite subject of satire with Fielding, is minutely described as to appearance and disposition in such a way that there is no doubt about the author's dislike for him before we ever see him. In greater or lesser degree the other minor characters all display some, at least, of their strongest qualities before the author arrives to supply the necessary details to make them complete, if brief, personalities.

In *Tom Jones* there is no great character like Adams to whom all the rest may be related, but the method of presenting single characters is the same as that in *Joseph Andrews*. The necessary character contrast is supplied by a carefully planned system of opposites. As I have already indicated, nearly every character of any importance has a counterpart who represents his opposite qualities. Consequently, one character is constantly being played off

1. P. 70.
against another.

Tom Jones, the titular hero of the novel, receives a fuller treatment than any of the other characters. The reasons are two: first, because Fielding liked him; second, because he is the occasion for the central plot to which the lesser intrigues are connected and to which they contribute at the dénouement. He is introduced in a distinctly leisurely fashion. Fielding takes great pains to establish a background for him, thoroughly depicting Allworthy, Miss Bridget, the Blifil brothers, Partridge, Jenny Jones, Thwackum and Square before discussing Tom at all, except as an infant. These people make up a group representative of the sort of people with whom Tom will come in contact later; also, three of them, Allworthy, Partridge and Jenny Jones, will appear from time to time. Fielding presents young Jones with an ironic flourish:

"As we determined, when we first sat down to write this history, to flatter no man, but to guide our pen throughout by the directions of truth, we are obliged to bring our hero on the stage in a much more disadvantageous manner than we could wish; and to declare honestly, even at his first appearance, that it was the universal opinion of all Mr. Allworthy's family, that he was certainly born to be hanged."¹

He goes on to tell us that Tom's crimes consisted of stealing apples, a duck and a ball from Master Blifil. He also explains that Jones suffered from comparison with Blifil's

spotless behaviour. Just at this point Fielding makes a remark which is significant in connection with his method of characterization:

"An incident which about this time, will set the characters of these two lads more fairly before the discerning reader, than is in the power of the longest dissertation."1

This comment speaks for itself and there is ample evidence in all four novels that he followed the practise it advises, although perhaps not as consistently as he might have. The incident referred to--Tom's refusal to betray Black George, the gamekeeper, for his part in the assault on Western's partridges--sets him in his character of generous good nature tinctured with weakness. Fielding recounts this incident himself, following it with a series of comments and reported actions which illustrate them. While describing Sophia he takes the opportunity to say that Tom was his own worst enemy;2 he tells of the seduction of Molly Seagrim, intimating plainly that he approves of Tom's behaviour and feelings after the event.3 In connection with this affair we have one of the first instances of direct comment by one character about another. Squire Western says that Tom is undoubtedly the father of Molly's child and Parson Supple makes this extenuating remark:

"... truly, I must say; though he hath the character of being a little wild, I never saw any harm in the young man."

It seems to me that in his portrayal of a character as important and as capable of arousing interest as Tom's, Fielding has been a little too much in evidence. Instead of allowing Jones to reveal his own sensations when he first suspects that Sophia loves him, the author tells how he felt. Unfortunately, the second-hand recital is cold; it has none of the reality of passion with which Tom's own words and actions might have invested a dramatic scene. There is a similar lack of direct action in the scenes of emotion throughout the book. The actions Jones performs are natural enough as they are retailed to us, but the manner of presenting them and the infrequent personal appearances of the doer throw a veil between him and the reader. Fielding is too anxious to impress us with the fact that if Jones was sexually immoral, he was not totally lacking in virtue. Therefore, when a situation arises in which his hero may display the finer feelings of remorse and grief Fielding hastily takes the scene into his own hands and describes it emphatically. The account of Tom's frenzy after being turned away by Allworthy and his grief at missing Sophia at Upton are more expressive of Fielding's desire to excuse him than of real feeling on Tom's part.

The incidents presented in direct action in which Jones appears for any length of time are more illustrative of his temperament. The scene between Tom and Sophia when they discover their mutual passion is delicate and tender. If we cannot suppress a smile at the image of them tottering under the impact of their newly-discovered feelings, we cannot condemn the scene as essentially unnatural. Even better is the short but pithy speech Jones delivers to young Nightingale when the latter wishes to sneak off from the enamored Nancy Miller:

"'Lookee,' Mr. Nightingale," said Jones, 'I am no canting hypocrite, nor do I pretend to the gift of chastity, more than any of my neighbors. I have been guilty with women, I own it; but am not conscious that I have ever injured any--Nor would I, to procure pleasure to myself, be knowingly the cause of misery to any human being.'"

There is no doubt that Fielding had a personal liking for Jones. It shows in the first remark he makes about him and continues to appear in piece after piece of special pleading.  

2. Ibid. Vol. IV. p. 27. 

"Though Jones was well satisfied with his deliverance from a thralldom which those who have ever experienced it will, I apprehend, allow to be none of the lightest, (his affair with Lady Bellaaston) he was not, however, perfectly easy in his mind. There was, in this scheme, too much of fallacy to satisfy one who utterly detested every species of falsehood or dishonesty: nor would he, indeed, have submitted to put it in practise, had he not been involved in a distressful situation, where he was
Sophia was equally dear to the author. Speaking generally about the figures in his history, he offers the superiority of her character as an excuse for his partiality. When he mentions her first he describes her beauty, saying that she resembles one "whose image can never depart from my breast". This description is couched in such terms that one can only deduce that Sophia is to be a character of consummate charm and goodness. He continues to give even more explicit statements, and he reports various actions to support them, but he is too much present with Sophia as he was with Jones. He idealized her rather than saw her. As a result, we have such remarks as the following, substantiated by nothing but the author's summary of what took place:

"Sophia with all the gentleness which a woman can have, had all the spirit which she ought to have." 3

Then he tells us that she started resolutely on her journey with a strange guide and that she exerted all the charm of

Footnote continued from p.
"obliged to be guilty of some dishonour, either to the one lady or the other; and surely the reader will allow, that every principle, as well as love, pleaded strongly in favour of Sophia."

1. Ibid. Vol. IV. p. 197.
2. Ibid. Vol. I. pp. 187-190
which she was mistress to persuade the post-boy to change his direction. How much better it would be if we could hear her words and deduce her attitude from them. It must be admitted, however, that Fielding does allow Sophia to speak on occasion. When she does she quite proves his statement about her charm and sparkle. She reveals unexpected vigor when she persuades Honour to run away with her:

"I intend to escape," said Sophia, "by walking out of the doors when they are open. I thank Heaven my legs are very able to carry me. They have supported many a long evening, after a fiddle, with no very agreeable partner; and surely they will assist me in running from so detestable a partner for life."

Her letter to Jones from her London captivity with Mrs. Western bespeaks dignity, sincerity and tenderness, besides having the added value of being a personal expression of feeling.

It is difficult to make an impartial estimate of the characterization of Sophia because Fielding personally stressed her submissiveness and retiring modesty at the expense of her more decisive qualities. It is only when we compare her with a paragon like Pamela or some of the heroines of sentimental drama that we can realize how much vitality he added to the accepted idea of a prudent and virtuous woman.

There are several characters in Tom Jones who do not

'come alive'. Two of them, Allworthy and Blifil, are extremely important as mechanical agents in the plot. Saintsbury, among others, suggests that one reason for Allworthy's unsatisfactory quality is the fact that Fielding intended him to extoll the virtues of his benefactor, Ralph Allen. Such a primary conception would be an obstacle to the natural delineation of character and, certainly, something seems to have hampered Fielding from giving Allworthy that mixture of good and bad qualities which he so emphatically declared to be necessary for natural characters. The lack of animation so apparent in Allworthy is particularly noticeable in his own speeches, which are lengthy and pious but not particularly interesting and quite unlike the conversation of a real person. He speaks frequently, but even though the benevolence which Fielding was so solicitous to emphasize in him is exemplified by Allworthy's own words, the author could seldom refrain from commenting on it.

The unreality of young Blifil is also the result of the author's failure to endow him with the proper mixture of human qualities. His one trait, his fawning duplicity, is copiously illustrated. In fact, everything he does and every word he speaks brings it home to the reader that he is the villain of the piece. The impression of complete wickedness which Blifil is intended to convey is lessened by the

absence of any mitigating circumstances to throw his villainy into relief. Jonathon Wild has no good qualities to offset his bad ones, but he presents a far greater effect of reality than Blifil. That, of course, may be partially explained by the fact that Fielding bent all his energies toward depicting Jonathon while he gave Blifil only a portion of his attention. However, I think the secret of his truth to life lies in the fact that Fielding first admitted him to be a scoundrel and then equipped him with the feelings and habits proper to such a type. He always behaves like a rascal, but he also approximates the commonplace actions of ordinary people. Blifil, unfortunately, is not presented fully enough to be a person; he remains an abstraction, 'the villain'. The words he speaks are far too few in comparison with those he is said to have spoken. For some reason of his own Fielding continues to give abstracts of Blifil's conversation and actions long after he should be showing the character in person. In this case, the method of characterization is ironic at first. Fielding piles up incident after incident, ostensibly to prove Blifil a model of virtue, but really to show his guileful nature and to heighten Jones' good points by a negative comparison. The ironic tone gradually disappears as Fielding becomes more open in his condemnation. After Blifil pays his second visit to Sophia the author descants on his wishes and desires by way of an explanation of his actions on that occasion. He makes him
out to be a thoroughly bad lot. But Blifil is unconvincing as a person; and part, at least, of his unreality comes from the author's failure to exhibit more than one side of his character. Blifil does, however, occasionally take part in scenes in which he behaves more like a normal human being than a villain. Witness his two visits to Sophia after their marriage has been agreed upon. As a lover, Blifil is decidedly incompetent, and there is material for comedy in his blundering attempts at gallant conversation. Unfortunately, Fielding presents these scenes from his own point of view. He fails to make use of the possibilities of dramatic narrative to produce convincing characterization.

Thwackum and Square are the other two who cannot be classed as human beings, but they are unreal from design, not accident. As their function in the novel is simply to show the folly of the modes of thought they represent there is no need for them to be fully developed. There is nothing inevitable about their alliance with Blifil, and as far as their part in the complication is concerned, they might well be spared. They are important, however, because their catchwords, "the divine power of grace", and "the eternal fitness of things", are, as Fielding apprehended, too often used to cover selfishness and hypocrisy. Thwackum and Square are presented more by direct than by indirect means but since Fielding did not intend to present all sides of their characters fully it matters little whether they speak
or the author speaks for them.

From the relative frequency of their appearances in the narrative, Squire Western, Partridge and Jenny Jones may be classed as major personages. They are exhibited in the same way as Tom and Sophia but it should be noted that Western and Partridge stand out as personalities more definitely than Tom simply because the author personally paid less attention to them. He watched over Jones like an anxious parent with a wayward son, but he treated Partridge and the Squire like the creatures of fiction they were. They are no more real than Tom but they are more distinct and memorable.

The number of minor characters in Tom Jones is so great; the personalities so varied and, on the whole, so much more interesting than Tom and Sophia that one hesitates to make a choice. Some of them are created simply for their momentary value; others go along with the narrative and take part in the events leading directly up to the dénouement. In the first class are Mrs. Deborah, Molly Seagrim and her mother and the group of landladies and inn-keepers. Honour, Black George, Harriet Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Western, Lady Bellaston and Mrs. Miller have continued parts to play. They have had to be carefully delineated for the plot's sake as well as their own. As I have noted in connection with the minor characters in Joseph Andrews, Fielding seems to have

1. P.
followed no set order for his comments and examples. Honour appears without introduction and immediately gives Sophia an account in her own idiom of the affair between Tom and Molly Seagrim. Later, Fielding personally describes her disposition and history. Lady Bellastone pays a visit in the most fashionable manner and disports herself at a masquerade before Fielding sees fit to describe her as the fashionable lady of elastic virtue. But before we even see Mrs. Miller or Mrs. Western the author gives comprehensive sketches of their characters, reserving their personal appearance until after they have been described. Harriet Fitzpatrick is the only person in this book who is allowed to tell her story entirely by herself. I can see no reason for the indulgence unless it is that Fielding wanted to give Sophia a chance to shine by contrast as she does through her behaviour while she listens. Harriet condemns herself out of her own mouth and there is no need for Fielding to comment. However, some time after her story is finished he remarks ironically that he thinks the reader ought to know that it was not a supernatural agent but the Irish peer who supplied the lady with money to escape from her husband. An examination of the author's comments on the lesser people will establish the fact that he was anything but impersonal in his treatment of


2. The man of the hill takes no part in the plot and is, therefore, not considered as one of the characters in the novel.
If he does not say bluntly, "I think this is a certain type of person, and I would have you, reader, think likewise", he makes no effort to hide his likes and dislikes.

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* there is little use of the indirect method of characterization by which one character speaks of the qualities of another. Few people speak long enough to do more than make some remarks pertinent to their own situations and the passages of dialogue are short. When Fielding condenses conversations in his own words, as he so often does, he excludes the random remarks which are often so illuminating about character. If any person is allowed to speak at length it will usually be found that he is either a very minor character or a very moral one like Allworthy or Dr. Harrison. The people of whom they speak are even more unimportant than themselves. For instance, Mr. Wilson tells a great deal about a number of persons, but they contribute nothing to the narrative. The part of Harriet Fitzpatrick's narrative which gives such an accurate picture of her husband is unnecessary because we do not need an accurate picture of him. She does, however, throw light on the character of Mrs. Western and her remarks have some value as being the opinions of an outsider. Hitherto, Mrs. Western had been delineated solely by Fielding and her own conversation. But even here we could well do without Harriet's information because we have already seen enough of Mrs. Western to know exactly what she would do in the situation.
Amelia marks a distinct change in Fielding's method of presenting character. He makes no preamble as to the merits or demerits of Booth and Miss Matthews but precipitates them into accounts of their own lives in which they unconsciously reveal their main characteristics. Booth prepares the reader for Amelia long before she ever appears. The long narrative in the first person may have its disadvantages as a structural device but it has the merit of putting one character forward in his own words and of providing natural comments on other characters. Booth's encomiums upon Amelia make his own weakness in complying with Miss Matthews' suggestions all the more glaring; where Tom Jones in a similar situation evokes no very drastic condemnation, Booth's continued protestations of his unworthy love for Amelia show him up as a contemptible weakling. But the conversational style of the long narrative soon becomes stilted and unnatural. We cannot strain our imaginations to the point of accepting the verbatim dialogues, while the production of letter after letter is ridiculous in the suggestion that Booth went about prepared at any time to recite his history. However, if the framework is unwieldy, the component parts are not. The carefully remembered conversations are typical of the people who later appear to prove them accurate representations. The personages discussed bear out the characters they have been given although they may display new angles as the story progresses.
The characterization of Amelia is, as a whole, coloured by some external influences which were operating strongly upon Fielding in his latter days. I do not wish to interrupt the analysis of character presentation long enough to go into the background of the social satire in Amelia nor to point out its relation to the sentimental bent of the period; but I do not think it can be disputed that the personalities in the novel were limited by Fielding’s interest in social reform and the popular fashion for characters in fiction.\(^1\) Therefore, in judging Booth, Amelia and the rest for their reality and truth to life, the reader must keep their limitations in mind and consider them in the light in which they were conceived.

Booth’s presentation begins by the indirect method. He listens to Miss Matthews’ story of her fall and we are told how he smiled covertly or tried to keep her on the track of her narrative. We receive the impression that he has some intelligence and a sense of humour, but as he tells his own story this impression is modified. He could smile at Miss Matthews’ rationalizations but he failed to see the equal falsity of his own. This failing is particularly evident in the section where he tells how he succumbed to his passion for Amelia. Booth’s history is told entirely in the first person; Fielding takes no part in the presentation.

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1. See pp.114-118 for a discussion of sentimentalism and social satire in Fielding’s novels.
of it and, I think, the effect of selfishness and moral weakness is made the more complete for his absence. Booth reveals himself as a weakling whose resolution is unequal to his intelligence; he does more harm than a thoroughly bad man because he has some glimmerings of conscience which cause him to make attempts at reformation. Fielding's first remarks about Booth are a feeble effort to excuse him for spending a week with Miss Matthews. It must be said in fairness that infidelity does not appear to have been one of the Captain's habitual failings, but his weak acquiescence to Miss Matthews' proposals is typical of his compliant nature. Booth is fully characterized when he brings the story up to date in the prison. After the author enters the narrative he follows his usual method of commenting on character, condensing action and occasionally allowing the people to speak. There are no further revelations of the Captain's character. His extensive borrowing, his gambling and his remorse simply bear out the description he gave of himself in his history, and one leaves him in possession of Amelia's fortune with misgivings in spite of the author's sanguine picture of his future good behaviour.

Of all Fielding's characters, Amelia receives the greatest share of indirect characterization. In his story Booth gives her background, her appearance, and enough of her actions to make her a complete personality. He tells us that she was beautiful; her flight from her mother's house
...and journey to Gibraltar prove her to have had courage. Her silence about M. Bagillard's attentions shows both tact and prudence. After such adequate preparation the usual method of comment and example serves admirably to convey the desired impression of a tender and unselfish wife. Fielding's remarks in the Covent-Garden Journal leave no doubt about his personal feelings towards Amelia:

"...nay, when I go further and avow, that of all my Offspring she is my favourite Child, I can truly say that I bestowed more than ordinary Pains on her Education; in which I will venture to affirm, I followed the Rules of those who are acknowledged to have writ best on the Subject."

As the title indicates, the novel is designed to portray her character, and Fielding overlooked no chance of showing her off to advantage. Once the preliminary narratives are over he reverts to his usual method of presentation. In the case of Amelia, his own comments are somewhat in the ascendancy, probably because he was so anxious to express her real worth. However, he allows her ample opportunity to express herself in her own voice, mentioning no characteristics which are not illustrated by one scene at least. We see her in a variety of situations, happy and unhappy, all calculated to display her guileless simplicity and affection for Booth. The result is a picture, sentimental but still true, of a loving and much-tried woman.

1. Covent-Garden Journal. No. 8. Taken from the trial of Amelia for dullness at the Court of Censorial Enquiry.
The introduction of characters like Miss Matthews and Harriet Fitzpatrick is probably the result of an adaptation of dramatic technique to the novel. They have no place in the main story but they provide a natural and useful means of disclosing the characteristics of those who have. Once she has told her story and ensnared Booth, Miss Matthews has finished her part in the plot. It is true that Fielding carries her along with it for some time but her letters to Booth and the estrangement which she causes between Booth and James might very well have been omitted. We find out no more about her than what she tells herself, and eventually Fielding had simply to ignore her.

Mrs. Bennet, later Mrs. Atkinson, is also allowed to reveal herself by a personal narrative. It might be argued that she takes up too much time in her recital of her sensational adventures but she has been so securely tied to the plot that anything she says has usually some purpose. Moreover, her circumstances make her a much more suitable contrast to Amelia than Miss Matthews could be. Fielding treats her with his usual comments making her provide both the comedy of the piece and a further complication in the action.

As the remaining persons in this novel are presented in Fielding's usual fashion, there is no need to consider them further.

In speaking of the characterization of Amelia I referred to the sentimental conception of character which
prevailed in Fielding's time. This is not the place to give a history of sentimentalism, but no discussion of Fielding's characters should end without some mention of an attitude of mind which coloured the whole eighteenth century, the middle and later years particularly. Sentimentalism is an outgrowth of the rise of the middle class. The steady growth of a wealthy mercantile class after the colonial expansion of Elizabethan England was bound sooner or later to have its effect on the moral and intellectual life of the nation. That effect was the gradual penetration of middle-class ideals into every department of thought. Perhaps it would be clearer to say that it was middle-class ambition which influenced current ideas of morality and fashion so strongly. Until a substitute was found for the noble pedigree of the aristocrat the trading class was, and felt itself, socially inferior no matter how rich it might be. However, religion succeeded in supplying the social climber with assurance that he was as good as his superiors by birth where wealth had failed to do so. Right feeling and good principles became the patent of spiritual nobility and the Christian doctrine of the equality of all men before God exactly suited a class which was lacking in social background. By Fielding's time middle-class ideals were the accepted ideals, as they still are. The original conception of 'right feeling' had widened to include natural feeling, the result being a tendency toward emotional excess, as reference to the fiction
or drama of the period will show. Applied to literary characters, sentimentalism takes the outward forms of deep piety, much talk about the joy of doing good, and an absence of emotional restraint. Tears flow freely; 'transports' of joy and 'agonies' of sorrow were expected of the heroes of fiction.

Fielding’s characters cannot be called sentimental in the way that Pamela or Mackenzie’s Man of Feeling comply with the term, but his work shows an increasing tendency to exhibit character in highly emotional situations. The Heartfreys in *Jonathon Wild* are sentimental characters. Parson Adams shows some traces of sentimentalism in his insistence on Joseph Andrews’ moral equality with him. *Tom Jones* becomes more and more charged with feeling as the conclusion approaches. Jones himself has some of the attributes of the sentimental hero and it must be admitted that they sit rather uneasily upon him. His passion of grief after Allworthy casts him out is a feeling he might naturally suffer, but toward the end of the story he develops a tendency to preach which is not quite in keeping with his previous character. As for the rest of the people, they indulge their feelings to varying degrees. Allworthy is a typical sentimental figure, both in his name and in his attributes.

He corresponds to the wise and benevolent older man of the dramas. Sophia has a certain amount of sensibility. She admits to Mrs. Western that the "true tenderness and delicacy" of a certain book she is reading has cost her many a tear:

"'Ay, and do you love to cry then?' says the aunt. '
'I love a tender sensation,' answered the niece, 'and would pay the price of a tear for it at any time.'"¹

Mrs. Miller, who appears late in *Tom Jones*, has a greater tendency to indulge her feelings than any other character except those in *Amelia*. Her outbursts of emotion are therefore significant as a mark of Fielding's growing adherence to a prevailing standard of conduct.

There is a difference between the sentimentalism of *Amelia* and of *Tom Jones*. In the latter it is either delicately applied to the main characters, as it is to Sophia, or it appears only occasionally in minor personages like Mrs. Miller. But in *Amelia* it is a factor which must be considered at every turn of the plot, otherwise many scenes will appear to be extraneous. All the major characters—Booth, Amelia and Dr. Harrison—as well as some of the minor people, particularly Atkinson and Mrs. Bennet, indulge their feelings to the fullest extent. They have no hesitation about expressing their religious or moral sentiments. Booth weeps freely during his narrative and afterward; Amelia has an alarming tendency to 'fall dead' at any affecting

circumstance.

I have mentioned only a few of the highlights of sentimentalism in Fielding's novels, but they will serve to illustrate that attitude in his work.

The sentimentalism of certain of Fielding's characters is only one manifestation of the didactic element which is so pervasive in his work. Numerous evils in the social system engaged his attention but he was most particularly interested in the movement for social reform which centred upon the administration of justice in the criminal courts. A passage in *Pasquin* (1736), between Queen Common Sense and Law, will show that he had long been aware of the rapacious practices of some of the members of the legal profession and also of the weakness in a code of law which could allow the rights of the public to be so ignored.

Queen Common Sense:

"My Lord of Law, I sent for you this morning; I have a strange petition given to me. Two men, it seems, have lately been at law for an estate, which both of them have lost, and their attorneys now divide between them.

Law:

'Madam, these things will happen in the law.'

Queen Common Sense:

'Will they, my lord? then better we had none: But I have also heard a sweet bird sing, That men unable to discharge their debts At a short warning, being sued for them, Have, with both power and will their debts to pay,
"Lain all their lives in prison for their costs."¹ Various satiric passages in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* illustrate further Fielding's opinion of the flagrant manner in which lawyers were accustomed to prey upon those who fell foul of the law. Witness Partridge's remark to Allworthy that he lay for seven years in Winchester gaol because he was unable to pay the charges arising from a ridiculous suit brought against him when his pig trespassed upon the property of a certain lawyer. Fielding was outspoken enough about his opinion of lawyers in general but his attitude toward abuses in the courts was even more bitter. His chief complain seems to have been that those who administered justice were either ignorant of the law or quite unscrupulous in the use of their powers. The Justice in *Joseph Andrews* who was only prevented by the timely intervention of Mr. Booby from committing Joseph and Fanny to prison for the theft of a hazel twig is worthy to stand beside Mr. Justice Thrasher who had never read a syllable of law and who was "never indifferent in a cause, but when he could get nothing on either side".²

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the incidents relating to conditions of law and justice are incidental; they are not absolutely necessary to the plot. In *Amelia* social satire is the backbone of the story. In this novel Fielding singled

out the condition of the prisons and the laws against debtors for his particular attention. Booth is an impoverished officer in the army who has neither training nor ambition for work; consequently, he finds himself frequently in prison for debt. His visits to the sponging house and his confinement within the verge of the court offer Fielding admirable opportunities to show up the bribery, corruption and injustice which flourished so abundantly in the petty departments of justice. Amelia begins with Booth's unlawful commitment to prison by the ignorant and ill-tempered Thrasher. Fielding describes the prison and presents almost as nauseating a picture as some of those Ned Ward had been able to paint some fifty years before in The London Spy. During his imprisonment Booth becomes aware of certain practices in the conduct of the prison. He learns that prison fare is insufficient and uneatable and that he must buy his food. He learns that prisoners who have money may live in comfort in the governor's house and, finally, he learns that if he can secure a bondsman he may be bailed from his confinement for a crime he did not commit. In the course of the book Booth is several times lodged in the bailiff's house for debt and on each occasion Fielding reveals something more about the corruption rife in such places. The last justice of the peace to appear in the novel is represented as being a good man who was willing to discharge his duty at the expense of some personal convenience, but his presence does
little to lighten the gloomy picture which Amelia presents of justice in mid-eighteenth century England.

It is obvious that Fielding was in Amelia deliberately making use of fiction to satirize a flaw in the social system. It seems very much as if Captain Booth had been created to go to prison so that Fielding could expose a corrupt legal system.

It has already been stated¹ that the pictorial representation of life imposed by the epic conception of the novel argues the presence of the author in the structure of the work. He must keep a controlling hand on the numerous lines of action and, for the sake of brevity and clearness, he must give abstracts of certain of the episodes. He need not, however, enter the story as a person unless he wishes.

In his usual fashion of following the happy mean, Fielding adopts a position mid-way between the extremes of personal interest and impersonality. The action does not concern him; yet he is not indifferent to its outcome. He is not one of the characters; yet he knows them intimately as one person knows another. The most significant feature of his personal attitude is the building up of a distinct relationship between author, story and reader. He never lost sight of the fact that he had a plot to be explained and an audience which must be given the means of understanding it.

¹. F. 78.
Such a conception of the author's province has certain advantages. In the first place, it relieves the writer of the necessity of building up a background for certain events which are not particularly interesting but which are necessary for the coherence of the story. It also allows him to go back in time to tell what has happened to various people since they last appeared. The author can personally tell the reader anything omitted in the story. The following is a representative sample of Fielding's habit of speaking to the reader about his method of conveying information:

"... we will now proceed to account for this, as well as for some other phenomena that have appeared in this history, and which, perhaps, we shall be forgiven for not having opened more largely before."¹

He then gives the history of Mr. Trent up to the time he tried to persuade Booth to capitalize Amelia's attraction for the noble peer. In the second place, the author's presence provides a clear and unmistakeable skeleton for the narrative. Fielding has always the story and the reader in mind as two distinct entities which must be brought together. Consequently, he comments freely on the workings of the one for the benefit of the other. He points out the important features of what has been related and says plainly what is to come. The excerpt quoted below is taken from the account of a conversation between Jones and Black George in the prison in London. The latter is telling how Sophia has been returned

to her father by Mrs. Western. Fielding interrupts at this point:

"The rest of the conversation which passed at the visit is not important enough to be here related. The reader will therefore forgive us this abrupt breaking off, and be pleased to hear how this great good-will of the squire towards his daughter was brought about."  

The author also takes it upon himself to keep the reader straight about the interaction of the various plots. He reminds him that it is some time since he has heard of this person or that, recalls the situation of the character in a few words, and announces that he will now relate a portion of that person's history. Personal control such as Fielding maintains over structure allows for an easy use of foreshadowing. Characters whose presence is essential at the dénouement cannot all be carried through the whole course of the narrative. Some of them must be introduced early and allowed to disappear until they are needed. If the author has a friendly relationship such as Fielding's with the reader, he can address a general remark indicating that the person in question will be of some importance later, the incident in which he appears will be saved from the suspicion of being unrelated. For instance, Booth tells Miss Matthews how he and Amelia fled in a storm from Mrs. Harris's house. They took refuge with Amelia's old nurse and employed her son to take a message to Dr. Harrison. Booth makes this

\[1\text{. Fielding. } \textit{Tom Jones}. \text{ Vol. IV. p. 304.}\]
"'I have said so much, ' continued Booth, ' of the boy's character, that you may not be surprised at some stories which I shall tell you of him hereafter.'"

Atkinson not only appears again in Booth's narrative but he also plays a large part in the London scenes; his early introduction is therefore justifiable.

The uses so far mentioned of the personal method in Fielding's novels have been all on the side of brevity and clarity. There are, however, some disadvantages to a technique which allows the author to comment informally about his work. Fielding's failure to fuse his several different plots into a naturally coherent whole is illustrated by the frequent attempts he himself makes to knit the narrative together. The structure of his novels seems to depend on his arbitrary comments. In the passages quoted above the author's remarks are a useful guide, but they too frequently become senseless repetition. Such, for instance, are the tags with which so many chapters are concluded.

"Here the Graces think proper to end their description, and here we think proper to end the chapter."

However, Fielding should not be too severely censured for a

practise which had the sanction of the burlesques upon which
his work was partially modeled.¹

The most serious defect in Fielding's four novels which
may be traced to the presence of the author in the narrative
method is the number of digressions. They vary in length
from a line or two to several pages, but one and all are the
result of the author's feeling that he was free to enter the
story when he liked, make what comments pleased him, and
leave in an equally casual fashion. Consequently, Jonathon
Wild, Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Amelia contain a veri-
table hodge-podge of Fielding's opinions.

His discursiveness shows itself in two ways. First, he
does not scruple to insert personal opinions upon politics,
religion, prison reform or any other topic of general interest.
Sometimes these digressions rise naturally out of preceding
events; sometimes the connection is far-fetched. For
example, in the course of his story the Man of the Hill
mentions the Monmouth rebellion, approving of it as a justi-
fiable precaution against popery. Jones, obviously expressing
Fielding's opinion, agrees with him:

"... it has often struck me, as the most wonder-
ful thing I ever read of in history, that so soon
after this convincing experience which brought our
whole nation to join so unanimously in expelling
King James, for the preservation of our religion
and liberties, there should be a party among us mad

¹. See p. 14. of the present discussion for a treatment of
Scarron's use of this convention.
"enough to desire the placing his family again on the throne." Jones is referring to the Jacobite rising of 1745. He goes on to express a thorough-going disapproval of the machinations of popery which could incite the nation to such folly. In one sense this incident is not a digression for it arises naturally out of the old man's story. But since that story is itself an excrescence on the body of the narrative, it is safe to assume that it contains the author's own belief. Fielding uses the circumstance of Molly Seagrim's commitment to Bridewell to remark on the houses of correction. That comment in turn leads him into reflections about the different treatment meted out by society to rich and poor. The above are typical of a number of similar digressions to be found scattered throughout all four novels.

The second way in which Fielding's discursiveness shows itself is in the number of moral reflections he draws from the various incidents in the story. He seldom lets an event go by without commenting on the moral issue it raises. There are few occurrences from which an interested observer cannot draw conclusions applicable to human nature and Fielding lost no opportunities for expounding such general principles. The jealousy of the country folk over Molly Seagrim's finery leads him to remark upon the similarity of weakness in high and low

2. Ibid., Vol. I. p. 239.
society. As Sophia and Harriet journey to London in the coach of the Irish peer Fielding is reminded of the similarity between writing and travelling, and compares the reader to the traveller who lingers in one place and ignores the scenery of another. A discussion, which he frankly admits to be a digression, of the nature of wisdom is arbitrarily drawn from the author's observation about Allworthy's sage comment on forced marriages. When Booth is refused entrance to Colonel James' house Fielding generalizes on the similarity between the variable behaviour of porters at great men's doors to that of the great men themselves. Fielding tells us that Booth was a Deist. He then reflects that human nature is much too prone to look upon itself with partiality, minimizing its vices while magnifying the unhappiness they cause.

Fielding's discursiveness is one of the most salient points in his narrative method. It links him with an earlier tradition, the tradition of the essayists and establishes a precedent still followed occasionally in the novel. It explains, as Sir Leslie Stephen has pointed out, why his novels present such an accurate picture of the age in which he lived and why they are less vivid as narratives than as pictures of contemporary manners.

Fielding will not efface himself; he is always present as chorus; he tells us what moral we ought to draw; he overflows with shrewd remarks, given in their most downright shape, instead of obliquely suggested through the medium of anecdotes; he likes to stop us as we pass through his portrait gallery; to take us by the button-hole and expound his views of life and his criticisms on things in general. His remarks are often so admirable that we prefer the interpolations to the main current of narrative. Shakespeare is really as much present in his plays as Fielding in his novels; but he does not let us know it; whereas the excellent Fielding seems to be quite incapable of hiding his broad shoulders and lofty stature behind his little puppet-show.\(^1\)

Stephen's comment on Fielding's method is worth quoting for it sums up in a few words the secret of Fielding's continued appeal. We grant that his characters are real, that they call forth our sympathy; we admit that his plots are credible and interesting, but it is the flavour of reality emanating from his personal comments which draws us to Fielding. We see the age through his eyes.

Fielding's personal attitude toward his stories is the same for the four novels. In *Jonathon Wild* he began the practise of referring familiarly to his reader whenever he wished to emphasize a point or clarify an obscurity in the plot. *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* bear witness to his increasing awareness of his audience. In the preceding section I have attempted to show that the awareness manifests itself in five ways. First, it provides a method for the condensation of uninteresting but necessary detail. Second,

it links the several different plots. Third, it permits the natural use of foreshadowing. These are the advantages of the relationship between author, reader and story. The disadvantages are as follows: first, it becomes a convention to allow the reader to see more of the workings of the narrative than is necessary, thus destroying its reality. Second, it makes for discursiveness and fosters a habit of digressing upon all and any subjects which may appeal to the author.

The actual technique of Fielding's novels, that is, the use of setting, method of presenting character and construction has been found to follow certain general principles. Setting is entirely subordinated to action and character. Indications of place consist chiefly of bald statements of localities and their names; there is little description of surroundings and no description of scenery or objects to create a background. The plot creates its background as it moves; it needs no external circumstances to set it off because it is, as Mr. Edwin Muir says, "an adroitly constructed framework for a picture of life". Character is presented by a combination of direct and indirect means. The author describes his people, indicates their type and then allows them to illustrate their characteristic attributes. Their actions he conveys partly by direct narration and

partly by dramatic representation. The personalities are static rather than developing, and as individual human beings of Fielding's time they conform to the required standards for characters in fiction. In regard to the structure of the novels, the author is very present as a guide personally interested in the outcome of the action. His comments supply the transition from one event to the next and he speaks to the reader as one man to another about the course of the narrative or any personal opinions which it suggests to him.
CONCLUSION

As the conclusions regarding the effect on Fielding's narrative method of the picaresque novel and the English criminal biography have already been stated at the beginning and end of chapter VI it is unnecessary to repeat them here. Not only is his technique a composite of adaptations and modifications of several literary forms which preceded him; it also contains certain theories which he himself held about the composition of the novel.

These theories—of history and the comic prose epic—are the most interesting and the most important part of his narrative technique. *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* adhere to them as closely as any compositions can be expected to conform to a pattern and still retain the vitality characteristic of a work of art. It is not, however, in their application to his own work that Fielding's theories are important. Their value lies in the standards they set up for the future conduct of prose narrative.

The transference to prose narrative of the fundamental quality of epic poetry—its portrayal of recognizable human beings and their reactions to ordinary life—linked the novel inevitably with reality. Henceforward, it was to cling to life in one respect, at least, event might become fantastic, as it did in the Gothic novel, but character must retain a basic psychological reality.

The representative presentation of common life was not
Fielding's only contribution to narrative. By his common sense remarks about procedure for writers of history and biography he pointed out the essential flaw in the biographical narrative as it had preceded him. The history, true or fictitious, had lacked pattern; it had impressed by the interest of its single episodes in the life of one man, achieving its effect more by the weight of accumulated evidence than by art. In *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* Fielding showed how episodes could be linked to show the interplay of cause and effect on the development of a single theme. He reaffirmed the necessity of selection in art, a principle which seemed to be in danger of being overlooked by historians in their sedulous reproduction of detail. He gave unity to narrative; made it a whole with all parts balanced in harmonic relation to a focusing point, the central theme and its conclusion. Without such unity narrative may be interesting, may be beautiful in its parts, but it cannot take its place with epic and the drama as a form of art.
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