

271

Defoe and Fielding: Studies
in Thievery and Roguery.

by

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ABSTRACT

Defoe and Fielding were intensely concerned with the social conditions of the time. The upsurge in crime constituted a threat to the ordinary citizen as well as a danger to civilized values. As Fielding in particular showed, exploitation of the ordinary citizen took place under the guise of respectability. It was the task of the writer to remove this guise and examine the real motives behind the actions of a particular individual and judge that person according to strict moral standards.

The criminal was not simply a member of the lower classes; he could be a member of the aristocracy or of the government. The times were corrupt; Defoe and Fielding had to come to terms with this corruption by examining the motives behind it and the possible remedies for it. The difference between the various levels in society becomes blurred in their writings in order to make the point that robbery on the highway and robbery by the apparently respectable members of society are one and the same thing; both have to be exposed in order to preserve civilized standards.

Both writers were searching for the truth, and took care to examine the individual circumstances surrounding a person's lapse into crime so that the fairest judgement possible could be made. This seeking after truth guides them in their fight against crime and corruption.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chronology	i
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Defoe : the Novels	12
Chapter 3. Defoe : the Criminal Biographies	57
Chapter 4. Jonathan Wild	83
Chapter 5. Fielding : the magistracy	106
Chapter 6. Fielding : the novels	125
Chapter 7. Fielding and Gay : the drama	144
Conclusion	176
Appendix. The attacks on Walpole.	179
Bibliography	183

CHRONOLOGY

- 1712 The Mohocks printed
- 1714 Accession of George I
- 1719 Publication of Robinson Crusoe
- 1720 South Sea Bubble
- 1721 Walpole becomes first Minister
- 1722 Moll Flanders
A Journal of the Plague Year
Colonel Jacque
- 1724 Ballad Newgate's Garland published
Sheppard hanged. (November).
Vol. I of the General History of the Pyrates.
- 1725 Wild hanged (May).
- 1724-5 Defoe's Lives of Sheppard and Wild.
- 1727 Accession of George II
- 1728 The Beggar's Opera (January)
Polly (December)
Vol. II of The History of the Pyrates.
- 1730 Tom Thumb
- 1731 The Tragedy of Tragedies
The Grub-Street Opera
An Effectual Scheme for the Immediate Prevention of
Street Robberies
Death of Defoe.
- 1732 The Covent Garden Tragedy.
Death of Gay.
- 1736 Pasquin
Gin Act
- 1737 The Historical Register for the Year 1736
The Stage Licensing Act.
- 1740 Pamela
- 1741 Shamela
- 1742 Joseph Andrews
Resignation of Walpole
- 1743 A Journey from This World to the Next.
Jonathan Wild.

- 1745 Death of Walpole.
- 1748 Fielding becomes Justice of the Peace for Westminster.
- 1749 Tom Jones.
- 1751 Amelia
An Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers.
- 1752 The Covent-Garden Journal.
- 1754 Death of Fielding.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

(i)

England had been growing rapidly as a trading nation ever since the time of Elizabeth I. By the beginning of the eighteenth-century, she had emerged as one of the leading trading nations in the world, with markets established in America, Africa and Europe. These trade links provided opportunities for the entrepreneur to expand his personal fortune, for increased wealth meant increased respectability. With the growth in trade also, the expansion of the middle-classes was inevitable, as they set themselves up in business and promoted their own interests - financial gain. As trade grew, so did London's population, but not simply owing to the increased number of bourgeois gentlemen who inhabited the city. London came to have more than its share of thieves and rogues, themselves eager to take their own share of the increased wealth in the capital, but not through trade. The desire for possession meant that people stole in order to have as much of the goods as possible. Protection against theft became an issue that no-one could avoid, and the most obvious way of removing the threat to property was to remove the initial factor: the number of offences punishable by hanging increased rapidly during the early part of the century. Radzinowicz estimates that there were between 160 and 220 offences punishable by death, although the precise number is difficult to estimate due to the Benefit of Clergy; certainly this is no exaggeration, and the number of statutes reflects the importance that property had.¹

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Radzinowicz, Leon, A History of English Criminal Law, 4 vols, (London, 1948), I, p.3.

To the Augustan mind, most aspects of society could be viewed in terms of possession or acquisition of property. 'At other times', writes Pat Rogers, 'people have felt most anxiously about self-preservation or about sexual purity. The threat came to one's person -literally so, or in terms of sexual violation'.² One possessed money, stocks, individual fortune in financial or political matters, as well as possessing virginity. The control of people in a political sense took on a financial aspect also, as people were manoeuvred to suit one's personal gain.³ The aspiration to become a gentleman or woman related to everyone, and the quickest way to riches, if you were not born into them, was by astute business deals, by political gambling, or, if none of these possibilities were open, by stealing someone else's. This meant that the cleverness with which the businessman operated had to be matched by the craft of the criminal: he, too, had to be a professional. Failure at one's job meant financial, political - or sexual - ruin on the one hand, and hanging on the other. So, while much of the crime carried out may well have been the 'hit and run' type, the most successful criminals promoted crime to a financial art, in which book-keeping and columns were an important part. Typically, the most ruthless of them, Jonathan Wild, controlled crime as others controlled their businesses by having an efficient work-force which was answerable only to him, and only one person - Wild - controlled the stock. England's pastoral days seemed to be over:

The birds of the air, the rabbits of the heath, the fish in the streams were ferociously protected for the sport and sustenance of gentlemen. Property acquired the sanctity of life and theft meant death. Benefit of clergy was abolished and hanging as

² Rogers, Pat, The Augustan Vision, (London, 1974). p.99.

³ See below, chapter 7.

punishment for crime increased ... (power was) also for the class which had come to dominate British life - commercially minded landowners with a sharp eye for profit.⁴

Criminals, too, needed a commercial mind, as well as a keen eye for survival.

If the underworld of London had to contend with a variety of statutes, it did not have the problem of evasion of the police force. Social histories of London reveal that London was still administered as though it were a mediaeval village, with the police force no more powerful than the parish constables⁵. Not until the time of Henry Fielding was a real push made towards fighting crime, through the power of the magistracy, backed by his 'Constables', but by then crime had spread so rapidly that Parliament - and Fielding - were desperately seeking a solution to the problem. By 1751, Parliament had come around to the idea that perhaps hanging was not a deterrent, since it had done nothing to curb the number of thieves; perhaps thieves and rogues should be made to work for a living: a Committee of the Commons in 1751 suggested that:

'it would be reasonable to exchange the punishment of death, which is now inflicted for some sorts of offences, into some other adequate punishments' - a proposal which resulted in a bill to substitute 'confinement and hard labour in his majesty's dock-yards' for the death penalty in a number of crimes - (this reflected a conviction coming to be widely held that the uncritical harshness of the criminal law had distorted the administration of justice and was itself partly to blame for the increase of crime.⁶

In fact, the Bill was thrown out by the Lords, who perhaps reflected the feeling that property was sacrosanct, and that it must be protected from the dregs of society. The concern of parliament was a concern that everyone held; the absence of any effective police force and the increasing

⁴ Plumb, J.H., Political Man, in Man versus Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain, ed. James L. Clifford, (Cambridge, 1968), p. 8-9.

⁵ See Marshall, Dorothy, Eighteenth-Century England, (London, 1962), p.36-7.

⁶ Beattie, J.M. Crime and the Courts in Surrey, 1736-1753, in Crime in England, 1500 - 1800, ed. J.S. Cockburn, (London, 1977), p. 155-6.

emphasis on possessions, soon came to mean that criminals did not confine their activities to clandestine robberies:

In 1731, the author of an anonymous pamphlet related how highwaymen and criminals, no longer content to practise their skills on Hounslow Heath or on the outskirts of the capital, were brazenly moving in to the centre: he instanced cases of Stage Coaches being robbed in High Holborn, Whitechapel, Pall Mall and Soho, and of citizens being held up in their carriages in Cheapside, St. Paul's Churchyard and the Strand. ⁷

After the robbery the thief would have little difficulty in secreting himself in the back streets of London. The buildings of London were definitely a contributory factor in the encouragement of thievery, for they were ' a confused tangle of courts and alleys (which) afforded endless opportunities to escape, where peace-officers penetrated only rarely and in force, and whence unwary strangers were unlikely to escape unharmed'.⁸ Quite literally, some parts of London became dens of thieves, for as the city spread eastwards, the poor crowded into such areas as Stepney, Spitalfields, Ratcliffe, Wapping and Shadwell. These districts contained a variety of people, as shipbuilders, brokers, merchants, tradesmen and manufacturers also moved eastwards.⁹ This growth was not necessarily due to any increase in the birth rate, as immigrants from the provinces began to stream into the capital: London, to some, meant fortune, to others, it meant a life of deprivation and crime. Some managed a successful combination of the two. Many were simply born into their trade, and carried on where their parents had left off.¹⁰

The professional nature of crime is affirmed by Ned Ward; he is guided around a prison by a friend:

⁷ Rudé, George, Hanoverian London, 1714 - 1808, (London, 1971), p.96.

⁸ Tobias, J.J., Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth-Century, (London, 1967), p.26.

⁹ See Rudé, *op.cit.*, p. 11-12.

¹⁰ See, for example, Defoe's Street Robberies Consider'd, (London, 1728), pp. 3-49, in which a thief tells of his life of crime, taking over from his mother.

"In this narrow part of the street", said my friend, "where we are now passing, many such a wretch has taken his last walk, for we are now going towards that famous University of Newgate where if a man has a mind to educate a hopeful child in the daring science of paddling, the light-fingered subtlety of shoplifting, and the excellent use of Jack and Crow, in the silently drawing bolts, and forcing barricades, with the knack of sweet'ning, or the most ingenious dexterity of picking pockets, let him but enter him in this college on the Common Side, and confine him close to his study but for three months, and if he does not come out qualified to take any degree of villainy he must be the most honest dunce that ever had the advantage of such eminent tutors'." ¹¹

A passage that is not without irony, but which testifies to the seriousness with which the acquisition of criminal skills was viewed in the eighteenth-century. Crime was a profession like any other, and a knowledge of the intricacies of the profession was necessary for success.

One of the largest contributors to poverty - and hence crime - in the eighteenth-century was the distilling and consumption of cheap gin. In 1725 in London there were around 6,000 places where one could buy gin. ¹² Defoe was incensed by the upsurge in its consumption, calling gin a curse which easily leads a man - or woman - to crime. He writes:

his own Hunger, the Cries of a Family for Bread, his natural Desire to support an irregular Life, and a propense Hatred of Labour, turn but too many an honest Tradesman into an arrant desperate Rogue: And these are too commonly the Means that furnish us with Thieves and Villains in general. ¹³

Defoe proposes licencing Gin-shops, and an Act did arrive in 1736 from Parliament, which demanded that any shop selling gin in quantities of smaller than two gallons should pay an annual tax of £50; in 1751 a further tax was introduced, but it seemed to have little effect. As late

¹¹ Ward, Ned, The London Spy, ed. Arthur L. Hayward, (London, 1927), p.86.

¹² Hammond, J.L. and Hammond, B., Poverty, Crime, Philanthropy, in Johnson's England, ed. A.S. Turberville, 2 vols., (London, 1933), I, p.312.

¹³ Defoe, Daniel, Second Thoughts are Best, (London, 1728), p.4.

as 1780 Horace Walpole could write 'as yet there are more persons killed by drinking than by ball or bayonet'.¹⁴

The position of women in eighteenth-century crime is an interesting one, and, not surprisingly, is one which has prostitution as its focal point. The 'female rogue' was usually a prostitute who stole by gaining the confidence of her customer, or she aided a gang of thieves in their street robberies. Selfishness and hard-headedness were her dominant characteristics, and one had to be wary:

She can pray, cant, shed a few Crocodile's Tears, or, rather than fail, sham a Fit, as a Token of the Passion and Tenderness she has for you; but then your Back's no sooner turn'd, but she tells her Stallion, you are a nasty, sickly, feeble Fellow, and that as soon as she has persuaded you out of the settlement and the new Furniture, she'll first affront you, then leave you ... Sometimes she's breeding, forsooth, and then sure you cannot be so barbarous to your own Flesh and Blood, but you will take some Care of the young one; besides, she wants Night-Gowns, and Damask for Clouts, and a thousand other Necessaries for a Lying-in Woman. ¹⁵

This is the craft of the female rogue when left to her own devices, with her own interests the only concern in her life, gained by means of control of another person: a familiar character to the readers of Fielding's Shamela.

Prostitutes often created a diversion for bullies or thieves in the street. Rosamund Bayne-Powell in Eighteenth-Century London Life describes a typical example:

They create a bustle and, try over the pockets of unsuspecting persons; till at length having marked one out, the accomplice shoves him hard up against other persons (usually some of the gang) who naturally repress the intrusion. Thus wedged in they hit him over the head with a stick, when he, to save his hat, or resent the insults, lifts up his arms. A third or fourth still further behind gives one more shove, rams his flat hand hard against the belly of the person marked out to be done, and pulls out his watch. ¹⁶

¹⁴ Quoted in Rudé, op.cit., p.91.

¹⁵ Straus, Ralph (ed.) Tricks of the Town, (London, 1927), p.86.

¹⁶ Quoted in Rumbelow, Donald, I Spy Blue. The Police and Crime in the City of London from Elizabeth I to Victoria, (London, 1971), p.82.

Defoe's street villains achieved much the same thing by similar methods, although prostitutes were not used as a diversion.

There was nothing new in the use of prostitutes as criminals, of course, but naturally their opportunities increased as did their customers, and their numbers must have been swelled by the growth of London. At any rate they had a firm tradition in which to work; the following is a piece of advice given from a bawd to a pimp, written in 1660:

give them Instructions to paint, Powder and perfume their clothes and carkasses, have fine clean Holland-smocks, kiss with their mouths open, put their tongues, as all wantons do, in his mouth, and suck it, their left hand in his Cod-piece, the right hand in his Pocket, commend his Trap stick, pluck their coats above their thighs, their smocks above their Knees. ¹⁷

This is an example of the 'professionalism' of the women, as they are instructed in the 'correct' way to conduct their business in order to maximise their profit. No doubt Roxana would have approved.

(ii)

The writers of the eighteenth-century who chose crime as a subject by which they could make points about contemporary life had a firm tradition in which to work. In English literature, the Elizabethan writers who took crime and cheating as a focal point did so because it communicated something about human nature in general, and provided a common ground on which all men could meet. Cheating was a phenomenon which existed in all walks of life, and writers were quick to see that there was little difference between the ordinary thief and the corrupt administrator, despite the semblance of respectability that surrounded the latter. The law, for example, which comes in for so much criticism in The Beggar's Opera, had always been a target for critical attention. The following extract, written in 1552, sets the tone:

¹⁷ Garfield, John, The Wandering Whore, numbers 1 - 5, (London, 1660). p.12. Published by The Rota at the University of Exeter, 1977.

here it riseth that, like as law, when the term is truly considered, signifieth an ordinance of good men established for the commonwealth to repress all vicious living, so these cheaters turned the cat in the pan, giving to divers vile patching shifts an honest and godly title, calling it by the name of the law; because, by a multitude of hateful rules, a multitude of dregs and draff (as it were all good learning) govern and rule their idle bodies, to the destruction of the good labouring people. And this is the cause that divers crafty sleights, devised only for guile, hold up the name of the law..¹⁸

High life and low life are brought together in this passage, for they have a common motive of profit through cheating: Fielding and Gay saw the relevance for a satirist on contemporary society of this type of analogy, and played on it to achieve social and political ends.

The stories written in Elizabethan times about the craft of the cheat and petty criminal anticipate the sort of tale that becomes familiar to any reader of Defoe; one example of this is by Robert Greene in his *Cony-Catching* stories. One tells of how a Miller was robbed through the craft of two thieves who feign a quarrel; the quarrel ends with one thief throwing flour in the other's face, and running away:

He, being thus dusted with meal, entreated the meal-man to wipe it out of his neck, and stooped down his head. The meal-man, laughing to see him so rayed and whited, was willing to shake off the meal, and whilst he was busy about that, the nip had stricken the purse and done his feat, and both courteously thanked the meal-man, and closely went away with his purchase ... He began then to exclaim against such villains, and called to mind how in shaking the dust out of the gentleman's neck, he shook his money out of his purse, and so the poor meal-man fetched a great sigh, knit up his sack and went sorrowing home.¹⁹

A simple tale of craft and thievery, the 'crime' being achieved by the wit of the rogues. Wit and craft are dominant characteristics of the rogue, and this may well account for the fascination of him to the writers: the Elizabethan hack writer was called upon to live by his wits, by providing his audience with what they required at any particular moment. The situation must also have been a familiar one to Defoe, constantly called

¹⁸ Walker, Gilbert, A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play, (1552), in Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets, ed. Gamini Salgado, (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 39 - 40.

¹⁹ Greene, Robert, The Second Part of Cony-Catching, (1592), in Salgado, op. cit., p. 216 - 217.

upon to live by his wits as he turned from political satirist, to businessman, to novelist and pamphleteer.

The phrase 'living on one's wits' is one which also applies to the hero of picaresque fiction. By emphasising craft, wit, and low-life, the writer of picaresque fiction applies himself firmly to reality. By adding qualities of humour and 'extracts' from everyday life to his writing, the picaresque writer establishes something about the nature of low-life and the need to survive. The story of the life of a hero of picaresque fiction reads rather like a tale of gradual addiction to the drug of crime; Chandler puts this succinctly:

(The rogue) is the child of circumstance. Given favourable conditions, he lives a normal life. Under stress of temptation, he yields, not to great and revolting crimes, but to petty. The temptation may be removed, or he may gather strength to oppose it. In either case, he returns to a career of virtue in appearance or in fact. But if repetition of the crime breeds indifference, and circumstances favor a continuance of delinquency, the occasional criminal is transformed into the habitual, and the character of his crimes grows blacker.²⁰

One thinks of Defoe's rogues in his novels, and the gradual descent into crime. Defoe, however, tightens up the structure of the tradition and applies himself to a study of the circumstances behind the formation of the criminal mind; he uses humour to a lesser extent, preferring to draw a message from the conduct of his characters. Also, the sympathy which a reader may feel for a typical picaresque rogue is more diluted in Defoe as he seeks judgement on an individual basis for Moll, Roxana, Jack or any of the pirates. He is not simply writing a 'story', but he takes into account conditions of contemporary life and places his characters in the middle of the hurly-burly of London's back streets.

While this is not the place for a detailed analysis of the picaroon in fiction, several of his characteristics are relevant to a study of

²⁰ Chandler, F.W., The Literature of Roguery, 2 vols., (Boston, 1907), I, p.3.

eighteenth-century roguery, namely craft, artistry and perspicacity in order to rob. Meriton Latroon sees a woman selling bacon; she keeps her money in a pocket made into her apron:

'Good woman', said I (speaking in a whining tone), 'how do you sell your bacon a pound?' 'Sevenpence,' said she, whereupon I began a lamentable oration, telling her I would willingly have half a pound but that I had but three pence; that my master was a very cruel man, half starving his servants. 'Come give me your money, sirrah,' she said, 'for once you shall have it so.' Weighing it, I desired her to cut it into slices and thrust it down my back. She asked my reason for it, I told her that my master usually searched me, and should he find any such thing in my pockets, he would half murder me. 'Alas, poor boy,' quoth the good old woman, 'lean down thy head towards me, surely I will do thee that small kindness.' Whilst she was larding my back, I got my hands underneath her apron, and with this short knife nipped off the bottom of her pocket. ²¹

A typical tale of the craft of the picaroon as 'con-man', as actor assuming a disguise in order to achieve his aims. Latroon here needs to keep his wits about him as he is forced to steal through circumstances.

This point is made more explicit in another novel written several years earlier. The main character asks himself what causes men to deceive:

And the cause of all this, is Necessitie; for if a man finds himself laden with obligations, and knowes not how to ease himself of them, he goes about to seeke all the helpes and meanes he can, to lighten himself of his load, and to come off as handsomely as he can. Necessitie teacheth us the way to all this, and makes the hardest and most untrodden paths, to appeare even, and easie to be hit. It will break thorow the thickest Briers, and clamber up the roughest and steepest Rockes. It is in its owne nature (as is before mentioned in our first chapter) full of daringnesse and of Lying. ²²

'Necessity' is another familiar word to the readers of Defoe; Fielding knew about it, and enquired closely into circumstances before pronouncing judgement as a magistrate. Fielding also knew, through his political concerns, that necessity did not answer every question: personal gain and

²¹ Head, Richard, and Kirkman, Francis, The English Rogue. Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon. (London, 1928), p.42. First published London, 1672.

²² Aleman, Matheo, The Rogue. Or, The Life of Guzman de Alfarache, ed. James Fitzmaurice-Kelby, 4 vols. (London, 1924), III, p.153. First published London, 1622, in the translation by James Mabbe.

power accounted for much of the crime and corruption which he saw around him. The picaroon lives on his wits, attempting to establish some order upon his chaotic life, a life in which society seems placed against him.

Defoe and Fielding, however, were not simply story-tellers. Defoe particularised a character in his novels, attempting to come to terms with the criminal mind. Fielding had a more satiric purpose in mind, and saw, like his Elizabethan predecessors, that human nature could be examined in terms of crime and corruption. All classes of men were subject to it. In this, he was anticipated by Lord Rochester, who wrote:

The general heads, under which this whole island may be considered, are spies, beggars and rebels, the transpositions and mixtures of these, make an agreeable variety; busy fools, and, cautious knaves are bred out of 'em, and set off wonderfully; tho' of this latter sort, we have fewer now than ever, hypocrisy being the only vice in decay amongst us. Few men here dissemble their being rascals, and no woman disowns being a whore. 23

Rochester had the world of the court in mind when he wrote this, but the vocabulary and tone suggest a broader application. As London social conditions deteriorated, writers of the time applied themselves to attempting to correct this, or at least indicate that the corruption and degeneration spread into all aspects of society. By evading that issue, or covering it up altogether, society would be stagnated and eventually deteriorate in quality. In particular, Defoe and Fielding saw what was happening and reflected an accurate picture of the manners of the time in their writings. They are socially concerned, and work within a literary tradition without being bound or restricted by it. With typical Augustan toughness of mind they faced squarely the issues that were part of everyday reality.

²³ Quoted by Graham Greene in Lord Rochester's Monkey, (New York, 1974), p.117.

CHAPTER 2.

DEFOE: THE NOVELS.

Defoe's interest in what is generally denoted as 'low-life' goes beyond a simple fictionalised view of eighteenth-century crime. While the main interest for critics has naturally been the novels, Defoe's studies of the lives of criminals help to form a more complete picture of Defoe's aims. The viewpoint which he pushes forward is that of a man deeply concerned with examining the function of the criminal mind. In the novels, the individual is centred on, with consideration given to the circumstances in which a person finds himself and how these force him or her into a life of crime. In the biographies, the viewpoint is possibly less sympathetic or moral, but the criminals and their activities are carefully delineated so that, taken together with the novels and other criminal writings of the times, a comprehensive view of contemporary society and its values is made possible.

The most useful starting point for a study of Defoe must be with an examination of his aims and achievements in the novels. By this means, a comparative and contrastive study is made possible, since the novels form a solid base, giving a wider range of material and motives than is reproduced in the criminal biographies. The differences and similarities between the two must also be taken into account: Defoe's attitude can differ even though he is writing about the subject of low-life throughout. The shorter biographies offered Defoe less scope for close examination, but they do allow him to communicate a contemporary event with immediacy.

The novelistic technique obviously demands a different means of approach from the short, poignant, biography. In the latter, the moral which the author may wish to draw may be more easily determined; in the former, Defoe is allowed scope to examine motives and events closely. Defoe's concern with realism is important here, for it is an aspect

that relates to his examination of the individual and his view of society as a whole:

(Defoe) named (his) characters in such a way as to suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment. Defoe's use of proper names is casual and sometimes contradictory; but he very rarely gives names that are conventional or fanciful ... and most of the major characters such as Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders have complete and realistic names or aliases. ¹

Defoe's concern for individuals in his fiction, and his acute awareness of the problems which arose in the 'contemporary social environment', is a combination of several complex factors, not least of which must be his own experiences within that environment. At certain times in his life a businessman, sailor, political pamphleteer, novelist, economist and biographer, he experienced successes and failures at almost every turn. No one of his contemporaries changed so often or lived so much by his wits - and a man who lives by his wits soon learns the value of individual judgement and the pressures under which a person may be placed. It is not a big step from this to a 'serious concern' with individuals in fiction, to quote Watt once more:

The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels.²

And, of course, the novelist must value the problems of the individuals, their possible motives and solutions to those problems.

Individuals have motives for their actions, so not far behind a study of a particular individual must be an awareness of the need to examine reasons for behaviour. Defoe would have agreed with this comment by

¹ Watt, Ian, The Rise of the Novel, (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.19 - 20.
² Ibid, p. 62.

Fielding:

as histories of this kind, therefore, may properly be called models of HUMAN LIFE, so, by observing minutely the several incidents which tend to the catastrophe or completion of the whole, and the minute causes whence those incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all arts, which I call the ART OF LIFE.

Later in the book, a character observes 'that every man (acts) merely from the force of that passion which (is) uppermost in his mind'.³ Defoe and Fielding would have agreed that a simplistic view of characters and events is unsatisfactory. Defoe demanded that an attempt at determining the precise reasons for an individual's behaviour should be made. In the case of crime and criminals, the 'simplistic view' mentioned above must be linked with a moral view: a reader who embarks upon a reading of Moll Flanders or Colonel Jacque with a view to proving that crime simply does not pay will soon despair in his efforts, or be confused by the complex stance of the novelist himself. As George Eliot remarked:

moral judgements must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.⁴

This quotation could easily be applied to what Defoe is attempting in the novels - and even in some of the rogue biographies.

The choice of low and criminal life by Defoe is, obviously, a deliberate one, but so also is the rejection by him of any study of the 'man of riches'; he writes in the Review:

the (rich) man's circumstances are easy, his trade answers, his cash glows, and his stock increases; this man cannot be otherwise than honest, he has no occasion to be a knave. Cheating in such a man ought to be a felony, and that without the benefit of clergy. He has no temptation, no wretched necessity of shifting and tricking, which another man flies to, to deliver himself from ruin. The man is not rich because he is honest but honest because he is rich.⁵

³ Fielding, Henry, Amelia, 2 vols., (London, 1930), I, p.4 and p.15.

⁴ Quoted by G.A. Starr, Defoe and Casuistry, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971), p.1.

⁵ Payne, W.L. (ed.) The Best of Defoe's 'Review', (New York, 1951), p. 269.

The rich man is hardly a very interesting character, seen in these terms. The man - or woman - who 'flies' to crime due to financial ruin has a personal story to tell - and not one which simply boosts his ego.

The book about crime and poverty that has received the most attention is certainly Moll Flanders, and it is also the most useful starting point for this study, concentrating as it does on the individual circumstances of Moll, her immersion into crime and her eventual retreat from it. Defoe's apparent absence from the novel, allowing Moll to relate her whole story, adds to the 'broadening' effect mentioned earlier that is the novel's major achievement. Any shock the reader feels comes not from a dramatic style of writing but from his own internal response. The consequent artistic re-examination of Moll's motives and the inevitability of her fate - at least as presented to us by herself - hopefully pushes the reader into a more liberal viewpoint. If the reader has felt no shock, then all the better, as he must then have allowed Moll to engage his sympathy. Then, by the time Roxana comes to be examined, a broader perspective may be reached. Although Moll and Roxana may be classed under the heading of 'female rogues', the novels are contrastive in nature, as Roxana gradually reveals herself as morally insensible.

Defoe's studies of rogues in the novels - and the two novels of female roguery in particular - must be taken seriously as works of art. This is not the view of all critics, however; Robert Alter, for example, writes:

Moll Flanders and Roxana are brilliant acts of journalistic ventriloquism, extended impersonations of real people, but in using the mere sequence of events of one person's life as their unifying form, they lack the imaginative integrity, the revelatory power, of the most serious literary art. ⁶

⁶ Alter, Robert, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, (Cambridge, Mass. 1968). p.100.

This apparent lack of high seriousness in the novels is surely a surface view: although not overtly moralistic, they can be seen as studies in moral dilemmas, with different conclusions reached by the individuals concerned.

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As in all of Defoe's fiction, the background of the main character in Moll Flanders is carefully delineated. She begins her story from her early misfortunes; Moll excites sympathy in the reader, but a sympathy that is hopefully devoid of sentiment. Her life starts as it is to continue - muddled, confused and directionless. In fact, Moll seems to have little control over her own destiny as the plot unfolds: her schemes are adopted by her as the only possible solutions to her problems, despite her knowledge that she is morally wrong on so many occasions. Because she is imposed upon by various other schemers and rakes, whose motives are cynical and whose actions are predetermined, her life seems a continual round of torment until, after sixty years of misfortune and exploitation, she can settle down to the existence of a lady, reflecting on her ways and her escapes.

The novel opens with a plea for tolerance; a plea which is the conclusion of a long life of suffering. It is the beginning of the reader's awareness that her plight has been taken out of her hands, that she has suffered needlessly and that a solution can be found:

I have been told, that in one of our Neighbour Nations, whether it be in France, or where else, I know not; they have an Order from the King, that when any Criminal is condemn'd, either to Die, or to the Gallies, or to be Transported, if they leave any Children, as such are generally unprovided for, by the Poverty or Forfeiture of their Parents; so they are immediately taken into the Care of the Government, and put into an Hospital call'd the House of Orphans, where they are Bred up, Cloath'd, Fed, Taught, and when fit to go out, are plac'd out to Trades, or to Services, so as to be well able to provide for

themselves by an honest industrious Behaviour.

Had this been the Custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate; and by which, I was not only expos'd to very great Distresses, even before I was capable of Understanding my Case ...

But the Case was otherwise here, my Mother was convicted of Felony for a certain petty Theft, scarce worth naming, (viz) Having an opportunity of borrowing three Pieces of fine Holland, of a certain Draper in Cheapside ... (she) obtain'd the Favour of being Transported to the Plantations, and left me about Half a Year old; and in bad Hands you may be sure. ⁷

There are several levels on which this may be read. Certainly, what she claims might have happened if she had not had the unprivileged start in life may be true, provided that her claims themselves are true also: she deliberately plays down the mother's crime who, after all, only 'borrowed' the cloth and yet was punished for it. She also finds it convenient to blame the country for her misfortune: surely help ought to be provided for an innocent, destitute child so that the creature will be able to pursue an honest trade in later life? By emphasising her isolation in 'bad Hands' and by indicating the laissez-faire attitude of those in power she pushes us into a sympathetic view of her early plight, or, rather, Defoe manipulates her words to show that social and economic forces perform a large part in determining what kind of citizen a person becomes.

Moll's attitude is a simplistic, if understandable, one. She has heard vaguely that there may be a European country that provides for orphans, but is unsure. She also assumes that to be placed in a 'House of Orphans' ensures an honest trade throughout one's life: a debatable point, as many apprentices ran away to join the Underworld, particularly as they

⁷ Defoe, Daniel, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, ed. G.A. Starr, (London, 1971), p. 7-8. All quotations will be from this edition and will be acknowledged by page numbers in the main text.

were generally poorly paid and cruelly treated: Defoe mentions several real-life instances of apprentices turning to crime, and, in later years, Blake had little doubt about the treatment of paupers by the custodians.⁸ She emphasises that she was placed in an impossible position from an early age, skirting around the details of her mother's crime, but adding all the necessary details to curry as much favour with the reader as possible before embarking on her tale of crime and misery. There is a mixture of Moll's bitterness and her naivety in this passage, introducing as it does a destitute woman who knows she could have been better if circumstances had allowed her, but who assumes culpability lies outside herself.

The passage also introduces a thorny problem which has been discussed by many critics, namely, the extent of Defoe's irony. At this stage, we are surely meant to be sympathetic towards Moll and also see her from a detached point of view: possibly self-deceiving, but understandably so, hence the inclusion of the word 'borrow' to describe her mother's theft. As we get to know Moll better, as a product of circumstances over which she has no control, yet as an exploiter of circumstances as they arise, the necessity of keeping a two-sided view is more firmly cemented in the reader's mind.

Moll's 'circumstances' take a turn for the better as she is put in charge of a fairly kind Nurse, which, incidentally, is surely preferable to being placed in a 'House of Orphans'. At the age of fourteen - an age when she would have been apprenticed anyway - the Nurse dies and 'I was just that very Night to be turn'd into the wide World; for the Daughter remov'd all the Goods, and I had not so much as a Lodging to go to, or a bit of Bread to eat.' (p. 16-17). Just how far we are meant to see that her fate up to this point is similar to many Orphans - except that

⁸ See below, Chapter 3 and the 'Holy Thursday' poems in Songs of Innocence and Experience.

she is not placed into an apprenticeship - is difficult to ascertain, but what can be determined is her conviction, even in late years, that everything was against her. Given that belief, her drifting is easily accounted for: she feels at a loss, unable to make events move for her.

By becoming a Maid she enters an apparently respectable profession, but one which is fraught with dangers - she is an easy target for frustrated, rakish nobility:

From this time my Head run upon strange Things, and I may truly say, I was not myself; to have such a Gentleman talk to me of being in Love with me, and of my being such a charming Creature, as he told me I was, these were things I knew not how to bear, my vanity was elevated to the last Degree: It is true, I had my Head full of Pride, but knowing nothing of the Wickedness of the times, I had not one Thought of my own Safety, or of my Virtue about me ...

he said, he was charm'd with me, and that he could not rest Night, or Day till he had told me how he was in Love with me; and if I was able to Love him again, and would make him happy, I should be the saving of his Life ...

he threw me down upon the Bed, and Kiss'd me there most violently; but to give him his Due, offer'd no manner of Rudeness to me, only Kiss'd me a great while; after this he thought he had heard some Body come up Stairs, so he got off the Bed, lifted me up, professing a great deal of Love for me, but told me it was all an honest Affectation, and that he meant no ill to me; and with that he put five Guineas into my Hand, and went away down Stairs.

(p.22-23).

Again, Moll is careful to assert her own innocence - although at the time of writing she is aware of the wickedness of the times, she was blind to the implications of the type of foreplay to which she is exposed here. Her insistence that she is governed by Pride is really a testimony to the success of the flattery: her vanity 'was elevated', the passive expressing her lack of control over the elevation. She is affected too by the lack of 'Rudeness' on the part of the gentleman, little suspecting his real intentions. She has to give him 'his Due' since he 'only Kiss'd her (violently) a great while'. One wonders what was going through Moll's head at the time of this attack. Her apparent view of his violent kissing as really quite innocent, suggesting no further complications is once again naive; true, though, that she is not yet a creature of the world,

nor does she understand the ways of the rake's mind: she really does start at the bottom of the ladder of experience, forced into a compromising situation due to the exploitation of her emotions.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the passage is the reference to the money. She accepts the five guineas innocently, while Defoe gives us no chance to suspect irony: the matter-of-fact way in which the statement is put, and the immediate assertion that 'I was more confounded with the Money than I was before with the Love', account for that. Her confusion over the expression of 'Love' is apparent, and she interprets the financial gesture as part of the same emotion. Moll is blind to the truth, but Defoe is communicating both her confusion and the truth to the reader. She is blameless, from her own point of view, and from that of Defoe. Given that her naivety stretches to the extent it does, her thoughts are genuinely fixed on her economic circumstances, which control most of her actions throughout her life and which she uses to justify her actions, especially when she is in a state of impoverishment. Possessions and money have to dominate her thoughts after this, since she is perpetually short of both. Her special circumstances determine her thievery and condition our response towards her.

One might even feel that her acceptance of the money is quite justifiable, given the trickery that is later practised upon her. She is persuaded to sacrifice her virtue to one of the two brothers on the promise of marriage on the death of his father, who is not the ailing geriatric he would have her believe. 'I have not broken one Promise with you yet,' he reports, 'I did tell you I would Marry you when I was come to my Estate; but you see my Father is a hail and healthy Man, and may live these thirty years still' (p.38).

Once again, it was naive of Moll not to have asked the obvious question, but how much worldly wisdom can we expect from one so inexperienced in

dealing with the mind of a rake?

Her next 'crime' - incest - is also used by Defoe to establish her innocence in the face of some irresistable malignant fate that overtakes her. Genuinely in love with the man, she marries him and becomes pregnant by him. Her immediate reaction was one of 'Anguish', but the distance between the experience and the actual recording of it allows her to comment that 'it had been no Crime to have lain with my Husband, since as to his being my Relation, I had known nothing of it' (p.88). She deliberately pushes the reader away from the issue of Crime, pursuing a line which she feels is a reasonable one: how can anyone blame her if she was ignorant? Ignorance of the law may not be an excuse, but her action started before the law would think of intervening: the circumstances are mitigating; any conviction against her would surely be a misjudgement as none of her actions - except possibly the pregnancy, which is understandable enough - were predetermined by her.

This, then, is her background before she embarks on a life of crime, establishing as it does the way events impinge themselves upon her. Moll sees herself cheated by love, and 'the woman who tells the story sees her tactical errors, but she has little conception of what she might have been had she not made them ... she has no comprehension of the impoverishment of her sensibilities.'⁹

Ian Watt writes:

Moll Flanders, like Rastignac and Julien Sorel, is a characteristic product of modern individualism in assuming that she owes it to herself to achieve the highest economic and social rewards, and in using every available method to carry out her resolve ... Defoe ... presents his whores, pirates, highwaymen, shoplifters, and adventurers as ordinary people who are normal products of their environment, victims of circumstances which anyone might have experienced.¹⁰

⁹ Zimmerman, Everett, Defoe and the Novel, (Berkeley, 1975), p.80.
¹⁰ Watt, op. cit., p.98.

These two views might not at first seem too far apart: Moll may have been 'impoverished' morally due to her poor economic circumstances, over which she has had no control. But a closer examination in the light of previous remarks reveals something else. Our closeness to Moll depends on our sympathy for her, and her peculiar circumstances explain her attitude. If however she is to be seen as 'impoverished' - even at the stage when she is writing the memoirs, as well as during the events themselves, then sympathy tends to diminish, replaced by a kind of clinical interest in the criminal mind, not in the events themselves that produced it.

True, she is capable of deceit; she lets it be believed that she has acquired a fortune through the death of her 'Captain':

With the Reputation of this Fortune, I presently found myself bless'd with admirers enough, and I had my Choice of Men ... I had nothing now to do but to single out from them all, the properest Man that might be for my Purpose; that is to say, the Man who was most likely to depend upon the hear say of a Fortune, and not enquire too far into the particulars; and unless I did this, I did nothing, for my Case would not bear much Enquiry.

I Pick'd out my Man without much difficulty ... but I was to try him to the bottom, and indeed in that consisted my Safety; for if he baulk'd, I knew I was undone, as surely he was undone if he took me.
(p.78).

This prepares us for the toughness of mind that is to follow when she is finally forced to take to a life of crime. But where does this leave the view that Moll is a 'victim' of circumstances? She is here trying to create her own circumstances, and make someone else the victim. Is Zimmerman's view then the correct one? The answer can only be 'yes' in this isolated example: as the novel progresses, Moll becomes harder (by necessity) but never reaches a stage of cynicism that the above passage suggests. Balance this also with the following quotation, in which she sees through the hypocrisy of her various male acquaintances, who choose excesses of 'drowning their Sorrow in their Wickedness':

But it is none of my Talent to preach; these Men were too wicked, even for me; there was something horrid and absurd in their way

of sinning, for it was all a Force even upon themselves; they did not only act against Conscience, but against Nature; they put a Rope upon their Temper to drown the Reflections, which their Circumstances continually gave them; and nothing was more easie than to see how Sighs would interrupt their Songs, and paleness, and anguish sit upon their Brows, in spite of the forc'd Smiles they put on ...

The weeping impoverished wife and children merely drive such a person to the extreme:

when he has Thought and Por'd on it till he is almost Mad, having no Principles to support him, nothing within him, or above him, to Comfort him; but finding it all Darkness on every Side, he flyes to the same Relief again, (viz) to Drink it away, Debauch it away.

(p.65).

Moll's contemptuous attitude is easily seen, and explicable once more in the familiar terms of 'economic individualism': the men in question have not attempted to better their condition and their poverty is a result of their own weakness. Moll seems to want to make it plain that the general debauchery stems from their own decision: the decision to drink, results in an impoverished family and reinforces the need for extra alcoholic intake. Now, despite Moll's downfall, she retains a healthy respect for the need to maintain a certain financial standing, which tends to make her intolerant of the type of person she describes above. She is forced into crime by her attitude towards money; refusing to become as debauched as the debtors she has seen, she relies upon her wits to survive:

O let none read this part without seriously reflecting on the Circumstances of a desolate State, and how they would grapple with meer want of Friends and want of Bread; it will certainly make them think not of sparing what they have only, but of looking up to Heaven for support, and of the wise Man's Prayer, Give me not Poverty least I Steal ...

Wandering thus about I knew not whither, I pass'd by an Apothecary's Shop in Leadenhall-street, where I saw lye on a Stool just before the Counter a little Bundle wrapt in a white Cloth; beyond it, stood a Maid Servant with her Back to it, looking up towards the top of the Shop, where the Apothecary's Apprentice, as I suppose, was standing up on the Counter, with his Back also to the Door, and a

Candle in his Hand, looking and reaching up to the upper Shelf for something he wanted, so that both were engag'd mighty earnestly, and no Body else in the Shop.

This was the Bait; and the Devil who I said laid the Snare, as readily prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it, 'twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the Bundle; be quick; do it this Moment.

(p.191).

A precise recollection of the first attempt at crime, and one which neatly places her in a position free of guilt: she begins by emphasising her poverty, associates poverty and crime with the Devil, and presents herself once more as being acted upon by an external force, over which she has no control. What she has also achieved in this passage is a manipulation, pushing the reader into sympathy with her by mixing the truth - the factual recollection of those past events - with a statement about her social and psychological condition: she states that she was 'Desperate' and 'Distracted and Raving', so what alternative had she? To ensure that the reader recognises her guilt but does not at the same time condemn her, she adds to the psychological and factual details; there is a suggestion of the total inevitability of her crime, after all the hardship and deprivation:

It is impossible to express the Horror of my Soul all the while I did it: When I went away I had no Heart to run, or scarce mend my pace; I cross'd the Street indeed, and went down the first turning I came to, and I think it was a Street that went thro' into Fenchurch-street, from thence I cross'd and turn'd thro' so many ways and turnings that I could never tell which way it was, nor where I went, for I felt not the Ground, I stept on ... I rested me a little and went on, my Blood was all in a Fire, my Heart beat as if I was in a sudden Fright: In short, I was under such a Surprize that I still knew not whither I was a going, or what to do ...

She goes on to describe what was contained in the bundle:

... there was a Silver Porringer of a Pint, a small Silver Mug and Six Spoons, some other Linnen, a good Smock, and Three Silk Handkerchiefs, and in the Mug wrap'd up in a Paper Eighteen shillings and Six-pence in Money.

All the while I was opening these things I was under such dreadful Impressions of Fear, and in such Terror of Mind, tho' I was perfectly safe, that I cannot express the manner of it; I sat me down and cried most vehemently; Lord, said I, what am I now? a Thief! why I shall be taken next time and be carry'd to Newgate

and be Try'd for my Life!

(p.192).

Once more the exactitude with which she recalls the details may astonish us, but it has a purpose - the memory can never be effaced since she was impressed by the enormity of the crime at the time. The confusion of her escape reflects also the confusion within her mind. Is it possible to doubt, then, that her grief was genuine, even though self-centred, since her main fear is of Newgate: but again, this is excusable as Newgate would mean hanging. Now, the detailed account of what she stole is a typical device of Defoe. Time and again throughout this novel, as well as in the other works of fiction and biography, precision is a key word, making it difficult to separate author from protagonist. Perhaps such a separation would be a mistake in Moll Flanders because of the sympathy we are meant to feel for Moll, created by Defoe's manipulation of the special circumstances surrounding her fate.

To substantiate this point, consider this quotation from Defoe's Review:

'Give me not poverty lest I steal', says the wise man; that is, if I am poor I shall be a thief ... Distress removes from the soul all relation, affection, sense of justice, and all the obligations, either moral or religious, that secure one man against another ... Men rob for bread, women whore for bread; necessity is the parent of crime. Ask the worst highwayman in the nation, ask the lowliest strumpet in town, if they would not willingly leave off trade if they could live handsomely without it. And I dare say, not one but will acknowledge it.¹¹

Defoe's comment goes a long way to explaining Moll's attitude. She insists on preserving the veneer of respectability, refusing to drag herself down like the debtors. Why then turn to crime? By living on her wits and earning money from her craft, she can afford a decent standard of living; she can dress in order to mingle with the London crowds without being suspected, and by doing so place herself psychologically in a category above the drunks with whom she has -

¹¹ Payne, (ed.), op. cit., p. 271.

mistakenly - associated. She can, in fact, live 'handsomely', surely the most significant word in the above passage. She feels the need for upward social mobility, for good living even if this means becoming a common thief. The paradox is that she does not regard herself as 'common': thievery is forced upon her, and she somehow knows that she is better than many of the common types with whom she has mixed. She retains, then, some of her pride, emphasising to the reader the paradoxical position in which she finds herself.

There is a mixture in Moll of two dominant feelings: firstly that she is a victim of circumstances and secondly, despite those circumstances, that she has the right to live 'handsomely', since she is in some way superior to the riffraff with whom she has had to mix. So when Michael Shinagel writes that ' (Moll's) career as a thief is brought on by circumstances, both physical and psychological, beyond her control', he is really only partly correct, as the view must be balanced by other factors.¹² Her psychology demands that she must maintain herself at a certain standard; she must refuse to remain static materially and insist on pushing ahead in as business-like a manner as possible. Her business sense is one which assures her of survival, and by living on her wits from day to day she begins to harden to the need for crime, accepting it as the only way out of poverty. Her conscience gradually fades, and a tougher attitude emerges. One might draw the parallel of the person in the business world who also finds it necessary to purge emotions, and accept dubious practices.

At one stage, she robs a lost child of a necklace:

in the dark of the Alley I stoop'd, pretending to mend the Child's Clog that was loose, and took off her Necklace and the Child never

¹² See Shinagel, Michael, Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 157.

felt it, and so led the Child on again. Here, I say, the Devil put me upon killing the Child in the dark Alley, that it might not Cry; but the very thought frightened me so that I was ready to drop down, but I turn'd the Child about and bad it go back again, for that was not its way home ...

The thoughts of this Booty put out all the thoughts of the first, and the Reflections I had made wore quickly off; Poverty, as I have said, harden'd my Heart, and my own Necessities made me regardless of any thing: The last Affair left no great Concern upon me, for as I did the poor Child no harm, I only said to my self, I had given the Parents a just Reproof for their Negligence in leaving the poor little Lamb to come home by it self, and it would teach them to take more Care of it another time.

(p.194).

From Moll the common Newgate thief awaiting the hanging to Moll the moralist! Not even, of course, the moralist who sees evil in her own actions - by now 'Poverty' seems to vindicate all of her actions¹³ - but one who sees herself as the teacher, hoping that the parents will know better next time.

Once more, a difficulty occurs here, and one which can never quite be resolved. Just how serious is she when she points this 'moral'? Is there not a hint of rationalisation in her arguments, in the sense that she is deliberately subduing her emotions? This is also the case in the passage immediately following the above, in which she imagines the circumstances wherein the child came to have the necklace:

I suppose it might have been formerly the Mother's, for it was too big for the Child's wear, but that, perhaps the Vanity of the Mother to have her Child look fine at the Dancing School, had made her let the Child wear it, and no doubt the Child had a Maid sent to take care of it, but she, like a careless Jade, was taken up perhaps with some Fellow that had met her by the way, and so the poor Baby wandred till it fell into my Hands.

(p.195).

She is searching for reasons, making the point more obvious: that she doesn't know the background to the necklace and so imagines the most detrimental

¹³ Note that poverty never justifies murder: Moll attributes such feelings to the 'Devil' and is strong enough to reject them. In contrast, Roxana proves herself to be quite capable of encouraging this act, making her morally reprehensible: Moll never reaches those depths.

circumstances she can think of at the time. The effect of this is to bring the reader closer to the truth of Moll's psychology: that in fact she has not become as hard of heart as she would like to imagine. Even at this stage, she needs to imagine extenuating circumstances which serve to ease her conscience. So, although we realise that she is guilty of the crimes, we can never quite condemn her outright. Starr has a point when he writes that ' Moll offers - and overtly seeks from her readers - a negative judgement of her criminal longings; nevertheless, her gesture of self-reproach may also involve an appeal to our fellow feeling.' ¹⁴ One might also suggest that Moll herself shows sensitivity and by doing so evokes our sympathy once more; again, a contrast with Roxana may be established, in that the latter is almost utterly without shame or remorse. Moll remains throughout very human, her psychology remains very much on a level with ours. Consider the following passage, in which Moll assumes she is about to die in Newgate. The control evident in the style indicates her subdued state of mind, aware as she is of the past and awaiting the inevitable:

the Proof was so evident that there was no room for me so much as to plead not Guilty; I had the name of an old Offender, so that I had nothing to expect but Death in a few Weeks time, neither had I myself any thoughts of Escaping, and yet a certain strange Lethargy of Soul possess'd me, I had no Trouble, no Apprehensions, no Sorrow about me, the first Surprize was gone; I was, I may well say I know not how; my Senses, my Reason, nay, my Conscience were all asleep; my Course of Life for forty Years had been a horrid Complication of Wickedness, Whoredom, Adultery, Incest, Lying, Theft, and in a Word, every thing but Murder and Treason had been my Practice from the Age of Eighteen. (p.279).

She is writing with the benefit of hindsight, knowing very well that her life is to be spared, but the feelings she expresses here are surely genuine. She remembers her blank state of mind, seems to face squarely what she has been. At this stage, her attempts at upward social mobility

¹⁴ Starr, op. cit., p. 123.

seem to have been futile: she has ended up as simply another Newgate bird, incapable of distinguishing herself from the others. But in the last stages of her life, Moll achieves what she has always been seeking: peace with a faithful husband, a life of honesty, and the time to atone for her past sins: the moral of the book is tacked on to the end:

As the publishing this Account of my Life, is for the sake of the just Moral of every part of it, and for Instruction, Caution, Warning and Improvement to every Reader, so this will not pass I hope for an unnecessary Digression concerning some People, being oblig'd to disclose the greatest Secrets either of their own, or other Peoples Affairs. (p.326).

Her experience seems to have taught her the wickedness of an indulgence in low life. Convinced as she is of this, she is blind to another interpretation, albeit a rather cynical one. Crime in her case has paid to some extent. By pleading extenuating circumstances, she is in danger of excusing all criminals, except for the drunks and the debtors for whom she has only contempt. By emphasising her riches - and she is all the while aware of the worth of her pickings - she seems to contradict her attempts at convincing the reader that she has a deep conscience. Ian Watt penetrates to a possible reason for this:

What seems to have happened is that Defoe succumbed to the eternal danger of the crime story: to be interesting the author has to project himself as completely as possible into the mind of the crook, but, having once donned the colours of crime, he plays to win ... Moll's penitent prosperity is based on her criminal career, and the sincerity of her reformation is never put to the acid test of sacrificing material for moral good. The plot, in fact, flatly contradicts Defoe's purported moral theme.¹⁵

An important consideration, but based on the assumption that there is a definite identification between author and protagonist. This may be the case - but then the question of irony, which Watt also raises, tends to fade - but disputable in the light of the issues raised throughout this argument. Moll captures our sympathy through her belief in herself

¹⁵ Watt, op. cit., p. 120.

and in the belief that, somewhere under the harsh exterior of daily life, there lies something genuine to grasp. An unkind critic might argue that she does find something to grasp, dear to herself and Defoe - money - but the book is a plea by Moll for understanding, even though she herself may be incapable of totally comprehending the implications of her remarks and her deeds. She wishes to be 'good', struggling throughout to understand why there is this disparity between her intentions and the processes that reality impinges upon her. This point is particularly striking when Defoe's other female rogue, Roxana, is placed next to Moll. Roxana turns out to be so much more cynical, hypocritical and avaricious that our sympathies are turned away from her altogether. Moll's struggles are a source of interest, and her eventual triumph is a victory for her belief in herself to rise above the degrading low life with which she has been surrounded. She repents, and is rewarded for it, but the reconciliation between her social aspirations and her spiritual life is not easy: she retains an acute awareness of her sins yet believes in her eventual salvation because of the circumstances surrounding her need to commit the crimes. One critic sums up the dilemma thus:

In Moll Flanders (Defoe) has written a story of sin and its consequences as well as of a woman's rise to material success. We have the external story of Moll's career, of how she eventually achieves her life-long ambition to become a gentlewoman; and most of what are often dismissed by critics as mere 'episodes' are in fact related to this theme. We have also the inward, spiritual story, the fable of what happened to Moll in the process of 'making good' ... The unity of the book is rooted in the tensions between the social and economic aspirations of the protagonist and her moral or religious scruples, the difficulties of being good in the process of 'making good'.¹⁶

Roxana too wishes to 'make good' - but is less determined in her attempts to 'be good' at the same time.

¹⁶ Michie, J.A., 'The Unity of Moll Flanders', in Knaves and Swindlers. Essays on the Picaresque Novel in Europe, ed. Christine J. Whitbourn, (London, 1974), p. 90.

(ii)

Roxana complements Moll Flanders in the sense that it establishes another view of the female vagabond; one who, rather than gaining our sympathy as the narrative progresses, through an appeal to humanity, loses all contact due to a selfish insistence on her own needs before any other person's. The book also aids us in completing the picture of Defoe's aims in writing studies of rogues - and in this case, female rogues in particular. The novel is part of Defoe's whole system of enquiry into the nature of contemporary society, and once again indicates his fascination for the mind of the rogue. As such, the novel complements Moll Flanders.

At the beginning of the account, there is the distinct possibility established that Roxana will be treated in a similar way to Moll. Her background suggests deprivation and a figure seems to begin to emerge who, once more, is acted upon rather than acting independently:

I was born, as my Friends told me, at the City of Poictiers, in the Province, or County of POICTOU, in France, from whence I was brought to England, by my Parents, who fled for their Religion about the Year 1683, when the Protestants were Banish'd from France by the Cruelty of their Persecutors.

I, who knew little or nothing of what I was brought over hither for, was well enough pleas'd with being here; London, a large and gay City, took with me mighty well, who, from my being a Child, lov'd a Crowd, and to see a great-many fine Folks. 17

There is an attempt to establish a sense of loss in the first paragraph, but Roxana is soon able to find her feet. With the aid of a rich merchant father, she rises through the 'gay City', achieving by her teen-age what Moll had wanted throughout her life: a sense of independence, of belonging to a class above the ordinary. By the age of fourteen she is well aware

¹⁷ Defoe, Daniel, Roxana the Fortunate Mistress, ed. Jane Jack, (London, 1964), p.5. All references to this edition, and acknowledged by page nos. in the text.

of her superiority:

I was ... tall, and very well made, sharp as a Hawk in Matters of common Knowledge; quick and smart in Discourse, apt to be Satyrical; full of Repartee, and a little too forward in Conversation ... Being French Born, I danc'd, as some say, naturally, lov'd it extremely, and sung well also, and so well, that ... it was afterwards some Advantage to me: With all these Things, I wanted neither Wit, Beauty, or Money. In this Manner I set out into the World, having all the Advantages that any Young Woman cou'd desire, to recommend me to others, and form a Prospect of happy Living to myself.

(p.6-7).

Here, of course, she is enjoying her life, but the reader may be brought up with a jolt: despite the appearance of confidence, she is not the creature of independence that we might suppose her to be. Her father accepts a dowry of '25000 Livres' from an 'Eminent Brewer in the City', and at the age of fifteen she is forced to marry him. She describes him as 'a Thing call'd a Husband', while acknowledging his good looks and sporting abilities. But the worst thing about the husband is that he is a fool - and foolish with, of all things, money. Roxana has been used to special attention and benefits due to the intelligent mercantilism of her father, and, indeed, wishes to improve on them. In this sense, her desire to climb the social ladder is no less than Moll's, but she is insatiable, and, once whetted, her appetite goes beyond anything Moll would have contemplated, into the realms of the liberal court of Charles II. This desire for a power beyond any middle-class aspirations seems to be within her from the moment she realises her social superiority, and accounts for the contempt that she feels for her husband. Four years after marrying, her father dies; the money he leaves to Roxana is carelessly invested by her husband, and it is lost. She explains her lot and her attitude towards her husband:

My Case was particularly hard, for I had a Variety of foolish Things complicated in this unhappy Match.

First, and which, I must confess, is very unsufferable, he was a conceited Fool, Tout Opiniatre, every thing he said, was Right, and Best ... and yet when he came to defend what he had said, by Argument and Reason, he would do it so weakly, so emptily, and so

nothing to the Purpose, that it was enough to make any-body that heard him, sick and asham'd of him.

Secondly, He was positive and obstinate, and the most positive in the most simple and inconsistent Things, such as were intollerable to bear.

These two Articles, if there had been no more, qualified him to be a most unbearable Creature for a Husband.

(p. 8-9).

There is one overriding factor which qualifies him to be fool of all fools: he wastes Roxana's money.

At this early stage in the novel, then, the question of sympathy arises. Although not quite suffering the same plight as Moll, Roxana is never firmly in control of her own destiny, forced to take a partner whom she regards as a fool and a wastrel. Once again, however, we must put the judgement in context. She is a harsh judge of everyone she comes across, and her degradation certainly cannot be blamed on her first husband, a man singularly unblessed with a talent for making money. She has an unfortunate financial beginning, which leads her to dress 'in Rags and Dirt', and her house stripped of all the goods in order to pay the rent. But again, this does not last long, and her possessions are soon restored. As usual, Defoe is not much help in the matter, at least not at this stage; he had written a gibe against foolish husbands in 1707. 'A fool', he wrote, 'has something always about him that makes him intolerable; he is ever contemptible and uninterruptedly ridiculous'.¹⁸ True, the passages have almost twenty years separating them, but the point remains that Defoe's tolerance level for fools, like Roxana's, was probably very low. Also to be borne in mind is the repetition that Roxana uses: in one paragraph of seven lines (p.8), the word 'fool' is used no less than ten times, drumming the point home almost to the extent of deafness. Defoe's somewhat throwaway comment is certainly a contrast in style and brevity if not specific content, and should not be used somehow to twist Defoe

¹⁸ Payne, (ed.), op. cit., p. 231.

around to the position of a sympathiser. He remains distant at this point, probably realising that there is no room for sympathy, and knowing too that a total commitment to it by the intelligent reader will not be possible after a consideration of the ensuing events.

With the aid of Amy, the maid, Roxana soon begins to climb to a - recognisable - for her - social position. Amy suggests she becomes the mistress of a young Gentleman, and, despite her initial shock, quickly discovers that it is to her material advantage to consent. Although it is Amy who suggests the affair, Roxana soon begins to enjoy it, becoming not only a participant but a voyeur somewhat in the style of a modern blue-film moviegoer. The master being already in bed, Roxana pushes Amy in with him:

... but Amy wou'd not go: Nay, you Whore, says I, you said, if I wou'd put you to bed, you wou'd with all your Heart: and with that, I sat her down, pull'd off: her Stockings and Shooes, and all her Cloaths, Piece by Piece, and led her to the Bed to him ... I fairly stript her, and then I threw open the Bed, and thrust her in. I need say no more; this is enough to convince any-body that I did not think him my Husband, and that I had cast off all Principle, and all Modesty, and had effectually stifled Conscience. ... the Wench being naked in the Bed with him, 'twas too late to look back, so she lay still, and let him do what he wou'd with her. (p.46-47).

This has a Richardsonian ring to it: the striptease details come very close to the physical excitement expressed in a novel like Clarissa. Amy doesn't appear to put up much resistance either, but that is not the point of the tale. Principle, Modesty and Conscience are fast receding from Roxana in this, her first real encounter with a kind of nobility. She remains satisfied with her man and also with the menage a trois: what does distress her is the death of her baby at six weeks, 'so all that Work was to do over again, that is to say, the Charge, the Expence, the Travel, etc.,' (p.49). Again, a contrast with Moll: the absence of emotion and the egotistical attitude turn the reader away from her. Nor has she the excuse this time to fall back on that her husband is a fool, thereby

attempting to create some sympathy: he is presented as a good businessman, a successful husband and lover: terms by which Roxana judges others.

After this 'husband's' death, it is not long before she encounters several other worthy suitors, including a Prince, a Dutch merchant and a Jew. The experiences add to the repository of knowledge of the male psychology; she learns how to control and manipulate. An interesting example of this manipulation is her attitude in an attempted seduction by a merchant, who wishes to marry her. At this moment, she is the lodger; both have separate rooms, and she has resisted several advances, but always with the promise of future delights. She becomes a Shamela figure:

I thought he had been gone indeed, and so that he had been in jest; and by the way, thought either he had no-mind to the thing, or that he never intended it; so I shut my Door, that is, latch'd it, for I seldom lock'd or bolted it, and went to-Bed; I had not been in-Bed a Minute, but he comes in his Gown, to the Door, and opens it a little-way, but not enough to come in, or look in, and says softly, What are you really gone to-Bed? Yes, yes, says I, get you gone: No indeed, says he, I shall not begone, you gave me Leave before, to come to-Bed, and you shan't say get you gone now: So he comes into my Room, and then turns about, and fastens the Door, and immediately comes to the Bed-side to me: I pretended to scold and struggle, and bid him begone, with more Warmth than before; but it was all one; he had not a Rag of Cloaths on, but his Gown and Slippers, and Shirt: so he throws off his Gown, and throws open the Bed, and came in at once.

I made a seeming Resistance, but it was no more indeed; for, as above, I resolv'd from the Beginning, he shou'd Lye with me if he wou'd, and for the rest, I left it to come after.

(p. 142-3).

The pretence, the domination of the male and the dramatic building up to the climax are all important. The first two aspects present us with Roxana's psychology: she enjoys the approach as well as the outcome. The stylistic delaying mechanism - the details of the opening of the door, of the words exchanged, of the dress of the gentleman - is part of the suspense, and part of the lurid memory of Roxana. Shamela would have recognised a twin sister here, although she may have regretted so sudden a capitulation. As so often in Roxana, sex is used to manoeuvre and to control. True, it

is used similarly in Moll Flanders, but there Moll is the victim of the attack; here, Roxana is the manipulator of events. Without wishing to be over-puritanical about it, if one condemns the men in Moll Flanders for sexual dishonesty, one must do the same in Roxana: in the case of the latter, the attack is turned upon the protagonist.

Another interesting parallel with Moll - and one which can be used to draw a contrast between the two figures - is in the portrait of whoring and the two women's attitudes towards it. Roxana's insistence on the necessity of wealth - and one unmanaged by anyone but herself - leads her to conclude that a single life is by far preferable to a married one: an argument not without reason, but underlying her surface explanations to her various suitors is the fact that she can earn more money by 'whoring' - selling herself to the highest gentleman bidder - than by risking another marriage to a fool. A suitor, Sir Robert, 'applauded my Way of Managing my Money, and told me, I shou'd soon be monstrous rich; but he. neither knew, or mistrusted, that ~~with~~ all this Wealth, I was yet a Whore, and was not averse to adding to my Estate at the farther Expence of my Virtue,' (p.171). While Moll continually regrets her plight, Roxana makes observations upon it; the vindication is a simple one: money means respectability, and money can come from 'whoring'. So in some strange way the whore and the outwardly respectable citizen are brought into close contact:

I may venture to say, that no Woman ever liv'd a Life like me, of six and twenty Years of Wickedness, without the least Signals of Remorse; without any Signs of Repentance; or without so much as a Wish to put an End to it; I had so long habituated myself to a Life of Vice, that really it appear'd to be no Vice to me; I went on smooth and pleasant; I wallow'd in Wealth, and it flow'd in upon me at such a Rate ... so that I had at the End of the eight Years, two Thousand eight Hundred Pounds coming Yearly in, of which I did not spend one Penny, being maintain'd by my Allowance from my Lord ---

(p.188).

A note of pride here, one which Moll could hardly share. Whereas in Moll Flanders the possibility of irony emerged, in Roxana Defoe's art

comes close to the satirist's in that he reveals the true mind beneath the veneer of respectability. Roxana talks of her life of 'wickedness' but the word carries little weight for her: she uses the conventional word, without allowing it to impress itself upon her conscience. 'With what Trifles we pretend to satisfy ourselves,' she argues (p.202), 'and suppress the Attempts of Conscience in the Pursuit of agreeable Crime, and in the possessing those Pleasures which we are loth to part with ... I cou'd not without blushing, as wicked as I was, (say) that I lov'd it for the sake of the Vice.'

There is confusion here, but one which causes Roxana little trepidation. She says that she 'blushes' - one might think shame has at last descended upon her - but the preceding sentence tells the truth: the 'crime' is 'agreeable', since it brings her financial rewards, and any tinge of conscience is dispelled. She is hardly aware of the confusion, or of the apparent paradox, so the enjoyment of her crime is the aspect of it which takes precedence. She is a stock-taker of experience, balancing the books between what she appears to sacrifice - 'virtue' - and her financial rewards.

One view of Roxana which involves some sympathy for her is expressed by G.A. Starr, who writes that 'Roxana's cynicism about such topics as love and honour, for instance, frequently turns out to be directed against society's still more cynical corruptions of those concepts.'¹⁹ Yet the question must remain: does Roxana really criticise society's methods? Rather, she seems to enjoy the position in which she finds herself, using her knowledge for her own ends. The novel is hardly Defoe's criticism of the society itself: true, Roxana is an accepted member of part of society, through her own cunning, but are we expected then to believe that the

¹⁹ Starr, op. cit., p.179.

society condoned murder of one's children when necessary? Or that merchants, princes and the like had Roxanas around all the time? The latter point may be a debatable one, but Roxana connives and cheats so many who have a basic kindness towards her, that it is difficult not to see the book as an indictment against her and her selfish attitudes. Whereas Moll emerges as a person aware of her deviations in her attempts to 'make good', Roxana is really only interested in the end. Roxana cannot recognise her own confusion, subsuming it under the guise of acquisition. A refusal to recognise confusion is allied to a denial of conscience, a quality Moll continually emphasises is with her. Consider the following storm scene in Roxana, which brings fear but causes her little anxiety beyond the immediate; Roxana and Amy are caught in a storm at sea on the way to Holland:

Nor did this incident do either Amy or me much Service; for the Danger being over, the Fears of Death vanish'd with it; ay, and our Fear of what was beyond Death also: our Sence of the Life we had liv'd, went off, and with our return to Life, our wicked Taste of Life return'd, and we were both the same as before, if not worse: So certain is it, that the Repentance which is brought about by the meer Apprehensions of Death, wears off as those Apprehensions wear off; and Death-bed Repentance, or Storm-Repentance, which is much the same, is seldom true ... I had no thorow effectual Repentance; no Sight of my Sins in their proper Shape; no View of a Redeemer, or Hope in him: I had only such a Repentance as a Criminal has at the Place of Execution, who is sorry, not that he has committed the Crime, as it is a Crime, but sorry that he is to be Hang'd for it.

(p. 128-129).

Moll wanders round the streets of London ashamed of her deeds, or at least looking around for someone much worse than her to fill the psychological abyss into which her conscience plunges her. Roxana dismisses the incident, showing no sorrow for her crimes but only for the idea that nature might be wreaking vengeance upon her: and she has no control over that. She does not deny that she sins wilfully: she belongs to the 'second' category of criminals, according to Moll's own

interpretation as to what draws a person to crime:

Moll Flanders obviously places criminals into two classes: most of them are vicious reprobates who richly deserve their fate (Roxana); but she and a few of her friends are essentially virtuous and deserving people who have been unfortunate - she is even morally pure in her whoring since it is, as she assures us, by necessity and not 'for the sake of the vice'. Like Defoe, in fact, she is a good Puritan who, despite a few necessary and regrettable compromises, has, in the main and in defiance of illustrious precedent, lived in a world of pitch and not been defiled. ²⁰

There is irony in Watt's interpretation of course, in that Moll is always looking for inferiors to confirm her own need to be upwardly socially mobile, but the view is useful in that it establishes a similarity between Defoe's mind and Moll's - and hence emphasises once again the sympathy between character and creator - and the contrast between Defoe and Roxana. Defoe makes Roxana completely culpable in her deeds, unscrupulous and selfish. This is very likely because Roxana was so close to the real-life criminals that he had encountered, based as she was on contemporary female tricksters and rogues:

(Defoe) turned for help to accounts of actual criminals: Roxana owes much more to accounts of real women than does Moll Flanders. One of these was that Mademoiselle Bardou whose dancing amused the Court of Charles II, another infamous forger, Mrs. Mary Butler. When... Roxana likens her own situation to that of 'the German Princess', she is referring to a notorious confidence trickster who became the subject of more biographies than any other criminal of the time. ²¹

Defoe deliberately refers to these real-life tricksters to draw the reader away from a sympathetic reaction towards her. As the artist also, he manipulates Roxana's actions to give the impression of a completely culpable, conscience-less woman. An example of this manipulation comes towards the end of the novel, where Roxana seems to reject her past life of whoring, agreeing as she does to marry her lover, a Baronet:

Thus I put an End to all the intriguing Part of my Life; a Life full of prosperous Wickedness,; the Reflections upon which, were so much

²⁰ Watt, op. cit., p. 118.

²¹ Jack, Jane, 'Introduction' to Roxana (op. cit.), p. X.

more afflicting, as the time had been spent in the grossest Crimes, which the more I look'd-back upon, the more black and horrid they appear'd, effectually drinking up all the Comfort and Satisfaction which I might otherwise have taken in that Part of Life which was still before me.

(p. 243).

On the surface, there is here the beginning of a repentance as she realises that her past has been one of a low Newgate whore and thief, but the passage serves to build up the irony against her. After living two easy years with her husband, she discovers that her daughter, who had previously thought Amy was her mother, finds out that Amy was merely carrying out orders from 'Lady Roxana', and seems prepared to denounce her as a whore. The girl is the product of a previous liaison with a jeweler. Amy suggests that the only way to prevent a discovery is to murder the girl. At first, Roxana is suitably shocked, feeling almost sympathetic towards her daughter. On accidentally meeting the girl on board a ship Roxana gradually becomes less passionate, coming to the conclusion that the girl is a 'Fool' and a 'Jade', words which have been heard before in her denunciation of others. She begins to irritate Roxana: although she never consents to have the girl killed, and curses Amy on several occasions for mentioning it, the deed is done without her knowledge. Defoe moves us rapidly to the conclusion that her former contrition is simply insufficient for her past life, that she has to suffer spiritually. Confession, as Roxana herself admitted in the face of death, is all too easy; Defoe places the punishment of unrelenting conscience upon her, as she at last recognises the absolute nature of her guilt:

As for the poor Girl herself, she was ever before my Eyes; I saw her by-Night, and by-Day; she haunted my Imagination, if she did not haunt the House; my Fancy show'd her me in a hundred Shapes and Postures; sleeping or waking, she was with me: Sometimes, I thought I saw her with her Throat cut; sometimes with her Head cut, and her Brains knock'd-out; other-times hang'd up upon a Beam; another time drown'd in the Great Pond at Camberwell: And all these Appearances were terrifying to the last Degree.

(p. 325).

Roxana is morally responsible for her daughter's death, even though she may protest conscience. The murder is the culmination of Roxana's and Amy's selfishness, of the complete materialism which they have displayed in the attempts to climb to the top of the social ladder. Her punishment is a fitting end to the novel, and does not detract from the attack against her: she deserves to suffer, and suffer spiritually at that. For her to suffer physically - i.e. at the hands of the Newgate gaoler - would be all too easy, and would even provide her with the possibility of an escape route, as in Moll Flanders. The spiritual torment is not such a tenuous thing, confirming her complete former mental decadence. As Maximilian Novak rightly points out, the novel is a study in 'moral decay', a story of 'wilful sinning'.²² It is also a story without a hero or heroine; our sensibilities are always turned onto the seamy side of human psychology. Outside the criminal biographies, it is probably Defoe's most complete attack on the cynical mind of the villain.

(iii)

A factor which unites Defoe's villains is the view they have of themselves as above the common element in society. Moll wishes to rise above the street drunks with whom she is forced to mix and Roxana insists throughout that she is a lady: our own judgements may be different, but Defoe deliberately gives them a view of themselves which places them in a position determined by their regard of class. This is no less true when one turns to the studies of the male rogues in the fiction. The novel closest to Moll Flanders, The History and Remarkable Life of Col. Jacque, explores the circumstances by which a boy is forced into crime through necessity;

²² Novak, Maximilian E., 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's Roxana', JEGP, vol. LXV, (1966), pp. 445-465, (p.446). Novak also notes that Roxana does little to prevent Amy in the killing.

a boy who nevertheless feels that he should become a 'gentleman', who works hard in the colonies to become rich and achieve his social aims, and who is robbed both by a cheating wife and pirates. Defoe once again is treading on delicate ground: how to make a villain a sympathetic figure without projecting the appearance of recommending crime as a worthwhile pursuit. The adage of 'give me not Poverty lest I steal' once again becomes significant, as does the desire for upward social mobility.

As one might expect, Jack, the hero, never knew his mother; he is placed in charge of a nurse who engraves upon his mind that he comes from noble stock. This does not do him any good at nine years old, as his nurse dies:

I was almost 10 Year old, the Captain 11, and the Major about 8, when the good Woman my Nurse died; her Husband was a Seaman, and had been drown'd a little before in the Gloucester Frigat ... The good Woman being dead, we, the three Jacks, were turn'd loose to the World; as to the Parish providing for us, we did not trouble our selves much about that; we rambl'd about all three together, and the People in Rosemary-Lane, and Ratcliff, and that Way knowing us pretty well, we got Victuals easily enough, and without much Begging. For my particular Part, I got some Reputation, for a mighty civil honest Boy; for if I was sent of an Errand, I always di~~d~~ it punctually and carefully, and made hast again; and if I was trusted with any thing, I never touch'd it to diminish it, but made it a Point of Honour to be punctual to whatever was committed to me, tho' I was as Errant a Thief as any of them in all other Cases. ²³

Jack's background is made very relevant; we are asked to consider his plight and his poverty, to regard his honesty and to share with him in the dismissal of the parish. 'Rather live one's life amongst friends than rely on the parish', Jack implies, and it is a dividend which seems to pay off. He is trusted by his neighbours and honest in the execution of his duty. By the time his admission is reached that he is as dishonest towards people he does not know as everybody else, it hardly seems to matter: he has established himself as a worthy young lad, eager to provide

²³ Defoe, Daniel, The History and Remarkable Life of Colonel Jacque, ed. Samuel Holt Monk, (London, 1965), p.8. All references to this edition, and acknowledged by page nos. in the text.

for those whom he likes.

This camaraderie between the young boys extends into a concern for each other's social welfare. The Major, enticed by two pickpockets to Bartholomew Fair, finds the day's takings sufficient to furnish both himself and Jack with a new pair of shoes:

We put them on immediately to our great Comfort, for we had neither of us any Stockings to our Legs that had any Feet to them for a long time: I found myself so refresh'd with having a pair of warm Stockings on, and a Pair of dry Shoes; things, I say, which I had not been acquainted with a great while, that I began to call to mind my being a Gentleman; and now I thought it began to come to pass ... I said ... What if we should go somewhere and get some Victuals, I am very hungry?

... so we went to a boiling Cook's in Rosemary-Lane, where we treated our selves Nobly, and as I thought with my self we began to live like Gentlemen, for we had Three-penny-worth of boil'd Beef, Two-penny-worth of Pudding, a penny Brick, (as they call it, or Loaf) and a whole Pint of strong Beer, which was seven Pence in all.

(p. 15).

The passage is ironic, but it is not an irony of which Jack is aware; nor is it an ironic attack by Defoe upon his character. It is stated - and there is no reason to doubt it - that the boys are not used to shoes, rather, they have been forced to go about in bare feet. The image of the poverty of the young boys is placed in the readers' minds; the cold and the hunger are emphasised, and sympathy is established. It is possibly a sentimental sympathy, particularly with the added details of the feast that follows, but it is never tear-jerking: Defoe's plain style accounts for that. With no parents or guardians to look after them, with an indifferent parish surrounding them, what is the alternative? They are attempting to survive 'in a hostile or indifferent world', living on their wits, while Jack at least is aware that something better must come. Defoe's position as an artist presents itself once again here. By choosing details from the early life of Jack, he demands sympathy from his audience towards the protagonist: small boys, if presented in such a way, can be excused almost any crime, particularly if the crime is a result of accident and neglect. By adding the detail of Jack's persistent

desire to become a 'gentlemen', Defoe completes the argument: Jack is morally and psychologically above the sort of life he is forced to lead.

If anything, the repetition in the early parts of the novel tend to have a bludgeoning effect upon the reader. No opportunity is wasted to emphasise the superiority of Jack; we are never allowed to consider the possibility of Jack being ultimately responsible for his actions: he is always forced into crime by necessity, and vindicates himself through his belief in his social superiority. When his conscience begins to prick, it is related to his attempts at becoming a gentleman; and, like Moll, he believes in classes of criminals, or at least seems to subscribe to the belief internally even though he writes about it in different terms:

Then as to Principle, 'tis true I had no Foundation lay'd in me by Education; and being early led by my fate into Evil, I had the less Sense of its being Evil left upon my Mind: But when I began to grow to an Age of understanding, and to know that I was a Thief, growing up in all manner of Villainy, and ripening a-pace for the Gallows, it came often into my thoughts that I was going wrong, that I was in the high Road to the Devil, and several times would stop short, and ask my self, if this was the Life of a Gentleman? But these little things wore off again, as often as they came on, and I follow'd the old Trade again; especially when Will came to prompt me ...

Will came to me as I have said, and telling me how much better Business he was fallen into, would have me go along with him, and I should be a Gentleman: Will it seems understood that Word in a quite differing manner from me; for his Gentleman was nothing more or less than a Gentleman Thief, a Villain of a higher Degree than a Pick-pocket ... my Gentleman that I had my Eye upon, was another thing quite, tho' I cou'd not really tell how to describe it neither.

(p.61-2)

Jack certainly seems to possess a conscience; also, he has a vision of his future career, but he capitulates to Will's suggestion perhaps a little too easily. He insists that his belief is 'different' from Will's, but re-commences his life of crime after very little prompting; this suggests that crime has become an integral part of his life, and that he agrees with Will. The critical problem in the passage must centre around the extent of the irony present; the problem is reduced somewhat by comparing Jack with his female counterpart, Moll. Moll looks back on

her past life, persistent in her view that she could not be held responsible for her mistakes and for her life of crime. Jack also looks back, and finds, that he has been placed under the influence of criminals from the age of ten: how, then, can he be blamed for falling back upon crime so easily, just eight years after the first contact? The language of the passage also suggests that Defoe, rather than presenting Jack as an object of ironic attack, is describing a confused mind. The language is too mild to constitute a condemnation. Jack is a young man of ambition, but whose social assets are insufficient to achieve those ambitions - and he realises this. As Shinagel points out, 'Jacque's entry into a life of crime is the direct result of his lack of education and his not being bred to any trade'.²⁴ This is certainly what Defoe wishes us to believe, but occasionally his style tends to detract from it.

If Defoe appears to be running into the possibility of ambiguity, the incident which follows firmly establishes Jack as a member of the gentry as far as conscience and morality are concerned. He re-assumes his life of crime, led by Will, and they rob a nurse and a maid in the street:

... hold, says I, make no Noise, unless you have a mind to force us to murder you whether we will or no, give me your Money presently, and make no Words, and we shan't hurt you; upon this, the poor Maid pull'd out 5s 6d. and the old Woman a Guinea, and a Shilling, crying heartily for her Money, and said, it was all she had left in the World; well we took it for all that, tho' it made my very heart bleed to see what agony the poor Woman was in at parting with it.

(p. 64).

The insistence that his heart 'bled' for the woman is hardly sufficient to convince us that his sorrow is genuine: the brief mention is swallowed by the immediate execution of the robbery, followed by the details of their escape. What Defoe does is to have Jack return to the incident a few pages later, just as Moll described the guilt she felt after robbing a child. Defoe also has an addition this time in the character of Will,

²⁴ Shinagel, Michael, op. cit., p. 164.

who has no desire to be a gentleman and very little conscience:

... Will was mighty full of the Success we had had, and how we might be sure of the like this way every Day. But he observ'd that I did not seem so elevated at the Success of that Night's Ramble as I us'd to be, and also that I did not take any great Notice of the Expectations he was in, of what was to come, yet I had said little to him at the time.

But my Heart was full of the poor Woman's Case at Kentish Town, and I resolv'd, if possible to find her out, and give her her Money: With the abhorrence that fill'd my Mind at the Cruelty of that Act, there necessarily follow'd a little Distaste of the thing it self, and now it came into my Head with a double force, that this was the High Road to the Devil, and that certainly this was not the Life of a Gentleman! Will and I parted for that time, but next Morning we met again, and Will was mighty Brisk and Merry.

(p. 66-7).

Jack's conscience has become external: saying little, his visible appearance draws Will fairly close to the truth, although he cannot pinpoint the precise reason for Jack's depression. He remains 'brisk and merry', while Jack's mind dwells on the enormity of the crime of robbing a person of their complete livelihood. He is never very far from the conclusion that his social ambitions are receding quickly, and seems earnest in his desire to reverse the corrupting way of life.

Defoe is a sufficiently subtle artist not to spring Jack's conscience upon us without adequate preparation. During these formative years in his adherence to crime, Jack is presented as a boy totally confused in his mind, unable to resolve the paradox between what he feels himself to be and what he actually is. This confusion is partly a result of the social circumstances in which he finds himself: as a member of a criminal 'gang' he is superficially similar to his fellows in aims and achievements; but Jack knows he is different, and struggles to convince us of this difference as the narrative progresses. It is Defoe's artistry that gives the reader passages like this, as Jack lies attempting to sleep ^{after} ~~and~~ a successful robbery that has brought him fourteen shillings:

Well, I carried it home with me to my Lodging in the Glass-house, and when I went to go to Sleep, I knew not what to do with it; if I had let any of the black Crew I was with, know of it, I should

have been smother'd in the Ashes for it, or robb'd of it, or some Trick or other put upon me for it; so I knew not what to do, but lay with it in my Hand, and my Hand in my Bosom ... Every now and then dropping a sleep, I should Dream that my Money was lost, and start like one frighted; then finding it fast in my Hand, try to go to sleep again, but could not for a long while, then drop and start again ... so that I pass'd that Night over in Care and Anxiety enough, and this I may safely say, was the first Nights rest that I lost by the Cares of this Life, and the deceitfulness of Riches.

(p. 23-4).

This is reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe who reflects on the uselessness of money, but who keeps it all the same. The parallel comes closer in the following scene, in which Jack determines on hiding the money. He finds a tree and attempts to hide it in the trunk at the top. The money falls through the hollow trunk, apparently lost:

As young as I was, I was now sensible what a Fool I was before, that I could not think of Ways to keep my Money, but I must come thus far to throw it into a Hole where I could not reach it; well, I thrust my Hand quite up to the Elbow, but no Bottom was to be found, or any End of the Hole or Cavity; I got a Stick off of the Tree and thrust it in a great Way, but all was one; then I cry'd, nay, I roar'd out, I was in such a Passion.

(p.25).

The scene has an element of farce about it, and, like farce, confusion and ambiguity are the central ingredients. The confusion is the one in Jack's mind, torn between the cares of money and the comfort he knows it can bring him. Also like farce, the incident has a happy ending: the money is rescued, much to the joy of Jack.

The device of contrast which Defoe used with Will has been used earlier in the novel; and once again it shines a favourable light upon Jack. This time, the first-person narrative is used to advantage as Jack reflects on the characters of the boys with whom he was brought up. One in particular, Captain Jack, provides the hero with a contrast to his own character and inclinations:

His Temper was sly, sullen, reserv'd, malicious, revengeful; and withal, he was brutish, bloody, and cruel in his Disposition; he was as to manners a meer Boor, or Clown, of a Carman-like Breed; sharp as a

Street bred Boy must be, but ignorant and unteachable from a Child ... and as if he was born a Thief, he would steal every thing that came near him, even as soon almost as he could Speak; and that, not from his Mother only, but from any Body else, and from us too that were his Brethren and Companions. He was an original Rogue, for he would do the foulest and most villainous Things, even by his own Inclination. (p.5-6).

This is not the dispassionate description that it appears to be on first reading. True, there is little cause to question the facts, but Jack's aim is really to present himself in as good a light as possible: he did not behave like this; he is not the hardened, cynical congenital villain that his namesake was. Our hero is, by comparison, a gentleman. Here, as throughout the novel, and especially during the early sequences, Jack is out to prove himself superior to the ordinary type of criminal who must be headed for Newgate. If Jack had had the opportunity, he would not have turned to crime; by way of contrast, his namesake the Captain would be a criminal whatever the circumstances.

It must however be admitted that Defoe's insistence on providing the reader with details of Jack's life of crimes endangers a completely sympathetic view of the protagonist. Whereas Moll blames no-one but herself and her 'circumstances' - Jack continually probes for a cause outside himself; he places blame on others when in fact it might be felt that he would do better to survey his own mind. One example of this occurs early in the novel, as he helps his 'Comrade' steal a bag of money:

This was a most Exquisite Fellow for a Thief, for he had the greatest Dexterity at Conveying any thing away; that he scarce ever Pitch'd upon any thing in his Eye, but he carried it off with his Hands, and never that I know of, miss'd his Aim, or was catch'd in the Fact. He was an Eminent Pick-pocket, and very Dextrous at the Ladies Gold Watches; but he generally push'd higher at such desperate things as those, and he came off the cleanest, and with the greatest Success Imaginable; and it was in these kindsof the wicked Art of Thieving, that I became his Scholar.

(p.44).

In one passage we are asked to condemn pick-pocketing as one of the 'low' activities, and yet here there is a sense of admiration at the

dexterity of the craftsman: just what is happening? As often in Defoe, it is difficult to give a precise answer, but there is a definite suspicion of confusion once more, this time between protagonist and author, Jack has been eager to condemn his fellow criminals and to present himself as worthy. Defoe's own admiration for those who lived by their wits, who carried out their chosen profession profitably seems to spill over into the narrative here. Defoe lived by his wits, and pushed himself at whatever task with which he found himself faced. In this passage, the minds of Jack and Defoe seem to merge, as Jack stands back and admires the handiwork. It is only at the completion of the event that Defoe remembers to inform us that all this thievery is 'wicked'. It may be so, but it has a subtlety of its own which can have nothing to do with morality.²⁵

Concentration on the earlier part of the novel reveals a close connection with Defoe's other studies of criminal activity: 'the importance of the protagonist's background, the inevitability of his turning to crime and the grand desire of becoming respectable. Moll achieves respectability only towards the end of the novel, but in Colonel Jack a somewhat different pattern emerges. Like Moll, he goes to America, achieving respectability through trade. At first a tiller of the soil, he earns respect and wealth through work, eventually becoming a successful merchant. The episodes are not without moral content, and Jack's conclusions do throw light on the content of the early part of Jack's life. In Virginia he is fortunate enough to meet his 'Pedagogue', a man of religious scruples and puritan wisdom:

But, Sir, said he, I believe my Case was what I find is the Case of most of the wicked Part of the World (viz.) that to be reduc'd to Neccessity is to be Wicked; for Neccessity is not only the Temptation,

25

See also James Sutherland's discussion of the 'wit' of Defoe's criminals, in Defoe, (London, 1937), p. 247-8.

but is such a Temptation as human Nature is not empower'd to resist: How good then, says he, is that God, which takes from you Sir, the Temptation, by taking away the Necessity?

(p.161).

This conclusion applies not only to Jack but also to Moll: the puritan belief that a hard life becomes tempered by a benevolent God, who ultimately provides comfort, is personified in the life of Moll and Jack. It is Jack who has this spelled out to him since his sufferings seem to end at this stage in the novel; Moll's misfortunes carry on to the bitter end, and she only has time for a quick repentance. 'Necessity' is the key word in the above passage; now that Jack has ample provision - by dint of hard work - he can choose the virtuous path and follow an honest life. The moral is again pointedly drawn, again by the Pedagogue:

How much is the Life of a Slave in Virginia, to be preferr'd to that of the most prosperous Thief in the World! here I live miserable, but honest; suffer wrong, but do no wrong; my Body is punish'd, but my Conscience is not loaded; and as I us'd to say, that I had no Leisure to look in, but I would begin when I had some Recess, sometime to spare.

(p.162).

Jack's life does not eke itself out as simply as this: the materialistic mercantile attitude with which he was born takes control, and his greed extends as far as disrupting the flow of trade between the New World and the Old. He is also subject to the ravages of fortune as he loses money at the hands of pirates; his refusal to decline into self-pity is a result of the hazardous life which he has led in the past. He ends up a 'real true Penitent', passing a 'civil life' in Scotland.

Defoe's close study of the criminal mind is not, then, a mere narrative of episodes. Events which take place in later life have a broader relevance, helping to clarify the past. Nor is the hero the completely sympathetic character one might assume: there is a definite ambiguity in the attempted drawing of the moral, as though Defoe wills Jack to win, yet all the time knowing he should suffer for his crimes. Jack's conscience

is the element in his character which suggests that necessity pushed him into his 'wicked ways', while good puritan philosophy pulled him out of them.

(iv)

The female rogue, the whore, the robber: what remained for Defoe to study in fiction? The answer was quite simple, and connected closely to other writings of the day. Travel captured the imagination in the eighteenth-century; piracy also did the same; what better but to combine the two in an adventure story tinged with morality? Defoe, ever aware of the needs of his reading public, proceeded to write The Life, Adventures and Pyracies of the famous Captain Singleton, a man singularly unblessed with a poor background, but who rises to overcome this, using opportunities as they arise, and who finally repents.

As ever, Defoe introduces his character from boyhood: his background of neglect and misfortune is presented completely unsentimentally, as a record of the trials of seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century life. Although of good parentage, he is stolen after his Nursery Maid finds more of interest in her 'Sweet-heart' than in the young lad:

From this time it seems I was disposed of to a Beggar-Woman that wanted a pretty little Child to set out her Case, and after that to a Gypsey, under whose Government I continued till I was about Six Years old; and this Woman, tho' I was continually dragged about with her, from one Part of the Country to another, yet never let me want for any thing ...

My good Gypsey Mother, for some of her worthy Actions no doubt, happened in Process of Time to be hang'd; and as this fell out something too soon for me to be perfected in the Strolling Trade, the Parish where I was left, which for my Life I can't remember, took some Care of me to be sure ...

I believe I was frequently removed from one Town to another, perhaps as the Parishes disputed my supposed Mother's last Settlement. 26

A passage which reveals as much about Defoe as about Singleton himself.

The description corresponds to a familiar pattern: the innocent child is

26 Defoe, Daniel, The Life Adventures and Pyracies of the famous Captain Singleton, (Shakespeare Head Press, Oxford, 1974), p.2-3. All references to this edition, and acknowledged by page nos. in the text.

forced into circumstances over which he has no control, and is deprived of the care and attention which would enable him to lead a decent existence. The irony of the 'worthy' is all Defoe; Singleton is self-deceiving if he believes his associations with low-life had no effect upon his later life. In fact, as the narrative progresses, he has to learn worthiness, in a religious and moral sense.

The associations with low-life continue; he is taken into the trade of mariner, and, eventually, that of a pirate:

Thieving, Lying, Swearing, Forswearing, joined to the most abominable Lewdness, was the stated Practice of the Ship's Crew; adding to it, that with the most unsufferable Boasts of their new Courage, they were generally speaking the most compleat Cowards that I ever met with; and the Consequence of their Cowardice was evident upon many Occasions. However, there was here and there among them one that was not so bad as the rest; and as my Lot fell among them, it made me have the most contemptible Thoughts of the rest, as indeed they deserved. I was exactly fitted for their Society indeed, for I had no Sense of Virtue or Religion upon me ... Fate certainly thus directed my Beginning, knowing that I had Work which I had to do in the World, which nothing but one hardened against all Sense of Honesty or Religion, could go thro'; and yet even in this State of Original Wickedness, I entertained such a settled Abhorrence of the abandon'd Vileness of the Portuguese, that I could not but hate them most heartily from the Beginning, and all my Life afterwards.

(p.7-8).

Like Jack, Singleton is at once part of the crew and separate from it. By asserting his distaste of the other members of the gang, he is attempting to convince us of his own social and moral superiority. His social background, despite its deprivations, was never as low as this, he senses that he has been bred to better things, even though he claims he was 'exactly fitted' for the life. The statement is ironic with regard to the discussion that follows, which sets about to show that he is aware of the brutishness of his companions' lives, and wants little part of their endeavours. He has little choice, however, as 'fate' once again takes charge of the hero and plunges him into a life of moral wickedness and thievery. Like Jack also, he is an impressionable youth, without the solidity of 'Education' to form a barrier between himself and the low life

he pursues:

I was now to enter upon a Part of independent Life, a thing I was indeed very ill prepared to manage; for I was perfectly loose and dissolute in my Behaviour, bold and wicked while I was under Government, and now perfectly unfit to be trusted with Liberty; for I was as ripe for any Villainy, as a young Fellow that had no solid Thought ever placed in his Mind could be supposed to be. Education, as you have heard, I had none; and all the little Scenes of Life I had pass'd thro', had been full of Dangers and desperate Circumstances; but I was either so young, or so stupid, that I escaped the Grief and Anxiety of them.

(p.14).

An assessment which once again comes across without self-pity, but which also manoeuvres the readers into a sympathetic concern for Singleton's plight. He has been 'disadvantaged'; even though he seems ripe for a life of crime, he is both 'young and stupid', again through no fault of his own. By emphasising his ignorance and his youth, Singleton is asking the reader to suspend judgement on himself, to weigh all the circumstances before and commitment to a condemnation of his character is made. The device is a common one in Defoe's fiction: by pleading his wickedness and refusing to indulge in self-pity, and by presenting a straightforward narrative, Singleton forces the reader to re-assess; again, individual circumstances are all-important.

A pattern also begins to emerge in a consideration of Singleton's early life on the seas. Moll wandered aimlessly around the London streets, Jack brooded in a corner; Singleton's voyage becomes a metaphor for the aimlessness of the criminal with both pretensions and a conscience. 'We were', he writes, 'as miserable as Nature could well make us to be; for we were upon a Voyage and no Voyage, we were bound some where and no where, for tho' we knew what we intended to do, we really did not know what we were doing.' (p.39). This description fits the three characters perfectly, capturing the feeling of desolation that each of them has after each escapade. True, consciences tend to fade as the novels progress, but they re-emerge as the characters surface from the sea of iniquity into

which they have been plunged. One of Singleton's low points arrives when he agrees to join in a mutiny, aiding the mutineers of another ship and then joining the crew. The act itself is hardly mentioned, since the execution of it hardly matters: it is Singleton's reaction to the event which takes precedence:

'I liked the Proposal very well', he writes, ' and he (Harris, the leader) got eight of us to join with him, and he told us, that as soon as his Friend had begun the Work, and was Master of the Ship, we should be ready to do the like; this was his Plot, and I without the least Hesitation, either at the Villainy of the Fact, or the Difficulky of performing it, came immediately into the wicked Conspiracy ... I that was, as I have hinted before, an original Thief, and a Pyrate even by Inclination before, was now in my Element, and never undertook any Thing in my Life with more particular Satisfaction.'

(p.171).

Much of the remainder of the novel narrates Singleton's adventures on the high seas, his exploits in Africa, and his eventual spiritual rescue at the hands of the quaker William. By concentrating on the low side of Singleton's escapades Defoe knew he had his audience on his side: he was presenting them with two subjects - piracy and exploration - that were the talking points of the day, as the Old World and trade began to spread. Pirates were a source of military power, they had reputedly great wealth, and they could obstruct trade; Defoe the artist found a source for the exploration of the social conditions that produce a criminal, while Defoe the businessman found an open market, a reading public eager for details of the exciting life of a pirate.²⁷ The novel becomes swashbuckling in character; Singleton's wickedness is dwelt upon so that his final redemption becomes even more emphatic:

Our Cruising so long in these Seas began now to be so well known, that not in England only, but in France and Spain, Accounts had been made publick of our Adventures, and many Stories told how we murdered the people in cold Blood, tying them Back to Back, and throwing them into

²⁷ See Moore, John Robert, Daniel Defoe, Citizen of the Modern World. (University of Chicago Press, 1928), p.265-8.

the Sea; one Half of which was not true, tho' more was done that it is fit to speak of here.

(p.176).

The 'buccaneer' spirit would appeal to Defoe's readers, who were perhaps familiar with such titles as Dampier's New Voyage round the World (1697).²⁸

Singleton's final salvation comes from the aid of the Quaker, William, who becomes the father confessor, a man gifted with practical common sense as well as spiritual insight. Singleton's mind becomes disturbed as he continues with his exploits; his conscience rises to the surface and he turns to William for aid:

Why, said I, I had frightful Dreams all Night, and particularly I dreamt that the Devil came for me, and asked me what my Name was? and I told him, then he askt me what Trade was I? Trade, says I, I am Thief, a Rogue, by my Calling; I am a Pirate, and a Murtherer, and ought to be hanged; ay, ay, says the Devil, so you do, and you are the Man I look'd for, and therefore come along with me.

(p.325).

The puritan mind animates the scene and brings it vividly alive to the readers; the conscience, once pricked, can never be subsumed. William's serious discussion with Singleton results in his conversion. Even more than this, Singleton determines on following a decent middle-class life after abandoning piracy. Taking William's advice, he does not despair of God's mercy, but 'applies (himself) with a sincere humble Confession of (his) Crime, to ask Pardon of God whom (he) had offended.' (p.326). His happiness is finally gained through the joy that he can impart to others, and that he finds in others. He marries William's sister, and draws the conclusion that 'really a Man that has a Subsistence, and no Residence, no Place that has a Magnetick Influence upon his Affections, is in one of the most odd uneasy Conditions in the World; nor is it in the Power of all his Money to make it up to him.' (p.334).

²⁸ Cp. Sutherland, James, Daniel Defoe. A Critical Study, (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p.149-50, and Dottin, Paul, The Life and Strange and Surprising Adventures of Daniel Defoe, (London, 1928), p.214.

Finally, it is Defoe who is the winner. Having created a character who captures his public's imagination, he proceeds to exploit that imagination; he then recommends a turning away from the criminal life, into one of middle-class mercantilism and a steady existence; the influence of religion remains paramount, satisfying therefore the puritan and the bourgeois ethic. As in all of the novels, we are enthralled by the adventures of the protagonist; the impossibility of prediction is part of the enthrallment: the reader may guess the final outcome, but the episodic structure of the narratives plunges the characters deeper into the criminal mire, so that a fuller picture of the extent of contemporary crime can be examined. Taken in this light, Defoe's novels cease to become simple 'adventure' stories. Adventures are an important element, but the novelist's aims are not simply to generate excitement. He has a serious moral theme, relating to the social conditions of his time and to the psychology of the characters he creates. If at times he appears contradictory it is because he is underlining the inherent paradoxes in a person who unwillingly - and in one case willingly - involves himself in a life of crime. The contrast between the inner and outer worlds of the protagonists is a characteristic which Defoe successfully communicates to his reading public.

CHAPTER 3.

DEFOE: THE CRIMINAL BIOGRAPHIES.

Defoe's acute sense of the needs of his readers meant that he was not content simply to furnish those needs with fiction. London was alive with thieves, and the patterns that he had set up in the novels conformed strongly to the pattern of lives of real-life thieves whose exploits were the household topics of the day. The criminals' lives had the appeal of an adventure story which was not simply confined to eighteenth-century taste: at least two of the rogue's names - Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard - have survived into the twentieth-century, along with the legends associated with them.

Defoe saw that a market existed, and supplied the needs of that market. As such, he was not alone. The Ordinaries of Newgate, for example, wrote accounts of the lives and deaths of the criminals whom they met. In the heyday of crime and hanging between 1700 and 1760, there are about 237 Accounts of the lives of various criminals, all issuing from the various pens of the different Ordinaries. These Accounts tell of the lives of fifty-eight women and 1129 men. An Ordinary could reckon on writing about five accounts per year, each one bringing him around £25; the Accounts became an important source of income, as well as of information.¹

Nor was the need to write about crime in a popular manner confined to 'lesser' authors like the Ordinaries. Swift, for example, wrote this popular ballad on a thief going to Tybourn:

As clever Tom Clinch, while the Rabble was bawling,
Rode stately through Holbourn, to die in his Calling;
He stopt at the George for a Bottle of Sack,
And promis'd to pay for it when he'd come back.
His Waistcoat and Stockings, and Breeches were white,
His Cap had a new Cherry Ribbon to try't.

¹ See Linebaugh, P. 'The Ordinary of Newgate and His "Account" in Crime in England, 1500-1800, ed. J.S. Cockburn, op. cit., p.247-250.

The Maids to the Doors and Balconies ran,
And said, lack-a-day! he's a proper young Man.
But, as from the Windows the Ladies he spy'd,
Like a Beau in the Box, he bow'd low on each Side;
And when his last Speech the loud Hawkers did Cry,
He swore from his Cart, it was all a damn'd Lye.
The Hangman for Pardon fell down on his Knee;
Tom gave him a kick in the Guts for his Fee!
Then said, I must speak to the People a little,
But I'll see you all damn'd before I will whittle,
My honest Friend Wild, may he long hold his Place,
He lengthen'd my Life with a whole Year of Grace.
Take Courage, dear Comrades, and be not afraid,
Nor slip this Occasion to follow your Trade.
My Conscience is clear, and my Spirits are calm,
And thus I go off without Pray'r-Book or Psalm.
Then follow the Patience of clever Tom Clinch,
Who hung like a Hero, and never would flinch. 2

The popularity of the criminal, and his audacity, are both brought out in this ballad.

As crime became organised, so writing about it ensured that the market was open for any writer who cared to tell his audience about the activities of the criminals, popular and unpopular, but written with an immediacy that guaranteed sales for the writer and the attention of his audience. Defoe stood himself well for both of these.

Defoe's tracts, like those of his fellow writers, were written mainly between the years 1717 and 1730. In Defoe's case, the overlap with the years in which he wrote the novels is no coincidence. His interest had turned to human character and motivation, a point which differentiates him from the Ordinary; it also turned to a concern with the methods of the rogues, and again a comparison with the novels is possible. By considering the full range of the rogues - from petty thieves to highwaymen and pirates - Defoe was able to present as full a picture as possible of the mind of the villain, the different motivations he had and the different considerations which had to be made before any

² Swift, Jonathan, Clever Tom Clinch going to be Hanged, in The Faber Book of Ballads, ed. Matthew Hodgart, (London, 1965), p.182-3.

judgement was possible: a statement which could easily apply to the novels.

The slightest information was of use to Defoe:

Cruel Highway Robbery. - In Essex we hear only of a Physician at Chelmsford, who going to administer to a sick Patient, carried with him a bottle of Cordial and two Doses, viz. for a Purge and a Vomit. He was set on by Thieves, who robb'd him of the sum of eighteen pence, and, because he had no more money, oblig'd him there present, as a Punishment, to take the two Doses and Cordial himself; and the Physician being of a weak Constitution, his Physick operated all the way home in a violent manner. ³

The incident no doubt brought amusement to Defoe's readers, who may have agreed that the robbery was 'cruel', and that the Doctor deserved his 'punishment'. Defoe evidently felt that this event, although trivial, was important enough to report - and 'reporting' is exactly what Defoe is about. By noting even these apparently inconsequential activities he was able to construct a view of the criminal mind and of criminal methods. The technique of 'reporting' was expanded in the novels, so that each episode built upon the last to expand the view of the protagonist's psychology and his motives. Defoe was used to this style of reporting: he had had ten years of experience in the writing of the Review, completed only four years earlier. The Review stories of the devastations that beset people were possibly a result of his experiences as a prisoner in Newgate, and Newgate must have aided him in his close examination of the circumstances that result in a person turning to crime. 'Reporting' was a natural style into which Defoe slid, and one which proved most effective for his audience as Defoe made his point simply and directly.

Defoe's close attention to detail, his refusal to moralise and his plain style communicate the directness of a street-robbery; he changed his narrative technique from reporting to first-person in the fiction, but the accounts owe a good deal to one another:

³ Daniel Defoe: His Life and Recently Discovered Writings, ed. William Lee, 3 vols. (London, 1869), II, p.77. Written by Defoe in 1718.

On Tuesday last, in the Evening, a Gentleman passing along the street at Charing-Cross, and three other Gentlemen in his Company, a Person, dress'd very well, comes up to him, and, pulling off his Hat, salutes him with, Sir, your most humble Servant, I am very glad to see you; - at which the Gentleman naturally pulling off his Hat too, and making some Stop, - his Company went a little Way forward, and then two more Gentlemen, as they seem'd, clap'd in between, so that the Gentlemen that went on, tho' they look'd back, could not see the first Gentleman that was Stop'd. In that Minute the first Man whisper'd to the Gentleman he had saluted and told him he wanted Money, and that he must give him what he had without any Noise or Hesitation, or he was a dead Man that Moment, and with that shew'd him a Pistol in his other Hand. The Gentleman seeing no Remedy, gave him his Purse and Watch, and he walk'd away with them. 4

The irony in the word 'Gentleman' together with the details of the robbery are typical of Defoe. The fascination in the execution of the robbery does not spill over into overt moralising, or, indeed, moralising of any kind. When he created fictional characters, he allowed them occasional moral statements or opinions, but usually their actions guide the reader in any judgement. This close attention to detail is paralleled by several instances in the novels; in Colonel Jacque, we read of the street robberies of Jack and his comrade:

Keep up, says Will to me, be nimble, and as soon as he had said so, he flyes at the young Man, and gives him such a violent Thrust, that push'd him forward with too great a force for him to stand, and as he strove to recover, the Threshold took his Feet, and he fell forward into the other part of the Court, as if he had flown in the Air, with his Head lying towards the Quaker's Meeting House; I stood ready and presently felt out the Bag of Money, which I heard fall. (p.58).

Will steps to the Gentleman ... got him down, then he begg'd for his life, Will having told him with an Oath, that he would Cut his Throat. (p.63)

There is a greater concentration of violence in the fictional account, since Defoe was able to use his imagination more: the reporting is enhanced by action, while in the earlier passage, Defoe is tied by the demands of presenting an account of the events, without any hint of sensation. Two separate accounts, then, of the eighteenth-century equivalent of a mugging.

Defoe's concern for the individual once again plays an important part

4 Ibid., p. 492. Written 1722.

in a consideration of his attitude towards the criminals. Defoe never forgets that sympathy and compassion may be of greater benefit to an individual who is forced into crime by necessity; nor does he forget that necessity is not the reason for every crime that is committed: for the wilful criminal he has no benevolence. He replies to 'A.J.', who had written a story of two 'poor Hay-Makers, who, ... driven to it by Necessity, assaulted a Gentleman upon the Highway and demanded his Money':

This put me upon thinking of the natural Progression of Crime in the nature of Man; and two very good Morals occur'd to my Thoughts from your Story.

1. There are Extremities which the Nature of Man cannot support, and which no Virtue, no Principle, will be a Protection against.

2. That Men driven to such desparate Extremities deserve our Compassion: both National and Personal Compassion, according to Solomon; Men do not despise a Thief who stealeth to satisfy his Hunger.

Family Distresses, and personal Distresses, such as Hunger and Want, are even to human Nature insupportable ...

How natural it is for us to pity poor Thieves who bring themselves to the Gallows for Trifles, when we find that Poverty and the Misery of their Families have driven them to those Exigencies? Certainly, not Christianity only, but even Humanity, extorts what Pity from us, if we consider what we should do, if we were driven to those Exigencies ourselves; for, 'tis to be doubted, it might be said of us all, that if God should give us Poverty, we should Steal ...

... By Stealing, I do not mean that he would go upon the Highway, - that he would go out and break open Houses in the Night, - or any of that Sort of Stealing; but he would go and borrow, tho' he could not repay; promise to pay, though he could not perform ... And these People who do so, we know nothing of the Necessities which drive them to it, but call them Thieves; - say they are worse than Highwaymen, - that they ought to be hang'd, - and the like. ⁵

Crime is a 'progression': it can have varying degrees, and so, by implication, criminals themselves can be grouped under different headings. Like Moll and Singleton, Defoe believes that necessity forces people into actions which they would not otherwise have undertaken, whilst they retain their superiority over the 'highwaymen' who indulge in crime as a profession. Defoe's appeal to 'Christianity' and 'Humanity' introduces the moral aspect of the argument: a careful delineation between the various types of criminal

⁵ Lee, op. cit., III, p.16-17.

is our moral responsibility, as this will aid us in our judgement of them. A blanket condemnation without consideration of the particular circumstances which led to the crime will result merely in a distorted view of the nature of the criminals. A charitable, but rational, view will result in a much fairer verdict: and after all, Defoe is always asking us to judge the characters about whom he writes.

Defoe's sympathy never extends to murderers, but in his descriptions of robbery-with-murder his passion is always held in check. We are allowed to judge for ourselves for most of the time, but Defoe adds his own comments at the end. In the account of the activities of two French robbers, Bizeau and Cartouche, Defoe is not content with depicting only their bloody deeds; in the writing of the pamphlet, Defoe had to satisfy the reader's curiosity with regard to the highwaymen's cleverness, and also conform to his own view that these characters are the lowest of the criminal type. He gives examples of their work:

... they attacked Two Coaches in the Road from Orleans to Fountainbleau, though attended by a Retinue of Fourteen Gentlemen on Horseback, among whom were Three of the Gendarms, with their whole Mounting and Arms, who, yet, they attack'd with such Vigour, that, after a short but bloody Dispute, the Fourteen Gentlemen were obliged to yield, Two of the Gendarms being wounded, and Two of the Gentlemen kill'd, and Three wounded, after which ... the Treasure (was) more easily plundered.⁶

This report follows the pattern of others: Defoe refuses to intrude to make his own comment, preferring to remain distant, detached from any moral consideration which could easily be an adjunct to the incident. The personal consideration does come, but not until after all the details of the lives. Defoe's two villains are not the brutish feeble-minded fellows that the above description might lead one to expect. The organisation of finance in the century became increasingly more complex;

⁶ Defoe, Daniel, A Narrative of the Proceedings in France. For Discovering and Detecting the Murders of the English Gentlemen, Sept. 21 1723. (London, 1724), p.15.

the business side of eighteenth-century crime had to achieve a comparable sophistication. Cartouche, through his business sense, became the more successful of the two; he not only robbed for gold, but also for 'Papers', meaning receipts for quantities of stock that had been sold, and which were convertible into cash. Cartouche aids Bizeau in the acquisition of these, and sets up an information service:

To make themselves Amends for this Deficiency (of information), Cartouch supply'd them ... with Setters and Winkers, as the Thieves cant calls them; a sort of People, who made it their Business to watch the Market, and see who Sold and who Bought the Papers; for this was justly called a Paper-Traffick, and to give Information where they were to be found. ⁷

Defoe describes Cartouche's intelligence without condemnation; it would probably be difficult to condemn such efficient administration. Defoe's only comment is that the practice, when it became more widespread, led to proper book-keeping, preventing fraud. One would hesitate to conclude that Defoe himself, as a businessman, admired such organisation, but the inclusion certainly suggests that Defoe is attempting to comprehend all the subtleties of the criminal mind. Violence can be seen every day, but beneath it there is intelligence. It is to violence that Defoe turns in his ultimate condemnation of Cartouche. He quotes an account of robbery and murder, from an eye-witness, Spindelow, a servant; Defoe goes on to comment that:

this inhuman Butchery soon spread its Fame over the whole Country; and, as it filled the Ears of all that heard it with Horror, so the Search after the Murtherers was so sudden, so strict, and so general, that it forced them to leave even the closest Retreats they had, and to fly the Country. ⁸

'This inhuman Butchery' is the closest that Defoe ever comes to emotional reaction to the subject; he remains distant. The phrase is sufficient to remind the reader that their activities are not a game: the business

⁷ Ibid, p.28.

⁸ Ibid, p.94.

methods may be organised and intelligent, but the method of acquisition is brutal and selfish. No overt moral need be drawn: the characters may be seen as warped intelligence, dominated by the lust for money, to be gained by any means.

Defoe returned to the subject of Cartouche in other writings. Apparently Cartouche returned and carried on with his escapades. He 'committed most desperate Robberies, some of them even in Mid-day'. The 'City Sergeants' and the army are employed in the attempted capture:

Upon two Occasions of their (the City Sergeants) attacking him, he fought his way through them all, wounding several, and killed two of them; afterwards, when the King's Foot-Guards were employ'd, one of the Officers of the Regiment employ'd a young Fellow, a Soldier of the Guards, to be a Spy upon him, to set him, and to give Intelligence, which he undertook, and to that End listed himself among Cartouche's Gang ... but in a few Days after, this young Fellow was found murder'd, his Throat cut, his Body cut open, and his Heart pull'd out. ⁹

Defoe's keen eye for detail - or, rather, his sense that the readers require the details, whether substantiated or not - makes for exciting reading. There is no attempt to disgust the reader with intricate surgical descriptions, but he includes sufficient material to communicate the brutishness of the gang, and of Cartouche in particular. Defoe would also be attracted to the story since the death of the soldier was not in vain. Several members of the gang are also members of the Guards, and blood-stains on one of the Musqueteer's uniforms leads the Officers to Cartouche. His house is surrounded:

(Cartouche) was surpriz'd, so as not to be able to make any Resistance; but he has since attempted his Escape, and has gotten out of the Chatelet through a Stone Wall four Foot thick, but with an Accomplice was taken in the next House, and is now in the Dungeon, double fetter'd and double guarded. They talk indeed of sparing his Life, if he will discover his whole Gang; and upon the very first Rumour of such a Thing, no less than thirty Men of the Regiments of Guards, and some of the Queen's, deserted, and are fled. On the other Hand,

⁹ Lee, op. cit., II, p.444. Written 1721.

about twelve are taken up; and it is not doubted but that Cartouche will be brought to the Wheel, notwithstanding any Confessions he may make; for he is so desperate a Rogue, they really know not what else to do with him. ¹⁰

All the elements of a best-seller are here: robbery, murder, spying, double-dealing, eventual capture and possible treachery. Defoe's study of the life of Cartouche was aimed at a popular readership, and Defoe knew how to capture his readers' attention. More especially in the pamphlet on Cartouche, he includes details which, if enlivened by spicy, prose style, would result in the equivalent of a 'thriller'. When Defoe turned to fiction, he certainly used elements from his real-life biographies, but refused to sensationalise even for the wider reading public which was now at hand. ¹¹ The 'plain style' of Defoe is never allowed to become out of control, as details are added to details: the facts are all important, communicated in as dispassionate a manner as possible.

One aspect of Cartouche's capture which Defoe mentions - his attempted escape, in fact - fascinated Defoe and captured the imagination of the public. Defoe had no need to concentrate on Cartouche for this particular piece of excitement. He had a ready-made English popular hero whose robberies and escapes enthralled the eighteenth-century public, and who became a legend long after his death: John - or 'Jack' Sheppard. ¹²

Defoe wrote at least two pamphlets on Sheppard, one as the third-person narrator and in the other, he uses the guise of the first-person narrator, a device already adopted in the novels. The first of these is a straightforward story of all the robberies and escapes of Sheppard, his appeal to the ordinary people of the day, and his eventual capture. Defoe whets the reader's appetite in the beginning: a brief bill of fare

¹⁰ Ibid, p.445.

¹¹ See Watt, op. cit., chapter II, passim, for details of the growth of the reading public.

¹² Sheppard's popularity extends into the twentieth-century: he is the hero of the film Where's Jack? for example.

for the feast. 'Here's a Criminal', he writes, ' bids Defiance to your Laws, and Justice who declar'd and has manifested that the Bars are not made that can either keep him OUT, or keep him IN, and accordingly hath a second time fled from the very BOSOM OF DEATH.' ¹³ Defoe includes all the ingredients that will capture his readers' attention, and make them read on. Sheppard is a 'criminal', who defies 'your laws': the laws made by the upper strata of society, not by the common man, who seemed to have much sympathy for Sheppard. Unlike Jonathan Wild, who used criminals to feather his own nest while remaining on the 'right' side of the law, Sheppard was involved in the actual process of maintaining a livelihood, while he gained a reputation for uniqueness because of his many escapes from gaol. In this pamphlet, Defoe often glosses over the actual details of each escape, but one passage gives testimony to the appeal of Sheppard:

His Escape and his being so suddenly Re-taken made such a Noise in the Town, that it was thought all the common People would have gone mad about him; there being not a Porter to be had for Love or Money, nor getting into an Alehouse for Butchers, Shoemakers and Barbers, all engaged in Controversies, and Wagers, about Sheppard. Newgate Night and Day surrounded with the Curious from St. Giles's and Rag-Fair, and Tyburn Road daily lin'd with Women and Children. ¹⁴

Defoe's comment later that, 'whatever Face of Penitence he put on when visited by the Curious', his 'first thought' was always on escape, completes the picture: Sheppard, the man of action, captured popular attention by his defiance of authority - including the authority of Wild - and by his refusal to be subdued when faced with seemingly impossible tasks. ¹⁵

A more interesting and complex pamphlet on Sheppard is the one written by Defoe in the same year. It purports to tell the story in Sheppard's own words, bringing the narrative closer to the type with which we are

¹³ Defoe, Daniel, The History Of the remarkable Life of John Sheppard, (London, 1724), preface (unnumbered). This appears in Moore's A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1962), as no. 468, and is hereafter cited as Moore, 468.

¹⁴ Moore, 468, p.27.

¹⁵ For the relationship between Sheppard and Wild, see below, chapter 4.

already familiar in the novels. The pamphlet is more complex because of the fusion of author and narrator. Just how far Defoe is inside the skin of Sheppard is difficult to determine, and exactly how far we are expected to trust Sheppard as narrator is also an enigmatic point. The narrative begins with his background, and, as in the novels, it takes on a confessional character. He is careful to point out that his mother was left a widow in his youth, although he was taken care of; nor did he observe Sunday. His guardian 'improv'd me in my Writing and my Accompts... and he being desirous to settle me to a Trade ... (made) me Apprentice for Seven Years ... I had too great a Loose given to my evil Inclinations, and spent the Lord's Day as I thought convenient.' ¹⁶ While this does not approach the sort of 'confessional' that appeared in the novels, it does suggest that Defoe is attempting a balanced view of Sheppard. Given a fair opportunity, he misuses the freedom that appears to be his; in other words, 'necessity' does not enter the argument at this stage: Sheppard appears to be congenitally dishonest, failing to appreciate the fortunate circumstances onto which he falls. Also in the novels there is a genuine reason why the character becomes involved in crime: Colonel Jack, for example, finds himself thrust into a gang of criminal youths, having no choice in the matter. Sheppard, however, scratches around for an excuse: 'After all', he claims, 'I may justly lay the Blame of my... Ruin on Joesph Hind, a Button-mould Maker, who formerly kept the Black Lyon Ale-House in Drury Lane; the frequenting of this wicked House brought me acquainted with Elizabeth Lyon, and with a Train of Vices, as before I was altogether a Stranger to.' ¹⁷ This is altogether unconvincing; in Defoe's terms, there are no extenuating circumstances here: Sheppard is

¹⁶ Defoe, Daniel, A Narrative Of all the Robberies, Escapes, etc. of John Sheppard, (London, 1724), p.4-5. Appears in Moore, (op. cit.), as no. 466, and hereafter cited as Moore, 466.

¹⁷ Moore, 466, p.5-6.

searching for reasons for his degradation; although he may believe them, he fails to convince us. Defoe knew what he was doing here: the way in which he handles his fictional rogues, placing them in positions which force the reader to sympathise with them, is altogether different from Sheppard's perfunctory description. Significantly, no details are supplied as to the actual 'Train of Vices': Sheppard is Defoe's puppet here, and Defoe deliberately avoids any convincing display of ill-fortune attacking Sheppard, in order to distance him and his actions from the reader. Sheppard does not have the excuse of a neglectful mother and guardian either; in fact, his doting mother protects him from discovery as he lies and cheats his way through his youth. On one occasion, he steals some cloth from a Mr. Bains, and is discovered:

I thought of an Expedient, and acknowledged that I had a piece of Fustian which my Mother had bought for me in Spittle-Fields of a Weaver; and she, poor Woman, willing to screen her wicked Son, confirmed the Story, and was a whole Day together with Mr. Bains in Spittle-Fields to find out the pretended Weaver. ¹⁸

Despite the apparent 'low' nature of Sheppard's character, Defoe sticks closely to the facts with regard to Sheppard's popularity, as in the following incident when Sheppard escapes from Newgate once again, and reports his popularity:

The Next Day I took shelter at an Ale-house of little or no Trade, in Rupert-Street near Piccadily. The Woman and I discours'd much about Sheppard. I assur'd her it was impossible to escape out of the Kingdom, and that the Keepers would have him again in a few Days. The Woman wish'd that a Curse might fall on those who should betray him ... (I then) mixt with a Crowd about two Ballad Singers: the subject being about Sheppard. And I remember the Company was very merry about the Matter. ¹⁹

Defoe is here adding authenticity to the narrative by imagining a typical scene in which Sheppard might find himself. By giving this account, Defoe is also admitting that Sheppard not only captured public attention but also public sympathy. He appears to represent the lower class in their

¹⁸ Moore, 466, p.8.

¹⁹ Moore, 466, p.26-7.

struggle against authority: Sheppard presents 'himself' as a symbol of a struggle. Defoe did not necessarily agree with this: the earlier descriptions of Sheppard's background certainly suggest that he did not, but he had to bow to popular demand. By including this incident, Defoe indicates Sheppard's popularity, while the earlier details guide the reader away from a completely sympathetic view of Sheppard.

In an account of Sheppard's arrest in September, 1724, Defoe produces a typical narration, in which Sheppard is seen as brave and cowardly, selfish and generous. Taken in the context of Defoe's other studies of criminals, it can be seen as an attempt to come to terms once more with the criminal mind:

... Sheppard took to the Hedges, where being closely pursued and discovered, and Pistols presented to this Head, he begged them, for God's sake, not to Shoot him on the Spot, trembled, was in great Agony, and submitted. There were found upon him two Silver Watches, a large Knife, and a Chisel, and a Knife only upon his Companion; they were both disguised in Butcher's Blue Frocks, and Woollen Aprons. Being brought to Town, Sheppard was immediately carried to Newgate, loaded with heavy Irons, put into the Condemned Hold, and Chained ... He has hinted in dark Terms, that he hath committed Robberies since his Escape; he denies that he was ever Married to the Woman who assisted him therein, and who is now the Compter for the same; declaring that he found her a common Strumpet in Drury Lane, and that she hath been the Cause of all his Misfortunes and Misery. He takes great Pains to excuse his Companion Page of being any Ways privy to his Crimes; who, he says, only generously accompanied him after his Escape. ²⁰

Justice is done: Sheppard is caught, and finally hanged (after one more escape) in November, 1724. The description of the capture of Sheppard again conforms to what we expect by now: a deliberate subduing of passion, inclusion of all relevant details for a more precise comprehension of Sheppard's psychology, and a refusal to condemn the victim outright. Defoe's respect for the law, despite his many brushes with it, would guide him away from any overt condemnation. Although wishing to guide the reader, he restrains from any outburst, believing that Justice will take

²⁰ Lee, *op. cit.*, III, 304-305.

its course:

Reviling Men when in the Hands of the Law, and before Tryal, is a kind of condemning them without a Tryal, as killing them afterwards is arrainging the Judgement of the Court, as insufficient and unequal; and both are in proportion Criminal ... Those People who vote Men to the Gallows, and would hurry them thither without Tryal, and even when their Crime imports no such Treatment, are a sort of Murderers in the Nature of the Things, are doubtless Guilty of intentional Murder, and ought to repent of it as such. ²¹

Liberal sentiments indeed, but ones to which Defoe tried to adhere to in his accounts of villains' lives. Defoe himself does not condemn before a full assessment of the facts: he places the criminal before the reader and asks him to judge, bending the reader towards the 'right' view but never strident in his tones of condemnation, if, indeed, any such thing is required. In the hands of Defoe, the criminals are presented as on trial - with the audience as the jury.

Besides these concerns, Defoe could enjoy Sheppard's life as a tale of adventure and communicate the cleverness of Sheppard to his readers. Sheppard's fascination for the contemporary audience is owing to his reputation as an escapalogist. How true the stories associated with him are ~~how~~ is difficult to ascertain, but certainly they captured the public's imagination. Defoe was not slow to capture this also, engaging their attention with tales of pure adventure; he records one of Sheppard's escapes in September, 1724:

The Escape of John Sheppard from the Condemn'd Hold in Newgate, on Monday last, was contrived as follows, viz. His Wife having furnished him with a Saw, File, etc., he proceeded to cut off one of the large Iron Barrels from his Links; and then, to prevent their Shackling, made them fast to one Leg, at the same time setting the other at perfect Liberty. He next cut an Iron Spike over the Door of about six Inches in Length, and one and a half square, his Tools being dipt in Oil; and his Wife with another Woman, pretending to be in close Conversation with him, he sawed it asunder, without being heard or suspected. The Interval thus made, being capable of admitting his slender Body to pass thro', and assisted by the Women, he instantly perfected his Liberty, and went out at the Lodge Door,

²¹ Ibid, II, 394 - 5.

together with them, in a Night-Gown, which concealed his Irons.²² How Defoe knew the exact measurements of the Spike, the exact order of the events or the precise nature of the escape is not explained - and it is also irrelevant. Defoe is once again the reporter of events, the cataloguer of happenings that will capture an audience. His detail and precision are part of the whole process of this capture: Defoe and others like him were the only source of information at this time. By combining the talents of a reporter and a popular novelist, he was able to achieve a balance that ensured him a regular audience.

Sheppard effected one more escape before his execution. Having been captured after the September escapade, he escapes 'through Six Strong Rooms, where People had formerly been confined, but had not of late been in Use, and got up to the top of the Gaol, then descended from thence by two Blankets tied together, on the Top of a Turner's House next to Newgate, broke through ... (and) let himself out at the Street Door.'²³ The round of capture and escape ceased at this point: he was recaptured and executed in November, 1724. The eighteenth-century Houdini had had his day, and had succeeded in gaining notoriety - even popularity - in his day. As in the fiction, the distinction between legend and fact became blurred, as Defoe was eager to ensure a successful capture on his part also. He communicated with precision and enthusiasm; he adapted his talents to the needs of the readers; he also ensured success for himself.

Another aspect of Defoe's writings which is closely connected with the novels is his description of the lives of the pirates. As mentioned previously, piracy had a particularly popular appeal: pirates affected trade, they had a life of adventure, and the distinction between them and the ordinary seamen was vaguer than before or since. Defoe ensured that

²² Lee, op. cit., III, p.300 - 301.

²³ Ibid, p.319.

the public had plenty of details about the lives of the most notorious pirates, while at the same time adding his own moral comment, or, rather guiding the reader into some judgement of the pirates' characters; they are by no means unfavourable judgements either.

A brief consideration of the background to piracy will prepare the reader for the sympathy that Defoe was able to extend to the pirates of his day. Ever a writer who regarded circumstances as paramount, Defoe would be aware that the pirates were formerly members of the naval service, who were now unemployed. England had been at peace with Spain since 1670, so there was no longer the need for the buccaneer 'watchmen' of English shores. As a means of livelihood they turned to piracy, and became true professionals. In 1701, on the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession, England needed all the defence she could muster. A pardon was granted to those buccaneers who assisted in the war. So the distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' in terms of the law once again breaks down: individual and political circumstances determine judgements; no absolute judgement is possible.

Defoe was more outspoken in his descriptions of the pirates' lives and attitudes than in many of the other rogue biographies. They were often more sinned against than sinning, and parallels could be drawn between them and many of the so-called 'respectable' professions. Defoe writes of one of the pirates, Captain Avery, whose piracies took him around Madagascar. He leaves the ship on several occasions in order to pass the riches into the hands of merchants, who cheat him:

In some Time his little Money was spent, yet he heard nothing from his Merchants; he writ to them often ... the Supplies they sent him from Time to Time, were so small, that they were not sufficient to give him Bread ... when he desired them to come to an Account with him, they silenced him, by threatening to discover him, so that our Merchants were as good Pyrates at Land, as he was at Sea. ²⁴

²⁴ Defoe, Daniel, A General History of the Pyrates, ed. Manuel Schonhorn, (London, 1972), p.56-7. This is the same book as 'Capt. Charles Johnson's A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates, (London, 1724)

An interesting comment from a man who himself gained a reputation as a merchant: but this may again be irrelevant. Defoe is not simply pointing the finger at the hypocrisies of the supposedly respectable middle-class, but also indicating that the activities of the pirates cannot be condemned outright. There is no difference between the two classes of men: both use 'dishonest' means in their attempts to become rich; the merchant has the upper hand all the while, and consequently gains respect. Defoe is not necessarily accusing all merchants of this type of hypocrisy either; in his dealings in trade, Defoe met such merchants; in his studies of the criminal mind, he drew the two classes together in order to make a social and moral point. He continues the attack on the social order in the biography of Captain Bellamy, to whom he gives several radical speeches. By putting words into the mouth of the pirate, Defoe is able to avoid a direct personal attack on the middle-class of the day. Bellamy's disgust is that of a strong man regarding a Sporus. On the capture of a Sloop belonging to a Captain Beer, Bellamy makes the following speech to him:

you are a sneaking Puppy, and so are all those who will submit to be governed by Laws which rich Men have made for their own Security, for the cowardly Whelps have not the Courage otherwise to defend what they get by their Knavery ... this is the only Difference, they rob the Poor under the Cover of Law, forsooth, and we plunder the Rich under the Protection of our own Courage; had you not better make One of us, than sneak after the A---s of those Villains for Employment? ²⁵

The attack is as vitriolic as Pope's 'mere white Curd of Ass's Milk', and shares with it the distance of placing the attack in other's mouth. These are not necessarily Defoe's words at this stage - in fact he has already called Bellamy 'an Enemy to Mankind' - but taken in the context of his earlier sympathetic treatment of Avery, the attack is not without a personal judgement of the activities of the merchants of the day. While refusing to commit Bellamy to the ideals of a Robin Hood, he does make

²⁵ Ibid, p. 587.

him fuse the respectable robbers on land with the apparently vicious ones on the sea. Consideration must also be given at this stage to character study; throughout the biography of Bellamy, ambitious, embittered men are presented to us. Bellamy himself, in the above speech, is rationalising to some extent, and attempts to cover his own villainy by arguing that others do it - and he has the advantage of being his own master. In another incident, a 'Stroler' - a man of humble origins - suggests to Bellamy and Williams, the two Commanders, that they should form an Empire with their plunder as a basis. The argument runs as follows:

Rome, the Mistress of the World, was founded by a couple of Sheep-Stealers; and peopled by run-away Slaves and insolvent Debtors; how much more advantageously might you two undertake the erecting of a new Monarchy, whose subjects are no Strangers to the Art of War, who are not environ'd as they were with invidious Neighbours, and who may increase your Power, and propagate the Species, by taking into your Protection the Indians of these Parts, and the discontented and desperate People of the neighbouring English and French Colonies? To strengthen yourselves, raise every useful Man to some Dignity in the State, and share the Prisoners (I mean such as won't swear Allegiance) as so many Slaves unworthy of Liberty among your Great Men ... force all the Prisoners either by fair or foul to acknowledge your Sovereignty; it was thus the greatest Empires of the World were founded ... I leave it to the mature Deliberation of your great Wisdom, whether it is not more eligible to found here an Empire, or make War by a lawful Authority derived from your Royal selves, than lye under the approbrious Appellations of Robbers, Thieves, profligate Rogues and Pyrates.²⁶

A passionate speech, and one in which irony occurs, although how deliberate this is, is difficult to determine. He wishes to compare the forthcoming Empire with that of Rome - since that too was founded by rogues of one sort. The two commanders may become Monarchs on the land: a bold statement to make, as the belief in the Divine Right of Kings was still prevalent in Europe at that time, even though England had gone through a radical change. The most interesting part of the passage however is the inference that Empires can be equated with piracy, connected with the simplistic notion that a conquering power plunders the land for

²⁶ Ibid, p.590 - 591.

its own selfish ends. A surprising implication from a writer who, as a member of the mercantile class, depended on trade for his livelihood. Once again, the point has to be made that the opinion expressed is not necessarily that of Defoe. He is able to give to characters speeches which typify their attitude, without necessarily sharing those attitudes. The art of the novelist and the art of the biographer are drawn closely together. Defoe is not, however, the dispassionate writer that the last statement might suggest. To take the passage in the context of the biographies of the pirates, reveals a concern for a broader - and truer - perspective of the nature of human endeavour in trade and the expression of it. By removing the veneer of respectability from the middle-class, and by suspending absolute judgement on the pirates, Defoe is endeavouring to communicate the truth, as he sees it, about professional life in his time.

The sympathy which Defoe gained for his pirates through the equation of merchants and rulers with them was a sympathy to which one could raise objections. After all, one might argue, one wrong hardly provides sufficient excuse for another; it also suggests a preservation of the status quo, as no alternative is ever suggested. Defoe may have been aware of this, but it would be unreasonable to demand a radical alternative from the writer here. As in the novels, Defoe at times suggests that the pirate's toughness can be broken down by a genuinely human appeal; they are not the cynical robbers that bad publicity might make them appear. Consider the following incidents, from the biography of Captain White, in which the toughness is juxtaposed with tenderness:

Soon after they plunder'd the Malabar Ship, out of which they took as much Money as came to 200 l. Sterling a Man, but miss'd 50000 Chequins which were hid in a Jar under a Cow's-Stall, kept for the giving Milk to the Moor Supercargo, an ancient Man. They then put the Portuguese and Moor Prisoners on board the Malabar, and sent them about their Business. The Day after they had sent them away one Captain Benjamin Stacy, in a ketch of six Guns fell into their Hands; they took what Money he had, and what Goods and Provisions they wanted. Among the Money were 500 Dollars, a Silver Mug and two Spoons belonging to a Couple of Children on board, and under

the Care of Stacy. The Children took on for their Loss, and the Captain asking the Reason of their Tears, was answer'd by Stacy, that the above Sum and Plate was all the Children had to bring them up.

Captain White made a Speech to his Men, and told 'em, it was cruel to rob the innocent Children; upon which, by unanimous Consent, all was restor'd them again; besides, they made a Gathering among themselves, and made a Present to Stacy's Mate, and other of his inferior Officers, and about 120 Dollars to the Children.²⁷

This passage speaks for itself. White's humanity comes through; his concern for the 'innocent Children' testifies to his underlying sensitivity. Defoe is, after all, the accomplished novelist and biographer: a full picture of the protagonist must be presented to the reader; only in this way can a proper judgement be made. Defoe, never a coward himself, admired the bravado of his subject, while also admiring the compassionate side to his nature: a trait traceable in Defoe himself, in his treatment of many of the characters in the novels.

Defoe was not content with a simple narrative, a factor which differentiates him from the Ordinary, for example, whose aim is to tell a story, and draw the message that 'crime does not pay'. Defoe is not satisfied with such simplicity. The Ordinary had more straightforward motives than Defoe, summed up by the following:

Guide literature warned man of the numerous evils he faced - the dangers inherent in his own depravity and in the hostile nature of his world, for ... it was a fallen world, inimical to the aims of spiritual man ... Most guides described sources of difficulty common to all men: neglect of the ordinary duties of their station or place, discouragement due to failure or afflictions, uncertainty because of the conflicting advice of companions. ²⁸

No mention here of circumstances; nor is there any attempt to build up a character study - two of the vital ingredients in any of Defoe's writings. Nor is there any mention of the adventure that the life of a 'misguided' person leads, an element which Defoe captured so often in his studies.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 484 - 5.

²⁸ Hunter, J. Paul, The Reluctant Pilgrim, (The John Hopkin Press, Baltimore, 1966), p. 28.

'Guide' literature helped the Christian on his journey through life. Defoe checked his attitude by blurring the distinction between good and evil.²⁹

Out of the guides grew the spiritual biographies of Christian morality - Pilgrim's Progress for example - from which many of Defoe's contemporaries gained inspiration for their descriptions of the unworthiness of criminals. Hunter points out that 'spiritual biography strives for ... a balance between the particular and the general; it endeavours to present information about its subject's life in exact, intricate detail, and at the same time to discuss principles of religion and morality in terms understandable and appealing to readers of varying persuasions'.³⁰ One is not surprised, then, at this comment written in 1705; one John Smith escaped three times from the gallows, 'but let no one who reads this account of his triple escape from the gallows indulge a moment's inclination to the pursuit of illicit practices: since, in almost every instance but the present, the ways of vice assuredly lead to destruction'.³¹ A comment which is typical of the Newgate Calendar, guiding the reader away from the life of crime that it is describing. Now, Defoe hardly recommends a life of crime, but consider the following quotation, again from the Calendar; Defoe would have made much more of it; the author gives details of one Jack Ketch, convicted of murdering a woman:

(He was) born in the parish of St. Martin in the Fields, and while he was very young his father was blown up in the demolishing of Tangier. His mother being left in circumstances of distress, was not able to give him a proper education, but she put him apprentice to a dealer in rags. Having served about two years, his master died, and soon afterward ran away from his mistress; and got employment in loading waggons with rags for other dealers. After this he went to sea, and served on board several ships in the royal navy for the space of about eighteen years.

The lesson to be learnt from the fate of this man is to moderate

²⁹ See Hunter, op. cit., pp. 23-50 for a fuller discussion of the tradition.

³⁰ Ibid, p.82.

³¹ The Newgate Calendar, ed. Sir Norman Birkett, (London, 1951), p.25.

our passions of every kind; and to live by the rules of temperance and sobriety. 32

Ketch appears from the first description to be a man of unfortunate circumstances, but no capital is made out of this; there is a moral to be learned from the tale, and the author is at pains to push the reader in the right direction. When Defoe moralises, the lesson is much more subtle; Defoe balances arguments in his attempts to bring his audience to a proper sense of Justice:

Hence, then, to be Tumultuous, to be Riotous, to insult Magistrates, and break the Publick Peace, is not only an Act of Rebellion against the Government we live under; but it is an Act of the greatest unkindness and disregard to the Prince also, depriving him of that which is the only true Felicity of a Sovereign; I mean the willing Submission of his Subjects. 33

Interestingly enough, Defoe became less tolerant of criminals as time went on; in the late 1720's he was writing in very strong terms about the threat which criminals posed. This is not as surprising as it might appear at first sight: although he had pleaded for consideration of individual circumstances before any condemnation came about, he actively disliked wilful crime, and was outspoken in his hatred towards it. Crime threatened individuals and their property, and some of the later pamphlets deal with criminals in no uncertain terms:

our Rogues are grown more wicked than ever, and Vice in all kinds is so much wink'd at, that Robbery is accounted a petty Crime. We take Pains to puff 'em up in their Villainy, and Thieves are set out in so aimable a Light in the Beggar's Opera, it has taught them to value themselves on their Profession, rather than to be asham'd of it. 34

He also writes about the 'Night Houses', to which criminals would escape after a robbery:

there are different Sorts of these Houses, that is to say, some for Men, some for Women; some for one sort of Employment, some for another; but all of the blackest Dye, all Criminal: Some entertain House-breakers,

32 Ibid, p.61-2.

33 Lee, op. cit., p. 304.

34 Defoe, Daniel, Second Thoughts are Best: Or, A Further Improvement Of A Late Scheme To Prevent Street Robberies, (London, 1728), p.2. Moore, (op. cit.), No.503.

others Street-Robbers; some Sodomites; some merely Shop-lifts and Pick-pockets; of Whores likewise there is a variety ... some well-kept and provided; some money'd Whores. ³⁵

This is certainly not as imprecatory as the former passage, as it gives details of the varieties of rogues, but they are all of the 'blackest Dye' - in other words, make no mistake about the sort of people you will find there. Defoe owed something to the 'morals' taught in other rogue biographies, but much more to his own feelings about justice, and how to discriminate between the cases deserving sympathy and those deserving punishment.

One important aspect of rogue biographers at the time, and which also connects them to Defoe, is the money to be made out of others' lives. Anyone connected with the criminals and who was literate enough to be able to write a brief history of their lives was guaranteed an audience. These accounts are often overtly moralistic in nature, written to please the audience but written as a warning also. Defoe may have drawn on them for his own accounts, but his knowledge of the novelistic techniques enabled him to blend his messages into the plot. News of executions was in great demand: pamphlets sold quickly, as audiences were eager to read the last words of a criminal they had seen hanged: the Ordinary of Newgate informs his readers of the death of John Quin:

nor did John Quin refuse any Instructions, when he was in any Condition to receive them; but told me as the World had forsaken him, he would endeavour to forsake the World; and would recollect himself, if his ill state of Health would permit him to do it) (sic.) what great and crying Sin he had committed in any former Part of his Life, which he now call'd down this heavy Judgement of God upon him, and would unite in employing God's Pardon for it.

Punishment is but the natural Consequence of Ungodliness; Plagues are what Sinners seek ... And if ill Men have brought Plagues upon themselves, they should blame none but themselves; should not have Malice against their Accusers, or I'll-will (sic.)

³⁵ Defoe, Daniel, An Effectual Scheme for the Immediate Preventing of Street Robberies, (London, 1731), p.43.
Moore, (op. cit.), no. 516.

towards those who put the Laws in Execution against them.³⁶

Quin has had a trail of bad luck, but none which the Ordinary feels constitutes mitigating circumstances for his robbery: after being apprenticed to two tailors in Ireland, and after the death of his mother, he left for England to seek his brother; after a series of jobs he 'falls into Misfortunes', robs a Rebecca Carter of three shillings, and also assaults her. The details are not elaborated upon, nor is there any real attempt at character analysis. The Ordinary is not interested in development in the same way as Defoe. By noting these details, he is fulfilling his function to provide a saleable commodity as quickly as possible, and one which has the added spice of personal 'involvement' in the last moments of the criminals.

These lives had a purpose: to instruct the readers in the villainy of many of the rogues, and to warn them of the dangers of carelessness. 'The first Design', writes one author, 'being purely to detect the many unheard of and unparall'd Villanies, which Rogues use to ruin honest People by; which Discovery may make them more cautious of preserving their Money and Goods for the future'.³⁷ This seems convincing enough, but none of these writers - including Defoe - ever seem to say openly that the lives of criminals provide exciting reading. Details are included to shock the reader, to amuse him, or simply to inform him about the various backgrounds of the villains. They usually stop short of Defoe's attempts to explain and understand, although he belongs to the same 'tradition'. The details are often earthy; circumstances which may well be familiar to many of the readers. For example, Smith writes of Eleanor

³⁶ Purney, T., The Ordinary of Newgate, his Account of the Behaviour, Confessions, and last dying Words of the Malefactors that were Executed at Tyburn, on Friday the 9th, of November, 1722, (London, 1722), p. 2.

³⁷ Smith, Capt. Alexander, Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the History and Lives of Modern Rogues, (London, 1726), p.ii

Sympson, a Shoplifter, that 'her Father, being a Farmer, to whom she laid a Bastard, got on her by the Clerk of the Parish, for which Piece of Impudence, being turn'd out of Doors, she came up to London, and turn'd common Whore.' 38

Two more quotations indicate that Smith is attempting to vary his material, to keep his readers' attention; in the first, Smith is writing about the background to Richard Shepherd's life of crime; in the second, he describes one of the activities of the Highwaymen, Blewet and Higgs:

the Midwife, who had taken up the Child in her Arms, to carry it Home, going over a little Bridge, which she was oblig'd to pass, fell into a dirty Pond ... and would have drown'd Child and all ... As he grew up, he mightily improv'd himself in unluckiness, insomuch as there came every Day fresh Complaints of the whole Neighbourhood to Shepherd's Father.

Shedding the Blood of a Man, Blewet and Higgs, no more valu'd than drinking a Morning's Draught together. And so undaunted were they at committing this Murder, that they had the unparallell'd Impudence to go back to the Deceas'd Widow, and telling her her Husband was paid for what Goods he had carried out with him, and that she must send another Parcel, which they then pitch'd upon ... 39

Interesting enough, with sufficient detail to enlighten the reader with regard to the methods of the criminals - in the second quotation - and the rather unfortunate beginning to life - in the first. Accuracy is irrelevant: the author's job is to provide the reader with a diversion sufficiently close to everyday life that some involvement could be assumed, and some moral drawn. As a twentieth-century editor of Smith points out, some of the tales have 'additions from Captain Smith's own imagination.' 40 This hardly matters as the purpose has been served: entertainment, with the ingredients of violence and death, makes money.

38 Ibid, p.115.

39 Ibid, pp. 204-5 and 284.

40 Hayward, A.L. (ed.) A Complete History of the Lives and Robberies of the most notorious Highwaymen, (London, 1926), footnote, p.5.

Defoe knew this too; while sticking closely to the formula some of the time, his talents extended beyond the ordinary writer, and his embellishments come from the mind of a lively thinker, a fair judge, and a talented novelist.

CHAPTER 4.

JONATHAN WILD.

The early years of the eighteenth-century saw a rapid growth in trade. Property became important, as wealth increased; so the protection of property became increasingly a matter of concern. As markets grew, so did business methods; and those business methods extended into the organisation of crime. Protection became important, but it was not provided by any growth in the 'police' force. Organised crime spread rapidly in London, and the judicial system found itself outpaced as crime grew. The judicial system remained based on the old village system in London; as Rogers points out, 'the war against crime in the pages of Defoe and Gay takes on the aspect of Dad's Army attempting to stem the Luftwaffe single-handed.'¹ Like the most successful of armies - and businesses - profit in crime became associated with organisation: Wild supplied this organisation. Acquisition of material goods meant an increasing concern for their safety and eventual return if stolen: Wild supplied the stolen goods, returning the property to the rightful owner. By not participating in thievery himself, Wild kept inside the law. Although he controlled gangs who stole for him, he remained very much the business man, refurbishing the victims of his own robbers' thievery - at a price. Like any good businessman also, he quickly realised the assets of advertisement. Many scanned newspapers for reports of the latest hanging; others had less exciting motives:

Jonathan Wild shaped the age, and the age shaped him ... Hangings at Tyburn proved for the victims gala days of applauded heroism, and for pickpockets who plied in the throng occasions of golden harvest. The newspapers, then in their youth, were already devoted to accounts of robberies, rogueries, and executions, as well as to advertisements of articles lost, but to be returned at a price and no questions asked.²

¹ Rogers, Pat, The Augustan Vision, (op. cit.), p. 101.
² Chandler, op. cit., p. 155-6.

Wild presented himself as a 'finder' of stolen goods, but, of course, it was his own gang that had taken the things in the first place. Wild had the controlling hand as long as he remained inside the law. Typical of the sort of advertisement that would appear in newspapers is the following from the Daily Courant, May 26, 1714:

Lost on Friday Evening 19th March last, out of a compting House in Denham Court in Great Trinity Lane, near Bread Street, a Wast Book and a Day Book; they are of no use to any one but the Owner, being posted into a Ledger to the Day they were Lost. Whoever will bring them to Mr. Jonathan Wild over-against Cripplegate-Church shall have a Guinea Reward and no Questions asked. ³

Wild kept his word: the rightful owner would produce his money and the goods would be returned; Wild could then tick off a successful sale in his own ledger, noting the names of the thieves who were 'producing' the most. Wild also presented himself at houses which had been recently robbed, informing the occupants that he had an idea where the goods might be: on production of the correct fee, Wild would direct the victims to the place. Alternatively, the owner would pay for the goods on receipt. Wild never made the mistake of being in possession of stolen goods; by directing the owner to the place of storage he acted as the 'middle man', always within the law.⁴ In fact, he was so concerned with his outward image that he was also active as a thief-taker as well as receiver. Criminals could be arrested if they stepped out of line, as he would condemn them to the authorities. He killed several; one report from the Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post of June 20, 1719, reads 'the Highwayman shot by Jonathan Wild, near Oxford, is since dead of his Wound, and Jonathan Wild is still continued in his Recognizances for that Fact, it having been thought not reasonable to imprison an Honest Man for killing a Rogue.'⁵

³ Quoted by Gerald Howson, Thief-Taker General. The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Wild, (London, 1970), p.66.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 67-8 and 75.

⁵ Ibid, p.89.

The message was clear to all the thieves under Wild's wing: step out of line and this will happen to you. The authorities were not quite as naive as this brief account may suggest: hampered by a totally inadequate judicial system, acts of Parliament which attempted to curb the activities of such people as Wild proved ineffectual. One of the most drastic measures, the Transportation Act of 1719, which made it illegal to receive stolen goods or to inform people of their whereabouts, only stemmed the growth in Wild's trade temporarily. By omitting his name from the advertisements, and more carefully covering his tracks, Wild's business expanded after 1719. Also, without the collusion of the public, Wild could continue; most people, it seems, were willing to pay and keep quiet. Wild's 'Lost Property Office' kept going despite the attempts of the public-spirited and hard-working magistracy.

Contemporary accounts of Wild confirm this picture of Wild's dictator status amongst thieves. Defoe provides details of Wild's life and methods in several pamphlets, in which he examines Wild's dominance of the underworld and the reasons for it:

When the late Act was made, which gives a Pardon to one Felon for convicting another, he became absolute over them all; for if any of them disobliged him, or as he call'd it rebel'd, he took them up, and thereby got the Reward appointed by Act of Parliament for taking Highwaymen: On the contrary, when any of his own People were taken, which he had a Mind to save, then he endeavour'd to take some other; then his own Men by claiming the Benefit of the Act became an Evidence. ⁶

The 'late Act' confused matters rather than clarifying them. In effect, it helped Wild to control his men; by contracting out of Wild's union, the danger of arrest and death increased considerably. By joining the gang, the chances were that you could save your own neck by condemning someone else. By depositing stolen goods at a Brokers, he also avoided

⁶ Defoe, Daniel, The Life of Jonathan Wild. From His Birth to his Death, (London, 1725), p.17-18.
Moore, (op. cit.), no. 471, and hereafter cited as such.

receiving stolen goods. The risk he ran was when he informed the owners of the whereabouts. By craft and organisation he was not only able to escape punishment for many years, but also present an image of the hardworking public servant:

It must be confess'd Jonathan play'd a sure Game in all this; and therefore it is not to be wonder'd at that he went on for so many Years without any Disaster: Nay, he acquir'd a strange, and, indeed, unusual Reputation, for a mighty honest Man, till his Success hardened him to put on a Face of public Service in it; and for that Purpose, to profess an open and bare Correspondence among the Gang of Thieves; by which his House became an Office of Intelligence for Enquiries of that Kind; as if all stolen Goods had been deposited with him, in order to be restor'd. ⁷

From the malevolent head of a gang of criminals to the dutiful servant, Wild managed to keep his head above water for many years. Having acquired knowledge of the people under his power, they could never escape from that power. The Newgate Calendar supplies some details of his background; imprisoned for debt in his early years, he used his imprisonment to gain information about criminals and their methods. 'It was impossible', writes the author, 'but he must in some measure be let into the secrets of the criminals there under confinement.' In prison he met Mary Milliner, and struck up a friendship; she was useful as she knew many notorious characters. By getting to know the 'inside information' about the lives and activities of the various felons, he was able to control them by blackmail and expand his business. At least he never went to prison again because of debt. ⁸ The Newgate Calendar also adds to our perception of Wild's craft. We know from Defoe that Wild used a Broker to deposit the stolen goods, but Wild received no gratuity from the owners of stolen goods, but deducted his profit from the money which was paid to the broker: thus did he amass considerable sums without danger of prosecution; for his offences came under the description of no law then existing'. ⁹

⁷ Defoe, Daniel, The True and Genuine Account Of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild, (London, 1725) p.13. Moore, (op. cit.), no.473, and hereafter cited as such.

⁸ The Newgate Calendar, (op. cit.), p. 75.

⁹ Ibid, p.78.

'Organisation' is a word which often occurs in discussions of Wild's methods, and it is to Defoe that a reader can look to confirm the profundity of this organisation. After his prison sentence he set up the 'lost property' shop, and his power grew:

But as the Thieves first set him up only as their Factor, he by degrees made himself their Master and their Tyrant; he divided the City and Suburbs into Wards, or Divisions, and appointed the Persons who were to attend each Ward, and kept them strictly to their Duty. He also call'd them to a very exact Account, and made them produce what they had got, and tho' it were Money he wou'd have his Dividend; and it was no less than Death to sink upon him, as he term'd it. ¹⁰

Reference has been made in earlier chapters to parallels with twentieth-century sales methods, and the equivalent of modern business methods is surely portrayed here: by dividing the city, he was able to instruct his agents to penetrate and make a killing; the incentive to succeed from the point of view of the thieves came not from any financial motive but from fear of loss of life. Clearly, too, Defoe is to be acknowledged as a fine writer of detail once more: Wild's craft and his 'cleverness' - an element in many of Defoe's other criminal biographies - attracted him; the danger with this is that too much 'admiration' for the villain may be communicated, the villainy being subsumed under the cleverness. Defoe avoids this by supplying details of Wild's methods, and by allowing himself the luxury of personal comment. In this passage, Wild has pursued one Cheesemonger, who has 'betrayed' him; his action on catching him provides an interesting insight into the real Wild:

Jonathan, having a Pistol in his Hand, under his Great Coat, which the other could not see, still continued his Wheedling, and approached nearer and nearer, that he might have a sure Mark, he of a sudden drew forth his desperate Hand, and let fly a Brace of Bullets in the Face of the valiant Cheesemonger, and drawing forth a sharp Hanger at the same Instant flew upon him like a Tyger, and with one Blow fell'd him to his Horse's Feet, all weltring in his Gore - So have I seen, and with as little Mercy, a gallant OX fell'd to the Ground by some fierce Butcher; and so, like Jonathan, have I seen him Bestride the mighty Beast, and strip him of his Skin ... (Wild then proceeds to rob the man) ... I presume this Story may suffice to let the Reader

¹⁰ Moore, 471, p. 16.

know by what kind of Policy this Machiavel of Thieves supply'd his Commonwealth with Subjects as fast as they were cut off. 11

There can be no doubt about our judgement upon Wild; he is a 'Machiavel' among thieves, far away from the image of the public servant which he pretends to be in reality. That facade is quickly removed by Defoe.

Comparing accounts of Wild's life and methods reveals a typical lack of concern for verisimilitude on the part of the different writers. While we tend to trust Defoe - since he is more skilful in guiding his readers to a judgement of the character - accuracy for him was not as strict as one might expect. Different authors quote different examples of Wild's activities; Smith, for example, insists he met Jane Sprackling whilst imprisoned for debt, 'who had a thorough Knowledge of all the Ill People of the Town, and had herself gone round the whole Circle of Vice'. 12 Smith also cites two interesting examples of Wild's methods; firstly, a method of acquiring money for services rendered: Lady Godolphin has her chair stolen:

Application was immediately made to Wild, who after taking his Fee, told the Inquirers, he would consider of it; and when they came again, he insisted on a pretty handsome Donation, which being comply'd with, he order'd the Chairmen not to fail of attending the Prayers at Lincoln's-Inn Chapel the next Morning; when to their no small Surprize, and Satisfaction, they found their Lady's Chair, exactly in the Manner as it was in when Stolen, under the Piazzas of the Chapel. 13

This quotation makes it easier to see why the public were willing to pay Wild a fee for the recovery of stolen property. Wild must have known the whereabouts of most of the stolen goods; by attempting to recover property through the normal processes of the law would mean considerable delay - and, in the end, the goods would no doubt be destroyed. Part of Wild's reputation must have rested on his ability to return property in perfect working order: and for the sake of a few pounds, and little

11 Ibid, p. 30-31.

12 Smith, Capt. Alexander, op. cit., p.5.

13 Ibid, p. 5-6.

aggravation, why not use the service?

Smith also describes Wild's vendettas against those who refuse to comply with the laws of the gang. He has several robbers killed, and preserves his 'good name' as a citizen by apprehending several thieves: the latter serving as a reminder of the punishment for defaulters. After one robbery:

(he was) inform'd of the Haunts of James Wright, One of the Persons concern'd in the Fact, he apprehended him at the Queens-Head Tavern on Tower-Hill, brought him to Newgate, and being convicted of other Robberies in Middlesex, he was executed at Tybourn; which proved a beneficial Jobb to Jonathan, who besides the Lord Bruce's Gold Watch, that was found in Wright's Pocket, had the whole Reward, as given by Act of Parliament, for the Apprehending and Convicting of a Highwayman.¹⁴

Actions which are typical of Wild, although the authenticity of the actual events are difficult to verify: this hardly matters, as so many reports are available concerning the efficient, cynical methods of the man. Wild was able to vindicate his methods: Defoe 'quotes' from Wild in prison:

1. The Publick Good (is served), in taking and apprehending the most open and notorious Criminals; and 2. The procuring and restoring the Goods again to the right Owners, which had been stolen from them either by Fraud or Violence. ¹⁵

Defoe described Wild as a 'Machiavel' in one pamphlet, and the above reasoning justifies the description; by playing down his role as a receiver of goods and a controller of thieves, he seems to believe himself to be performing a valuable public service; Wild's hypocrisy is never glossed over by Defoe, or, indeed, any of his biographers.

The final example of Wild's complete ruthlessness also comes from Defoe. Wild anticipated nineteenth-century crime by taking poor children from the streets and training them in crime; Defoe comments:

But which is still worse than all the rest, I have several Stories by me at this Time, which I have particular Reasons to believe are

¹⁴ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁵ Moore, 473, p.15.

true, of Children thus strolling about the Streets in Misery and Poverty, whom he has taken in on pretence of providing for them, and employing them; and all has ended in this (viz.) making Rogues of them. Horrid Wickedness ! his Charity has been to breed them up to be Thieves, and still more Horrid! several of these his own foster Children, he has himself caused afterwards to be apprehended and Hang'd for the very Crimes he first taught them how to Commit. ¹⁶

So, the condemnation of Wild is complete. A heartless, thankless robber who stooped to any ends for material gain.

Contemporary attitudes to Wild are no less unsympathetic than the above statement. Like Sheppard, he was notorious in his day, and also like Sheppard, he captured the public's attention. He was a self-made businessman, and pursued his fortune ruthlessly. But fortune was insufficient to carry sympathy with it; no-one created an image for Wild, as they had created one for Sheppard. Wild's manner and his lust for power gained him a place in the minds of his contemporaries - as a symbol 'of brutal, unjust authority', as Howson describes him. ¹⁷ This authority was seen not just as a threat to the thieves themselves, but an extension of political authority: the major politician of the day, Walpole, was viewed as a 'robber' figure by his opponents. ¹⁸ One way in which Sheppard, the most popular figure of the underworld, gained more support was by condemning the activities of such a man as Wild. Sheppard and Wild had several confrontations, Wild being responsible for the former's arrest on numerous occasions. Defoe gives Sheppard these words:

I have often lamented the Scandalous Practice of Thief-catching, as it is call'd, and the publick Manner of offering Rewards for stoln Goods, in Defiance of Two several Acts of Parliament; the Thief Catcher lives sumptuously, and keep publick Offices of Intelligence: these who forfeit their Lives every Day they breathe, and deserve the Gallows as richly as any of the Thieves, send us as their Representatives to Tyburn once a Month: thus they hang by Proxy, while we do it fairly in Person. ¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid, p.32 - 3.

¹⁷ Howson, op cit., p. 6.

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion, see below, section (ii) and chapter 7.

¹⁹ Moore, 468, p. 15-16.

These sentiments are designed to curry as much sympathy as possible for Sheppard, and turn the readers away from the representative of absolute power over which the ordinary citizen has no control. A perfect example of a propaganda exercise in fact, particularly considering the real nature of Sheppard. While it is true that Wild was a brutal manipulator of others, Sheppard was hardly the innocent victim that contemporary accounts make him appear. Sheppard appealed to the public - possibly because of his 'small size, dapper appearance and cool wit: a perfect Cockney Sparrow.' In fact, Sheppard was 'a cold, unscrupulous, vengeful guttersnipe ... Yet when he betrayed his companions (as his brother had betrayed him), begged for his life, or made blasphemous jokes, the public applauded with delighted admiration.'²⁰ The truth was that Sheppard served a useful purpose to the people who wrote about him in that he defied authority, and defied it more successfully than anyone else. By playing down Sheppard's true character, and emphasising the nasty traits in Wild's, Defoe and others were able to capture a market - for there's nothing like a story of good against bad to enliven a reading public - and make occasional satiric points about the political administration of the day.

As Sheppard fought the administration, so the latter fought back:

Now Mr. Sheppard's long and Wicked Course seemingly draws towards a Period. Mr. Kneebone (robbed by Sheppard) having apply'd to Jonathan Wild, and set forth Advertisements in the Papers, complaining of his Robbery. On Tuesday the 22d. of July at Night Edgworth Bess was taken in a Brandy-shop near Temple Bar by Jonathan Wild; she being much terrify'd, discovered where Sheppard was: A Warrant was accordingly issued...²¹

Wild had to break any opposition to his absolute authority: it would take only one person to ruin the stranglehold which he had over the underworld. Sheppard's 'dapperness' and his 'Cockney cheek' pushed Wild to the limits, and Sheppard's death - ironically only a few months before

²⁰ Howson, op. cit., p.224-5.

²¹ Moore, 468, p.14.

Wild's own, and by the same method - must have been seen as a triumph for the 'establishment'. Defoe is outspoken in his condemnation of Wild. 'Who can think of such a thing', he writes, 'without a just Abhorrence, who can think it to be any less than the worst sort of Murder; such was the Life, and such the Practise of this wretched Man.' ²²

Reactions to Wild's capture and his eventual execution also bear a remarkable contrast to the reactions of the mob on the execution of Sheppard. Defoe tells of his transportation to Tyburn, in an open cart:

here was nothing to be heard but cursings and Exceerations; abhorring the Crimes and the very Name of the Man, throwing Stones and Dirt at him all the way, and even at the Place of Execution ... the Mob ... call'd furiously upon the Hangman to dispatch him, and at last threatened to tear him to pieces, if he did not tye him up immediately. ²³

Defoe also adds details in another account of his journey to the gallows:

so far had he incurred the Resentment of the Populace, that they pelted him with Stones, etc, in several Places, one of which, in Holborn, broke his Head to that Degree that the Blood ran down plentifully; which Barbarity, tho' as unjustifable as unusual, yet may serve to deter others from treading his Steps, when they find the Consequence so universally odious. At the Place of Execution, the People continued very outrageous, so that it was impossible either for Jonathan, or any of the rest to be very composed. ²⁴

Other accounts confirm this vilification: the Newgate Calendar reports that the crowd 'execrated him as the most consummate villain that had ever disgraced human nature', ²⁵ while Smith notes that Wild's body 'was so contaminated with Venereal Performances with lewd Women, that it was perfectly Rotten long before he died'. ²⁶ Perhaps the comment owes more to Smith's imagination than to medical history, but it is a touch that Smith's audience would take as indicative of Wild's life:

²² Moore, 473, p.34.

²³ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁴ Lee, op. cit., III, p. 389.

²⁵ The Newgate Calendar, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁶ Smith, Memoirs, op. cit., p. 22.

rotten, stinking and corrupt.

Finally, the following 'elegy' sums up the reactions of most people on the death of Wild. The language amusingly combines eighteenth-century diction and the language of the broad-sheet ballad:

What mournful Muse must aid me in my Verse,
To pin on Jonathan's dark sable Hearse?
I know in Lethe I must dip my Pen
To write against the very worst of Men;
For none (I think) can write of him so well,
But what is brought from the Confines of Hell...

Then Snot and Snivel throw about his Grave,
And with Old-Nick may Soul and Body have. ²⁷

(ii)

The activities of Wild took him into the realms of complex administration; by making money by organising other people to do the work for him, Wild symbolized to many people the 'new order' in public life. The political administration had taken on, for opponents of the government of the day, a remarkable parallel with the pursuits of Wild and his cronies. The brunt of the satiric and personal attack fell on the 'prime minister', Robert Walpole. Walpole's administration became an 'operation', with Walpole the 'manipulator' of events for his own ends.²⁸ Walpole's enemies never forgave him for his accumulation of a vast fortune during his period of Paymaster General, nor did they forgive him for his domination of the political scene until the mid 1740's. Because of the hitherto unprecedented acquisition of power, his friends and enemies alike began to call him the 'Great Man'. It was no coincidence that Wild also became known by the same name - especially by Walpole's enemies, of course. Defoe makes an oblique reference to Walpole in his preface to the life of Wild. The readers of his tract, he claims, 'will see deeper Stratagems and Plots

²⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁸ See Pat Rogers, The Augustan Vision, op. cit., p. 104, and below chapter 7 and appendix.

form'd by a Fellow without Learning or Education, than are to be met with in the Conduct of the greatest Statesmen, who have been at the Heads of Governments.' ²⁹ At the time of writing, Walpole was still at the head of the government, but the reference would have been taken by all of the readers.

Walpole became the object of satiric attack, especially in the drama of Fielding and Gay, but it is in one of Fielding's novels that the protagonist is completely destroyed by ridicule. Jonathan Wild exploits the convention of the 'Great Man' and the 'Hero', removing by satire any pretensions to greatness that Wild may have had. The political purpose remains somewhat in the background; although the reader must be aware that the 'Great Man' under discussion is Walpole as well as Wild, specific parallels between the two are not pressed; Fielding allows his readers to draw their own conclusions. A reading of Jonathan Wild reveals Fielding the moralist, as each incident provokes an antagonistic reaction against the main character. Fielding's concern in the novel is similar to his concerns as a magistrate: to reveal the corruption beneath the surface and to destroy it as far as possible: he attempted this through the law, and through the weapon of ridicule. Fielding states his aim:

We would not therefore be understood to affect giving the reader a perfect or consummate pattern of human excellence, but rather, by faithfully recording some little imperfections which shadowed over the lustre of those great qualities which we shall here record, to teach the lesson we have above mentioned, to induce our reader with us to lament the frailty of human nature, and to convince him that no mortal, after a thorough scrutiny, can be a proper object of our adoration. ³⁰

The words 'perfect', 'excellence' and 'great' are overshadowed by 'imperfections', 'shadowed' and 'frailty'. Wild becomes more than frail

²⁹ Moore, 471, p. v-vi.

³⁰ Fielding, Henry, The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild The Great, (London, 1932), p. 4. All references to this edition, acknowledged by page nos. in the text.

as the novel progresses - a heartless, immoral illiterate who uses any opportunity for his own financial gain.

Fielding is not as deadly serious as the other 'biographers' who wrote tracts and pamphlets on the lives of villains. Fielding must have been aware of the numerous accounts of the lives of criminals, but he remains aloof from the aims of the Ordinary, or indeed of Defoe. He parodies elements, but turns the 'biography' to a political and social purpose. It is necessary, he argues, 'to step a little backwards' in biographies to supply background to the subject. Fielding is not content with stepping as far back as his subject's childhood; he creates for Wild a whole family tree of roguery:

Mr. Jonathan Wild, or Wyld, then (for he himself did not always agree in one method of spelling his name), was descended from the great Wolfstan Wild, who came over with Hengist, and distinguished himself very eminently at that famous festival, where the Britons were so treacherously murdered by the Saxons; for when the word was given, i.e. Nemet cour Saxes, take out your swords, this gentleman being a little hard of hearing, mistook the sound for Nemet her sacs, take out their purses; instead therefore of applying to the throat, he immediately applied to the pocket of his guest, and contented himself with taking all that he had, without attempting his life.
(p. 6.)

Greatness and eminence are an established part of Wild's background, as, it seems, is stupidity. The tradition continued to the next Wild, who lived in the reign of Henry III; this man, (Longfinger by name), 'could, without the knowledge of the proprietor, with great ease and dexterity, draw forth a man's purse from any part of his garment where it was deposited'. (p.6.); and so the tale continues until Wild's birth, as though Wild were not responsible for his actions: the stain on his character was a result of his 'background'. For confirmation of this, one need step no further backwards than his mother, who, 'during her whole pregnancy constantly longed for everything she saw; nor could she be satisfied with her wish unless she enjoyed it clandestinely ... she had at this time a marvellous glutinous quality attending her fingers,

to which, as to birdlime, everything closely adhered that she handled.' (p.9.). Whereas the conventional criminal biography gave details of the subject's birth and early years only briefly, Fielding's account delves into seemingly irrelevant realms, but it becomes important in the irony as a whole. True, Wild could not 'help' his background, coming as he did from a stock of thieves, but this has nothing to do with the development of Wild's psychology; Defoe mentioned deprived childhoods in his own fiction, but Fielding has none of this; in fact he makes it quite clear that Wild had every opportunity in education, his father taking 'all imaginable care of his instruction' until he is ready to fend for himself in the world.

Fielding's point is one with which Defoe would have agreed: wilful criminals should be recognised, and punished to the full extent of the law; the compilation of details about Wild's 'background' is used to emphasise the degradation of the man through no cause exterior to himself: the Wilds are thieves because they are thieves; Jonathan is a thief-taker because that is his natural inclination:

If an orchard was to be robbed (at school) Wild was consulted, and, though he was himself seldom concerned in the execution of the design, yet was he always concerter of it, and treasurer of the booty, some little part of which he would now and then, with wonderful generosity, bestow on those who took it. He was generally very secret on these occasions; but if any offered to plunder of his own head, without acquainting Master Wild, and making a deposit of the booty, he was sure to have an information against him lodged with the schoolmaster, and to be severely punished for his pains. (p. 9-10).

Obviously, this forms a parallel with his later life and activities, and Fielding's point that Wild's actions are those of a peevish schoolboy is a pertinent one. Described in this light, his 'comrades' appear as foolish as he is exploitative; but, like the criminals in Wild's later dealings, they are caught in the trap, the only escape being Newgate - or its equivalent.

Fielding is of course bending the truth - in fact he hardly adheres to it at all in his satiric attack on Wild at this point. Defoe reports that

Wild's father died early:

... leaving four or five small Children for the Widow to bring up and subsist, 'tis no wonder if their Education was no better taken care of. As for Jonathan, he show'd early Signs of a forward Genius, and, whilst a Boy, would commit a thousand little Rogueries among those of the same or a superior Class. ³¹

The difference is contained in the word 'report': Defoe is attempting to place facts before us in as dispassionate a way as possible, and all details are significant in the drive towards a balanced judgement. Fielding does not require a balanced judgement: his study is an ironic attack by a novelist on a threatening part in society, and any 'details' to enhance the attack are justifiable. Fielding is much more free to add or subtract details as he sees fit, and also at liberty to include personal comments to tip the balance firmly against Wild.

Wild's associations with women are mentioned by Smith and Defoe; neither of them seem particularly complimentary about those creatures. Fielding, true to this ironic epic style, gives Wild a girl-friend, the chaste Laetitia Snap:

Her lovely hair hung wantonly over her forehead, being neither white with, nor yet free from, powder; a neat double clout, which seemed to have been worn a few weeks only, was pinned under her chin; some remains of that art with which ladies improve nature shone on her cheeks; her body was loosely attired, without stays or jumps, so that her breasts had uncontrolled liberty to display their beauteous orbs, which they did as low as her girdle; a thin covering of a rumpled muslin handkerchief almost hid them from the eyes, save in a few parts, where a good-natured hole gave opportunity to the naked breast to appear.

(p.26-7).

A lady who seems so well-matched to the noble aspirations of Wild, but who, like Wild, persists in the facade of respectability; she repels Wild's advances while at the same time allows 'favours' to one Tom Smirk:

(Wild was) transported to freedoms too offensive to the nice chastity of Laetitia, who was, to confess the truth, more indebted to her

³¹ Moore, 471, p. 2.

own strength for the preservation of her virtue than to the awful respect of her lover ... for at the ends of her fingers she wore arms, which she used with such admirable dexterity, that the hot blood of Mr. Wild soon began to appear in several little spots on his face ... She then proceeded to talk of her virtue, which Wild bid her carry to the devil with her, and thus our lovers parted. (p.27-8).

when we discover all, as to preserve the fidelity of our history we must, when we relate that every familiarity had passed between them, and that the FAIR Laetitia (for we must, in this single instance, imitate Virgil when he drops the pius and the pater, and drop our favourite epithet of chaste), the FAIR Laetitia had, I say, made Smirk as happy as Wild desired to be. (p. 30).

The problem of irony never enters into these passages: clearly, Fielding is adopting a mock-heroic style to indicate the precise nature of Wild's character and of his relationships. The touch that Fielding includes of making Wild a loser in love, and indeed deceived by it, adds to the humour that is built up against him. Wild, a deceiver himself, and a character who should be able to judge other deceivers, is duped by a woman as harsh and calculating as he is with others. Laetitia is hardly given the status of heroine of course; the ironic parallel with Virgil emphasises that Wild and Laetitia deserve each other: but only in battle.

Having established a firm basis for a judgement of the nature of Wild, Fielding goes on to give examples of his methods and of how his mind works. Defoe described Wild as a 'Machiavel' and Fielding puts thoughts into Wild's mind that suggest a close resemblance to Machiavellian reasoning. Wild divides mankind into two:

those that use their own hands, and those who employ the hands of others. The former are the base and rabble; the latter the genteel part of the creation ... (the latter) is that noble and great part who are generally distinguished into conquerors, absolute princes, statesmen, and prigs (thieves). Now all these differ from each other in greatness only - they employ more or fewer hands. And Alexander the Great was only greater than a captain of one of the Tartarian or Arabian hordes, as he was at the head of a large number. In what then is a single prig inferior to any other great man, but because he employs his own hands only; for he is not on that account to be levelled with the base and vulgar, because he employs his hands for his use only. Now, suppose a prig had as many tools as any prime minister ever had, would he not be as great as any prime minister whatsoever?

(p.42-3).

The irony assumes several forms in this passage. Fielding continues the ironic parallel with other great figures, drawing the reader more closely into Wild's psychology - for it is Wild himself at this point who presses the point that he - the prig - is to be compared with Alexander. The satire against the leaders of the state is an obvious reference to Walpole, himself attacked for gaining the status of a 'prime' minister in the government, and the irony of the redefinition of the word 'great' combines the two leaders of men, Walpole and Wild, in the minds of the readers. It also emphasises Fielding's concern with the 'proper' use of epithets: an unquestioning acceptance of a simple word can lead to a single person gaining a reputation which is undeserved; it can also give the person in question an inflated opinion of himself, as Wild has here.³²

Fielding gives another of his villains, Mammon, similar sentiments in his poem The Vernoniad. This passage summarises Wild's attitude.

Mammon, a thinly disguised Walpole, is speaking:

Nature 'twixt men no other bounds hath set
Than that of sums - the little and the great.
Nor is it reckoned scandalous, to be
A rogue. The scandal lies in the degree;
A little robber meets my disregard,
A great one my embraces and reward;
And laws the little rogues alone pursue,
As floods drown those not able to swim thro'.³³

This selfish, egotistical attitude is typical of Wild: he 'embraces and rewards' himself, and, from what one knows of the life of Wild, he was contemptuous of the 'little thieves' who worked for him. He too, would 'drown' the rogues who refused to comply with his demands. Fielding sums up Wild's Machiavellian attitude thus:

With such infinite address did this truly great man know how to play with the passions of men, to set them at variance with each other,

³² Cp. Rawson, C.J., Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress, (London, 1972), p. 229.

³³ Fielding, Henry, The Vernoniad, in The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, ed. William Ernest Henley, Miscellaneous Writings, 3 vols., (London, 1903), II, p. 53.

and to work his own purposes out of those jealousies and apprehensions which he was wonderfully ready at creating by means of those great arts which the vulgar call treachery, dissembling, promising, lying, falsehood, etc., but which are by great men summed up in the collective name of policy, or politics, or rather polittics; an art of which, as is the highest excellence of human nature, perhaps our great man was the most eminent master.

(p.64).

The ironic purpose is once more made quite clear - and the repetition of the 'great man' theme brings Wild and Walpole into close alliance.

If Wild loses in his attempts to seduce and exploit Miss Snap - because of her own willingness to fight back and her refusal to be conquered - he certainly gains a noble victory in his involvement with the Heartfree family. Heartfree is a naive believer in the dignity and honesty of human nature: ripe, then, for a cynic like Wild to exploit. Thomas Heartfree 'married a very agreeable woman for love', a notable contrast to Wild's lascivious attempts on Laetitia, and they run a jewellery business. Fielding describes his character in terms which are intended to invite our sympathy, and which also openly serve as a contrast with the character of Wild:

Heartfree ... was of an honest and open disposition. He was of that sort of men whom experience only, and not their own natures, must inform that there are such things as deceit and hypocrisy in the world, and who, consequently, are not at five-and-twenty so difficult to be imposed upon as the oldest and most subtle. He was possessed of several great weaknesses of mind, being good-natured, friendly, and generous to a great excess.

(p.46).

Heartfree's character, so much the antithesis to that of Wild, remains as static as this throughout the novel. It must do so, since the novel is, in simplistic terms, concerned with the conflict between the Machiavellian and Christian instincts. Heartfree has to learn that there are such people as Wild in the world, but Fielding cannot allow him to retract from any of his beliefs: the dignity of man, at the expense of Wild's reputation, must win through. As Mrs. Heartfree says, after she has escaped from the lecherous intents of various sea captains, 'providence will sooner or later procure the felicity of the virtuous and innocent.' (p.161)

A belief in a benign destiny for those who uphold the faith of a 'good heart' is the underlying message that the novel possesses. The contrast between the philosophy of Heartfree and that of Wild is made explicit by Fielding on several occasions. Wild persuades Heartfree to pay for some jewels, and then robs him of those jewels. 'This double method of cheating the very tools who are our instruments to cheat others is the superlative degree of greatness, and is probably, as far as any spirit crusted over with clay can carry it, falling little short of diabolism itself.'(p.51). Heartfree the Christian, Wild the 'devil'. With this contrast, Fielding is running into a difficulty that he did not foresee; is the suggestion that Christians are simple, trusting souls, with little or no insight into behaviour and motives, necessarily an accurate one? Are only the Snaps of this world the ones who will triumph over the Wilds? Fielding does not answer these questions, except to allow destiny to run its course and, at the outcome, it will be seen that the virtuous will survive. Fielding does not really need to answer the questions, since they are only subsidiary ideas attached to the main one of denouncing Wild. By sticking to this task, Fielding does let himself over-simplify the character of Heartfree. It is not that the reader is asked to sympathise totally with him, but merely to recognise that such characters can exist, and are open to the methods that Wild prescribes. Irwin raises a point on similar lines:

A Marxist might accuse him of being too timid to draw the conclusion of his social observations. But the point is rather that he has not realised just how fundamental is the variance between the Christian morality he is everywhere concerned to recommend, and the practice, if not the theory, of the current English social system. ³⁴

An interesting point, and one to which it is difficult to reply in absolute terms. True, Fielding does not write explicitly about this

³⁴ Irwin, Michael, Henry Fielding. The Tentative Realist, (Oxford 1967), p.49.

'variance', but the strong desire for reform which he had, both in practice as a magistrate, and in theory as a novelist, does push Fielding closer to a position in which he can point some solution. He is surely not arguing that we all become 'like' Heartfree, just as we all cannot become 'like' Tom Jones, but a truer recognition of the social set-up will reveal to his audience the widespread hypocrisy of many of its members. A gradual change to a society of 'good hearts' is not possible: Fielding would recognize that villainy, like poverty, is an integral part of his society, and his task was to open men's eyes to it, and control it as dutifully as possible.

In order to drive home the satirical point as fully as possible, Fielding employs devices which go beyond the technique of the novelist. Fielding's aim is satire, and not just of Wild and Walpole. He was aware that he was fictionalising the popular criminal biographies, and concerned himself with a parody of many of the techniques used by their authors. This meant that he could fuse fiction with facts, the fusion deepening the satiric purpose. Wild's 'cleverness' - a word used earlier to describe Wild and many of his contemporary rogues - is one which, like Cartouche's was a corrupt version of the normal associations of the word. Manipulation and exhortation are the incentives. Fielding captures this in the ironic repetition of 'greatness'. Beyond this, Wild had little to recommend him in the way of brains; consider the following letter, from Wild to Laetitia:

MOST DIVINE AND ADWHORABLE CREETURE, - I doubt not but those IIs, briter than the son, which have kindled such a flam in my hart, have likewise the faculty of seeing it. It would be the hiest preassumption to imagin you eggnorant of my loav. No, madam, I sollemly purtest, that of all the butys in the unaversal glob, there is none kapable of hateracting my IIs like you. Corts and pallaces would be to me deserts without your kumpany, and with it a wilderness would have more charms than haven itself. For I hop you will beleve me when I sware every place in the univarse is a haven with you. I am konvinced you must by sinsibel of my violent passion for you, which, if I endeavored to hid it, would be as impossible as for you, or the son, to hid your buty's. I assure you I have not slept a wink since I had the hapness of seeing you last; therefore hop you will, out of Kumpassion, let me have the honour of seeing you this afternune; for I am, with the greatest adwhoration,

Most deivine creeture,

Your most passionate admirer,
Adworer, and slave,
JONATHAN WYLD.

(p.100).

This is certainly one way of ridiculing Wild, but it is based on fact. Howson notes that Wild was not skilful at grammar or spelling, judging from his surviving letters.³⁵ The point is even more forceable when the letter is taken in context: Fielding emphasises Wild's school days, his father keeping him there for as long as possible. The truth - as Defoe records it - that Wild had little education, would detract from Fielding's point: the novelist picked up points of fact that were useful to him, whereas the biography attempted to adhere to the facts, choosing those which could command popular attention. Style is also involved: whereas Fielding's purpose is ironic, Defoe's is much more straightforward. Having acknowledged these points, it should also be noted that the similarities between the two techniques are important factors in any consideration of the novel: by using the tradition in which he was writing to satiric ends, Fielding expanded that tradition, and combined it with a different 'tradition' - ironic, political prose - to produce a work which went beyond the two.

A favourite device of the biographers of the day was to present the condemned man's words from prison, either recorded by the writer himself, or noted by the Ordinary; both found the device a lucrative one. Fielding is no exception, and presents 'a dialogue between the ordinary of Newgate and Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great; in which the subjects of death, immortality, and other grave matters, are very learnedly handled by the former':

Jonathan. Faith, doctor, I remember very little of your inferences; for I fell asleep soon after your naming your text. But did you preach this doctrine then, or do you repeat it now in order to

³⁵ Howson, op. cit., p. 11.

comfort me?...

Faith, doctor! well minded. What say you to a bottle of wine?

Ordinary. I will drink no wine with an atheist. I should expect the devil to make a third in such a company, for, since he knows you are his, he may be impatient to have his due.

Jonathan. It is your business to drink with the wicked, in order to amend them.

Ordinary. I despair of it; and so I consign you over to the devil, who is ready to receive you.

Jonathan. You are more unmerciful to me than the judge, doctor. He recommended my soul to heaven; and it is your office to shew me the way thither.

Ordinary. No: the gates are barred against all revilers of the clergy.

Jonathan. I revile only the wicked ones ...

(p.164-5).

The irony here is that it is Wild who appears to be preaching, rather than the Ordinary. In a desperate attempt to make Wild see the error of his ways, the ordinary pleads with him to regard his punishment as just, and as 'exemplary'; Wild's reaction is to offer him a glass of wine. Wild remains impervious to any suggestions that he should feel morally guilty for his actions; the ordinary is almost like all the others: Wild uses him, for his company means that he can drink 'punch' - which induces sleep. The ordinary is almost another Heartfree in that, despite having his eyes open to the wickedness surrounding him, he enters into relationships with the villains in an attempt to save their souls. Wild's was sold to the devil long ago; again, the association between Wild as the devil, opposing the good Christian forces here represented by the ordinary, is a by now familiar one.

Wild's final act of greatness is at his execution; Fielding had a ready-made piece of satire here, in reality. The behaviour of the crowd at Wild's execution has already been shown; Fielding had to add very few embellishments:

When he came to the tree of glory, he was welcomed with an universal shout of the people, who were there assembled in prodigious numbers to behold a sight much more rare in populous cities than one would reasonably imagine it should be, viz. the proper catastrophe of a great man.

But though envy was, through fear, obliged to join the general voice in applause on this occasion, there were not wanting some who maligned this completion of glory, which was now about to be fulfilled to our hero, and endeavoured to prevent it by knocking him on the head as he stood under the tree, while the ordinary was performing his last office. They therefore began to batter the cart with stones, brickbats, dirt, and all manner of mischievous weapons... The ordinary being now descended from the cart, Wild had just opportunity to cast his eyes around the crowd, and to give them a hearty curse...

(p.171).

Wild leaves the world as he entered it: contemptuous of those whom he regards as beneath him, those only worthy of exploitation.

Throughout the novel, then, Fielding takes biography as the jumping-off point, and uses Wild's 'life' in order to make a political and social point. Typical of Fielding also is that he is making a human point: people like Heartfree must be protected against the cynical selfishness of Wild. Corruption spread itself through society as a whole:

the chief (corruption) is the tendency by many, notably those born into high stations, to assume that the distinctions among people are moral rather than social; to forget that all men are equal before God and their consciences; to think, like Wild and other vicious great men, that the weaker orders are chattels of a different sort from ourselves, not people whose passions, desires, and situations demand their sympathy.³⁶

Wild remains opposed to any sympathetic, Christian consideration for any of his victims. The ruthlessness with which he carries out his plan is devoid of human sentiment. Fielding is urging the reader to consider the implications of this: both the moral and the social connotations are inextricably combined in a book which, beneath the humour, contains a serious critique of the contemporary social situation.

³⁶ Golden, Morris, Fielding's Moral Psychology, (Massachusetts, 1966), p. 100.

CHAPTER 5.

FIELDING : THE MAGISTRACY.

Fielding's career as a novelist and playwright and the commitment to cleaning up contemporary London might appear contrasting pursuits at first sight. His novels and plays are full of humour, the style and plots coming together to make some satirical or ironic point about the characters. On the other hand, the period as Chief Magistrate in Bow Street in the 1740's and 1750's seems a period of relentless endeavour against the low life of the day. But the contrast is a superficial one, and certainly would not have existed in Fielding's mind. Beneath the jollity of the fiction and the drama lies a moral seriousness that concerns the society at large and its hypocrisies, as well as individual political figures, notably Walpole. 'Crime' existed in a moral sense and concerned the high and the low of Fielding's society. By attempting to ensnare the criminal by all means available to him, Fielding ensured the protection of the ordinary citizen. By revealing the lowness of the apparently respectable through satire he maintained a healthy disregard for mere names: instead, a close view of the individual was necessary.

Fielding's task was by no means simple. Eighteenth-century law made little provision for individual circumstances, and magistrates had made little effort to analyse the reasons for the increase in crime. Radzinowicz reports that there were between 160 and 220 capital statutes: their precise number being difficult to determine due to the Benefit of Clergy. Children were not exempt from the fullest punishment that the law could inflict: in 1748 a 10-year old boy was hanged 'for secreting notes at the Chelmsford Post Office.'¹ Fielding's own view was not as harsh as this, but he never became an easy magistrate to deal with: if a robber

¹ Radzinowicz, op. cit., p. 12-13.

was proven guilty, Fielding showed little mercy if there were no extenuating circumstances. His attitude hardly stretched as far as the author of the pamphlet Hanging, Not Punishment Enough (1701), who suggests that those convicted of robbery with murder should be broken on the wheel or starved to death, or whipped to death: justifiable, claims the author, since the outcome would be less public bloodshed, and this 'ultimate deterrent' would therefore be for the public good. Interestingly, he also suggests that receivers of stolen goods should be punished in the same manner as thieves.² While it would be a harsh punishment indeed, and one not to Fielding's taste, he had little sympathy for the wilful criminal; the magistrate before him, de Veil, had attempted to come to terms with the increase in crime, but lack of assistance and the weak nature of the 'police' system inevitably resulted in frustration. Neither de Veil nor Fielding could rely on the support of the public who tended to regard many of the members of the underworld as heroes fighting against a corrupt system. John Sheppard is an obvious example, and highwaymen in general were viewed as 'princes of the underworld':

It is difficult to understand why they had so glamorous a reputation in the eighteenth-century and, indeed, why their image has been so romanticised ever since ... Their place in the public's estimation was well-recognised, as for example, their right to travel in the first cart whenever they were among a batch of prisoners making a final journey from Newgate gaol to the gallows at Tyburn.³

A state of affairs which Fielding had to deal with throughout the period of magistracy. He attempted to counter the upsurge in crime - and its popularity - by stepping down hard on criminals and by employing irony as a weapon. In The Covent-Garden Journal, he writes occasionally about the social conditions of his time:

² Quoted by Radzinowicz, p. 231-4.

³ Babington, Antony, A House in Bow Street. Crime and the Magistracy London 1740 - 1881, (London, 1969), p. 18.

the first Instance I shall give is that of Sodom and Gomorah. Now though the Sins of these two Cities are not very expressly set forth in Scripture, yet, from the Consequence, I think it very reasonable to conclude, that they were, at least, somewhat worse than we are at present ...

And England is a Christian state, since there are so many begging for Charity:

(There are an) immense Number of Beggars who frequent our Streets, and are to be found almost at every door ... A Beggar waiting at a Man's Door doth, indeed, as effectually prove his Charity, as a Bailiff would assure his Neighbours that he was in Debt.⁴

This was hardly a sufficient method of battle against the villains of the day, but it serves as an important indication towards what Fielding was trying to achieve in this and in the major work An Inquiry Into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers etc.. His task was to open the public's eyes to the real danger to which they were exposed, and encourage them, through assurances of his own concern for their safety, to be aware that the 'criminal hero' was only a figment of a romanticised imagination.

The 'Introduction' to the Inquiry outlines the contemporary evil and the danger which it poses for the ordinary citizen - Fielding himself, in fact. It is worth quoting this passage at length, for it brings out Fielding's insights and attitudes:

The great increase of robberies within these few years is an evil to me appears to deserve some attention; and the rather as it seems (tho' already become so flagrant) not yet to have arrived at that height of which it is capable, and which it is likely to attain: For diseases in the political, as in the natural body, seldom fail going on to their crisis, especially when nourished and encouraged by faults in the constitution. In fact, I make no doubt, but that the streets of this town, and the roads leading to it, will shortly be impassable without the utmost hazard; nor are we threatened with seeing less dangerous gangs of rogues among us, than those which the Italians call Banditti.

Should this ever happen to be the case, we shall have sufficient reason to lament that remissness by which this evil was suffered to grow to so great a height. All distempers, if I may once more resume the allusion, the sooner they are opposed, admit of the

⁴ The Covent-Garden Journal, ed. G.E. Jensen, 2 vols., (New Haven, 1915). I, p. 140-143.

easier and the sager cure. The great difficulty in extirpating desperate gangs of robbers, when once collected into a body, appears from our own history in former times. France hath given us a later example in the long reign of Cartouche, and his Banditti; and this under an absolute monarchy, which affords much more speedy and efficacious remedies against these political disorders, than can be administered in a free state, whose forms of correction are extremely slow and uncertain, and whose punishments are the mildest and the most void of terror in any other in the known world. For my own part, I cannot help regarding these depredations in a most serious light; nor can I help wondering what a nation so jealous of her liberties, that from the slightest cause, and often without cause at all, we are always murmuring at our superiors, should tamely and quietly support the invasion of her properties by a few of the lowest and vilest among us: doth not this situation in reality level us with the most enslaved countries? If I am to be assaulted, and pillaged, and plundered; if I can neither sleep in my own house, nor walk the streets, nor travel in safety; is not my condition almost equally bad whether a licenced or unlicenced rogue, a dragoon or a robber be the person who assaults and plunders me? ⁵

The country has a disease which must be cured. The image is a more poignant one than the attempt to compare England with Sodom and Gomorrah, as the image of the spreading cancer applied so very aptly to the visible social conditions of the day: people surrounded by squalor could make the translation from the dirt surrounding them to the sordid lives of the villains with whom they invariably had dealings of one sort or another. Jensen notes that 'London social conditions at that time might be compared with those of Rome or Corinth in its worst days'.⁶ This is a point worth noting because it is too easy to regard Fielding as employing hyperbole in his attempts to make the public aware of the increase in crime. All that Fielding describes is an accurate assessment of the social conditions of the time - and placed in the larger context of the other, more popular, pamphlets on crime and criminals, Fielding's claims about the enormity of the events he is describing can be seen as no exaggeration. To substantiate

⁵ Fielding, Henry, An Inquiry Into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers, etc., in Works, ed. W.E. Henley, (London, 1903), Legal Writings, p. 19-20.

⁶ Jensen (ed.), op. cit., Introduction, p. 18.

this point, and to come to a close agreement with Fielding in his description of thieves as 'the lowest and vilest', Babington's facts about the activities of the footpads prove useful:

Footpads were as callous as they were daring. They would often hamstring the persons they had robbed by cutting the sinews of their legs in order to prevent their escape. It was small wonder that Smollett felt constrained to write 'thieves and robbers are now become more desperate and savage than they have ever appeared since mankind was civilised.⁷

Smollett's concern is with 'civilisation': the nagging feeling that England - and London in particular - may be degenerating is shared by Fielding. Fielding uses the example of Cartouche in France as both a contrast and a comparison. 'Even' the absolute monarchy in France cannot cope with the gangs, then how is a relatively free country - and, by implication, a more civilised one - to cope with the threat? The same sort of gang warfare will soon happen here if care is not taken. In this passage, Cartouche is used as an example of depravity, as a threat to the personal livelihood of innocent citizens - Fielding sets himself up as typical of the man in the street who desires a peaceful home life; the reproach that he implies against his countrymen for being a moody murmuring race who merely rail at authority bolsters his own position as a magistrate: the appeal is one to common sense and the need for justice in a declining state.

Having stated his views about the state of the country, Fielding proceeds to examine the ways of dealing with criminals, and how to deter the potential criminal from any anti-social act. As one might expect, Fielding's view is not the simplistic view that many of his contemporaries held: 'hang the lot' is not Fielding's answer, as it was, for example, in the pamphlet of 1701, quoted earlier. Fielding's position always verged on the question of morality: he is asking himself whether or not he was

⁷ Babington, op. cit., p. 17.

right to commit a person to prison, whether the law is too indiscriminating in its provisions for the offender. In other words, Fielding's concern is a familiar one: the individual and his circumstances are all-important. One example of this is his attitude towards the drunks who were brought before him who had stolen because of their addiction to cheap gin:

the intoxicating draught itself disqualifies them from using any honest means to acquire it, at the same time that it removes all sense of fear and shame, and emboldens them to commit every wicked and desperate enterprize. Many instances of this I see daily: wretches are often brought before me, charged with theft and robbery, whom I am forced to confine before they are in a condition to be examined; and when they have afterwards become sober, I have plainly perceived, from the state of the case, that the gin alone was the cause of the transgression, and have been sometimes sorry that I was obliged to commit them to prison. ⁸

The answer to the problem lies not with the magistrates but with the law-makers, or, rather, those with the power to increase the tax on this liquor. Gin, claims Fielding, is a threat to the 'morals and health' of the nation, and he calls for 'a more effectual provision against drunkenness than any we have at present.' The example which Fielding gives of gin causing crimes is an important one as it emphasises his concern for a discriminating view of so-called 'criminals'. The ones who steal for money to buy gin are not the ones who threaten the ordinary citizen in his bed: rather, they are people desperate for a few pence which they can use to get drunk. While never inclining towards a lenient attitude towards these people - he punishes them as the law dictates - he can see distinctions between them and others whom he has to convict.

This brief discussion of gin drinking serves as a useful introduction to Fielding's concern for the defects in the legal system and the possible remedies. His examination centres around a moral problem: 'what should be the position of the law?' seems a frequent response to the system as he sees it.

⁸ Henley, (ed.), op. cit., p. 34.

Fielding is concerned with the moral aspect of the law, and with its minutiae. Both the thief and the receiver of stolen goods are equally guilty, and by allowing one or the other to go free constitutes a breach of faith between the public and the efficacy of the law:

if a pickpocket steal several handkerchiefs, or other things, to the value of twenty shillings, and the receiver of these, knowing them to be stolen, is discovered, and both are indicted, the one as principal, the other as accessory, as they must be; if the jury convict the principal, and find the goods to be of as high value as a shilling, he must receive judgement of death; whereas, by finding the goods (which they do upon their oaths) to be of the value of tenpence, the thief is ordinarily sentenced to be whipped, and returns immediately to his trade of picking pockets, and the accessory is of course discharged, and of course returns to his trade of receiving the booty. Thus the jury are perjured, the public highly injured, and two excellent acts of parliament defeated, that two miscreants may laugh at their prosecutors, and at the law.⁹

The breakdown of the legal system is Fielding's concern here, from several angles. The public has a right to expect a successful prosecution in such a case, since failure to do so results merely in an upsurge in this type of 'petty' thieving. The resulting sneer at the law is by no means petty however, and Fielding is aware that the persistent acquittals are no good for the legal system, as it encourages the view that the law is an easy victim for the clever trickster. Fielding is not satisfied with this law, despite the fact that provision has been made within the law for the prosecution of the buyers and receivers of stolen goods. It is not enough, argues Fielding, that the legislature makes this provision - for it is only that, and has proved ineffective in practice. With the true enquiring mind that one expects from Fielding, he sets about analysing precisely why the law has been ineffective, and proceeds to suggest remedies. He is here the good lawyer, bringing out the arguments in such a way that it is difficult not to agree with him. He already has the audience on his side, provided they are convinced that

⁹ Ibid, p. 80.

the law should not be mocked, as it has been in the past. Fielding also knows that the receivers - the Wilds of London - are by no means popular with the public. The blemish on society is a 'deplorable evil' which must be contended with. Fielding tackles the question by assessing the defects and the reasons for it:

The principal defect seems, to me, to lie in the extreme difficulty of convicting the offender; for,

1. Where the thief can be taken, you are not at liberty to prosecute for the misdemeanour.
2. The thief himself, who must be convicted before the accessory is to be tried, cannot be a witness.
3. Without such evidence it is very difficult to convict of the knowledge that the goods were stolen: which, in this case, can appear from circumstances only. Such are principally, first, Buying goods of value, of persons very unlikely to be the lawful proprietors. Secondly, Buying them for much less than their real value. Thirdly, Buying them, or selling them again, in a clandestine manner, concealing them, etc. None of these are commonly liable to be proved.¹⁰

Having analysed the problems confronting the law, Fielding makes various suggestions; he appeals to the 'sense of parliament' to introduce laws to deal with these defects. The problem is a 'stubborn mischief', and must be extirpated. Fielding's appeals to 'sense', and his insistence that the continuation of the situation is harmful to the law and to society as a whole gives him a large advantage: who could disagree with such sensible suggestions as these?

First, Might it not be proper to put an effectual stop to the present scandalous method of compounding felony by public advertisements in the newspapers? Might not the inserting such advertisements be rendered highly criminal in the authors of them, and in the printers themselves, unless they discover such authors?

Secondly, Is it impossible to find any means of regulating brokers and pawnbrokers? if so, What arguments are there against extirpating entirely a set of miscreants, which, like other vermin, harbour only about the poor, and grow fat by sucking their blood?

Thirdly, Why should not the receiving of stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen, be made an original offence? by which means the thief, who is often a paltry offender in comparison of the receiver, and sometimes his pupil, might, in little felonies, be made a witness against him.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 81.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 81-2.

The conscientious effort to make the law appear as dutiful as it possibly can is seen once again. True, argues Fielding, the law has defects, but it is my moral duty to point these out and to suggest remedies. The law is not remote from real life, either: by condemning the brokers as 'vermin' he is identifying with the victims, and showing his capacity to view the situation on a broad perspective. Above all, he has to gain the sympathy of his audience: the law must not be seen as distant and inhuman, or detached from the realities of the harshness of contemporary conditions. Lack of sympathy with the law had allowed criminals to go free: Fielding is too concerned for the principles of justice - based on sense and humanity - to settle for anything less than an acceptance that the law is doing its best to deal with the 'vermin' of society. The vocabulary is significant, as it is throughout the Inquiry, as it attempts to establish a firm base in the reader's mind for a rejection of criminals and their way of life.

Fielding was also aware that the law had to have a compassionate side. He saw English justice as far superior to any which he had studied on the continent, upholding as it did the right of every accused to defend himself, to ensure a fair trial and jury for himself, and to appeal if the verdict turned against him. Fielding's major concern is for the respectability of the law: it must be viewed as morally defensible as well as practicable; abusing the law through the press can do no good unless it is accompanied by constructive criticism and arguments - as Fielding's always was. The following passage, written in 1753, states this quite clearly:

To make, therefore, such an application (i.e. proof of innocence after sentencing) on behalf of injured innocence is not only laudable in every man, but it is a duty, the neglect of which he can by no means answer to his own conscience; but this, as I have said, is to be done in a proper and decent manner, by a private application to those with whom the law hath lodged a power of correcting its errors and remitting its severity; whereas to resort immediately to the public by inflammatory libels against the justice of the nation, to establish

a kind of Court of Appeal from this justice in the bookseller's shop, to re-examine in newspapers and pamphlets the merits of causes which, after a fair and legal trial, have already received the solemn determination of a Court of Judicature, to arraign the conduct of magistrates, of juries, and even judges, and this even with the most profligate indecency, are the effects of a licentiousness to which no government, jealous of its own honour, or indeed provident of its own safety, will ever indulge or submit to. ¹²

The extract is full of a sense of 'right', beginning with the 'duty' that every man must feel if he sees an injustice being performed: only the conscience is the judge here, but, in Fielding's terms, it is one which demands a great deal. The civilised way of protesting is contrasted with the hysteria that can break out from the popular press. Fielding's concern for the suppression of criminality is one which centres around a civilised way of life; the preservation of decency through sense is a belief held dear by Fielding, indeed, it is a way of life. To challenge that decency by the methods Fielding outlines is 'indecent' and can only result in a rejection of those methods. By acquiring a sense of civilised behaviour, by being prepared to discuss merits and defects - as Fielding was prepared to do - then the value of life and the decency of justice will be preserved. It is never claimed by Fielding that the law is always correct: his suggestions are ones which invite improvement and open discussion. As he writes in the Inquiry:

If none of these methods be thought possible or proper, I hope better will be found out. Something ought to be done, to put an end to the present practice, of which I daily see the most pernicious consequences; many of the younger thieves appearing plainly to be taught, encouraged, and employed by the receivers. ¹³

Fielding had to face the fact that, despite his admirable intentions, crime continued to increase. It was Fielding's task to attempt to find

¹² Fielding, Henry, A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning, in The Works of Henry Fielding Esq., ed. Leslie Stephen, 10 vols., (London, 1882), vol.VI. Essays and Legal Cases, p. 373.

¹³ Henley, (ed.), Works, op. cit., p. 82.

out why. One of the answers had already been provided: the ease of access to cheap gin and its quickly intoxicating effects created a demand which only stealing could satiate. Outweighing this by far is the ease by which a criminal could hide in the maze of streets in the cities of London and Westminster. As Fielding succinctly puts it, 'the other great encouragement to robbery, besides the certain means of finding a market for the booty, is the probability of escaping punishment.' The method of inquiry remains the same; by asking the question 'how do we relieve this situation?' Fielding arrives at a conclusion which should satisfy all sections of the community and conform to the standard which he has set previously for a civilised and humane law. Whereas the concern has been moralistic on many occasions, the point here centres around a social concern, and an 'evil' which is prevalent in his society:

Here, according to the method I have hitherto pursued, I will consider, what remedy our laws have applied to this evil, namely, the wandering of the poor, and whether and wherein these remedies appear defective.

Fielding's 'method' is similar, but different in the sense that he now becomes historical. Former laws furnish an example of how to deal with this 'evil'. The tone is calm, but the vocabulary is once again chosen to provoke the reader; the example of Alfred is a reminder of Fielding's view that England may well be degenerating:

There is no part of our ancient constitution more admirable than that which has calculated to prevent the concealment of thieves and robbers. The original of this institution is given to Alfred, at the end of his wars with the Danes, when the English were very much debauched by the example of those barbarians, and betook themselves to all manner of licentiousness and rapine. These evils were encouraged, as the historians say, by the vagabond state of the offenders, who, having no settled place of abode, upon committing any offence, shifted their quarters, and went where it was difficult to discover them. To remedy this mischief, therefore, Alfred having limited the shires or counties in a better manner than before, divided them into hundreds, and these again into tithings. ¹⁴

Fielding begins by reminding his audience of the 'ancient constitution',

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 83.

in contrast to the barbaric laws of the invaders - a theme which he has introduced before in his discussion of Cartouche and the difficulty of controlling crime even in a state governed by an 'absolute monarchy'. Even the parallel between contemporary life and the end of the Danish War is closely relevant: England had been at peace only for three years, after the end of the War of Austrian Succession in 1748. The appeal is again concerned, then, with the preservation of a civilised way of life, while acknowledging the dangers to the structure of society that these 'evils' and the vagabonds represented. Fielding's call is for action in a legal and moral sense: Alfred did something about it, and so must we.

Fielding continues his survey of the laws relating to vagabonds until he comes to his own times. Basically, the law stipulated that there should be no habitation of 'foreign' parishes without registration, but the law had its loopholes and it was difficult to administer. Fielding's concern is once more a social one: vagabonds encourage thievery, indeed they thrive on it and are a social sore on the landscape:

though most of the rogues who infest the public roads and streets, indeed almost all the thieves in general are vagabonds in the true sense of the word, being wanderers from their lawful place of abode, very few of them will be proved vagabonds within the words of this act of parliament. These vagabonds do, indeed, get their livelihood by thieving, and not as petty beggars or petty chapmen; and have their lodging not in alehouses, etc., but in private houses, where many of them resort together, and unite in gangs, paying each 2d. per Night for their beds. ¹⁵

This is bad enough, but the people who lodge in these houses are subject to torments which invite sympathy rather than rejection. It is not Fielding's concern to invite detestation of a genuine case; rather, he wishes to improve the lot of as many people as possible, in order to preserve a civilised standard:

I can add, what I myself once saw in the parish of Shoreditch, where two little houses were emptied of near seventy men and women; amongst whom was one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen, who had been

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 96.

carried off by an Irishman, to consummate her marriage on her wedding-night in a room where several others were in bed at the same time.

If one considers the destruction of all morality, decency, and modesty; the swearing, whoredom, and drunkenness, which is eternally carrying on in these houses, on the one hand, and the excessive poverty and misery of most of the inhabitants on the other, it seems doubtful whether they are more the objects of detestation or compassion. ¹⁶

Fielding had a reputation as a hard man, who administered the law as no other magistrate before him had done, but he was not without pity, and his humane judgements and compassionate acts were all part of the administration of the law as he saw it: the law could and must discriminate in its judgements, until an objective assessment of the situation could be reached:

In conjunction with other justices of the peace, he also revoked licences for the sale of spirits; and tried to end all unlawful traffic in gin, though he found the traffic inadequate for the purpose. Profane swearers on the street were hauled into his court, and fined or sent to Brickwell, that he might check 'the licentious insolence of the vulgar.' Vagrants who appeared honest were discharged; the sick were recommended to the care of the overseers of the poor; and the rest were bound to good behaviour or sent to the house of correction until they could be removed to the parishes where they belonged. ¹⁷

Fielding's powers were limited however and, although he continually attempted to administer the law and influence parliament into more effective remedies against crime, he was faced with resistance from the public, as well as the criminals themselves. He could hold a suspect for five days but had to release him if no-one appeared against him: it is hard to resist the conclusion that the public still viewed the criminal with a certain amount of awe; this is certainly true of highwaymen, and petty thieves had places to run and hide, to ensure their safety and their propagation. Footpads and highwaymen continued to flourish. In the summer of 1753, he was called upon to probe five murders which had

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 96-7.

¹⁷ Cross, Wilbur L. The History of Henry Fielding, 3 vols. (New Haven, 1918), II, p. 281.

occurred in the space of a week; robbery appeared to be on the increase, and Fielding was asked for advice. He submitted a plan to take the place of the existing law which offered rewards to the betrayers of thieves. This had encouraged villains to induce the ignorant into crime, and then denounce them. Fielding had a different plan:

(he) proposed that the Government, instead of issuing proclamations of large rewards, should deposit £600 in his hands to be used at his discretion. With this sum to draw upon, he guaranteed 'to demolish the then reigning gangs, and to put the civil policy into such order, that no such gangs should ever be able, for the future, to form themselves into bodies, or at least remain any time formidable to the public.' ¹⁸

One of the most important words in the passage is probably 'discretion': Fielding's fine sense of judgement, his view that the laws had to be administered fairly and with a sense of the individual circumstances and his awareness that he himself had to be exemplary in his respect for the law and its upkeep, combined to produce a system of magistracy which the criminal world feared, but which was nevertheless fair in its judgements. Fielding's reputation spread quickly, and his name became synonymous with fair judgement. The following anonymous ballad has some interesting points to make about the nature of thievery, the reasons for it, and its eventual suppression:

I went to London both blithe and gay,
My time I wasted in bowls and play
Until my cash it did get low
And then on the highway I was forced to go.

O next I took me a pretty wife,
I loved her dear as I loved my life,
But for to maintain her both fine and gay
Resolved I was that the world should pay.

I robbed Lord Edgcumbe I do declare
And Lady Templar of Melbourne Square.
I bade them good night, sat in my chair,
With laughter and song went to my dear.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 283-4.

I robbed them of five hundred pounds so bright
But all of it squandered one jovial night,
Till taken by such as I never knew,
But I was informed they were Fielding's crew.

The judge his mercy he did extend,
He pardoned my crime, bade me amend,
But still I pursued a thriving trade,
I always was reckoned a roving blade.

O now I'm judged and doomed to die
And many a maid for me will cry,
For all their sigh and for all salt tear
Where I shall go the Lord knows where.

My Father he sighs and he makes his moan,
My mother she weeps for her darling son,
But sighs and tears will never save
Nor keep me from an untimely grave. 19

The desire for increased material possessions drives the man to crime, while the demands of his 'pretty wife' push him even further into 'debt'. He testifies to Fielding's initial mercy, but is sentenced to death after other misdemeanours. If Fielding was familiar with the ballad, its message no doubt pleased him. It communicates the effectiveness of Fielding's 'crew' - the thief-takers employed by him to roam around the most violent areas of London - and ends on the sad note that 'crime does not pay.' The view of crime in this ballad accords with Fielding's own: it is not glorious, nor should its executors ever regard it as such. Fielding was fighting a battle here. Despite his compassion, he inevitably had to see hang several - indeed, many - committed criminals. The road to Tyburn was paved with admirers; paradoxically they seemed to regard hanging as the high point of a studded career. Fielding's attitude is made clear in a passage in the Inquiry, which shows also the tremendous fight against the obstinacy of the public that Fielding had to wage:

No hero sees death as the alternative which may attend his undertaking with less terror, nor meets it in the field with more

¹⁹ The Highwayman, from The Penguin Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse, ed. Dennis Davison, (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 243.

imaginary glory. Pride, which is commonly the uppermost passion in both, is in both treated with equal satisfaction. The day appointed by law for the thief's shame is the day of glory in his own opinion. His procession to Tyburn, and his last moments there, are all triumphant; attended with the compassion of the meek and tender-hearted, and with the applause, admiration, and envy, of all the bold and hardened. ²⁰

Fielding was objective enough to see that punishment did not always have the desired effect, but that the law had to be managed in such a way. It is impossible not to be impressed by Fielding's compassion and humanity, when faced by the dregs of society with whom he had to deal. His belief in the 'goodness of the heart' gave him sufficient will to carry out his duties.

Perhaps, one might argue, he was too discriminatory in his views of the people brought before him, and too willing to seek the extenuating circumstances? If so, his experience with desperate men indicates his ability to cope with threats and violence:

The General Advertiser in January, 1753, recounted an incident which had occurred at Bow Street when Henry Fielding was examining two men charged with the theft of two silk-handkerchiefs. 'They behaved in a very impudent and saucy manner,' the paper stated, 'and one of them said he wished he had a pistol about him to blow the Justice's brains out.' ²¹

Fielding was not the sort of man to be steered away from the course of justice by such threats, but he was the person to be touched by the story of Elizabeth Canning, abducted by gipsies and kept on bread and water for a month before her escape. She swore her story before Fielding:

When she came before me she appeared in tears, and seemed all over in a trembling condition; upon which I endeavoured to soothe and comfort her: the words I first spoke to her, as well as I can remember, were these, - Child, you need not be under this fear and apprehension; if you will tell us the whole truth of this affair, I will give you my word and honour, as far as it is in my power to protect you; you shall come to no manner of harm. ²²

20 Henley (ed). Works, op. cit., p. 121-2.

21 Babington, op.cit., p. 97-8.

22 A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning, op. cit., p.391-2.

Obviously, Fielding is concerned with presenting as good a view of the magistracy as possible, with its ability to be both compassionate and objective; Fielding examines the facts of her case coolly and critically . There is no denying that the ability to combine the two resulted in a humane yet dispassionate magistracy: Fielding's view of human nature never became soured despite his experiences, and he insisted at all times in viewing each case individually.

This insistence spread over into other works. One which can be briefly mentioned here is A Journey from This World to the Next. The examples which Fielding gives, and the conclusions at which he arrives, conform largely to the sort of arguments presented in the Inquiry. In the book, several people are judged by Minos as they attempt to enter Elysium. Fielding notes that 'those who were guilty of some very heinous crimes ... were hustled in at a little black gate, whence they tumbled immediately into the bottomless pit.'²³ Just the sort of remedy for alleviating the 'evils' that Fielding saw around him in society. But he was not simply concerned with presenting the punishment of a felon; Minos acts as a judge, but a humane dispassionate one; he shares many of the qualities of Fielding: a spirit approaches Minos, begging that:

he might not go to the bottomless pit: he said he hoped Minos would consider that, though he had gone astray, he had suffered for it - that it was necessity which drove him to the robbery of eighteenpence, which he had committed, and for which he was hanged - that he had done some good actions in his life - that he had supported an aged parent with his labour ... that he had ruined himself by being bail for his friend. At which words the gate opened, and Minos bid him enter, giving him a slap on the back as he passed by him.²⁴

'Necessity', the word much used by Defoe to initiate a favourable response to a character, is here turned to a similar advantage by Fielding. Earthly punishment has already been administered of course, but in the ideal world of Elysium those who show themselves of 'good heart' and have at

²³ Fielding, Henry, A Journey from This World to the Next, ed. Claude Rawson, (London 1973), p. 31-2.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 33-34.

least tried to preserve a humane, civilised standard are allowed to partake of a decent life in the 'next' world.

Respect for the law, a theme which Fielding had pushed consistently throughout the Inquiry, occurs in the Journey. Fielding cites an 'example' of a fiddler, who played while his mother picked the pockets of his listeners. Both are caught and taken before a magistrate; the latter dismisses them since the fiddler's victim had been a poet, and poets and musicians should be together; besides, a poet with money showed that there could be no robbers around. Fielding's experience as a magistrate would turn him against such a sentimental attitude, and the incident is included by Fielding to make a point about the law. He gives the fiddler the following words:

the acquittal of a guilty person (inspires) him with confidence, and it had this effect on us: for we now laughed at the law, and despised its punishments, which we found were to be escaped even against positive evidence. We imagined the late example was rather a warning to the accuser than the criminal, and accordingly proceeded in the most impudent flagitious manner. ²⁵

In the face of 'positive evidence', no magistrate could possibly acquit; but this one evidently did, and the consequence is contempt for the law rather than respect for its broad-mindedness. The point of the passage is obvious, in that misguided judgements in the face of objectivity merely result in further lapses, and it conforms to Fielding's other passages, where lenience must take its proper place. The action of the fiddler, though not heinous, should nevertheless have been punished; lack of action by the magistrate has an adverse, rather than corrective, effect on the criminal mind. Fielding summed up his attitude in a passage in which he could also be a compressed statement of Defoe's own:

Actions are their own best Expositors; and though Crimes may admit of alleviating Circumstances, which may properly induce a Judge to mitigate the Punishment; from the Motive, for Instance, as Necessity

²⁵ Ibid, p. 66-7.

may lessen the Crime of Robbery, when compared to Wantonness or Vanity.²⁶

Fielding's attempts to preserve a civilised standard, while insisting upon a law which was humane and objective, was a more moralistic line than Defoe was ever prepared to follow, at least overtly. The two men are linked in their attitudes by their attempts to come to terms with the criminal mind and to view each case in the light of individual circumstances. By doing so, and by persuading their audiences to do so, both asked for a humane understanding of human nature while at the same time demanding the punishment of committed, wilful rogues.

²⁶ Fielding, Henry, Essay on the Knowledge and Characters of Men, in Miscellanies, ed. Henry Knight Miller, (Oxford, 1972), p. 163.

CHAPTER 6.

FIELDING : THE NOVELS.

Fielding was a serious moralist: his work as a magistrate reveals this clearly, as he wrestled with the social problems of the day with a fairness of mind unsurpassed by any of his Bow Street predecessors. This, however, is only one side of the man, and an important characteristic should be emphasised here, which appears forcefully in the novels: his sense of humour, which is used to communicate a literary point to the reader, used often to gain sympathy for his characters. There are portrayals of low-life and criminals in the novels, but Fielding's interests range onto many other things, extending beyond a study of the criminal mind.

Humour in the novels is mentioned above, and it is worth pausing briefly on this subject. Attempts at a strict analysis of humour often spoil the effect of it, and indeed analyses are often unnecessary and lead the reader into a feeling of irrelevance and dullness; Shamela is a good example of this, in which a literary point is made humorously. The book is certainly worthy of note since it deals with a type of 'female rogue', but never in the same sense with which it might have been dealt by Defoe. In a discussion of the rogues of the latter, a consideration may be given to Defoe's interest in the criminal mind, part of Defoe's fascination for this side of life. Moll or Roxana may be discussed as if their experiences required judgement on the part of the reader: as though they could possibly be real people. This is often not the case in Fielding and certainly not so in Shamela. It would be a mistake to talk about her in 'real' terms, as though Fielding were making some point about human nature; Fielding is interested in a literary tradition, and by creating a parody of that tradition he is making a critical point. Feeling that Richardson's Pamela made a false point about human nature,

he simply turned everything on its head, not to indicate that he was writing more realistically, but to bring out the hollowness of Richardson's character.

Perhaps all this is too large a generalization about the nature of Fielding's heroine, for she is allowed to display traits which show she is a creature of craft if nothing else. She knows how to capture her man - the lecherous but frustrated Booby - and has the cynical detachment necessary to keep him under her control. She is able to judge the characters of men in order to exploit their weaknesses to her advantage; she writes to her mother:

the young Squire hath been here, and as sure as a Gun he hath taken a Fancy to me; Pamela, says he ... you was a great Favourite of your late Mistress's ... and then he took me by the Hand, and I pretended to be shy: Laud, says I, Sir, I hope you don't intend to be rude; no, says he, my Dear, and then he kissed me ... and I pretended to be Angry, and to get away, and then he kissed me again ... and by Ill-luck Mrs. Jervis came in, and had like to have spoiled Sport. ¹

Shamela may, in some instances be paralleled with Roxana in that both adapted themselves to situations as they arose and played a role which conformed to their own selfish requirements. Here the comparison must end, for the judgements we make about Roxana, her guilt and her conscience, are not the ones we can make about Shamela. Shamela is all counterfeit; she enjoys the power she has over Booby, and Fielding evidently enjoys the hits he is making over Richardson. Fielding is not the cynical novelist out to exploit Richardson's view of human nature, but a realist. 'Vartue' could be not only an object of attack by a squire but an exploitable commodity by its possessor:

I counterfeit a Swoon. Mrs. Jervis then cries out, O, Sir, what have you done, you have murdered poor Pamela: she is gone, she is gone. -

¹ Fielding, Henry. Joseph Andrews and Shamela, ed. Douglas Brooks, (London, 1970). p. 326.

O what a Difficulty it is to keep one's countenance when a violent Laugh desires to burst forth.

(I) had not been a Bed half an Hour, when my Master came pit a pat into the Room in his Shirt as before, I pretended not to hear him, and Mrs Jewkes laid hold of one Arm, and he pulled down the Bed-cloaths and came into Bed on the other Side, and took my other Arm, and laid it under him, and fell a-kissing one of my Breasts as if he would have devoured it; I was forced to awake, and began to struggle with him.

In my last I left off at our sitting down to Supper on our Wedding Night, where I behaved with as much Bashfulness as the purest Virgin in the World could have done. The most difficult Task for me was to blush; however by holding my Breath, and squeezing my Cheeks with my Handkerchief, I did pretty well. ²

Fielding's view of the events in Richardson does not stop there either; Richardson rewards his heroine with marriage to the squire as a reward for her perseverance in the preservation of her purity; Fielding does a similar thing but Shamela grows to hate the man she has tricked, as a punishment for her exploitation.

Fielding's parody of the literary type is a result of his familiarity with it and with the less savoury aspects of human nature. He parodies Pamela's real nature because he is concerned that Richardson may be recommending something of which he was not fully aware: although Pamela itself may have been a genuine attempt to acknowledge that virtue should be rewarded, a less than honest person would gain hints that could bolster her hypocrisy and create a Shamela-type situation. Fielding enjoyed poking fun at the new literary type, and by doing so pointed to its inadequacies, but he knew that his own 'character' was near to the truth, and he attempted to reveal the real nature of such types in much of his fiction. In A Journey from this World to the Next, for example, he gives the following words to Anna Boleyn, who has familiarised herself with certain traits in men's characters:

² Ibid, pp. 330, 340-41, 347.

I had still charms enough to encourage as many lovers as I could desire, and I could yet rival them who had cruelly insulted me ... my public way of life gave me such continual opportunities of conversing with men, and the strong desire I now had of pleasing them led me to make such constant observations on everything they said or did, that I soon found out the different methods of dealing with them. I observed that most men generally liked in women what was most opposite to their own characters; therefore to the grave solid man of sense I endeavoured to appear sprightly and full of spirit; to the witty and gay, soft and languishing; to the amorous (for they want no increase of their passions), cold and reserved. ³

It would be pretentious to attempt to be moralistic about this passage, or indeed any of the Shamela passages, but an interesting point which can be made is one which once again allies Fielding with Defoe. Both are interested in the way the mind of a rogue functions; the above quotation does suggest that Anna and Roxana could become close allies. The combination of these two with Shamela would produce an indefatigable Triple Alliance. It was a case of 'young men beware' - and especially rich young men; the following poem, although specifically referring to Pamela, could be easily applied to any of the cynical females in the two novelists' works:

Admir'd Pamela, till Shamela shown
Appear'd in every colour - but her own:
Uncensur'd she remained in borrow'd light,
No nun more chaste, few angels shone so bright.
But now, the idol we no more adore,
Jervice a bawd, and our chaste nymph a w----
Each buxom lass may read poor Booby's case,
And charm a Williams to supply his place;
Our thoughtless sons round-ear'd caps may burn,
And curse Pamela, when they've serv'd a turn. ⁴

Fielding and Defoe insisted on discovering the truth about the individuals they wrote about, or on revealing the real nature and implications of a seemingly moralistic way of writing. The major difference between the two lay in the method: Fielding chose a more humourous, satiric vein in which to wrap his considerations; Defoe persisted in a close examination

³ Fielding, Henry, A Journey ... (op. cit.), p. 129-130.

⁴ The London Magazine, July, 1741, x. 304. Also quoted in Henry Fielding. The Critical Heritage, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, (London, 1969). p. 116.

of each individual 'rogue' in his works, with lengthy accounts of circumstances and motives.

One novel which might possibly contradict this is Amelia, which is concerned with the honourable Booth and the even more honourable Amelia herself. The novel is interesting in two ways as far as this examination is concerned: Fielding presents us with another type of female rogue, and he lets us inside an eighteenth-century prison. In the character of Miss Matthews, who seduces Booth while they are both in prison, Fielding gives us a more subtle variation of the female temptress. He allows her to tell her own story, thereby asking his audience to be as duped by her apparent straightforwardness as Booth himself. It is only occasionally that Fielding allows us into the mind of the woman, by analogy; his general principle is stated early:

I happened in my youth to sit behind two ladies in a side-box at a play, where, in the balcony on the opposite side, was placed the inimitable B---y C---s, in company with a young fellow of no very formal, or indeed sober, appearance. One of the ladies, I remember, said to the other - 'Did you ever see anything look so modest and so innocent as that girl over the way? what pity it is such a creature should be in the way of ruin, as I am afraid she is, by her being alone with that young fellow!' Now this lady was no bad physiognomist, for it was impossible to conceive a greater appearance of modesty, innocence, and simplicity, than what nature had displayed in the countenance of that girl; and yet, all appearances notwithstanding, I myself (remember, critic, it was in my youth) had a few mornings before seen that very identical picture of all those engaging qualities in bed with a rake at a bagnio, smoking tobacco, drinking punch, talking obscenity, and swearing and cursing will all the impudence and impiety of the lowest and most abandoned trull of a soldier. ⁵

It is not that Miss Matthews is the same lady that Fielding describes above, but she has the same general principles, which are the same : as the ones which Anna Boleyn described herself as having in A Journey: adapt yourself to the desires of the man concerned, and you will gain your ends.

⁵ Fielding, Henry, Amelia, 2 vols. (London, 1930), I, p. 29.

Now, Miss Matthews's own aim is to seduce Booth; perhaps this hardly seems an ignoble or particularly dishonourable act, but that is not the whole point. Booth values the love and fidelity of Amelia, and any deviation from this is regarded by him as a great sin: his conscience bears the burden of infidelity and punishes him far beyond the original crime. Fielding's point about Miss Matthews is that her selfish acts can ruin the life of another, and would do, if it were not for the sympathy and understanding of Amelia. Miss Matthews ignores everything beyond her own desires, and her seduction is to gratify no-one but herself. Fielding's point is not perhaps as puritanical as this account might make it seem, but the reader is definitely asked not to be taken in by her appearance - as Booth is - and to judge her as dispassionately as we might judge Roxana.

Miss Matthews's ploy is a clever one and one which we might expect would appeal to a sentimentalist like Booth. It appears as a frank confession of the heart, the tale of her seduction of Hebbers and how she was eventually forced to stab him. Hebbers had, apparently, complimented her highly on her skill at the harpsichord; by doing so he convinced her of his affection; she is eventually seduced:

Hebbers no sooner perceived that he had made an impression on my heart, of which I am satisfied I gave him too undeniable tokens, than he affected on a sudden to shun me in the most apparent manner. He wore the most melancholy air in my presence, and, by his dejected looks and sighs, firmly persuaded me that there was some secret sorrow labouring in his bosom; nor will it be difficult for you to imagine to what cause I imputed it ...

... The villain Hebbers danced with me that night, and he lost no opportunity of improving the occasion. In short, the dreadful evening came. My father, though it was a very unusual thing with him, grew intoxicated with licquor; most of the men were in the same condition; nay, I myself drank more than I was accustomed to, enough to inflame, though not to disorder. I lost my former bed-fellow, my sister, and - you may, I think, guess the rest, - the villain found means to steal to my chamber, and I was undone. ⁶

⁶ Ibid, p.34 and 37.

This tale, although evidently quite accurate, is calculatingly told by Miss Matthews to tug at the heart strings of Booth, and to win him over. He becomes another conquest, in fact. After this, her story assumes interesting proportions. Defoe as a novelist persistently asked his readers to consider the separate circumstances involved when judging the actions of his characters. Miss Matthews now does the same thing; what Fielding seems to be attempting is a fuller conception of the nature of circumstances as presented in a novel. Judgement, in fact, has to be guided by the author; trust only those characters that the author asks us to trust: not an opinion well-received by many twentieth-century critics. Miss Matthews's tale comes to its climax in sympathetic circumstances. She is abandoned by Hebbers and he writes to advise her to reconcile herself with her family - after she has been his mistress for many months:

I need not mention my indignation at these proposals. In the highest agony of rage, I went in a chair to the detested house, where I easily got access to the wretch I had devoted to my destruction, whom I no sooner found within my reach than I plunged a drawn penknife, which I had prepared in my pocket for the purpose, into his accursed heart. For this fact I was immediately seized and soon after committed hither; and for this fact I am ready to die, and shall with pleasure receive the sentence of the law. ⁷

These circumstances seem in some ways to parallel the sort of misfortunes with which Moll Flanders had to deal. In some respects, the desired end effect is also similar: Miss Matthews attempts to seduce Booth through a sympathetic consideration of her circumstances, just as Moll demands sympathy from the reader. But whereas a consideration of Moll's life reveals an exploited, if naive, character, Miss Matthews is hardly in a similar predicament, for at this moment in time as we see her, she is the one organising the exploitation. The sympathy that Booth feels for her is eventually rejected as false by the reader, guided as he is by Fielding.

⁷ Ibid, p.45.

After a long interval, in which Booth tells his own tale, Miss Matthews finally seduces him with the aid of 'a glass of something' and a bribe of half a guinea to the governor. Fielding is careful to indicate the right path to tread: after all, one might argue, much of the blame could easily fall upon Booth himself, whose resistance to Miss Matthews's advances seems low:

We desire, therefore, the good-natured and candid reader will be well pleased to weigh attentively the several unlucky circumstances which concurred so critically, that Fortune seemed to have used her utmost endeavours to ensnare poor Booth's constancy. Let the reader set before his eyes a fine young woman, in a manner, a first love, conferring obligations and using every art to soften, to allure, to win, and to inflame; let him consider the time and place; let him remember that Mr. Booth was a young fellow in the highest vigour of life; and, lastly, let him add one single circumstance, that the parties were alone together, and then, if he will not acquit the defendant, he must be convicted, for I have nothing more to say in his defence. ⁸

The plea for a consideration of circumstances comes to aid Booth, but not Miss Matthews. She remains the temptress figure. One critic notes that 'the cautionary flavour of Miss Matthews's tale assumes a curiously ironical aspect, for as she tells it in the first book, she reveals that she is not a reformed sinner preaching virtue but a temptress spreading her net.' ⁹ This may be true enough, but a consideration must also be given to an aspect of Fielding's fiction which is important here. Fielding's 'character studies', if that is the correct term, are studies which see the character in a fixed position; there is an innate quality to the characters, and the ones in Amelia are no exception. Just how far, then, should one blame a person like Miss Matthews for behaving in such a way if that is her dominant trait? Fielding's answer to this would link his career as a magistrate to his passion for novel-writing: in order to preserve civilised standards of behaviour it is necessary to recognise

⁸ Ibid, p. 161.

⁹ Wright, Andrew, Henry Fielding: Mask and Feast, (London, 1965), p. 110.

rogues at all levels in society and to deal with them accordingly; this becomes important in the London scenes in Tom Jones, which deal with the knavery of genteel society. After a week of this 'living together' in prison, Amelia comes along to rescue Booth; the meeting of the two ladies might easily have been a cue for a mock-epic battle already described in Tom Jones. Instead, Fielding has a different point to make, and it is one which concerns both Miss Matthews and Amelia. The former expects insults; but Amelia

was not one
Who thought the nation ne'er would thrive,
Till all the whores were burnt alive.
Her virtue could support itself with its own intrinsic worth, without
borrowing any assistance from the vices of other women. ¹⁰

Fielding directly attributes the words 'whores' and 'vices' to Miss Matthews, and contrasts her attitude with that of Amelia, who is virtuous - but respectfully so; she is not the prudish Pamela, although she runs close to this description at several points in the novel, but a woman of compassion and forgiveness. Fielding once more guides our attitude to Miss Matthews by his choice of vocabulary; naturally, the opportunities for guidance are few in a first-person narration, but he leaves us in no doubt about the true nature of Miss Matthews from his occasional comments. Defoe and Fielding's studies in the female rogue take into account character, motivation, literary tradition and circumstances, and as such are a complementary view of the authors' interest in the mind and art of the time.

Fielding's continual search for standards of human decency was connected closely with his duty as a magistrate; in Amelia, completed only a few months before the Inquiry, he asks us to judge the administration of the law and to judge the punishment of those convicted of some crime. As in the Inquiry, the position is a moralistic one in that Fielding is asking whether such behaviour and treatment is fitting; he also complains that

¹⁰ Fielding, Amelia (op. cit.), I, p.167.

until the law is seen to be performing in the best interests of all parties, respect for the law will never increase. As in the Inquiry, he is at pains to communicate that the magistracy should conduct its work in as painstaking a manner as possible; in order to direct our attention to how the magistrate should conduct his affairs, he gives an example of a bad magistrate. Fielding realises that such people existed and their execution of the law left much to be desired; his own attitude to work was exemplary, while he viewed anything less than absolute dedication as lamentable, since the magistrate could not then perform his duty to the public and to the law. As in the case in A Journey, the Justice about whom Fielding writes in Amelia encourages only contempt for the law in his crass administration of it.

Fielding's attack on a bad magistrate is not performed with the vitriol of a Swift. Fielding's mocking tone communicates his view of Justice Thrasher, before whom Booth is brought; as the description progresses Fielding builds up a picture of an inadequate man, as he lets down the litigants and the law itself:

Mr. Thrasher ... had some few imperfections in his magistratical capacity. I own, I have been sometimes inclined to think that this office of a justice of the peace requires some knowledge of the law: for this simple reason; because, in every case which comes before him, he is to judge and act according to law. Again, as these laws are contained in a great variety of books, the statutes which relate to the office of a justice of peace making themselves at least two large volumes in folio; and that part of his jurisdiction which is founded on the common law being dispensed in above a hundred volumes, I cannot conceive how this knowledge should be acquired without reading; and yet certain it is, Mr. Thrasher never read one syllable of the matter. ¹¹

Fielding's attack is mild in tone, but this should not obscure the issue with which he is intensely preoccupied: the example of Thrasher can only lead to a deterioration in standards of administration of the law, while dutiful magistrates - like Fielding - find themselves

¹¹ Ibid, p. 7.

continually faced with opposition from the public as they steadily come to regard the law as conducted by asses. To make his point more lucid, Fielding gives examples of Thrasher's work. No direct comment is made by the author, and none is necessary as the actions condemn Thrasher, in legal and human terms:

The second criminal was a poor woman, who was taken up by the watch as a street-walker. It was alleged against her that she was found walking the streets after twelve o'clock, and the watchman declared he believed her to be a common strumpet. She pleaded in her defence (as was really the truth) that she was a servant, and was sent by her mistress, who was a little shopkeeper and upon the point of delivery, to fetch a midwife; which she offered to prove by several of the neighbours, if she was allowed to send for them. The justice asked her why she had not done it before? to which she answered, she had no money, and could get no messenger. The justice then called her several scurrilous names, and, declaring she was guilty within the statute of street-walking, ordered her to Bridewell for a month. ¹²

The word 'criminal' is used ironically here, as the only 'crime' committed seems to be by Thrasher himself, who fails in his duty to preserve civilised standards. By pronouncing this decision, based on instant judgement rather than an objective assessment of the facts, Thrasher serves no other purpose than encouraging contempt for the law and its administrators. What Fielding is doing is building up a case against Thrasher by giving examples of his mismanagement. Again, the point can be made that to discuss Thrasher in terms of a 'real person' is to falsify Fielding's aims. Thrasher is an example of how a magistrate should not conduct himself. The 'life' or 'psychology' of the man is irrelevant, for Fielding is making a moral point about his own greatest concern. Building up a case against Thrasher is the same thing as attacking maladministration of the law; as a by-product of this, Fielding hopes that his own position as a diligent but fair magistrate will be remembered. Thrasher's last judgement is one which finally condemns him; one cannot help but contrast Fielding's insistence upon objective analyses

¹² Ibid, p. 8.

of the whole situation, in examples quoted in the previous chapter.

There remained now only one prisoner, ... His trial took but a very short time. A cause of battery and broken lanthorn was instituted against him, and proved in the same manner; nor would the justice hear one word in defence; but, though his patience was exhausted, his breath was not; for against this last wretch he poured forth a great many volleys of menace and abuse. ¹³

The case for the prosecution rests; most readers would produce a verdict of 'guilty' on the charge of abuse of the position of magistrate.

In Amelia, Fielding also takes his readers inside a prison. He is under no sentimental allusions about the nature of prisons, nor about their inhabitants. Fielding was above all a realist, and his account conforms largely to contemporary descriptions of eighteenth-century prison life. Typical of the sort of person one might meet in prison was Blear-eyed Moll; her physical description sums up her character, and the nature of the prison. It also reflects part of Fielding's real concern that the fabric of society, may well be deteriorating and reinforces the view that only a good magistracy can check the disease that is spreading through society:

Her eye (for she had but one), whence she derived her nickname, was such as that nickname bespoke; besides which it had two remarkable qualities; for first, as if Nature had been careful to provide for her own defect, it constantly looked towards her blind side; and secondly, the ball consisted almost entirely of white, or rather yellow, with a little grey spot in the corner, so small that it was scarce discernable. Nose she had none; for Venus, envious perhaps at her former charms, had carried off that grisly part; and some earthly damsel, perhaps, from the same envy, had levelled the bone with the rest of her face: indeed it was far beneath the bones of her cheeks, which rose proportionally higher than is usual. About half a dozen ebony teeth fortified that large and long canal which nature cut from ear to ear, at the bottom of which was a chin preposterously short, nature having turned up the bottom, instead of suffering it to grow to its due length. ¹⁴

Moll is here almost a symbol for the type of society about which Fielding was concerned, and his involvement with the lower orders figured heavily in his assessment of the nature of contemporary life. If the fabric of

¹³ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 12.

society was crumbling, then Moll represents the sort of depths to which many people could sink: the philosophy here sounds one of despair, but only seems so; while people like Booth - and Fielding himself - are allowed to flourish, then there is hope for the preservation of civilised standards. Connected with this is the need for a realistic outlook on the contemporary scene, an outlook communicated by Fielding and also by Hogarth. The bustle of activity which is present in Hogarth's drawings is present also in Fielding's descriptions of the prison. It is an eye-opener for Booth, but, more importantly, it serves the same function for the reader, as he is brought closer into the underworld, with which Fielding was dealing and which was viewed with trepidation by the establishment, as a threat to the existing order. The hurly burly of prison life is experienced directly by Booth; it is a world of selfishness and total lack of concern for anything other than the cheap stimulation of basic emotions:

A great noise now arose, occasioned by the prisoners all flocking to see a fellow whipped for petty larceny, to which he was condemned by the court of quarter-sessions; but this soon ended in the disappointment of the spectators; for the fellow, after being stripped, having advanced another sixpence, was discharged untouched ...

Mr. Booth took notice of a young woman in rags sitting on the ground, and supporting the head of an old man in her lap, who appeared to be giving up the ghost. These, Mr. Robinson informed him, were father and daughter; that the latter was committed for stealing a loaf, in order to support the former, and the former for receiving it, knowing it to be stolen. ¹⁵

It should be emphasised at this stage that Fielding is attempting an honest evaluation of the nature of prison life; hyperbole does not enter into his style, as can be seen by comparing his statements with those of Ned Ward; the latter enters a prison and is shocked by the sights there; like Booth, he is accosted and insulted by the whores:

When we entered this apartment, under the title of the King's Ward, the mixtures of scents that arose from tobacco, dirty sheets, stinking breaths, and uncleanly carcasses, poisoned our nostrils, far worse than a Southwark ditch, a tanner's yard or a tallow chandler's melting room.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 16-17.

The ill-looking vermin, with long rusty beards, were swaddled up in rags, some with their heads covered with thrum-caps and others with them thrust into the tops of old stockings ... Some lay round the fire, almost covered with ashes, like potatoes roasting, head to tail like hogs upon a dunghill. Another was crept into a corner and had upturned over his head the ash tub, and so made a night-cap of a ale-firkin, to defend his head from the coldness of the weather ...

... I could not but wonder to hear this impudence from women, more especially when I considered they were under such shame, misery and punishment, which one might reasonably imagine would work upon the most corrupt minds, and make them abominate those base practices which brought 'em to this unhappiness. ¹⁶

Fielding is out to shock his readers, to move them not simply to pity for the victims of prison life, but to stir the question over the proper handling of offenders, and to indicate that a differentiation in the treatment and punishment of law-breakers is socially and morally necessary. Here Fielding differs from Defoe in that Moll Flanders's reaction to prison life is one which stems from a feeling of ill-treatment at the hands of fate, as though she hardly deserved a trip to Newgate since she had at least attempted to lead a proper life, but forced into crime through circumstances. Fielding's perspective is broader in that he is demanding a moral reaction towards prison life and towards the execution of the law. Blear-eyed Moll and the prisoners who relish the flogging are a threat to society and its values; the starving girl and her dying father hardly merit the same definition. The demand for a precise view of what actually constitutes crime is Fielding's object here, and the concern extends far beyond Defoe's. This cannot be taken as a criticism of Defoe, since his novels concern themselves with the circumstances involving individual cases of crime, and not the administration of the law. Fielding here displays once again though that he is also concerned with individual cases and that each criminal's circumstances must be investigated before any condemnation can occur. The social and

¹⁶ Ward, Ned The London Spy, (op. cit.), p. 66-7 and 108.

moral upheavals that would be apparent in any toleration or encouragement of such extreme cases as he describes involve the whole of society, and he intends to shock the reader into a realisation that the law exists for the protection of the ordinary citizen against such upheavals.

If people of the nature of Booth are to be allowed to flourish in society, then they must be protected against the Blear-eyed Molls and the thieves who - literally - remove the clothes from one's back. The argument has come almost full circle: in an attempt to gain respect for the law Fielding argues for a persistent objectivity in its execution and for its correct administration. These, coupled with a more humane view of what actually constitutes a criminal activity and the method of punishment, should ensure the preservation of standards. Prison life is 'topsy-turvy', but there is no reason why the chaos should extend beyond its bounds or why the evident corruption cannot be contained.¹⁷

Fielding's concern for the preservation of standards of behaviour in the face of the cynical, selfish threat which many members of society posed comes across also in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. Primarily intended as comic novels, they have their serious side in that Fielding is attempting to describe the 'manners' of the society. As such, his range is broad and is, in fact, a panorama of English life. The major concern in the books, and especially in Tom Jones, is hypocrisy, as Fielding once more digs down towards the truth. Crime and seduction are often a part of the hypocrisy, extending as it does through all classes of society. Fielding is concerned that a humane view of people in difficult circumstances should be sought. The points made above that Fielding's characters should not be discussed in terms of real people can again be made here, and it is particularly relevant; Fielding himself helps us come to terms with what he is attempting to do:

¹⁷ Cp. C.J. Rawson, (op. cit.), p. 77-8.

I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species. Perhaps it will be answered, Are not the Characters then taken from Life? To which I answer in the Affirmative; nay, I Believe I might aver, that I have writ little more than I have seen ... when the first mean selfish Creature appeared on the human Stage, who made Self the Centre of the whole Creation; would give himself no Pain, incur no Danger, advance no Money to assist, or preserve his Fellow-Creatures; then was our Lawyer born. ¹⁸

By exposing 'mean selfish Creatures' in the worlds of fiction and of fact he is trying to 'clean up' society: only by recognising that such characters exist can the preservation of decent life be guaranteed. This factor links some of the incidents in the two novels with the serious concerns in Amelia and in the Inquiry. At one stage, Joseph is violently robbed of his money and his clothes, and complains of the cold:

You are cold, are you, you Rascal! says one of the Robbers, I'll warm you with a Vengeance; and damning his Eyes, snapt a Pistol at his Head ... both (thieves) together fell to be-labouring poor Joseph with their Sticks, till they were convinced that they had put an end to his miserable Being: Then they stript him entirely naked, threw him into a Ditch, and departed with their Booty. ¹⁹

The incident speaks for itself, and the description of the harshness of the criminal mind is a familiar one to the readers of Defoe. Where Fielding differs is in the incident which follows; Joseph is picked up by a coach, but not after one 'Lady' objects to riding with a naked man, and a lawyer advises against carrying him as they might be blamed if Joseph were to die. The Good Samaritan turns out to be the Postillion, 'a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost,' and who gives Joseph his coat, saying "that he would rather ride in his Shirt all his life than suffer a Fellow-Creature to lie in so miserable a Condition'."²⁰ The neat touch of irony is typical of the sort of detail Fielding enjoyed including, as the implications involving the law and common humanity are profound: and they are investigated by Fielding throughout his life and work. Respectability lies in one's attitude to

¹⁸ Fielding, Henry, Joseph Andrews, (op. cit.), p. 168-9.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 45-6.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 46.

others, and the law should never lose sight of that.

Fielding later wrote in the Inquiry about the acquisition of material wealth and the greed of man as he sought to gain it by cheating. In terms of 'manners' an explanation of thievery is posited by Fielding, and it is in terms of a ruling passion. Vanity is the motivating force behind so many actions, not least crime; interestingly, the low and the great are linked by Fielding, as both are subject to the force of vanity. It explains the actions of a thief and those of a great man: the parallel was later made much more explicit:

The greatest Villanies are daily practised to please thee: nor is the meanest Thief below, or the greatest Hero above thy notice. Thy embraces are often the sole Aim and sole Reward of the private Robbery, and the plundered Province. It is, to pamper up thee, thou Harlot, that we attempt to withdraw from others what we do not want, or to with hold from them what they do. ²¹

One should never lose sight of the fact that Joseph Andrews is a novel of fun, which turns the puritanism of Pamela on its head. The seduction scenes in the novel amuse, as Joseph attempts to preserve his virtue. The points made about Miss Matthews or any of the other temptresses, could also be made about Lady Booby, but this would be a po-faced reaction to the good woman. One point that can usefully be made is that Fielding employs his knowledge of the methods of the female seducer; the tone is light and there is a feeling of harmlessness about the incidents; the threats that a Roxana or a Miss Matthews posed are simply not present:

She would now walk out with him into Hyde - Park in a Morning, and when tired which happened almost every Minute, would lean on his Arm, and converse with him in great Familiarity. Whenever she stept out of her Coach, she would take him by the Hand, and sometimes, for fear of stumbling, press it very hard; she admitted him to deliver Messages at her Bed-side in a Morning, leered at him at Table, and indulged him in all those innocent Freedoms which Women of Figure may permit without the least sully of their Virtue. ²²

21 Ibid, p.61.

22 Ibid, p.23.

Fielding's buoyancy keeps the passage alive, and the sense that he is aware that such situations are fun and part and parcel of the human situation: once more he is using a literary tradition - that established by Richardson - to make his own literary point.

What is needed to make the world a better place is benevolence, a virtue which Fielding had and which is a dominant factor in his major characters:

The Good or Evil we confer on others, very often, I believe, recoils on ourselves. For as Men of benign Disposition enjoy their own Acts of Benificence, equally with those to whom they are done, so there are scarce any Natures so entirely diabolical, as to be capable of doing Injuries, without paying themselves some Pangs, for the Ruin which they bring on their Fellow-Creatures. ²³

Fielding's concern that a social conscience is of paramount importance for conducting everyday affairs comes through strongly in all of his works. Although Tom Jones falls outside the main scheme of the present study, the intrigue in London between Tom and Lady Bellaston, in which the latter attempts to ruin Tom's relationship with Sophia through the threat of a letter, reveals that genteel society had its knaveries with which a comparatively innocent person like Tom had little chance of competing. Tom regards his involvement with Lady Bellaston as on the same level as his other intrigues, but fails to take into account the craft and subtlety of the female's mind. His mistake is a result of a trait which many of Defoe's characters possessed: the need to prove oneself as socially mobile, that the class barrier can be broken by endeavour. But this is not the case, as Tom discovers to his cost. Lady Bellaston's schemes for the ruin of Jones are a result of a desire for intrigue; as Tom attempts to understand what has befallen him, so the reader moves slowly to realise that Tom's own intrigues in the country and on the road are forgivable, and do not contain serious

²³ Fielding, Henry The History of Tom Jones A Foundling, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Fredson Bowers, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1974), II, p.765-6.

consequences. Lady Bellaston, however, is a difficult person to describe: she is never a Roxana, or a Miss Matthews, or a Shamela, which is why the word 'roguery' is hardly a fitting description of the situation she creates: it is an integral part of the London society into which Tom is thrust; she serves as a lesson to Tom, as a necessary adjunct to Tom's learning process; her intrigue serves to remind Tom of his place in society.

Fielding's preoccupations with the standards in civilised life summarise the real meaning behind most of his work: as a novelist he attempted to indicate truth by an examination of motives and conditions, while as a magistrate he worked rigorously to preserve respect for a civilised way of life. His task was to open his readers' eyes to the way of the world surrounding them, to encourage positive participation in society, and to admonish those who worked against such aims. Fielding is striving for an ideal, but he worked to put his ideals into practice by a minute examination of cause and effect; by endeavouring to pursue a humane and objective course in the execution of the law he hoped to preserve a way of life in society which he felt was crumbling. No-one could deny that he created principles and adhered strongly to them.

CHAPTER 7.

FIELDING AND GAY: THE DRAMA.

Critical attention has primarily centred upon Fielding as a novelist, and one who was intensely concerned with social conditions through his occupation as a magistrate. This has meant that the drama has been neglected, and unfortunately so, since he reveals similar concerns in his plays. Also, drama was a recognised means of expression in which artists could criticise or rebuke the politicians of the day. Much of Fielding's drama gains its impact from its comic aspects, making its points through satire; lechers, hypocrites and dishonest politicians are chosen as targets for Fielding's satire.

At this stage, it is important to emphasise once again Fielding's methods; as in the novels, it is little use turning to the plays in order to study character development or gain profound psychological insights into the actions of the characters, for they are static, present to make a point, to score a hit and to press home some opinion to the audience. This is a valid argument to make for many of the novels, and it is certainly the case in the drama. It is always possible to attempt to discuss characters in the conventional terms of 'development', but we are steered away from this by the author and by a consideration of the writing in its social and political context. An example of this can be found in The Coffee-House Politician; Squeezum, the lecherous justice of the peace, attempts to ravish Hilaret, but he is caught and prevented by Satmore; Squeezum arrests the two of them for conspiracy to swear a rape against him. Worthy, a man who has no part whatsoever in the action, has this comment to make:

golden sands too often clog the wheels of justice, and obstruct her course; the very riches, which were the greatest evidence of his villainy, have too often declared the guilty innocent ... I long to

see the time when here, as in Holland, the traveller may walk unmolested, and carry his riches openly with him.¹

This is the whole point of the play, made towards the end of it to implant itself firmly in the minds of the audience. Fielding's concern with justice and its correct administration is the driving force behind the farce - with comedy as the primary objective. By poking fun at the magistrate, Fielding ridicules the corrupt administration of the law, and uses Worthy at the end of the play to make this point.

One of the more interesting aspects of the play is the combination of the realistic with farce, or anti-realism. This is most obviously seen in the names of the characters: 'Squeezum' seems most appropriate for the ravisher and 'Worthy' is an obvious name for a character who indicates the moral of the play. Interesting too is the transition that Worthy makes in the above quotation from justice to villainy - and ravishment is the crime here - to safety of property in general. Fielding is making a subconscious transition here also. Correct administration of the law will lead to the safe custody of property: and safety for one's virtue comes under the general heading of 'property'. This is by no means a cynical comment or viewpoint: to the eighteenth-century mind protection included property and virginity, and the two became naturally associated. A comment on the language of the play also reveals the blend of the realistic and anti-realistic which Fielding is trying to achieve. In a strict sense, if one wants to protect one's virtue, then the law should offer protection; a corrupt magistrate can only encourage a slackening of standards. On the other hand, the sight of a middle-aged man attempting to seduce an unwilling young lady becomes a scene of great comic potential; a successful manipulation of this can lead to a satisfied audience, more willing recipients of the message. The following scene is an example of

¹ Fielding, Henry, The Coffee-House Politician, Act V scene 5, in Works, ed. Henley, (op. cit.), II, 145-6.

this; Squeezum has attracted Hilaret to an interview on the promise that Satmore, whom she really loves, will be there:

Squ: Oh! are you come - you little pretty, dear sweet rogue! - I have been waiting for you these - these four hours at least.

Hilaret: Young lovers are commonly earlier than their appointments.

Squ: Give me a kiss for that. - Thou shalt find me a young lover, a vigorous young lover too. - Hit me a slap in the face, do, - Bow-wow! Bow-wow! I'll eat up your clothes. - Come what will you drink? White or red? ...

Squ: Oh! - I can bear no longer, my angel! my dove! my darling!

Hil: What do you mean sir?

Squ: I mean to eat you up, to swallow you down, to squeeze you to pieces.

Hil: Help there! a rape! a rape! ²

In his attempt to enjoy Hilaret as a gastronomic delight, Squeezum reduces himself to the level of a dog greedily attempting to devour its feed before the rest of the pack arrives to spoil his enjoyment. Moreover, his manoeuvring is a selfish manipulation of Hilaret, and a clumsy one at that, and is naturally doomed to failure. The farcical, exaggerated aspects of the language, ('my dove' etc.), and the ridiculous light in which Squeezum is shown enforce Fielding's point, and it is one which is also made in the novels. If types like Hilaret and Satmore are to flourish in contemporary society, then the activities of the Squeezums must be exposed and checked, otherwise the personal corruption which he represents will spill over into the whole of society; this is particularly the case when a person with social responsibility abuses his position. This is the reason why development of character is not present in the plays: Fielding's major aim is to present a social condition, not a psychological one; if that comes across, Fielding would argue, then the aim of the drama has been achieved.

The abuse of power by an esteemed person is again the theme of the play

² Ibid, IV, 6, p. 129-131.

The Debauchees, and it again takes sexual seduction as the means to reveal hypocrisy and corruption. By way of contrast, Fielding introduces the character of Old Laroon who adds a refreshing touch of honest speaking to the play.

The play tells the story of Isabel, her father confessor Martin, and the two Laroons - father and son. Martin attempts to seduce Isabel, but she insists on remaining faithful to Young Laroon, whom she loves. Martin's language is an important aspect of his type, and comes close to Squeezum's on occasions:

Martin: Those Eyes have a Fire in them that scarce seems mortal.
Come hither - - give me a Kiss - ha! there is a Sweetness
in that Breath like what I've read of Ambrosia. That
Bosom heaves like those of Priestesses of old, when big
with Inspiration.
... Be in your Chamber this Evening at Eight; take care there
be no Light in the Room, and perhaps the Spirit may pay you a
second Visit. ³

Perhaps not quite as ridiculous as Squeezum, but the language is deliberately exaggerated to indicate the over-romantic and self-indulgent nature of the rake. Fielding's concern with revealing the corruption beneath an apparently respectable - and even revered - member of society is expressed through Martin's corrupt use of language. 'Priestesses' and 'Spirit' are the sort of words a priest might use, but not in that context. At one stage he remarks to Isabel that 'You are to believe what the Church tells you, and no more', an indication of the tergiversation that is evident in his character, as he sets himself up as a representative of the Church's values. He is punished for his hypocrisy by Isabel's craft as she pretends to go along with him and is able to bring out his true nature with the aid of Young Laroon. It is a vital exposure, and constitutes a triumph of common humanity over sham and hypocrisy. Again, the robbing of Isabel's 'property' is seen in terms of crime, and is a

³ Fielding, Henry, The Debauchees: Or, The Jesuit Caught, (London, 1746), Act II, scene 4, p.19 and III, ii p.29.

double crime since it involves deceit, and an abuse of privilege since it attempts to exploit a respected social position. The play goes a little further than the former, however, as it explores the nature of an honest alternative. Fielding is not recommending a strict adherence to some code of sexual virtue, but is concerned with uncovering the spurious nature of certain members of society. The character of Old Laroon indicates this. He is a man on the same style as Squire Western, open, down-to-earth, and honest. Some of his comments are worthy of note:

I am not so young in Years, (but) I am in Constitution as any of them; and I don't question but to live to see a Son and a great Grandson both born on the same Day ...

I tell you Sirrah, no Man is safe in the Faith of a Mistress, no one is secure of a Woman till he is in Bed with her. Had there been any Security in the Faith of a Mistress, I had been at present married to half the Dutchesses in France. I no more rely on what a Woman says out of a Church, than on what a Priest says in it...⁴

He also suspects Young Laroon has made Isabel pregnant:

Well, Master Jourdain, if the young Dog has tripped up your Daughter's Heels in an unlawful way, as St. Francis says, why, he shall make her amends and - do it in a lawful one. So I'll go seek for my Son, while you go and comfort the poor Chicken that is pining for fear of a Nunnery. - Odsheart, it would be very hard indeed, when a Girl has once had her belly full, that she must fast all her life afterwards.⁵

These are all delightfully down-to-earth comments, worthy of Squire Western. Perhaps two points can usefully be made about them. Firstly, Old Laroon believes in living as full a life as possible, but a 'lawful' one; in other words, wrongdoing must be answered for and punished, and in as civilised a manner as possible. Despite the fact that Old Laroon is secretly pleased with his son's amours, he recognises the need for openness: his buoyancy and forthrightness keep him well away from the cynicism of a Father Martin. Secondly, there is no evidence in the play that Old Laroon is to be at all condemned for his attitudes. 'Get your

⁴ Ibid, I, 2, p. 3; I, 8, p.10.

⁵ Ibid, II, 2, p.17-18.

woman to bed' is his down-to-earth way of looking at things and it is expressed in an honest manner; only by secreting one's real nature behind a veneer of respectability can such a trait constitute a threat to civilised standards. This is an important point to emphasise, since there is a real danger that Fielding might be regarded as an advocate of protection of virtue at all costs, at least from a reading of the plays. By placing them in the context of Fielding's literary activities, a different view is reached. Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews preach a message of honesty - even if mistakes are made. Fielding's 'good' characters are not dull advocates of chastity, but people opposed to hypocrisy: they present us with Fielding's view of 'correct' behaviour; human nature cannot be purified, but one can be aware of certain aspects of behaviour which are dishonest, in all senses of the word. What Fielding hopes for is an establishment of Common Sense. Old Laroon has this attribute, and it is one to which Fielding turns as a hope for the future: a hope in the face of the continuing 'crime' of hypocrisy. Common Sense appears as a character in the play Pasquin, in fact. The play is a satire on the declining standards in the theatre; the Queen of Common Sense is killed and the Queen of Ignorance appears to reign; the ghost of the former Queen arises to remind the murderers of her existence:

Here, tho' a Ghost, I will my Power maintain,
And all the Friends of Ignorance shall find,
My Ghost, at least, they cannot banish hence.
And all henceforth, who murder Common-Sense,
Learn from these Scenes that tho' success you boast,
You shall at last be haunted with her Ghost.⁶

The Ghost asserts that 'You shall ... be haunted', but this is a hope rather than an explicit belief. The play is supposed to be in rehearsal, and Fustian, the author, comments that this is the only

⁶ Fielding, Henry, Pasquin, (London, 1736), Act V, p.64.

play where Common Sense has had any benefit lately. This last comment comes closer to the reality of which Fielding was aware, and the play can be taken in a broader context: the need for Common Sense to reign in the theatre would produce the same effect if the queen were to reign in society; Fielding's sense of reality told him that this might not be, and he dedicated his work to recommending the support of the accession of Common Sense to the throne. Lack of it would result in confusion and disenchantment in society. As in the theatre, Common Sense in society would replace chaos by order, and ensure literary and civil standards. By exposing the villains in society, Fielding was acting as the guardian of Common Sense.

The transition from theatre to society might be viewed as an extravagant one; but Fielding was very aware that such a transition was possible, and worked hard to ensure that his audience was aware of the parallel. He was 'exposing the vices of the town to view' through a series of types which were easily identifiable to a contemporary audience. The prologue to The Covent Garden Tragedy makes this point clear:

Our Poet from unknown, untasted Springs,
A curious Draught of Tragic Nectar brings.
From Covent Garden, culls delicious Stores,
Of Bullies, Bawds, and Sots, and Rakes, and Whores.
Examples of the Great can serve but few,
For what are Kings and Heroes Faults to you?
But these Examples are of general Use.
What Rake is ignorant of the King's Coffee House?
Here the old Rake may view the Crimes h'as known,
And Boys hence dread the Vices of the Town:
Here Nymphs seduc'd may mourn their Pleasures past,
And Maids, who have their Virtue, learn to hold it fast. ⁷

The play is a parody of Ambrose Philips's The Distrest Mother, itself a translation of Racine's Andromaque. Philips's play lent itself to parody, with its long moralistic speeches, and its eventual death-bed of doomed lovers. Fielding parodies the classical modes by claiming

⁷ Fielding, Henry, The Covent Garden Tragedy, (London, 1732), p.12.

inspiration from the gods, but turns it around to write about 'Rakes and Whores'. Although many of the personal references have been lost, the general point of the play remains as clear as it was during its performance. By removing the scene to Covent Garden - familiar setting for whores in eighteenth-century London - and particularising the setting in a brothel, Fielding could pinpoint some of the 'evils' of the time, in terms of sexual antagonism with which the audience was inevitably cognizant. He could also include humour to 'soften up' his audience so that the impact of the message was more devastating. Fielding came under heavy criticism for such practices. The play centres around Punchbowl, the 'distressed mother' - actually the Madam of the brothel, Lovegirlo, a customer who has fallen for one of the whores, Kissinda. By way of contrast Stormanda and Bilkum (the customer) have a much more argumentative relationship. True love wins in the end, and the apparent death of Lovegirlo in a duel turns out to be a mere hole in the coat, much to the relief of Kissinda. The play's humour comes from the down-to-earth nature of the language and the characters; despite Fielding's assertion in the prologue that the faults of Kings would mean very little to the audience, he inserts parallels that remind the audience that both the bawd and the statesman have something in common: the need to make money. The latter has an easier time, surrounded by the aura of respectability; the opening speech of the 'mother' indicates the direction of the line of thought that Fielding is asking us to take:

Who'd be a Bawd in this degenerate Age!
Who'd for her Country unrewarded toil!
Not so the Statesman scrubs his plotful Head,
Not so the Lawyer shakes his unseed Tongue,
Not so the Doctor guides the doleful Quill. ⁸

⁸ Ibid, Act I, scene 1. The edition is confused in the correlation between its collation and pagination; this is reference B1r, paginated 1.

The vices of the town are, ironically, not so much the fact that bawds and whores flourish, but that they are experiencing economic difficulties when, after all, they are providing a service. There is no question that the Statesman, the Doctor or the Lawyer are any more respectable, for they too are providing a service, and one which has the same motive of self-interest. This is the point that Fielding is making in the prologue: he is providing 'examples' of the vices, but they cannot be taken simply in isolation. Corruption spreads right through society: 'Here the old Rake may view the crimes h'as known', and view them not only in real life, but as reflected on stage. Once again, the writing operates on two levels; by facing an aspect of society Fielding comes close to realism; by introducing static types, comic situations and twists of language, he is placing himself at several removes from realism. This means he can make a theatrical point about society without the unnecessary - to him - embellishments of character development.

Moving on from that, Fielding introduces the business aspect of whoring, and the dangers that are involved when emotional attachments take over from economics. Whores are professionals, and, like thieves, should be good at their jobs, able to distance themselves from the action; Kissinda finds herself in difficulties here after flattery by Lovegirlo:

Oh! my Lovegirlo, I must hear no more,
Thy Words are strongest Poison to my Soul;
I shall forget my Trade and learn to dote ...

Thou know'st too well a Lady of the Town
If she give way to Love must be undone. ⁹

She is very much aware of the need to adhere closely to the rules of her trade, and to avoid the individual relationships that would inevitably lead her into a situation that is less than professional.

The ironic use of the term 'Lady' reminds the audience of the references

⁹ Ibid, I, 9, C2r, paginated 11.

to high society in the prologue, and indeed Punchbowl's opening speech. The balance between involvement and professionalism seems to have been achieved by Stormanda in her relationship with Bilkum; it is less than romantic, and there are reminders throughout that such relationships have an economic basis, the possession of a whore similar to the possession of property:

Stormanda: Dost thou forget the Time,
When shiv'ring on a Winter icy Morn,
I found thy coatless Carcase at the Roundhouse,
Did I not then forget my proper Woes,
Did I not send for half a Pint of Gin,
To warm th' ungrateful Guts? ...
... Did I not picket a Pocket or a Watch,
A Pocket pick for thee?

Bilkum: Have I not for thee ... 10
Robbed the Stage-Coach?

Honourable sentiments indeed, and one which would surely have a large impact on a contemporary audience. Robbery, whores, possessions and customers are all associated in the play. To keep a mistress is to have a possession, and it must be kept properly, at all costs. Relationships are economic, whether they are the personal ones of the master and the mistress or the strictly business ones of the statesman and the lawyer. The epilogue sums this up neatly:

And virtuous Women, tho' they dread the Shame,
Let 'em but play secure, all love the Game.
For tho' some Prude her Lover long may vex,
Her coyneſs is put on, ſhe loves your Sex...

In ſhort, you (men) are the Buſineſs of our Lives,
To be a Miſtreſs kept, the Strumpet ſtrives,
And all the mo-deſt Virgins to be Wives.
For Prudes may cant of Virtues and of Vices,
But faith! we only differ in our Prices. 11

Fielding did not always make himself popular with the critics of the day, some of whom missed the ironic point that the plays possessed. By assuming a straightforward interpretation of the nature of the plays,

¹⁰ Ibid, II, 2, D1r, paginated 17.
¹¹ Ibid; Epilogue, p.13.

to the critics, it seemed that Fielding was recommending the very vices which he was in fact condemning. There should be 'poetic justice' in the words of one anonymous critic - criminals should not be allowed to get away scot free.¹² This particular critic - Publicus - argues that 'tis no wonder there are so many Whores and Pickpockets in the streets' since the 'obscenity' of their ways of life go unchecked. 'Prosaicus' in the same journal comments:

how was I surprized to see the most notorious Bawds, Pimps, and Whores, brought on the stage to please as polite an audience as ever I saw ...
Where is the humour of the Bawdy-House scene to any but a Rake?
Or that of ... Stormanda to any Women, but those of the Town? ¹³

Gay came under similar criticism, and it is a point of view into which it is easy to lapse. Because the whores are not punished does not necessarily imply that the author is recommending a life of crime and debauchery. Poetic justice may exist in certain theatrical conventions, but it does not mean that this is always the case in real life: Fielding knew this from observation and he was later to experience the same during the period of the magistracy. Fielding attempted to counter the criticism by 'appearing in the guise of 'Philalethes' in The Daily Post of July 31, 1732:

Why should any Person of Modesty be offended at seeing a Set of Rakes and Whores exposed and set in the most ridiculous Light? Sure a scene of a Bawdy-house may be shewn on a Stage without shocking the most modest Woman; such as I have seen sit out that Scene in the Humorous Lieutenant, which is quoted and commended by one of the finest Writers of the last Age. ¹⁴

He also mentions Moliere's Don Juan, which seems 'to recommend all Manner of Vices'; the operative word is 'seems': as in all irony, there is a deeper meaning beneath the surface, and it is this meaning that the various critics have missed. Fielding is simply exposing what

¹² Quoted by Paulson, Ronald and Lockwood, Thomas (eds.) Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage, (London, 1969), p. 2 - 3.

¹³ Ibid, p. 41 - 2.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 62.

happens beneath the surface of contemporary society in order to communicate a viewpoint about it and to awaken his audience to the real situation, through comedy. The plays have naturally been taken in isolation by the respective critics, but the twentieth-century reader has the benefit of viewing the work as a whole; the drama fits into the general scheme. This scheme was expressed by a contemporary of Fielding, Dr. John Hill, in 1751:

Every Man's Heart told him the Descriptions were just, while he was reading them, and every Incident had its particular Moral or Instruction couch'd under it, inspiring to something laudable, or cautioning against some Foible, which all Characters of a like Turn must have a Propensity to.¹⁵

This may be a very Augustan, moralistic way of viewing Fielding's achievements, and one which ignores the humour with which Fielding communicated his message, but it does express the essential nature of much of Fielding's writing in the use of the words 'inspire' and 'caution'. These were Fielding's aims throughout his whole life and work.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the plays which Publicus criticised for recommending 'obscenity' was the political satire The Tragedy of Tragedies; this may give us a clue to the man's insight if nothing else. Several of these political satires are worth examining as they come close to the themes of other plays, and in particular the theme of corruption in society. This time, corruption is viewed as it spreads itself through the court; no mortal can escape criticism through being respectable in appearance and Fielding extends his shafts of wit to all the characters in the play. The Tragedy of Tragedies is a rewritten version of the original play Tom Thumb. The two plays overlap at several points, and they may easily be considered as one piece. Certainly, in the later

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 283.

play, the political satire is made clearer, as Thumb is specifically referred to as 'the Great'; it is also probable that the battle between Thumb and Grizzle over love-matches at court is a burlesque of Walpole and Townshend's quarrel over the Treaty of Seville, with Glumdalca representing the Queen of Spain.¹⁶ Such minutiae of detail are interesting from a political viewpoint and help to explain Fielding's overall regard of the contemporary scene and the highly critical eye with which he surveyed it. Several of the speeches are worth examining for the light which they cast on contemporary society; comedy is the vehicle whereby the point gains its impact; the language of the King in particular seems designed to provoke comment on his own character and the possibility that it reflects a subconscious opinion about the current scene. The Queen cries for Tom Thumb, to which the King retorts:

Ha! what wrinkled Sorrow
Sits, like some Mother Demdike, on thy Brow?
Whence flow those Tears fast down thy blubber'd Cheeks,
Like a swoln Gutter, gushing through the Streets?

While on the marriage of Tom Thumb and Huncamunca he gives them the following blessing:

Long may ye live, and love, and propagate,
'Till the whole Land be peopled with Tom Thumbs.
So when the Cheshire Cheese a Maggot breeds,
Another and another still succeeds;
By thousands and ten thousands they encrease,
Till one continu'd Maggot fills the rotten Cheese. 17

The King's language flows naturally on from a consideration of personal circumstances to a general comparison. The comparisons are ones which reflect the nature of society: the gutter image and the rotten cheese are portraits of contemporary society as Fielding saw it, gradually

¹⁶ These, and other allusions are taken up by L.J. Morrissey in the Introduction to his edition of Tom Thumb and The Tragedy of Tragedies, (California, 1970).

¹⁷ Fielding, Henry, Tom Thumb, etc. Ibid, Act I, scene 3, p.25 and II, 8, p.35. The last speech also appears in The Tragedy of Tragedies, Ibid, II, 8, p.79, spoken by a Parson.

swelling out with degeneracy until the whole state is infested with the maggots. The speeches are not, then, as localised as they might at first appear, for they are not simply a part of the King's character. More accurately, Fielding is placing into the mouth of the King words which, he feels, produces an image in the audience's mind which correlates with his own view of social conditions. True, the plays comically relate the triumphs of Tom Thumb, but the more perspicacious of Fielding's audience would surely recognise Fielding's larger purpose. Even if this were not foremost in his mind - as it probably wasn't in the description of Moll in Amelia - the imagery of rottenness fits into the larger pattern that should by now be apparent.

If Tom Thumb represents Walpole, then he also represents power; power in Fielding is often synonymous with possession, and it is this possession that Fielding synthesizes into the relationship between Tom and the Queen; in both plays Tom gains power over the Queen, and they are rejected in both. In the first play, the Queen is downcast:

For what's a Woman, when her Virtue's gone?
A Coat without its Lace; Wig out of Buckle;
A Stocking with a Hole in't - I can't live
Without my Virtue, or without Tom Thumb.
Then let me weigh them in two equal Scales,
In this Scale put my Virtue, that, Tom Thumb,
Alas! Tom Thumb is heavier than my Virtue. ¹⁸

In the second play, Glumdalca, queen of the giants, falls for Tom, but she is rejected by him in favour of Huncamunca; her speech show more aggression:

Left scorn'd, and loath'd by such a Chit as this;
I feel the Storm that's rising in my Mind,
Tempests and Whirlwinds rise, and rowl and roar.
I'm all within a Hurricane, as if
The World's four Winds were pent within my Carcass.
Confusion, Horror, Murder, Guts and Death. ¹⁹

¹⁸ Tom Thumb, Ibid, I,6, p.28.

¹⁹ The Tragedy of Tragedies, Ibid, II, 8, p. 75-6.

The sorrow over the surrender of 'Virtue' on the one hand and the anger at the usage to which she has exposed herself on the other, combine to force an impression of power and politics upon the audience. To gain possession of a person - in whatever form - means to gain power over him; Tom's use of power for his personal ambition is, then, part of the cycle about which Fielding was writing in many of the works: possession implies surrender, it implies a usurpation of one set of values over another. If this second set of values proves corrupt, then the corruption spreads itself into all corners of the person, or state, that is possessed. If the values are not questioned, then the corruption goes unchecked and engulfs the innocent.

These may seem extravagant claims in view of the comparative lightness of the two plays, but it corresponds closely to Fielding's opinions as expressed in his work as a whole. Another play, The Grub Street Opera, makes the political and social points even more apparent. The characters in the play correspond directly to political personalities of the day. Sir Owen Apshinken is George II; Master Owen is his son, the Prince of Wales; Lady Apshinken is Queen Caroline; Robin, a servant, is Walpole, with Sweetissa as Molly Skerrit, Walpole's mistress and later his wife. The life in an upper-class household parallels the life at court; the high and the low squabble, cheat, and are corrupt: Owen's 'Air' in Act I expresses this:

The worn-out rake at pleasure rails,
And cries, 'tis all idle and fleeting;
At court, the man whose int'rest fails,
Cries, all is corruption and cheating:
 But would you know
 Whence both these flow,
 Tho' so much they pretend to abhor them? 20

²⁰ Fielding, Henry The Grub-Street Opera, ed. L.J. Morrissey, (Edinburgh, 1973), Act I, scene 4, p.33.

Fielding's purpose is once more twofold: the high and low in society act from common motives, while only those who lose actually complain about the performance. The cynical message is similar to the one which Robin delivers later in the same Act; Fielding's adherence to his belief in portraying the truth of the situation again comes through strongly:

For rich and poor
Are rogue and whore,
There's not one honest man in a score
Nor woman true in twenty-four. 21

If the message is true, then it is a shocking one and one which Fielding feels morally bound to expose as a reality of the society. In fact, much of this exposure is achieved through the character of Robin, but not before he has been subject to ridicule; the fun is on a level of language and attitude, and may be compared with the exaggerated language of Squeezum. Robin here attempts to woo Sweetissa:

Oh my Sweetissa! thou art straighter than the straightest tree -
sweeter than the sweetest flower - thy hand is white as milk, and
as warm; thy breast is as white as snow and as cold. - Thou art,
to sum thee up at once, an olio of perfections.
... thy face is brighter than the brightest silver.
Oh could I rub my silver to be as bright as thy dear face,
I were a butler indeed! 22

The hyperbolic language distances the audience from Robin and makes him a figure of fun. If this is so he is one who must also be taken seriously, since he has successfully robbed the family over a long period of time without discovery. Amusing though he may be in his personal relations, he is adept at acquiring a fortune by corrupt means. This is brought across in an argument that Robin has with a fellow servant, William; William threatens to expose Robin's practises:

Sirrah, I'll make you repent you ever quarrell'd with me - I will tell my master of two silver spoons you stole - I'll discover your tricks - your selling of glasses and pretending the frost broke them - making master brew more beer than he needed, and then giving it away to your own family; especially to feed the great swoln belly

21 Ibid, I, 9, p.41.

22 Ibid, I, 6, p.37-8.

of that fat gutted brother of yours. 23

This accusation may appear trivial, but not when the broader context is taken into account; the small world of the upper-class family and servants represents the state; Robin is feeding and profiteering not simply from one man but from the nation as a whole and by doing so endangers the livelihood of all those he robs. He is presented as an exploiter of the people to whom he is supposed to be loyal. Naturally, he has an excuse for his actions, but it is a cynical one, and expresses a belief only in the corrupt nature of mankind:

the heads of all professions thrive, while the others starve.

Air.

Great courtiers palaces contain
While small ones fear the gaol,
Great parsons riot in champagne,
Small parsons sot on ale;
Great whores in coaches gang
Smaller misses
For their kisses
Are in Bridewell bang'd;
While in vogue
Lives the great rogue,
Small rogues are by dozen hang'd. 24

The play does not content itself with just an attack upon Robin, for Robin has to learn that, despite his assumption that he is much cleverer than his master, he too is capable of cheating and outwitting Robin. Whereas Robin steals cutlery behind Sir Owen's back, the latter attempts to steal Sweetissa by setting the two at loggerheads. In fact, it turns out that all the characters in the play are in some way corrupt. All are willing to cut any of the others' throat if it suits his or her purpose. The dialogue between the four servants expresses this:

William ... I'll swear to your stealing the two silver spoons.

Sweetissa... I'll swear to your having robb'd one of the coaches of the curtains, to make yourself a waistcoat ...

Susan ... who stole a short silk apron from my lady, and a new flannel petticoat, which you have on at this moment.

23 Ibid, II, 4, p.55.

24 Ibid, II, 5, p.58.

John ... Who basted away dozens of butter more than she need,
that she may sell the grease? Who brings in false
bills of fare, and puts the forg'd articles in her
own pocket? ²⁵

So much for honour among thieves, which turns out to be on the level of blackmail. If all are corrupt then one cannot over-simplify by pretending that singling out Robin for punishment will result in a more honest state. The problem is rooted in society at large, with its intense desire for material possessions. So, as Puzzletext says, 'if Robin the butler hath cheated more than other people, I see no other reason for it, but because he hath more opportunity to cheat.' ²⁶ This is not the whole moral of the play, since the statement implies an acceptance of the status quo; rather, Fielding is attempting to draw the audience closer into the inner circle of society, so that no villain, criminal or corrupt person escapes the attention and treatment he deserves. Ironically, the play ends happily, as the couples are united:

Couples united,
Ever delighted,
May we ne'er disagree!
First we will wed,
Then we'll to bed;
What happy rogues are we! ²⁷

The situation will continue as it has done because it suits every party; allowing others' corruption to flourish ensures that one's own skin - and livelihood - are preserved. The maggots continue to feed on the cheese, and will do so until no more goodness can be drained out of it.

Fielding's patience must have been inexhaustible, as his fight against crime and corruption continued; no easy solutions were available to the problem, and Fielding must have been resigned to the fact that he could only scratch the surface of the dilemma. No radical alternative to

²⁵ Ibid, III, 14, p.80.

²⁶ Ibid, III, 14, p.81.

²⁷ Ibid, III, 15, p.85.

facing the predicament seemed to offer itself: it simply had to be repeated and patiently acted upon through literary and social endeavours. Something of the frustration of the times may be judged from the following poem by Gay; it comes close to pinpointing the frustration that men like Gay and Fielding felt as they surveyed the scene and found much wanting:

I grant corruption sways mankind,
That int'rest too perverts the mind,
That bribes have blinded common sense,
Foil'd reason, truth and eloquence;
I grant you too, our present crimes
Can equal those of former times.
Against plain facts shall I engage,
To vindicate our righteous age?
I know, that in a modern fist,
Bribes in full energy subsist:
Since then these arguments prevail,
And itching palms are still so frail,
Hence politicians, you suggest,
Should drive the nail that goes the best;
That it shows parts and penetration,
To play men with the right temptation. 28

Gay can only attempt similar things: he has to acknowledge that the age is corrupt - hence the 'grant' in the first line - and insists that his readers also pay heed to this; crimes are equal to anything that has occurred in the past, which recalls Fielding's concern that the age may be degenerating, until its erosion results in the crumbling of civilised order. It is a 'plain fact' that the age is vastly imperfect, and Gay faces that squarely, with a toughness of mind that is matched by Fielding. The solution may lie with the politicians, but Gay, like Fielding, knew that they were equally to blame. Robin is just as much the thief as Wild. The politician was also the Machiavel; Fielding brings the wheel full circle in the Dedication to the play The Historical Register For the Year 1736, a Dedication which is concerned with the corruption of high officers and the cynical manipulation of power:

28 Gay, John, Fables, 1738. Fable IX, lines 1 - 16, in Poetry and Prose, ed. Vinton A. Dearing, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1974), I, p.410-411.

the meanest, lowest, dirtiest fellow, if such a one should ever have the assurance, in future ages, to mimic power and browbeat his betters, will be as able as Machiavel himself could have been, to root out the liberties of the bravest people. 29

Power means corruption, and it destroys the innermost liberty of the people who are exploited. Fielding knew that 'such a one' existed - and, indeed, more than one. Wild browbeats his 'better', so does Amelia, so, apparently, did Walpole; in fact, the quotation sums up much of the management of people that took place at the time. Fielding's way of dealing with it was, in the words of the First Player in The Historical Register, 'to have a humming deal of satire, and I would repeat in every page that courtiers are cheats, and don't pay their debts, that lawyers are rogues, physicians blockheads, soldiers cowards ...' 30 Like Gay, he saw satire as an important weapon in the fight; the fight was against Wild, corrupt government and corrupt society that had as its only code 'Let them hiss. Let them hiss and grumble as much as they please, as long as we get their money.' 31 The final testimony to Fielding's success as a critic of the moral lassitude of the prominent figures of the day was the enforcement of the Licensing Act of 1737, which effectively curtailed the criticism of Walpole and his government. Literature and politics were never separate in this age, as each commented on the other and each attempted to influence the other. Finally, the government had the last word. Perhaps too harsh a view may be taken up from the knowledge that the theatres were closed; Siebert's words serve as a reminder that government, after all, must sometimes act:

Government must necessarily exert some control over the press as it must over all other types of institutions operating in society. All agree that it is the function of government to protect private

29 Fielding, Henry The Historical Register For the Year 1736 and Eurydice Hissed, ed. William W. Appleton, (London, 1968), p.8.

30 Ibid, Act I, p. 13.

31 Ibid, Act III, p.43.

reputation, to control to some unspecified degree the distribution of obscene matter, and to regulate to a still more vague degree publications which undermine the structure of organised society. 32

It is easy to disagree with much of this, as sympathy tends to ally Fielding with the protector of standards and government with the protection of its own interests, but no artist could really have been surprised at the action, as literature immersed itself in political controversy and persisted in its attempts to reveal the truth behind the apparent respectability. The works gain 'vigour and immediacy' because of this immersion. 33

(ii)

Gay described the early play The Mohocks as 'A Tragi-Comical Farce' and by doing so allies himself to the methods to which Fielding subscribed in his plays. By highlighting a particular social evil of the time through comedy, he was able to indicate the ridiculous nature of the main characters. It would be a spurious claim, however, to assert that the play is of great literary merit; critics have pointed out that the humour is forced, and the play is probably unactable - in fact, the play was not acted during the time it was written, nor indeed afterwards. 34

Despite these serious drawbacks, the play is worth considering since it is part of the documentation of the underworld of the time, and part of the author's attempt to reveal the contemptuous nature of it. 'Mohocks' were gangs of young men who roamed the streets at night to rob and attack women. Called 'Scourers' in Charles II's time, they had the reputation of being town rakes and bullies, but may have been young Whigs out to

32 Siebert, Frederick S. Freedom of the Press in England, 1476 - 1776, (Illinois, 1952), p. 9-10. Quoted by John Loftis, The Politics of Drama in Augustan England, (Oxford, 1963), p.95.

33 See Loftis, op. cit., chapter 1, passim.

34 See Irving, William Henry John Gay. Favorite of the Wits, (North Carolina, 1940), p.66.

bait unfortunate Tory nightwalkers.³⁵ Whatever the truth of the matter, they certainly enjoyed a large reputation; Gay gives the leader the mock title of 'Emperor' as a reminder of the proximity between the Machiavellian leader and the street brawler. The Mohocks boast over their activities:

ABADDON

Thus far our riots with success are crown'd,
Have found no stop, or what they found o'ercame;
In vain th' embattled Watch in deep array,
Against our rage oppose their lifted poles;
Through Poles we rush triumphant, watchman rolls
On watchman; while their lanthorns kick' aloft
Like blazing stars, illumine all the air.

Mol. Such acts as these have made our game immortal,
And wide through all Britannia's distant towns,
The name of Mohock ev'ry tongue employs;
While each fond mother at the sound grows pale
And trembles for her absent son - 36

The success of the riots are seen by them as 'crowning' their endeavours, an ironic comment on the nature of their psychology - although once again it is important to note that 'character development' is an irrelevant title to assume, as the characters exist in farce to make a point about contemporary society. While taking this into account, it should also be remembered that the Mohocks were, apparently, a serious threat, and rumours about their activities spread beyond the play. Gay writes in Trivia:

I pass their desp'rate Deeds and Mischiefs done,
Where from Snow-hill black sleepy Torrents run;
How Matrons, hoop'd within the Hogshead's Womb,
Were tumbled furious thence, the rolling Tomb
O'er the Stones thunders, bounds from Side to Side,
So Regulus to save his Country dy'd. 37

Whether or not the victim died after this adventure is not made clear, nor is it clear whether the incident took place at all, but the point is that the lawlessness by which the men existed posed a major threat to ordinary citizens. Gay and Fielding come close to one another in their

³⁵ See Armens, Sven M. John Gay. Social Critic, (London, 1954), p.240.
³⁶ Gay, John The Mohocks, scene I, in The Poetical, Dramatic and Miscellaneous Works of John Gay, 6 vols. (London, 1795), V, p. 75-6.
³⁷ Gay, Trivia, part III, lines 329-334, in Dearing (ed) Poetry and Prose, (op. cit.), I, p. 169-170.

concerns here, for both were moved to write about the latent undercurrent of violence and corruption and its eventual effect on the common man. The Mohocks revel in the fact that the law is incapable of dealing with them:

Great potentate! who leadst the Mohock squadrons
To nightly expeditions, whose dread nod
Gives law to those, lawless to all besides:
To thee I come - to serve benath thy banner.
Mischief has long lain dormant in my bosom
Like smother'd fire, which now shall blaze abroad
In glorious enterprize - 38

There is here a suggestion that the Emperor is a Satanic figure who leads the crew not just in nightly revelry but in a deliberate attempt to promote anarchy: in a song which appears later in the play, this is expressed once more; the Chorus runs as follows:

Then a Mohock, a Mohock I'll be,
No law shall restrain
Our libertine reign,
We'll riot, drink on, and be free. 39

The confusion between riot and freedom is one which will lead to a selfish operation of their own wills with complete neglect of the wishes of the ordinary people - their victims. Their high opinions of themselves is coupled with a contempt for the law, expressed in a parody of the magistrate's court in the play. The Mohocks disguise themselves as Constables and Watchmen by forcing the latter to change clothes with them, and proceed to 'try' various innocent people - including the Constables - with the Emperor as the magistrate. The scene is an attempt at a farcical reproduction of their anarchial activities as they show total contempt for the law processes, and by doing so threaten the framework of civilised society; they try Gentle:

Emp: Harkye, fellow, you seem very suspicious, you have a downcast, hanging look.

Gent: A languishing air, you mean Sir.

Emp: Give an account of yourself, fellow, whence come you? whither are you going? What is your business abroad at this time of

38 Mohocks (op. cit.), I, p.8.
39 Ibid, scene I, p.78.

night - take his sword from him there, lest he should have some evil design against the Queen's officer.

Gent: I am a gentleman, Sir.

Emp: A doubtful, a shuffling answer! we need no farther proof that he is a Mohock - commit him.

Gent: 'Tis a strange thing that the vulgar cannot distinguish the Gentleman ... Believe me, Sir, there is a certain Je ne scai quoi in my manner that shews my conversation to have lain altogether among the politer part of the world.

Emp: Lookye, Sir, your manners in talking Latin before her majesty's officer, shew you to be an ill-designing person. 40

Gentle seems to belong to the fop tradition, established in Restoration comedy, and this association tends to detract from the main idea behind the mock trial, which is contempt for the law. Gay had several masters to serve here, not least of which was the attempt to provoke laughter through the scene. By introducing Gentle, if he is to be seen as a fop, Gay is risking making him the figure of fun, and a figure who deserves his treatment; the fop of previous comedy was never really a figure who deserved sympathy. In this play he is supposed to be the innocent victim of the Mohocks; their only motive is the propagation of their own selfish ends. What Gay is really after is respect for the law in its attempts to curb lawless actions, but he is in danger of losing this end. The Constables and Watchmen also fall victims to the Mohocks, and they are brought before the magistracy charged with being Mohocks: they are afraid to speak up for themselves with the threat of future reprisals hanging over their heads. Again, this seems to detract from the main theme, as the scenes degenerate into stuttering pleas for help by the Constables with prods in the rear from their captors to remind them of their place. The 'main idea' is expressed by Cloudy, a Constable, before the farce against them commences:

O Magistrate, thou art, as I may say,
So great by night, as is Queen Anne by day,
And what greater power can any where be seen?
For you do represent the person of the Queen.

40 Ibid, scene II, p.86.

The greatest judge in England cannot do,
Or execute more greater things than you.
God save you, Master Constable, we pray,
Who are your honest Watch-men night and day. 41

Fielding would no doubt have approved of the sentiment and the attempt to promote the office of the magistrate to ^{the} level of respectability which it deserves.

In the face of the control which the Mohocks have over the ordinary citizen and the law, there seems little anyone can do to prevent their rise to power. By binding Gentle and the Constables the Mohocks bring their control out into the open and make it a physical reality. There is, however, one solution and it links with the purpose behind Fielding's and Gay's work; it is spoken by Joan Cloudy:

To be tongue-tied is fit for nothing but liars and swearers. I'll speak the truth, and shame the devil. Tho' a Constable be to keep peace and quietness, yet the greatest Constable in England shall not make me hold my tongue, when there is occasion for speaking. 42

The only way to combat the threats which are posed by the gang - and all criminals - is to 'speak out'. Fielding and Gay did so in a literary manner, through irony and satire, and through a persistent effort to make their audiences aware of the reality of the contemporary situation. The Mohocks may be a failure as far as staging is concerned, and it never approaches the peaks of vigorous language in which Fielding wrote, but it proves that even at an early stage, Gay's thoughts were on society and its problems.

Gay's persistent attacks on society and government found its most intense expression in The Beggar's Opera. Peachum is both Walpole and Wild; he persistently manipulates criminals and balance sheets for his own ends. One of the dangers in any discussion of the play, however, is an insistence on a close alliance between characters in the play and

41 Ibid, scene II, p. 79.

42 Ibid, scene II, p. 88.

those in real life. His aims can be seen in much more general terms, and coincide with those of Fielding. 'For petty rogues submit to fate/ That great ones may enjoy their state' is the basic message of the play, which 'scores its hits by way of a succession of political parallels, each established briefly and then obscured as different character relationships emerge'.⁴³ Basically, Peachum sees that his own self-interest must survive, reason and morality going by the board. He is in favour of a stagnant society, in which his own riches are increased, at the expense of trust, friendship or honour - all the attributes of which both Gay and Fielding would approve. He attempts to justify his actions - of seller of stolen goods and thief-taker - by rationalising and bringing all down to his level:

Through all the employments of life
Each neighbour abuses his brother;
Whore and rogue they call husband and wife;
All professions be-rogue one another.
The priest calls the lawyer a cheat;
The lawyer be-knaves the divine;
And the statesman, because he's so great,
Thinks his trade as honest as mine.

A lawyer is an honest employment; so is mine.
Like me too he acts in a double capacity,
both against rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting
that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by them.⁴⁴

Like Fielding, Gay recognised that without an adequate judiciary system such people as Peachum would flourish; but the Machiavellian reasoning that is behind the above statement had to be exposed as false before any headway could be made. True, the parallel between the politician and the thief is often made by Fielding and Gay, but for different reasons from the way in which Peachum handles the matter. Fielding and Gay try to open people's eyes to the abuses of the time, and by doing so hope to

⁴³ Loftis, op. cit., p. 94.

⁴⁴ Gay, John, The Beggar's Opera, ed. Edgar U. Roberts, (London, 1969), Act I, scene 1, p.6.

change the nature of society; Peachum's interests lie in convincing himself and others that the times are corrupt and that there is little point in trying to change since everyone is corrupt anyway. He completely opposes change, therefore, preferring the static society that allows him to promote his financial interests. In fact, Peachum sees everything and everybody in terms of their financial use to him. Polly's love for Macheath is condemned:

A handsome wench in our way of business is as profitable as at the bar of a Temple coffeehouse, who looks upon it as her livelihood to grant any liberty but one. You see I would indulge the girl as far as prudently we can - in anything but marriage! After that, my dear, how shall we be safe? Are we not then in her husband's power? For a husband hath the absolute power over all a wife's secrets but her own ... Married! If the wench does not know her own profit, sure she knows her own pleasure better than to make herself a property! My daughter to me should be, like a court lady to a minister of state, a key to the whole gang. ⁴⁵

These are significant words, and establish Peachum's view of the need to 'own' people in marriage as he owns people in his trade: people are for profit, they are 'property' - and his daughter is his property, not to be sold since it is useful to his business.

The Peachums reach their lowest ebb when they decide that the only solution is to have Macheath 'peached' - i.e. hand him over to the law with evidence that he is a thief, so that he will hang:

PEACHUM

But really, my dear, it grieves one's heart to take off a great man. When I consider his personal bravery, his fine stratagem, how much we have already got by him, and how much more we may get, methinks I can't find in my heart to have a hand in his death. I wish you could have made Polly undertake it.

MRS PEACHUM

But in a case of necessity - our own lives are in danger.

PEACHUM

Then, indeed, we must comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest. He shall be taken off. ⁴⁶

There is an example here of the dangers involved in adhering strictly to an interpretation of the play which makes each character represent

⁴⁵ Ibid, I, 4, p. 13-14.

⁴⁶ Ibid, I, 11, p. 26.

another in real life. Because Peachum refers to Macheath as the 'great man', it does not necessarily mean that Macheath is Walpole. Indeed, such an interpretation would lead one into sympathy with Walpole, which Gay wishes to avoid. What it does indicate is that Gay's methods are flexible: by showing the inhumanity of Peachum he is reminding the audience that political figures may be the same; by alluding to the politician/thief analogy he simply adds to the condemnation, and is not inviting a specific parallel as a means whereby people are judged in reality. General or specific, Gay's message sank home; Walpole summed him up as 'the fat clown', perhaps with an allusion to Gay's preference for farce.⁴⁷

By way of a contrast to Peachum, Gay introduces the vibrant, humane figure of Macheath. Although a thief, he shows compassion and subscribes to the belief that there should be honour among thieves. Macheath is an exemplar of honour and friendship, attributes which Fielding and Gay saw as essential to the preservation of human dignity. While some of his broad statements may be questioned, there is no doubt of the sincerity of them or of his actions:

I am sorry gentlemen, the road was so barren of money. When my friends are in difficulties, I am always glad that my fortune can be serviceable to them. (Gives them money.) You see, gentlemen, I am not a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing.

AIR XLIV, Lillibulero.

The modes of the court so common are grown,

That a true friend can hardly be met;

Friendship for interest is but a loan,

Which they let out for what they can get.

'Tis true, you find

Some friends so kind,

Who will give you good counsel themselves to defend.

In sorrowful ditty

They promise, they pity,

But shift you for money, from friend to friend.

⁴⁷ See Gaye, Phoebe Fenwick John Gay. His place in the Eighteenth-Century, (London, 1938), p. 328.

But we, gentlemen, have still honour enough to break through the corruptions of the world. And while I can serve you, you may command me. 48

He seems to accept that he is a victim of the corrupt society, although at the same time wishes to 'break through the corruptions' of society. He is, however, more of a gentleman than the supposedly 'superior' class which appears in the characters of Peachum and Lockit. Peachum earns his living by having Macheath as a puppet, and by professional deceit and hypocrisy.

There is no denying that we are expected to sympathise with Macheath: like many of Defoe's characters he is a victim of circumstances, corrupted and acted upon, rather than the perpetrator of the events. Not surprisingly, Gay came in for criticism here; an extract from a letter in Mist's Weekly Journal of March 30, 1728, pinpoints the moral question that many contemporaries felt the play raised:

How shocking, then, wou'd it have appeared to the venerable Sages of Antiquity, to have seen an Author bring upon the Stage, as a proper Subject of Laughter and Merriment, a Gang of Highwaymen and Pick-pockets, triumphing in their successful Villainies, and braving the ignominious Death they so justly deserve, with the undaunted Resolution of a Stoical Philosopher ... The chief End of Punishment is to prevent the Comission of the like Offences for the future ... But to place these Penalties in a ludicrous light, and to represent them as easie to be borne and contempible, is an effect blunting the edge of the Civil Sword, and opening the Flood-Gates of the most outrageous Enormities. 49

Gay's point, like Fielding's, is exposure; he is hardly recommending a life of crime but is portraying what can happen, even to men of honour, in a society that allows itself to be dominated by a cynical manipulator like Peachum. If there is no alternative to a life of crime then there is something wrong with the social values. Gay is concerned that his audience should go away and examine those social values, and question

48 The Beggar's Opera, op. cit., III, 4., p. 63.

49 Quoted in Schultz, William Eben Gay's 'Beggar's Opera'. Its Content, History and Influence, (New Haven, 1923), p.230.

just how far the corruption extends. If there is social injustice - and there evidently is - then it has to be rooted out. The aristocrats, if hypocritical villains, cannot be allowed to prosper if the exploitation of the ordinary citizen is to cease.

Gay followed The Beggar's Opera with a sequel, Polly, hoping that the success of the former play would guarantee large audiences for the latter. Polly and Macheath appear once more, but Gay changes the emphasis of the play: Macheath (alias Morano) is no longer a sympathetic figure, and he is portrayed as a harsh, uncompromising pirate. His answer to all problems is to plunder, rob and kill in order to provide for himself; anyone who comes in his way is despatched without any ceremony:

Morano: Look'e, lieutenant, the trussing up this prince, in my opinion, would strike a terror among the enemy. Besides, dead men can do no mischief. Let a gibbet be set up, and swing him off between the armies before the onset. ⁵⁰

Gay also avoids a repetition of the 'honour among thieves' idea by portraying Morano's gang as a bunch of selfish squabblers, intent on lining their own pockets at the expense of honour and friendship. Having dispensed with these difficulties, Gay is able to persevere with the main theme of the play, the proximity of the values of 'high' and 'low' life, and the corruption in contemporary society. Polly, disguised as a man, attempts to join Morano's gang:

Morano: What are you, friend?

Polly: A young fellow, who hath been robb'd by the world; and I came on purpose to join you, to rob the world by way of retaliation. An open war with the whole world is brave and honourable. I hate the clandestine pilfering war that is practised among friends and neighbours in civil societies. I would serve, sir.

AIR XXXIV

The world is always jarring;
This is pursuing
T'other man's ruin,
Friends with friends are warring,

⁵⁰ Gay, John, Polly, Act II in Plays etc., op. cit., IV, p. 184.

In a false cowardly way ...

Each, returning hate,
Wounds and robs his friends.
In civil life,
Even man and wife
Squabble for selfish ends. 51

The terms 'friendship' and 'civil' have very little genuine meaning in the contemporary situation, and loyalty means nothing. Two of Morano's gang, Laquerre and Capstan, are entrusted with the care of their prisoner, Cawwawkee, a West Indian prince. Polly bribes them to set him free:

Laquerre: If we conquer'd, and the booty were to be divided among the crews, what would it amount to? Perhaps this way we might get more than would come to our shares.

Capstan: Then too, I always lik'd a place at court. I have a genius to get, keep in, and make the most of an employment.

Laquerre: You will consider, prince, our own politicians would have rewarded such meritorious services. 52

The parallel between the actions of the pirates and those of the politicians is clear, as each side sells its services to the highest bidder. Both groups of robbers refuse to remain loyal to the side that is employing them.

Gay introduces a contrast, in the characters of the West Indian king, Pohetohee, and his son, Cawwawkee. Both are contemptuous of the actions and general way of life of the 'Europeans' :

Caw: ... you are an European. Are you fools? Do you believe me another? Sure speech can be of no use among you.

Polly: There are constitutions that can resist a pestilence.

Caw: But such vice must be inherent in such constitutions. You are asham'd of your hearts, you can lie. How can you bear to look into yourselves? 53

The vocabulary is significant since once again, society is viewed as containing a 'pestilence' which a few can resist but to which most succumb. There is none of the openness of heart which both Fielding and Gay advocated; deceit and hypocrisy is a normal way of life among

51 Ibid, Act II, p. 179-180.

52 Ibid, p. 193-4.

53 Ibid, p. 191.

the 'Europeans'.

Having established his theme, Gay presses home the point at every opportunity; Morano attempts to do a deal with Pohetohee:

Poh: Shall robbers and plunderers prescribe rules to right and equity? Insolent madman! Composition with knaves is base and ignominious. Tremble at the sword of justice, rapacious brute. 54

As Pohetohee says later, after he has won his battle and put Morano to death, 'Tis my duty, as a king, to cherish and protect virtue,' a point reiterated by Fielding, and acknowledged by Gay to be of the highest importance. Armens sums up the message:

Indicative of Gay's attitude toward justice and the divergent moral codes of town and country is the caustic irony implied in Pohetohee's denunciation of Morano. In London and at Court (with special innuendoes cast at Walpole and political life), robbers and plunderers do prescribe the rules. The inference is that those rapacious brutes who nourish themselves on money, swollen as they are with the fat of power and the sweat of lechery, have buried the sword of justice in Fleet Street - and human dignity with it. 55

Even though goodness and virtue win through by the end of the play, the defeat of Morano is only the beginning of the attempt to clean up society. Ironically, the action takes place away from London, and so the metropolis is unaffected by the defeat. The exposition remains clear; as long as political and social life remain polluted, and as long as that pollution remains tolerated, then the only outcome will be a severance of human dignity from the normal intercourses of daily life. By making these points, the dramas of Fielding and Gay complement each other. The overall concern is for exposition, protection and preservation.

54 Ibid, Act III, p.201.

55 Armens, op. cit., p.19.

CONCLUSION

Defoe, Fielding and Gay give their audiences an insight into the more unsavoury aspects of eighteenth-century life. By choosing low life as their primary subject, they drew attention to the increasing number of social problems. By examining thievery and roguery in a new light, they were able to satirize the apparently respectable elements in their society, elements which were supposed to uphold moral standards, but persistently pillaged and raped the ordinary person. The distinction between high society and low life is blurred in the writings of all three, so that Defoe's pirates become gentlemen, Fielding and Gay's gentlemen become dishonest manipulators. By the end of the day, very little distinction can be seen between the two. If this is so, then the writers have achieved their aim, which was to expose the way in which standards in society were deteriorating.

Whitehead, a contemporary poet, summed up the position in his poem Manners, A Satire, written in 1738:

Well - of all the plagues which make mankind a sport,
Guard me, ye Heav'ns! from that worst plague - a court.
'Midst the mad mansions of Moorfields, I'd be
A straw-crown'd monarch, in mock majesty,
Rather than sovereign rule Britannia's fate,
Curs'd with the follies and the farce of state.
Rather in Newgate Walls, O! let me dwell,
A doleful tenant of the darkling cell,
Than swell, in palaces, the mighty store
Of fortune's fools and parasites of power.
Than crown, ye gods! be any state my doom,
Or any dungeon, but - a drawing room. ¹

Satirists are well known for their desire to strip away the veneer and to concentrate on the interior; this is why the satirists and the moralists may often be spoken about in the same breath. By being aware also of the literary nature in which a writer exposes the facts, through style and wit,

¹ Whitehead, P. Manners, A Satire, in The Works of the English Poets, (London, 1810), vol. XVI, p.210.

a comprehensive view of the methods aims, and a success of them may be obtained.

An Augustan writer's duty was not simply to expose what he saw as contemptible, but to relate that to individual circumstances in an attempt to be fair. 'Fairness' is the sort of word that may be applied, since it involves an examination of events to convey the truth; this implies that judgement of persons and events is very necessary, for until the real nature of an individual's lot and circumstances is assessed, no valid general view of what is wrong with society may be reached. The examination of individual circumstances that may be found in the pages of Defoe helps the reader to arrive at a broader view than a single condemnation of the criminal type. It is not a case of 'tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner'; Defoe's fascination with the activities of criminals and the workings of their minds never prevents him from making it clear that atonement is a vital element in the development of his characters. Fielding's intense work as a magistrate offered more practical alternatives, as he immersed himself in attempting to correct the vices that he had seen and written about previously.

All three were also aware of the difficulties of city life, for 'in the town, with its atmosphere of repression and tension, diseases of the mind break out in mass epidemics just like the London plagues of the seventeenth-century.'² The vocabulary is significant in that the repressed - and oppressed - nature of the inhabitants of the town could generate only disease; Fielding was very much aware of this, and pointed out that the disease was in the mind as well as an integral part of the physical surroundings.

² Armens, op. cit., p.82.

That the message of the writers hit its mark may be gathered from the popularity and success of such works as The Beggar's Opera. The three principal writers under discussion were all intensely aware of their powers and of the power of the written word to communicate a message. By choosing a familiar topic of the day, a topic that touched everyone and upon all classes of society, they achieved a notoriety that was matched only by that of their subjects. From Defoe's pamphlets to Fielding's expression of high-minded principles with regard to the law, the subject was the same. It engaged the attention, too, of all readers - from the high to the low - and reflected directly contemporary events.

Perhaps the last word should be left with another eighteenth-century moralist, Samuel Johnson. In the Rambler of Saturday, March 31, 1750, he writes:

There have been men indeed splendidly wicked, whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and whom scarce any villainy made perfectly detestable, because they never could be wholly divested of their excellencies; but such have been in all ages the great corrupters of the world, and their names to be no more preserved than the art of murdering without pain. ³

All must come under scrutiny: corrupters of the world must be rooted out while the innocent are allowed to prosper.

³ Quoted in Williams, Ion, (ed.), Novel and Romance, 1700 - 1800. A Documentary Record, (London, 1970), p.145.

APPENDIX: THE ATTACKS ON WALPOLE.

Robin in The Grub Street Opera is presented as a conniving robber, but the attack on him is mild compared with the vituperative nature of many of the attacks on Walpole's character. Consider the following:

(Walpole has) a malicious, vindictive, sanguinary Nature; a saucy, insulting, over-bearing imperious Behaviour in Prosperity; a poor, low, wretched, mean, abject Spirit in Adversity; of a perfidious, impious, atheistical Principle; remarkably addicted to Lying; an ignorant, forward, positive, inexperienced, headstrong, blundering Driver, despised, contemn'd, and hated by all his Master's faithful Servants. ¹

Most prose is a little more subtle in its approach, preferring to allude to Walpole as the 'great man', as in this passage from Fielding's A Journey from This World to the Next:

I cannot give my reader a more adequate idea of this scene than by comparing it to an English mob conducting a pickpocket to the water... Some laughed, some hissed, some squawled, some groaned, some bawled, some spat at him, some threw dirt at him ... to our great surprize, we were informed that it was a king: we were likewise told that this manner of behaviour was usual among the spirits to those who drew the lots of emperors, kings, and other great men, not from envy or anger, but more derision and contempt of earthly grandeur. ²

The parallel between, Walpole, Wild, and the thief was well-known, as was the knowledge that Walpole's main interest in life was acquiring a great personal fortune, a task he achieved whilst in the role of Paymaster General; the 'earthly grandeur' is only superficial, as he is no better than the pickpocket; robbing the nation and robbing an individual are the same. ³

Two interesting pamphlets attacking Walpole appeared in 1740, attributed to James Miller. The first is a poem which purports to be by Pope, who is the protector of civilised society fighting the corruption of Walpole:

¹ Robin's Panegyrick: or, The Norfolk Miscellany, 1731. Quoted in Roberts's edition of The Grub-Street Opera, (op. cit.), Introduction, p. xix.

² Op. cit., p. 25-6.

³ See Dickinson, H.T. Walpole and the Whig Supremacy, (London, 1973), pp. 34 - 47.

That thus the Fountain of Britannia's Health
Source of her Grandeur, Liberty, and Wealth,
Polluted by your all-corrupting Hand,
With rank Infection deluges the Land;
Parent at once of Want and Luxury,
Of open Rapine and dark Treachery;
The knaves Elixir, and the Just Man's Bane,
Food to the Locust, Mildew to the Swain;
Pouring on those who once in Goshen dwelt;
More deadly Plagues than Aegypt ever felt. 4

A familiar accusation: Walpole is a threat to civilised standards,
and works against the ordinary citizen.

The pamphlet was followed by a reply, in which the Great Man attempted
a defence, but by doing so lands himself in deeper trouble. The pamphlet
is entitled The Great Man's Answer to Are these Things So? and takes the
form of a dialogue between E.M. (Pope) and G.M. (Walpole) :

E.M. If none Thy baleful Influence will withstand,
Go forth, Corruption, Lord it o'er the Land;
If they are thine for better and for worse,
On Them and on their Children light the Curse.

G.M. Corruption, Sir! - pray use a milder Term;
'Tis only a Memento to be firm;
The times are greatly alter'd - Years ago,
A Man would blush the World his Price should know:
Scruple to own his Voice was to be bought;
And meanly minded what the Million thought;
Our Age more Prudent, and Sincere is grown,
The Hire they wisely take, they bravely own;
Laugh at the Fool, who let's his Conscience stand,
To barr his Passage to the promis'd Land;
Or, sway'd by Prejudice, or puny Pride,
Thinks Right and Int'rest of a different Side. 5

As a last resort, G.M. attempts to bribe E.M. to keep quiet:

G.M. Furies! My thousand Bank, Sir, E.M. Thus I Tear,
Go, blend Corruption, with corrupting Air.

G.M. Amazing Frenzie! Well, if this won't do,
What think you of a Pension? E.M. As of You.

G.M. A Place - E.M. Be gone. G.M. A Title - E.M. is a Lie
When ill conferred. G.M. A Ribband. E.M. I defie. 6

4 Miller, James, Are these Things So?, (London, 1740). Reprinted by
Augustan Reprint Society, no.153, (Los Angeles, 1972), p.5.

5 Miller, James, The Great Man's Answer to Are these Things So?
(London, 1740). Augustan Reprint Society, (Los Angeles, 1972), p.8.

6 Ibid, p.13.

The honest citizen defies the attempt to corrupt his honesty, and offers some hope for the preservation of civilised standards in the face of the cynical materialism of Walpole.

Fielding poeticises Walpole's avowed greed in the Vernoniad; he here describes the dome of Mammon (Walpole) :

Here horror reigns, still miserably great
In solemn melancholy pomp of state,
A huge dark lantern hung up in his hall,
And heaps of ill-got pictures hid the wall. ⁷

The 'pomp of state' cannot hide the fact that Walpole is a tasteless ('heaps') collector of possessions. People, pictures, profit are the same to him and symbolize power.

Gay also writes of Walpole's acquisition of money in the Blueskin Ballad:

Some cheat in the Customs, some rob the Excise,
But he who robs both is esteemed most wise;
Church-Wardens, too prudent to steal from the Altar;
But now to get Gold
They may be more bold,
And rob on the High way since Jonathan's cold.

Some, by publick Revenues, which pass'd through their Hands,
Have purchas'd clean Houses, and bought dirty hands,
Some to steal from a Charity think it no Sin,
Which, at home (says the Proverb) does always begin. ⁸

To give Walpole his due, he was generally thick-skinned enough to take most of the attacks, and he was able to survive despite them. He was also able to come back at his critics occasionally. One anecdote tells of his attendance at a performance of The Beggar's Opera, and the Air 'When you censure the age':

Sir Robert, observing the pointed manner in which the audience applied the last line to him, ('Each cries "That was leveled at me"'), parried the thrust by encoring it with his single voice;

⁷ Fielding, Henry, The Vernoniad, in Miscellanies, ed. W.E. Henley, 3 vols., (London, 1903), II, p. 40-41.

⁸ Poetry and Prose, (op. cit.), I, p.289.

and thus not only blunted the poetical shaft, but gained a general huzza from the audience.⁹

The job of prime minister can never be an easy one; Walpole's task - political and personal - was made even more difficult by the watchdogs surrounding him.

⁹ Irving, op. cit., p.248. Schultz, op. cit., p. 186.

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