

SOCIAL CONTEXT IN *MOLL FLANDERS*,
PAMELA, AND *TOM JONES*

by NORA A. DE ALLENDE

Every social community possesses a set of beliefs, ideals, moral principles, which constitute the foundations upon which that community rests. The writer may not agree with them, he may try to modify or change them, but he is none the less tied to them. Every literary work, no matter how original and independent its author may be, in some way or other reflects the national soul and the spirit of the age.

When Duranty, summing up the purpose of realism, asked for *the exact, complete and sincere reproduction of the social milieu in which we live*¹, he also expressed the aims of eighteenth-century novelists. Just as their literary predecessors had tried to depict the general, the universal in human nature, these writers turned to the particular and the individual. The first English novels do not deal with the exemplary fate of representative, almost depersonalized heroes, but with the common, even trite, lives of men and women. This interest in the particular also explains the attention the novelist pays to the background that surrounds his characters. Individuals, according to Locke, are defined through the categories of time and place. While in the previous literary forms time and setting were given little or no importance, they occupy a relevant place in the

¹ Quoted by Harry Levin in "What is Realism?". In *Comparative Literature*. Vol. III, Summer, 1951, No 3.

novel. Abundance of circumstantial details is a characteristic common to the first English novelists.

The novel, Lionel Trilling tells us, is a *perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul*². By *manners*, he understands the *buzz of implication* that accompanies any work of art, the *whole evanescent context* without which our understanding of it is not complete. In the case of the novel, it would be supplied by the context the writer, more or less deliberately, offers us along with the adventures of his heroes and heroines. Context in a novel is given through direct presentation of —or comment upon— the manners, conventions, ideas, institutions of the time, or —more frequently— by the report of little incidents, meaningful pieces of conversation, gestures, details of clothing or decoration, etc., which the author, I would say quite unconsciously, includes in his work. Thus in *Moll Flanders*, *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*, Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, present a view of life in eighteenth-century England, as they tell us about their characters' experiences and doings.

To report in a novel does not merely consist in a simple presentation of facts; it always reveals something more than the bare facts; it tries to discover the causes of social contradictions and usually hints at the possible solutions. Thus the novelist, though we must not identify him with a social reformer, in the strict sense of these terms, cannot but express his own ideas and feelings about the society around him. More often than not, ridicule is his favourite weapon to fight against what he considers the follies of mankind. Humour and irony, then, are frequent devices the novelist uses to expose social foibles, but when he is too intent in his zeal to correct society, his ironical, detached attitude, may degenerate into satire. This, fortunately, was not the case with the three novelists we are going to deal with, and I say fortunately because the satirist, too much concerned with his reforming purpose, is prone to give us a

² TRILLING, L.: "Manners, Morals and the Novel". In *Discussions of the Novel*. Sale, Roger, ed. Boston, D. C. Heath & Co., 1960, p. 58.

distorted picture of society, which, no matter how interesting it may be from other points of view, is not suited to our purpose of reconstructing the life of English society in the eighteenth century.

The novel then, besides presenting the life and fate of individuals, is a vehicle for social documentation; through a careful reading of *Moll Flanders*, *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*, we can discover the beliefs, principles and ideas that informed eighteenth-century English culture, and the peculiar attitude Defoe, Richardson and Fielding adopted towards it³.

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I. THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVELIST AND REALITY

The English novel was born as a reaction against the extravagance of romances, following the example set up by the picaresque novels, and, above all, by Cervantes, the acknowledged model of eighteenth century English novelists. Thus, in the Preface to *Roderick Random*, Smollet stated that:

“...when the minds of men were debauched, by the imposition of priestcraft, to the most absurd pitch of credulity, the authors of romances arose, and losing sight of probability, filled their performances with the most monstrous hyperboles.”

Then Cervantes, he continued,

“...by an inimitable piece of ridicule, reformed the taste of mankind, representing chivalry in the right point of view, and converting romance to purposes far more useful and entertaining, by making it assume the sock, and point out the follies of ordinary life.”⁴

³ After this work had been finished, I came to know that Routledge & Kegan had published a book by Diana Spearman, *The Novel and Society*, which, it seems, might have points in common with the present work. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get it yet.

⁴ SMOLLET, TOBIAS: *Roderick Random*. London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1951. (Everyman's Library, 790), p. 4.

In this way Smollet voiced the common aims of the novelists of the time, and, as we are going to see in the present work, those aims answered to the characteristic features of eighteenth century cultural and social background.

All the English novelist of this period, likewise repudiating the absurdity of the romances, asserted their intention to bring fiction into the boundaries of reality. From the very first words of the Preface to *Moll Flanders*, Defoe claims the historical truth of his story, as opposed to the unreality of the romances: *The world is so taken up of late with novels and romances, that it will be hard for a private history to be taken for genuine . . .*⁵ He further stresses his demand for verisimilitude when he apologizes for not having given any accounts of Moll's final destiny, for, being the book an autobiography, *nobody can write their own life to the full end of it unless they can write it after they are dead* (p. xii). Consistent with his purpose of creating a convincing likeness of reality, and, of course, closely related to his early years of journalism and pamphleteering, is Defoe's passion for details, which he shared with Richardson, though this tendency was differently expressed in both writers. Defoe's detailed descriptions of Moll's adventures, his careful enumeration of merchandises, purloined objects, etc., respond to his desire to give solidity to his fiction, and, as Ian Watt has acutely observed, they are indebted to Locke's empirical philosophy, the emphasis being placed on the primary qualities of objects, especially on number⁶. Thus Moll's world is the realm of tangible and countable things. A good example is afforded by the midwife's account of expenses handed in to Moll after her Lancashire marriage (cf. p. 176).

In the postscript to *Clarissa*, Richardson observed that on writing his novel, *there was frequently a necessity to be very circumstantial and minute, in order to preserve and maintain that air of probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a story designed to represent*

⁵ DEFOE, DANIEL: *Moll Flanders*. New York, Pocket Books, Inc., 1952, p. VII. Subsequent quotations of this work will correspond to the same edition.

⁶ Cf. WATT, IAN: *The Rise of the Novel*. London, Penguin Books, 1966, p. 106.

*real life*⁷. In accordance with this avowed purpose of representing every day life, is his adoption of the letter form that, through the first-person point of view, reduces the distance between the reader and the narrated events, which, being reported almost as they occur, acquire greater freshness and plausibility.

In *Pamela*, details served the purpose of creating an atmosphere of domestic reality which must have charmed its feminine readers. Pamela rejoices in the description of her country attire in a passage which, for all its fastidiousness, must have made the delights of the petticoated reading public:

“...I dressed myself in my new garb, and put on my round-eared ordinary cap, but with a green knot, my home-spun gown and petticoat, and plain leather shoes, but yet they are what they call Spanish leather; and my ordinary hose, ordinary I mean to what I have been lately used to, though I should think good yarn may do very well for every day, when I come home. A plain muslin tucker I put on, and my black silk necklace, instead of the French necklace my lady gave me; and put the ear-rings out of my ears.”⁸

Richardson's opinion about the pernicious influence of the romances is very clearly stated in *Pamela*. *Why, Goodman Andrews, I think thou hast read romances as well as thy daughter; thy head is turned with them* (I, p. 80), says Mr. B. to Pamela's father, expressing a widely spread notion of the absurdity of the world of the romances.

Fielding did not fail to comply with this convention of eighteenth-century English novelists. He thus differentiates his works from the romances: *...truth distinguishes our writings from those idle romances which are filled with monsters, the productions, not of nature but of distempered brains*⁹. He also includes verisimilitude

⁷ Quoted in Davis, Robert Gorham: “The Sense of the Real in English Fiction”. In *Comparative Literature*, vol. III, Summer, 1951, No 3, p. 200.

⁸ RICHARDSON, SAMUEL: *Pamela*. London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1955. (Everyman's Library, 684), (2 vol.). Vol. I, p. 41. Subsequent quotations of this work will correspond to the same edition.

⁹ FIELDING, Henry: *Tom Jones*. London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1964. (Everyman's Library, 1355), (2 vol.). Book IV, ch. i. Subsequent quotations of this work will correspond to this same edition.

among the laws a writer must abide by: ... *I think it may very reasonably be required of every writer, that he keeps within the bounds of possibility; and still remembers that what it is not possible for man to perform, it is scarce possible for man to believe he did perform* (Book VIII, ch. i).

But Fielding's primary interest was not in circumstantial details. He not only wanted to differentiate his writings from the fantastic romances but also from the factuality of history:

"For though every good author will confine himself within the bounds of probability, it is by no means necessary that his characters, or his incidents, should be trite, common, or vulgar; such as happen in every street, or in every house, or which may be met with in the home articles of a newspaper." (Book VIII, ch. i)

More than his two predecessors, Fielding was aware that he was *the founder of a new province of writing... at liberty to make what laws [he pleased] therein* (Book II, ch. i). Nevertheless, even caring little for minute descriptions, he never broke the rules of probability, and insisted upon the value of observation and first-hand experience, when describing society: *A true knowledge of the world is gained only by conversation, and the manners of every rank must be seen in order to be known* (Book XIV, ch. i).

This concern for verisimilitude and the interest for particularized descriptions which characterized eighteenth-century novelists, answered the demands of their public. The Augustan Age, says Prof. A. R. Humphreys, is the first age in which ordinary man becomes the norm¹⁰. This ordinary man was no ideal abstraction but the embodiment of representative features of the people of the time. Normality, every day life, became the center of interest. The writers complied with the taste of their public producing a literature in which the record of social manners was of paramount importance. This interest in social behaviour may somewhat be ascribed to the desire for peace and unity, which was the direct consequence of

¹⁰ HUMPHREYS, A. R.: "The Social Setting". In *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*. Vol. 4, London, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 15-48

the social and political disturbances that had troubled England during the seventeenth century. The cruel experience of the Civil War and of the religious persecutions, led the English people to seek harmony and unity through what was common to all of them: social manners as expression of a national culture.

II. THE BOURGEOIS: A DOMINANT FIGURE IN THE LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD

The pre-eminence of ordinary man in literature is also the effect of the bourgeois's rise to power. In eighteenth-century England, political and economical supremacy was steadily drifting into the hands of the middle class. Social distinctions were mainly based on wealth and, as a result, classes were constantly shifting. Thus there was a tendency towards social leveling, not in the sense it has acquired in modern times, but denoting the wane of such aristocratic tenets as noble birth and breeding. The only persistent difference was the one between the rich and the poor.

The middle class gradually assumed the cultural leadership which up to then had been the privilege of the nobility. The literary taste was remodelled and it was only natural that the bourgeois would want to see himself represented in the literature of the time. Many of the characters in the novels we are now considering belong to the middle class; and, what is more significant, the point of view in the three of them is undoubtedly that of the bourgeois. The ideas, opinions, feelings expressed, are strongly representative, though it does not necessarily follow that they are identical in all the novels. There are divergences that answer to each author's peculiar background and personality. Nevertheless, the three novels are permeated with the self-assured, smug bourgeois spirit, and the picture of English life they offer us, is the image framed by the bourgeois, cheerfully watching himself and his contemporaries.

As the eighteenth century was an age of economic progress, the merchant became a figure of paramount importance both in society and in literature. *Moll Flanders* is profusely peopled with all sort of

traders; Moll herself eventually becomes a member of that class to which she really belongs, if not by birth, certainly by her choice and calling.

Pamela deals with country life and the characters, with very few exceptions, are land owners and servants to them, clergymen or other members of rural society, but the heroine's attitude towards life, her shrewdness and cautious conduct, answer to the merchant's code of behaviour: to risk something with a view to obtain a large profit.

The merchant has little room in the world of *Tom Jones*, except for a few incidental remarks about his greediness. A sample of them is the comment on some travellers' incapacity to appreciate the beauty of the English countryside (cf. Book XI, ch. ix).

The mercantilistic conception of self-interest as the mainspring of human activity also found its expression in the writings of the period. Money is a recurrent topic both in *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*. The central problem in *Tom Jones* is the outcome of Squire Western's decision to marry her daughter with the purpose of enlarging his state:

"He did indeed consider a parity of fortune and circumstances to be physically as necessary an ingredient in marriage, as differences of sexes, or any other essential; and had no more apprehension of his daughter's falling in love with a poor man, than with any animal of a different species." (Book VI, ch. ix)

Even virtuous Pamela is tainted with a preoccupation for material security and she surprises us with a very practical turn we did not expect of her—at least not so openly stated—when she declares that, as she can not wear in the country the clothes she inherited from her deceased lady, she *will turn them into money* (I, p. 74).

Money is certainly the hub of *Moll Flanders*. All throughout her life, Moll's main and almost only concern is to increase her *stock*, and acquire social status. From her early childhood she wants to become a *gentlewoman* who *does not go to service nor do housework* (p. 8). If she commits crimes it is only as a means to better her condition. It is true she claims to be in love with the elder son of the

house where she has been sent from the parish institution, but we can hardly give any credit to her assertions, specially when she lets us know how moved she is when he offers her some gold: *My colour came and went, at the sight of the purse* (p. 25). Furthermore, when she regrets her weakness, she does not complain of the loss of her virtue but she ruefully laments:

“... if I had known his thoughts, and how hard he thought I would be to be gained, I might have made my own terms with him; and if I had not capitulated for an immediate marriage, I might for a maintenance till marriage, and might have had what I would.” (p. 22)

She is likewise disappointed when she discovers the young man has no intention to marry her, and so her expectations of rising in the social scale, fall to pieces; but when he offers her 500 £, she is easily prevailed upon to marry the younger brother.

We must not be too hard on Moll's failure to abide by our moral standards. The age of Walpole, J. H. Plumb tells us, *was rough, coarse, brutal; a world for the muscular and the aggressive and the cunning*¹¹. In this world of hard facts the value of things and of persons, depended on the wealth and status they stood for; gold was the best accomplishment a person could desire. The fate of beautiful women who had no money, was quite uncertain. Defoe himself lets us know about it in the sister's speech, significantly using the terminology of trade:

“...the market is against our sex just now; and if a young woman have beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, and all these to an extreme, yet if she have no money, she's nobody, she had as good want them all for nothing but money now recommends a woman...” (p. 16)

Moll's debasement is then the result of her never ending struggle for economic security. Money was essential for survival and she had but one thing to sell. If she becomes a prostitute it is only to

¹¹ PLUMB, J H.: “England in the Eighteenth Century”. *The Pelican History of England*. London, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 33.

get a profit; she is terrified —and her fear is well grounded— to grow old and poor. She never sins out of lust, but when she is driven by necessity. She excuses her behaviour telling the readers: *... poverty... hardened my heart, and my own necessities made me regardless of anything* (p. 209).

In his *Essay upon Projects* Defoe expands the idea that man's means of survival are usually fraud, theft or honest invention. The three devices are employed by Moll, namely, when she cajoles the bank clerk into marriage, when she later becomes a pick-pocket, and lastly, when she skillfully manages to increase her stock in the colonies.

Fielding agrees with Defoe in considering necessity as the mother to many of man's wicked actions. Thus Black George, *being in want of bread, either to fill his own mouth or those of his family* (Book III, ch. x), does not hesitate to risk his neck poaching in Mr. Western's property. The highwayman that attempts to rob Tom near London, similarly pleads that he *has been driven by distress to this* (Book XII, ch. xiv).

Richardson contributes to the same notion when he makes Pamela write that:

"...among the poor wretches who are sunk so low as the town-women are, there are very few of birth or education; but such, principally, as have had their necessities or their ignorance taken advantage of by base men..." (II, p. 434)

The ghost of poverty haunts the merchant's mind. Thus bankruptcy and debt imprisonment, not unfamiliar to Defoe, and the most dreaded events in the life of tradesmen, are also depicted in *Moll Flanders*. Moll's second husband, that *amphibious creature*, the gentleman-tradesman —a typical figure in eighteenth-century England—, flees from his creditors leaving Moll once more alone to strive for survival.

III. THE NOVELISTS' VIEW OF THE TOILING CLASS

Moll's abhorrence of poverty is partly explained by the inhuman attitude of the society of her time towards the poorer classes. Mandeville, giving voice to a current opinion of the ruling class, wrote that *to make the Society happy and People easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite that great Numbers of them should be kept Ignorant as well as Poor*¹².

Defoe's view of the problem is more sympathetic but no less realistic. He expresses his admiration towards a French orphanage where destitute children *are bred up, clothed, fed, taught and when fit to go out, are placed out to trades or to services, so as to be well able to provide for themselves by an honest, industrious behaviour* (p. 1). This leads us into a problem of no little importance during the period. The problem of the poor acquired importance in an age when economic situation lacked stability. We have already seen that bankruptcy was severely punished by English law. Beggars also hardly excited any compassionate feelings from their fellow citizens; this was the result of their having become a heavy burden for the community. A law had been passed stating that it was the duty of every parish to support its poor. Partridge's rebuke to the beggar—*every parish ought to keep their own poor* (*Tom Jones*, Book XII, ch. iv)—expresses popular resentment against the destitute, as well as a grudging acquiescence to the law.

How was this parish charity carried out? Our three novelists give us hints about the true condition of the poor. Richardson tells us of Pamela's virtuous benevolence towards her less fortunate countrymen, but, somehow, her pious compassion is not quite convincing. A more realistic view of the current conception of charity is expressed in one of Pamela's letters to Polly Danford, where she writes:

"... a little matter, *prudently* bestowed, and on true objects of compassion... will go a great way, and especially if laid out properly

¹² Quoted by Novak, Maximilian: *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1962, p. 71.

for them, according to the exigencies of their respective cases. For such poor people, who live generally low, want very seldom any thing but reviving cordials at first, and good wholesome kitchen physic afterwards: and then the wheels of nature, being unclogged, new oiled, as it were, and set right, they will go round again with pleasantness and ease for a good while together, by virtue of that exercise which their labour gives them..." (II, p. 185)

Besides the ominous use of the machine metaphor, which seems to anticipate the dehumanization of man, it is clear that the idea of a change in social conditions did not even dimly occur to Richardson, who firmly believed —as most of his contemporaries— in the excellence of a perfectly stratified society.

Fielding's outlook is more generous, and, as it is always the case with the ideas expressed in *Tom Jones*, it implies a criticism of the prevalent opinion:

"...there is one degree of generosity (of charity I would have called it), which seems to have some show of merit, and that is, where, from a principle of benevolence and Christian love, we bestow on another what we really want ourselves; where in order to lessen the distresses of another, we condescend to share some part of them, by giving what even our own necessities cannot well spare. This is, I think, meritorious; but to relieve our brethren only with our superfluities; to be charitable (I must use the word) rather at the expense of our coffers than ourselves; to save several families from misery rather than hang up an extraordinary picture in our houses or gratify any other ridiculous vanity — this seems to be only being human creatures." (Book II, ch. v)

But the sharpest criticism of eighteenth-century charity is afforded by Moll's ironical comment on the institution where she had been brought up: *So that in a word, excepting a plain diet, coarse lodging, and mean clothes, we were brought up as mannerly and as genteelly as if we had been at the dancing-school* (p. 4).

The lower strata of society were regarded as a separate kind. We have already examined the current opinion about poverty, as stated by Mandeville. Richardson's acquiescence to the general view has also been considered (cf. *supra*). But, in the figure of Pamela's

father, he gives us a sympathetic portrait of the yeoman's distressing condition. The enclosure system, though favourable to the wealthy landed gentry, caused the ruin of many small land owners. But, J. H. Plumb explains, some landlords were wise enough to make use of the yeomen's experience and industriousness, and employed them to conduct their farms¹³. This is the case with Mr. B. and Pamela's father. Goodman Andrews, proudly refusing Mr. B.'s charity, considers himself a tenant and devotes his efforts and invention to improve the productivity of the farm (cf. II, p. 5).

Fielding's attitude towards the working class, as expressed in the following passage, may appear quite advanced:

"Those members of society, who are born to furnish the blessings of life, now began to light their candles, in order to pursue their daily labours, for the use of those who are born to enjoy these blessings. The sturdy hind now attends the levee of his fellow-labourer the ox; the cunning artificer, the diligent mechanic, spring from their hard mattress; and now the bonny housemaid begins to repair the disordered drum-room, while the riotous authors of that disorder, in broken interrupted slumbers, tumble and toss, as if the hardness of down disquieted their repose." (Book XI, ch. ix)

It would be misleading to trace any proletarian vindications in the contrast between the industrious worker and his idle superior. In fact Fielding is expressing one of the moral tenets of his time: the ethical value of labour. The poor man deserves praise in so far as he is diligent and humble, but sloth, disgraceful but venial in the classes that could afford it, must be severely repressed in the lower ones. Sloth is the mother of drunkenness and robbery, the poor man's vices Fielding thoroughly condemns. He thus qualifies the poor as a social group:

"By the poor here I mean that large and venerable body which, in English, we call the mob. Now, whoever hath had the honour to be admitted to any degree of intimacy with this mob, must well know that it is one of their established maxims to plunder and pillage

¹³ Cf. PLUMB, J. H.: *op. cit.*, p. 20.

their rich neighbours without any reluctance; and that this is held to be neither sin nor shame among them. And so constantly do they abide and act by this maxim, that, in every parish almost in the kingdom, there is a kind of confederacy ever carrying on against a certain person of opulence called the squire, whose property is considered as free-booty by all his poor neighbours; who, as they conclude that there is no manner of guilt in such depredations, look upon it as a point of honour and moral obligation to conceal, and to preserve each other from punishment on all such occasions." (Book XII, ch. i)

The lazy poor is then liable to be corrupt and ungrateful (cf. the connivance of Molly's mother to her daughter's wicked commerce, Book V, ch. v, and Black George's misuse of Tom's trust, Book VI, ch. xiii).

Defoe also considers sloth as the worst evil that can afflict the lower social classes and the direct cause of other depravations. Moll tells us:

"It was indeed a subject of strange reflection to me to see men who were overwhelmed in perplexed circumstances, who were reduced some degrees below being ruined, whose families were objects of their own terror and other's people's charity, yet while a penny lasted, nay, even beyond it, endeavouring to drown their sorrow in their wickedness; heaping up more guilt upon themselves, labouring to forget former things, which now it was the proper time to remember, making more work for repentance, and sinning on, as a remedy for sin past." (p. 64)

But she ponders on the consequences of utter indigence and despair:

"The next morning they are at their penitentials again; and perhaps the poor weeping wife comes over to him, either brings him some account of what his creditors are doing, and how she and the children are turned out of doors, or some other dreadful news; and this adds to his self-reproaches; but when he has thought and pored 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 flies to the same relief again, viz. to drink it away,

debauch it away, and falling into company of men in just the same condition with himself, he repeats the crime, and thus he goes every day one step onward of his way to destruction." (p. 65)

Thus Defoe, showing a deeper understanding of social problems than his two fellow novelists, which is perhaps due to his own personal experience, implies that the vices of the lower classes were often the result of bad economic conditions.

Our three novelists voice the opinion of their contemporaries: the poor man, far from becoming the object of his fellow beings' compassion, deserves their contempt, for according to the Puritan conception, earthly success is but a proof of God's goodwill and it is the duty of every Christian to work towards it. Faith and labour are thus united and become the basis of the eighteenth-century moral code. R. H. Tawney, who has carefully analysed the relationship between the Protestant ethics and economics, summarizes the Puritan's attitude towards the destitute:

"Convinced that character is all and circumstances nothing, he sees in the poverty of those who fall by the way, not a misfortune to be pitied and relieved, but a moral failing to be condemned, and in riches, not an object of suspicion — though like other gifts they may be abused — but the blessing which rewards the triumph of energy and will."¹⁴

IV. THE NOBILITY LOOSES RANK IN LITERATURE

This was the age of the bourgeois, and middle class resentment against aristocracy is present in the three works we are dealing with. Moll expresses Defoe's ideas about *gentlemen* when, following her bias to consider matters in the economic terms of labour and productivity, she tells us of her Lancashire husband: *...he was bred a gentleman, and by consequence was not only unacquainted, but indolent, and when we did settle, would much rather go out*

¹⁴ TAWNEY, R. H.: *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. London, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 229.

into the woods with his gun... than attend the natural business of his plantation (p. 353). If there is one thing Moll despises, it is a gentleman's ineptitude to achieve financial success or to face adversity courageously. She ironically comments on her *fine gentleman's* dismay on learning they are going to be transported, and how she has to manage their affairs. Once more she evinces her dauntless resourcefulness, the primary quality of economic man. In previous instances she had showed that was her outstanding feature and the one attribute she valued above all things; thus, she had scorned her unfortunate husband, the bank clerk, who lacked the mettle to look *his misfortunes in the face, . . . for to sink under trouble is to double the weight, and he that will die in it, shall die in it* (p. 204). Derisive remarks about gentlemen's love of fun and indolence are quite frequent throughout the novel (cf. p. 336, 338, 340, 366).

Richardson's attitude towards gentlemen is quite contradictory. Pamela, rather democratically, states: *... we were all on a footing originally; and many of those gentry, who brag of their ancient blood, would be glad to have it as wholesome and as "really" untainted as ours!* (I, p. 229). But just a little afterwards she is surprisingly acquiescent to Mr. B.'s remarks: *... some company you must keep. My station will not admit it to be with my servants...* (p. 233). We may ascribe this to middle-class snobbery, also present in other characters of the novel (cf. Parson Williams's letter to Pamela, (I, p. 111).

Most probably the contradiction arises from the different connotations of the term "gentleman". In some cases Richardson, as Defoe had done before him, refers it to the fashionable, idle, worthless fop; thus Mr. H., Lady Davers's nephew, is a *gentleman* (cf. II, p. 205). In other instances "gentleman" stands for an ideal pattern of man, possessing not only the outward qualities of politeness and refinement, but also and foremost, the virtues of religiosity and morality.

High nobility scarcely appears in Pamela's world. Excepting Mr. B.'s remarks about the freedom with which titles were bestowed (cf. II, p. 93), and the cautious though somehow critical portrait of Lord Davers, obviously no match for the more plebeian but manlier and

abler Mr. B., Richardson preferred not to venture on dangerous ground.

Fielding's attitude was more definite. His description of the landlady's husband at Gloucester is quite transparent: *He had been bred, as they call it, a gentleman; that is, bred up to do nothing; and had spent a very small fortune, which he inherited from an industrious farmer his uncle, in hunting, horse-racing, and cock-fighting. . .* (Book VIII, ch. viii). But the opposite view, that of a gentleman as the embodiment of all desirable qualities, is also present. Thus Fielding tells us: *There is a certain air of natural gentility, which is neither in the power of dress to give, nor to conceal. Mr. Jones, as hath been before hinted, was possessed of this in a very eminent degree* (Book XIII, ch. ii). The figure of the fop is fully described when Mr. Nightingale is introduced (cf. Book XIII, ch. v).

The ambiguity in the meaning of the word "gentleman" need not surprise us if we recall the peculiar conditions of English society at the time. Prof. Plumb tells us that, at the beginning of the century, *it was relatively easy to pass from one social class to another*¹⁵. The boundaries between the gentry and the lower nobility were quite indefinite. Thus Moll calls her second husband, that *amphibious creature, the gentleman-tradesman*, because he is vain and extravagant as a gentleman, but with a tradesman's ingenuity to save whatever he could from his financial wreck.

In *Pamela*, Mr. B. states the question even more clearly: *. . . as to citizens, in a trading nation like this, I am not displeased in the main, with seeing the overgrown ones creeping into nominal honours. . .* (II, p. 94).

The Tatler and *The Spectator*, the spokesmen and arbiters of middle-class opinion, asserted that the merchants had more right to be called *gentlemen* than the idle courtiers, for, the former had raised the nation to power and glory, and they ought to be considered as a new nobility. When the term "gentleman" is used

¹⁵ PLUMB, J. II.: op. cit., p. 17.

with a worthy connotation, it must then be understood as referring to the middle class, not only to the prosperous merchant but also to the intermediate group between them and the nobility, the gentry.

In the eighteenth century English economy was still mainly based on farming and cattle raising. Rural life was consequently a favourite setting among the novelists of the period. Country life occupies a prominent place in the microcosm of *Pamela* and *Tom Jones*, though not in Moll's world, mainly restricted to urban society.

In *Pamela*, Richardson's feelings being wholly identified with those of the middle class, rural nobility, represented by the squires, usually does not cut a good figure. Squires are criticized by Pamela no less acrimoniously than their city brothers. She resents their loose morals, their love of hunting, drinking, cock-fighting, and above all, their uncouth manners. She scornfully reproduces the table conversation of several country gentlemen:

"This flippant stuff was all that passed, which I *can* recite; for the rest, at table, and after dinner, was too polite by half for me; such as, the quantity of wine each man could *carry off* (that was the phrase), dogs, horses, hunting, racing, cock-fighting, and all accompanied with swearing and cursing, and that in good humour, and out of wantonness (the least excusable and more profligate sort of swearing and cursing of all)." (II p. 199)

She puts an epitaph on them when she tells us:

"And indeed, it is a hapiness, that such gentlemen take no more care than they generally do, to interest any body intimately in their healths and preservation; for these are all single men. Nor need the public be much concerned about them; for let such persons go when they will, if they continue single, their next heir cannot well be a worse commonwealth's man; and there is a great chance he may be better." (II, p. 200)

Fielding's portrayal of Squire Western is certainly richer and more warmly human. It is perhaps his best achievement in characterization; there is hardly any instance in which Squire Western's appearance will not delight us with its genial criticism and deep

humanity. He certainly has all the faults Pamela complained of, but they are presented under a much more benevolent light. He loves swearing, drinking, hunting and racing. He is a bigoted Tory, suspicious of Hanoverian intentions and of foreign influence on political matters. He is not devoid of tender feelings and is a good sport. He partakes of the merchant's eagerness to enlarge his property and he heartily despises the extravagance and idleness of the lords. He is, in short, a thorough John Bull.

The Squire's character is best appreciated when opposed to that of the courtier who had come to ask him some compensation to Lord Fellamar's injured honour:

"Sir, I come to wait upon you by the command of my lord Fellamar; but with a very different message from what I suppose you expect, after what passed the other night.

'My lord who,' cries the squire; 'I never heard the same of 'un.'

'His lordship,' said the gentleman, 'is willing to impute everything to the effect of liquor, and the most trifling acknowledgement of that kind will set everything right; for as he hath the most violent attachment to your daughter, you, sir, are the last person upon earth from whom he would resent an affront; and happy it is for you both that he hath given such public demonstrations of his courage as to be able to put up an affair of this kind without danger of any imputation on his honour. All he desires, therefore, is, that you will before me make some acknowledgement; the slightest in the world will be sufficient; and he intends this afternoon to pay his respects to you, in order to obtain your leave of visiting the young lady on the footing of a lover.'

'I don't understand much of what you say, sir,' said the squire; 'but I suppose, by what you talk about my daughter, that this is the lord which my cousin, Lady Bellaston, mentioned to me, and said something about his courting my daughter. If so be, that how, that be the case—you may give my service to his lordship, and tell un the girl is already disposed of.'

'Perhaps, sir,' said the gentleman, 'you are not sufficiently apprized of the greatness of this offer. I believe such a person, title, and fortune would be nowhere refused.'

'Lookee, sir' answered the squire; 'to be very plain, my daughter is bespoken already; but if she was not, I would not marry her to a lord upon any account; I hate all lords, they are a parcel of courtiers and Hanoverians, and I will have nothing to do with them.'

'Well, sir,' said the gentleman, 'if that is your resolution, the message I am to deliver to you is, that my lord desires the favour of your company this morning in Hyde Park.'

'You may tell my lord,' answered the squire, 'that I am busy and cannot come. I have enough to look after at home, and can't stir abroad on any account.'

'I am sure, sir,' quoth the other, 'you are too much a gentleman to send such a message; you will not, I am convinced, have it said of you, that, after having affronted a noble peer, you refuse him satisfaction. His lordship would have been willing, from his great regard to the young lady, to have made up matters another way; but unless he is to look upon you as a father, his honour will not suffer his putting up such an indignity as you must be sensible you offered him.'

'I offered him!' cries the squire; 'it's a d-n'd lie! I never offered him anything.'" (Book XVI, ch. ii)

We do not know what to admire more: Fielding's deep insight into those peculiar "humours", or his ability to reproduce their characteristic actions and speech. The courtier's code of honour is thoroughly ridiculed which shows it was already on the wane. The new social standards of the bourgeoisie were based on reason and morality, not on pride of birth and point of honour. It is not difficult to guess that Fielding's sympathy is wholly with the squire.

V. THE NOVELISTS GLANCE AT THEIR SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Our novelists' concern for social documentation also covered other levels of society. We have already mentioned the increasing influence of the merchant class. Moll's exploits take place in a world of mercers, drapers, and all types of merchants. It is worth noting that the majority of them are connected with the purchase and selling of cloth, cloth-making being one of the most important industries at the time. Laws were passed to protect this national industry, and we see that Moll takes advantage of the prohibition to import foreign goods, such as Flanders lace: she denounces the possession of smuggled articles to the custom officers and thus

collects a reward (cf. p. 227). Moll's frequent journeys to Bristol are also significant, since that city was then the main entry for the import of American cotton. Cotton manufacture centered in Lancashire and was closely connected with slave traffic to the colonies (cf. Pamela's mention of the *pretty black boy* sent to Miss Godwin to *wait upon her* (II, p. 220).

The growing importance of commerce was somewhat slackened by the bad conditions of English roads, situation which was made worse by the proliferation of highwaymen who ruthlessly robbed and killed the unfortunate travellers. But their crimes earned them merciless retaliation. Prisons were undoubtedly the most gruesome of English public institutions. Newgate is the most dreaded event in Moll's life. Defoe's own experience of imprisonment and the pillory seems to have been an indelible one. He knew English justice from the less pleasant angle and he does not conceal his opinion about it. Moll is seized by a merchant on the very act of stealing and before the judge she claims she has *neither broken anything to get in, nor carried anything out* (p. 295). This gives us a sample of penalty laws at the time. Punishment did not depend on the quality of the crime itself, but rather on the circumstances under which the offense was committed. Thus, Trevelyan tells us¹³, shop-lifting and pick-pocketing, no matter how little value the stolen object had, were severely punished, even with death.

Defoe's consciousness of the incongruity of the law that was then enforced, is ironically stated in Moll's adherence to the wording of the law and not to its essence: . . . *They did not do me strict justice, for I was not in the sense of the law an old offender, whatever I was in the eye of the judge, for I had never been before them in a judicial way before* . . . (p. 315).

Pamela's remark about her having attended an execution (I, p. 92), though the event may strike us as a very improper entertainment for such a delicate lady, well exemplifies that death penalty

¹⁶ TREVELYAN, G. M.: *English Social History*. London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1948. Ch. X.

was not an unusual way of correcting —or rather suppressing— transgressions of the law.

Again we must come to *Tom Jones* for a more explicit criticism of the eighteenth-century idea of justice. Partridge's account of a trial is, though humorous, no less corrosive, specially if we recall that the unfortunate prisoner's crime was horse-stealing:

"To be certain, the judge must have been a very brave man, as well as a man of much learning. It is indeed charming sport to hear trials upon life and death. One thing I own I thought a little hard, that the prisoner's counsel was not suffered to speak for him, though he desired only to be heard one very short word, but my lord [the judge] would not hearken to him, though he suffered a counsellor to talk against him for above half an hour. I thought it hard, I own, that there should be so many of them: my lord, and the court, and the jury, and the counsellors, and the witnesses, all upon one poor man, and he too in chains. Well, the fellow was hanged, as to be sure it could not be otherwise..." (Book VIII, ch. xi)

The dismal conditions of English prisons are fully depicted in *Moll Flanders*. Filthiness and depravity were their outstanding features. Guilty as Moll was, we can not but pity her when she is sent to Newgate, that horrid place where she could expect *no redemption but by an infamous death* (p. 295). The grim place is vividly described to us by the distressed heroine:

"...the hellish noise, the roaring, swearing, and clamour, the stench and nastiness, and all the dreadful crowd of afflicting things that I saw there, joined together to make the place seem an emblem of hell itself, and a kind of entrance into it." (p. 295)

Imprisonment was meant to punish offenses against the law, but as regards the reform of the trespasser, the effect was rather the opposite. Thus Moll's mother remarks: *We all know ... that there are more thieves and rogues made by that one prison of Newgate than by all the clubs and societies of villains in the nation* (p. 90).

Richardson's sense of propriety did not allow him to deal with

such undelicate matters, and, unfortunately, Fielding, when he sent Tom to prison, was too intent on developing the plot towards the happy ending, and did not state any comments upon that dreadful place.

Another penalty that was often imposed on criminals, is also mentioned in *Moll Flanders*: transportation to the American colonies. In the same passage above quoted, Moll's mother lets us know that Newgate birds *half people* the colonies. Even if Defoe's estimate might have been exaggerated, the main fact, the transportation of convicts to the colonies, has been corroborated by historians. Prof. Plumb remarks that at the time, to the majority of the population, America was *the dumping ground for thieves, bankrupts and prostitutes . . .*¹⁷.

But, for all its sternness, English justice was not free from corruption. Moll tells us how she *had obtained the favour, by the help of money, nothing to be done in that place [Newgate] without it, not to be kept in the condemned hole, as they call it, among the rest of the prisoners who were to die, but to have a little dirty chamber to herself* (p. 312).

In the Molly Seagrim episode of *Tom Jones*, we discover that social position could also modify the course of justice:

"Just as he (Tom) arrived at Allworthy's outward gate, he met the constable and company with Molly in their possession, whom they were conducting to that house where the inferior sort of people may learn one good lesson, viz. respect and deference to their superiors; since it must show them the wide distinction Fortune intends between those persons who are to be corrected for their faults, and those who are not; which lesson if they do not learn, I am afraid they very rarely learn any other good lesson, or improve their morals, at the house of correction." (Book IV, ch. xi)

Both in *Tom Jones* and in *Moll Flanders*, the criticism of English justice also reaches the dispensers of that justice. We have already seen in *Tom Jones* how judges abused of their unchecked power. The

¹⁷ PLUMB, J. H.: op. cit., p. 124.

casuistry of lawyers is exposed in the episode about Sophia's little bird, when the shrewd lawyer avoids a too compromising answer to Squire Western's request to condemn Blifil's action. But the finest piece of satire is afforded by Partridge's amusing report of his misfortune as owner of a pig:

"...one day ... this pig broke out, and did a tresspass, I think they call it, in a garden belonging to one of my neighbours, who was a proud, revengeful man, and employed a lawyer, one — one — I can't think of his name; but he sent a writ against me, and had me to size. When I came there, Lord have mercy upon me — to hear what the counsellors said! There was one that told my lord a parcel of the confoundedest lies about me; he said that I used to drive my hogs into other folk's gardens, and a great deal more; and at last he said, he hoped I had at last brought my hogs to a fair market. To be sure, one would have thought that, instead of being owner of one poor little pig, I had been the greatest hogmerchant in England." (Book XVIII, ch. vi)

Lawyers' ability to turn justice in favour of their clients, is also exemplified in Moll's adventure with the mercer she attempts to rob, and whom, on her being caught, she manages to convert from offended into offender. Her lawyer so well handles the affair, that Moll not only is not sued by the mercer, but also, taking advantage of the poor man's fear of scandal and legal troubles, she gets a large amount of money from him (cf. p. 270).

Though not strictly connected with the preceding subject, it is interesting to note that physicians are another favourite target of the social satirists of the period. *Tom Jones* abounds in humorous passages concerning doctors (cf. Book III, ch. ix; Book XV, ch. xiv; Book V, ch. viii); the most amusing is the one that reproduces the doctor's technical disquisition to the lieutenant, after curing Tom's injures; this, because of its length, I shall quote only in part:

"I was once, I remember, called to a patient who had received a violent contusion in his tibia, by which the exterior cutis was lacerated, so that there was a profuse sanguinary discharge; and the interior membranes were so divellicated, that the os or bone very plainly appeared through the aperture of the vulnus or wound. Some febrile

symptoms intervening at the same time (for the pulse was exuberant and indicated much phlebotomy), I apprehended an immediate mortification." (Book VII, ch. xiii)

Thus Fielding delights us again with his fine art of characterization and his satirical humour.

VI. THE NOVELISTS WATCH THEIR CONTEMPORARIES AMUSING THEMSELVES

Social entertainments receive special consideration from our three novelists. In her London life, Pamela attends theatrical performances, and Richardson denounces the freedom in speech and morals that since the Restoration ruled over the English stage. Pamela says of *The Distressed Mother*, probably Ambrose Philips's adaptation of Racine's *Andromaque*:

"...half of it is a tempestuous, cruel, ungoverned rant of passion, and ends in cruelty, bloodshed, and desolation, ... the epilogue ... was more shocking to me, than the most terrible parts of the play; as by lewd and even senseless *double entendre*, it would be calculated only to efface all the tender, all the virtuous sentiments, which the tragedy was designed to raise." (II, p. 253)

Pamela also complains of the playwrights' crude concept of love:

"...I think there is hardly one play I have seen, or read hitherto, but has too much love in it, as that passion is generally treated. How unnatural in some, how inflaming in others, are the descriptions of it! — In most, rather rant and fury, like the loves of the fiercer animals, as Virgil, translated by Dryden, describes them, than the soft, sighing, fearfully hopeful murmurs, that swell the bosoms of our gentler sex: and the respectful, timorous, submissive complainings of the other, when the truth of the passion humanizes, as one may say, their more rugged hearts." (II, p. 253)

This craving for *tender, complaining* feelings, as expression of bourgeois sentimentality, opposes aristocratic restraint and already announces Romanticism.

Richardson's view of the stage as a vehicle of moral instruction is thus voiced by Pamela:

"...I think the stage, by proper regulations, might be made a profitable amusement ... The terror and compunction for evil deeds, the compassion for a just distress, and the general beneficence which those lively exhibitions are so capable of raising in the human mind, might be of great service, when directed to right ends, and induced by proper motives: particularly where the actions which the catastrophe is designed to punish, are not set in such advantageous lights, as shall destroy the end of the moral, and make the vice that ought to be censured, imitable; where instruction is kept in view all the way, and where vice is punished and virtue rewarded." (II, p. 252)

Such puritanical enunciation of the Aristotelian theory of tragic catharsis, must certainly have received the smug sanction of Richardson's middle-class reading public.

Richardson's condemnation also reaches the fashionable audience that attended those dire displays of vices: *The pleasure this gave the men was equally barbarous and insulting; all turning to the boxes, pit, and galleries, where ladies were, to see how they looked ...* (II, p. 253).

Pamela's comments on Steele's comedy *The Tender Husband* are also adverse:

"There seemed to be much wit and satire in the play; but, upon my word, I was grievously disappointed as to the morality of it; nor, in some places is *probability* preserved; and there are divers speeches so very free, that I could not have expected to meet with such, from the names I mentioned.

In short the author seems to have forgotten the moral all the way..." (II, p. 255)

Richardson, besides accusing Steele of not obeying the established literary canons, resents the playwright's departure from the propriety he himself had fostered as journalist. The censure is softened, or perhaps ironically strengthened, by the preceding praise of the authors ... *the authors of "The Spectator" cannot possibly produce a faulty scene ...* (II, p. 255).

The opera also deserves Pamela's objections: . . . *the scenery is fine, the company splendid and genteel, the music charming for the time, the action not extraordinary, the language unintelligible, and, for all these reasons – the instruction none at all* (II, p. 256). The same pedestrian didacticism imbues Richardson's scorn of the romances which inspired one of the few purposely humorous passages in the work: his parody of the affected style in those compositions (cf. II, p. 447). Then Pamela states the current opinion about the literary style: . . . *I am convinced, that no style can be proper, which is not plain, simple, easy, natural and unaffected* (II, p. 448).

Swift, whose scourging satires of English society must certainly have shocked him, also falls under Richardson's condemnation:

"I could multiply such instances, were it needful, to the confutation of that low, and I had almost said, *unmanly* contempt, with which a certain celebrated genius treats our sex in general in most of his pieces I have seen; particularly his *Letter of Advice to a new married Lady*; so written, as must disgust, instead of instruct; and looks more like the advice of an enemy to the *sex*, and a bitter one too, than a friend to the *particular Lady*. But I ought to beg pardon for this my presumption, for two reasons; first, because of the truly admirable talents of this writer; and next, because we know not what ladies the ingenious gentleman may have fallen among in his younger days" (II, p. 416).

No doubt Richardson knew how to win his feminine readers.

Fielding also gives us his view of the theatre of the time, but being more genial and open-minded than Richardson, his portrayal of the English stage is livelier and merrier. He describes the eighteenth-century English audience with a keen eye when he imagines it watching Black George running away with Tom's money. The feelings of every section of the audience, and specially the way they express them, very well reflect the features peculiar to their condition:

"Those who sat in the world's upper gallery treated that incident, I am well convinced, with their usual vociferation; and every term of scurrilous reproach was most probably vented on that occasion.

If we had descended to the next order of spectators, we should have found an equal degree of abhorrence, though less of noise and scurrility; yet here the good women gave Black George to the devil, and many of them expected every minute that the cloven-footed gentleman would fetch his own.

The pit, as usual, was no doubt divided; those who delight in heroic virtue and perfect character objected to the producing such instances of villany, without punishing them very severely for the sake of example. Some of the author's friends cried, 'Look'e gentlemen, the man is a villain, but it is nature for all that.' And all the young critics of the age, the clerks, apprentices, &c., called it low, and fell a groaning." (Book VII, ch. i)

The passage, which seems a parody of Pamela's squeamish behaviour, shows that the opinions of Richardson's heroine entirely conformed to the taste of her class. Fielding also ironically echoes the literary gospel of his time: Art must follow Nature. The frivolous members of the fashionable world do not escape his notice and he comments:

"As for the boxes, they behaved with their accustomed politeness. Most of them were attending to something else. Some of those few who regarded the scene at all, declared he was a bad kind of man; while others refused to give their opinion, till they had heard that of the best judges." (Ibidem, id.)

Drawing from his own experience as a dramatist, Fielding makes reference to the rivalry and the ruthless warfare carried on among the playwrights. He tells us that Sophia, when she was attending a theatrical performance, ... *had left the play before the end of the first act; for this, ... being a new play, at which two large parties met, the one to damn, and the other to applaud, a violent uproar, and an engagement between the two parties, had ... terrified our heroine ...* (Book XIII, ch. xi).

Fielding agrees with Richardson that the theater may serve a didactic purpose, but his didacticism is not so coarse and it is always subordinated to the artistic design. With Partridge's experience when he sees *Hamlet*, Fielding offers a suitable instance of the kind of emotions a gifted playwright may arouse in his audience, even if

this is so naive and shallow as Partridge was (cf. Book XVI, ch. v). This passage, where Fielding again displays his fine sense of humour and his keen knowledge of human nature, overwhelmingly surpasses the edifying prudery of Pamela's pretentious disquisitions.

Fielding had had the benefits of a classical education and he was widely read, as it is proved by his frequent mention of English and classical authors and the quotations from their works. His opinion of his fellow writers is more generous than Richardson's. He often praises them and when some criticism is implied, it takes the form of innuendo or subtle irony; he thus alludes to Mrs Aphra Behn's cheap popularity, talking about an Irish loafer:

"He was a younger brother of a good family, and, having no fortune at home, was obliged to look abroad in order to get one; for which purpose he was proceeding to the Bath, to try his luck with cards and the women.

This young fellow lay in bed reading one of Mrs. Behn's novels; for he had been instructed by a friend that he would find no more effectual method of recommending himself to the ladies that the improving his understanding, and filling his mind with good literature." (Book X, ch. ii)

His comments about the literary taste of the period are even more interesting. Mrs Fitzpatrick's haphazard readings include such contradictory books as Mrs Manley's scandalous *New Atalantis* and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Dryden's plays and Chillingworth's religious works (cf. Book XI, ch. vii). Partridge's literary erudition denotes the same random quality. He claims:

"I have some curious books in both languages; such as *Erasmi Colloquia*, *Ovid de Tristibus*, *Gradus ad Parnassum*; and in English I have several of the best books, though some of them are a little torn; but I have a great part of Stowe's *Chronicle*; the sixth volume of Pope's *Homer*, the third volumen of the *Spectator*; the second volume of Echard's *Roman History*, the *Craftsman*; *Robinson Crusoe*; *Thomas a Kempis*; and the volumes of Tom Brown's Works." (Book VIII, ch. v)

Since Fielding was a cultivated man, with an aristocratic bias, we

may guess here some ironical criticism of the snobbery of the new reading public, the parvenues to literature.

But his most satirical invectives are aimed at the rethorical grandiloquence that still survived in the works of some of his fellow writers. He humorously comments upon the critics' bigotry, blaming them for the enforcement of the unities (cf. Book V, ch. i); he also makes fun of the fad to write prologues, which, incidentally, he did not evade (cf. Book XVI, ch. i). He likewise ridicules the traditional invocations (cf. Book XIII, ch. i) and the bombastic introduction of the heroine (cf. Book IV, ch. ii).

The above quoted passages from *Pamela* and *Tom Jones* reflect the undergoing change in literary taste: morality, propriety, didacticism and sentimentality were becoming the predominant notes in the literature of the period, together with a growing tendency towards a simple, direct language and style.

More frivolous entertainments do not escape our three novelists' criticism. Both in Miss Goodwin's innocent questions and in Pamela's sermonizing answers, Richardson expresses his contempt of gambling, though he worries more about the decorum than about the ethical implications of the act:

"Will Ladies game, Madam? I have heard you say, that Lords, sharpers but just out of liveries, in gaming, are upon a foot in every thing, save that one has nothing to lose, and the other much, besides his reputation! And will ladies so disgrace their characters, and their sex, as to pursue this pernicious diversion in public?"

'Yes, my dear, they will too often, the more's the pity! And don't you remember, when we were at Bath, in what a hurry I once passed by some knots of genteel people, and you asked what those were doing? I told you, whisperingly, they were gaming...'" (II, p. 469).

Defoe and Fielding fully agree with Richardson in considering Bath as the eighteenth-century English Babylon (cf. the Bath episode in Moll's adventurous life and the wretched matrimony of Sophia's cousin in *Tom Jones*, (Book XI, ch. iv; also see Book IX, ch. vii).

But drinking was the national vice. Ale and gin were the favour-

its beverages, and ale, being a native product, was the most popular. Taverns, usually referred to as *alehouses*, are a recurrent setting both in *Moll Flanders* and in *Tom Jones*. We have already commented upon the universal condemnation of drinking as a wickedness of the lower classes, but the vice was by no means confined to the humbler members of society and Pamela considers it almost a characteristic feature of the nobility (cf. section .IV) Fielding thus comments upon this extended calamity: *It takes away the guard of reason . . . It heightens and inflames our passions . . .* (Book XIII, ch. ix). Defoe similarly states: *There is nothing so absurd, so surfeiting, so ridiculous, as a man heated by wine in his head* (p. 244).

Fielding also deals with one of the popular entertainments of his age: puppets. Through his ironical remarks on the extreme propriety of a puppet-show he ridicules his contemporaries' conventional morality:

"The puppet-show was performed with great regularity and decency. It was called the fine and serious part of the *Provoked Husbands*; and it was indeed a very grave and solemn entertainment, without any low wit, or humour, or jests; or to do it no more than justice, without anything which could provoke a laugh. The audience were all highly pleased. A grave matron told the master she would bring her two daughters the next night, as he did not show any stuff; and an attorney's clerk and an exciseman both declared, that the characters of Lord and Lady Townley were well preserved, and highly in nature. Partridge likewise concurred with this opinion" (Book XII, ch. v).

The audience's common consent as regards the necessity to convey *good and instructive lessons*, and to avoid *low stuff* and *idle trumpery*, only meekly opposed by Tom's regret for the disappearance of Merry Punch and his wife Joan, satirically evinces the mediocrity and dulness of bourgeois prudery.

As regards other entertainments, both Fielding and Richardson consider the fashionable masquerades as a dangerous sort of revelry, where moral and propriety are easily neglected (cf. *Pamela*, II, p. 261; also *Tom Jones*, Book XII, ch. 7). Fielding, little suspect-

ing the future popularity of boxing, playfully refers to it as *a truly British art*, and he quotes a funny advertisement of a boxing academy of his time (cf. Book XIII, ch. v).

VII. POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH NOVEL

Politics and religion had been closely connected in the previous century, and religious grudges still survived in the minds of the people, though they were steadily wearing off. Richardson, through Pamela's description of Mr. H.'s fickleness in religious questions, lets us hear a resentful note:

"...his aunt and I endeavouring to give him a serious and religious turn, we had like to have turned him into a Roman Catholic. For he was much pleased with the shewy part of that religion, and the fine pictures, and decorations in the churches of Italy; and having got into company with a Dominican at Padua, a Franciscan at Milan, and a Jesuist at Paris, they lay so hard at him, in their turns, that we had like to have lost him to each assailant: so we were forced to let him take his own course; for, his aunt would have it, that he had no other defence from the attacks of persons to make him embrace a faulty religion, than to permit him to continue as he was; that is to say, to have none at all" (II, p. 428).

Moll's attitude towards Catholics is more generous:

"The first discovery I made here was, that the family were all Roman Catholics, and the cousin too, whom I called my friend; however, I must say that nobody in the world could behave better to me, and I had all the civility shown me that I could have had if I had been of their opinion" (p. 151).

The same tolerant spirit is reflected in her comment upon the *honest Quaker*, who proved a *faithful, generous, and steady friend* (p. 365).

Fielding could bring himself to tolerate Roman Catholics (cf. the landlady's remark about them in Book XII, ch. vii), but the

Quackers fully received his caustic criticism. Tom's encounter with the ironically labelled *honest* Quacker, is meant to expose the hypocrisy and selfishness of some members of that much abused sect. Even the virtuous compassion the Quacker feels towards the supposedly mad Tom, evaporates when he learns that Jones is but a destitute bastard. Though Fielding's criticism may be exaggerated and single sided, he has thrust deep into an essential feature of Calvinism, to which all Protestant sects were somehow indebted. Success in this world was the expression of God's goodwill towards his creatures, almost a proof of future salvation, so it is no wonder that Tom's unfortunate situation should deserve him the Quacker's pious indignation.

In their desire to reproduce the social milieu our novelists do not spare the priests of the Church of England. In the corrupted world of *Moll Flanders* priests do not escape Defoe's criticism. Moll tells us of the priest in the prison:

"...to observe the poor creature preaching confession and repentance to me in the morning, and find him drunk with brandy and spirits by noon, this had something in it so shocking, that I began to nauseate the man more than his work, and his work too by degrees, for the sake of the man; so that I desired him to trouble me no more" (p. 300).

The portrait is further blackened by the good priest's words: *He told me he did not come as ordinary from the place whose business it is to extort confessions from prisoners, for private ends, or for the further detecting of other offenders* (p. 310). This honest priest is presented as the antithesis of the ordinary of the prison. Moll tells us: *I am not able to repeat the excellent discourses of this extraordinary man; 'tis all that I am able to do, to say that he revived my heart, and brought me into such a condition that I never knew anything of in my life before* (p. 311). Moll thus implies, had she been brought up according to sincerely felt religious principles, she would have never fallen so low. But the pious effect is somewhat deflated by Moll's next humorous remark: *The good minister was sorely afflicted for me ... and left me not that evening so long as*

the prison-keepers would suffer him to stay in the prison, unless he would be locked up with me all night, which he was not willing to be. The saintlike figure recovers his human dimension.

Mr. Williams, Richardson's rural parson, is an instance of the conditions to which the low clergy were reduced: their situation entirely depended on their lords' favour (cf. II, p. 96). This dependence compelled them to connive at many things that little agreed with their principles. When the parish minister refuses to help Pamela, who has been kidnapped by Mr. B., Mr. Williams writes to her, reporting his superior's words:

"...when I represented the duties of our function, and the like... he coldly said, I was very good; but was a young man and knew little of the world. And though it was a thing to be lamented, yet when he and I should set about to reform mankind in this respect, we should have enough upon our hands; for he said it was too common and fashionable a case to be withstood by a private clergyman or two; and uttered some reflections upon the conduct of the present fathers of the church, in regard to the first personages of the realm as a justification of his coldness on this score" (I, p. 116).

Once Pamela marries Mr. B., her former contemptuous opinion of this minister is significantly modified:

"...when I came to know Mr. Peters, I had a high opinion of his worthiness, and as no one can be perfect in this life ... To be sure, a gentleman, one who knows, and practises so well his duty, in every other instance, and preaches it so efficaciously to others, must have been *one day* sensible, that it would not have mis-become his function and character to have afforded that protection to oppressed innocence, which was requested of him..." (II, p. 85).

I would not venture to suspect any irony hidden in Pamela's words, but rather ascribe them to Richardson's wish not to hurt the feelings of such an influential portion of society. This opinion is, I think, supported by Pamela's next assertion:

"...I have so much honour for the clergy of all degrees, that I never forget in my prayers one article, that God will make them

shining lights to the world; since so much depends on their ministry and examples, as well with respect to our public and private duties. Nor shall the faults of a few make impression upon me to the disadvantage of the order. . . ." (II, p. 86).

In *Tom Jones* parsons are shown sharing the comforts of the rural nobility and losing contact with the people. Parson Supple, as his name suggests, is good-natured but too weak to enforce his convictions upon the boisterous Squire. After the Squire's discovery of the love affair between Tom and Sophia, the following illuminating scene ensued:

"No sooner had the squire swallowed a large draught than he renewed the discourse on Jones, and declared a resolution of going the next morning early to acquaint Mr. Allworthy. His friend [Supple] would have dissuaded him from this, from the mere motive of good nature; but his dissuasion had no other effect than to produce a large volley of oaths and curses, which greatly shocked the pious ears of Supple; but he did not dare to remonstrate against a privilege which the squire claimed as a freeborn Englishman. To say truth, the parson submitted to please his palate at the squire's table, at the expense of suffering now and then this violence to his ears" (Book VI, ch. ix).

No political allusions are to be found in *Moll Flanders* or *Pamela*, but Fielding, through the Squire's rebukes to his sister, an amateur politician and the ancestress of the feminist movement, lets us know something about the politics of the time. Western accuses his sister of having made a Whig of her daughter, and fiercely states:

"...I am a true Englishman, and not of your Hanover breed, that have eat up the nation.' 'Thou art one of those wise men,' cries she, 'Whose nonsensical principles have undone the nation; by weakening the hands of our government at home, and by discouraging our friends and encouraging our enemies abroad'" (Book VII, ch. iii).

But the conflict between Whigs and Tories, as it is clear in the amusing verbal battle between the Squire and his sister, could never

lead to the bloody consequences of the political struggles in the previous century. The religious zeal that fostered party controversies had been placated and the concern for social and political stability became paramount. Moderation was the key note both in political and religious questions. Even Prince Charles's invasion is made little of by the light treatment Fielding gives it. Though the people of England did not wholly agree on political matters and some characters express Jacobite inclinations (cf. Partridge's opinions, Book VIII, ch. ix), the prevalent opinion is better voiced by Tom:

"... it has often struck me, as the most wonderful thing I ever read in history, that so soon after this convincing experience which brought our whole nation to join so unanimously in expelling King James, for the preservation of our religion and liberties, there should be a party among us mad enough to desire the placing his family again on the throne" (Book VIII, ch. xv).

VIII. BOURGEOIS MORALITY AND LITERATURE

The worldly interests of this age are counterbalanced by a deep concern in religious and ethical matters. The preceding period had abounded in religious controversies and the scientific and philosophical studies contributed to the shaping of a new conception of religion and morality. Reason was the human faculty that, as it is lavishly exemplified in the literature of the time, acquired the greatest prestige, and, though this supremacy of reason did not oppose religion, it certainly modified its trend. Religion had, up to then, largely rested upon revelation; now, prompted by the scientific and philosophical attainments of the age, it came to be supported by the evidences found in nature. Thus Archbishop Tillotson, an outstanding figure in the religious field, said: *All the duties of Christian religion which respect God, are no other but what natural light prompts men to, excepting the two sacraments...*¹⁸. Scientific and philosophical

¹⁸ Quoted by Basil Willey in: *The Eighteenth Century Background*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1962, p. 11.

knowledge served to prove God's wisdom, through the harmony and perfection discovered in nature.

In accordance with the practical spirit of the age, religious speculation gravitated towards concrete, normative aspects, rather than to metaphysical ones. Moral reflections occupy no little place in the works of our novelists, and, though their ideas do not always coincide, they all fundamentally echo the bourgeois moral code. This code is in marked contrast with that of the aristocracy, and its literary expression frequently adopts the form of a more or less open attack against the expiring canons of the quality.

As Oliver Elton has very well pointed out, Defoe's moral standards, as expressed in *Moll Flanders*, have a rather platitudinous and commercial turn¹⁹. Prof. Plumb tells us that, in the most popular of eighteenth-century sermons, Archbishop Tillotson expressed the view that if a man applied to his moral life the same principles he used in business, he would be sure of a place in heaven²⁰. This sort of practical morality is similarly exemplified in Moll's advices to women, concerning the ways to trap a wealthy husband (cf. p. 74). They constitute a fine piece of humour and irony that might well be a parody, had it not been written earlier, of Pamela's virtuous behaviour.

Moll is a businesswoman, both when she sins and when she grows virtuous. Her repentance lasts in so far as it pays well. All her actions are aimed at the gain of some profit; money is the ultimate goal of Moll's life and her conscience can be comfortably easy about the way she gets it. Defoe's avowed intention, as stated in the Preface, is to offer his readers *a work from every part of which something may be learned, and some just and religious inference is drawn, by which the reader will have something of instruction, if he pleases to make use of it* (p. x). But, we may add, this *instruction* can hardly be considered a moral improvement.

Moll lives in the underworld of thieves and swindlers but, though

¹⁹ ELTON, OLIVER: *A. Survey of English Literature: 1730-1780*. London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1950. Vol. I, p. 163.

²⁰ PLUMB, I. H.: *op. cit.*, p. 44.

she manages to achieve success in that world, she feels she does not belong there. She is cautious and thrifty, she has the bourgeois yearning for economic security and for respectability. Quite significantly, she never questions the moral standards of society. In fact, the wording of her moralizing and repentant scenes agrees with the morals of the middle class. Thus she abhors drinking (cf. p. 244) and is always anxious to keep up appearances: *...you may see how necessary it is for all women who expect anything in the world, to preserve the character of their virtue, even when perhaps they may have sacrificed the thing itself* (p. 147).

Moll, as her Bath lover, frequently repents of her wickedness, but her contrition never lasts long and, of course, does not make her renounce to the ill-gotten profit. When, taking advantage of the panic caused by a fire, she runs away with the valuable things of the distressed family, she reflects:

"I say, I confess the inhumanity of this action moved me very much, and made me relent exceedingly, and tears stood in my eyes upon that subject; but with all my sense of its being cruel and inhuman, I could never find in my heart to make any restitution. The reflection wore off, and I began quickly to forget the circumstances that attended the taking them" (p. 222).

Moll's peace of mind in her pious life of comfort in the colonies, need not surprise us. She has achieved the economic security she was struggling for and she can then afford to be righteous.

But Moll's moral preaching sounds anything but sincere, and we grow rather suspicious of Defoe's moralizing intention. Perhaps he was shrewdly undermining the sham of Augustan propriety. Some incidental remarks, such as the observation about the vanity of her little victim's parents, whose desire to dress her luxuriously contrasts with the little care they took of her security, or the ironical reflections about the gentleman of Bath, who repented of his sinful life when he was seriously ill, may obey to a satirical intention. This view might be further supported by Moll's sly excuses for telling her readers about her new life, once she has repented from her past sins:

"...I reflect that many of those who may be pleased and diverted with the relation of the wild and wicked part of my story may not relish this, which is really the best part of my life, the most advantageous to myself, and the most instructive to others. Such, however, will, I hope, allow me the liberty to make my story complete. It would be a severe satire on such to say they do not relish the repentance as they do the crime..." (p. 313).

It is impossible to ascertain what amount of irony underlies the pretended moral design of the book; probably the irony we perceive does not arise from the author's conscious intention but is the result of the gulf that separates Augustan moral standards from our own.

The ethical strain is stronger in *Pamela*. The heroine's letters denote a somewhat shabby moral code, which nevertheless answered to the Puritan zeal for orthodox social morality. This explains the success of *Pamela* and the opinion of the reading public that, as Pope stated it, believed it would do more good than a great many sermons.

Ian Watt has observed that *the eighteenth century witnessed ... a redefinition of virtue in primarily sexual terms*²¹. Richardson, excusing himself for some shocking scenes in his work, made one of Pamela's correspondents tell her: *It was necessary ... that we should know that he [Mr. B.] had tried every stratagem to subdue you to his purpose ... which you so nobly resisted, as to convince us all, that you have deserved the good fortune you have met with...* (II, p. 27).

Pamela's virtue seems to have lain almost exclusively in her efforts to preserve, with some small allowances, her maidenhood. This virtue had to be thoroughly tested in order to be rewarded not only with heavenly approval but also with earthly bliss, and we wonder what was more alluring to the public: the testing or the rewarding. This rather coarse and materialistic conception of virtue inclines us to agree with Mrs. Barbault's dictum upon Pamela: *Pamela is the conscious possessor of a treasure which she wisely resolved*

²¹ WATT, IAN: op. cit., p. 157.

*not to part with but for its just price*²². For all her prudery, she is not so wholly different from mercantilistic Moll.

Pamela's sense of propriety often verges on the ludicrous, as when her master offers her a pair of stockings and she says: *... I was inwardly ashamed to take the stockings, for Mrs. Jervis was not there: if she had, it would have been nothing* (I, p. 8). But, though it may appear funny to us, as Pamela's parents feared and contemporary readers anticipated, the scene proved to be quite ominous, and, according to their principles, a sure sign of Mr. B.'s debauchery.

The clash between middle-class morality and the ethical code of the aristocracy is the core of *Pamela*, and it is manifoldly expressed in the different opportunities in which Pamela's virtue is opposed to the frailty of the quality that surrounds her. The most obvious instances are, of course, her controversies and skirmishes with Mr. B., but Richardson also makes use of other characters to drive his point home. Thus when Pamela, submitting to Lady Daver's pressing questions, shily admits she is pregnant, the Countess of C. comments: *... you are a happy man, Mr. B., that your lady's bashfulness is the principal mark by which we can judge she is not of quality* (II, p. 92). If we compare this passage with Pamela's remark at the beginning of the novel: *... they are ladies — and ladies may say anything* (I, p. 40), it becomes evident that Richardson wanted to rebuke the shameless outspokenness of the nobility, as opposed to bourgeois seemliness. The same snubbing of aristocratic speech is expressed in Pamela's disapproval of witty conversation, that *dear polite double entendre* (II, p. 72; also see II, p. 62). But Pamela's most cutting remarks about the morals of the quality are uttered on the occasion of a dinner Mr. B. offers to some friends (cf. II, p. 122). She then derides the sham of stylish marriages, the snobbishness of fashionable fops and the haughtiness of highborn ladies. However, Richardson's worst debauchees, the ones he depicts more scathingly, do not belong to the upper classes: he portrays Mrs. Jewkes and Collbrand, Pamela's watchdogs, under such pitiless lights, that they

²² Quoted by Oliver Elton: *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 167.

seem to have come out from one of Hogarth's series. This, I think, reveals something of Richardson's character: he voices the bourgeois's grudge against the nobility but he is not free from a snobbish yearning for their social and cultural superiority.

Though Fielding's condemnation of social flaws sometimes coincides with Richardson's, his conception of morality is quite different. As Basil Willey has observed, the eighteenth century witnessed the ebb of the *tragic sense of life*²³. The idea of God as a terrible judge, and of life as a punishment for the original sin and a transition to eternal life, gave way to a more optimistic view of life, and of a God whose wisdom and benevolence were expressed in the beauty and perfection of Nature. This notion that Nature was the work of God and it was thus inherently good and wise, led to the conception of a Natural Law governing both the universe and man's life.

Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, stated that reason was *natural Revelation, whereby the Father of Light and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties*²⁴. Morality resulted from following the dictates of reason and came to be identified with natural and divine law: Shaftesbury supported the theory of an innate "moral sense" in man's nature. His work, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times*, was widely read in the first half of the century, and the influence of his moral doctrine is easily recognizable in Fielding's works.

Fielding opposes goodness and evil in the characters of Tom and Blifil. Tom, though he frequently acts rashly and commits many blunders, is inherently good; Blifil, apparently good, condenses all evil in his character and does not possess a single redeeming feature.

Fielding tells us of Tom's attitude towards Molly: *His own heart would not suffer him to destroy a human creature who, he thought, loved him. and had to that love sacrificed her innocence* (Book V, ch. iii). We very well know that the only *sacrificed innocence* was

²³ WILLEY, B.: op. cit., p. 17.

²⁴ Quoted by Basil Willey, op. cit., p. 15.

Tom's, but the passage serves to illustrate the hero's innate generosity and kindness.

Intentions are even more important than actions, Fielding seems to state, challenging the sham of a morality based on outward appearances rather than on intrinsic virtue. He ironically comments upon the ordinary conception of ladies' respectability:

"Our travellers had happened to take up their residence at a house of exceeding good repute, wither Irish ladies of strict virtue, and many northern lasses of the same predicament, were accustomed to resort in their way to Bath. The landlady therefore would by no means have admitted any conversation of of a disreputable kind to pass under her roof. Indeed, so foul and contagious are all such proceedings, that they contaminate the very innocent scenes when they are committed, and give the name of a bad house, or of a house of ill repute, to all those where they are suffered to be carried on.

Not that I would intimate that such strict chastity as was preserved in the temple of Vesta can possibly be maintained at a public inn. My good landlady did not hope for such a blessing, nor would any of the ladies I have spoken of, or indeed any others of the most rigid note, have expected or insisted on any such thing. But to exclude all vulgar concubinage, and to drive all whores in rags from within the walls, is within the power of every one. This my landlady very strictly adhered to, and this her virtuous guests, who did not travel in rags, would very reasonably have expected of her" (Book IX, ch. iii).

If decorum was preserved and clothes were fine, the bourgeois moral cannons were not so rigid, Fielding suggests.

Fielding, as Richardson, has a moral purpose, but, though decided to expose the humbug of the conventions of his time, he is always genial and optimistic. He possesses the cheerfulness Addison recommended, which makes man watch the world as *a kind of Theatre filled with Objects that either raise in us Pleasure, Amusement or Admiration*²⁵. He loves his fictional creatures, and even when he ridicules them, he does it with a sort of affectionate, playful humour. If Blifil is deprived from his sympathy, it is because he is not really

²⁵ Quoted by Basil Willey in op. cit., p. 49.

a human being but the embodiment of the very hypocrisy Fielding is denouncing.

Tom's speech to Nightingale advising him to marry the girl he has seduced, is the most striking contrast to Pamela's attitude:

"...when you promised to marry her, she became your wife; and she hath sinned more against prudence than virtue. And what is this world which you would be ashamed to face, but the vile, the foolish, the profligate? Forgive if I say such a shame must proceed from false modesty, which always attends false honour as its shadow" (Book XIV, ch. vii).

Fielding thus condemns hypocrisy and false moral standards and attacks the smug propriety Richardson stood for.

Irony is Fielding's favourite weapon to expose the flaws of society. In fact, the whole book is a masterly sustained display of ingenious irony. He uses Tom to this effect, because, though the hero does not actually denounce his contemporaries' foibles, he causes them to unmask themselves by the contrast with his own natural goodness.

In accordance with Shaftesbury's principles, to be natural leads to be moral, but natural instincts have to be governed by reason. This is what Tom must learn and Fielding states it early in the novel:

"...we shall, if rightly understood, afford a very useful lesson to those well-disposed youth who shall hereafter be our readers; for they may here find, that goodness of heart, and openness of temper, though these may give them great comfort within, and administer to an honest pride in their own minds, will by no means, alas! do their business in the world. Prudence and circumspection, are necessary even to the best of men. They are indeed, as it were, a guard to Virtue, without which she can never be safe" (Book III, ch. vii).

Fielding then coincides with his two fellow novelists in having a didactic purpose, but his view of education and morality is quite different.

Pamela's lengthy and pedantic discussions of Locke's *Treatise on Education*, points out the vogue that work had gained at the time, and is at the same time a manifestation of Richardson's narrow-

mindness and of his desire to please his public. The platitude of some of Pamela's objections to Locke's theories is quite irritating (cf. II, p. 372-412).

Fielding conveys his lesson much more cleverly and humorously. Two finely drawn characters, Thwackum and Square, serve his purpose of exposing the faults of two current and opposed conceptions of virtue and education:

"Square held human nature to be the perfection of all virtue, and that vice was a deviation from our nature, in the same manner as deformity of body is. Thwackum, on the contrary, maintained that the human mind, since the fall, was nothing but a sink of iniquity, till purified and redeemed by grace. In one point they only agreed, which was, in all their discourses on morality never to mention the word goodness. The favourite phrase of the former, was the natural beauty of virtue; that of the latter, was the divine power of grace. The former measured all actions by the unalterable rule of right, and the eternal fitness of things; the latter decided all matters by authority; but in doing this, he always used the scriptures and their commentators..." (Book III, ch. iii).

These two gentlemen whom Fielding significantly calls Square the Philosopher and Thwackum the Divine, agree in something else: the rod is the most effective way to enforce their teachings on too rebellious pupils. All throughout the novel the opposition between them shows the absurdity of a blind adherence to prejudices and theoretical principles.

The practical application of the current ideas about education is also illustrated in the works we are now considering. Our three novelists give us hints about the eighteenth-century educational system in England. The lower classes were quite neglected in this respect, as it is revealed by the spelling in the letter Pamela receives, denouncing Mr. B.'s affair with the Countess (cf. II, p. 301; also see *Tom Jones*, Book XV, ch. xi).

The middle class and the nobility had tutors to instruct their children at home. The results were quite uneven, judging by the contrast between Tom's knowledge of the classics and Mr. H.'s spelling (cf. *Pamela*, II, p. 203). Public schools, according to Mr.

Allworthy's opinion, were not satisfactory (cf. *Tom Jones*, Book III, ch. vi). Universities seemed to have had a reputation as centers not only of learning but also of loose morals (ch. the Man of the Hill story in *Tom Jones*, Book VIII, ch. xi).

As regards women, ladies still received the traditional and restricted instruction at home: reading, writing, music, dancing and a little French (cf. *Moll Flanders*, p. 14). But they were gradually advancing on their way to a broader learning, as it is shown by Mrs. Western's literary and political erudition, which Fielding so sneeringly comments upon, and also by Pamela's knowledge of the literature of her time. Since both Fielding and Richardson were so careful to keep the events in their novels within the boundaries of reality, it is evident that such display of feminine cultural attainments, must have been considered quite plausible by contemporary readers. But, of course, this benefit did not reach the women of the humbler classes, who were as uncultivated as their male equals. Nevertheless, the lower strata of society were slowly progressing in this respect, through the action of charity schools (cf. *Tom Jones*, Book XII, ch. v).

IX. CONCLUSIONS

For all the social flaws our three novelists point out in their works, their attitude is far from being pessimistic. Their novels are pervaded with a feeling of self-confidence and this was the prevailing mood in eighteenth-century England.

De Saussure, a French traveler who visited England in 1727, wrote: *I do not think there is a people more prejudiced in its own favour than the British people, and they allow this to appear in their talk and manners. They look on foreigners in general with contempt, and think nothing is as well done elsewhere as in their country*²⁶. The three works we are dealing with justify this observation. Richardson voices this feeling of national pride very explicitly. Pamela, traveling in Europe, writes to a friend: *. . . I shall bring you an heart as entirely English as ever, for all that!* (II, p. 427).

²⁶ Quoted by J. H. Plumb, op. cit., p. 33.

This feeling of national pride often takes the guise of a more or less open attack to the French, who had influenced English culture so much in the preceding period. Thus, the Man of the Hill tells Tom Jones:

“But of all the people I ever saw, heaven defend me from the French! With their damned prate and civilities and doing the honour of their nation to strangers (as they are pleased to call it), but indeed setting forth their own vanity; they are so troublesome, that I had infinitely rather pass my life with the Hotentots than set my foot in Paris again. They are a nasty people, but their nastiness is mostly without; whereas in France, and some other nations that I won't name, it is all within, and makes them stink much more to my reason than that of Hotentots does to my nose” (Book VIII, ch. xv).

The quoted passages in this work, which are by no means unique in these novels, are the expression of the recognition of a coherent national culture, and they illustrate the English people's consciousness of their growing importance in the concourse of nations.

Though the possibilities have by no means being exhausted, I must, for the time being, abandon the search for the evidences in these novels which, in some way or other reflect the social milieu in which their authors lived. Each of our novelists has contributed in his own peculiar way to round up an image of eighteenth-century England.

Defoe's *Moll Flanders* has shown us the seamy side of city life. The author has minutely presented the heroine's struggle to escape from the hopeless living conditions of the lower urban classes. Moll's world is mainly the world of bankrupts, thieves and prostitutes, but Moll herself is more than a mere *gaol bird*. Her character embodies all the talents and shortcomings of the rising merchant class. She is resourceful and ruggedly individualistic and she is also unscrupulous and greedy. As Dorothy Van Ghent has observed, her personality is nothing but the result of life in an acquisitive world²⁷. Moll is a thief but a thief to her is *a creature that watches the advantages of*

²⁷ VAN GHENT, DOROTHY: op. cit., p. 42.

other people's mistakes (p. 90), which is an excuse not very different from the one that might be employed by a successful businessman.

Moll's ethical values are those of the society that surrounded her. She breaks social conventions but, though it seems contradictory to our modern moral conscience, she always expresses deference towards them, and her one earnest desire is to achieve respectability. She tells us:

"I knew what I aimed at and what I wanted, but knew nothing how to pursue the end by direct means. I wanted to be placed in a settled state of living, and had I happened to meet with a sober, good husband, I would have been as faithful and true a wife to him as virtue itself could have formed" (p. 135).

Moll's observations about her world are realistic and candid, and they usually express her general acquiescence to that world. It is true that humorous and ironical comments on contemporary manners are not absent from this work, but, as I have already said, the ironical contradiction between what is said and what we believe is implied, often arises from the contrast with our own set of values. For Moll, and also for most of her contemporaries, there is no moral contradiction in her too timely repentance, once she is rich, and in hers and her husband's decision, when they are old, to spend *the remainder of . . . (their) years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives . . . (they) have lived* (p. 368).

Pamela does not offer us a fundamentally different picture: only the angle has varied. Richardson deals with the middle class and the lesser gentry, the environments he was best acquainted with. He gives us a faithful portrayal of domestic life and social manners in those circles where Pamela moves. The heroine's characterization is also interesting to us, since, thanks to Richardson's experience as a writer of love letters, it gives us an insight into the mind of a representative maiden of the period.

Pamela can be considered, according to Richardson's ethical intention and to the conventions of his time, as an extended moral exemplum. In fact, *Pamela* marks the triumph of bourgeois ethics

over aristocratic moral standards. The transition from one outlook to the other is illustrated by Mr. B.'s conversion.

For all its dull didacticism, *Pamela* is, of the three works we are now considering, the richest picture of contemporary manners. Richardson's fastidious minuteness in the description of every day matters is very revealing to us as regards homely life, and Pamela's thoughts and feelings express the social norms of her time.

Fielding's view of life in eighteenth-century England is presented on a much larger canvas. His culture and better understanding of human nature allowed him to offer us a wider panorama than his two fellow novelists. Free from Richardson's conventionalism and from Defoe's restricted point of view, he does not hesitate to people his novel with characters from all the social strata. But, though broader, his picture of society is less naive and more intellectual. His deeper knowledge of humanity and his superior intellect raise him above his contemporaries.

He belongs to the group of privileged writers whose works defeat time. He is then nearer to us than either Richardson or Defoe, but, for this very reason, his work is, in some aspects, less representative of the spirit of his time. We need to be aware of Richardson's smug conventionalism and Defoe's mercantilistic conception of life to understand their age fully.

This view of eighteenth-century England through the significant works of three contemporary novelists is by no means complete, but I think the essential features have been delineated, and we can appreciate the changes that were going on at the period, which would eventually lead to social canons still persistent in our times. We have also seen how the novel is, from its very birth, connected with the problem of the individual and society. This basic characteristic of the novel has withstood all the changes that affected the evolution of the genre and is, undoubtedly, a reason for its enduring popularity. Our three novelists acknowledged the close relationship between the novel and social manners and this has made their works everlasting sources of pleasure and enlightenment.