

The Social Design Of Fielding's Novels

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Article:

During the last two decades we have received a "definitive" reading from two editors of the Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding to complement definitive editions of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. According to Martin C. Battestin and Henry K. Miller, we must read these novels—and presumably, *Amelia*—as emblem, allegory, or romance in which character and plot illustrate abstractions. In doing so, however, we slight the representational art of a novelist who dealt continuously with the lives of men in communities—before his first novel, as a lawyer riding the Western Circuit of England and as a political journalist; and before his last, as a justice of the peace in London. I suggest that Fielding was much more interested in social mimesis than this new reading of his novels allows. He sets the actions of his fiction in communities which determine their significance. Unlike the vague criminal realm of *Moll Flanders* or the isolated households of *Pamela*, Fielding's communities extend from postilion to peer; and unlike the grotesques of *Roderick Random*, his characters are carefully integrated into social patterns. As this essay will show, we must give more consideration to the social design which, in itself, constitutes a major part of the meaning of *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*.

Fielding peoples his imagined communities with figures whose bonds are apparent to the reader, though not necessarily to the characters themselves, most of whom suffer from egotism. This kind of dramatic irony is integral to Fielding's morality, as "An Essay on Knowledge of Characters of Men" makes clear. There Fielding contrasts a modern reality with a classical ideal of community: "This *Art of thriving* being the very Reverse of that Doctrine of the Stoics; by which Men were taught to consider themselves as Fellow-Citizens of the World, and to labour jointly for the common Good, without any private Distinction of their own: whereas *This*, on the contrary, points out to every Individual his own particular and separate Advantage, to which he is to sacrifice the Interest of all others."² The best "Method" to detect the hypocritical basis of "thriving," Fielding later declares, is "carefully to observe the Actions of Men with others, and especially with those to whom they are allied in Blood, Marriage, Friendship, Profession, Neighbourhood, or any other Connection . . . Trace then the Man proposed to your Trust, into his private Family and nearest Intimacies. See whether he hath acted the Part of a good Son, Brother, Husband, Father, Friend, Master, Servant, &c. if he hath discharged these Duties well, your Confidence will have a good Foundation" (*Misc.*, p. 175). This recommendation for daily life corresponds closely to the context of Fielding's moral analysis in the novels. While we detect aberrations from Fielding's social ideals, by observing the actions of characters in communities, we recognize the interdependence of those characters.

In contrast to the kind of novel *Pamela* epitomized to Fielding, this social design places protagonists in a nexus of human beings and frees them from self-enclosure for true "Conversation" in society—"the Art of pleasing or doing Good to one another" (*Misc.*, p. 123). Fielding objected to *Pamela's* virtue because it seemed too much like the "Art of thriving"; he found her individualism thwarting proper social action. When *Pamela* herself, believing upward mobility to be a sign of grace, appears in the final chapters of *Joseph Andrews*, she embodies the self-love which prompted Fielding's novel and dominates its pages. As she admonishes Joseph, whom she assumes to be her brother, not to lower their newly risen family by marrying Fanny Goodwill, who is her sister, *Pamela* loses her soul in the labyrinth of Fielding's irony. Because of such irony intricate social structures are

essential to Fielding's novels. Of situations, suggests Bernard Harrison, in which "we can perceive the slow opening of the revelatory gulf between the way a man talks and the pleasing picture of his motives which his talk is designed to foster," there must be "sufficient complexity to allow ironies to multiply For this to happen the characters must move in an imagined world which has sufficient depth and intricacy. The characters must constitute for each other a forest of constraints and hindrances, through and around which each character pursues his way and his interests as best he may, groping, stumbling, and in the process revealing his true nature."³ Such depth and intricacy Fielding achieves through a full exploration of the manifold relations with others which characterize this social animal, man. But the method of exploration differs in each novel.

If *Joseph Andrews* begins in response to *Pamela*, each subsequent novel begins where the previous one ends. In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding arranges most of his characters in satiric gatherings, temporary social groups encountered by Joseph and Parson Adams in coaches, houses, or inns, which serve as microcosms. The novel's final book portrays a provincial community around Lady Booby's estate, where Fielding's good parson has a wife, children, and a larger family of parishioners. In *Tom Jones* Fielding focuses on another Somersetshire community, formed by two patriarchal families and their interlocking educational, marital, and judicial problems. While Tom and Sophia Western journey separately to London, Fielding situates them in a number of groups, like those in *Joseph Andrews*, where self-love dominates. The ties of family and friendship between the Somersetshire characters and the London community underscore the more unified social design of this novel. In *Amelia* Fielding fuses the links of mutual dependence between his characters into a single urban community in which he places a central conjugal family, the Booths. As we turn from *Joseph Andrews* to *Tom Jones* to *Amelia*, then, we can observe Fielding's development of communities with increasing depth and complication in which to disclose his moral actions.

The communities of *Joseph Andrews* are, as Joseph says of schools, "little Societies," in which a reader "of any Observation may see in Epitome what he will afterwards find in the World at large" (III, 5). They abundantly illustrate the satiric aim of the novel's preface—the ridicule of affectation caused by vanity and hypocrisy. In the London townhouse of Book I, in the coaches and inns of Books I and II, in the country houses of Book III, and in the Somersetshire parish of Book IV, Fielding anatomizes the social identities of his characters, dramatizing their self-love, while disclosing their social bonds. He finds a general principle for these "little Societies" in "A Dissertation concerning high People and low People," where he describes "the Picture of Dependance like a kind of Ladder" ascending from postilion to footman and squire's gentleman, then from squire to lord, favorite, and king. He concludes: "Nor is there perhaps, in this whole Ladder of Dependance, any one Step at a greater Distance from the other, than the first from the second: so that to a Philosopher the Question might only seem whether you would chuse to be a great Man at six in the Morning, or at two in the Afternoon. And yet there are scarce two of these, who do not think the least Familiarity with the Persons below them a Condescension, and if they were to go one Step farther, a Degradation" (II, 13). This great chain of social being belies the relationship the "great" have with those below them.

The word "Dependance" in this passage implies not only the subordination characteristic of a hierarchical society, but also the varieties of mutual experience binding individual characters. Jonathan Swift provides an interesting gloss of this usage in one of his sermons: "Now, according to this Equality wherein God hath placed all Mankind, with relation to himself, you will observe, that in all the Relations between Man and Man, there is a mutual Dependence, whereby the one cannot subsist without the other. Thus, no Man can be a Prince without Subjects, nor a Master without Servants, nor a Father without Children . . . for, where there is a mutual Dependence, there must be a mutual Duty, and consequently a mutual Subjection."⁴ One aspect of Fielding's social ladder is the denial of another's human equality, the treatment of him as an object to gratify vanity or lust. The terms "*strange Persons, People one does not know, the Creature, Wretches, Beasts, Brutes*" (II, 13), and "Bettors" reveal a speaker's effort to denigrate others as "low" and to make himself appear "high." But the patterns of Fielding's communities give the reader evidence for such characters' interdependence, or, in Swift's phrase, their "mutual Subjection."

We can see this design emerge in the townhouse, coach, and inn of Book I. Fielding begins with a household like that of *Pamela*—his female B., Lady Booby, her maid, Mrs. Slipslop, and Pamela's brother, Joseph. The lady expects Joseph to be malleable because she is his "Better." Since pride will not permit her to treat Joseph as an equal, she must dismiss him or daily be humiliated. Mrs. Slipslop later sees Fanny as her rival and snubs her, but she never refuses to help Joseph and even grapples with a landlady on Adams's behalf. Fielding later explores such conflicts more characteristically in settings where he is less interested in parodying *Pamela* than in portraying English society. In the novel's final book, of course, he places Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop, and Joseph in their own rural community.

The stagecoach encountered after Joseph's banishment and robbery establishes a paradigm for these "little Societies." It contains a coachman, a postilion, and four passengers, all but one of whom prefer little contact with the suffering human being lying on the road. The postilion, at the bottom of Fielding's "Ladder of Dependence," behaves with more charity than his "Betters." The egotistical characters cannot acknowledge the mutual dependence which the law compels them selfishly to accept when they take Joseph into the coach on the advice of their counsel. The law which makes it punishable to leave the scene of a capital crime recognizes the responsibilities men have for each other, though the lawyer's version alters that understanding to responsibility for self. Later in Book III Fielding identifies this lawyer's origin with the appearance of "the first mean selfish Creature . . . on the human Stage, who made Self the Centre of the whole Creation; would give himself no Pain, incur no Danger, advance no Money to assist, or preserve his Fellow-Creatures" (III, 1). This character and the episode's legal context attest to the function of this "little Society" as an "Epitome" of those that follow.

When this coach arrives at the Dragon Inn, Joseph encounters the Towwouses, the first of several families in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* responsible for the kind of community associated with an inn, where economic motives generally control hospitable obligations to guests. As in the case of the Tow-wouses, Fielding sometimes dwells on the marital problems of his innkeepers and usually expands their relationship with temporary patrons to include other figures in the neighborhood. The possible moral leader of this community, Parson Barnabas, prefers to argue points of law with the surgeon and drink punch with his friends. His inadequacy is manifested in a conversation with Adams and a bookseller, during which the good parson describes the purpose of the sacrament: "For what could tend more to the noble Purposes of Religion, than frequent cheerful Meetings among the Members of a Society, in which they should in the Presence of one another, and in the Service of the supreme Being, make Promises of being good, friendly and benevolent to each other?" (I, 17). Where the law reinforces social obligation in the coach scene, here the church's central event is seen as an instrument of social love. However, except for the chambermaid Betty, the characters at the Dragon, attending only to money or social position, do not admit such a social bond.

Fielding's *comédie humaine* continues in Book II mostly in the vicinity of inns. Two lawyers met at an inn by Adams judge a neighbor entirely "out of love to one's self." Another group combines Fielding's static and vehicular communities, when Slipslop, having rescued Joseph from the Dragon, brings Adams into a coach, which stops for refreshment at an inn, then continues its journey. After a man of false courage fails to help Adams thwart an assault, a "Set of young Fellows" takes Adams, Fanny, and her assailant to the house of a justice, where a "Company" is present. While the young men use the law for reward, the magistrate neglects his duty, with support from a parson. Joseph and Fanny are reunited at another inn, where the hostess trusts Adams' credit as long as she believes him to be the brother of Parson Trulliber. Her literal concept of brotherhood makes the novel's figurative bond more emphatic, as does a peddler's volunteering the necessary money. This book concludes when Fielding's protagonists encounter a false promiser at an inn, whose keeper behaves kindly.

The social milieu of Book III consists primarily of two houses where Adams, Joseph, and Fanny stop before reaching their parish. The first is occupied by Mr. Wilson's family; the second, by a young squire and six companions, who show no hospitality in roasting Adams and threatening Fanny. But the Wilsons' "*Way of Living*" distinguishes them from the self-love in the society around them. The mutual love of this family is the basis of its duty and happiness. Their visitors notice "the Tenderness which appeared in the Behaviour of Husband and Wife to each other, and to their Children and . . . the dutiful and affectionate Behaviour of these to their Parents" (III, 4).

Because of such family life the Wilsons do not seclude themselves; their social love encompasses their guests and neighbors. They do not need to know that Joseph is their son to show him charity. Battestin rightly concludes about this family: "Wilson's solution is . . . as close as possible to Fielding's ideal of the happy life, and it serves as a model for Joseph and Fanny to follow."⁵

Joseph's peregrination through English society ends in the provincial community where Lady Booby wields the secular influence, and Parson Adams, the religious. Her ambitious steward Peter Pounce, the deferential tools lawyer Scout and Justice Trotter, and three guests, her nephew Mr. Booby, his new wife Pamela, and Beau Didapper serve their vanity there. Although Fielding accords Didapper the highest social status among the novel's characters (in itself a satiric commentary on the others' aspirations), he makes the beau dependent on a higher figure. Adams's family, as his eldest daughter and little Dick reveal, comically joins selfishness and charity; Mrs. Adams, introduced as a prudent woman, regards her husband affectionately and overcomes expediency to act benevolently toward Joseph and Fanny. It is fitting that Fielding gave his quixotic parson a wife instead of a Sancho Panza as the basis for his belief that "the whole Parish are his Children" (IV, 11). This sense of a Christian community is prominent in the opening chapters of Book IV, when Fielding describes the economic satisfaction of the parish's poor about Lady Booby's return and continues as follows: "But if their Interest inspired so publick a Joy into every Countenance, how much more forcibly did the Affection which they bore Parson *Adams* operate upon all who beheld his Return. They flocked about him like dutiful Children round an indulgent Parent and vyed with each other in Demonstrations of Duty and Love" (IV, 1). Parson Adams's familial love extends into the social love of his parish. As Fielding declares elsewhere, "If a Man hath more love than what centers in himself, it will certainly light on his Children, his Relations, Friends, and nearest Acquaintance. If he extends it farther, what is it less than general Philanthropy, or Love to Mankind?" (*Misc.*, p. 176). With such an amplified representation of community life *Joseph Andrews* ends.

II

In the Somersetshire portion of *Tom Jones* Fielding creates a web of interdependence which extends far beyond the boundaries of Tom's parish. The families of squires Allworthy and Western form the basis of the novel's entire action, not only its first six books. The relatives and dependents of these landed gentlemen constitute a community which Fielding joins in the proposed marriage of their heirs. The two elders and young Blifil reveal the possibilities of self-love and social love in their provincial society. Allworthy, though a model of hospitality and benevolence, reflects the occasional errors or excesses which may arise in the most unselfish character. Tom's antagonist Blifil is appropriately his half-brother, a bond he conceals and seeks to end in the novel's final books. Western demonstrates how selfishness impedes love in the management of a daughter. Although Allworthy and Western make some arbitrary and faulty judgments as squires (for example, the former's judgment of Partridge), these errors are much less central to the novel than their mistakes as heads of families. Allworthy's resolution of boyhood conflicts between Blifil and Tom or of Tom's association with Black George are family matters, as are the marriage of Bridget Allworthy and the anticipated marriage of Blifil and Sophia. The issues transforming *Tom Jones* into a novel of the road, those leading to Tom's banishment and Sophia's flight, including Allworthy's opposition to marriage without love and Western's objections to it without land, are family problems.

Most prominent among the selfish relatives and dependents in these two families are the aging sisters of each squire. Bridget, the mother of both Tom and Blifil, sets in motion the sibling rivalry which nearly ruins her unacknowledged first son. Sophia's maiden aunt, Diana Western, twice frees her from Western's house arrest only to urge vociferously her marriage to Blifil or Lord Fellamar. Little is disclosed about Tom's father, but Blifil's father, Captain Blifil, and his less benevolent uncle, Dr. Blifil, bequeath their family's ambition to their heir. Among the squires' dependents, Honour and Wilkins are painfully aware of their social status. Thwackum and Square derive much of their liveliness from a tutorial rivalry for the land of the widowed Bridget, though Square's discovery in Molly Seagrim's room complicates his relationship to Tom. Parson Supple, the curate of Allworthy's parish and Western's drinking companion and moderating influence, exemplifies the insignificant character with sufficient vitality to enlarge our sense of this community.

Fielding fills out the Somersetshire community with other characters connected to Allworthy and Western. Some, like Goody Brown and several surgeons, appear only briefly. And Fielding introduces the collective "Neighbourhood" or "Mob" to respond whimsically to the fortunes of Tom, Partridge, or Jenny Jones (for example in I, 9; II, 6; III, 2; VI, 11). But two families and a lawyer affect Tom's life to an extent which their peripheral relationship to the squires might not suggest. Black George, first seen in the novel as Allworthy's gamekeeper and Tom's fellow poacher on Western's estate, ruined by his flaws and Blifil's malice, though restored as Western's gamekeeper, is "as honest as Men who love Money better than any other Thing in the Universe generally are" (VI, 12) and so robs Tom. His daughter Molly's pursuit of men, including Tom and Square, and the vanities of his wife and daughter Betty cause even more familial disorder. Partridge, forced to leave the parish by the squire's verdict on his role in Tom's parentage, seeks reward for repatriating Tom. Though becoming a servant for expedient reasons, his loyalty foils Honour's desertion of Sophia; but he also suffers the pangs of dependent status and repeats Tom's story too often at inns. Mrs. Partridge reveals the potent effects of jealousy through her faulty association of a memory (seeing Partridge leaning over Jenny's chair) with the news that Jenny is Tom's mother. Her plausible account (which satisfies the prudence of Wilkins, the selfishness of Captain Blifil, and the justice of Allworthy, and so ruins her husband) illustrates Fielding's ability to mesh the passions of a minor figure in the web of many other characters' desires. Jenny Jones, Partridge's servant and Bridget's confidante, reappears as Mrs. Waters at Upton, where she is Tom's lover, and in London, where she occupies the vacant post of wife for Mr. Fitzpatrick, further complicating her relationship to Tom. Finally, the Salisbury attorney Dowling rises from Bridget's deathbed messenger to Allworthy's steward and the planned successor to that post in Western's household, while his relationship to Blifil changes from unwitting accomplice, concealing Tom's identity from Allworthy, to active agent, seeking Tom's arrest in London.

In the novel's middle six books, set mostly on the road between Somersetshire and London, we find no such fully realized community, but satiric groups like those in *Joseph Andrews*. Fielding again gathers his minor figures around a host, most often an innkeeper, to scrutinize their self-love. At the inn where Tom first meets Partridge, Fielding places a representative group, composed of a company of soldiers, a neighborhood surgeon, the innkeepers, and their servants. Fielding's landlady remains his typical hostess who "loved Money so much, that she hated every Thing which had the Semblance of Poverty" (VIII, 4). Her husband tamely acquiesces; Nanny the chambermaid falls in love with Tom; and the surgeon, with much jargon, wrongly diagnoses his injury. These characters could easily reside at the Dragon Inn. Among the soldiers is ensign Northerton, later Mrs. Waters's assailant, twice Tom's combatant. This social microcosm is typical of the seven inns where Tom and Sophia stop during their journeys to London. More significant among Tom's hosts is the Man of the Hill, whose misanthropy and withdrawal are social as well as philosophical errors. If one retreats in Fielding's novels, he should retire with his family, like Mr. Wilson, to a rural community rather than sequester himself as a hermit.

In the six London books of *Tom Jones* Fielding constructs the *d&wuement* within another more tightly related community like that which begins the novel and whose prominent characters converge in the town. He groups his new characters primarily around the households of Lady Bellaston and Mrs. Miller, whose ties to the Somersetshire community further integrate the novel's moral action. Lady Bellaston, Sophia's cousin and Tom's final lover, presides over the masquerade of the beau monde. Mrs. Miller, Allworthy's friend and dependent, is benevolent toward Tom, especially in advocating his cause with the squire and Sophia. The characters who visit or reside in these two houses tend to reflect the orientation of their hostess. Those at Mrs. Miller's boarding house have a familial basis, while Lady Bellaston's town house is a center for scorn of the family.

Among the latter's visitors, Sophia's other cousin Harriet Fitzpatrick, with whom she journeys from Upton to London, tries to reinstate herself in her aunt's graces by betraying Sophia. Her protector, an unnamed Irish peer, is a shadowy figure, and Mr. Fitzpatrick caricatures the tyrannical husband and the passionate Irishman, whose impetuosity nearly causes Tom's execution. Lord Fellamar repeats his concern for honor with more sincerity than his attempted rape of Sophia would indicate; for Tom's release from prison joins Fellamar, the Irish peer, and Fitzpatrick in a common purpose. Among the characters in Mrs. Miller's "little Society" her daughters, like her cousin Anderson (who tries to relieve his family's distress by robbing Tom), are sentimental examples of her

situation. Her new son-in-law Nightingale marries against his family's wishes and loyally detects Dowling's role in Blifil's conspiracy. The appearance of Nightingale's father, another old friend of Allworthy, and uncle suggests the selfish heritage he must overcome to do these things. Although Fielding completes the intricate social design of *Tom Jones*, which so thoroughly links the Somersetshire and London characters, by restoring order in the families of Allworthy, Western, and Mrs. Miller, no such comic vision encompasses the urban community of *Amelia*.

III

Fielding extends the interdependence of his characters to include nearly every one in the London milieu of his last novel. By placing the Booths in a relationship of intimacy with the Jameses and Atkinsons, the Noble Lord and Dr. Harrison, and by intertwining their actions with those of a number of minor figures in both public and private relationships, Fielding creates a vivid sense of what it means to be Amelia and Billy Booth or their vulnerable children. In the novel's dedication he asserts that *Amelia* is "designed to promote the cause of virtue, and to expose some of the most glaring evils, as well public as private, which at present infest the country" (p. xv). Fielding clearly intends the community of *Amelia* to be a microcosm of town life in mid-eighteenth-century England.

As the most potent defender and assailant of the Booths and therefore of the family as the basis of the novel's community, Dr. Harrison and the Noble Lord represent the idea that greatness and goodness are not synonymous. The good man loves and protects the Booths, while the great man seeks to ruin them to sate his lust. Dr. Harrison comes to London from the country, where "All his parishioners, whom he treats as his children, regard him as their common father" (III, 12), to help the Booths. Despite his arrest of Billy, this Christian censor more characteristically attacks public or social vices, like dueling, bribery, and adultery. In a letter to Colonel James, for instance, the doctor describes adultery as "robbing" a man of "that property which, if he is a good man, he values above all others" (X, 2). Or in a conversation with an influential peer who will not aid Booth's military career without Dr. Harrison's support for his parliamentary candidate, he declares: "Nor is it only an act of injustice to the man himself, but to the public, for whose good principally all public offices are, or ought to be instituted" (XI, 2). The Noble Lord seldom appears in the novel, even though he threatens Mrs. Bennet and Amelia, but his anonymity, his disguises, his network of agents, and his power (he can procure a commission for Atkinson when he thinks the reward will be Amelia), make him a sinister figure, a person of rank who puts self first.

Through the Jameses and Atkinsons Fielding establishes relationships between families rather than individuals. Bob James, Booth's fellow officer at Gibraltar, jealous of Billy's liaison with Fanny Matthews and envious of Amelia, withholds his financial and military assistance. His position as a colonel and member of parliament permits James to promise freely and to pursue Amelia with impunity. Ambitious Jenny Bath, Amelia's longtime friend, is an apt mate. Colonel Bath, who advances through his brother-in-law's fortune, is potentially disruptive to the novel's community in his failure to distinguish modern custom, dueling, from true honor. Fanny Matthews, as Booth's lover and James's mistress, also occupies a troublesome place in the family life of each. While the James family represents an obstacle to the Booths' matrimonial happiness, the Atkinsons demonstrate the possibilities of benevolence. Amelia's foster brother and Booth's faithful servant at Gibraltar, Atkinson refuses James's bribes and protects Booth from Murphy's agents. Before Fielding marries him to Mrs. Bennet, she tells her equivocal history to Amelia as a warning about the Noble Lord, who ruined her first marriage. Though she continues to help Amelia detect others' intrigues, Mrs. Bennet is selfish enough to compromise Amelia's reputation in order to secure a commission of her husband, whom, unlike Mrs. James, she loves.

Fielding surrounds the Booths with agents of the Noble Lord, James, and Betty Harris, Amelia's sister, a minor figure whose deception makes possible the novel's happy ending. Mrs. Ellison, the Noble Lord's cousin and Mrs. Bennet's and Amelia's landlady at different times, mediates between the assailant and his victims. Captain Trent, Booth's former military companion, having ensnared the Noble Lord with his wife as bait and become his procurer, urges Booth to use Amelia as a lure for the lusty peer. Later his securing Booth's arrest through the services of a bailiff and a frequent assistant, the pimp currently employed by James to spy on Fanny, shows how

self-love joins these characters in their menace to the Booths' integrity. Like Dowling in *Tom Jones*, Murphy works for many characters, being the partner of Miss Harris's forgery, the intermediary for Fanny's and Booth's release from Newgate, the agent of Dr. Harrison's suit against Booth, and finally the betrayer of his former co-conspirator Robinson, who is Booth's fellow prisoner.

Four government officials illustrate the pernicious influence of self-love on the efficacy of public institutions, with support from superiors like the "great man" of Dr. Harrison's acquaintance. As the first figure to appear in the novel, Justice Thrasher establishes the moral quality of this community. Fielding's inclusion of a worthy justice near the end of the novel cannot dispel the sense of widespread self-love in the public domain, introduced by Thrasher, who believes himself "the centre of gravity" that attracts "all things thither" (I, 2). The keeper of Newgate prison, where Booth and Fanny are confined, reveals the unequal treatment of prisoners determined by their wealth. Similarly, Bondum the bailiff uses the sponging house where Booth is detained to extort "civility-money." A minor War Office official, who pretends to "manage the wheels in the great state lottery of preferment," dupes Booth and others who do not realize that the lottery is rigged. And the peer, with "very considerable interest with the ministers at that Time," expresses his disdain for Dr. Harrison's ideal of government as "chimerical . . . inconsistent with the state of human affairs" (XI, 2). It is no coincidence that James, Bath, and the Noble Lord, along with this peer, are all members of parliament, high government officials joined by their selfishness to lower ones like Thrasher and Bondum in their cynical disregard of social responsibility.

Fielding also includes within this imagined community two groups of characters similar to the satiric gatherings in Books I-III of *Joseph Andrews* and Books VII-XII of *Tom Jones*, which appear at Newgate and Bondum's. Several are familiar satiric figures, but the prisoners in the first book represent Fielding's concern with those punished by a community whose prevailing values he questions extensively in the novel and too often judges injurious to human dignity. Unlike his other "little Societies," these characters are where they are because of a particular social relationship to the whole community. They are agents, if guilty, or victims, if innocent, of self-love as a dominant way of life. For example, Booth sees a pretty, seemingly innocent girl, really a prostitute, who illustrates one possibility for a young woman without Amelia's integrity or Fanny's ingenuity. But he also encounters a wrongly imprisoned former soldier, residing in Newgate because of institutional indifference, a result of his poverty. Blear-eyed Moll, whose massive personal decay and vicious actions are described in a position symmetrical to that of Amelia's beauty and virtue at the worthy justice's house, is the predominant character in Newgate. C. J. Rawson finds Moll's sketch inconsistent with Fielding's Augustan vision of order and argues that "the phenomenon of Blear-eyed Moll and that of Amelia simply cannot connect."⁶ But they connect in the sense that Moll reflects the ultimate degradation of a human being in the self-seeking world that threatens Amelia and her family. In *Amelia* some of society's criminals, like Moll, reside in Newgate because of their low status, while the great, like the Noble Lord or Justice Thrasher, avoid the prison and receive only the novelist's wishful punishment. Though few characters in the novel acknowledge it, Fielding sees them as a community in which the Booths must struggle to live moral lives.

IV

The social design of Fielding's novels represents the bonds joining men and the human failures separating them. Especially in *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, Fielding integrates his characters into a "genuine community" of the kind Raymond Williams judges essential for the realistic novel: ". . . a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship—work or friendship or family—but by many interlocking kinds," like that in *Middlemarch*, which is a "complex of personal, family, and working relationships [that] draws its whole strength from their interaction in an indivisible process."⁷ Fielding examines the moral lives of his characters in diverse social settings, but increasingly in this "indivisible process," in Book IV of *Joseph Andrews*, in Books I-VI and XIII-XVIII of *Tom Jones*, and in *Amelia*. His focus on communities sets Fielding's novels apart from contemporary works like *Clarissa*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Humphry Clinker*, in which the extended family, but not its community, is central. Indeed, Fielding's social design leads on to the human context so effectively portrayed by the Victorian novelists. For instance, the communities of those who make "self the Centre of the whole Creation" in Fielding's novels resemble the family and parish "skein of life" violated in *The Mill on the*

Floss. And the links between Fielding's characters in his last two novels suggest the patterns of community in *Bleak House*, those uncovered by Tulkinghorn, a more powerful and sinister Dowling, and those joining Esther Summerson and the outcast Jo, which Dickens calls "the web of very different lives."

Though this perspective on Fielding's novels does not square with the prominent view of professors Battestin and Miller, it does accord with the Ciceronian philosophy Fielding so much admired. In *De Officiis* Cicero asserts: "Again, that wisdom which I have given the foremost place is the knowledge of things human and divine, which is concerned also with the bonds of union between gods and men and the relations of man to man. If wisdom is the most important of the virtues, as it certainly is, it necessarily follows that duty which is connected with the social obligation is the most important duty."⁸

Fielding's novels represent this obligation not only through the themes of charity and benevolence but also through their communities. The educations of the heroes in *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*, as we have seen, take place in a social milieu that compels the reader to recognize the interdependence of its characters. Fielding's mimesis of the social world is not just a clue for allegorizing his fiction but a meaningful representation of the human environment for living wisely and well.

Notes:

- 1 Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959); "Introduction," *Tom Jones: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968); *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), especially Chapter VI, published in *ELH* in 1968 and reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Tom Jones* in 1973; Miller, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones and the Romance Tradition*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series, No. 6 (Victoria: Univ. of Victoria Press, 1976).
- 2 *Miscellanies, Volume I*, ed. Miller (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), pp. 154-155. Subsequent references to the *Miscellanies* are cited parenthetically, as are references to these editions of the novels: *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Battestin (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967); *Tom Jones*, ed. Battestin & Fredson Bowers, 2 volumes (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975); *Amelia*, 2 volumes (London: Dent, 1930).
- 3 *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p. 64.
- 4 "On Mutual Subjection," *Irish Tracts 1720-1723 and Sermons*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 144.
- 5 Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, p. 129.
- 6 *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress* (London: Routledge, 1972), p.96.
- 7 *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 286.
- 8 *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (London: Heinemann, 1913), I, xliii.