POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN SELECTED DRAMA OF HENRY FIELDING

APPROVED:

[Signature]
Major Professor

[Signature]
Minor Professor

[Signature]
Director of the Department of English

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN SELECTED
DRAMA OF HENRY FIELDING

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

John O. Rosenbalm, B. A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1966
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. IN WHICH TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF CRITICISM IS BRIEFLY EXAMINED AND REVIEWED TO ESTABLISH THE REASONS FOR AND THE PURPOSES OF THIS THESIS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. IN WHICH CERTAIN AUTHORS AND HISTORIANS ARE QUOTED IN ORDER TO PRESENT A PORTRAIT OF THE DARKER ASPECTS OF ENGLISH SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE WHICH FIELDING SATIRIZED</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. IN WHICH CERTAIN OF FIELDING'S PLAYS WHICH SHOW HIS CONCERN FOR SOCIETY ARE EXAMINED</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. IN WHICH CERTAIN OF FIELDING'S PLAYS WHICH SHOW HIS CONCERN ABOUT POLITICS ARE EXAMINED</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. IN WHICH THE CONCLUSIONS YIELDED BY THIS THESIS ARE GIVEN</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

IN WHICH TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF CRITICISM IS BRIEFLY EXAMINED
AND REVIEWED TO ESTABLISH THE REASONS FOR AND THE
PURPOSES OF THIS THESIS

Detailed criticism of Henry Fielding's drama has been
scanty until only recently, and that which has been produced
during the last thirty years is marked by disagreement with
respect to the purpose, quality, and significance of
Fielding's contributions to the stage. Commenting on the
purpose of Fielding's drama, Robert Etheridge Moore asserts
that Fielding was the "author of very funny but essentially
frivolous dramatic burlesques."¹ Winfield H. Rogers,
however, sees in Fielding's drama "a basic seriousness which
in many respects anticipates his great novels."² The
significance of Fielding's drama to the twentieth century is
also a topic which has aroused considerable disagreement.
Edgar V. Roberts believes that the plays are of little value
because they are "topical and dated."³ Claude E. Jones feels

¹Robert Etheridge Moore, "Dr. Johnson on Fielding and Richardson," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 180.
²Winfield H. Rogers, "The Significance of Fielding's Temple Beau," PMLA, LV (1940), 441.
that the plays have some value because they speak "to us across two centuries." And Olivia Robertson, noting the social and political content of Fielding's drama, asserts that his work "is more suited to the twentieth century than his own age."

It is not surprising, however, to find such disagreement among twentieth century critics: eighteenth and nineteenth century critics were also divided over the merits of Fielding's genius. Dr. Samuel Johnson, when asked about Fielding's merit as a novelist, replied that "there was as great a difference between them (Fielding and Richardson) as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial plate." Johnson's biographer, James Boswell, holds an entirely different view of Fielding's novels:

... the moral tendency of Fielding's writings, though it does not encourage a strained and rarely possible virtue, is ever favorable to honour and honesty, and cherishes the benevolent and generous affections. He who is as good as Fielding would make him, is an amiable member of society, and may be led on by more regulated instructors, to a higher state of ethical perfection."

---


7 Ibid., p. 368.
During the eighteenth century, criticism of specific dramas by Fielding is also marked by disagreement. David Ernest Baker, commenting in *Biographia Dramatica*, feels that Fielding's "dramatic pieces, every one of which is comic, are far from contemptible." Of the specific dramas, *Love in Several Masques* is said to possess "considerable merit," and *Tom Thumb* is called "one of the best burlesques that ever appeared in this or any other language." Yet in the same work, Baker quotes a rather uncomplimentary passage by Arthur Murphy, Fielding's first biographer:

> When his finances were exhausted, he was not the most elegant in his choice of the means to redress himself, and he would instantly exhibit a farce or a puppet-show, in the Haymarket theatre, which was wholly inconsistent with the profession he had embarked in.

And again in the same work appears the remark, attributable to no one, that "little can be allowed to the careless and hasty pencil of Mr. Fielding."

The nineteenth century also produced critics who differed substantially in their opinions of Fielding's works. The romantics were, on the whole, sympathetic with the

---


11 Arthur Murphy, quoted in Baker, I, 242.

12 Baker, III, 325.
efforts of Henry Fielding. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his criticism of Shakespeare, praises Fielding in almost panegyric proportions:

I honour, I love, the works of Fielding as much, or perhaps more, than those of any other writer of fiction of that kind; take Fielding in his characters of postilions, landlords, and landladies, waiters, or indeed, of any-body who had come before his eye, and nothing can be more true, more happy, or more humorous.\(^\text{13}\)

And William Hazlitt, in his *Essays on Comic Writers*, expresses much the same opinions:

... I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II as we meet with in the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams. This work, indeed, I take to be a perfect piece of statistics in its kind.\(^\text{14}\)

The English Victorians, however, present quite another view. William Makepiece Thackeray, in a review of *Fielding's Works in One Volume, with a Memoir by Thomas Roscoe*, prudishly asserts:

The world does not tolerate now such satire as that of Hogarth and Fielding, and the world no doubt is right in a great part of its squeamishness; for it is good to pretend to the virtue of chastity even though we do not possess it; nay, the very restraint which the hypocrisy lays on a man is not unapt in some instances to profit him.\(^\text{15}\)


\(^{15}\)The *Times*, September 2, 1840, p. 6.
Since Fielding felt that "the only source of the true ridiculous affectation,"\textsuperscript{16} it is not surprising to find an even denser assessment of Fielding's dramatic works further on in Thackeray's review:

They are not remarkable for wit ever, though they have plenty of spirits; a great deal too much perhaps. ... Fielding writes in a slovenly, dashing, swaggering way; and the pieces are, it must be confessed, irretrievably immoral.\textsuperscript{17}

In nineteenth century America, James Russell Lowell seems to have caught the true spirit of Fielding's works. In the \textit{Atlantic Monthly} for September, 1890, appears a rather bad poem entitled "Inscription for a Memorial Bust of Fielding":

\begin{quote}
He looked on naked Nature unashamed, \\
And saw the Spinx, now bestial, now divine, \\
In change and rechange, he nor praised nor blamed, \\
But drew her as he saw with fearless line. \\
Did he good service? God must judge, not we; \\
Manly he was, and generous and sincere; \\
English in all, of genius blithely free; \\
Who loves a man may see his image here.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The most impressive aspect of most of the criticism on Fielding and his work is the disparity which exists. It would seem that over a span of two centuries some definite conclusions about the purpose and significance of Fielding's


\textsuperscript{17}The Times, September 2, 1840, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{18}James Russell Lowell, "Inscription for a Memorial Bust of Fielding," \textit{Atlantic Monthly}, LXVI (September, 1890), 322.
drama should have been reached; yet few, if any, exist. The purposes of this thesis are to show that Fielding's dramas reflect the social and political abuses prevalent in England during the first four decades of the eighteenth century; to show through careful delineation of specific dramas that those dramas led to repeated attempts by the Walpole Ministry to pass a licensing act; and to show that Fielding was seriously concerned about the political and social deterioration which he felt was occurring during the decade of the 1730's. Because of the limits of space, the thesis will not attempt to unify Fielding's political and social ideals into a systematic philosophy.

In showing that Fielding's drama reflects the social and political abuses of the early eighteenth century, this thesis will examine closely the following dramatic pieces: *The Author's Farce*. 1727; *The Temple Beau*. 1730; *The Grub-Street Opera*. 1731; *The Letter-Writers*. 1731; *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. 1731; *The Modern Husband*. 1732; *The Lottery*. 1732; *Pacquin*. 1736; *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*. 1737; *Eurydice Miss'd*. 1737. The above listed plays, burlesques, and farces represent less than half of the twenty-six dramatic pieces written by Fielding, but they provide the most comprehensive selection of Fielding's attacks upon the social and political ills of English society. It should
also be noted that some of the above dramas are concerned almost exclusively with either social or political abuses. The *Letter Writers*, for example, is satirical, but not particularly political, in content. The idea for the play was probably suggested by events which occurred in 1730 and 1731. C. B. Woods reports that records in the *Monthly Chronicle* for October, November, and December, 1730, indicate that "incendiaries and murderers had flooded the country with threatening letters, and had succeeded in extorting considerable sums of money from the easily intimidated." The fact that the play was first acted on Wednesday, March 24, 1731, as an afterpiece to *Tom Thumb*, barely six months after the first reports in the *Monthly Chronicle*, would seem to substantiate Woods’ interpretation of the play’s source. The *Lottery* is another example of a play which is, "for the most part, nonpolitical." The basis for this play is the English State Lottery of 1731. Edgar V. Roberts asserts that "the evils of the lotteries occurred not in the drawing, but almost exclusively in the manipulation of tickets by

---


20 Ibid.


brokers or stockjobbers, like Fielding's Stocks."

The Coffee House Politician is, however, substantially political in content. Since Fielding found very little to admire in either party, the play is concerned with the political abuses of both the Whigs and the Opposition. The "Prologue" to the play is very interesting because it contains what Fielding thought should be the goal of those who hold or seek power:

Then only reverence to power is due
When public welfare is its only view:
But when the champions, whom the public arm
For their own good with power, attempt their harm,
He sure must meet the general applause,
Who 'gainst those traitors fights the public cause.

And although there is some social satire in Pasquin and The Historical Register, these plays are substantially political in content also. Those plays which are largely concerned with social abuses will be considered in chapter three of this thesis; those largely political, in chapter four. Because of the complex structure of The Author's Farce and Eurydice His'd, it will be necessary to examine them in both the chapter dealing with social satire and the chapter dealing with political satire.

Although censorship of the stage was practically abolished under George I, there were numerous instances of suppression

---

23 Ibid., p. 47.

under George II. Kenneth D. Wright reports that John Gay's 
Polly was banned in 1729 for political reasons. In the 
summer of 1731, The Fall of Mortimer was banned and the players 
were arrested. Hurlothurumbo was stopped and the players 
dispersed in August of the same year. Ostensibly these 
suppressions were caused by the failure of the theatres to 
hold royal patents. Following such incidents as these, 
the Walpole Ministry twice attempted to restrict the English 
stage by acts of parliament. The first attempt was made in 
1733, and although the bill was debated in Parliament, it 
did not come to a vote. In 1735 a second attempt was 
made, but this bill was defeated by a vote of ninety to 
seventy-four. These early attempts at suppression would 
seem to indicate that Fielding was the victim of an idea 
firmly implanted in the mind of Walpole long before the 
appearance of Fielding's most abusive political satire. Yet 
it was only after the staging of Pasquin, The Historical 
Register, and Eurydice Hiss'd that Walpole was successful. 
In chapter five, this thesis will attempt to substantiate 
Kenneth D. Wright's claim that "it was Fielding's satirical

25 Kenneth D. Wright, "Henry Fielding and the Theatres 
Act of 1737," Quarterly Journal of Speech, L (October, 1964), 
252-53. 
26 Ibid., p. 253. 
27 Scouten, London Stage, p. xlix. 
28 Ibid. 
29 Ibid. 
30 Ibid.
drama, consistently effective and popular with London, that provided the impetus needed to start the machinery of government interference."\(^{31}\)

The last question with which this thesis will deal is that of Fielding's purpose in writing his drama. Considerable disagreement is once again the dominant theme of the criticism of Fielding's purpose. Sheridan Baker believes that Fielding, in political perspective, becomes much less original, much less the Champion of England, much more a talented young writer catching a popular advantage, willing to please the town, pleased to please his eminent and literate friends among the lords of the Opposition, really believing that most men have their prices, that Walpole has no monopoly on sin.\(^{32}\)

And Martin C. Battestin contends that "the portrait of Fielding as a paragon of political integrity is largely a fiction."\(^{33}\) This thesis will not attempt to prove that Fielding was a "paragon of political integrity"—few men are—but it will attempt to show that Fielding was seriously concerned about the political and social abuses of his time. When any author chooses to write comedy, he runs the risk of being taken lightly; yet "broad humorouseness \(_{\text{sic}}\) . . . is just as necessary to fine literature—as . . . high

\(^{31}\)Wright, p. 258.

\(^{32}\)Sheridan Baker, "Political Allusion in Fielding's Author's Farce, Mock Doctor, and Tumble Down Dick." PMLA, LXXVII (June, 1962), 231.

Fielding was a moralist who believed that "the capital sins were hypocrisy, cowardice, brutality and greed, not immorality." One has only to read Fielding's plays to know that although they are comic, they have a basic seriousness and are not, as Rebecca West asserts, merely "political squibs and pornography."  

---

34 Joe Lee Davis, "Criticism and Parody," Thought, XXVI (1951), 190.
35 Jones, p. 896.
CHAPTER II

IN WHICH CERTAIN AUTHORS AND HISTORIANS ARE QUOTED IN ORDER TO PRESENT A PORTRAIT OF THE DARKER ASPECTS OF ENGLISH SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE WHICH FIELDING SATIRIZED

When Henry Fielding began to reside in London sometime around the close of 1727 or the beginning of 1728, the city was already a growing metropolitan area with a population of over 500,000. During the first half of the eighteenth century, London was a city of strange contrast. It was the capital of a nation with substantial industry which needed raw materials from outside provinces, and yet the roads of the country were both dangerous and at times, impassable. Nor did the law fulfill the needs of the country. In theory, all English people were equal, but social practice and legal concept were very different. Dorothy Marshall accurately characterizes the dichotomies of Hanoverian England:

---


Hanoverian society is not something about which it is easy to generalize; it is too marked by those contradictions which are so characteristic of the eighteenth century. Class distinctions were important . . . but created no insurmountable barrier to . . . progress. . . . it was an age of violence but it was also an age in which Englishmen of all classes boasted of the rule of Law. Though it was an age of patronage and subservience, . . . it was also an age in which men prided themselves on their independence. . . . In some ways there was a great respect for authority, in others none at all.5

As London was a city of sharp contrasts, so was Sir Robert Walpole, England's political leader, a man of sharp contrasts. As First Minister of England for over twenty years (1721-1742), he provided a solid footing for future generations of Englishmen by consolidating the cabinet system of government, keeping England out of war, and putting the country on a sound financial basis. In summing up the reign of Walpole, Basil Williams asserts:

He was one of our greatest finance ministers; he was a great peace minister, "adverse to war," as it was said of him, "from opinion, from interest and from fear of the Pretender . . . ." And above all, he was a great house of commons man.6

Yet for all his greatness as a minister and as a party leader, his tenure was marked by bitter conflicts, patronage, bribery, and desertion of one capable Whig after another into the ranks of the opposition.7 Once he attained power, he brooked no rival; and "towards the end of his career, he had reduced his

5Ibid., p. 39.
7Ibid., p. 173.
ministry to a set of second-rate men, whose only resource against his dominance was secret-intrigue." It could easily be said that Walpole's greatness as a minister was matched only by his corruptness in holding on to his position of power. W. E. Lunt reports that Walpole "cynically used the means at hand [bribery, patronage, and sinecures] to secure a majority in the house of commons."9

Political and social historians have, on the whole, treated Walpole and his England with considerable kindness. Leslie Stephen describes the century as one of "sound common sense and growing toleration, and of steady social and industrial development."10 Historians, with a characteristic human trait for labeling everything, blithely tag the eighteenth century as "the age of reason." A. R. Humphreys reports that Hanoverian England "abounds in human interest and displays a world in whose basic reasonableness and daily skirmishes the ordinary man could fully participate."11 But one must wonder at a country of "basic reasonableness" where the most enlightened and intelligent of its citizens turned from support and actively pursued a policy of opposition.

8 Ibid.
11 Humphreys, p. 135.
Men like Pultney, Carteret, and Chesterfield joined the ranks of opposition because, unlike Horace Walpole, they could not justify bribery.\(^{12}\) Although it is evident that England prospered under Walpole, it is also evident that England suffered. The century may have been one in which "there were no troublesome people with philanthropic or political or religious nostrums, proposing to turn the world upside down and introduce an impromptu millennium";\(^ {13}\) but it was also a century of unrest and turmoil. The greatest literary achievements of the age were satirical, and the century drew to a close with the advent of the American and French Revolutions. That the events in the English colonies of North America cannot be dissociated from England itself should be evident. George Macaulay Trevelyan asserts that the loss of the American colonies was partly due to the defects and corruption of the English system.\(^ {14}\) Nor can the oppressive measures taken by England during the course of the French Revolution be entirely discounted. After the Revolution had begun in France, William Pitt the younger used the hysteria of the public, partly brought on by Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution, to introduce several repressive measures, among which were the suspension of habeas corpus and a proclamation against

\(^ {12}\)Ibid.  
\(^ {13}\)Stephen, p. 58.  
so-called seditious literature that, in many cases, merely advocated social reform through existing institutions. Such measures were perhaps necessary because Pitt still used some of the corrupt practices initiated under Walpole sixty years prior to the outbreak of the French Revolution. Pitt "did not hesitate to pervert to his own advantage the electoral system which he had failed to reform. He created new peers more liberally than any of his predecessors, conferring the honor particularly on the patrons of rotten boroughs." Revolutions and the ideals behind them do not spring up overnight. The fiery eruptions which marked the end of the eighteenth century must have begun to flicker long before, and the intellectuals and the writers of Fielding's era, although they probably abhorred the idea of a bloody revolution, helped to fan the flames.

Such generalizations as outlined above, however, do not depict the specific abuses with which Fielding and his colleagues concerned themselves. To see the inequalities in the administration of justice, the abuses fostered by political corruption, and the effects of social follies, one may examine the literature of the eighteenth century. London society during the first half of the eighteenth century was not a lovely spectacle to behold. Ned Ward describes well the tumult of London life in his poem *Hudibras Redivivus*:

---

15 Lunt, pp. 612-613.  
Young Drunkards reeling, Bayliffs dogging,
Old Strumpets plying, Mumpers propping,
Fat Dray-men squabbling, Chair-men ambling,
Oyster-Whores fighting, School-Boys scrambling,
Street Porters running, Rascals batt'ling,
Pick-pockets crowding, Coaches rattling,
News bawling, Ballad-wenchses singing,
Guns roaring, and the Church-Bells ringing. 17

Jonathan Swift in *Journal to Stella* shows substantial concern
over "a race of rakes called the Mohocks that play the devil
about this Town every Night." 18 Nor does Swift forget the
filth of London as he describes Fleet Street ditch after "A
City Shower":

> Now from all Parts the swelling Kennels flow,
> And bear their trophies with them as they go;
> Filths of all Hues and Odours seem to tell
> What street they sail'd from, by their Sight and Smell . . .
> Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts and Blood,
> Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud,
> Dead Cats and Turnip-tops, come tumbling down the Flood. 19

A. R. Humphreys, however, reports that "the general voice
extolled London's merits." 20 He quotes the following passage
from Gay's *Trivia* to substantiate his view:

> Happy Augusta! law-defended town!
> Here no dark lanthorns shade the villain's frown;
> No Spanish jealousies thy lanes infest,
> Nor Roman vengeance stabs th' unwary breast;
> Here tyranny ne'er lifts her purple hand
> But liberty and justice guard the land. 21

18 Jonathan Swift, *Journal to Stella*, quoted in Humphreys, p. 10.
20 Humphreys, p. 6.
Somehow, though, it is difficult to believe that Gay means precisely what his poem asserts. The above passage comes from "Book III. Of Walking the Streets by Night" and contains many caveats for the London pedestrian. Within this section of the poem, all manner of thieves, pickpockets, prostitutes, and murderers who populated the streets of London are described.

Conditions such as these described by contemporary writers were due in part at least to the political and social abuses prevalent during the first half of the eighteenth century. There existed a fairly rigid class structure, and the lowest of the classes was left with little recourse to honest employment. One has only to listen to Moll Flanders tell her story of how she was forced to embark upon a life of crime and prostitution:

Had this been the custom in our country /the custom of providing children of condemned criminals a place to be raised, clothed, and taught a trade/, I had not been left a poor desolate girl without friends, without clothes, without help or helper, as was my fate; and by which I was not only exposed to very great distresses, even before I was capable of either understanding my case or how to amend it, but brought into a course of life scandalous in itself, and which in its ordinary course tended to the swift destruction both of soul and body.22

Moll was not just attempting to justify her sordid life; she had a very good argument. George M. Trevelyan, discussing the Poor Law after the Restoration, asserts that

the power granted by the Act of Settlement was frequently and stupidly exercised by jealous rate-payers, the fluidity of labor was checked, and the working class deprived of personal and economic freedom for over a hundred and thirty years.\(^2^3\)

In his *A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor*, Henry Fielding describes the terrors which the poor of London were heir to:

> But if we were to make a progress through the outskirts of this town, and look into the habitations of the poor, we should there behold such pictures of human misery as must move the compassion of every heart that deserves the name of human. What, indeed, must be his composition who could see whole families in want of every necessary of life, oppressed with hunger, cold, nakedness, and filth; and with diseases, the certain consequences of all these—what, I say, must be his composition who could look into such a scene as this, and be affected only in his nostrils.\(^2^4\)

There were, of course, many honest poor who managed to eke out a bare existence and who did not find it necessary to turn to a life of crime. There were also members of the upper classes who took their obligations to society seriously and endeavored to eradicate the social and political abuses which had contributed to the intolerable plight of the poor.

Although England in the eighteenth century prided itself on being a nation of law, the law itself operated discriminately


\(^2^4\) Henry Fielding, "A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor," *Complete Works*, edited by W. E. Henley, 16 vols. (New York, 1902), XIII, 141. (Note: All future references to the works of Fielding will be from Henley's edition and will be noted by the specific title of the work being cited.)
and cruelly.\textsuperscript{25} Allowing that trials were more fairly conducted after the Revolution of 1688, Trevelyan then asserts that

the prisons, still farmed out to a base type of gaoler to make his profit out of the prisoners, were, in Wesley's opinion, worse than anything "on this side hell," and the innocent debtor often fared the worst of all.\textsuperscript{26}

In \textit{Jonathan Wild}, Fielding comments upon the capriciousness of the law, especially with respect to debtors:

\begin{quote}
\ldots it seems the law of the land is, that whoever owes another 10\textlsbx{\pounds}, or indeed 2\textlsbx{\pounds}, may be, on the oath of that person, immediately taken up and carried away from his own house and family, and kept abroad till he is made to owe 50\textlsbx{\pounds}, whether he will or no; for which he is perhaps afterwards obliged to lie in jail; and all these without any trial had, or any other evidence of the debt than the above said oath, which, if untrue, as it often happens, you have no remedy against the perjurer; he was, forsooth, mistaken.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Of all the abuses of the eighteenth century, Fielding was probably most concerned with the inequalities of the law. Such inequalities were touched on time and time again in a great many of Fielding's works. One of the songs in \textit{Tumble Down Dick} caustically derides some of the inequalities of English law:

\begin{quote}
Great courtiers palaces contain
Poor courtiers fear a jail;
Great parsons riot in champagne
Poor parsons sot in ale;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Voorde}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Fielding, Jonathan Wild}, II, 12.
Great whores in coaches gang,
Small misses
For their kisses
Are in Bridewell banged;
Whilst in vogue
Lives the great rogue
Small rogues are by dozens hanged.28

Not all of Fielding's judgments of the law were satirical, however. During his later years, he wrote several eloquent and reasoned opinions about the operation of English law. Of special concern to Fielding was the spectacle of public hangings. Van der Voorde contends that "the hanging days at Tyburn contributed to brutalize the people and became public rejoicings, where the man who faced death fearlessly, was applauded as if he were a hero."29 In *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*, Fielding pleads for an end to public executions.30

Like London itself, the politics of the eighteenth century were marked by strange contrasts. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the cabinet system of government began to take discernible shape; and under the leadership of Sir Robert Walpole, the cabinet system solidified, thus laying the groundwork for popular rule through the reform legislation enacted in the early nineteenth century.31 It was in the eighteenth

28 Fielding, *Tumble Down Dick*, XII, 16.
29 Voorde, p. 25.
30 Fielding, "An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers," XIV, 121-25.
century also that political parties began to mature and exert considerable influence on the policy of the nation. Yet Walpole used the cabinet system and the party system cynically and unscrupulously to acquire and hold personal power; and although these new developments were later to give Englishmen more liberty, they were, during the eighteenth century, responsible for the many political abuses which writers such as Fielding, Gay, and Swift attacked. The corruptness of English elections during the century seems to indicate that they were elections in name only. Rotten boroughs were rife. The borough of Old Sarum presents a classic example: there were no residents in the borough, and seven landlords of tenures in Old Sarum elected two representatives to parliament. And although this particular example is extreme, there were many instances of boroughs in which fewer than 100 voters elected members to parliament. Even in those towns where suffrage was not restricted, bribery of voters was a common practice. If a candidate felt that he had been defeated because of his opponent's bribing voters, he could appeal to a committee in parliament. Disputed elections, however, were generally decided along party lines, irrespective of evidence.32

Once in the House of Commons, the young politician was kept in check by one or more of several political expedients.

Although the votes of members were not generally secured by cash payments, they were often secured by the promise of profitable offices or sinecures under the Crown. Often Whig nobles kept wavering Whigs in line by the promise of social favors and distinctions. Of the 550 members of the first parliament of George I, 271 held offices, pensions, or sinecures.  

Of course the above descriptions of English life and politics do not tell the complete story. Because the very nature of satire is negative, this thesis, in commenting upon one of the great satirists of the eighteenth century, will have to deal with the darker sides of English political and social activity. Yet London with all its squalor also possessed many commendable attributes. Daniel Defoe describes the sections of London which bordered the Thames:

\[
\text{The Thames is glorious by the Splendor of its Shores, gilded with noble Palaces, strong Fortifications, large Hospitals and publick Buildings; with the greatest Bridge, and the greatest City in the World, made famous by the Opulence of its Merchants, the Encrease and Extensiveness of its Commerce; by its invincible Navies and by the innumerable Fleets of Ships sailing upon it, to and from all Parts of the World.}\]

Nor was English political life completely corrupt. For all its inherent evils, the English political system was the most

---

33 Ibid.

34 Daniel Defoe, \textit{Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain}, quoted in Humphreys, p. 10.
liberal one to be found anywhere in the world during the eighteenth century. Trevelyans describes well the pervading atmosphere of eighteenth century England which differentiated that island nation from the nations of the continent:

Two things specially distinguished the government of Britain from the governments of the ancien régime on the continent—Parliamentary control, and freedom of speech, press and person. Of these advantages Britons were very conscious and very proud. They looked with contempt on French, Italians and Germans as people enslaved to priests, Kings and nobles, unlike freeborn Englishmen. Freedom had been so lately acquired in Britain and was still so rare a thing in Europe, that Englishmen prized it high among their blessings.33

And it is perhaps owing to these advantages of Parliamentary control and freedom that England was able to withstand the revolutionary tremor that rocked all of the continent during the next century when the Industrial Revolution began to make society urban rather than rural, taking away most of the natural power of the landed aristocracy. And Fielding recognized England's glories as well as her evils. Most of his drama is filled with a lusty patriotism, best exemplified by the still-famous song, "The Roast Beef of Old England."

During the last years of his life, Fielding was a magistrate, and he performed the duties of that office with dignity and fairness. His essays during those years—especially his Charge to the Grand Jury, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, and An Effectual Provision for the Poor—

clearly illustrate the seriousness of his concern for improving the greatness that he saw in the English constitutional system.

The darker circles of English life were sufficiently black, however, to provide an ample target for the satirical darts of opposition writers. Of these writers, Fielding was one of the most accurate and prolific. The social follies and political vices of early eighteenth century England are exposed and scorned in most of his drama, and through his drama appear aspects of English life which are sometimes overlooked or ignored.
CHAPTER III

IN WHICH CERTAIN OF FIELDING'S PLAYS WHICH SHOW HIS CONCERN FOR SOCIETY ARE EXAMINED

The significance of Fielding's attacks on the social follies of eighteenth century England is readily found in the contemporaneity of his plays, for Fielding was a man who "was intensely in touch with his times."¹ From his first dramatic effort, Fielding was caught up in the political and social debates that were so much a part of his time; and because of his cumulative achievement in the drama, he may rightly be called "the single most important figure in the theatre of the 1730's."² As has been noted earlier, some of Fielding's plays deal with social folly and abuse, and those plays will be examined in this chapter. Yet it is not certain what Fielding thought may have caused the social shortcomings of England which he caustically derided in many of his plays.

There is some evidence that he may have thought the political corruption of the Walpole regime might have caused the many social evils which he exposed to ridicule. In his preface to The Historical Register for the Year 1736, Fielding indicates

¹John Loftis, Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (Stanford, 1959), p. 114.
²Ibid., p. 115.
a belief that political corruption produces a destructive change in society:

I shall only observe, that corruption has the same influence on all societies, all bodies, which it hath on corporeal bodies, where we see it always produce an entire destruction and total change; for which reason, whoever attempteth to introduce corruption into any community doth much the same thing, and ought to be treated in much the same manner with him who poisoneth a fountain, in order to dispers a contagion, which he is sure every one will drink of.3

Yet, as John Loftis aptly points out, the "central social antithesis of his plays . . . is that between residents in rural and urban England."4 Fielding depicts all levels of London life as corrupt: his benevolent characters are generally residents of the country; his characters that are depraved are generally—but not always—Londoners.5 Certainly the corruptness of the Walpole government reached the countryside and was not limited exclusively to the city of London. Fielding seems to have entangled himself in a controversy as old perhaps as the first city: rural life tends to make one more moral; urban life tends to make one more corrupt. This particular view of Fielding may be attributed to the fact that he spent his entire mature life in London, where he witnessed daily the depravity of the city. But whatever the causes of the evils Fielding saw and

4Loftis, Comedy and Society, p. 116.
5Ibid.
satirized, those evils were actual and, in many instances, destructive.

Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques,* was initially presented at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane on February 16, 1728. The play is constructed along traditional Restoration comedy lines and is very similar to Congreve's *Love for Love.* In *Love in Several Masques,* Helena, a young girl and niece of Sir Positive Trap, is in love with young Merital. Sir Positive adamantly refuses permission for Helena to marry the young man because Merital has only a small estate. Sir Positive's favor is bestowed instead on a fool and fop, Sir Apish Simple, who has an estate of 3,000 pounds a year. Through a trick, Helena is able to marry her true love, Merital. Fielding's first drama lightly satirizes the follies of women, but it does not contain any of the stinging satire which characterizes most of his subsequent efforts. The play does, however, contain a theme which Fielding was to amplify and vary in a substantial number of his later plays which dealt with social folly: the degenerative effects of the acquisitive attitude in a society that measures worth, not by merit but by wealth. In *The Temple Beau* Fielding depicts an acquisitive attitude which undermines the purpose of education. The effect of greed corrupts public life in *The Lottery.* The lust for wealth also reaches into the

---

6Cross, I, 62. 7Ibid.
private lives of individuals, and in The Letter-Writers and in The Modern Husband, Fielding illustrates how such an attitude leads to extortion and blackmail. Nor are the theatres spared from the corrupting influence of wealth, and in The Author's Farce and in Eurydice Miss'd, Fielding asserts that worthy drama was often kept from the stage because of the avarice of the theatre managers of the era.

After the production of Love in Several Masques, Fielding returned to Leyden to continue his studies of the classics.8 It was not until Fielding's return to London and the production of The Temple Beau that Fielding began to use the stinging and often abusive satire which led ultimately to the Licensing Act of 1737. Why Fielding turned from the light-hearted tradition of the Restoration comedy which he followed in Love in Several Masques is a speculative question of course; but at Leyden, he studied under "the great humanists who had made the university famous ever since the days of Scaliger and Salmasius."9 It was also during his stay at Leyden that Fielding began work on his second drama, Don Quixote in England. How much influence the humanists of Leyden exerted on the young playwright is probably a moot question, but there is a definite humanistic aura in most of Fielding's works which cannot be overlooked.

8Ibid., p. 66. 9Ibid., p. 67.
Although *The Temple Beau* also closely follows the tradition of standard Restoration comedy, it is the first of Fielding's plays which contains the topical social satire which marks a substantial number of Fielding's subsequent dramatic efforts. 

*The Temple Beau* was first presented on Monday, January 26, 1730, at Goodman's Fields Theatre. Primarily the play concerns the adventures of two students and their fathers. Sir Avarice Pedant, the father of young Pedant, puts money above everything else while his son refuses "to give up his books for an heiress of 20,000." The other student, young Wilding, son of Sir Harry Wilding, will not give up his pursuit of the pleasures of the town, and he squanders the money his father sends him. Cross believes that the play is "a bit of serious ridicule." *The Temple Beau*, however, contains more than a bit of serious ridicule. Prior to the publication and presentation of the drama, an article by Joseph Addison appeared in *The Spectator*. The article contains a list of different types of pedants who populated London, among whom were the military pedant, the law pedant, and the book pedant. There is, of course, nothing particularly new in the satirizing of pedants: it is a practice which extends at

---

13 Rogers, pp. 441-42.  
least back to the comedies of Plautus and Terence. What is significant, however, is that Fielding used Addison's satirizing of pedants by expanding the idea in order to characterize that type of person who subordinates every other desire to that of acquiring riches. In *The Temple Beau*, Fielding scathingly attacks this so-called "avarice pedant." Although Fielding's "social philosophy of a stratified society," he was opposed to the "arbitrary elevation of individuals to positions for which they were not qualified." Fielding's belief that money does not make a man worthy is a belief which can be found in many of his literary endeavors and is one which he presented in his first drama. (Merital, although far less wealthy than Sir Apish Simple, is a more worthy suitor for Helena's affection.) Sir Avarice Pedant puts nothing ahead of his desire to gain more wealth. The irony of one of Sir Avarice's speeches to his son is clearly illustrative of Fielding's attitude toward the equation, wealth equals merit:

Sir Avarice Pedant. You seem, indeed, to have read a great deal; for you said several things last night beyond my understanding: but I desire you would give me some account of your improvement in that way which I recommended


to you at your going to the university; I mean that useful part of learning, the art of getting money: I hope your tutor has, according to my orders, instilled into you a tolerable insight into stock-jobbing. I hope to see you figure at Garraway's, boy. 17

When Sir Avarice's son replies that he has not learned the art of acquiring a lot of money but has learned the art of logic, Sir Avarice is almost beside himself with frustration:

Sir Avarice Pedant. Did ever mortal man hear the like!—Have I been at this expense to breed my son a philosopher? I tremble at the name; it brings the thought of poverty to my mind. Why, do you think if your old philosophers were alive, any one would speak to them, any one would pay their bills!—Ah! these universities are fit for nothing but to debauch the principles of young men; to poison their minds with romantic notions of knowledge and virtue; what could I expect, but that philosophy should teach you to crawl into a prison; or poetry, to fly into one!—Well, I'll show you the world! Where you will see that riches are the only titles to respect; and that learning is not the way to get richer. There are men who can draw for the sum of a hundred thousand pounds who can hardly spell it. 18

The low esteem in which learning was held by some is fairly evident in Sir Avarice's speech, and the idea that knowledge poisoned a young mind must surely have made the learned Fielding recoil in horror. Fielding's disdain for the concept that riches were the only titles of respect has already been commented on. Certainly such attitudes as Sir Avarice expresses were prevalent in some circles throughout England. The prologue to The Temple Beau urges the wealthy to

18 Ibid., p. 110.
Convince the town, which boasts its better breeding,
That riches—are not all that you exceed in.19

The prologue then asserts that "Merit, wherever found, is still the same."20

The English State Lottery of 1731 provided Fielding in The Lottery with an excellent example of how the destructive effects of greed could permeate the public life of English society.21 The operation of the lottery presented unscrupulous stock-jobbers with a perfect opportunity to bilk a populace deluded by the dreams of instant riches. The Lottery was first presented on January 1, 1732, at Drury Lane.22 The play is a very brief one act fable about a young suitor, Lovemore, who has followed his Chloe to London. Chloe, it seems, has grown disgusted with life in the country and has purchased a lottery ticket that she is sure will win 10,000 pounds for her. Immediately after Chloe arrives, she asks Mr. Stocks how best to dispose of the 10,000 pounds. Stocks, who is a stock-jobber for lottery tickets and is bilking the masses, thinks that Chloe is an heiress and devises a plan whereby his brother, Jack, can marry her and claim the supposed fortune. Jack succeeds in marrying Chloe, and the

20Ibid.
21Roberts, p. 39.
22Cross, I, 116.
new husband and wife are at the lottery drawing when Chloe's
ticket comes up a blank. She faints, and Jack discovers that
she is not a heiress. The faithful Lovemore is present,
however, and he promises to marry her if she will leave Jack. 
Chloe accepts Lovemore's offer, and all ends happily for her.

Although The Lottery is based on the English State 
Lottery of 1731, the play "is, for the most part, nonpolitical." The satire of the play is directed, not at any political 
figure, but rather at those unscrupulous jobbers who manip-
ulated the lottery tickets for their own gain, often at the 
expense of the poor and illiterate. Edgar V. Roberts in his 
study of The Lottery asserts that "the evils of the lotteries 
ocurred not in the drawing, but almost exclusively in the 
manipulation of tickets by brokers or stockjobbers, like 
Fielding's Stocks." Stocks' manipulation of the lottery 
tickets is illustrated in a scene where two ticket holders 
discover that they have the same number. When confronted 
with this evidence Stocks replies:

Ha! Why Mr. Trick has made a little blunder here
indeed! However, madam, if it comes up a prize, you
shall both receive it.--(Ha, ha, ha! d'ye think my 
horses won't carry double, madam?--This number is a
sure card, for it was drawn a blank five days ago.)

Roberts also asserts that Fielding felt "that the lotteries 
were dangerous because they beguiled the impoverished and

---

23 Roberts, p. 39.  
24 Ibid., p. 47. 
innocent with dreams impossible of realization and encouraged outright corruption." Although Fielding probably believed that the lotteries encouraged corruption, in his characterization of Chloe, he is less than kind. She is a frivolous young girl whose head is filled with absurd dreams, and she deserves little sympathy from the audience. Fielding was probably concerned about those whom the dreams of quick wealth prompted to squander what little money they had, but their foolishness did not escape his satire. The following song, sung by Chloe, illustrates well her foolishness:

O how charming my life will be
When marriage has made me a fine lady!
In chariot, six horses, and diamonds bright,
In Flanders lace, and 'broidery clothes,
O how I'll flame it among the beaus!
In bed all the day, at cards all the night,
O! how I'll revel the hours away!
Sing it, and dance it, coquette it, and play;
With feasting, toasting,
Jesting, roasting,
Rantum scantum, flanting, janting,
Laughing at all the world can say.27

While The Lottery points out that the easiest marks for lottery tickets were those who could least afford to lose their money, the play's main purpose seems to be to show that such a scheme for raising money is conducive to that corruption which Fielding felt poisoned society.

26 Roberts, pp. 51-52.
The following two plays illustrate the corruptive effects of greed operating in the private lives of individuals. In each of the plays, the lust for wealth causes the moral decay of the persons concerned. In *The Letter-Writers* Fielding depicts the miserly attempts of two old men to save money by writing threatening letters to their wives in the hope that those letters will prevent their spouses from gambling, going to the theatre, and paying calls on friends. Fielding then shows, in *The Modern Husband*, an example of attempted blackmail which leads to debauchery.

*The Letter-Writers; or A New Way to Keep a Wife at Home* was first acted as an afterpiece to *Tom Thumb* on Wednesday, March 24, 1731, at the Haymarket Theatre. This particular play was received with indifference, Cross relates, because "it was too conventional to arrest attention; it was too detached from those phases of contemporary life that the audience was then demanding of the actors at the Haymarket." Yet C. B. Woods asserts that the "uses of threatening letters to keep the wives at home was suggested by certain events that occurred in 1730 and 1731." The play itself concerns the attempts of two husbands to keep their wives from roaming about the city carrying on intrigues.

---

28 Cross, I, 98.  
29 Ibid., p. 102.  
Mrs. Softly, the two wives who received threatening letters written by their husbands, react differently to the threats of murder contained in the letters. Mrs. Softly merely hires an additional footman and carries a small arsenal with her when she makes trips abroad. Mrs. Wisdom, however, is truly afraid to venture outside her home and continues to carry on her intrigues there. The whole plot is exposed after Hakel, who has been carrying on intrigues with both Mrs. Wisdom and Mrs. Softly, is discovered hiding under a table in Mrs. Wisdom's house.

There is little doubt that The Letter-Writers was based solely on certain events which occurred prior to the first presentation of the play. Woods reports that "incendiaries and murderers had flooded the country with threatening letters, and had succeeded in extorting considerable sums of money from the easily intimidated."\(^{31}\) In The Monthly Chronicle for October, November, and December of 1730, there appeared numerous reports of such letters.\(^{32}\) This practice was apparently widespread and vicious because "on November 20 the King issued a proclamation which offered rewards for information concerning the writers of threatening letters and prohibited compliance with their demands."\(^{33}\) Emphasizing Fielding's awareness of the proclamation of the King is a statement made

\(^{31}\)Ibid. \(^{32}\)Ibid., pp. 360-61. \(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 361.
by Risque, the servant to Rakel. Risque is being belabored by Mr. Softly and Mr. Wisdom for giving false evidence and he tells them: "Lookee, gentlemen, you had best hold your tongues, or I shall become evidence for the king against you both." 34

That the play was not popularly received by the London audiences is a matter of record, but the reasons for its unpopularity are still a matter of conjecture. Certainly The Letter-Writers was not, as Cross suggests, "too detached from those phases of contemporary life." Perhaps one of the reasons for its failure to attract the approbation of the public is that The Letter-Writers centers around a certain series of events that probably terrified many London citizens. As has been pointed out, the practice of sending threatening letters was a widespread one, and perhaps many of those who saw the play performed were sufficiently afraid of receiving an incendiary letter to laugh at such a comical rendition of so serious an event. Perhaps another reason for the failure of the play is that it is not nearly so farcical as Fielding's successful ventures such as Tom Thumb.

One of the most unusual aspects of The Letter-Writers is that, unlike most of Fielding's other dramatic attempts, it does not contain a single identifiable person. In this play, 

34Fielding, The Letter-Writers, IX, 204.
Fielding chose to attack social evils on an impersonal rather than personal level. The Softlys and the Wisdens may be said to be fairly representative of the English middle class; Rakel and Risque, of any young beau and his valet. What Fielding does in The Letter-Writers is satirize very pointedly certain follies of eighteenth century England: card playing, intrigues, going abroad (the eighteenth century term for paying calls), and gambling. The very source of the play indicates that there was substantial lawlessness present in the country. Fielding probably felt that such lawlessness was due in part to the corrupt administration of justice. Risque, prior to giving false evidence against Rakel, speaks to Mr. Wisdom and Mr. Softly:

I have been told that you are apter to hire rogues to swear against one another than to pay them for it when they have done it. Therefore, supposing it to be all the same case with your worship, I should be glad to be paid before hand.35

The remark is telling because Mr. Wisdom and Mr. Softly both know that the information that Risque proposes to give against Rakel is false. The best satire of the play, however, is woven into its complete fabric. Not one of the characters is admirable or has any redeeming quality. Mr. Softly and Mr. Wisdom use a despicable device to try to keep their wives from carrying on intrigues; and when the two husbands

find it to their advantage, they agree to support Risque's perjured testimony. Mrs. Softly refuses to give up her intrigues and continues "going abroad." Mrs. Wisdom, although afraid to venture outside the protection of her home, continues her intrigues. Rakel tries to carry on affairs with both Mrs. Wisdom and Mrs. Softly. Risque lies to save his own skin. Jack Commons, a friend to Rakel and nephew to the Wisdoms and Softlys, affects the piety of a young man studying the ministry but tries to arrange a rendezvous between Rakel and either Mrs. Wisdom or Mrs. Softly. The constable who arrests Rakel accepts a bribe from Jack Commons. Yet despite all their debauchery, none of the characters is punished. At the end of the play, Mrs. Softly and Mrs. Wisdom are free to resume their affairs, Rakel is free once again to continue the life of a libertine, and even the husbands are no worse off than they were before they wrote their threatening letters. The entire play illustrates Fielding's low opinion of life in middle-class English society, and the fact that none of the characters is punished for his misdeeds is evidence of the shabby workings of the law in England.

Despite the failure of The Letter-Writers as a popular entertainment, Fielding's next play, The Modern Husband, was also based on contemporary events which were even more distasteful than the events on which The Letter-Writers was based. The play was less successful than The Letter-Writers,
and when it was first presented at Drury Lane on February 14, 1732, it was hissed by the audience.36 The play concerns the endeavors of a young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Modern, to live above their means. Mr. Modern, in an effort to acquire money to pay off his gambling debts, persuades his wife to sell herself to Lord Richly for 1,500 pounds. During this intrigue, Mr. Modern proposes to catch his wife and Lord Richly together and subsequently collect a substantial sum of money in damages from the peer. Mrs. Modern, however, has already been carrying on an intrigue with Lord Richly for some time, and he has grown tired of her. Desperate for money, she agrees to help Lord Richly initiate a new intrigue with Mrs. Bellamant, and Mr. Modern proposes to catch his own wife in an intimate scene with Mr. Bellamant, who has also been seeing Mrs. Modern and who thinks that he is in love with her. Through a bizarre series of events involving the marriages of Mr. Gaywit, Richly's nephew, to Emilia Bellamant, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bellamant, and the marriage of Lady Charlotte Gaywit to Captain Bellamant, the play ends with no one being severely punished for his transgressions.

Despite the sordid escapades of The Modern Husband, such aspects of English life did appear from time to time in the eighteenth century. C. B. Woods reports that in the Monthly

36CROSS, I, 120.
Chronicle for February, 1730, there appears an article about a case which was tried in the Court of Common Pleas at Westminster. A husband, one Lord Avergovenny, sued one Richard Lidell, Esquire, for having had "criminal conversation" with the wife of the nobleman. Woods further asserts that the details of the play closely parallel the details of the case reported in the Monthly Chronicle.\(^\text{37}\) As in The Letter-Writers, the satire of The Modern Husband is not directed at particular individuals but rather at specific practices. In the prologue to The Modern Husband, Fielding clearly states the purpose of his comedy.

> If modern vice detestable be shown,  
> (And, vicious as it is, he draws the town;)  
> Though no loud laugh applaud the serious prize,  
> Restore the sinking honour of the stage:  
> The stage, which was not for low farce designed,  
> But to divert, instruct, and mend mankind.\(^\text{38}\)

Certainly Fielding was demanding a remedy for this social evil; yet Woods believes that Fielding had an even greater purpose in writing The Modern Husband. Woods asserts that when the Restoration comic playwrights censored vice, "their quarrel was usually with vice inherent in human nature."\(^\text{39}\) Woods claims Fielding was trying to amend the law of England which offered no relief to innocent victims of collusion.

---


\(^{38}\)Fielding, The Modern Husband, X, 10.

between unscrupulous husbands and wives.\textsuperscript{40} There is, however, no internal evidence that Fielding's purpose was to attack English law, although Fielding's interest in the law does not preclude such a possibility. The general satirical texture seems to be woven on the same broad, general looms that Fielding used in weaving the satire of \textit{The Letter-Writers}.

Fielding was, of course, particularly interested in the affairs of the English stage, and in \textit{The Author's Farce} and \textit{Eurydice Hiss'd} he comments upon the degeneration of the drama. Each of these plays has a complex structure, containing a play with a play. In each, the author of the play within the play is beset by difficulties in getting his play presented. The tyrannical control of the theatre managers, who would produce only those plays which were financially attractive, is satirized in \textit{The Author's Farce}. In \textit{Eurydice Hiss'd} Fielding derides the then current practice of the theatre managers in charging exorbitant admission prices. In both plays Fielding also illustrates how greed tends to corrupt the professions of acting and publishing.

Although \textit{The Author's Farce} and \textit{The Pleasures of the Town} is not based on any one current event reported in the papers or written about in one of the many pamphlets which had begun to circulate in London, it does contain a substantial

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 364, 366.
amount of satire on the reigning diversions of London. Although the title page to the farce reprinted in Henley's edition of Fielding's works asserts that it was first acted at the Haymarket in 1729, Cross, Dudden, and Scouten claim that The Author's Farce was first presented on Monday, March 30, 1730. Because the play was altered and expanded by Fielding for presentation in 1734, there are some textual difficulties. The first edition of the play contains a character named Sparkish, who represents John Wilkes. By the time Fielding was ready to revise the play, Wilkes had died. For the character of Sparkish, Fielding substituted Marplay Junior, a caricature of Theophilus Cibber. The edition of the play discussed below is the expanded version of 1734.

The Author's Farce is actually two plays in one. The first part of the play is contained in the first two acts and concerns itself with the fortunes of a young playwright, Luckless. The second part of the play contains a puppet show called, strangely enough, The Pleasures of the Town. In the first part of the play, Luckless is being dunned by his landlady, Mrs. Moneywood. The young playwright is in love

\(^{41}\) Fielding, The Author's Farce, VIII, 191.

\(^{42}\) F. Holmes Dudden, Henry Fielding, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1952), I, 49; Cross, I, 80; Scouten, I, 45.

\(^{43}\) Dudden, I, 50.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
with Harriot, the landlady's daughter, and Mrs. Moneywood is in love with Luckless. Because Luckless has been unable to get his play accepted, he is forced to pawn even his hat in order to get money for food. After his play has been refused, he writes a nonsensical farce which is immediately accepted. The farce, possibly suggested by the first edition of Pope's Dunciad, is presented in the third act and takes the form of a puppet show in which the characters, all of whom are supposed to be dead, contend for the chaplet of arch poet to the Queen of Nonsense. The setting for the puppet show is on the other side of the River Styx. Each of the characters who vies for the chaplet represents one of "the pleasures of the town." The characters who perform for the Queen of Nonsense are Signor Opera, Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical Comic, Dr. Orator, Monsieur Pantomime, and Mrs. Novel.

Most of the characters in the first two of The Author's Farce are thinly veiled characterizations of actual contemporaries of Fielding. Marplay Senior and Marplay Junior are Colley Cibber and Theophilus Cibber respectively. Bookweight, the bookseller, is probably a characterization of the disreputable publisher Edmund Curll. Through these characters, Fielding unmercifully satirizes not only certain aspects of London but also certain persons. Fielding uses Marplay Senior and Marplay Junior to illustrate the iron grip which

\[\text{45}^\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 49-50.}\]
the theatre managers held over both the playwrights and the plays to be presented on the London stages. The following exchange between Marplay Senior and Junior illustrates this despotic practice:

Marplay, Jun. What do you think of the play?
Marplay, Sen. It may be a very good one, for aught I know; but I am resolved since the town will not receive any of mine, they shall have none from any other. I'll keep them to their old diet.\(^{46}\)

Not only did Fielding believe that some good plays were kept from the stage, but he also believed that some deserving authors were prevented from making a living by their talents:

Marplay, Jun. Rat the Town, I say!
Marplay, Sen. That's a good boy; and so say I; but prithee, what didst thou do with the comedy which I gave thee t'other day, that I thought was a good one?
Marplay, Jun. Did as you ordered me, returned it to the author, and told him it would not do.
Marplay, Sen. You did well. If thou writest thyself, and that I know thou art qualified to do, it is thy interest to keep back all other authors of any merit, and be as forward to advance those of none.\(^{47}\)

There is probably an autobiographical element contained in the above exchange. Cross relates that upon Fielding's return from Leyden to London he had lost favor with the manager of Drury Lane. Fielding then tried to get *Don Quixote* in *England* accepted at Drury Lane, but Cibber rejected it, telling Fielding the play was immature and unsuitable for the stage.


\(^{47}\)Ibid., p. 216.
It is also quite probable that Cibber rejected *The Temple Beau*. 48

In *The Author's Farce* Fielding did not limit his satirical attacks to the actions of the Cibbers as theatre managers; he also unmercifully ridiculed their personalities. Much as Pope had done in *The Dunciad*, Fielding makes the Cibbers appear no better than blithering idiots:

Marpley, Jun. Oh! your humble servant--your very humble servant, sir. When you write yourself, you will find the necessity of alterations. Why, sir, would you guess that I had altered Shakespeare?

Witmore. Yes, faith, sir, no one sooner.

Marpley, Jun. Alack-a-day! Was you to see the plays when they are brought to us, a parcel of crude undigested stuff. We are the persons, sir, who lick them into form, that mould them into shape--The poet make the play indeed! the colourman might as well be said to make the picture, or the weaver the coat: my father and I, sir, are a couple of poetical tailors: when a play is brought us, we consider it as a tailor does his coat; we cut it, sir, we cut it; and let me tell you, we have the exact measure of the town; we know how to fit their taste. The poets between you and me, are a pack of ignorant ______.

Although Fielding probably used *The Author's Farce* to salve his wounded pride, there remains the fact that Theophilus Cibber did produce emended editions of two of Shakespeare's plays; 50 and since Fielding had done nothing to alienate the Cibbers, there is no reason to believe that they did not treat other authors in the same manner as they treated Fielding.

48 Cross, I, 74.


50 Dudden, I, 50.
After Luckless' reading of his play for the Marplays occurs an interesting scene which shows some of the despicable practices of Grub Street publishers. The following exchange is most revealing. Bookweight, the publisher, has just offered to publish a translation of the *Aeneid* brought to him by a character named Scarecrow. The publisher then offers a job as translator to young Scarecrow:

**Scarecrow.** But I am afraid I am not qualified for a translator, for I understand no language but my own.

**Bookweight.** What, and translate Virgil?

**Scarecrow.** Alas! I translated him out of Dryden.

**Bookweight.** Lay by your hat sir, lay by your hat, and take your seat immediately. Not Qualified! thou art as well versed in thy trade, as if thou hadst labored in my garret these ten years. Let me tell you, friend, you will have more occasion for invention than learning here. You will be obliged to translate books out of all languages, especially French, that were never printed in any language whatsoever.

**Scarecrow.** Your trade abounds in mysteries.  

Fielding was not far from the target in thus satirizing the notorious Curll. In 1716 and 1721, Curll was reprimanded by the House of Lords for "publications which deemes to be a breech of privilege." Curll was also fined and sentenced to stand in the pillory in 1728 for issuing immoral books.

The second part of *The Author's Farce* takes the form of a play within a play wherein Luckless portrays the part of a puppet master and expresses Fielding's contempt for the

---

51 Fielding, *The Author's Farce*, VIII, 222.

52 Dudden, I, 50.

53 Ibid.
reigning pleasures of the town. As was noted above, the scene of this play within a play is on the other side of the River Styx, and six characters contend for the chaplet of arch poet to the Queen of Nonsense. Some of the characters in The Pleasures of the Town seem to be representations of actual people: Mrs. Novel is probably Eliza Haywood;\(^5^4\) Don Tragedio, James Thompson;\(^5^5\) Dr. Orator, John Henley;\(^5^6\) Sir Farcical Comic, Colly Cibber.\(^5^7\) The other two contenders, Signor Opera and Monsieur Pantomime, generally seem to represent other fashionable diversions of London life. Cross relates that at the time of the first presentation of The Author's Farce Handel and a group of Italian singers were playing at the Opera House and that farces and pantomimes had been playing at Lincoln's Inn Fields.\(^5^8\)

Each of the contenders performs before the Goddess of Nonsense in an attempt to win the chaplet. Monsieur Pantomime presents an especially ridiculous figure. He cavorts about the stage, saying nothing and pointing to his broken neck. The master of the show has to tell the Queen that although Monsieur Pantomime cannot talk he has been of great service

\(^5^4\)Ibid., p. 56.  
\(^5^5\)Cross, I, 83.  
\(^5^6\)Dudden, I, 54.  
\(^5^8\)Cross, I, 83.
to her because "he was the only one of her votaires that set people asleep without talking." Don Tragedio is the next to perform, and he tells the Queen:

Yes, Tragedio is indeed my name,  
Long since recorded in the roles of fame,  
At Lincon's Inn, and eke at Drury Lane.  
Let everlasting thunder sound my praise,  
And forked lightning in my scotcheon blaze;  
To Shakespeare, Johnson, Dryden, Lee, or Rowe,  
I not a line, no, not a thought do owe.  
Me, for my novelty, let all adore,  
For, as I wrote, none ever wrote before.

Sir Farcical Comic is the next to tell of his accomplishments in the cause of nonsense:

**Sir Farcical Comic.** Nay, egad, I have made new words, and spoiled old ones too, if you talk of that; I have made foreigners break English, and Englishmen break Latin. I have as great a confusion of languages in my play as was at the building of Babel.

Dr. Orator then tells the Queen why he deserves the chaplet. Standing in a tub, he asserts: "Have understood me, sir? What has understanding to do? My hearers would be diverted, and they are so; which could not be if understanding were necessary, because very few of them have any." The Queen of Nonsense then thanks them for their contributions to nonsense, and bestows the chaplet on Signor Opera, who responds by singing an air, perhaps significantly, to the tune of "L'il'bolera" *sic*:

---

59 Fielding, *The Author's Farce*, VIII, 238.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Ibid., p. 239.  
62 Ibid.
Let the foolish philosopher strive in his cell
By wisdom, or virtue, to merit true praise;
The soldier in hardship and danger still dwell,
That glory and honor may crown his last days:
The patriot sweat,
To be thought great;
Or beauty all day at the looking-glass toil;
That popular voices
May ring their applauses,
While a breath is the only reward of their toil.
But would you a wise man to action incite,
Be riches proposed the reward of his pain:
In riches is centered all human delight;
No joy is on earth but what gold can obtain
If women, wine,
Or grandeur fine,
Be most your delight, all these riches can;
Would you have men to flatter?
To be rich is the matter;
When you cry he is rich, you cry a great man.

The Queen repeats the last line of the song "in an ecstasy,"
an act which again illustrates Fielding's contempt for the
equation, wealth equals merit. The play also ends in a
rather strange way. Luckless discovers that he is the King
of Bantam and can now marry Harriot. Luckless' last speech
of the play also illustrates just how riches make a man great.

**Luckless.** Pardon you—Ay, more—You shall be chief
constable of Bantam.—You, Sir John, shall be chief
justice of peace; you, sir, my orator; you my poet
laureat; you my bookseller; you, Don Tragedio, Sir
Farcical; Signior Opera, and Count Ugly, shall entertain
the city of Bantam with your performances; Mrs. Novel,
you shall be a romance-writer; and to show my generosity,
Monsieur Marplay, you shall superintend my theatres.—
All proper servants for the King of Bantam.

Although one of Fielding's last dramatic entertainments,
*Eurydice Hiss'd*, contains a great deal of political satire,

---

the play also contains substantial social comment. This play was first acted as an afterpiece to *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* on April 13, 1737, at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket.\(^{65}\) *Eurydice Hiss'd* is a very short farce and follows the rehearsal pattern which Fielding used in *The Author's Farce*. Despite its brevity, the play is one of the most complex that Fielding ever wrote. C. B. Woods contends that it "is a double allegory."\(^{66}\) He further believes that only a master of irony could have written a farce in which the satire applies equally well to a playwright's attempt to make a farce succeed in the theatre and a minister's attempt to pass an unpopular bill through the House of Commons.\(^{67}\)

The social comment of *Eurydice Hiss'd* is generally aimed at the difficulty with which a young author had to contend to get his play accepted by the public. Pillage, the author of the play within the play, surrounds himself with a levee of printers, actors, and hired agents who are supposed to sit in the pits and applaud his farce when they hear the rest of the audience begin to hiss. Fielding's attitude toward this practice is clearly stated by Honestus, a friend to Pillage:

\[ \text{Honestus: Curse on this way of carrying things by friends.} \]

\(^{65}\text{Cross, I. 216.}\)

\(^{66}\text{Woods, "Notes on Three of Fielding's Plays," p. 370.}\)

\(^{67}\text{Ibid., p. 373.}\)
This bar to merit; by such unjust means,  
A play's success, or ill success is known,  
And fixed before it has been tried 1' th' house.  

The play also satirizes the higher prices which were being charged for less worthy dramatic entertainments. Honestus tells Pillage that

In former times,  
When better actors acted better plays,  
The town paid less.  

And of course, actors, booksellers, and stooges are also the targets of Fielding's satire in *Eurydice Hiss'd.*

Throughout the course of his dramatic career, Fielding showed himself to be seriously concerned with social folly and injustice. He deplored vice wherever he found it, and his pen often inflicted severe criticism. The beaus and fops of the upper classes were ridiculed as were the gin guzzling lower classes. The belief that wealth equals merit was unmercifully exposed as an idea that reached the apex of folly. Those who would pervert the law for selfish gain were shown to be ignorant clowns. Fielding would not let vice go unremarked, nor were personalities spared. Wilkes, Colly Cibber, and Theophilus Cibber felt the sting of Fielding's satirical wit. Yet for all his activity as a social critic, Fielding also showed substantial concern over what he thought

---

was the political degeneration of England. Many of his plays are directly connected with English political life and with one man in particular, Sir Robert Walpole.
CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH CERTAIN OF FIELDING'S PLAYS WHICH SHOW HIS CONCERN ABOUT POLITICS ARE EXAMINED

There is little doubt that Henry Fielding's later dramatic efforts such as The Historical Register for the Year 1736 and Pasquin were politically inspired and oriented. Yet there is substantial evidence which indicates that Fielding began his attacks on political corruption far earlier than 1736, the year Pasquin first appeared. The first direct political satire to appear in Fielding's works is found in the veiled allusions to the "great man" in Tom Thumb. After the success of Tom Thumb, Fielding made substantial use of political comment in nearly every other drama which he wrote. Although the political satire in Fielding's earlier political plays is often obscure and perhaps more evident to contemporary viewers than modern readers, that satire is sufficiently clear to illustrate Fielding's interest in and concern about the political situation of eighteenth century England.

Although it has been noted that Tom Thumb was Fielding's first attempt at direct political satire, some critics have noted that certain aspects of The Author's Farce may be interpreted as having political significance. Sheridan Baker
believes that there is some political comment which is non-partisan in The Author's Farce. Baker contends that the dominant idea of the play is to use Cibber and the stage as a parallel to Walpole and the state.¹ Baker also believes that "Fielding intends Luckless's show to cast some shadow on the political scene as well as the theatrical, intimating that Walpole's England is not unlike a puppet show about the Court of Nonsense on the nether side of Hell."² Such a consideration cannot be substantiated, of course, but it is not unlikely that the rather ridiculous figures who perform before the Queen of Nonsense for the chaplet of archpoet might well correspond to political hacks with whom Walpole surrounded himself. In an earlier chapter, it was noted that the most intelligent Whig politicians of the era resigned their allegiance to Walpole and his ministry, leaving Walpole surrounded by a group of second-rate men. It is possible that these second-rate politicians performed before Walpole much as Don Tragedio and Senior Opera performed before the Queen of Nonsense: they cavorted about the stage and spouted nonsense in order to gain favor.

Baker also points out that Fielding may have used a political topic which was already the subject of Gay's


² Ibid., p. 223.
Beggar's Opera: the marital troubles between Walpole and his wife. Baker believes that the allusion to Walpole and his wife is contained in the Punch and Joan segment of The Author's Farce. These two characters sing a duet which contains at least one hint that they may have been caricatures of the Walpoles:

**Punch.** Joan, you are the plague of my life
A rope would be welcomer than such a wife.

**Joan.** Punch, your merits had you but shared,
Your neck had been longer by half a yard:

**Punch.** Ugly witch,
Son of a bitch,

**Joan.** Since we hate like people in vogue,
Let us call not bitch and rogue;

**Punch.** Gentler titles let us use,
Hate each other, but not abuse.

**Joan.** Pretty dear!

**Punch.** Ah! Ma Chere!

**Both.** Joy of my life, and only care.

The indication that this episode alludes to the Walpoles' marital problems, Baker asserts, is found in the label of Punch as a "rogue." The term rogue, since The Beggar's Opera, was generally accepted as another name for Sir Robert Walpole. Although such threads of evidence as Baker quotes are indeed tenuous, the evidence is conclusive enough to cause some speculation as to whether Fielding's first attempts at political satire are actually found in The Author's Farce.

---

3Ibid., p. 224.
4Fielding, The Author's Farce, VIII, 230.
Fielding's best known and most successful drama, *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*, was first presented on April 24, 1730, at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. There are some textual difficulties involved in considering this particular burlesque. The text was changed and lengthened several times. The edition that will be used in this thesis is the one that appears in W. E. Henley's edition of Fielding's collected works. This form of the play was first presented on March 24, 1731, at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. The play is a sustained parody of the heroic tragedy and tragic conventions. Tom Thumb is replete with grand characters who are ludicrously vulgarized, and there is an ample supply of battles and wars with "trumpets sounding, drums beating, thunder and lightning." Tom, the lilliputian-sized hero of the play, is caught up in a mock love, honor, duty triangle. Tom loves Huncamunca, a mighty eater, and is loved by Queen Dollalolla and Glumdalca, the widow of twenty giants. Lord Grizzle, a member of the court, also loves Huncamunca; and when he discovers that she has married Tom Thumb, he raises an insurrection against the kingdom. Tom stops the rebellion and slays Lord Grizzle, but as he is parading about the town carrying the head of Lord Grizzle on a platter, he meets his tragic end by being swallowed by a cow. This tragedy invokes such hysteria at the

---

6Dudden, I, 56.  
7Ibid., p. 58.
court that the principal characters begin to kill each other. During the last scene, six members of the court lie dead around the king's feet, and the king, to complete the final tragic slaughter, stabs himself and dies. Tom Thumb is perhaps the most brilliant parody in the English language, but critics have never determined whether the play contains direct political satire. Most critics seem to agree with Dudden's statement that

... if Fielding really meant to caricature Walpole as "the great Tom Thumb," he carried out his purpose with such artful caution that, though the audience might understand his hits, neither the censor nor the contemporary press could publicly take note of them.  

Despite the caution of most critics in assigning political significance to Tom Thumb, there is substantial internal evidence which suggests that the play has a political orientation.

By the time of the first appearance of Tom Thumb, the "great man" was a common appellation of Sir Robert Walpole, and many references to Tom Thumb are to Tom Thumb the Great. Tom is called variously throughout the play "the pillar of the state" and the "most famous man in the kingdom." These are titles which could be equally applied to Walpole. In the play, Queen Dollalolla is in love with Tom, a possible allusion to the close friendship which existed between Queen Caroline, wife of George II, and Walpole. The king of the

---

8 Ibid., pp. 68-69.
play is not unlike King George II. In the farce, King Arthur is a boorish sort, given to drink and bombastic utterances. For example, King Arthur tells Doodle, a courtier:

Petition me no petitions, sir, to-day; Let other hours be set apart for business. To-day it is our pleasure to be drunk. And this our queen shall be as drunk as we. 9

Such a characterization fits quite well with Lunt's description of King George II as "a fussy, pompous, irascible little man, who suspected that he had no great ability but sought to make others think that he had." 10 There is also a possible allusion to the well-known fact that Queen Caroline actually controlled the king. King Arthur tells Poodle, another courtier:

We were indeed a pretty king of closets To truckle to her will--For when by force Or art the wife her husband over-reaches, Give him the petticoat, and her the breeches. 11

Lunt states that Caroline "controlled the king, and Walpole and the court knew it. The king also knew it, but he appeared to think no one else did." 12 The most troubling problem in stating flatly that these excerpts clearly illustrate political intent on Fielding's part is that the characterizations are not consistently typical of King George II, Queen Caroline.

9 Fielding, Tom Thumb, IX, 22-23.
10 Lunt, p. 533.
11 Fielding, Tom Thumb, IX, 29.
12 Lunt, p. 533.
and Sir Robert Walpole. There are as many departures as there are similarities. John Loftis, although he believes that the political meaning of Tom Thumb has remained an enigma, asks whether Tom Thumb the Great, the giant killer, the upholder of peace, the favorite of the queen, the successful lover could be innocent of political innuendo. Perhaps the answer lies in Cross' statement that "no one could quite say that Tom Thumb was intended for Walpole, so perfect is the irony."

If there is any doubt about the political intent of Tom Thumb, there is no doubt whatever about Fielding's next drama, The Grub-Street Opera. There is considerable disagreement, however, about the play's first presentation, but most modern critics feel that the play was never presented. The Grub-Street Opera, like several others of Fielding's dramas, underwent substantial textual changes; and the first version of the play, called The Welch Opera, was presented at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket on April 22, 1731. Jack Richard Brown asserts that there were three different versions of the play. The first version was The Welch Opera, which was presented but never reprinted. The second version was

---

14 Cross, I, 103.
15 See Dudden, I, 90; Cross, I, 107; Loftis, Politics and Drama, p. 105.
16 Dudden, I, 38.
entitled *The Genuine Grub-Street Opera*, which also was never reprinted. The final version was entitled *The Grub-Street Opera* and is the text which is now almost universally followed.\(^1\)

*The Welch Opera* was an abusive, undisguised attack on both Walpole and the Royal family.\(^2\) When the expanded version of the play, *The Grub-Street Opera*, was announced for presentation on June 11, 1731, something interfered to keep it from the stage. Brown asserts that that something "was the government, which, already stung by *The Welch Opera*, was taking no more chances on a more extended attack."\(^3\) As has been noted previously, there is no doubt that *The Grub-Street Opera* is a sustained political attack; yet in order to fully understand its implications and the reasons for its suppression, it is necessary to know something of the current relationships between the royal family and Sir Robert Walpole and other noted politicians of the time.

The English king was George II, an inordinately vain and pompous man who was given to carrying on intrigues with several mistresses. His manners were boorish at best, and he was a complete egotist. His wife, Caroline of Anspach, was by far the abler and more intelligent of the royal pair. She had a natural aptitude for politics, and in collusion

---


\(^2\)Dudden, I, 89-90.

\(^3\)Brown, p. 35.
with Walpole she controlled the king and actually governed England. Despite all her admirable qualities, she was a coarse woman, and her conversation at court was often blunt and immoral. Because she loved the power that she and Walpole held, she had to countenance the pomposity and intrigues of the king. Their eldest son, Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales, possessed no quality to recommend him. He was neither handsome nor intelligent; he had neither charm nor integrity. He was, in fact, the most unimportant man in the kingdom until the opposition adopted him as figurehead leader. He was given to debauchery and excessive gambling, and the hatred he bore his father and mother they returned to him in kind. Certainly the royal family was an odd assortment of characters who seemed hardly fit to govern a great nation.

The first minister to this royal family, Sir Robert Walpole, possessed more admirable qualities than the royal family's added together. He was a great financial expert, an extraordinary parliamentary leader, and possessed of considerable common sense. Despite all his good qualities, however, he often allowed political circumstances to permit him to rise above principles. He never hesitated in using either a bribe or the promise of patronage to secure the results he wanted in the House of Commons. His relations with his mistress were notorious, and he quietly tolerated the many indiscretions of his wife. Because of his refusal to
tolerate opposition, he was soon surrounded by a group of political hacks, among whom were Thomas Pelham-Holles and Lord Hervey. Pelham-Holles was Walpole's elections-manager and was nothing short of a complete fool. Dudden describes him as "rambling, shuffling, blundering, everlastingly flustered and confused." Lord Hervey was a writer of political pamphlets, and he used his talent in defense of the royal family and the Walpole ministry. One of the best characterizations of Hervey is found in Pope's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot:

Let *Sporus* [Hervey] tremble—A. what? that thing of silk,
*Sporus*, that mere white curd of ass's milk?

This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings;
Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,
Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys.

Although this description may have been the result of a quarrel between Pope and Hervey, it is, nonetheless, a fairly accurate one. Dudden remarks that Hervey was a sickly, effeminate person who plastered his face with paint. But if Walpole had his admirers, he also had his detractors, chief among whom was William Pultney. Pultney was an able man, a good scholar, and a fine speaker. He was,

---

20 Dudden, I, 87.
22 Dudden, I, 88.
Unfortunately, held in disfavor by both Walpole and Queen Caroline. His ambition was to replace Walpole as first minister, and to gain this end he secretly and vainly courted the Queen for her favor.  

In The Grub-Street Opera, Fielding audaciously and clearly uses the current political situation for his play. The leading characters so closely resemble the political and royal personages described above that there could be no doubt on anyone's part about the targets of the satire. The plot of the play is simple enough. It concerns the loves of Robin and Sweetissa, two members of the household of Sir Owen Apshinken. Despite their innocent appearance, however, the characters are representations. Sir Owen is King George II; his wife, Lady Apshinken, is the Queen; Master Owen Apshinken is Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales; Sir Robert Walpole is the character of Robin, a butler to the Apshinkens; John, a groom to Sir Owen Apshinken, is Lord Hervey; Thomas, the gardener, is Thomas Pelham-Holles; William, the coachman, is Pultney; and Sweetissa is Maria Skerrett, a mistress of Walpole's.  

The play opens with a conversation between Sir Owen Apshinken and Puzzletext, a parson. Even in the first lines
the play's political significance is apparent:

Sir Owen Apshinken. Oh, Puzzletext! what a fine thing it is for a man of my estate to stand in fear of his wife, that I dare not get drunk so much as—once a day, without being called on account for it. Peticoat-government is a very lamentable thing indeed.—But it is the fate of many an honest gentleman.  

This is an unmistakable allusion to Queen Caroline's control of George II, and it sets the tenor for the remainder of the play. Master Owen Apshinken is described as being "too familiar with the maids," and Lady Apshinken remarks that Nature "left his head unfurnished." The fact that Queen Caroline actually governed England is further emphasized by Sir Owen when he tells Puzzletext: "If she interferes not with my pipe, I am resolved not to interfere with her family.—Let her govern, while I smoke." Although most of the remarks about the royal family in The Grub-Street Opera are caustic, Fielding does not forget that George II possessed some admirable qualities. To emphasize George II's finer traits, one of Sir Owen's tenants, Mr. Apshones, tells Master Owen:

Sir Owen hath still behaved as the best of landlords; he knows a landlord should protect, not prey on his tenants—should be the shepherd, not the wolf to his flock; but one would have thought you imagined we lived under that barbarous custom—I have read of—when the

---

26 Ibid., p. 215.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 216.
landlord was entitled to the maidenheads of all his tenants' daughters.\textsuperscript{29}

Curiously enough, Master Owen, who represents Frederick Louis, is the only character in the play who has no redeeming qualities at all. Even the serving girls despise and insult him. Master Owen asks Susan for a kiss, and she exclaims:

\begin{quote}
Give you a kiss!--give you a slap in the face, or a rod for your backside. When I am kissed, it shall be by another guise sort of spark than you. Sbud! your head looks like the scrag and of a neck of mutton just floured for basting. A kiss!--a fart!\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Evidently Fielding made no departure from accuracy in characterizing the Prince of Wales. The political implications concerning the royal family are clearly evident; and not only did Fielding manage to describe the existing political situation, but he was also able to illustrate the personal characteristics of George II, Caroline, and Frederick Louis. In addition, by setting the scene of the play in Wales, Fielding enabled the members of the Apshinken family to speak with an accent which probably resembled a German one.

The servants of the Apshinken household represent the leading political figures of the era, and in characterizing them Fielding is as accurate as he was in portraying the royal family. Robin, otherwise Sir Robert Walpole, is the most important servant in the house of Sir Owen Apshinken. The character and activities of each of the servants are clearly

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 251. \textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 269.
illustrated in the most politically significant episode of the play. Robin and William, who represents William Pultney, are arguing over the affections of Sweetissa, who Robin believes has been false to him:

William. Sirrah, I'll make you repent you ever quarrelled with me.--I will tell my master two silver spoons you stole--I'll discover your tricks--your selling of glasses, and pretending the frost broke them--making master brew more beer than he needed, and then giving it away to your own family; especially to feed the great swollen belly of that fat-gutted brother of yours--who gets drunk twice a day at master's expense.

Robin. Ha, ha, ha! And is this all?

William. No, sirrah, it is not all--then there's your filling the plate, and when it was found lighter, pretended that it was wasted in cleaning; and your bills for tutty and rotten-stone, when you have used nothing but poor whiting. Sirrah, you have been such a rogue; that you have stole above half my master's plate, and spoiled the rest.31

After this heated exchange, John (Lord Hervey) and Thomas (Thomas Pelham-Holles) come to the defense of Robin. After John and Thomas have their say, the exchange between William and Robin continues:

Robin. Was it not enough to try to supplant one in my place, but you must try to get my mistress?

William. Your mistress--any man may have your mistress that can outbid you, for it is well known you never had a mistress without paying for her.

Robin. But perhaps you may find me too cunning for you, and while you are attempting my place, you may lose your own.32

One of the servants, Susan, tries to mediate the quarrel but finally gives up and despairingly remarks: "If you can't be

31Ibid., pp. 242-43. 32Ibid., p. 244.
friends without it, you had best fight it out once for all."

Robin, however, wants no part of a fight:

Robin. No, no, I am for no fighting; . . . it is very well known what difficulties I have been put to to keep peace in it.
William. I suppose peace-making is one of the secret services you have done master.

After this exchange, William leaves, and Robin and Thomas hold a significant conversation that alludes to Pultney's endeavors to gain Walpole's position.

Thomas. I suppose he is gone to inform master against you.
Robin. Let him go. I am too well with madam to fear any mischief he can make with master.--And harkye, between you and I, madam won't suffer me to be turned out.

In these scenes, Fielding alludes to most of the significant political situations which existed during the period. Walpole's position as a favorite of the Queen, his peace policy, and his intrigue with his mistress are made targets for Fielding's satirical darts. The feud between Pultney and Walpole and Pultney's machinations in an effort to replace Walpole as first minister are amply illustrated in the fight scene between Robin and William. By the almost meaningless drivel of John and Thomas, Pelham-Holles and Lord Hervey are exposed as parasites clinging to Walpole in the hope of gaining political favor and power. And of course the corruption of the Walpole ministry is emphasized by William's accusations against Robin.

33 Ibid., p. 245.  34 Ibid.  35 Ibid., p. 246.
It should be noted, however, that *The Grub-Street Opera* is distinctly non-partisan. None of the leading characters is sympathetic. A close reading of the play indicates that Fielding thought no more of William Pultney than he thought of Sir Robert Walpole.

After the trouble with the government over the presentation of *The Grub-Street Opera*, Fielding wrote no more sustained attacks against Walpole and the royal family for almost five years. This hiatus of course does not imply that Fielding did not resort at times to personal and political satire; he could never restrain his distaste for Walpole's corrupt activities and the general state of political affairs in England. In many of his subsequent plays, Fielding touched upon the topic of bribery and often lightly satirized Walpole. *Don Quixote in England*, for example, contains some very effective satire on the election process and the bribery which seemed to be inherent in most of the borough elections held in England. The most illustrative scene of this apparently rampant bribery occurs between the Mayor of the borough and two citizens, Guzzle, an innkeeper, and Retail, an alderman.

**Mayor.** My neighbor and I have a strange thought come into our heads. You know, Mr. Guzzle, we are like to have no opposition, and that I believe you will feel the want of, as much as any man. Now, d'ye see, we have taken it into consideration, whether we should not ask this Sir Don to represent us, ... I make no doubt be he is some very rich man, who pretends to be poor in order to get
his election the cheaper; he can have no other design in staying among us. For my part, I make no doubt but that he is come to stand on the Court interest . . . .

Retail. But if you think he intends to offer himself, would it not be wiser to let him; for then, you know, if he spends never so much, we shall not be obliged to choose him.

Mayor. Brother alderman, I have reproved you already for that way of reasoning; it savors too much of bribery . . . .

Guzzle. Mr. Mayor talks like a man of sense and honor, and it does me good to hear him.

Mayor. Ay, ay, Mr. Guzzle, I never gave a vote contrary to my conscience. I have very earnestly recommended the country interest to all my brethren; but before that I recommended the town interest, that is, the interest of this corporation; and, first of all, I recommended to every particular man to take a particular care of himself. And it is with a certain way of reasoning, that he that serves me best will serve the town best; and he that serves the town best will serve the country best.36

Fielding in this play wisely illustrates that for every corrupt politician who resorted to bribery, there had to be many more corrupt voters who were willing to accept the bribery.

Some of Fielding's best allusions to Walpole in the plays between The Grub-Street Opera and 1736 are found in The Mock Doctor. Sheridan Baker asserts that during this era Walpole was currently satirized as a quack and that contemporary audiences would not fail to make an association between a mock doctor and a mock minister.37 Yet the plays between The Grub-Street Opera and the plays of 1736 are curiously light-hearted and nonpartisan; they do not exhibit the rancor displayed in

37Baker, p. 227.
The Grub-Street Opera. It was not until the time of the plays of 1736–37 that "Fielding was a satirist no longer nonpartisan and no longer light-hearted, but rather one who had become a serious advocate of political reform and of the overthrow of the Walpole government."  

Just what occasioned Fielding's return to direct and often abusive satire is uncertain. No one particular event occurred in 1735 or 1736 which would cause Fielding to again take up his caustic pen. In all probability, the reasons are numerous. Perhaps Fielding became an advocate of reform because he saw that the corruption of the Walpole ministry showed no signs of abating and because he felt that the corruption was spreading throughout all levels of English life. Wilber P. Cross attributes Fielding's renewed and vehement attacks on politics and society to gradual shifts in allegiances that had occurred in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Cross relates:

... by 1736, fresh blood was being infused into the Opposition, ... In the House of Lords, Chesterfield found an able supporter in the young Duke of Bedford, who had taken his seat a few years before. In the House of Commons, the position of Pultney and the "patriots" was greatly strengthened by George Lyttleton and William Pitt, subsequently Earl of Chatham, both of whom were returned in the by-election of 1735.

Cross further relates that Fielding became most friendly with Pitt and Chesterfield, and that his relations with Bedford

---

38 Brown, p. 41.  
39 Cross, I, 179.
and Lyttleton became intimate. But whatever his reasons, Fielding, with the appearance of Pasquin, became a serious political critic who insistently advocated reform.

Pasquin was first presented at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket on March 5, 1736. There is absolutely no plot whatever in Pasquin, but its structure is exceedingly complex. The play takes the form of a rehearsal of two plays: a comedy called "The Election" and a tragedy entitled "The Life and Death of Common-Sense." The ostensible authors of each separate play are present and stage the rehearsal of their own play. The authors, Trapwit and Fustian respectively, comment on the action in each episode and serve to emphasize the satire. The title of the play, Pasquin, is also politically significant and illustrates clearly Fielding's intent in writing it. Cross relates that there was a legend which told of two statues in opposite quarters of Rome. One of the statues was called Pasquin; the other, Marforio. People would attach epigrams and charges to Pasquin; the answers to these were attached to Marforio. Thus it was that Fielding, through Pasquin, made the charges. He had only to wait until 1737 for his answer.

The segment of Pasquin called "The Election" contains much excellent political satire. This part of the play

\[\text{Ibid.}\]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 180.\]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 179.\]
concerns an upcoming election, and the mayor and the aldermen of the borough are discussing the possibilities of their enrichment as the play opens. The candidates of the Court Party are Lord Place and Colonel Promise; the candidates of the Country Party are Sir Henry Foxchase and Squire Tankard. The mayor and aldermen are unable to decide which party to vote for; all of the candidates, asserts the Mayor, "are worthy gentlemen."\(^3\) At about this time, Lord Place and Colonel Promise enter and hold the following conversation with the Mayor and the aldermen:

Mayor. My Lord, we are sensible of your great power to serve this corporation; and we do not doubt but we shall feel the effect on't.

Lord Place. Gentlemen, you may depend on me; I shall do all in my power. I shall do you some services which are at present not proper to mention to you; in the mean time, Mr. Mayor, give me leave to squeeze you by the hand, in assurance of my sincerity.\(^4\)

At this point, Trapwit, the author of the comedy, interrupts the action of the rehearsal to instruct his actors to "bribe a little more openly, if you please, or the audience will lose that joke, and it is one of the strongest in the entire play."\(^5\) After receiving bribes, the Mayor and the aldermen are resolved to support Lord Place and Colonel Promise. Quite unexpectedly, however, after Lord Place and Colonel Promise leave, their opponents of the Country Party enter and attempt to gain the support of the Mayor and his aldermen. There is

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 173. 
\(^5\) Ibid.
no difference in the methods of any of the candidates to get
votes, only the means. Sir Harry Foxchase and Squire Tankard
do not resort to the direct method of bribery. Instead they
use promises of future trade with all the local merchants.

Sir Harry. Mr. Alderman Stitch, your bill is too
reasonable, you certainly must lose by it: send me in
half a dozen more great-coats, pray: my servants are
the dirtiest dogs! Mr. Damask, I believe you are afraid
to trust me, by those few yards of silk you sent my
wife--she likes the pattern so extremely, she is resolved
to hang her rooms with it--pray let me have a hundred
yards of it; I shall want more of you. Mr. Timber--and
you Mr. Iron, I shall get into your books too--

And then after Sir Harry makes a promise to buy bricks from
the Mayor so that Sir Harry may rebuild his house, they all
drink and sing together the chorus which the Mayor refused to
sing before Sir Harry offered his indirect bribes. They
drink to "liberty and property and no excise." After these
bribery scenes, the election is held, and the winners are
Sir Harry Foxchase and Squire Tankard. The Mayor's wife,
however, persuades her husband to announce that the defeated
candidates had been duly elected. By this device, the
election will be contested, and the citizens of the borough
will get a trip to London at the expense of the candidates.

Fielding's satire in the first part of Pasquin is
generally nonpartisan, but it is not particularly light-
hearted. He attacks both parties for their corrupt practices,

46 Ibid., p. 176.
and the charges he makes against them are grave ones. Unlike the charges of bribery in *Don Quixote in England*, the charges in *Pasquin* are directed against the easily identifiable political parties in England. In *Don Quixote* it is largely the citizens who conspire to line their own pockets, but in *Pasquin* the politicians, who are meant to portray the representative politicians of each party, are only too willing to use either the direct or the indirect bribe in order to get elected. Fielding, emphasizing his belief that his charges are just and accurate, has Trapwet tell Fustian, "Sir, this play is an exact representation of nature."47

The rehearsal of the tragedy which makes up the second part of *Pasquin* does not deal directly with party politics, but many of the implications of "The Life and Death of Common-Sense" are political. The structure of this segment of the play is very similar to the structure of the puppet show in *The Author's Farce*. The plot is a simple one: Queen Nonsense arrives from France to invade the realm of Queen Common-Sense in England. The subjects of Common-Sense—Law, Physic, and Firebrand—desert her and join forces with Queen Ignorance and her army "of singers, fiddlers, tumblers, and rope-dancers."48 In the battle which follows, the paltry forces of Common-Sense are routed, and Queen Ignorance claims victory, asserting:

Beat a retreat, the day is now our own,
The powers of Common-Sense are all destroyed;
Those that remain are fled away with her. 49

Queen Common-Sense is murdered by her former priest, Firebrand. But as the forces of Ignorance are celebrating their victory, the ghost of Common-Sense appears and frightens them away. The characters of the tragedy are representations of certain groups of people. Law, of course, represents lawyers, judges, justices, and bailiffs. Physic represents doctors and apothecaries. Firebrand, who worships the sun, represents the impious clergy. These representations, however, are not meant to satirize those honest members of the legal and medical professions. Fustian interrupts the rehearsal to emphasize that "what is said here cannot hurt either an honest lawyer, or a good physician; and such may be, nay, I know such are: if the opposites to these are the most general, I cannot help that." 50

Fielding felt strongly about the degeneration of the law in eighteenth century England; he believed that the law had deserted common sense, which he felt should be the basis of all law. The following conversation between Law and Physic illustrates Fielding's belief that English law had parted company from common sense:

Physic. My Lord, there goes a rumor through the court
That you descended from a family
Related to the queen; Reason is said
T'have been the mighty founder of your house.

---

49 Ibid., p. 211. 50 Ibid.
Law. Perhaps so; but we have raised ourselves so high
And shook this founder from us off so far,
We hardly deign to own from whence we come. 51

A later conversation between Queen Common-Sense and Law
illustrates the abusiveness of law which is operative without
a basis in reason.

Queen Common-Sense. My Lord of Law, I have sent for
you this morning;
I have a strange petition given to me;
Two men, it seems, have lately been at law
For an estate, which both of them have lost,
And their attorneys now divide between them.
Law. Madam, these things will happen in the law.
Queen Common-Sense. Will they, my lord? then better
we had none;
But I have also heard a sweet bird sing,
That men unable to discharge their debts
At a short warning, being sued for them,
Have, with both power and will their debts to pay,
Lain all their life in prison for their costs.
Law. That may perhaps be some poor person's case,
Too mean to entertain your royal ear.
Queen Common-Sense. My lord, while I am queen I
shall not think
One man too mean, or poor to be redressed;
Moreover, lord, I am informed your laws
Are grown so large, and daily yet increase,
That the great age of old Methusalem
Would scarce suffice to read your statutes out. 52

The above passage clearly shows Fielding's serious concern
about the illogical operation of the law, and the concern of
the queen about each of her subjects, no matter how mean or
poor, typifies a humanitarian strain found everywhere in
Fielding's works. There is also an allusion to those members
of the legal profession who accept bribes and render their
verdicts accordingly. After Firebrand murders Queen Common-
Sense, he remarks:

51 Ibid., p. 207. 52 Ibid., p. 208.
She's gone, but ha! it may be seem me ill
T'appare her murderer; I'll therefore lay
This dagger by her side, and that will be
Sufficient evidence, with a little money.
To make the coroner's inquest find self-murder.\textsuperscript{53}

Fielding's intent in presenting \textit{Pasquin} is quite clear.
He deplored the abusive and corrupt practices in all levels
of English life. He felt that a contagion, at least partly
initiated by the Walpole ministry, was spreading and infecting
his country. In \textit{Pasquin}, Fielding pleads for a return to
common sense; and he asserts that, if the citizens would
refuse to accept bribes, if the politicians would become more
honest, and if the professional men would deal more justly
with their clients, common sense, although now only a spectre
of what she was in former days, would be powerful enough to
make England a glorious and honorable nation.

Emboldened by the success of \textit{Pasquin} (it had a continuous
run of sixty performances),\textsuperscript{54} Fielding wrote several more
dramas, each one more boldly attacking Walpole. The culmination
of Fielding's vehement attacks was reached with the presentation
of two plays in 1737. The first play, \textit{The Historical Register
for the Year 1736} was presented on March 21, 1737, at the
Little Theatre in the Haymarket.\textsuperscript{55} The second play, \textit{Eurydice
Hiss'd}, was first presented as an afterpiece to \textit{The Historical
Register} on April 13, 1737.\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{Historical Register} is a

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{54}Cross, I, 187.
\textsuperscript{55}Dudden, I, 194.
\textsuperscript{56}Cross, I, 216.
brief play in three acts. Its structure is similar to that of Pasquin. The scene is laid in a playhouse, and an author is holding a rehearsal of his play. There is absolutely no plot to The Historical Register. It consists merely of a number of different scenes which purport to catalogue the major events of 1736.

The Historical Register contains only two purely political scenes, but these two scenes are so closely connected with the current political climate that the contemporary audiences could not mistake either the purpose or the target of them. The first political scene presents a group of politicians sitting around a table. They are discussing foreign affairs, but it soon becomes apparent that none of them knows one thing about the foreign affairs of their nation. Tiring of the useless discussion on foreign affairs, one of the politicians seated at the table exclaims: "Hang foreign affairs, let us apply ourselves to money." 57 All of the politicians then begin to discuss ways to raise money. They decide to levy a new tax but have difficulty in determining what commodity to tax. Finally one of the politicians suggests that they levy a tax on learning. This idea is voted down because "learning is the property of very few," 58 and there would be little gain in taxing a rare item. Finally, the politicians decide to

57 Fielding, The Historical Register, XI, 245.
58 Ibid., p. 246.
lay a tax on ignorance, for "ignorance will take in most of the great fortunes in the kingdom." Fielding's purpose in including this scene in the play was to assert that the main business of the Walpole government had been to levy new taxes and then collect them.

The other purely political scene marks a return by Fielding to personal political satire. This scene opens with four supposed patriots standing around and toasting liberty, property, and trade. The patriots are of four distinct types, all of whom Fielding loathed. The first patriot is the noisy patriot, "who drinks and roars for his country, and never does either good or harm in it." The second is the cautious patriot who is for something only if there is a reservation attached to it. The third is the self-interested patriot who is for war because he is a sword-cutter by trade. The last is the indolent patriot who is for peace or war; he does not care which. Into this group of ragged patriots comes Quidam. He lays a purse of gold on the table and wins the allegiance of the men. Quidam then begins to play the fiddle, and all of the others dance off the stage behind him. Medley, the supposed author of the play that is being rehearsed, explains the significance of this scene:

Sir, every one of these patriots have a hole in their pockets, as Mr. Quidam the fiddler there knows; so

59 Ibid. 60 Ibid., p. 266.
that he intends to make them dance till all the money is fallen through, which he will pick up again, and so lose not one halfpenny by his generosity.61

There is no doubt that Quidam represents Walpole; and Fielding, to insure that there would be no mistake in recognizing the figure of Quidam, asserts in his preface to The Historical Register that "it is so plain who is meant by this Quidam, that he who maketh any wrong application thereof, might as well mistake the name of Thomas for John, or Old Nick for old Bob."62

There are also other minor political allusions scattered throughout The Historical Register, but they deal with the general degeneration of politics rather than with specific abuses. The play has an effective and amusing auction scene in which the auctioneer is unable to sell the following items: "a curious remnant of political honesty, a piece of patriotism, and three grains of modesty."63 The auctioneer is able to sell, however, "a considerable quantity of interest at Court."64 The price he receives for this select item is 1,000 pounds. And perhaps the most disappointed person at the auction is the man who pays eighteen pence for all the Cardinal Virtues but who thought he was getting a Cardinal's virtues. The auction scene is a clever device, and through it Fielding is

61 Ibid., p. 267.
62 Fielding, "Preface," The Historical Register, XI, 236.
63 Fielding, The Historical Register, XI, 256.
64 Ibid.
able again to emphasize the amoral social and political conditions of England.

Eurydice Hiss'd, as has been noted in a previous chapter, is perhaps the most complicated play that Fielding ever wrote. Noting its complexity, C. B. Woods asserts that Eurydice Hiss'd

is a double allegory, and a very clever one. Pillage, the author of the farce, stands for both Fielding and Walpole, the "farce" for both Eurydice [sic] and the Excise Bill, the "house" for both the playhouse and the House of Commons.65

Woods further believes that "nearly every passage lends itself readily to double interpretation."66

Because the social import of Eurydice Hiss'd has been discussed in Chapter III, it will not be necessary to reiterate the plot and setting of the play. In this discussion, however, it will be necessary to remember that Pillage actually is a representation of Walpole. Pillage's attempts, then, to get his play presented may be taken as suggesting Walpole's attempts to get a bill passed in the House of Commons. In the opening scenes, Pillage is besieged by actors who want parts in his next play. It is fairly certain that these players represent any number of different types who must have haunted the upper levels of government seeking patronage or places. Pillage's plans to fill the boxes of the theatre

66 Ibid.
with hired stooges so that his play will be a success is
certainly an allusion to Walpole's practice of bribing
constituents in order to insure his success. Although Woods
asserts that Pillage stands both for Fielding and for Walpole,
it seems most likely when considering the political implications
of the play that Honestus actually voices the sentiments of
Fielding. For example, when Pillage tries to bribe Honestus
to applaud his farce, Honestus replies that he will not accept
a bribe and, if the play is unworthy, he will hiss if he has
to hiss alone. Pillage replies: "Now, by my soul, I hope to
see the time/When none shall dare to hiss within the house."67
Honestus's reply to Pillage's hope is particularly significant:

I rather hope to see the time, when none
Shall come prepared to censure or applaud,
But merit always bear away the prize.
If you have merit, take your merit's due;
If not, why should a bungler in his art
Keep off some better genius from the stage?68

The reply is exactly what Fielding had been trying to tell
Walpole for over eight years: govern honestly, and let that
which has merit be the law; and if others are more able to
enrich England, do not hold your place by bribes and promises.

Walpole could ill afford to allow such brilliant and
abusive attacks to continue against him. And Fielding in
the preface to The Historical Register promised his public
that he would continue to ridicule vice and imposture:

67 Fielding, Eurydice Hiss'd, XI, 300.
68 Ibid., pp. 301-02.
If nature hath given me any talents at ridiculing vice and imposture, I shall not be indolent, nor afraid of exerting them, while the liberty of the press and the stage subsists, that is to say, while we have any liberty left among us. I am, to the public, a most sincere Friend, and devoted Servant.69

But Walpole was neither friend nor servant to the public, and liberty did not concern him. Taking Fielding to be a man of his word, Walpole started the machinery that was to silence the dramatic career of one of the greatest geniuses of the era.

CHAPTER V


On May 24, 1737, Sir Robert Walpole introduced into the House of Commons an amendment to the Vagrant Act of Queen Anne, a portion of which dealt with the common players of interludes. This amendment prohibited the production of any play for "hire, gain, or reward" unless a copy of the play had been submitted fourteen days prior to the Lord Chamberlain for his approval.\(^1\) Despite the opposition in the House of Commons of William Pultney and in the House of Lords of Lord Chesterfield, the amendment was quickly passed and became the law of England on June 24, 1737.\(^2\) The reason for the Licensing Act is not a difficult one to find, and no less a dramatist than George Bernard Shaw provides that reason:

In 1737, Henry Fielding, the greatest practising dramatist, with the single exception of Shakespear, produced by England between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century, devoted his genius to the task of exposing and destroying parliamentary corruption, then at its height. Walpole, unable to govern without

\(^1\)Dudden, I, 208.

corruption, promptly gagged the stage by a censorship which is in full force at the present moment. Fielding, driven out of the trade of Molière and Aristophanes, took to that of Cervantes; and since then the English novel has been one of the glories of literature, whilst the English drama has been its disgrace.³

Shaw somewhat overstates his case, but there is no doubt that it was Fielding's drama that was responsible for Walpole's insistence on an act which would regulate the stage.

Although Fielding was the chief reason for and the prime target of the Licensing Act, he was not the victim of a sudden capricious whim of Walpole. Even in the reign of William III there had been some popular movements for governmental regulation of the stage. Perhaps the most famous proposal for the supervision of the stage in William III's reign was Jeremy Collier's Short View of the English Stage, which was published in 1698. In his tract, Collier advocated governmental control because he felt that the stage had become licentious. Throughout the reign of Queen Anne, the clamor for regulation was provoked by the lewdness of the stage, and critics urged governmental supervision to improve the moral tone of English drama.⁴ After the death of Queen Anne, censorship of any kind was practically abolished.⁵ During the reign of George I, actor-managers were in control of most of

---

⁴ Loftis, Politics and Drama, p. 128.
⁵ Wright, p. 252.
the theatres, and the critics of that period agitated for control not because of the immorality of the stage but rather because of the control of the stage by actors who devoted excessive attention to irrational entertainments such as pantomimes and dances. 6 This love affair between the actor-managers and nonsensical entertainments actually discouraged promising playwrights from composing new dramas, so difficult had it become to get a legitimate play presented in the face of the fierce competition raised by entertainments such as Hurlothrumbo. Finally, after the almost overwhelming success of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, there was some agitation for control raised in response to the use of the drama for political propaganda. 7

After the success of the *Beggar's Opera*, the government used some means to prevent the presentation of objectional material on the stage. Gay was probably the first to suffer from renewed governmental interference of the stage. In 1729, Gay had arranged to have his new play, *Polly*, presented at the Lincoln Inn Fields Theatre. Before the play could be presented, however, the Lord Chamberlain sent an order to John Rich which prohibited the exhibition of the play until it had been supervised and approved by the Duke of Grafton. 8 Although *Polly* is not systematic political allegory, it does imply an equation of felons to courtiers. Loftis, in attempting to

---

6 Loftis, *Politics and Drama*, p. 128.
7 Ibid., p. 129.
8 Ibid., p. 97.
give a reason for the suppression of Polly, asserts:

The dimmest wit in a London audience would have caught the innuendo in the title character's explanation of what had happened to her father (1): "My Papa kept company with gentlemen, and ambition is catching. He was in too much haste to be rich. I wish all Great Men would take warning. 'Tis now seven months since my Papa was hang'd."  

Walpole, already stung by the allusion to him as Macheath the robber of the public, was not going to allow the stage to be used as a vehicle for satirizing him again; and it was he who suggested to the king that an order be sent to the Lord Chamberlain which would effectively prohibit the exhibition of Polly.  

For awhile after suppression of Polly in 1729, the government did not attempt to exert any more control, but in the summer of 1731, the machinery of governmental interference was well oiled and was used on several occasions. In June of 1731, Fielding attempted to present an expanded version of The Welch Opera, now entitled The Grub-Street Opera, at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. The play was announced for presentation on June 11, 1731, but was postponed on the pretext that one of the actors was indisposed. Finally on June 14, the play was to be performed, but then came the announcement that the play was to be deferred until a later date.  

Although the details of the suppression are not known, there is little  

---

\[9\] Ibid.  
\[10\] Ibid., pp. 97-98.  
\[11\] Cross, I, 110.
doubt that the play was prohibited through the efforts of the Lord Chamberlain and Walpole. As was noted in a previous chapter, *The Grub-Street Opera* is one of the most sustained, vehement, and audacious satirical attacks upon both Walpole and the royal family, and there can be no doubt that Walpole must have exerted his influence to keep the play from ever being acted.

During the very next month, a group of players proposed to act an anonymous play, *The Fall of Mortimer*, which had appeared in print earlier in the spring. The plot of the play concerns an evil counsellor who subverts the liberty of the people for his own selfish gain. Ostensibly the play is a historical one set in the reign of Edward III, but the allegory is crude, direct, and readily apparent. Mortimer, who could be none other than Walpole, is supported by the Queen Mother; and through their collusion, he is able to exert a tyrannical control over the affairs of the nation. Mortimer's fall comes only after the accession of the young king, who has been tutored by a band of patriots to understand the uses of his prerogative. Besides the clear allusion to Walpole through the character of Mortimer, there is an implication of the close relationship between Walpole and the Queen. And the idea of the nation being saved through the efforts of a band of patriots was a favorite theme of

---

opposition leaders such as Pultney and Bolingbroke. All of these allusions were too much for Walpole to countenance, and in July, 1731, a grand jury returned a presentment against the play as a "false, scandalous, infamous, seditious, and treasonable" libel against the government. The company at the Haymarket attempted to perform the play even after the grand jury had returned its indictment, but the company was stopped by the appearance of a constable who had a warrant for the arrest of the actors. Whether the players were actually arrested is uncertain. Cross asserts that the players managed to escape in the confusion, but Arthur H. Scouten believes that the players were arrested. In any case, the players were subject to more harrassment, and in August of 1731 they were dispersed for trying to perform so innocuous a play as Hurlothrumbo, which was originally dedicated to Walpole.

The political and theatrical scene remained relatively quiet following the flurry of activity that marked the summer of 1731, and open hostility did not erupt again until 1733 when Walpole introduced a new excise bill into Parliament. This excise, which proposed to use bonded warehouses for

---

13 Loftis, Politics and Drama, pp. 105-106.
14 Cross, I, 111.
15 Ibid., pp. 111-112.
16 Ibid., p. 112.
17 Scouten, I, xlix.
18 Cross, I, 112.
storage of wine and tobacco duty free until actually sold for domestic consumption, aroused a storm of protest. The opposition played on public fears of a general excise, and Walpole was forced to withdraw the bill after the second reading. 19 The controversy also spawned a number of dramatic pieces, none of which were intended for the stage, that contain harsh and forthright criticism of Walpole and his excise bill. 20 In one of these dramatic tracts, Home Excised, there appears a statement by a Roman Senator which epitomises the theme of most of these political tracts in dramatic form. The senator, commenting on a proposed tax, asserts:

This general tax, if ratify'd by the Senate and Augustus, will bring Oppression upon us all, and may here after prove a Precedent for worse, if worse can be; and will not then Posterity have Cause to curse us, if we tamely acquiesce, and use not our utmost Efforts to prevent its Progress? 'tis the Project of Cyrenius [Walpole], who not content with what he has already done, will lop the Growth of Arts and Sciences, and bring us all to Slavery. 21

Walpole, who must have viewed these pseudo-dramatic pieces with considerable alarm, probably felt that it would be only a matter of time before such pieces were presented on the stage. Despite the provocativeness of the above type of criticism, Walpole probably would not have taken any action

---

19 Loftis, Politics and Drama, p. 112.
20 Ibid., p. 113.
21 Home Excised, quoted in Loftis, Politics and Drama, p. 114.
had it not been for other troubling problems. The first minister was undoubtedly stunned by the growing strength of the opposition which had forced him to withdraw his excise bill, and he must have viewed with considerable trepidation the reputation of Fielding who was, by 1733, the most popular of living playwrights.  

Determined to limit the popular appeal of his critics and anxious to silent the voice of his popular critic, Walpole introduced a Licensing Act into the House of Commons in 1733. The bill was debated, but for some reasons, probably having to do with the fact that the pseudo-dramas were never presented and that the government had thus far been able to prevent openly hostile or seditious drama from being presented, the proposed Licensing Act of 1733 never came to a vote.

After the tumultuous events of 1733, a new election was called and held in 1734. Despite a few modest gains by opposition forces, Walpole, by skillful manipulation of constituencies, secured a comfortable though diminished majority. Possibly feeling that his diminished majority might encourage his opponents, Walpole took several steps which he hoped would consolidate and strengthen his position as first minister. In an effort to repudiate the attacks of *The Craftsman*, an opposition publication, and to popularize his

---

Cross, I, 115.  
Scouten, I, xlix.
own policies, Walpole founded a newspaper, *The Daily Gazetteer* in 1735. In the same year, Walpole also attempted to push through an act to regulate the English stage. In an effort to be successful, the first minister enlisted the support of Sir John Barnard. Barnard himself introduced the bill into the House of Commons on April 3, 1735. After its introduction, the bill was printed; and on April 14 the bill had its second reading. Sometime after the second reading of the bill, a split developed between Barnard and Walpole. Barnard agreed to introduce the bill because he was concerned about what he considered the moral degeneration of the stage. When he discovered that Walpole wanted the bill for political reasons, Barnard withdrew his support. Walpole, despite the withdrawal of Barnard's support, continued to press for passage of the Licensing Act. Finally, on April 30, the measure came up in the House for its final reading and vote; the proposed act was defeated by a vote of ninety to seventy-four. This defeat, however, did not portend any substantial defeat for Walpole, and in January of the following year Walpole received the unanimous approval of the Parliament for his conduct of foreign affairs. Seemingly Walpole's position early in 1736 was more secure than ever before, but once again he was to feel the stinging effect of Fielding's satirical pen.

24 Dudden, I, 163.  
25 Scouten, I, xlix.  
27 Dudden, I, 163.
Sometime during the winter of 1735-36, Fielding offered the first draft of *Pasquin* to John Rich, who was then manager of the Covent Garden Theatre. For some reason, Rich rejected Fielding’s new play. Undaunted by Rich’s refusal, Fielding conceived a bold plan. He formed a partnership with James Ralph, and the two men acquired the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. In addition to owning his own theatre, Fielding also formed his own company of actors whom he called, more or less facetiously, The Great Mogul’s Company of English Comedians.\(^{28}\) Thus freed from the restraint of submitting his plays to other theatre managers, Fielding was able to return to writing that topical political satire so well received by contemporary audiences in plays such as *Tom Thumb* and *Don Quixote in England*. Fielding lost little time in preparing *Pasquin* for the stage, and when it was presented on March 5, 1736, neither Walpole nor the contemporary audiences could mistake the target of this "dramaticke satire on the times." The unmistakable charges of bribery and corruption, already a sore spot for Walpole, must have caused the first minister a great deal of concern. And even more troubling must have been the tremendous popular appeal of *Pasquin*, which had a run of over fifty consecutive nights.\(^{29}\) Fielding was not one to let his popular advantage pass unused. By the time of the

\(^{29}\) *Cross*, I, 118.
first appearance of *Pasquin*, he was on friendly terms with the leaders of the opposition. Possibly spurred on by the hope that the popular appeal of his plays would contribute to Walpole's downfall, Fielding followed his success with *Pasquin* by a series of plays, each of which was bolder in its attacks on Walpole than the succeeding one. After the appearance in March and April of 1737 of *The Historical Register* and *Eurydice Hiss'd*, Walpole must have felt compelled to take action. He was not so secure that he could withstand the immensely popular appeal of Fielding's dramas which had openly accused him of bribery and collusion.

On May 24, 1737, Walpole introduced into the House of Commons an amendment to the Vagrancy Act passed during the twelfth year of the reign of Queen Anne. That Walpole was finally successful in introducing legislation which would permit strict governmental regulation of the stage can be attributed to a strange play, *The Golden Rump*, which was never presented nor reprinted. The play was evidently based on an attack on Walpole and his associates which ran in the March 19 and March 26 issues of *Common Sense*. The title of the attack is descriptive of the god worshipped by a group of natives in India. Basically the idol has a human shape, "except that his legs are those of a goat terminating in the cloven feet of *30* Wright, p. 253.
the devil." The head of the idol is made of wood, and its trunk is silver. Its most distinguishing characteristic, however, is its huge golden buttocks. In the story which appeared in Common Sense, the chief magician led his followers in prostrating themselves at the rear of the idol and performing, as Cross rather euphemistically terms it, "the rites expected of them." The play which was based on this attack is surrounded by considerable obscurity. About the only thing that is certain is that Walpole got a copy of the play and read the most lewd and obscene passages in the House of Commons in an attempt to secure passage of his amendment. Most reliable authorities also concede that Henry Giffard, then manager of the Goodman's Fields Theatre, first received the play and wishing to gain Walpole's favor sold it to the first minister for a reported 1,000 pounds. From whom Giffard received the play, however, is the subject of considerable speculation. Horace Walpole, son of Sir Robert, definitely attributed the authorship of The Golden Rump to Fielding, but, as Cross points out, it is unlikely that Fielding would give to another theatre a political farce which would draw crowds away from his own theatre. Other stories circulating about the time of the Golden Rump episode attributed the authorship to one of Walpole's hack-writers;

31 Cross, I, 226.  
32 Wright, p. 253.
and although Cross dismisses these reports as preposterous, Loftis maintains that those reports are possibly true. Perhaps Loftis is closer to the truth than Cross. Certainly Walpole had to be disturbed over recent events in the theatre, and it was definitely not above him to resort to the type of deceit attributed to him by his contemporaries. But regardless of the authorship of The Golden Rump, it was Fielding and his drama that were directly responsible for the Licensing Act of 1737; The Golden Rump merely provided the impetus Walpole needed to get the act passed.

Although there were some instances of government regulation of the stage during the decade of the 1730's, no concerted effort came until 1733 when Henry Fielding was already the most popular living playwright of the century. Renewed activity by Walpole in obtaining legislation to regulate the stage always coincided with new successes of or activity by Henry Fielding. By 1737, Fielding's popularity had become so immense and his attacks on the government had become so apparent that Walpole was forced to take quick and decisive action. Walpole introduced his amendment in the House less than one month after The Historical Register and Eurydice Miss'd appeared together at the Haymarket Theatre for the first time. All of these events, their timing and

33 Cross, I, 227.
34 Loftis, Politics and Drama, p. 140.
relativeness, could not have been coincidental. There can be little doubt that it was Fielding's "satirical drama, consistently effective and popular with London, that provided the impetus needed to start the machinery of government interference."\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\)Wright, p. 258.
CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE CONCLUSIONS YIELDED BY THIS THESIS ARE GIVEN

Despite the disparity that exists among the critics of Fielding's dramatic efforts, there are some unquestionable conclusions which may be drawn about his drama. Most of his dramas, farces, and burlesques had as their bases those aspects of English life which Fielding believed were causing his nation's decay. No level of society escaped his satire. The corruption of public officials and the delusive dreams of a weak and unsuspecting populace are both exposed and ridiculed in The Lottery. He relentlessly exposed the destructive force of greed and hypocrisy on individual lives in such plays as The Modern Husband and The Letter-Writers. The abusive practices of the theatre managers during the decade of the 1730's were ridiculed and lamented in The Author's Farce and Eurydice Hiss'd. Fielding also wove into the fabric of these plays much scathing comment on those individuals—such as doctors, lawyers, and judges—who used their positions of power or trust to cheat the public in order to gain their own selfish goals.

In addition to ridiculing society and its follies, Fielding also used the theatre to expose the widespread
political corruption that was prevalent during his lifetime. For the most part, Fielding directed his attacks at one man, Sir Robert Walpole. Fielding's first attempts at political satire were largely light-hearted and nonpartisan. There is no discernible rancor in Fielding's earlier plays, such as Tom Thumb and The Author's Farce. It was only after these light-hearted attempts at political satire that Fielding began his vehement attacks, best exemplified by the direct and abusive satire in The Grub-Street Opera, The Historical Register, and Eurydice His'd. In all his political plays, Fielding also remembered to allude to the corruptness of a public not only willing to countenance corruption in government but also willing to accept bribery.

On many occasions Fielding asserted that his purpose in exposing public and private vice and folly was to try to correct the degenerative effects of those evils upon all levels of English life. Fielding believed that the duty of public officials was to insure the welfare of the public, and he seemed to plead often with the general populace to reject the corruption that had infected all levels of English government.

Although a few of Fielding's plays were unsuccessful—The Modern Husband, The Letter-Writers, and Eurydice—most of them were enthusiastically received by the London audiences; and after a few years, Fielding was easily the most popular living dramatist in England. His popularity, however, was
both an advantage and a disadvantage. Although his plays consistently pleased the public, they just as consistently displeased the higher echelons of government. It was during these years of Fielding's rising popularity that Walpole began his attempts to regulate the stage. Finally, after Fielding had acquired the Little Theatre in the Haymarket and had begun to present more direct and abusive satire of Walpole, the First Minister found a pretext for restricting the stage; and on June 24, 1737, the dramatic voice of one of the greatest geniuses of the era was silenced.

Although Fielding never wrote another drama after the Licensing Act of 1737 was passed, he continued to expose the vice and hypocrisy that were the subjects of his plays. One of his novels, Jonathan Wild, is nothing more than a continuation of his attacks on Walpole. After the downfall of the despised First Minister, Fielding turned from the negative satire of his plays and first novel to a more positive type of criticism. And in these his concern, as it ever was, was for the moral life of his country and its people. He wrote of making An Effectual Provision for the Poor; he made an Enquiry into the Late Increase of Robbers; and he, as a justice of the peace, delivered A Charge to the Grand Jury that remains today an eloquent example of reason and justness. There is no doubt that Fielding loved his country and admired its people, and he dedicated his adult
life to exposing those follies and abuses that he knew would
cause England to decay.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


The Historical Register for the Year 1736, Vol. XI of Complete Works, edited by W. E. Henley (16 volumes), New York, Croscup and Sterling, 1902.


The Letter-Writers; or A New Way to Keep a Wife at Home, Vol. IX of Complete Works, edited by W. E. Henley (16 volumes), Croscup and Sterling, 1902.


The Tragedy of Tragedies; or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great, Vol. XI of Complete Works, edited by W. E. Henley (16 volumes), New York, Croscup and Sterling, 1902.


West, Rebecca, The Court and the Castle, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957.

**Articles**


Davis, Joe Lee, "Criticism and Parody." *Thought*, XXVI (1951), 180-204.

More, Robert Etheridge, "Dr. Johnson on Fielding and Richardson," *PMLA*, LXVI (1951), 162-81.

Nichols, Charles W., "Social Satire in Fielding's *Pamphlet* and *Historical Register*." *Philological Quarterly*, XIII (1924), 309-18.


Rogers, Winfield H., "The Significance of Fielding's *Temple Beau*," *PMLA*, LV (1940), 440-44.


Newspapers

London, The Times, September 2, 1840.