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# THE INTERRELATION OF LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY IN THE EXPLICATION OF THREE ENGLISH NOVELS

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for the degree Doctor of Arts

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THE INTERRELATION OF LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY

IN THE EXPLICATION OF THREE ENGLISH NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

THE INTERRELATION OF LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY
IN THE EXPLICATION OF THREE ENGLISH NOVELS

By Helen LaVerne Emery

This study explores the possibility of compromise between the English department "survey course," which neglects primary literature for background information, and the "author course," which neglects social and historical backgrounds for intense critical analysis of primary works. It suggests that a knowledge of social background is useful in helping the student to understand the language of the work and the tradition and literary custom of the author's time; to assess an author's achievement; and to increase appreciation of his work and other works of the same period. In attempting to overcome the difficulty of neglecting primary literature or using class time to present social background, the study tests the feasibility of integrating

institutions is compared with the actual structure and function of these institutions in order to determine the accuracy of the novelist's reporting and to locate specific instances where sociological analysis served to illuminate the literary qualities of the novels. Then the critical verdicts are reconsidered and related to the sociological analysis of each novel.

Chapter five summarizes the results of the investigation, evaluates the representative quality of the novels, and demonstrates the usefulness and validity of sociological analysis and the possibilities of this method as a pedagogical technique. No claim is made that this technique should be used alone; instead the author suggests its use in conjunction with other conventional methods of literary analysis. The literature instructor is cautioned against allowing a student to consider literary realism as fact, art as life, or the novel as history. The author concludes with the suggestion that this study might serve the English teacher by reemphasizing the importance of social and historical knowledge and demonstrating the possibility of simultaneously teaching social history and literature in the English course without neglecting the primary works or the purposes of teaching literature.

a study of historical and social background into a close textual analysis of the literary work itself in order to illuminate characterizations, motivations, and themes of the primary piece.

Chapter one treats the difficulties of setting chronological boundaries for the study, the problem of the representative quality of the novels chosen for examination, the limitation of the scope of sociological analysis to the four basic institutions, the choice of historians not basing their social descriptions on literary works, and the selection of novels having English settings which reasonably correspond to their dates of publication. Other areas which juxtapose sociology and literature are cited.

Chapters two, three, and four consider, respectively, Fielding's Tom Jones, Godwin's Caleb Williams, and Dickens' Bleak House. Each chapter presents a brief plot summary of the novel, reviews the chronological historical background and biography of its author, and then investigates the actual structure and function of the basic institutions of marriage and family, economics, government, and religion at the time the novel was written. The major source of data for the study is the novels themselves, which are subjected to a textual analysis emphasizing the author's treatment of the basic institutions. The fictional treatment of the four

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This study of the interrelation of literature and sociology in three English novels has as its prime purpose the testing of the feasibility of examining literature and social backgrounds simultaneously as a possible pedagogical technique. It suggests that a knowledge of social background is useful in helping the student to understand the language of a work and the tradition and literary custom of the author's time; to assess an author's achievement; and to increase appreciation of his work and other works of the same period. The study tests the feasibility of integrating such an investigation of historical and social background into a close textual analysis of the literary work itself, while yet illuminating characterizations, motivations, and themes of the primary work. The idea for the study arose from a dissatisfaction with the sole use of one or another of the conventional critical methods to the neglect of others. The author was especially disturbed by the tendency to polarize historical and analytical criticism and employ one to the total neglect of the other. Although there are, of course, many other critical techniques, a look at the development and opposition of these two will set the scene for the further explanation of the purpose of this study.

The pedagogical history of English literature in the twentieth century has been characterized by a series of reactions against methods of criticism and scholarship. What David Daiches calls "the slow patterning of English literature into movements, with their precursors and successors, the isolation of separate periods, each with its own characteristics, the plotting of the rise and fall of movements"[1] resulted in the establishment, at the university level, of the typical "survey course" about which the humorous story, told by Guerin, Labor, Morgan, and Willingham, is not tremendously exaggerated:

> Some years ago, a story was making the rounds in academic circles, where it was received in good humor by all enlightened teachers of literature. A professor in one of our great Eastern universities, so the story goes, entered the classroom one day and announced that the poem under consideration for that hour was to be Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." He then proceeded to discuss Marvell's politics, religion, and career. He described Marvell's character, mentioned that he was respected by friend and foe alike, and speculated on whether he was married. At this point the bell rang. The professor closed his sheaf of notes, looked up, smiling, and concluded, "Damn fine poem, men. Damn fine."[2]

The revolt against the "survey course," with its liberal use of historical, sociological, psychological, and

[1] David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 322.

[2] Wilfred L. Guerin, Earle G. Labor, Lee Morgan, and John R. Willingham, A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 1.

biographical background, led to the elimination of most of such background information on the basis of the contention that this was a useless critical tool for the proper intensive study and evaluation of literary works. The modern analytical criticism, which came to be called "new criticism," maintained that "good critical writing is always more or less empirical in method, which means that the critic looks first and last at the poem. . . ."[3] "Aesthetic values are anchored within the poem; it is solely the aesthetic structure, the internal organization of the poem, that gives any poem its value. Its value as a poem does not lie in its relation to the mind of the author."[4] It insisted on a strictly close, detailed, and inevitably long analytical description of the primary work, but ignored all other aspects not intrinsic to the literature itself. However, many of the new critics, in their attempt to avoid over-emphasis on sociological, biographical, and historical interpretations, "have been guilty of what may well be a more serious mistake: ignoring any information in the work itself, however helpful or necessary it may be."[5]

[3] John Crowe Ransom, "Ubiquitous Moralists," The Kenyon Review, 3 (Winter 1941), 96.

[4] Robert Wooster Stallman, ed., Critiques and Essays in Criticism: 1920-1948 (New York: The Ronald Press, 1949), p. 498.

[5] Guerin et al., p. 2.

The pedagogical equivalent of the new criticism was the elimination of the "survey course" and its replacement with "author courses" which concentrated on analyzing only the primary literary works of an author without any investigation of the milieu out of which they were produced. This substitution of intense analytical description had great merit in that it required an intimate knowledge of the primary work, a great emphasis on original thought, and a sharp intelligence, but still something was lacking. Lionel Trilling discusses this lack in his essay on "The Sense of the Past":

> The faults of these critics we know. Perhaps their chief fault they share with the scientific-historical scholars themselves--they try too hard. No less than the scholars, the critics fall into the error that Chapman denounced, the great modern illusion "that anything whatever . . . can be discovered through hard intellectual work and concentration." We often feel of them that they make the elucidation of poetic ambiguity or irony a kind of intellectual calisthenic ritual. Still, we can forgive them their strenuousness, remembering that something has happened to our relation with language which seems to require that we make methodical and explicit what was once immediate and unformulated.
>
> But there is another fault of the New Critics of which we must take notice. It is that in their reaction from the historical method they forget that the literary work is ineluctably a historical fact, and, what is more important, that its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience. Literature, we may say, must in some sense always be a historical study, for literature is a historical art.[6]

[6] Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1953), pp. 178-179.

A compromise between old and new criticism--between "survey" and "author" courses--calls for the use of background information, not to evaluate the work of art, but in order to see it properly before such an evaluation can commence. As Daiches points out, "ideally, there is never any need to go to history in order to find out what kind of work an author has produced. But in fact we are often conditioned by our experience to respond only to a work written in one kind of tradition and so to misread a work of another kind--to treat it as we would be treating a Gothic cathedral if we thought of it as a distorted Greek temple."[7] Such a mistaken reaction illustrates the usual error which sociologists refer to as ethnocentrism--the tendency to assume that people of another culture will think and feel as we would if transplanted to their situation. It ignores the fact that most people think and react only as their culture trains them to think and react. A corollary reaction is temporocentrism, the tendency to assume "that the present is more important than the past and that the whole of historical time is significant only for what it means to us. We thus tend to judge earlier societies in terms of criteria that are relevant to our own rather than

[7] Daiches, p. 265.

to theirs and to weigh their virtues and defects in terms of standards drawn from our own contemporary century."[8]

The refusal of the "new critics" to consider the background of a work is an attempt to increase the aesthetic delight in literature for its own sake, but there is also the danger of falling into the errors of ethnocentrism and temporocentrism. As Allan Rodway points out, "perhaps we should abandon aesthetic delight in some cases, or at least let it take its chance--in particular cases where a work clearly purports to reflect life? It creates a frame of reference that mirrors nature, and thus items in it can perfectly well be compared with their counterparts in life and checked as true or false to them."[9]

Historical and sociological scholarship can be valuable, and has proven so in many situations:

(1) It can help to "mitigate an author's faults" or "magnify his achievement" and to determine the standard by which a work should be judged. By understanding the taste and temper of the times in which a work was written, the student will be better able to determine whether an author has accomplished what he set out to do. A knowledge of eighteenth century social customs and institutions, for

[8] Robert Bierstedt, The Social Order, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), pp. 177-178.

[9] Allan Rodway, The Truths of Fiction (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 98.

example, enables the reader to judge the success of Fielding's attempt to portray "human nature."

(2) It can help the student to understand the language of a work. "If the word 'homely' means 'cosily domestic' in England and 'ugly' in America, English readers seeing the word in an American poem, and American readers seeing it in an English poem, will misunderstand the poem completely without this background information. This is a simple and obvious example of the kind of scholarship necessary before one can see a work for what it is--and one must see it for what it is before one can hope to be able to evaluate it."[10]

(3) It can help the student understand the tradition and literary convention of the period in which the work was written (knowledge often taken for granted by professors and other experts, but not by students). Daiches compares the possibility of misinterpretation resulting from a lack of understanding of literary convention to the likelihood of misinterpretation resulting from an assumption that a picture is complete in itself when it is really only a minute part of a vast mural. A confusion of faults and virtues might be the likely result of such a misconception.

(4) It can increase the richness and significance of the work as well as other works of the same period and

[10] Daiches, p. 327. This and the following two points are made by Daiches in his discussion of the controversy concerning place of biography and history in criticism, pp. 327-329.

background by giving the student a total impression of the age. This does not necessarily mean that close analytical criticism is not valuable, or that background investigation precedes close analysis of a work which then takes over and ignores it. Both are necessary. "The most fruitful and illuminating kind of criticism of earlier works often moves freely between historical and purely esthetic insights, as it does between descriptive and normative comments. . . . Whenever we deal with the product of a previous age the sense of the past is always with us, if we are literate at all, and we cannot help drawing on it and utilizing it."[11]

Admitting the validity of the argument for historical and social background in conjunction with close analysis of the literature, the teacher is often confronted by the question of how to organize his class to best handle the presentation of both aspects. Instructors attempting to illuminate the social backgrounds of literary works often seem to be severely limited by the available class time and the fear of neglecting the primary material, the literature. Such social background is important, however, as we have seen. If the average freshman or sophomore student can fit Shakespeare into the reign of Queen Elizabeth, he is at the outer limits of his historical knowledge. Even the upperclassman often knows absolutely nothing about such things as

[11] Daiches, p. 328.

the social stratification of English society, the marriage and family customs of Augustan England, or the effect of the Industrial Revolution on the England of Victoria. Often this ignorance inhibits his understanding of the primary literary work; thus the instructor is faced with a number of alternatives. Should he abandon literature and teach history and sociology? Obviously not. Should he assign supplementary readings? Few students demonstrate the interest and initiative to read them, or if they do, to integrate them with the primary work. Should he treat the historical and social backgrounds in a cursory manner and get on with the business of teaching literature? Though unsatisfactory, this seems at present to be the least unhappy solution to the problem.

How much better for the instructor and student alike if a study of the historical and social background of a period could be integrated into a close textual analysis of the literary work itself. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the feasibility of just such a teaching technique. The study includes little original research from the point of view of literature, history, or sociology. Its area is broad; its material is interdisciplinary, and its emphasis is more upon the process or technique being explored rather than the facts accumulated through the research. No attempt is made to prove that the method of

teaching literature and social background simultaneously is or is not a "good" technique. The excellence of the technique is not being tested; the matter under consideration is simply the feasibility of the technique.

The study seeks to determine whether the teaching method is feasible for novels and eras vastly different in theme and technique; to this end an extended historical period has been selected. If it can be demonstrated that the teaching technique can be used for novels and eras as different as those represented by this extended time span, then there would be probable cause to believe that it would be feasible for any era or novel. Thus the end product would be of broad general use to the teacher of literature.

If, for instance, Tom Jones does accurately reflect the social institutions of mid-eighteenth century England, then both student and instructor in a course on eighteenth century literature can discuss government, economics, religion, and the family without disconnecting these areas from the novel itself. Knowledge of the eighteenth century background, obtained in this way, will serve to enhance the student's understanding not only of Tom Jones, but of further examples of eighteenth century literature to be studied during the semester. If the sociological analysis of Tom Jones can be shown to help illuminate the characterizations, motivations, and themes of the novel, rather than

simply providing unnecessary additional information, then the value and feasibility of sociological analysis of primary literary works as a teaching technique can be suggested.

Of minor interest in this research would be the question of its value to sociologists, who, as scientists, have traditionally been extremely skeptical of using material filtered through the artistic imagination as documentary evidence for periods antedating the inception of formal scientific studies of society. The study may serve as a check upon social historians and help to demonstrate that literature, as a reporting of observations made by the trained sensitivity of an artist, does have potential value, in that the literary artist may prove to be as accurate an observer of social interaction as the historian, philosopher, or documentarian. If it could be shown that a particular novelist's handling of the basic social institutions is an accurate representation of his society, then the sociologist might be persuaded not to categorically eliminate all literary materials from his storehouse.

An attempt to examine literature in its social setting and society as it is depicted in literary works creates several difficulties and related problems. The first such problem involves the establishment of operational limits to the study. Chronological boundaries to the period under

surveillance must be set. It was foreseen that a central difficulty would be the effort to keep so large an undertaking in a manageable frame; for a description of social backgrounds and a review of individual works based on that description would inevitably entail a lengthy report of results. There is a limit to the detail which a paper can hold in focus, and this limit is strained when such a paper tries to present both literature and sociology simultaneously. For this reason care has been taken to limit the study chronologically to one century, and to examine a novel from the beginning, one from the middle, and one from the end of the period. The period from 1750 to 1850 was chosen in order to sample both eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature. Another reason for this choice involves the fact that this period demonstrates the rise of the novel as a literary form in England. Its beginning, around 1750, roughly marks the point where fiction became divorced from patronage as a result of the rise of the middle classes. Thus the author was no longer as strictly confined within the range of his patron's values, norms, and life style. Frequently in earlier works "the principle that he who pays the piper calls the tune meant that attention had to be paid to the likings of the patron."[12] But fiction's divorce from

[12] Levin L. Schücking, The Sociology of Literary Taste (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 12.

patronage around 1750 frees the study from the complicating factor of having to examine the relationships between the tastes of the majority and those of an aristocratic minority which controlled artistic production prior to that time. Schücking's discussion illustrates the thinking which prompted the decision to begin with 1750 rather than with the even century or the beginning of the English novel:

> Consider, for instance, the state of things in England at the outset of the eighteenth century, when the rise of the middle class was slowly taking place. The view and valuation of the world and the principles of conduct were entirely different at that time among the Puritan middle class and among the aristocracy. As a rule the social ideals of the two classes were sharply contrasted. But posterity held that in many respects, in regard, for instance, to marriage and family life, the ideals of the middle class were much the higher. In the course of time, these ideals gradually won through. Yet in this period science, and especially art, were mainly supported by the aristocracy. The leaders in science and art did not, indeed, spring from the aristocracy, but they found in it their main support and encouragement.[13]

Since around 1750 the English novelist has had to rely on public acceptance for his support, and this has made for a mutuality of opinion concerning the meaning of human activity and the common view of morality. Likewise, a tendency, since the end of the nineteenth century, toward a breakdown of this atmosphere of community agreement which has tended to force the novelist away from such a social

[13] Schücking, p. 7.

sense of mutuality, was responsible for concluding the study before the beginning of the twentieth century. This aspect is considered at length by David Daiches in his Critical Approaches to Literature:

> For the English novel depended on society, and on public agreement about what, among the multifarious details of daily life, was worth picking out as significant. What was significant was what altered a social relationship--love and marriage, quarreling and reconciliation, gain or loss of money or of social status. You could, of course, criticize society, but you did it by showing how social convention did not in fact lead to that generally-approved practical morality which it professed to foster. You could explore the relation between spontaneity of feeling and social convention, as Jane Austen did, or the relation between gentility and morality, as Thackeray did, or the effect of industrial society on private character, as Dickens did, or investigate the possibilities of self-knowledge and vocation in a context of society at work, as George Eliot did, but in every case the plot would be carried forward by public symbols. And in every case society is there, to be taken account of and accepted as a basic fact about human life even when the author wishes to attack it or alter it. The eighteenth and nineteenth century novel is therefore a particularly happy hunting ground for the sociological critic, and the student might ask himself what sociological questions can profitably be asked about, for example, the novels of Richardson, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot. But with such a novelist as Emily Brontë, who worked with a poet's kind of imagination, the sociological approach is perhaps less fruitful. Similarly, with the twentieth century novel, we can perhaps profitably ask sociological questions about Wells, Galsworthy, Dos Passos, even (though in his own way he operates as a poet) Faulkner, but what about Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and Hemingway? (Hemingway, though he apparently deals with man in society, is, in his best novels, constructing heroic myths which can derive from an essentially poetic sensibility. Lawrence's social origins can be usefully

> investigated by those interested in his psychology, but the relevance of such investigation to an understanding of the way in which his imagination works in his novels is surely dubious.) These are distinctions which the reader would do well to consider, whatever the conclusions he may reach.[14]

A second problem--the representative quality of the novels chosen--has been dealt with by assuming that the authors considered were intentionally attempting to produce novels which present a realistic picture of society. Special care has been taken to choose realistic works rather than novels which rely heavily on romance, satire, or heroic myth. With realistic intent as the major criterion for choice of novels, the question of the public acceptance and popularity of each novel was eliminated. The novels chosen--Tom Jones, Caleb Williams, and Bleak House--are considered, by people knowledgeable in the field, to be worthy of literary examination as well as sociologically representative. Critical examinations of these works which are discussed are also based upon the assumption that verisimilitude is a primary literary value.

A "novel" has traditionally been defined as "a long, fictitious, prose narrative." This description, although adequate for some purposes, requires considerable amendation when employed in a discussion of sociological background and critical analysis. As Thrall and Hibbard point out, "however

[14] Daiches, pp. 370-371.

diffuse and various the novel is as a form, it has always submitted itself to the dual test of artistic success and imitative accuracy or truth. It has, therefore, proved to be a continuing problem to the critic, while it has spoken with unique authority to the average reader of the past two centuries. Its best definition is ultimately the history of what it has been."[15] The literary forms preceding the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century were primarily verse and drama. Increasing literacy and social complexity and wider human interaction during this period led to the creation of a literary form with "a unified and plausible plot structure, sharply individualized and believable characters, and especially a pervasive illusion of reality."[16] Stevenson discusses the literary atmosphere after the great age of English drama:

> There remained the need for a form of narration that could encompass all sorts of action with a maximum of vividness, so as to rival the drama in its illusion of reality, and yet be available to every person everywhere. After the invention of printing this was gradually made possible by the large-scale distribution of books and the concurrent extension of literacy. A story could now have wide circulation and popular appeal when embodied in prose. For purposes of listening, verse had been easier than prose; but on the printed page its patterns distracted the reader's attention, and verse came to be regarded as an artificial and difficult form of communication.

[15] William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, rev. and enl. C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 319.

[16] Martin S. Day, History of English Literature: 1660-1837 (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1963), p. 217.

> The adoption of prose, in turn, produced a change in the handling of narrative material. Familiar details could be included and the natural phrases and rhythms of everyday speech could be reproduced. Prose began to perform the same function in promoting the illusion of reality that had been contributed to drama by the physical presence of the actor, his gestures and inflections, and the costumes and stage settings. Prose narrative moved out of the realm of historical exposition, which it had held from the time of Herodotus to that of Clarendon, and started to talk to readers about themselves and their surroundings. It is more than a coincidence that the history of the English novel begins at the same time as the history of journalism.[17]

As the novel developed, so did critical consensus on a long list of characteristics considered typical of the genre. The list presently may include such factors as structural unity, individualized characters, descriptive and denotative use of language, particularized details of time and place, a typically modern and scientific precision of observation and reporting, chronological consistency, a sense of immediacy and actual participation, and an atmosphere of complete authenticity which gives an illusion of reality through purporting to be an actual valid account of human experience. Watt is one among many critics who emphasize "the lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole, its formal realism";[18] and he summarizes the

[17] Lionel Stevenson, The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 5.

[18] Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 34.

novel's imitation of reality "in terms of the procedures of another group of specialists in epistemology, the jury in a court of law. Their expectations, and those of the novel reader coincide in many ways: both want to know 'all the particulars' of a given case--the time and place of the occurrence; both must be satisfied as to the identities of the parties concerned . . . and they also expect the witness to tell the story 'in his own words.' The jury, in fact, takes the 'circumstantial view of life,' which T. H. Green found to be the characteristic outlook of the novel."[19] It is this formal realism, this truth to human experience, which has been set up as a criterion for novels to be considered in the study of social backgrounds. Because it was felt that the realistic novel would be a better vehicle for the treatment of the social interests and problems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, care has been taken to avoid works in "the earlier literary tradition of using timeless stories to mirror the unchanging moral verities,"[20] or of using "general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention."[21] While employing caution in the avoidance of the "romance" (dealing with the long ago and far away), the

[19] Watt, p. 31.

[20] Watt, p. 11. Watt refers specifically to "the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences."

[21] Watt, p. 15.

study also has discounted the "propaganda novel" and the "ashcan" type of naturalistic novel as too unrealistic to be valid attempts to portray society as it actually existed.

Another problem which arose during early consideration of the limits of the study was that of the scope of the sociological analysis. This question has been dealt with by limitation of the study to an examination of the basic social institutions of (1) marriage and family, (2) government, (3) economics, and (4) religion. These are areas for which we possess fairly accurate historical information, as well as areas which are considered by sociologists to be the most basic social institutions. Sociologically, an institution is defined as "an organized system of social relationships which embodies certain common values and procedures and meets certain basic needs of the society."[22] Institutions come about as a result of the unplanned efforts of people to satisfy their needs in a society. When the people discover a functional pattern, it becomes necessary for this pattern to be sanctioned and supported by the folkways and mores; eventually it comes to be enforced by laws. Thus behavior which was originally random or experimental

[22] Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt, Sociology, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 177. Other similar definitions are "an organized way of doing something" (Bierstedt), "a set of interwoven folkways, mores, and laws built around one or more functions" (Kingsley Davis), or "great clusters of established, accepted, and implemented ways of behaving socially" (Hertzler).

is replaced by patterned and predictable activity which is accepted by society as necessary and proper.

Institutions differ with different societies, and some, such as feudalism, have disappeared while others, such as science, have only recently come into existence; nevertheless, there is evidence that the four which the study has considered as basic have existed, in one form or another, in all societies at all times. Every society has a form of family life, for the family is basic to all social life. In every society man makes some attempt to relate to the supernatural or ultimate reality (religion), promotes and carries on the production of goods and services (economics), and coordinates and enforces the rules by which his society operates (government). In addition, most societies have some form of education; but since education was commonly handled by the family during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries--before the time when increased complexity of social life came to require more than could be taught by the family--it has not been considered as one of the basic institutions to be examined in this study. No attempt has been made to be inclusive of all social institutions; therefore, in addition to education, some other very important institutions such as science, art, and the military have been eliminated from consideration except where they affect significantly any of the four

basic institutions which have been selected. That institutions do significantly affect one another is a point which cannot be too strongly stated. The institutions of the family, economics, government, and religion discussed in this study are always interrelated and interdependent, and a change in one inevitably causes a change in all others. The divisions are conventional and not clean-cut; elements of one institution often overlap into another, and with chronological movement and increased societal complexity they become increasingly difficult to separate.[23] It would seem obvious to all that novelists are not to be considered as historians, but this is a mistake frequently made and thus requires reiteration. Careful attention should be paid to social history in order to determine the historian's intent, his emphasis, his source of evidence and the validity of his scholarship. It is necessary to determine whether the historian's aim is simply to relate what occurred or whether his intent reaches considerably beyond the desire to relate factual information. This is a difficult distinction to make because there is really no such thing as history which is uninfluenced by the historian and his personal beliefs and interests.

[23] Horton and Hunt, pp. 177-196. The sociological explanation of the characteristics of institutions is based on the chapter entitled "Social Institutions" in the standard introductory text by Horton and Hunt.

A historian's aim or intent may often be determined by what emphasis he places upon historical events. In addition to examining the points that he stresses, slights, or omits, it is necessary to consider the sort of material which the historian finds interesting, as well as the fact that "if different evidence about the same event is available to several historians, the event will not really be the same for each of them. Even if the evidence seems to be the same, different interpretations of that evidence will change the character of the event. The forces back of a great movement like the Crusades may seem to some writers predominantly economic; to others, political; and to still others, religious."[24] Each historian will make generalizations and inferences based upon the particular facts available to him. Many of these generalizations and inferences involve questions of causations which may have preceded or followed them and may be inferred by reason of "necessary conditions" or "probable consequences." Discussing the distinction between "necessary conditions" and "probable consequences," Hill first points out that we may infer, from events which have occurred, that their necessary conditions must also have occurred. For example, if a historian discovers a

[24] Knox C. Hill, Interpreting Literature: History, Drama and Fiction, Philosophy, Rhetoric (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 18.

brick house, he can infer that masonry was a technique known to the civilization responsible for the brick house. Hill goes on to explain that "probable consequences" often may be inferred from a known fact. If a man fell overboard in mid-ocean, for instance, the probable consequences would be that he had drowned. The historian may be using either or both of these types of inferences, but, as Hill warns, "we can never be as certain about inferences to probable consequences as we can sometimes be about inferences to necessary conditions."[25]

Even more important than the historian's intent and emphasis, is the question of his evidence, which may consist of both "accounts of the past" and "traces of the past."[26] Hill emphasizes the fact that the reputable historian, even if he should choose to omit a certain item of evidence, will consider both types as important and worthy of examination:

> Political constitutions and laws are not written for the purpose of recording what has happened; but they bear witness to activities and attitudes of men of the past. The whole body of humanistic products is a very valuable source of evidence. This sort of evidence may include poetry and other forms of fine art, as well as histories written by other historians. These histories do not provide the same kind of evidence as that found in written

[25] Hill, p. 49. Hill's discussion of these factors is found on pp. 47-49.

[26] Hill, p. 41. Hill considers accounts of the past more important, for "written records constitute the greatest single source of historical evidence today." Traces of the past "include all the facts which a historian may use as evidence but which were not deliberately left by men as historical accounts."

> records mentioned in the preceding paragraph. For even if the historian has reason to disbelieve a written history and does not use it as a source of information about that history's subject, it is still a historical fact that the earlier historian said what he did, and this may give us important information about his own times and circumstances.[27]

Further tests employed in the choice of social historians involve questioning of the author's scholarship to determine whether he has looked for contradictions and, if they were found, determined which version is most credible; made specific citations to reputable sources; criticized his sources or pointed out their weaknesses and prejudices; and examined "traces" to verify factual evidence. Accounts which were lacking in specific detail or internally inconsistent, have been omitted in favor of those which were found to be harmonious with general experience and consistent with what is known to psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists about human group behavior and development.[28]

A final potential problem in this examination of the social background of literature has been eliminated by a careful choice of novels having English settings which reasonably correspond to their dates of publication. Eliot's Middlemarch, for example, was an original choice

[27] Hill, p. 41.

[28] Hill, pp. 42-47. These criteria are suggested by Hill as tests which the historian should apply to "make sure his evidence is as accurate as possible."

which had to be changed, for although the date of publication is 1872, the novel is set in the Reform period. For purposes of the study, it was assumed that an author would not be seriously attempting to provide his readers with a realistic picture of the social conditions of the day if he were writing about a time other than his own; such a social background would interpose one more step of the literary imagination between the actual social conditions and those presented in the novels.

Before the study was begun, consideration was given to related studies in other areas involving literature and social background. It was discovered that the juxtaposition of literature and sociology is neither original nor revolutionary. Many works are available which deal with one or two aspects of a society; some slant toward sociology and some toward literature, but seldom do they bring together society's major institutions and present them as a unified pattern of the "real" historical and social background of the realistic novelist.

These studies fall into several categories, the first of which involves studies which attempt to teach sociological concepts through the illustrative use of readings in literature. Their aim is to allay the initial confusion of

the student's first exposure to the abstract and technical language of sociological theory and research reporting.[29]

A second category includes studies in the area of sociology of literature, a sub-field of the sociology of knowledge, which emphasizes the relationship between a work of art, its public, and the social structure within which its reception and production take place. It is a science which is concerned with the definition, classification, and interpretation of literary works; it concerns the study of authors and their relationship to their works; and it concerns the effect of both author and work on society, as well as society's effect upon them. Its goal is an explanation of the emergence of a particular work of art in a particular form in society and of the ways

[29] Examples of these are: Lewis A. Coser, ed. Sociology Through Literature: An Introductory Reader (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Jane Dabaghian, ed. Mirror of Man: Readings in Sociology and Literature (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970); and Nelson Manfred Blake, Novelist's America: Fiction as History, 1910-1940 (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1969). Blake's concern is with the teaching of history rather than sociology. He admits in his first chapter that "to suggest that the search for historical materials should be extended to the study of novels requires some courage"; and he recommends great caution, but points out that "novelists (especially autobiographical, reminiscent, and documentary novelists) do often treat just the thing that the student of history would like to know."

in which the creative imagination of the writer is shaped by cultural traditions and social arrangements.[30]

A third category of studies involving both sociology and literature includes studies which attempt to provide a broad picture of a literary age, without extensive reference to specific works of art. There are a great many of these, and they are well-known to students of literature.[31]

A final category is made up of studies which employ the sociological approach in the social criticism specifically of works of literature. Such studies are often flawed by the tendency to praise or condemn a piece according to

[30] Examples of work in sociology of literature are: Milton C. Albrect, James H. Barnett, and Mason Griff, eds., The Sociology of Art and Literature (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); James H. Barnett, "Sociology of Art," Sociology Today, ed. Robert K. Merton, Leonard Broom, and Leonard S. Cotrell, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1959); and Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Language and Literature in Society: A Sociological Essay on Theory and Method in the Interpretation of Linguistic Symbols with a Bibliography Guide to the Sociology of Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). Duncan's bibliography is very comprehensive and would be indispensable for work in the sociology of literature. See also Helen LaVerne Emery, "An Investigation of the Sociology of Knowledge and Related Developments," unpublished thesis Middle Tennessee State University 1970, pp. 56-79.

[31] Among the most valuable are: Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1951); Louis L. Snyder, The Age of Reason (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1955); Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies in the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period (Boston: Beacon Press, 1940); and G. M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

whether its social and moral implications are congruent with the convictions of the critic. The best sociological critics try to place the work of art in the social atmosphere and define that relationship. If too narrow an evaluation follows, this is likely to reveal the moral position of the critic, as much as the intrinsic merit of the work.[32]

After an examination of previously related studies involving a juxtaposition of sociology and literature and a careful selection of three novels, representative of fifty-year periods from 1750 to 1850, thought to provide an accurate picture of the social background of their periods, the study proceeded to briefly review the chronological historical backgrounds of each novel and the biographical circumstances of the life of each author. Then followed a close textual analysis of each of the chosen novels, with particular emphasis upon their authors' treatments of the institutions of family, economics, government, and religion as fictional material. The novels themselves provided the major source of data for the study. The authors treated all four basic institutions realistically; therefore, it was unnecessary to try to explain any discrepancies on the

[32] Examples of some of the better works in this area include: Lionel Charles Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Johnson (New York: George W. Stewart, Publishers, 1937); and Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man: Sociological Studies of European Drama and the Novel, 1600-1900 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

basis of sociological and historical evidence, except in one very minor case.

The next step in the research procedure consisted of an investigation to determine the actual structure and function of the basic institutions based upon what was reported by reputable social historians who had made extensive studies of the periods. This step was followed by an examination of the selected critical works of specialists (especially those using reality as a prime aesthetic criterion) on each particular novel. This examination included the verdicts of the specialists concerning the literary qualities of the work and was later used to demonstrate how these verdicts support the sociological findings. The fictional treatment of the four institutions was compared with the actual structure and function of these institutions in order to determine (a) the accuracy of the novelist's reporting and (b) specific instances where sociological analysis served to illuminate the literary qualities of the novels, such as characterizations, motivations, and themes. Then the critical verdicts of the specialists were reconsidered and related to the sociological analyses of each novel.

In the final preparation of the paper based on the research outlined above, an attempt has been made to acquaint the reader with the purpose of the study, the anticipated

problems, the related studies, and the procedures used in researching and reporting the work. The intermediate chapters are on the novels Tom Jones, Caleb Williams, and Bleak House; each will briefly summarize a novel's plot, the biography of the author, and the historical framework of the period. Following the presentation and comparison of the characteristics of both the actual and fictional institutions, the study will juxtapose the sociological analysis and the critical verdicts in order to attempt to illustrate the accuracy with which the author has portrayed his society. The conclusion will summarize the findings and report on the representativeness of the novels, the usefulness and validity of sociological analysis, and the feasibility of this method as a pedagogical technique.

## CHAPTER II

## HENRY FIELDING: THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES, A FOUNDLING

Henry Fielding first attempted novel writing as a reaction to the saccharine, sanctimonious view of virtue and sexual ethics which was presented by Samuel Richardson in Pamela. Fielding saw more to morality than sexual chastity, and his novels were intended to describe not only the actual customs and ways of life of his own age, but also what he referred to as "human nature." His realistic descriptions of the problems and procedures of family life, economics, government, and religion enabled his readers to better understand the themes of his novels and the motivations of his characters by showing the social situation as it existed and the attempts of Fielding's characters to deal with it in a socially acceptable manner. The modern reader's ignorance of the actual structure and operation of eighteenth century social institutions may hinder his critical appreciation and analysis of the artistic themes of Fielding's novels; however, a careful comparison of actual social conditions in the novel Tom Jones shows Fielding to be an accurate observer of "human nature" as it was displayed within the framework of the basic social institutions of his age. This chapter examines Fielding's fictional treatment of historical fact concerning

the basic eighteenth century social institutions and indicates the importance of accurate sociological knowledge to the student's critical interpretation of the novel.

The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, Fielding's best novel, is "what many consider the greatest English novel."[1] Its characters are "real persons" whom Fielding was able to bring to life as a result of close and constant study of men and women in the various relationships of real life. Determined to relate facts as they are, he drew his materials from nature only and pictured them faithfully and accurately. He had a "mind with a true grasp of human reality, never deceived or deceiving about himself, his characters or the human lot in general."[2] His ability as a novelist was such that he could convey "not only a convincing impression but a wise assessment of life, an assessment that could only come from taking a much wider view than Defoe or Richardson of the affairs of mankind."[3] His predominantly external approach to character, which Watt calls realism of assessment (as opposed to Richardson's realism of presentation) was to describe not

[1] Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire: A History of Civilization in Western Europe from 1715 to 1756, With Special Emphasis on the Conflict between Religion and Philosophy in The Story of Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), IX, 196.

[2] Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 288.

[3] Watt, p. 288.

individual motives present "in any particular person's mind at any particular time but only . . . those features of the individual which are necessary to assign him to his moral and social species."[4] Fielding reinforces the impression of reality by careful attention to time and place, the mention and appearance of real people, the use of specific descriptions of food, drink, and travel, the insertion of passages of naturalistic dialogue, and by his habit of interrupting and editorializing[5]--all of which call forth from critics such comments as "the glory of this book pre-eminently consists in the superb realistic portraiture of the persons that carry on the action."[6]

Tom Jones is the history of an illegitimate infant who is discovered, as the book opens, in the bed of his future benefactor, Mr. Allworthy. Between Tom's discovery and his marriage to Sophia Western at the end of the novel, Fielding includes a multitude of picaresque and apparently unconnected episodes. By the time this tangle of incidents is unravelled, it has become obvious that nearly all of them were essential to the intricate and skillfully woven plot and its necessary character development. Tom is adopted by the virtuous

[4] Watt, p. 272.

[5] Michael Irwin, Henry Fielding: The Tentative Realist (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 98-99.

[6] F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works and Times (1952; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 627.

Mr. Allworthy and educated by the Reverend Mr. Thwackum and the philosopher Mr. Square. Sophia, whom her father, Squire Western, loves more than anything in the world except his guns, dogs, horses, and his bottle, admires Tom; but conscious of his mysterious illegitimate parentage, Tom never dares to approach a lady so far above him in social and financial status. When he saves her from injury, Sophia's blushes reveal her love for Tom, and he loses his heart to her. Squire Western, however, insists that she marry Mr. Blifil, the legitimate nephew and heir of the wealthy and childless Mr. Allworthy. She refuses; the Squire insists, and Sophia takes to the road with Tom in hot pursuit. Their separate travels consume at least a third of the book, and they finally meet again in London. After many trials and complications, Tom is revealed to be Mr. Allworthy's nephew, and that honorable gentleman finally pardons him for his past indiscretions. Tom sets matters straight with the shy, but forgiving, Sophia and is heartily accepted as a son-in-law by the blustery Squire Western.

The highly intricate plot, with its skillfully related incidents, includes a large array of characters representative of various social classes and occupations. Its author constantly chats with his readers about what he is trying to accomplish and about his philosophy of life, and he comments specifically on "topical problems of his age: the administration of justice and penological theory, the duties and

obligations of parents and children, appearance and reality in the jealously preserved gradations in rank, marriage customs, habits of speech, the conditions of servants, game laws, and many others."[7]

Fielding wrote with the conscience of an artist. He wrote to please his readers, and his book has lived for over two hundred years. He was not a sociologist by any modern definition of the term but he understood the society of his age. Fielding himself was probably a valid representative of the eighteenth-century educated Englishman. He was a gentleman by birth and education, but had not the assured financial income which should accompany the appellation. The distinction between gentleman and non-gentleman was never clearly drawn in Fielding's day, but Fielding's family had kinship with nobility, were landowners, and were educated. His father was an army officer, and his mother was the daughter of a distinguished jurist from whom she inherited some property. Fielding spent seven years at Eton and studied law at the University of Leyden in Holland. For several years he made his living as a dramatist until he was cut off from writing for the stage by the Licensing Act of 1737, an act pushed through Parliament by Prime Minister Robert Walpole to counter some of the anti-Walpole satires, such as Fielding's

[7] Grover Cronin, Jr., Fielding's Tom Jones (New York: Monarch Press, 1964), p. 55.

play The Historical Register. Knowing he would never be able to get another play licensed, Fielding returned to the law and also began to write in other genres.[8] He spent many years as a magistrate on Bow Street in London, and he knew well the conflicts and instincts which his novel explores. The novel is eminently social, embracing a vast area of eighteenth century English life. Its characters are numerous, and in its hundreds of pages the plot shifts freely through time and space. The most diverse social surroundings are studied or touched on in passing. Accounts of city manners, the pastimes of London, the country society of the squire's manor, roadside inns, the hazards of travel, and the nether world of crime make the novel invaluable for a sociological study of the mid-eighteenth century milieu.[9]

Fielding was engaged in the exploration of a complex mechanism, "that of human society as a whole."[10] "His understanding and keen observation of life and his portrayal of it in . . . Tom Jones laid the basis for the realistic novel of our day."[11] Both country life (at East Stour) and

[8] Wilbur L. Cross, The History of Henry Fielding (New York: Russell and Russell, 1918), I, 233.

[9] Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, trans., Helen Douglas Irvine, W. D. MacInnes and Louis Cazamian (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 891.

[10] Watt, p. 289.

[11] Frederick Olds Bissell, Fielding's Theory of the Novel (New York: Cooper Square, 1969), p. 80.

city life (in London) were well within the realm of Fielding's personal experience, and, in addition, he had often traveled the roads to London. Thus he was well-acquainted with these backgrounds and the various types of people to be found in them and was supremely adept in the creation of "characters who behave with a verisimilar consistency or inconsistency."[12] The many vivid scenes in drawing rooms and inns give evidence of Fielding's experience in all layers of social stratification, but he does not attempt to particularize his characters. His purpose is "to show not men, but manners; not an individual but a species."[13] His concern is not psychological, but sociological; and his plot "reflects the general literary strategy of neo-classicism . . . to make visible in the human scene the operations of universal order."[14] The subject matter of Fielding's work then "is not the medicine of Christian morality but the disease for which it may be prescribed,"[15] and his immediate purpose in Tom Jones was "the comic deflation of the heroic and romantic pretenses of the human word by the unheroic and

[12] Andrew Wright, Henry Fielding: Mask and Feast (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 37.

[13] Watt, p. 272, quoting from Joseph Andrews.

[14] Watt. p. 271.

[15] Ronald Paulson, ed., "Introduction," Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 2.

unromantic eloquence of the human deed."[16] One is inclined to trust the sociological sensitivity of Fielding, the man--a moral magistrate preaching a Latitudinarian doctrine of benevolence--and Tom Jones, his novel--accepted by many knowledgeable critics as "a panoramic commentary on England in 1745"[17] and "the most complete and realistic picture of life in mid-eighteenth century England."[18] The study of history gives us generalities, overviews, the "big picture" of the age. Fielding personalizes these things and shows us how they are reflected in his characters and in the major institutions of the period.

Historically, one must briefly glance backward to the English revolution in order to place the period in perspective. The English had beheaded a king, lived under a commonwealth government, and restored Charles II to the throne in 1660 after the collapse of the Commonwealth. For the next twenty-eight years they lived under submission to the various degrees of absolutism of the Stuarts. After the Puritan revolution, the Anglican Church was reestablished, and about one-fifth of the English clergy were expelled from their parishes as non-conformists. This resulted in a

[16] Watt, p. 278.

[17] Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1951), I, 78.

[18] Bissell, p. 75.

political division which was the origin of the Whig and Tory parties in England.

Charles II had learned French manners and ideas while in exile, and his court came to mock the "lower class" virtues such as sobriety and sexual morality. When a plot to have Charles' illegitimate son named to the succession failed, his Catholic brother was crowned as James II. After cruelly putting down a revolt from the non-conformists in the Whig party, James began a policy of public terror and turned to France for aid. This lost him the support of the Tories also, and in 1688 both parties united in inviting James' son-in-law, William of Orange, to intervene. James fled to France, and Parliament voted that he had "abdicated the government." A Declaration of Rights, affirming English liberty, denying kingly privilege to supersede law, insuring free worship of all Protestants, and binding William and Mary to maintain the Protestant religion and obey the laws of the land, marked the high point of the famous bloodless or "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. The Glorious Revolution put an end to the idea of rule by divine right and allowed every succeeding English monarch to rule only by permission of Parliament. The Glorious Revolution also established the authority over the crown of the English middle class which was gradually, with the development of commerce and industry, to rise to complete ascendancy during the century to come.

Under Queen Anne, successor to William and Mary, England was involved, against France, in the War of the Spanish Succession. The Peace of Utrecht in 1714 marked the beginning of a new role for England as a special guardian of the balance of power in Europe. Queen Anne's line ended with her, and the House of Hanover, whose claims were supported by the Whigs, came to the throne. George I ruled from 1714 to 1727 and George II from 1727 to 1760. Neither king made any great effort to understand England or even the English language, and the rule of England was left to the Whig party, headed by Prime Minister Walpole, for a period of approximately thirty years. It is this period which provides the historical background for the adventures of the characters represented in Tom Jones, published at mid-century (1749).

The social background was relatively peaceful and prosperous in England, the country of Newton, Locke, Pope, Hume, and Hogarth. The industrial revolution was beginning, but England was still primarily rural and agricultural. Serfdom was gone and, due to the enclosure of pasture and woodland, farming was becoming an occupation of those with large capital, better implements, greater skill, and wider markets than the peasants had. Better farming techniques afforded sufficient food for the burgeoning urban population, but neither peasants nor town

workers shared in the growing wealth brought to agriculture. Landowners and middlemen received the profits, and the field laborer often sank to a position of lower class dependence and poverty.[19] The Puritan tradition contributed to the rise of the middle class by encouraging hard work, careful management of money, the accumulation of capital, and the sanction of wealth, and by giving the bourgeoisie the "special grace of God."[20]

Intellectually, the atmosphere was one of controversy over philosophy, religion, politics, and science, with a broadening and intensification of the practice of free rational inquiry. Reason was beginning to challenge the obscure points of religion, and Christian apologists were beginning to rise to its defense, but both sides claimed to appeal to the authority alone of nature and reason.[21]

According to Becker's The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers, however, "the laws of nature and nature's God appeared henceforth to be one and the same thing, and since every part of God's handiwork could all in good time be reasonably demonstrated, the intelligent man could very well do with a minimum of faith--except, of course (the exception was tremendous but scarcely noticed at the time), faith in the uniform

[19] Durant, pp. 45-48. [20] Durant, p. 49.

[21] Legouis and Cazamian, pp. 767-768.

behavior of nature and in the capacity of reason to discover its modus operandi."[22]

An examination of the major institutions of family, economics, government, and religion will help to describe the society of Fielding's day. Always keeping in mind the inevitable intertwining of these institutions, a look first at the most basic of them, the family, will include the areas of marriage, the place of women, the socialization process, and the contrast between family customs and manners in city and country life.

Actually mid-eighteenth-century London was England's only large city, with one-tenth of the nation's population.[23] Although the country was sprinkled with small towns, villages, and country seats of gentlemen or noblemen, eighty percent of the English population was still rural, agricultural, and self-governing on relatively democratic principles. Many, but not all, country squires "were ignorant, stupid, loutish guzzlers and little more. They gobbled up meat and swilled down liquor, played stable-boys' jokes, were seasoned lechers, bold riders, fuming Tories,

[22] Carl L. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 22.

[23] Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 707.

and an example to the Parish."[24] They acted as justices of the peace for their neighborhoods. They rarely accepted bribes, spoke the dialect common to their region, handed down reasonably just decisions, and were "Stuart in sympathies but Hanoverian in deportment."[25] Their country houses were economically self-sustaining, and their lives were more stable and tradition-oriented than those of the Londoners. They attempted to enlarge their estates by carefully planned marriages and often became Tories because of a fear that the increasing acquisition of estates by the nobility was causing a diminution of the power of the squirearchy.[26]

Rural marriages, even among the lofty, were still arranged for the financial benefit of the families. "During most of the century the parties involved were neither consulted nor considered, and marriages of convenience were quite as common as lovers' meetings."[27] Marriages consisted of "feasting and toasting, dancing and drinking, and then the bringing home of the bride to her husband's house, where,

[24] Louis Kronenberger, Kings and Desperate Men: Life in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Vintage Books, 1942), p. 158.

[25] Kronenberger, p. 159.

[26] J. H. Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), VII, 18-19.

[27] Kronenberger, p. 161.

after supper, her bridesmaids put her to bed. Then the entire wedding party clustered round the bridal couple and . . . said and did virtually anything that might embarrass the bride and groom. And when, at length, they withdrew, it was only until daybreak. Returning then, they serenaded the young couple outside their window, not with song only, but with a clatter of kettles and pans, and a pounding of pokers and shovels."[28]

A great percentage of the citizens of London lived as husband and wife without benefit of clergy. As in the country, "most marriages were still arranged by the parents after careful weighing of the bride's dowry against the bridegroom's actual or prospective income. An act of 1753 prohibited persons under twenty-one from marrying without the consent of their parents or guardians. As this law applied to England alone, many English elopers crossed the border into Scotland, where the parsons in the village of Gretna Green followed an easier rule."[29]

Divorce was prohibited, and adultery was common in both upper and lower classes. It was not so prevalent in the middle classes, who were still strongly influenced by

[28] Kronenberger, p. 161. (It was the crudity of these customs which led to the origination of the honeymoon as we know it.)

[29] Durant, p. 64. (We still refer to such marriage mills as "Gretna Greens.")

Puritanism. "The double standard was imposed and accepted. . . . In all classes woman was looked upon as naturally and irrevocably inferior to man. . . ."[30] The Durants report that "about 1750, women in England had reached a new low hardly in advance of their position in the twelfth century."[31] "For the most part, ladies were pleasure-loving merely. Ill-educated, light-minded, irresponsible, born too early to dispense fashionable charity, they recognized but a single adversary--ennui. They might wake late in the morning (or be awakened by their restless lap-dogs) to find callers already in their bedroom, since it was the practice for them to receive in bed."[32] When they arose for the day, they would dress and go out to shop or promenade. Like their male counterparts, they were cynical concerning sexual virtue--which they considered absurd. Idealism and high-mindedness were spurious, and morality was never allowed to inconvenience them.[33]

The rural-urban dichotomy is evident in Fielding's treatment of the institution of the family in Tom Jones. He describes the customs of both rural and urban family life and nicely demonstrates the differences between the two with regard to attitudes and values.

[30] Durant, p. 65. [31] Durant, p. 65.

[32] Kronenberger, p. 71 [33] Kronenberger, p. 73.

Both Mr. Allworthy, Tom's benefactor, and Squire Western are country squires, Justices of the Peace, and members of the gentry. Mr. Allworthy, though he places a bit too much confidence in his ability to judge human nature, is nevertheless a virtuous man. He is, however, somewhat colorless. Squire Western, according to Bissell, is "the most vivid portrait of the country squire that exists."[34] Each is pleased at the prospect of joining, by marriage, his country seat with that of the other. Here the resemblance ends, however, for Squire Western is determined that Sophia obey her father's wishes concerning marriage to Blifil, as custom dictates. Sophia is determined to marry for love, and she is on the wrong side of custom in the debate, for, all in all, Squire Western's comment, "if she marries the man I would ha her, she may love whom she pleases,"[35] still reflects the prevalent custom among both city and country dwellers. When Sophia does finally marry Tom, it is with her father's consent, and Squire Western sings a merry song "which bore some relation to matrimony and the loss of a maidenhead" (p. 882) typical of the attitude taken by country folk of his day at rustic marriages.

[34] Bissell, p. 79.

[35] Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 219. Future references to Tom Jones will be cited in parenthesis in the text.

We have seen that Squire Western is more typical of most country squires than he might at first have appeared to be. Many of them could, indeed, be as boorish, obscene, illiterate, and coarse as Western. Actually most of them fell somewhere between the extremes of Western and the benevolent Mr. Allworthy, but this polarity of characterization is Fielding's method. His realism "is one of opposites and larger reference . . . polarizing his views of people, his kinds of people and their experiences and motives."[36] In the same way, Fielding polarizes Tom Jones and Blifil, Sophia and Lady Bellaston, country family customs and manners and city family customs and manners.

Squire Western, in his role of country gentry, curses all the Londoners for being "like the Court" and thinking of nothing but "plundering country gentlemen" (p. 785). Tom Jones is "thoroughly ignorant of the town . . . had no knowledge of that character which is vulgarly called a demi-rep; . . . a woman who intrigues with every man she likes, under the name and appearance of virtue, and who, though some over-nice ladies will not be seen with her, is visited (as they term it) by the whole town; in short, whom everybody knows to be what nobody calls her" (p. 723). Lady Bellaston, a demi-rep of whom Tom does not long remain ignorant, is in her turn equally critical of the country

[36] Paulson, p. 5.

girl like Sophia. "The bane of all young women is the country," she says. "There they learn a set of romantic notions of love, and I know not what folly, which this town and good company can scarce eradicate in a whole winter" (p. 694).

One of Fielding's general organizing themes is the proper place of sex and the sexes in human life.[37] Women were judged according to a double standard in all things. Sophia's Aunt chafes at this reality. She insists of men that their "bodies and not . . . brains are stronger than ours" (p. 220), but Squire Western's comment that "politics belong to us and petticoats should not meddle" (p. 219) was very much the eighteenth century majority opinion.

Fielding indicates his disapproval of society's stand regarding the place of women by making his heroine not only beautiful and virtuous but also intelligent, independent, and determined--a fit partner for his naturally virtuous but imprudent hero Tom Jones. Sophia is also an appropriate foil for the sexually promiscuous London "Lady" Bellaston. She enjoys music (especially Handel), reading, singing for her father, and the homely country pleasures and entertainments, while Lady Bellaston confines her activities to "drums," masquerades, card-playing, and shopping or promenading with friends, both male and female.

[37] Watt, p. 27.

Sophia has been educated by her Aunt Western, at home, of course, as was the eighteenth century practice. Mrs. Western was a woman of "great discretion" who had lived at court and retired to the country and was skilled in the knowledge of politics, history, and love. Tom's and Blifil's education has also taken place within the home and family environment by the tutors Thwackum and Square, gentlemen employed through the poor judgment of Mr. Allworthy. Tom admits to having had the "advantage" of never attending the university and insists that "it is as possible for a man to know something without having been at school, as it is to have been at school and to know nothing" (p. 311). Tom's knowledge is not gained from his tutors, however, for he "showed no more regard to the learned discourses which this gentleman [Square] would sometimes throw away on him than to those of Thwackum" (p. 90). Instead Tom is "natural man" nourished by the concern and kindness of his benefactor, and possessed of goodness of heart and charity rather than any polish artificially induced by a theory of virtue or philosophy or manners. Fielding's opinion of the education and socialization of children seems to be that virtue, for Tom, the natural man, is "caught" and not "taught." The theories of Thwackum and Square make Blifil an educated man, but they do not make him a virtuous man, but on Tom Jones they have little effect at all.

Tied very closely to the institution of the family is that of economics, especially in the area of social stratification. Eighteenth century class distinctions were based fundamentally upon ownership of land which meant social prestige and representation in politics. Of the four classes which can be distinguished, the highest was the nobility, those influential and wealthy families who provided the most powerful political and religious dignitaries and the ranking military officers. Because of the rule of primogeniture, their estates went to the eldest sons, but they were often burdened with settlements for female members of the family and a duty to maintain younger sons, brothers, and other kinsmen.

The second rung down the social ladder was occupied by the gentry--gentlemen who were also closely connected with the land. The heads of these families were often Justices of the Peace for their regions. Their relatives competed with the younger sons of the nobility for preferment in the Church or filled family livings controlled by the squire. This class, the squirearchy, was often jealous of local nobility and aristocratic interference with their affairs. "Some might be the rude squire of caricature and fiction, deep drinking, hard riding, and with a mentality as limited as his activities. But others were builders of minor country seats, collectors of libraries, improvers of their

estates, and by no means incapable of listening intelligently to the arguments of the politicians in the commons."[38]

Between the gentry and the third class, the "middling sort," no strict economic line can be drawn. The "middling sort" were not gentlemen in the sense of gentry, but they were often found in the same professions and possessed as much money. The dividing line was one of manners and behavior. They were mostly those "whose income came from some non-manual occupation but who, by their way of life and attitude of mind, had no claims to be ranked with the gentry."[39] These were the successful tenant farmers, small freeholders, millers, innkeepers, traders, shopkeepers, middlemen, clothiers, ironmongers, linen drapers, schoolmasters, barbers, civil servants and excise men--the solid backbone of the country, whose main activity was making money and who were seldom involved in politics.

In the lowest class, the poor, were the great mass of manual workers among whom there was also a wide income variance. Within this class, there was a definite dividing line between rural and urban poor. The rural poor barely

[38] Dorothy Marshall, Eighteenth-Century England (New York: David McKay Company, 1962), p. 32. The division of classes into nobility, gentry, "middling" class, and the poor are based on Marshall's book--as are the descriptions.

[39] Marshall, p. 33.

eked out a living by farming, but had no savings or chance of acquiring any, and bad luck, illness, or old age pushed them into the poorhouses. The urban poor included some highly skilled craftsmen (tanyard or brickyard workers, tailors, shoemakers, bakers, carpenters, porters and such) as well as those dregs of city life, the pimps, thieves, prostitutes, receivers, and other deviates, and the ill, old, or retarded. They lived--one family in a room--on bread and beer or gin. Because of the lack of an adequate police force, they were a constant menace to society. They had no political rights, and lack of money precluded their claiming any legal rights. Imprisoned, they would often starve for want of money to pay their jailors. When prices rose, this eighteenth century mob often turned to violence.[40]

Agriculture supported eighty percent of the English population. Although most of rural England was busy and prosperous, some hardship was evoked for the small farmer by the process of enclosure which took land from the common use and placed it in the hands of rich landlords. When this occurred, the rural peasant found himself reduced to pauperism by abuses of the poor laws; for the goal of each parish was to expel all those who might become an expense to those who paid the poor rates.[41] This practice encouraged

[40] Marshall, pp. 34-37.

[41] G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria (New York: Longmans, Green, 1943), p. 352.

unemployment and caused the poor to migrate to the slums of London where poverty was almost synonymous with crime. The second quarter of the eighteenth century marked the depths of lower class life in England as London became steadily more lawless and punishments far exceeded the crimes. Prisons were almost beyond description for their stench, filth, and disease. Prisoners--even debtors--were underfed, over-crowded, sick, and vermin-infested. Their corrupt guards required tips in order to provide the essentials of life. "The poor, in those days," remarks one historian, "simply did not believe in tomorrow."[42] There was little public pressure to relieve this situation, for, until Fielding's time, there was little public indignation regarding it. It was an age when "executions were public, and hanging days were holidays in London."[43] Gradually a developing atmosphere of humanitarianism led to increased sense of social responsibility. Such feeling as that which stimulated the work of Fielding as a justice of the peace grew eventually into a literature of prison reform and anti-slavery.

Economically, Fielding's England was mistress of the seas and of commerce and, therefore, of money. She required

[42] Kronenberger, p. 98.

[43] Alan Dugald McKillop, English Literature from Dryden to Burns (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 109.

an army and navy to support her position as the holder of the balance of power over continental governments. However, conditions in the navy were so bad throughout the century that, when various financial inducements failed, press gangs were sent out by the state to snare, drug, or otherwise persuade men into His Majesty's ships. Impressment was necessary because of the graft which pervaded the naval administration and allowed conditions such as "bad sanitation, bad food, and brutal floggings."[44] Conditions in the army were little better. Soldiers were disciplined by whipping. They were forced to live in ale houses or in the private homes of citizens who hated them and behaved accordingly.[45] They functioned as the only efficient police force against rioting and smuggling and were used, specifically, in 1745, to put down the second Jacobite invasion in the North.

In surveying the institution of economics as it is presented in Tom Jones, we find that Fielding very definitely takes into account the power of the squire which was based on the ownership of land. The novel is peopled by all four of the social classes which Marshall has described, and we see them in both rural and urban settings. We even see the pitiful conditions of those of the poor who found themselves in prison. A great many of the novel's secondary characters

[44] McKillop, p. 114. [45] Trevelyan, p. 348.

are members of the expanding middle class--"the middling sort." Fielding's setting includes life on the manor in rural England, a description of the difficulties Tom encounters in traveling from Paradise Hall into London, and a comprehensive description of London itself and Tom's reaction to the activities and philosophies of all classes of urban life. We are allowed to glance at army life when Tom spends an interval of his journey traveling with soldiers who have been sent out in response to the threatened Jacobite rebellion, and we see the press gangs at work "recruiting" sailors in London.

All these things are present in the novel, but Fielding's primary emphasis seems to be upon social stratification. Empson discusses Fielding's attitude as an author toward the English class system: "An author needs to have experienced both low life and high life, he is saying; low life for honesty and sincerity; high life, dull and absurd though it is, for 'elegance, and a liberality of spirit; which last quality I have myself scarce ever seen in men of low birth and education.'"[46] Although Fielding supported the system as a whole, he fiercely attacked the injustices of privilege. He conceived of a true gentleman as a person fit, through his expert knowledge of all types of people,

[46] William Empson, "Tom Jones," The Kenyon Review, 20 (Spring 1958), 248.

to sit on the bench as a magistrate and make equitable judgments of those who come before his court.[47]

Tom has no claim to an inheritance from Mr. Allworthy or marriage to Sophia who is a member of the privileged country gentry. Squire Western knows this; he is aware of the value of land and social prestige, even though he objects strongly to lords and courtiers, and, within the eighteenth century framework, he is acting reasonably when he insists that his daughter marry Blifil. Squire Western judges each of his daughter's suitors by "whether he got a voot of land in the wo world" (p. 745), even though he is moved to comment that "most o' zuch great estates be in the hands of lords, and I heate the very name of themun" (p. 221).

The Squire will have nothing to do with such a "parcel of courtiers and Hanoverians" (p. 742). Sophia sees "no charms in the thoughts of having a coronet on [her] coach" (p. 793). Fielding, however, is very much aware of nobility. He laments that "one reason why many English writers have totally failed in describing the manners of upper life may possibly be that in reality they know nothing of it" (p. 649), yet himself ironically describes "those happy mansions where fortune segregates from the vulgar those magnanimous heroes, the descendants of ancient Britons, Saxons, or Danes, whose ancestors, being born in better days, by sundry kinds of merit, have entailed riches and honour on their posterity" (p. 601).

[47] Empson, pp. 246-247.

Fielding devotes a great many scenes to depicting the activities and financial status not only of the gentry but also of the lower social orders. He presents all manner of innkeepers and servants, and is particularly concerned with widows and children (such as Mrs. Seagrim, Honour Blackmore, and Mrs. Miller) of deceased clergymen. Research shows, in fact, that while writing Tom Jones Fielding was advocating, in his Jacobite's Journal, "a scheme for providing for the widows and children of poor clergymen."[48] Tom shows great sympathy for the poor and is always ready to part with whatever meagre amount of money he has to relieve their distress. Dorothy Van Ghent makes the point that in Tom Jones "the signature of Fortune's favor is wealth"[49]--that is, because Tom is blessed with good nature he is, in the end, also blessed with wealth. Ian Watt points out that Fielding uses money as a useful plot device, but that it has no controlling significance--"Money is something that the good characters either have or are given or momentarily lose: only bad characters devote any effort either to getting it or keeping it." He continues:

> Birth, on the other hand, has a very different status in Tom Jones: as a determining factor in the plot it is almost the equivalent of money in Defoe or virtue in Richardson. In this emphasis, of

[48] Dudden, p. 587.

[49] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. 79.

> course, Fielding reflects the general tenor of the social thought of his day: the basis of society is and should be a system of classes each with their own capacities and responsibilities. The vigour of Fielding's satire on the upper classes, for example, should not be interpreted as the expression of any egalitarian tendency: it is really a tribute to the firmness of his belief in the class premise. . . .
>
> This class fixity is an essential part of Tom Jones. Tom may think it unfortunate that, as a foundling of presumed low ancestry, he cannot marry Sophia; but he does not question the propriety of the assumption on which their separation is decreed. The ultimate task of Fielding's plot therefore is to unite the lovers without subverting the basis of the social order; and this can only be done by revealing that Mr. Jones, though illegitimate, is genteel.[50]

An investigation of Fielding's treatment of social stratification in the novel, compared with the factual description of the mid-century arrangement of the various classes and their functions in society, reinforces the statements of the critics Empson and Van Ghent. Fielding is by no means repudiating class privilege; he is only suggesting that the lofty should deserve their positions by virtue of their natural benevolence. Tom is not allowed to marry Sophia until Fielding has painstakingly indicated to his readers that he is worthy of her, not only by his revealed gentility, but also because he is naturally good and unspoiled by any mask of affectation.

Looking into the institution of government--an area which includes not only national politics and jurisprudence,

[50] Watt, pp. 269-270.

but also local laws and administration of justice--we find that on the national level Jacobism was a dying cause. Its final flare-up was the invasion in the North in 1745 when the Stuarts, supporting Prince Charlie, marched "with a feudal army into a bourgeois society."[51] The average man showed little interest in government, especially in politics, and was frequently a sceptic about corruption and political infighting. "Parliament showed little legislative activity, except in private acts for enclosure of land, for turnpike roads, or other economic activity. In administrative matters there was a lag in legislation, at a time when great industrial developments were every year changing social conditions, and adding to the needs of a growing population."[52]

As Trevelyan indicates, however, there was no dearth of criminal legislation:

> Throughout the Century, Parliament went on adding statute after statute to the 'bloody code' of English law, enlarging perpetually the long list of offences punishable by death: finally they numbered two hundred. . . . The effect of increased legal severity in an age that was becoming more humane, was that juries often refused to convict men for minor offences that would lead them to the scaffold. Moreover it was easy for a criminal, by the help of a clever lawyer, to escape on purely technical grounds from the meshes of an antiquated and over elaborate procedure.[53]

[51] Kronenberger, p. 40. [52] Trevelyan, pp. 350-351.

[53] Trevelyan, p. 348.

To magnify the problem, there was small chance of a criminal being arrested for any offense. England lacked any sort of effective police system "except the 'runners' of the office which the Fielding brothers, about the middle of the Century, set up in their house in Bow Street."[54] Trevelyan calls these justices of the peace "inefficient, but cheap," and reports that they had no proper staff or bureaucracy to carry out their administration. "Generally speaking the Justices who did most of the work in rural districts were substantial squires, too rich to be corrupt or mean, proud to do a hard public work for no pay, anxious to stand well with their neighbors, but often ignorant and prejudiced without meaning to be unjust, and far too much a law unto themselves."[55] The power of the squire is evidenced by the fact that he probably "controlled the clergyman's living, his tenants tilled the soil, his servants were a large and important group, and the village tradesmen depended on his favor."[56]

Fielding frequently comments upon or dramatizes incidents involving various aspects of the institution of government. He discusses the trend toward enclosure in agriculture, the legal rights and responsibilities of gamekeepers, the state of the English highway system and

[54] Trevelyan, p. 349. [55] Trevelyan, p. 353.

[56] McKillop, p. 96.

English prisons and penology, and the power of lawyers and local justices of the peace. Fielding was himself a lawyer and magistrate, and it appears that his handling of all aspects of legal matters was above reproach as far as his accuracy and understanding of both fact and law. Dudden, a Fielding biographer, emphasizes the fact that no critic was able to detect any errors or inaccuracies in his references to the law. Dudden quotes Mathew Davenport Hill, formerly Recorder of Birmingham and famous for his efforts to reform English criminal law, as testifying to the invariable correctness of Fielding's legal references: "Writers of fiction are very fond of making their stories hinge on points of law. But so far as I know, there are but two writers in our language who ever touch law without showing their ignorance on the subject. They are Shakespeare and Fielding. Walter Scott, a lawyer by profession and by office, is no exception."[57]

Fielding's novel is set during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 in which the supporters of the Catholic Stuarts (the house which advocated the divine right of kings) were opposing the firmly ensconced and somewhat more republican Hanoverian government. The 1745 rebellion is the cause which Tom's servant Partridge favors and falsely assumes that Tom supports. Historically, the invasion had little

[57] Dudden, p. 710, quoting Hill.

effect, much as Partridge predicts when he tells Tom that he thinks

> "There will be but little danger; for a Popish priest told me the other day the business would soon be over, and he believed without a battle."--"A Popish priest!" cries Jones, "I have heard is not always to be believed when he speaks in behalf of his religion."--"Yes, but so far," answered the other, "from speaking in behalf of his religion, he assured me the Catholics did not expect to be gainers by the change; for that Prince Charles was as good a Protestant as any in England; and that nothing but regard to right made him and the rest of the Popish party to be Jacobites!" (pp. 368-369)

Tom is not convinced, however. He replies, "'I believe him to be as much of a Protestant as I believe he hath any right . . . and I make no doubt of our success, but not without a battle'" (p. 369). Partridge argues with Tom and refers to monsters and prophecies concerning spilt blood. "'With what stuff and nonsense hast thou filled thy head!' answered Jones; 'this too, I suppose, comes from the Popish priest. Monsters and prodigies are the proper arguments to support monstrous and absurd doctrines. The cause of King George is the cause of liberty and true religion. In other words, it is the cause of common sense. . .'" (p. 369). The interchange between Tom and Partridge not only illustrates the impossibility in this period of separating ideas of government from ideas of religion, but also shows Tom's support of the King in line with the majority opinion of the day.

Actually, despite the Tory Squire Western's comment that "the Hanover rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turneps to feed upon" (p. 264), the old Squire keeps a good table, and is not at all threatened by the government. He is content, as Tom Jones told the gypsy king, "to submit to a few inconveniences arising from the dispassionate deafness of laws, [rather] than to remedy them by applying to the passionate open ears of a tyrant" (p. 587).

The last of man's four major social institutions to be examined is that of religion. In this area we find that by the end of the seventeenth century, Locke had demonstrated the "reasonableness" of Christianity, while other thinkers provided structure and function to the idea of a religion according to nature. The Reformation had established Protestantism once and for all. Thus the Anglican Church found itself in a favored position in the eighteenth century. It was a low church, and latitudinarian. It tried to accommodate itself to the age, to be a "polite" and "enlightened" church. It advocated a reasonable faith and stressed the social virtues in place of dogma, the conviction of sin, or clerical privilege. More concerned with ethics than the unknown, "the church was beset by lassitude within and Catholics, sectaries, and Deists from without."[58] The clergy had become lifeless, more interested in promotion than

[58] Baugh, p. 830.

religion. About half of the Church's livings were endowed by gentlemen to support younger sons who served the needs of the parish with little zest. The other half of the clergy were poor parsons of low birth. The poverty and religious inertia of the clergy weakened its political power, causing a split between the majority of the priesthood and its national leaders. Bishops were Whig ecclesiastics whose power was weakened by the estrangement and dislike of the clergy, who frequently had secret Jacobite sympathies and preferred to separate themselves from active interference with political matters.[59]

In addition to the problems within, the Established Church was beset by problems from without in the form of Methodism and Deism. Methodism originated within the Church and only reluctantly parted company from it as a result of its manifestations of frenzy and physical convulsions which shocked more sedate believers, especially members of the upper class, who disapproved of the subjectivism, hysterical enthusiasm, and "pernicious principles" of the Methodist movement. Nevertheless, many of the common people took Whitefield and the Wesleys to heart and quite willingly adopted their teachings. While the Anglican clergy ignored their religious duties to the poor and the

[59] John Richard Green, A History of the English People (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), pp. 155-156.

laboring classes, Methodism stepped in and converted this large group to its principles.[60]

Deism was a hopeful faith in the possibility of forming a set of doctrines all men could live by without disputes over dogma. However, this religion of nature was not wholeheartedly accepted by the many who were sceptical about its willingness to abandon many of the most sacred dogmas of the Christian revelation in the interests of national and intellectual calm.[61]

Deism, especially as it was expounded by Shaftesbury, saw man as endowed with a "moral sentiment" that instinctively instructed him in matters of right and wrong. It defined virtue as a pleasant sensation of goodness which is rewarded by the happiness of others. Deism exalted reason and good sense as every man's endowment and tried to link the territory of reason with faith. This was attempted by playing down miracles and threats of damnation, mocking "enthusiasm," and emphasizing the reasonable nature of Christianity. God was depersonalized to the prime mover, and Deism was able to avoid the puzzling, unanswerable problems of sin and guilt.[62] However, in spite of its very positive character, Deism was denounced almost universally because it maintained that religion could not be contrary

[60] Plumb, p. 44. [61] Cronin, pp. 7-8.

[62] Plumb, p. 74.

to reason and, therefore, if religious tradition was cloudy and mysterious or illogical, religion was at fault. Such an idea threatened several of the essential beliefs of Christianity, and made the Established Church a quite human and fallible institution.[63]

The religious controversy between the established church and the proponents of Deism who were gaining strength in the Augustan age is present in Tom Jones, for Fielding represents these two opposing religious and philosophical positions by the antagonists Thwackum and Square:

> [These two] scarce ever met without a disputation; for their tenets were indeed diametrically opposite to each other. Square held human nature to be the perfection of all virtue, and that vice was a deviation from our nature, in the same manner as deformity of body is. Thwackum, on the contrary, maintained that the human mind, since the Fall, was nothing but a sink of iniquity, till purified and redeemed by grace. . . . The favourite phrase of the former was the natural beauty of virtue; that of the latter was the divine power of grace. The former measured all actions by the unalterable rule of right and the eternal fitness of things; the latter decided all matters by authority . . . [of] the Scriptures. (p. 83)

Fielding emphasizes that "Thwackum . . . held, that if the end proposed was religious . . . it matter not how wicked were the means. . . . Square . . . taught that the end was immaterial, so that the means were fair and consistent with moral rectitude" (p. 285). Thwackum is a typical argumentative divine, emphasizing total depravity

[63] Legouis and Cazamian, p. 769.

and redeeming grace. Square is a Stoic Deist whose jargon includes the natural beauty of virtue, the fixed rule of right, and the everlasting appropriateness of circumstances. Both, however, have long ignored goodness and benevolence. Fielding insists that "it is not religion or virtue, but the want of them, which is here exposed. Had not Thwackum too much neglected virtue, and Square, religion, in the composition of their several systems, and had not both utterly discarded all natural goodness of heart, they had never been represented as the objects of derision in this history. . ." (p. 86).

That Fielding disapproved of both Thwackum and Square does not imply disapproval of religion as an institution. Like many of the intellectuals of his day, he was very conscious of the abuses of religion and of the fact that the English clergy was, by virtue of its stature and office, in a position to do a great deal of harm. He rejected the Deistic optimism concerning man's morality and the notion that virtue can be examined apart from man's nature as a social animal. "There are," he said, "a set of religious, or rather moral writers, who teach that virtue is the certain road to happiness, and vice to misery, in this world. A very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, namely, that it is not true." (p. 690). Fielding realized man's imperfections, but he

also refused to deny the existence of his virtues. He stands in the middle between the systems of Shaftesbury and Mandeville, Deism and Calvinism; and it is just this realistic vision of life and view of human nature, coupled with the accuracy of his presentation of the sights and sounds of eighteenth century England, which makes Fielding's Tom Jones a valid and valuable source of sociological insights.

We have found that Fielding has presented the actual conditions in the four basic institutions of society in mid-eighteenth century England much as they were. In the area of marriage and the family, marriages were contracted, women were subjugated, and illegitimate offspring could not inherit. City and country manners were, in fact, much as Fielding depicted them, and the family was, as always, the primary agent of socialization. In economics, agriculture was dominant, and poverty and privilege were tied to the English class system, as was almost every area of English life. In government, roads were poor, the welfare system and criminal laws were in need of reform, prisons were disgraceful, and there was indeed a rebellion raging in the very heart of the kingdom. In religion, the established church was being threatened by Deism and Methodism. Its ability to serve its members had degenerated, and its political power had been weakened by trouble from within and without.

In addition, we have been able to marshal enough reputable information to believe that Fielding was realistic in the way in which he presented these institutions. His passion for accuracy, in fact, was so great that he seems actually to have consulted an almanac of 1745 in order to determine when there was a full moon. Tom's and Sophia's journeys can, by the movements of the soldiers and the locations of the towns, be placed to the exact day from November 24, 1745, when Tom was dismissed from Mr. Allworthy's manor.[64] Characters and incidents throughout the novel, although gathered by Fielding to further the complex plot, are frequently used to point a moral about some aspect of eighteenth-century social institutions. As Irwin points out, "Tom's encounter with the gypsies is an oblique comment on the law of criminal conversation; the affair of the puppet show is a jibe at the morality of the contemporary stage."[65] Fielding misses few opportunities to attack misanthropy, repressive marriages, quack doctors, corruption in military promotions, the morals of high society and its leisure-time diversions,[66] the lack of pensions for the clergy and, generally, "the discrepancy between philosophical theory and practice."[67]

[64] Dudden, p. 604. [65] Irwin, p. 95.

[66] Irwin, p. 94. [67] Irwin, pp. 94-95.

Fielding uses this realistic description of mid-eighteenth century social institutions to underscore and illuminate the themes of the novel. The literary point of view which he employs is that of Master of the Revels. As such he orders and arranges Tom's world in a manner which he feels will provide, as he indicates in his first chapter, a feast of human nature for his readers. He compares the world and the stage because he contends that men themselves masquerade as something they are not; the method enables him to point to the artificiality with which much human motive is disguised. His technique involves the use of humor, especially a gentle irony, well-diffused throughout the novel. He uses it in the character sketches, the dramatic situations, and even in the chapter headings, which, true to his position of Master of the Revels, he treats as a sort of program or bill of fare to keep his readers informed of his intentions in so arranging the production.[68]

Fielding's stated purpose in the novel is two-fold--to promote virtue and to show human nature. He aimed to promote virtue by showing his readers both the positive and negative sides of human nature. The distinction seems to be that "human nature" includes both "good nature" and its antithesis. His method was didactic and moralistic in keeping with the Miltonic notion that the most effective way to

[68] Wright, pp. 31-32.

illustrate good is to show it in conjunction with its opposite. Thus Fielding's intent was to give a view of all human experience; the good in order to provide examples of what man could be, and the bad for the purpose of illustrating the need for reform in non-benevolent individuals and those who had strayed because they relied on social masks in their dealings with others. His intention was to indicate, as Empson says, that different characters hold very different ideas of honor. "The society Fielding describes is one in which many different codes of honor . . . exist concurrently. The central governing class acts by only one of these codes and is too proud to look at the others (even Western's); but they would be better magistrates, and also happier and more sensible in their private lives, if they would recognize that other codes surround them."[69] Fielding's didacticism is evidenced by the fact that "he confessedly wrote, not merely to picture, but also to edify; not merely to describe the life of his time, but also to criticize it with a view to its correction."[70]

Certain didactic themes concerning specific social and moral issues recur regularly in Fielding's work, and each of his narratives is tailored to meet the demands of a moral plan. The "degression" concerning the Old Man of the Hill, for instance, "provides the extremes of degradation and

[69] Empson, p. 230. [70] Dudden, p. 678.

divine ecstacy which Tom has no time for,"[71] and it gives Fielding a chance to express some of his own disillusionment about London society. The incident of the highwayman allows Fielding to comment upon "the evils that strict justice would have caused here."[72] The meeting with the Quaker is a satire on religious hypocrisy, for we see that he cannot live peacefully with even his own family. Squire Western is a study of arbitrary power; the trio of Blifil, Thwackum, and Square illustrates Fielding's opinion of the lack of value in their type of education; and Sophia's inclination to love Tom even before she knows his true history indicates her willingness to overlook social class distinctions. Irwin discusses Fielding's didactic, moralistic comments at length:

> By making Allworthy a virtually perfect character, Fielding has provided himself with a ready-made didactic mouthpiece, and he takes full advantage of him. Allworthy reads Jenny a full-scale sermon on chastity, and Dr. Blifil a lecture on the foundation of a happy marriage. He engages with Captain Blifil on the meaning of Charity, and expatiates on Death when on his sick-bed. Tom himself is permitted a share of the moralizing. He states Fielding's own condemnation of the sort of misanthropy expressed by the Man of the Hill; and he is even made to lecture Nightingale on sexual morality. Sophia and Mrs. Miller are others who deliver moral discourses on a variety of topics.
>
> Throughout the novel Fielding is didactic in a more general "epic" way, introducing all kinds of information and anecdotes from both modern and classical sources. . . . And apart from his direct

[71] Empson, p. 228. [72] Empson, p. 229.

> moralizing he insinuates his opinions on certain subjects in a variety of minor ways, ranging from comparison: " . . . it is certain they were no more in the right road to Coventry than the fraudulent, griping, cruel, canting miser is in the right road to heaven" (book xii, ch. 11), to the use of footnotes: "This is the second person of low condition whom we have recorded in this history to have sprung from the clergy. It is to be hoped such instances will, in future ages, when some provision is made for the families of the inferior clergy, appear stranger than they can be thought at present" (book iv, ch. 14).[73]

The list could go on and on, for Fielding never seems to tire of this type of gentle preaching. Actually, his views are not unusual; they derive from the worthiest Christian ideals, and they emerge more often in a miscellany of relatively trivial observations on a myriad of specific topics than in basic statements of principle. Over and over again Fielding emphasizes the idea that virtue is natural to man, and its practice is the only way to salvation.[74] The traits which he considers "the highest human virtues" (the positive side of the antithesis of charity and self-interest) are, according to Bissell, "generosity, kindness, honesty, idealism, and a truly Christian attitude toward life."[75] The negative side of the antithesis is the presence of hypocrisy and false values. Fielding's aim in Tom Jones was simply to show that the positive, virtue, brings greater rewards than the negative, vice. Tom is essentially the virtuous, good-natured man, and his misfortunes result from

[73] Irwin, pp. 96-97. [74] Irwin, pp. 86-87.

[75] Bissell, pp. 73-74.

indiscretion and imprudence rather than vice.[76] Baker explains the distinction between the two characteristics:

> A man may yield to his weaknesses, but he must not become a slave to vice. If he yields, let him take the consequences cheerfully; and if he shows regard for his fellows, much will be forgiven him. Let him acquire prudence and knowledge of evil, whose snares are set for him on every side; without such knowledge he will never prosper, or even be secure. But should he employ this worldly wisdom for base personal ends, and not as a safeguard against the shortcomings of the flesh, then he will become a hypocrite and a villain, and a clear-sighted girl like Sophia will see through and detest him.[77]

Tom's history consists of a progression of moments of weakness bringing unfortunate consequences. He is guilty of four crucial mistakes: (1) the affair with Molly Seagrim, (2) his misconduct during Allworthy's illness, (3) his behavior with Mrs. Waters, and (4) the liaison with Lady Bellaston. In each incident a series of unfortunate circumstances produces painful results. Certain honorable actions on Tom's part help promote his return to favor and gain him Mrs. Water's good character reference and Mrs. Miller's support, but his final good fortune depends less on meritorious deeds than on the realization by Allworthy and Sophia of his true worth.[78]

[76] Irwin, p. 85.

[77] Ernest A. Baker, "Intellectual Realism: from Richardson to Sterne," The History of the English Novel (1930; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1950), IV, 136.

[78] Irwin, pp. 85-93. The four major mistakes are those pointed out by Irwin.

Tom is simply the good-natured man who needs to learn prudence and discretion. His conception of women is idealistic. He considers them generous in offering themselves to him, and his code of honor does not allow him to refuse such an offer. The modern reader would not feel that Tom was obliged, by a sense of honor, to accept. Instead he would see virtue in refusing a female offer, and might tend to think of Tom's behavior as disreputable. Yet Tom's purity is real; he is acting more in accord with humanity than with conventional virtue. "His reaction is," as Murry puts it, "that of a naturally generous soul to generosity."[79] It is this natural generosity that Allworthy and Sophia come to realize by the end of the novel.

Ian Watt also supports the idea that Tom is Fielding's conception of the "natural" man, instinctively virtuous and benevolent:

> He believed that virtue, far from being the result of the suppression of instinct at the behest of public opinion, was itself a natural tendency to goodness or benevolence. In Tom Jones he tried to show a hero possessed of a virtuous heart, but also of the lustiness and lack of deliberation to which natural goodness was particularly prone, and which easily led to error. . . . To realise his moral aim, therefore, Fielding had to show how the good heart was threatened by many dangers in its hazardous course to maturity and knowledge of the world; yet at the same time and without exculpating his hero, he had also to show that although Tom's moral transgressions were a likely

[79] J. Middleton Murry, Unprofessional Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 31.

> and perhaps even a necessary stage in the process of moral growth, they did not betoken a vicious disposition. . . .[80]

According to Empson, Fielding set out to preach a theory about ethics and devised a plot to illustrate the doctrine of mutuality of impulse. As the doctrine defines good nature, we can see that Tom is Fielding's choice for the prototype of a virtuous man: "If good by nature, you can imagine other people's feelings so directly that you have an impulse to act on them as if they were your own; and this is the source of your greatest pleasures as well as of your only genuinely unselfish actions."[81] Murry also indicates his awareness of the idea of mutuality of impulse in his discussion of the theme of Tom Jones as "good nature":

> In short, good nature is a natural and effortless goodness expressing itself as imaginative sympathy with the joys and sorrows of others: as distinct from the goodness which is constrained either by religious fears, or by the pursuit of a rationally conceived idea of virtue: both of which Fielding holds up to ridicule in Thwackum and Square. He means that both these kinds of goodness tend to hypocrisy (perfected in their pupil Blifil), which is intolerable to him; and even at their best, he believes them to be essentially inferior to the goodness which is natural and spontaneous, and finds expression in sympathy.[82]

We have seen that Fielding uses his hero to exemplify virtuous man reacting to those about him in society who are generally less than virtuous. He has fulfilled his didactic

[80] Watt, p. 282. [81] Empson, p. 225.

[82] Murry, pp. 34-35.

goal of promoting virtue by showing his hero as a virtuous man of "good nature" against a background of characters and institutions embodying all the various types of "human nature," ranging along a continuum from good to bad. Irwin emphasizes the place of the social system in the generalization of "human nature":

> His concentration on Tom's morality shows up the helplessness of individual merit in the eighteenth-century social system. A more virtuous Tom who was merely the son of Jenny Jones could not have been rewarded by marriage with Sophia; a much wickeder Tom who was truly heir to the Allworthy estates, would have had her as a matter of course. The artificial plot is Fielding's means of bridging the gap between moral worth and material reward. It enables him to avoid answering the question that suggests itself so often in the course of the story: can he endorse a social system whose standards are not only irrelevant to the morality he is preaching, but often run counter to it?[83]

Fielding's solution to this dilemma seems to be not to question the English social system as a whole, but instead to attack, with explicit detail, particular evils within the system. Actually Tom and Sophia are both rebelling against accepted social codes. According to the standards of the day, Sophia's duty was to obey her father without question, and "Tom should be, what Blifil thinks him, an illegitimate upstart who ought to be put firmly in his place."[84] But Fielding, ultimately, supports the system and allows Tom legitimacy and Sophia obedience. What Fielding seems to be suggesting by such a conclusion is that the social system,

[83] Irwin, p. 112. [84] Kettle, p. 78.

although it has its faults, is not as much in need of reform as some persons who exist within it. Just as Tom points out what could have happened to the highwayman if "strict justice" had been applied to his case, Fielding is pointing out that, human nature being what it is, perhaps man should learn to temper "strict justice" with mercy. "Strict justice" would require that Fielding, acting as Master of the Revels, take care not to unite his lowly hero with the high-born Sophia, but the Master's reaction is (again quoting the same key phrase from Murry) "that of a naturally generous soul to generosity."[85] Both Tom and Sophia have shown that they are virtuous and benevolent beings, and Fielding, true to his aim, is proving that virtue brings more rewards than vice.

Fielding's literary credo was that "an author should remain within the probable."[86] In short, an author should be realistic; and Fielding is realistic enough to know that, within the bounds of eighteenth-century social institutions, the marriage of Tom and Sophia would be improbable if "strict justice" were to be applied to their situation. Fielding's outrage is not at the social system; he is willing to work within it. Instead his anger and satire is aimed at individuals--the multitude of artificial, non-benevolent characters who people the novel.

[85] Murry, p. 31. [86] Bissell, p. 51.

As an "intellectual realist,"[87] Fielding did not feel compelled to refrain from "showing many persons and things, which may possibly have never fallen within the knowledge of a great part of his readers."[88] Until recent times, Fielding's realism led many critics to consider him immoral because he presented some of the darker aspects of life. But there is virtually unanimous agreement today that he was not only a moralist and a non-Deist, but a didactic, influenced by Latitudinarian divines, who preached a Christian version of benevolence.

Fielding's dual purpose--the teaching of virtue and the demonstration of human nature--is expertly accomplished by his treatment of the realities of eighteenth century social life; and the themes of Tom Jones are illustrated through a close analysis of the major social institutions with which he deals. Dudden calls the majority of the characters in the novel "thoroughly and typically English":

> It is English humanity that Fielding described. It is the life of eighteenth-century England that he realistically pictured. Yet at the same time he took pains to reveal, underlying the local and temporal form, that universal human nature which is essentially the same at all times and in all places. In other words, he so portrayed the people of his own country and day as to illustrate by their means the constant, intrinsic, fundamental qualities of human personality. Thus, notwithstanding its

[87] Baker, pp. 5-8. The term is Baker's. He defines intellectual realism as the method by which the author conceives of his characters intellectually and gives them imaginative reality.

[88] Bissell, p. 51, quoting Fielding.

> English colouring, his novel is not merely a national epic, an epic of England, but also, as he himself claimed, an epic of humanity, an epic of the life of all mankind.[89]

Fielding, in his role as Master of the Revels, serves up a drama of both "natural man" and all the various masks and roles of human nature, in a stage setting of eighteenth century society. His society exists as both a reflection and at times a criticism of the real world. "He is," in effect, "showing the age its face."[90] His characters are ordinary people, and his comments constitute an intellectual analysis of the social phenomena in which they exist. If we can accept the notion that Fielding's literary goal was to present both inner and outer life as it was, for the purpose of promoting virtue, then we can see the value of that outer life. The inner life we can test for ourselves, for human nature changes very little. The outer life, since it has undergone tremendous change in the past two hundred years, must be tested by sociological investigation and analysis. An understanding of the actual operation of the social institutions which he presents not only allows us to understand the subleties and nuances of Fielding's lesson, but also broadens the novel to fulfill his commitment to demonstrate human nature, which transcends time and place.

[89] Dudden, p. 659.

[90] Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1955), p. 57.

## CHAPTER III

## WILLIAM GODWIN: *THINGS AS THEY ARE; OR THE ADVENTURES OF CALEB WILLIAMS*

William Godwin, whose most popular novel, *Caleb Williams*, is next to be considered, was less well known as a novelist than as a political philosopher and the author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. This famous work, written in response to Burke's *Reflections*, was published in 1793, one year before the publication of *Caleb Williams*. *Political Justice* is both social criticism and Godwin's social theory, as well as the author's conjectures as to what the future might be. In this work, Godwin indicates his belief in man's reason and his conviction that arguments for truth are by their nature stronger than arguments for error. His beliefs include the idea that false judgments can be cured by education, even though he maintained that man's mind is subject to an unchanging sequence of cause and effect which he termed "necessity." According to Godwin, man is good only because he prefers pleasure to pain. A proper education could encourage him to subjugate his selfish interest to a desire for the good of society. "This enlightened 'self-interest' which in the moral sphere

corresponds to the 'will of the majority' in the political, points forward to the Utilitarians. . . ."[1]

Godwin maintained that human reason, rather than artificially developed laws, would keep society in balance if men were not misled by improper education. Government would be minimized or would vanish altogether because rational and well-educated men would find it unnecessary. Men could still hold private property, but only in just proportions. Since marriage was considered a type of tyranny, it would no longer exist. Man is not to be considered totally selfish. Rather he is born without any tendency to good or evil; thus his environment is completely responsible for what he is. If his environment is maintained in such a way as to cause him to be benevolent, then reforms in society would automatically be made without violence.

An important facet of Godwin's theory was that the English criminal law, with its harsh punishments, could and would be improved if only man could be brought to understand the basic principles set forth in Political Justice: "Truth is omnipotent. Vice is merely an error in judgment. Man is perfectible. Government is the great obstacle to human happiness. The operation of the law of necessity produces

[1] Albert E. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 113-114.

inevitable progress. The private affections block universal benevolence."[2]

Realizing that his Political Justice essay was too expensive and too erudite for the common man, Godwin chose to write Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams so that his ideas might reach more people in a more readable form. "This novel is intended to illustrate by a particular case the general indictment of society which Godwin had drawn up in Political Justice."[3]

The author explained the motives for creating Caleb Williams in his 1794 preface:

> While one party pleads for reformation and change, the other extols, in the warmest terms, the existing constitution of society. It seemed as if something would be gained for the decision of this question, if that constitution were faithfully developed in its practical effects. What is now presented to the public, is no refined and abstract speculation; it is a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world. It is but of late that the inestimable importance of political principles has been adequately apprehended. It is now known to philosophers, that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. But this is a truth highly worthy to be communicated, to persons, whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach. Accordingly it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story

[2] Elton Edward Smith and Esther Greenwell Smith, William Godwin (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 23.

[3] Baugh, p. 1198.

> would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man.[4]

True to his purpose, Godwin examines the struggle between the upper classes, who possess great influence by virtue of their social position, and those who are relatively helpless in the face of that influence. But Caleb Williams is more than simply a "thesis" novel. It is, additionally, a skillfully plotted, psychological mystery-adventure of pursuit and capture somewhat along the lines of the modern detective novel. The reader knows who committed the murder, but his attention is captured by Godwin's psychological analysis of the murderer and the man he pursues.

The book's aristocratic hero, Falkland, has been goaded into committing a murder and, in order to protect his prestige, has allowed a poor farmer to be put to death for the crime. Caleb Williams discovers his employer's secret, and Falkland uses his position as a member of the aristocracy to do everything in his power to prevent Caleb from revealing what he knows. In his struggle for survival, Williams, who has been pursued by Falkland throughout the novel, finally reverses the roles and makes his persecutor his victim.

[4] William Godwin, Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. xxviii. Future references to this edition of Caleb Williams and its introduction by George Sherburn will be given in parentheses in the body of the paper.

Actually, in planning the novel, Godwin started with the third volume and worked backward to the first. The third volume was designed to be one of pursuit and fear of capture, and the second volume was to show the situation which provoked the pursuit. Finally Godwin planned the initial volume to describe the events of the pursuer's history before the chase began.[5] Godwin uses his plot to emphasize the power of the aristocracy to direct society's institutions against underlings. However, Falkland is not depicted as a villain but as a worthy and generous man who is corrupted by the attempt to defend his aristocratic misconceptions. The book's real villain is class privilege, and Falkland is as much its victim as the somewhat-overly-curious Caleb.

Godwin arrived at his philosophical principles in much the same manner as many of the other "preachers without a pulpit" of the early nineteenth century. Very much a product of the eighteenth century, he was born in 1756, the son of a Calvinist preacher. A frail, studious youth, he was trained as a dissenting clergyman, but after preaching a few years, he became interested in the ideas of the French philosophers. He gave up the ministry and moved to London. Here he married Mary Wallstonecraft, author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women. After his first wife's death Godwin

[5] Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1954), p. 104.

married a widow, Mrs. Clairmont. During his years in London Godwin attempted, through his writing, to reform society and bring about universal welfare by a rational explanation of the tyranny of the social institutions of marriage, government, and religion. He turned from the deterministic Calvinistic doctrine of original sin to a belief in "the innate goodness of human nature and the capacity of mankind to live virtuously by the light of pure reason."[6] Although his convictions later mellowed, at the time when Caleb Williams was written he was a firm supporter of the principles (though not the violence) of the French Revolution. In the novel, as in Political Justice, he wrote in condemnation of "every form of organized control over individual liberty, such as taxation, private property, marriage, and any sort of legal punishment for crime."[7]

England, from the middle of the eighteenth century when Tom Jones was published to time of the publication of Caleb Williams, had endured a long period of war and domestic dispute. The War of the Austrian Succession lasted from 1740 to 1748. From 1748 to 1756 the country was at peace, but it was a peace troubled by domestic problems as well as difficulties in India and America. The Colonial problems,

[6] Lionel Stevenson, The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 171.

[7] Stevenson, pp. 170-171.

especially with the French, led to the Seven Years War, which lasted from 1756 to 1763, and the Anglo-French struggle for Empire led by the elder Pitt.

When George III ascended the throne in 1760 he was determined to regain the royal prerogative which had been forfeited by the German-speaking George I, and by George II who had left the affairs of government to "Whig ministers who produced parliamentary majorities by patronage and bribery. . . ."[8] The arrest of John Wilkes in 1763, under a "general" warrant (one which named no actual offender) precipitated a furor. Wilkes' case, and the constitutionality of "general" warrants, was taken up by the electorate who returned him to parliament again and again. The election of Wilkes was nullified, and his opponent was seated in the House of Commons. Churchill explains the reaction:

> The whole machinery of eighteenth century corruption was thus exposed to the public eye. By refusing to accept Wilkes the Commons had denied the right of electors to choose their members and held themselves out as a closed corporation of privileged beings. Wilkes's cause now found the most powerful champion in England. Pitt himself, now Earl of Chatham, in blistering tones attacked the legality of general warrants and the corruption of politics, claiming that more seats in the counties would increase the electorate and diminish the opportunities for corruption, so easy in the small boroughs. His speeches were indeed the first demands for Parliamentary reform in the eighteenth century.[9]

[8] Alan Dugald McKillop, English Literature from Dryden to Burns (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 314.

[9] Winston S. Churchill, "The Age of Revolution" in A History of the English-Speaking Peoples (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957), III, 166-167.

The Wilkes case emphasized the need of election reform and turned public opinion against the king. The defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown and the consequent loss of the American colonies effectively ended the king's efforts to control government. The agricultural and industrial revolutions, with their attendant new inventions, enclosure movements, and rise of capitalism, brought with them new economic theories and social problems, but the American and French Revolutions delayed most reform efforts until the next century. "Eighteenth-century inertia tolerated established injustice and incompetence."[10]

With royal prerogative stifled, the leading men of the end of the century were the younger Pitt, who took office in 1784, and Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke. McKillop describes Pitts' position:

> Pitt was the head of a new Tory party, conservative, nationalistic, interested in efficient government and in guaranteeing constitutional rights and liberties, but not primarily in social reform. A student of Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, Pitt was a firm believer in individual enterprise and free trade. Given a free hand, he would have put through a series of moderate liberal reforms: he was disposed to correct such abuses as the slave trade, the archaic and unjust system of parliamentary representation, and the injustices imposed by law on the Irish and Catholics. But his party took shape in opposition to the new democratic movements represented by and stimulated by the French Revolution. Liberals turned reactionary, and reform in England was postponed until the nineteenth century.[11]

[10] McKillop, p. 110.

[11] McKillop, p. 316.

With the exception of Fox, ever the "flaming liberal" and advocate of the French Revolution, and a certain relatively small group of radicals who supported him, "the great body of English sentiment and opinion may be described as predominately conservative and Tory to the end of the century."[12] Representative of the majority opinion was Edmund Burke, a conservative and defender of the English Constitution. Like many Englishmen, he supported the American Revolution because he feared the increased power and influence which the king was gaining from Colonial control. It has been said of Burke that, "in supporting the American Revolution he had defended Britain's Constitution against itself; in opposing the French Revolution he was defending the same Constitution against anarchy."[13]

Pitt's position was somewhat neutral. He attempted to remain detached from questions of revolution. Instead he concerned himself with domestic and financial matters and tried to keep England out of war. He was unsuccessful, and by 1793 England was in a war with France which lasted until 1802.

In spite of the international upheaval in the late eighteenth century, few of the social institutions were

[12] McKillop, p. 318.

[13] Louis Kronenberger, Kings and Desperate Men: Life in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Vintage Books, 1942), p. 215.

significantly different from those of the first half of the century. There were some efforts, of course, toward the humanitarianism and reform movements of the next century, but with the exception of economic changes, things remained nearly as they were when Fielding was writing Tom Jones.

In the area of marriage and family life, women were still very much second-class citizens. For the most part, marriages were still arranged, although young women were often allowed to express a choice in the selection of their husbands, and "an ever-increasing proportion of ordinary marriages were the outcome of mutual affection."[14]

The life-style of the country squire had changed somewhat by the middle of the eighteenth century, from that described as typical in the period of Squire Western and Squire Allworthy. Remnants of feudalism still existed in manor house living with its large number of servants and tenants, but, with better transportation, city manners were spreading and narrowing the gap between city and country customs. There was a noticeable increase in servant and tenant participation in social life and a noticeable decrease in the ignorance, coarseness, drunkenness, and prejudice of

[14] G. M. Trevelyan, "The Eighteenth Century" in Illustrated English Social History (London: Longmans, Green, 1942), III, 20.

the country squire. Both master and servants showed increased interest in more refined and intellectual pursuits.[15]

With new methods of farming, requiring large capital, and with the pressure of increased taxation, only a few country squires were able to enlarge their estates to the point where they became substantial landowners with control over many tenant farmers. Those who could not produce larger capital were forced to sell their holdings to large landlords and sunk in status to the position of tenants, renting the land they had once owned. Many migrated to London to find jobs or joined the ranks of the unemployed.[16]

Education of the young was still mainly a function of the family, for there were yet few public schools. The poor received very little education unless they were apprenticed to a local craftsman or managed to gain favor from someone in the wealthier classes. Young aristocrats were educated at home by tutors or the local parson. For them the "grand tour" was still considered necessary to broaden the experience of the proper gentleman. Women were taught to sew, dance, play a musical instrument or, in rare cases, to read (but not to speak) French. They received little in the way of actual formal classical education.

[15] William Edward Hartpole Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (1893; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), VII, 218.

[16] Lecky, pp. 220-221.

In Caleb Williams Godwin deals only briefly with marriage and the family. He was opposed to marriage in principle (though he married twice) and was not particularly enchanted with the benefits of family life. He felt that marriage, along with other forms of possession of property, would eventually disappear. This view he later modified to accept marriage as one of the traditions and social institutions with which "even though we might disapprove of them as individuals, 'an accurate morality will direct us to comply.'"[17] His original harsh views of family life were later amended to admit that family affection was a necessary part of the development of the personality which could "act as a stepping stone toward universal benevolence."[18]

Godwin accepts the idea of an arranged marriage for the young Emily, rebelling only at the thought of her being forced to marry a country roughneck far below her social station. He seems to disapprove of the fact that Emily is treated as a poor, outcast relative of the harsh Tyrell, but points out that "her happy insignificance had served her as a protection. No one thought it worth his while to fetter her with those numerous petty restrictions, with which the daughters of opulence are commonly tormented" (p. 54). Although Emily's "accomplishments were chiefly of the customary and superficial kind, dancing and music" (p. 45),

[17] Smith and Smith, p. 75. [18] Smith and Smith, p. 92.

Godwin objects to Tyrell's tendency to consider her, as well as all those of her sex, "as made for the recreation of the men, and to exclaim against the weakness of people who taught them to imagine they were to judge for themselves" (p. 59).

There is little of family life in Caleb Williams. Godwin does give his readers a suggestion of life in the manor, with its many servants and tenants, and describes three different English squires: Tyrell, Falkland, and Forester. Of the three, the crude and dictatorial Tyrell is shown as the most typical. He "might have passed for a true model of the English squire" (p. 18), "insupportably arrogant, tyrannical to his inferiors, and insolent to his equals" (p. 19). Falkland is perhaps more representative of the English squire of the latter part of the century, who had acquired city manners and culture through an aristocratic education and the advantage of a "grand tour," and who was "principally occupied in contemplations too dignified for scandal, and too large for the altercations of a vestry, or the politics of an election-borough" (p. 24).

Both Tyrell and Falkland are the victims of their education. Tyrell's education has turned him into an arrogant and tyrannical bully. Falkland's education has created in him a false sense of honor: "He was the fool of honor and fame; a man whom, in the pursuit of reputation, nothing could divert; who would have purchased the character of a true, gallant and

undaunted hero, at the expense of worlds, and who thought every calamity nominal, but a stain upon his honor" (pp. 118-119). The education of the nominal hero of the book, Caleb Williams, had been, Godwin tells us, "free from the usual sources of depravity" (p. 3). Of humble birth, Caleb's conception of honor is a "natural" one, not founded on the false ideals of feudalism. His faults are rather those of excessive curiosity and an attempt to put himself on an equal plane with his master. "Curiosity," he says, "so long as it lasted, was a principle stronger in my bosom than even the love of independence. To that I would have sacrificed my liberty or my life; to gratify it" (p. 165). In the area of education and honor, Caleb is a foil both to Tyrell and to Falkland.

Education, still very much a function of the family in eighteenth-century society, was an extremely important part of Godwin's philosophy because of his belief in benevolence, determinism, and human perfectibility. He believed that society made man what he was, that benevolence could make him better, and that there would inevitably be "some future period of human improvement" (p. 112). Man must care for his fellow man. "If I see you fall into a pit, it is my business to draw you out and save your life. If I see you pursuing a wrong mode of conduct, it is my business to set you right and save your honor" (p. 87). "The actual means

of existence are the property of all" (p. 333). Even Collins, Caleb's substitute father, does not blame Caleb for what Collins thinks is his lawlessness:

> I do not consider the vicious as proper objects of indignation and scorn. I consider you as a machine: you are not constituted, I am afraid, to be greatly useful to your fellow men; but you did not make yourself; you are just what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be. I am sorry for your ill properties; but I entertain no enmity against you, nothing but benevolence. Considering you in the light in which I at present consider you, I am ready to contribute everything in my power to your real advantage, and would gladly assist you, if I knew how, in detecting and extirpating the errors that have misled you. You have disappointed me, but I have no reproaches to utter: it is more necessary for me to feel compassion for you than that I should accumulate your misfortune by my censures. (p. 360)

Godwin does not hesitate to express his opinions about marriage, family life, and education, but, as they are presented in the novel, we see little change from the institution of marriage and family as Fielding saw it approximately fifty years earlier.

In economics the situation is very different. Probably more changes had occurred in the institution of economics by the last half of the eighteenth century than in any of the other social institutions. Population was increasing rapidly, and the agrarian and industrial revolutions had begun. The agricultural revolution was marked by the enclosure movement and the employment of improved farming methods. Mechanization through inventions, and faster transportation resulting from canal-building, contributed to

the revolution in agriculture as well as in industry. Dietz speaks of the increase of international prestige which these changes produced:

> As a result of these developments in industrial efficiency through improvements in machinery, the spread of the factory system, and cheaper and more rapid communication and transport, British manufacturers were ready to increase their production enormously, and at the same time they maintained quality and gave cheaper prices than the manufacturers of most other countries. . . .
> . . . . . .
>
> In the face of the world-wide demand for goods from all these quarters for all these reasons, England, thanks to her extraordinary industrial development, was ready to become the Workshop of the World.[19]

Society was hard put to keep up with the rapid economic changes, and because of the new policy of laissez-faire "questions of trade, manufacture, wages, and other conditions of labour were increasingly left to settle themselves."[20] For this reason, historians of the eighteenth century have less to say about capital-labor and employer-employee relationships than about the older feudal relationships of master to dependent, servant, or tenant. England was still very much a society of social classes.

[19] Frederick C. Dietz, A Political and Social History of England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 505-506.

[20] William Hunt, "The History of England From the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration, 1760-1801" in The Political History of England (1905; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), p. 269.

"Society was modelled on the example of the rich and powerful, and this imitation of customs deemed fashionable and usual was carried in some degree into every sphere of life, whether it was that of the country gentleman, the merchant, the shopkeeper or even the humble workman."[21] Upper class England was strictly a closed society. "The upper classes had tremendous political and social power and were totally unregulated by public opinion. . . ."[22] The rise of the middle class had begun with the industrial revolution, but was not to be an important economic or social factor until the next century. "The security we think of as characteristic of the eighteenth century extended only to property owners, and the growth of wealth and luxury widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The poor could hardly better themselves, and were victims of every economic depression and every alternation of war and peace."[23]

Looking at the social institution of economics as it is presented in Caleb Williams, we find Godwin concerned with this same social class stratification almost exclusively--"the power which the institutions of society give to one over the others" (p. 296). The novel is peopled with squires,

[21] A. E. Richardson, Georgian England: A Survey of Social Life, Trades, Industries and Art (1931; rpt. Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), p. 14.

[22] Hunt, p. 256. [23] McKillop, p. 108.

tenants, jailers, highwaymen, and prisoners, but each of these characters is considered on the basis of the power which wealth and class allow a man to possess. Hawkins, a tenant, also had a freehold, which allowed him a vote; but he was expected to vote at the direction of his landlord or lose his land. Tyrell had the power to ruin him and did. Falkland had the power to have him killed, by not confessing to the crime for which Hawkins was blamed, and he did. Hawkins's situation was such that "it was of no avail for him to have right on his side, when his adversary had influence and wealth" (p. 82).

Godwin gives Falkland, the book's real hero, a significant speech about the tendency to abuse the class structure:

> "It is very true," said Mr. Falkland, avoiding any direct notice of the last words of Mr. Tyrell, "that there is a distinction of ranks. I believe that distinction is a good thing, and necessary to the peace of mankind. But, however necessary it may be, we must acknowledge that it puts some hardship upon the lower orders of society. It makes one's heart ache to think, that one man is born to the inheritance of every superfluity, while the whole share of another, without any demerit of his, is drudgery and starving; and that all this is indispensable. We that are rich, Mr. Tyrell, must do everything in our power to lighten the yoke of these unfortunate people. We must not use the advantage that accident has given us, with an unmerciful hand. Poor wretches! they are pressed almost beyond bearing as it is; and, if we unfeelingly give another turn to the machine, they will be crushed to atoms." (p. 88)

Later we find, however, that the "benevolent" Falkland uses his class status unmercifully to wreak vengeance upon Caleb in defense of his mistaken sense of honor. "I wear an

armour," he tells Caleb, "against which all your weapons are impotent. I have dug a pit for you; and, whichever way you move, backward or forward, to the right or the left, it is ready to swallow you" (p. 177).

That wealth and social class are inextricably linked is a generally accepted statement. In the eighteenth century the wealthy land-owning classes were also those who maintained almost total control over the functions of government, and government was the institution which Godwin most desired to improve or, preferably, eliminate. In the area of government, the late eighteenth century had progressed little beyond the state of affairs at the beginning of the century. Lecky nicely sums up the situation:

> Legislation concerned itself much less than in our day with social abuses. The prevention of crime, and the regulation of commercial interests, were seduously, if not always wisely, attended to; but there were few attempts during the Hanoverian period to deal with special evils and forms of suffering among the poor, and in spite of occasional laws relating to gaming, lotteries, disorderly houses, and the observance of Sunday, there was in general little disposition to regulate habits and restrain private vices, by law.[24]

Governmental power was still concentrated in the hands of the country gentry, large landowners who legislated in their own favor. "Rural England was governed by the patriarchal sway of the Justices of the Peace,"[25] who were "far too much a law unto themselves."[26] They controlled all

[24] Lecky, pp. 348-349. [25] Trevelyan, p. 58.

[26] Trevelyan, p. 60.

aspects of rural life, supervised Quarter or Petty Sessions, and even held court in their own homes. In addition, they were frequently known to misuse their authority through favoritism and the commission of dictatorial acts. Criminal laws of the period were unbelievably strict, and justice administered by local magistrates left much to be desired. "The poor were brutalised by cruel and indecent punishments, and were far too much under the power of the magistrates, some of them vicious and ignorant men, who had summary jurisdiction in a large number of criminal cases."[27] Criminals were seldom allowed legal advisors. Their trials generally lasted no more than one day: a longer trial would have been too costly and too boring to jurors who were often drunk or asleep or both.

Historians such as Kronenberger and Hunt repeatedly express shock at the state of the eighteenth century English justice:

> The penal code had been shocking at the beginning of the century, and as the century advanced, it grew worse.[28]

> However much England might pride itself on its form of government, its penal code was the most vicious and sanguinary in Europe.[29]

> The criminal law was fearfully severe. Early in the reign as many as 160 crimes were capital felonies, and the number was constantly augmented. A theft of

[27] Hunt, p. 266. [28] Kronenberger, p. 247.

[29] Kronenberger, p. 248.

> more than the value of twelve pence by picking a pocket was punishable by death. This severity led to an increase in crime. The injured would not prosecute, juries would not convict on clear evidence, judges recommended to mercy, and criminals were emboldened by the chances of escape. The heavy punishments attached to light offenses tended to multiply serious crimes; for a thief who knew that he might be hanged was tempted to commit murder rather than be caught. Though only about a fifth of the capital sentences were carried out, executions were terribly numerous, especially between 1781 and 1787.[30]

English prisons, if anything, had deteriorated since the beginning of the century, since few new ones had been built and the number of prisoners had increased with the number of crimes and the growth in population. First offenders, innocent men, felons, debtors, men, women, old, and young were all thrown together in prisons without sufficient food, water, ventilation, or sewage systems. Prisons were characterized by horrible smells, filth, disease, drunkenness, cruelty, and corruption. In the majority of county prisons, the prisoners were shackled with chains and iron collars which were only removed if the jailor was bribed. Lecky describes the unreasonableness of the situation. "Untried and perhaps innocent men were often exposed for months to its contagion. In some counties the gaol delivery was but once a year. At Hull it was but once in three years. Every year hundreds of persons who had entered the prison door either innocent or mere novices in

[30] Hunt, pp. 265-266.

crime, came out of it accomplished criminals, completely and hopelessly depraved, and at the same time shut out from almost all honest means of subsistence."[31] Even a prisoner who had been legally acquitted was often required to remain in prison until he could pay the jailer's fees. Like the class struggle, prison reform had to wait for the nineteenth century and its attendant reform movements.

Godwin's objections to the English class systems, and the government policies which it controlled, were tied in with his sympathy for the principles of the French Revolution. He was among those intellectual radicals of the time who, in support of the French version of the "rights of man," preached social radicalism and flouted conventional morality. George Sherburn summarized Godwin's stand on the French Revolution as follows:

> His political opinions have the current biases of the "age of reason": he disbelieved in the freedom of man's will; circumstance and environment was all-compelling. He believed heartily, however, in the potentialities of man--meanwhile distrusting the political institutions men had established. He evidently took Swift's Houyhnhnms very seriously, and believed in progress toward some sort of extra-religious millenium. His more "rational" opinions owe much to French thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rosseau, d'Holbach, Helvetius, and others. He was substantially, as Caleb Williams indicates, a philosophical anarchist; but he was no bomb-throwing revolutionary. (p. vii)

Among these functions of government of which Godwin most disapproved were prison conditions and laws (especially

[31] Lecky, p. 330.

criminal laws) which allowed wealthy landholders to tyrannize poorer citizens. His descriptions of the conditions of the prison in which Caleb finds himself are found to be starkly realistic when compared to actual conditions described by the historians Hunt and Lecky. English justice, he implies in Caleb Williams, is a mockery and a fallacy:

> "Thank God," exclaims the Englishman, "we have no Bastile! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime!" Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty, where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons! witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that, show me the man shameless enough to triumph, and say, England has no Bastile! Is there any charge so frivolous, upon which men are not consigned to these detested abodes? Is there any villainy that is not practiced by justices and prosecutors? But against all this, perhaps you have been told, there is redress. Yes, a redress, that it is the consummation of insult so much as to name! Where shall the poor wretch, reduced to the last despair, and to whom acquittal perhaps comes just time enough to save him from perishing,--where shall this man find leisure, and much less money, to fee counsel and officers, and purchase the tedious, dear-bought remedy of the law? No, he is too happy to leave his dungeon and the memory of his dungeon behind him; and the same tyranny and wanton oppression become the inheritance of his successor. (pp. 209-210)

Godwin, like his character, Caleb, "could never believe that all this was the fair result of institutions inseparable from the general good" (p. 211). He felt that punishment based on the idea of revenge or deterrence was ineffective, and advocated instead an attempt to reform the criminal

(a very modern notion) by humane methods. The highwayman, Raymond, maintains that law is an improper force for reforming mankind, and the horrible sufferings of Falkland demonstrate that legal punishment is superfluous.

Both Falkland and Forester, in their position as landlords, are Justices of the Peace and have the power to try Caleb. They do so. Mr. Forester "had the folly to think he could be impartial" (p. 260), but, as one of Godwin's minor characters points out, "when two squires lay their heads together, they do not much matter law, you know; or else they twist the law to their own ends, I cannot exactly say which; but it is much at one, when the poor fellow's breath is out of his body" (p. 274). Caleb has good reason to fear the summary justice of Squire Falkland, for, as Kronenberger tells us, the perjury which Falkland committed, which might have resulted in Caleb's death, was punishable by no more than a fine or a jail sentence,[32] while the crime of which Caleb is accused was a capital offense. Even though Caleb is acquitted, after many months in prison, Falkland can still warn him. "Do you think you are out of my power because a court of justice has acquitted you?" (p. 327). And when Caleb finally comes to accuse Falkland of the crime of murder, he is told that the magistrate will not accept his accusations:

[32] Kronenberger, pp. 247-248.

> And this at last was the justice of mankind! A man, under certain circumstances, shall not be heard in the detection of a crime, because he has not been a participator of it! The story of a flagitious murder shall be listened to with indifference, while an innocent man is hunted like a wild beast to the furtherest corners of the earth! Six thousand a year shall protect a man from accusation; and the validity of an impeachment shall be superseded because the author of it is a servant! (p. 321)

Godwin's concern with government was less in the areas of trade, colonization, or national defense than in the domestic misuse of the law and the power to make and enforce the law. His concern with religion was more with human benevolence, reason, and perfectibility than with any theological dogma. He "tended to think first of man and mind and only latterly of God and the Church."[33] Godwin was the son of a dissenting minister and was trained in that creed. He accepted Calvinism until 1782, "but Baron d'Holbach's Septeme de la Nature, which he read in that year, converted him to Deism. The next year he read Dr. Joseph Priestley's Institutes of the Christian Religion, and the Deist became a Socinian. Two years later, Socinianism had eroded to the point that he corresponded with Dr. Priestley about his dwindling faith. In two more years, 1787, he describes himself as 'a complete unbeliever.'"[34]

Godwin's discontent with religion may have been explained by the fact that religion in the late eighteenth

[33] Smith and Smith, p. 20.

[34] Smith and Smith, pp. 56-57.

century, as Hunt points out, "was a matter in which the Church was neither better nor worse than the age." "The ecclesiastical system was disorganized by plurality and non-residence; the dignified clergy as a whole were worldly minded, and the greater number of the rest were wretchedly poor. The Church was roused to a sense of its duty to society by Methodism and evangelicalism, two movements for a time closely connected, though after 1784 Methodism became a force outside the church."[35] Methodism was an important social trend. Those, especially among the working classes, who were neglected by the established Church took up Wesley's assault on the complacency of the eighteenth-century tendency in religion to rank "reason" as more important than "enthusiasm." But the religion of the majority was still Latitudinarian in character. The Latitudinarian idea was one of tolerance and reason; its "general trend was away from absolute doctrines and toward empiricism and utilitarianism, a description of the good in terms of actual human experiences and desires."[36]

Trevelyan calls 1776 "a date usually regarded in retrospect as belonging to the period most marked by infidelity and laxity of doctrine."[37] Lecky speaks of "that decline of theological beliefs which was so manifest in the

[35] Hunt, p. 264. [36] McKillop, p. 132.

[37] Trevelyan, p. 61.

closing years of the eighteenth century."[38] Generally, with the exception of the Methodist movement, the age lacked passion and heroics in religion as well as in politics. Its greatest achievements were intellectual rather than moral. "It was natural," says Trevelyan, "that an aristocratic, unreforming, individualistic, 'classical' age should be served by a Church with the same qualities and defects as the other chartered institutions of the country."[39]

An investigation of the treatment of the institution of religion in Caleb Williams tends to reveal something of Godwin's early Calvinism, in that each of Godwin's major characters has a predetermined tragic flaw which leads him to his doom; but one discovers nothing of formal dogma or theology in the novel. "Caleb Williams demonstrates the cult of pride in reputation that drove Falkland on when mere existence seemed intolerable, and has nothing of religious doctrine."[40] God, when mentioned at all, is spoken of in terms of scepticism. Caleb exclaims, "Oh God! (if God there be that condescends to record the lonely beatings of an anxious heart)." The highwayman speaks much the same way: "God, we are told, judges of men by what they are at the period of arraignment, and whatever be their

[38] Lecky, pp. 346-347. [39] Trevelyan, p. 64.

[40] Burton Ralph Pollen, Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin (New York: Las Americas Publishing Company, 1962), p. 227.

crimes, if they have seen and abjured the folly of those crimes, receives them to favour. But the institutions of countries that profess to worship this God admit no such distinctions" (p. 264). Godwin was an "unbeliever," but he was not unreligious. For Godwin, the Kingdom of God "simply became the Kingdom of Faith in the Perfectibility of Man. Men who could no longer be served by an outmoded religion might still be exalted by the vision of moral happiness."[41] Godwin's religion then (when religion is defined as a system of belief involving a code of ethics and a philosophy) was the essential goodness of man--man shaped by environment, governed by reason, and perfectible by rational argument.

We have found that the novel Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams is in most respects typical of eighteenth-century social institutions. Godwin presents only a very brief description of family life, but what he does deal with is accurate. He says almost nothing about religion, but, except for the stirrings of the Methodist movement, neither did many of the other intellectuals of his day. Nor were the common people particularly concerned with a church which had become a fairly ineffectual force in society. Godwin set out to describe "things as they are" and, although he might tend to exaggerate certain aspects of society, his observations were never inaccurate.

[41] Smith and Smith, p. 20.

In the institution of marriage and family he shows realistically the inferior position of women, the continuance of the practice of arranged marriages, and the custom of educating children in the home, or, in the case of the upper classes, on the grand tour. His observations of eighteenth-century society in the area of economics are limited to the conditions of a closed-class society with power vested in the wealthy, particularly the land-holding gentry who possessed great power by virtue of their position as landlords and Justices of the Peace. Godwin spotlights the abuses of this class privilege. It is the institution of government about which we find him most concerned. His descriptions of prison conditions and the perversions of criminal law are frighteningly accurate. The realization of the strictness of the eighteenth-century penal code lends a strength to Caleb's motivations which modern readers might not realize. Caleb really was in fear of his life, and Falkland really did have the power to pursue him unmercifully. In the area of religion, Godwin allowed for no theological dogma, but his novel accurately represents the eighteenth-century worship of reason. He believed in universal benevolence and man's perfectibility. He believed that if he could show man "things as they are," then man could be reasoned out of his inhumanity to his fellow man and into a better age to come. It is this idea

which pervades the entire novel. On the title page Godwin wrote the following verse: "Amidst the woods the leopard knows his kind; / The tyger preys not on the tyger brood: / Man only is the common foe of man."

In Political Justice Godwin attacked aristocracy, private property, marriage, and religion, and encouraged man toward a future in which government would be unnecessary. This theory of philosophical anarchism was a part of his "religion" of man.

Those few critics who deal with Caleb Williams to any great extent tend to analyze the novel in terms of Godwin's theories in Political Justice. They deal with his style in a cursory manner, pointing out that it tends to be excessively exclamatory, needlessly noble, and, in short, remarkably bad. Nearly all critics praise Godwin's technical mastery of atmosphere and plot, and admire the real suspense, mystery, and adventure of the chase. His interest in psychology is credited for the remarkable way in which he is able to analyze the thoughts and motivations of his characters. As Tompkins indicates, Godwin's interest in psychology seems to stem from an interest in social conditions and the "moral ideas" that go with them, for all of his psychological states are illustrations of different forms of tyranny, slavery, and assertive independence. "Moral right and wrong raises intense feeling in the characters of

the story, even in so unimportant a person as the footman who smuggles tools to Caleb in prison, while the emotions of Caleb, and of Godwin himself, rise not so much from a contemplation of individuals as from an abstract consideration of the relationships between men at large."[42]

That Godwin is interested in the individual mind is a fact that cannot be denied, but this does not make him more a writer of psychology than a writer of social protest. He uses individuals as symbols for the different forces in society. Both Falkland and Tyrell are symbolic of tainted aristocracy. Tyrell is a brute who is able to tyrannize others by virtue of his social class. Falkland is a man about whom it can be said that "all his native humanity and acquired polish is in the end turned to cruelty by the influence of a worship of honour and reputation which make him the 'fool of fame.'"[43] "Godwin believed he was presenting in symbolic terms the relation between government and those who incur the enmity of government."[44] His symbolism is not hidden, however; he emphasizes it quite

[42] J. M. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England, 1740-1800 (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 308.

[43] H. N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), p. 144.

[44] Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1955), p. 105.

clearly for his readers. In one case he speaks of Falkland as a man who "exhibited, upon a contracted scale indeed, but in which the truth of delineation was faithfully sustained, a copy of what monarchs are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state" (p. 204). Godwin even compares Falkland to God. "Did his power reach through all space, and his eye penetrate every concealment?" Caleb muses. "Was he like that mysterious being, to protect us from whose fierce revenge mountains and hills, we are told, might fall on us in vain?" (p. 279). Godwin uses symbolism, but Caleb Williams cannot be classed as a symbolic novel, for its author very realistically emphasizes exactly what his symbols are and what they are meant to represent.

Neither is Caleb Williams a romantic novel, although it does have many romantic elements. There are Gothic terrors, secret trunks, an air of mystery and suspense, and a band of happy highwaymen. But Godwin's vision of utopia was "not a 'return to nature' in accordance with the usual English interpretation of Rousseau's doctrines, for Godwin advocates not innocent ignorance but virtuous wisdom."[45] His peasants are not "noble savages" but less-than-noble men concerned with everyday life and the dictatorship of their masters. Eighteenth-century English roads were frequented by bands of smugglers and highwaymen. Godwin's

[45] Baugh, p. 1114.

highwaymen who, to the modern reader, might be considered "improbable thieves" and much too romantic for a realistic novel, are documented by the historian Lecky: "The English highwaymen were an altogether different class from the savage and half-famished brigands who found a refuge in the forests of Germany and among the mountains of Italy and Spain. They were in general singularly free from ferocity, and a considerable proportion of them were not habitual criminals."[46] Thus the romantic elements of the novel are not as improbable as they might sound, and the Gothic terrors do not go unexplained. Godwin clearly tells us that he is using his plot to illustrate his judgments on the state of society--"things as they are."

Caleb Williams is one of the best examples in literature of the "victim of society" novel, for which Cross provides the formula:

> The scheme on which the revolutionary novel was constructed was that which the propagandist with difficulty avoids--strong and exaggerated contrast, and development on parallel lines. A tyrant or villain was selected from the upper class, who, hedged about by law and custom, wreaks a motiveless hatred on the sensitive and cultured hero, who, though born free, is not born to wealth and a title. The gentleman after a career of crime may or may not come to a disgraceful end. That was optional. The hero, after years of drudgery and abject labor, after perhaps being compelled to play the violin or write poetry to keep from

[46] Lecky, p. 340.

> starving, either is crushed, or by a revolution of fortune gains comparative ease.[47]

Godwin was admittedly didactic in attempting to reform society by portraying man's inhumanity to man, but to call Caleb Williams "exaggerated" or to infer that it is a "propaganda novel" is perhaps going a bit too far in the light of the modern derogatory sense of the term "propaganda." Rather it is a "type of controlled environment for providing concrete application of the moral principles explicated in his theoretical works."[48] The intellectual ability of the author, his handling of technical matters, and his successful psychological analyses should prevent critics from discounting the novel as simply a propaganda piece. Falkland's persecution of Caleb may be atypical and exaggerated, as Wagenknecht claims, though the social historian might not find it so unconvincing. Nevertheless, the essence of his comment is that Godwin has used his fiction to illustrate a real situation. Wagenknecht says, "Godwin's point is that even in the extreme situation that he has conceived, even when the poor man has discovered that the rich man is a murderer, still poverty has no chance against riches in the courts of the land. The mere fact that

[47] Wilbur L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 91.

[48] Pollen, p. 215.

the situation is not typical must clear Godwin of the charge that he was simply a propagandist with no interest in fiction as such."[49]

Godwin was neither symbolist, romanticist, nor propagandist. For anyone with an accurate knowledge of late eighteenth century social institutions, he was a superb realist. Philosophically he made two important mistakes in not admitting evil in human nature and in not realizing that a situation may, nevertheless, have a psychological impact even though reason may convince us that it is unimportant and illogical. But his novel demonstrates both social and individual evil, and his psychological analyses of character are unsurpassed in his age.

"Caleb Williams is a capital story, it is also a living and humane book, which conveys with rare power and reasoned emotion the revolt of a generous mind against the oppressions of feudalism and the stupidities of the criminal law."[50] Godwin set out to show his readers "things as they are." He accomplished exactly what he set out to do, and an appreciation of the patterns of eighteenth century social institutions enables the modern reader to recognize his magnificent accomplishment.

[49] Wagenknecht, p. 103. [50] Brailsford, p. 145.

## CHAPTER IV

## CHARLES DICKENS: *BLEAK HOUSE*

If William Godwin was very much a product of eighteenth-century thought and society, Charles Dickens was as emphatically a product of the nineteenth century. Dickens wrote nearly twenty major works during his lifetime, but the novel *Bleak House*, published in 1853, probably provides his best and most authentic description of English social institutions as they existed at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. Like Godwin, Dickens is concerned in *Bleak House* with the state of English justice; however, the novel is an indictment not only of the English judicial system and chancery, but of all of society's institutions and the immorality which allowed them to exist in such a condition in Victorian society.

Dickens did not need the Gothic horrors of the Romantics to capture his public; he used the actual horrors of mid-Victorian society which he attacked with his own unique mixture of reality, caricature, and symbol. Davis indicates Dickens' literary and social purpose:

> *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, and *Little Dorrit* all have a consuming purpose which follows a similar theme: an attack upon social institutions which interfere with human happiness. Dickens' intent was to make this widespread assault on many levels: from the incapacity of the legal system to the artificialities of caste; from the abuses of economic practice to the stupidities of religion, education, and politics; from the conditions

> which permit nauseous slums to the Victorian attitude which admired pyramiding capitalists and inefficient government. Above all was his growing sense that nothing could be done to make the world better unless the public saw what was wrong and used all its opportunities to better conditions in the future.[1]

The plot which Dickens devised in Bleak House to demonstrate this thesis was incredibly complex yet skillfully developed and unified. More than fifty characters all function in some way to unravel the two basic interlocking plots--the course of the chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce and the mystery behind Lady Dedlock's guilt and remorse. Each of the characters touches either the chancery world of London mud and fog or the dismal rain of the Dedlock mansion at Chesney Wold. Most of the major characters are involved in both worlds. Much of the story is told through the omniscient narrator technique. The remainder of the narrative is given to Esther Summerson, who is later revealed to be Lady Dedlock's illegitimate daughter. Richard Carstone and Ada Clare have an interest in the long-delayed Jarndyce suit being heard by the chancery court, as do John Jarndyce, their cousin and Esther's guardian, who ignores it; Mr. Gridley, whom it has destroyed; Miss Flite, who has been driven mad by it; Mr. Guppy, Tony Jobling, Conversation Kenge, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Vohles, all lawyers or law clerks with a hand in

[1] Earle Davis, The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), p. 198.

trying the suit; Mr. Snagsby, a law stationer; Mr. Krook, brother of the Lord Chancellor and a parody of that worthy gentleman; Mr. Bucket and Neckett, law enforcement officials; and (inanimate but still important) the slum area home of Jo and the brickmakers known as Tom-all-Alone's, which has been tied up in chancery for so long that the buildings are falling into dust. Lady Dedlock is also involved in the chancery suit, and on a paper belonging to her husband's lawyer has recognized the writing of a law copier who was later found dead by Krook and Tulkinghorn. Lady Dedlock, wearing the clothes of her maid, is guided to the dead man's grave by Jo, the ragged crossing-sweeper. Mr. Tulkinghorn learns that the dead man was her lover (and Esther's father) but is shot before he can reveal the facts to her husband, Sir Leicester. Suspicion of the murder falls, among others, on Lady Dedlock, who disappears. Mr. Bucket, however, discovers the true murderer and the true reason for Lady Dedlock's disappearance, and eventually, with Esther's help, finds Lady Dedlock's body before the graveyard where her lover was buried.

As Lady Dedlock's daughter, Ada's companion, and Jarndyce's ward, Esther is of course involved in both plots. She is infected with smallpox which her maid, Charley, has caught from the crossing-sweeper, and although her face is permanently scarred, she is loved and respected by nearly

everyone with whom she comes in contact, including the married couple, Ada and Richard, Caddy Jellyby, the brick-makers, Jo, George Rouncewell, a host of other characters, and especially by Mr. Allen Woodcourt whom she eventually marries after her kindly guardian has released her from a promise to marry him and become mistress of Bleak House.

In the words of J. Hillis Miller, "in the opening paragraphs the novel presents the corpse of a dead society, smothered in fog, immobilized in mud, paralyzed by the injustices of an outmoded social structure frozen in its stratifications, and enmeshed in the nets of inextricably tangled legal procedures. The rest of the novel initiates us into the nature and causes of this general paralysis."[2] The world of chancery is Dickens' symbol of ruin and decay, for chancery has injured or destroyed everyone and everything touched by it.

Charles Dickens was not a stranger to the intricacies of chancery procedure, and he was not unaware of the problems of mid-Victorian society. He knew whereof he spoke. He was a member of the middle class for which, and about which, he wrote. His father had been a clerk in a navy pay office, but had gotten himself into debt and even spent a short time in debtor's prison. At the age of

[2] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 169.

twelve, young Dickens was put to work in a blacking warehouse in order to supplement the family income. Thus he was introduced to poverty early in life. He had little formal education, but he knew and loved many of the literary classics and even taught himself a complicated system of shorthand while serving as a clerk in a London law office. This knowledge enabled him to secure employment as a court-reporter, a parliamentary reporter, and in 1834 as a journalist for the Morning Chronicle. Of Dickens' experiences as a court reporter in Doctor's Commons, Wilson tells us this:

> Here in a court near St. Paul's he was to listen for nearly four years to rambling, involved cases, mainly concerned with ecclesiastical suits pertaining to the Bishop of London's Consistory Court or the Archbishop of Canterbury's Court of Arches, with occasional excursions into marine matters in the Admiralty Court, or wills and testaments in the Prerogative Court. From these years comes the most brilliant, funny and savage picture of the machinery and furniture (inanimate and human) of the British legal system, reaching its height in the masterly Bleak House; but from it comes the sketchiest of outlines of the content of this absurd law or the substance of its cases.[3]

Of his days as a journalist we are told that "then he was learning the by-ways and slums of London; the intricacies of lawyers and the absurdities of their clerks; the full

[3] Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 64.

meaning of 'shabby-genteel'; the ways of land ladies and lodgers; the social pretensions of obscure men; the use of money; the sins of poverty; the value of ugliness; the love of death."[4]

As his writing became more successful he resigned from the Morning Chronicle and accepted a position as the editor of Bentley's Miscellany. During his lifetime he also edited two other periodicals, Household Words and All the Year Round, both of which are important to a study of Dickens because in them he published his views concerning social problems which coincide, for the most part, with what he says in the novels.[5]

An amazingly active man, Dickens also participated in numerous charitable activities and committees. He criticized his society; he wanted to see it improved, and he was willing to contribute to activities which he felt would achieve that goal. But he advocated working within the system toward an increase of human kindness and benevolence. He was by no means a revolutionary.

As a matter of fact, there were very few revolutionaries in mid-Victorian England. It was an age of industrial productivity and trade, both of which stimulated the expansion of the British Empire and gave England great economic

[4] Humphrey House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 20.

[5] Wilson, p. 220.

power in the world. As Thomson points out, "the generation of Englishmen between 1815 and 1850 suffered from the combined aftermath of two great social and political revolutions, the American and French; of two great social and economic upheavals, the agrarian and the industrial revolutions; of two great foreign wars, the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815)."[6] They had had enough of violent revolution and now were eager to proceed with the progress and prosperity of the new industrial growth. There was an enlarging middle class, a movement of growing urbanization, and a rapidly increasing population. Enclosure was nearly complete by the middle of the century, and agriculture was becoming more efficient. Railroads and the postal system were beginning, and roads were being improved. The corruptions and nepotism of the eighteenth century were gradually being lessened. The Reform Bill of 1832 had enfranchised most of the middle class. Some electoral reforms were being accomplished, poor laws were being improved, landowner's tithes had been reduced, and a municipal act had further extended voting privileges.

Nevertheless, all was not well with mid-Victorian society. Workers, especially women and children, were being exploited by the new industrialists. Poor farmers

[6] David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century: 1815-1914 in The Pelican History of England, 8 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1950), 33.

were being forced to seek employment in urban industrial areas where the poor were crowded together without decent housing or sanitation. The cities and the poor were still under-represented in Parliament, even with new franchise laws, because population shifts had made the electoral system obsolete. Landowners were still in the ascendancy and property was still more represented in Parliament than people. Although there had been no major war since Waterloo, there were constant small wars and political crises. Fear of civil disorder was occasioned by the Chartists, working men who sometimes rioted in order to draw attention to their demands for manhood suffrage, vote by secret ballot, abolition of property qualifications for members of Parliament, equal electoral districts, and annual Parliaments. The riots were quelled, and the demands rejected, but there was still fear for life and property. The 1840's, a period of crop failures and famine in Ireland, became known as the "hungry forties." The people demanded repeal of the hated corn laws which protected British agriculture and prohibited the import of grain without high duties. As a result of the fear of famine and the fear of collapse of the English agricultural system, the corn laws were repealed in 1846, and the question of free trade versus protection was settled at last.

The mid-nineteenth century was an age of radical changes in thought, behavior, moral and intellectual

customs, politics and diplomacy, "an age of transition from aristocracy to democracy, from authority to mass judgment."[7] "The outstanding fact in the Early Victorian Age was that the machinery of life designed to control an aristocratic, agricultural, and mercantile society could not control the society that industrial capitalism had imposed on the older system."[8]

Dickens was as well aware of the problems as were the majority of the Victorians and much more able to reach the growing middle classes with his ideas than most intellectuals of the day. He showed them the problems and sufferings of the down-trodden and oppressed. He drew out their sympathy with stories of "workhouses, debtor's prisons, pawnbrokers' shops, hovels of the poor, low haunts, and lurking-places of vice, crime, and pain."[9] But he offered no detailed concrete solutions to the problems. He was neither a philosopher nor a political scientist. He did what he could, and no one could have done his particular job better. Cross discusses Dickens' timeliness:

[7] G. M. Trevelyan, "The Nineteenth Century" in Illustrated English Social History (London: Longmans Green, 1942), IV, 59.

[8] House, p. 182.

[9] Wilbur L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), p. 183.

> He did not believe it possible for the lower and criminal classes to raise themselves by the elective franchise to a higher moral and intellectual plane. To him Parliament was the dreariest place in the world, and he kept out of it. He sought to arouse the conscience of the British public, and he left the issue with themselves. He accordingly attended, often acting as chairman, meetings of philanthropic societies, where governmental abuses and the condition of criminals and the poor were to be canvassed, visited jails and prisons, holding long conversations with the keepers, and went on addressing the ever increasing audience of his novels. Through him spoke the heart and conscience of Britain, which had found no responsive voice in Scott.[10]

That Dickens wrote to awaken his fellow-citizens to the evils of their social institutions is an oft-repeated factor in literary history. That the evils existed in much the same light as he pictured them is not a frequently emphasized point. What was the state of Victorian society in the year of the Great Exhibition of Progress when the idea for Bleak House was forming in his mind? A look at the four major social institutions as they existed in 1851 might serve to explain just why Dickens reacted as he did to the problems of his society.

His comments concerning the Victorian family are never very explicit, but he is concerned with the different styles of family life within the upper, middle, and lower classes. He reflects details of their housing, health, diet, morals, and the way in which their children are socialized and educated. The Dedlocks of Chesney Wold

[10] Cross, p. 183.

represent the old aristocratic family, while the Bleak House family is typical of the middle class, and the brick-makers and Jo represent lower class family life. We find from historical studies that country life of aristocratic families such as the Dedlocks went on much as it had in the eighteenth century. There was little change in activity or in the power which the aristocrats possessed and used. Bleak House represents the ideal middle-class household. Housekeeping chores were inclined to be well-organized, orderly, systematic, but not regimented. The Protestant ethic prevailed in that the Victorian family indocrinated its children with the ideals of cleanliness, self-discipline, duty, service, and thrift. At all social levels, the average Victorian family was large. "A family of eight or ten children, or perhaps even more, was by no means a phenomenon. . . ."[11] Possessions were many, and the Victorians had a fondness for clutter that would have made housecleaning an impossibility if it were not for the fact that homes, except those of the poor, were quite large. The middle classes lived in overbuilt houses; and "many thousands of domestic servants, mainly women, were available for employment in their homes at inexpensive wages."[12]

[11] Nicholas Bentley, The Victorian Scene: A Picture Book of the Period 1837-1901 (London: Georg Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968), p. 60.

[12] George Clark, English History: A Survey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 445.

"Ninety per cent of the actual producers of wealth had no home they could call their own beyond the end of the week. . . ."[13] Their houses were over-crowded and built back-to-back without proper ventilation or sanitation. Because of the window tax, which was not repealed until 1851, most Victorian houses, even those of the wealthier classes, were built without proper ventilation. Bentley points out that drainage was always a problem also:

> That there was any connection between health and ventilation was not a matter likely to trouble the conscience of a speculative Victorian builder. Nor were government or local authorities unduly concerned about the effects of sanitation on public health. For the greater part of the Queen's reign water supplies were inadequate and often liable to contamination, and arrangements for cleaning the streets were of the most primitive kind. It is not surprising that illnesses and epidemics were frequent. In 1848 cholera appeared in London for the second time since the turn of the century. Yet the government was reluctant, and remained so until 1855, to enforce comprehensive measures for the improvement of city sanitation.[14]

The death rate in England had decreased rapidly from 1780 to 1810; but the decrease stopped between 1810 and 1850, in spite of improved medical methods, because of the growth in population of the urban slums and the fact that,

[13] Frederick C. Dietz, A Political and Social History of England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 583.

until 1848 and the first public health bill, the government had no control of building or sanitation or ventilation or drainage. The very poorest classes lived in unbelievably horrible urban slums. Bentley quotes a nineteenth-century description of a typical slum housing area:

> It is one great maze of narrow crooked paths crossing and intersecting in labyrinthine convolutions, as if the houses had been originally one great block of stone eaten by slugs into innumerable small chambers and connecting passages. There is no privacy here for any of the over-crowded population; every apartment in the place is accessible from every other by a dozen different approaches. Only at night, when they are asleep--and not always at night--can their redundant numbers find room; for so long as they are lively enough to turn and be aware that anything presses them, there is squeezing and jostling, and grumbling and cursing. Hence whoever ventures here finds the streets (by courtesy so called) thronged with loiterers . . . the stagnant gutters in the middle of the lanes . . . piles of garbage . . . pools accumulated in the hollows of the disjointed pavement . . . filth choking up the dark passages which open like rat-holes upon the highway. . . . It is a land of utter idleness.[15]

Family life as we know it was virtually impossible for the poor of Dickens' day. Their diet was as unappealing as their living conditions. "Bread was the staple of the working class diet, but some could only afford stale bread, which was sold for as little as a penny or sometimes even a halfpenny for a four-pound loaf. If there were a few pennies to spare they might be spent at a soup-house where

[15] Bentley, p. 64, quoting from London, a six-volume description of London life published by Charles Knight between 1841 and 1844.

for a twopence or threepence you could buy 'a basin of prime soup, potatoes, and a slice of bread'."[16] Middle and upper class meals were rich and heavy in meat and game.

By mid-century the family was beginning to lose its monopoly on primary education. However, education was still tied to religion and not state-supported to any great extent, except where the state could make grants to private voluntary societies which ran non-denominational schools. It was not necessarily assumed that education was a good thing. Too much education might make people restless, teach them to dislike the work which their social class called for, and enable them to read seditious and unchristian books. Secondary education was still for wealthy families who could afford to send their children to private schools, which were for the most part very ineffective. Dissenters maintained schools for the middle classes which were less classical and provided a better education. Under the influence of Thomas Arnold, the (really private) Public Schools were reformed and made available to the middle classes as well as to the landed gentry. This association of classes proved a very beneficial leveling step in the history of English education.[17] "The idea of educating girls, except in deportment and the domestic arts, was still thought of as a suspicious eccentricity."[18]

[16] Bentley, p. 102. [17] Trevelyan, pp. 55-58.

[18] Bentley, p. 149.

Esther's virtues of household order, thrift, and purposeful activity were typical of those of the proper Victorian female, and they were all that was required. "In the middle years of the century the secondary education of girls was very ill provided for. They were sacrificed to pay for the expensive education of their brothers. In that and in other matters concerning women, the great emancipation and improvement was postponed until the last thirty years of Victoria's reign--the real period of the emancipation of women in England."[19] Within the middle-class family circle, and especially among middle-class women, a sympathy for the unfortunate was encouraged. They were expected to perform charitable works.

Although Bleak House has little to say specifically about the institution of the family, generally it says a great deal. Esther's narrative is about parents and children and their relationships. Many of the characters with which Esther comes into contact are grotesque parodies of family life. Esther herself is an illegitimate child searching for her true parents. The family life provided her by her guardian was the most "typical" of any in the novel. Most modern readers find her somewhat insipid, especially when she says such things as "Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!" and gives her "little basket of

[19] Trevelyan, p. 58.

housekeeping keys such a shake that they sounded like little bells,"[20] but she was the epitome of the middle-class Victorian housewife, possessing all the virtues approved by the society of her day and for her social class. Esther has a great sympathy with children, especially the abandoned and unloved children who people the novel--children such as Caddy Jellyby, the daughter of a totally ineffective father and a mother with a "mission"; the Pardiggle children, dour little beings whose mother forces them to attend matins in the cold and give all of their allowance to charity; Prince Turverydrop, who is a slave to the dictatorship of his father's "Deportment"; Harold Skimpole, "that elderly young gentleman" (p. 821) whose claim to childlike innocence "is only a-crying off from being held accountable" (p. 822); Richard and Ada, whose only parents are Chancery; and Jo the crossing-sweeper, whose "favourite declaration" is "'I never done nothink yit, but wot you knows on, to get myself into no trouble. I never was in no other trouble at all, sir--'cept not knowing nothink and starwation'" (p. 686). Bleak House is filled with horrible examples of family life. Even among the aristocrats, family life is neither happy nor satisfying to its members. The Dedlock relatives are forced by social class values to be nothing

[20] Charles Dickens, Bleak House ed. Edgar Johnson, The Laurel Dickens (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1965), p. 606. Future references to the Laurel Edition of Bleak House (1853) will be given in parentheses in the text.

more than Sir Leicester's handymen--parasites which he is no longer powerful enough to place in the government. Lady Dedlock exists in an uncomfortable state of fashionable boredom. "Having denied the forces of love and life, she can find no sound basis for rebellion. Mingled with the false guilt imposed by a conventional code of ethics is the real guilt of her submission to its standards, her hidden cowardice, her failure to be faithful to her lover and child. The fictitious conception of honor dictated by the morality of society has involved her in a tragic emotional dilemma, of which her very name, Honoria Dedlock, is symbolic."[21] Because of their economic insecurity and disgraceful housing conditions, any sort of satisfactory family life is totally impossible for the poor, and this, of course, is exactly the point Dickens is making. Bleak House cannot describe family life among the lower classes because they have none. Jenny the brickmaker's wife can produce a child, but the care which she can give it amounts to nothing more than its burial, and Jo "knows nothink" because he has no family to be concerned with his socialization and education. Caddy Jellyby can not even interest her mother in her wedding. Mrs. Jellyby neglects her family and turns her eyes to Africa or, when Africa fails, to female emancipation.

[21] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (Boston: Little, Brown, 1952), II, 766.

"In no other novel does Dickens make so much play with female emancipation and female management, and perhaps in no other novel could he have used these themes so satisfactorily. Every reader of Bleak House can see in what directions the energy of these women might more properly have been turned; but the contemporary reader would have recognized their living prototypes."[22]

In Bleak House Dickens describes family life or the lack of it in all levels of society; the closest he ever comes to what sociologists consider the "modal" family is his picture of the second Bleak House, the home of Esther, her husband, and children which is modeled upon Mr. Jarndyce's Bleak House but lacks the pall of chancery. He voices his objection to the female emancipation movements of the day and stresses the importance for women of the homely virtues. Any concern with education is strictly subsidiary to his more important concern with decent family housing. To help the poor, Dickens advocates slum clearance for decent housing and then education, in that order. Wilson emphasizes the necessary sequence:

> To these all other concerns--prison reform, women's rights, foreign missions--must be subordinated. Without these two the shameful blot on England would remain; without them there could be no proper hope for civil order; without them there was always

[22] John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, 1958), p. 194.

> the infection of crime and of disease to make nonsense of the domestic happiness of the better off, of the bourgeois wedding bells that gave happy endings to his own novels; without them the Sermon on the Mount was gibberish to the vast, illiterate masses like Jo and a hypocrisy for all the "decent" folk above him, who professed to follow it.[23]

In economics, the greatest problem of the day was the condition of the poor. As we have seen, poverty was also one of Dickens' major concerns in Bleak House, as well as in several other novels. The agricultural and industrial revolutions had brought immense prosperity to England, but they had also brought immense misery. "In 1841 one Englishman in eleven was a pauper," and "nearly one-tenth of the nation was unemployed."[24] The period from 1839 to 1850 had been a period of revolt of the proletariat, against intolerable conditions, under the banner of Chartism. Although the Chartist demands were mostly for electoral reforms, it was basically a protest movement against intolerable social conditions. Its members were hoping to improve their condition through greater Parliamentary representation. Although the movement failed, it did succeed in awaking the middle classes to the problems of the laboring class. The Anti-Corn Law League was better organized than the Chartist movement. Supported by

[23] Wilson, p. 226.

[24] R. J. Evans, The Victorian Age: 1815-1914, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1968), p. 72.

manufacturers and industrial workers, it was able to force the repeal of the high duty on imported grains, thus encouraging free trade, to the benefit of industry, and enabling England to feed her burgeoning population. "The fear of over-population and the consequent struggle for survival troubled even those minds who cared little for the minutiae of economics."[25] According to the Malthusian theory, population increased more rapidly than the means of subsistence and could only be controlled by the checks of war, famine, and disease, or by the self-restraint of the poor who were guilty of giving birth to greater numbers of children than they were able to support.

Benthamism, the prevailing economic theory of the time, was based on the ideas of Malthus, Adam Smith, and David Ricardo. Benthamism encouraged the idea of "the less law, the more liberty."

> The movement began by adopting completely the laissez-faire, individualistic doctrines of Adam Smith (1723-90) in economics, and a far-reaching programme of legal simplification and codification which in time transformed the whole system of English common law and judicial procedure. Although identified at first with opposition to all State interference in economic and social life and a distrust of all positive efforts of governments to do good to their subjects, it was transformed by the force of circumstances and by the inherent implications of its central social

[25] Raymond Chapman, The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society 1832-1901 (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 17.

> doctrine--"the greatest happiness of the greatest number"--into a philosophy of legislative reform, social-service organization, and even a variety of Socialism.[26]

It was this transformation process from laissez-faire to social reform with which Dickens was dealing in Bleak House and which, it is said, the novel helped bring about. But Dickens did not encourage socialism. Like most others, his attempt to help the poor was more in order to support the capitalistic system. While Dickens was incubating Bleak House, "people's minds were then focused upon the facts and problems of poverty as they had not been before, and scarcely have been again since 1850."[27]

Manufacturers and industrialists had attacked the corn laws; now the protectionist squires mobilized an attack on the evils of factory labor. "The split in the ranks of the well-to-do gave the wage-earner a hole through which to thrust his head, and make his case heard. And behind these class recriminations lay the genuine humanitarianism of the age, focused by the Evangelicals, but not confined to any religious sect or party."[28]

Sympathy of humanitarians for social reform was encouraged by contemporary reports on slum conditions. A preacher, speaking of his poor London parish gave the following statistics:

[26] Thomson, p. 30. [27] House, p. 62.

[28] Trevelyan, p. 81.

> It contains 1,400 houses, inhabited by 2,795 families, or about 12,000 persons. The space upon which this large population dwells is less than 400 yards (1,200 feet) square, and in this overcrowding it is nothing unusual to find a man, his wife, four or five children, and sometimes both grandparents, all in one single room, where they eat, sleep, and work. I believe that before the Bishop of London called attention to this most poverty-stricken parish, people at the West End knew as little of it as the savages of Australia or the South Sea Isles. And if we make ourselves acquainted with these unfortunates, through personal observation, if we watch them at their scanty meal and see them bowed by illness and want of work, we shall find such a mass of helplessness and misery, that a nation like ours must blush that these things can be possible. I was rector near Hudderfield during the three years in which the mills were at their worst, but I have never seen such complete helplessness of the poor as since then in Bethnal Green. Not one father of a family in ten in the whole neighbourhood has other clothing than his working suit, and that is as bad and tattered as possible; many indeed have no other covering for the night than these rags and no bed save a sack of straw and shavings.[29]

The reports of Engels about the working class in England were corroborated by Chadwick's report of the Royal Commission of 1845 on the Health of Towns,[30] and help us understand the realism of Dickens' scenes. Jo, the crossing-sweeper of Bleak House, is "Dickens' greatest blow at social inhumanity, perhaps the greatest blow against social wickedness that any novelist has ever struck.[31] Neither Jo's working conditions nor his occupation is the least bit unrealistic.

[29] Friedrich Engels, "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844," in Robert Langbaum, ed., The Victorian Age: Essays in History and in Social and Literary Criticism (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1967), p. 64.

[30] Evans, p. 73. [31] Wilson, p. 229.

> In London and other large cities there was a huge force of itinerant workers who scratched a bare living from the streets as hawkers, traders, porters, lightermen, cabbies and entertainers, or by doing whatever the season or the locality had to offer. In this last category come the innumerable dung-collectors, rubbish-carters, crossing-sweepers, rat-catchers, chimney-sweeps, ballast men and mudlarks--those who fished in the slime of the Thames foreshore for anything that might fetch the price of a night's lodging. A good many who were reduced to this kind of employment had no homes and slept in doss houses, when they could afford to; for not every day yielded the twopence or threepence a night that was charged for a lice-ridden shakedown in one of these establishments.[32]

Factory Acts did not prevent the exploitation of cheap labor, and workhouses were no real solution for the poor. They were scandalously administered and the philosophy behind the poor laws was to make the workhouse so unattractive that the poor would rather do almost any kind of work under almost any kind of conditions than to be supported by the poor rates. Thus the workhouses were worse than the most abject poverty outside of the workhouse. The one redeeming factor of the poor laws that set up such workhouses was that they served to instigate a centralized control which later in the century was able to mobilize itself to give some real aid to England's poor.

Dickens' primary concern, in Bleak House, with the institution of economics was with the social stratification which created such unbelievably bad conditions for the

[32] Bentley, pp. 212, 216.

lower classes. As House tells us, "Dickens had probably read little or nothing of the economists themselves: he had certainly made no serious attempt to understand their theories. But in various forms, according to intelligence and circumstances, the leading ideas of laissez-faire and the Malthusian principle of population were current everywhere. . . ."[33] As previously demonstrated, these ideas were in part responsible for the lack of laws concerning sanitation, ventilation, drainage, and building. They helped those at the top of the class structure defend their own vested interests and continue to exploit the working classes, whose working conditions were even worse than their living conditions. The Report of the Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Mines (1842), "a landmark in social history," had described conditions so terrible "that public opinion, the horrified anger of ordinary decent men and women, rose high enough to overcome all the solemn objections of the laissez-faire theorists, the employers, and the Government, and to sweep away the whole monstrous evil at one stroke."[34] In Bleak House Dickens blames both the class structure and the government controlled by the upper classes for allowing such economic exploitation in the first place. The novel's description of class stratification accurately reflects the system which

[33] House, p. 73. [34] Evans, p. 73.

prevailed at mid-century. It neglects no class in its cast of characters. "The wide range of Dickens's survey enabled him to imply much about the transformation that was occurring in the class system. This comes to a focus in the interview between Sir Leicester, the ultra-conservative exponent of the landowning aristocracy, with the feudal sense of privilege and its rigid ideal of family honor, and the newly rich industrialist, Rouncewell. Proof of Dickens's maturity is that he represents both of them sympathetically while yet showing that their principles are irreconcilable."[35] Sir Leicester dutifully cares for his relatives, forgives his wife, and bears his infirmities with dignity. "But, for all his private virtues, he has no hesitation about trying to bully or buy a victory in Parliamentary elections, although he bitterly resents the corrupt opposition to his own purposes that makes this expensive course necessary."[36] Sir Leicester and the ironmaster do not really communicate. Both are rich and powerful, but neither can at all understand the other's reasoning--the barrier of inherited wealth and title stands between them. Chancery Wold is rotting in the rain, but Rouncewell's iron country and England's newly developing

[35] Lionel Stevenson, The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 299.

[36] Johnson, p. 774.

railroads are no improvement on the ancestral mansion. The railroads are scarring the countryside with "fragments of embankments," "rusty carts and barrows," and "tripods of tall poles" (p. 791), and the iron country is an area of "coalpits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke. . ." (p. 893). Bleak House seems to indicate, as Edgar Johnson points out, the prediction that "all that the rising power of the industrialists really means is that they too will force their way into the coalition of exploitation formed by their predecessors, the landed aristocracy, the lawyers and politicians, the merchants and the bankers."[37]

The diversity of the social structure in Bleak House enables Dickens to demonstrate that disease and pestilence are everywhere, in high places as well as low places. "In this society of shocking extremes the highest and the lowest are inextricably linked to each other."[38] The typical urban slum which Dickens calls Tom-all-Alone's breeds the pestilence which affects every order of society. "There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, no one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its

[37] Johnson, p. 775. [38] Johnson, p. 781.

retribution through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with the tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge" (p. 672). Contemporary official reports all corroborate the pictures Dickens gives his readers of the brickmakers of St. Albans and the slums of Tom-all-Alone's, but they were slower to point out that the horror was everybody's responsibility because everybody was affected by it. "Perhaps Dickens's greatest achievement in this vast social network is that he never allows the reader to forget that, however wide the tapestry, it is a vertical web with the Lord Chancellor on his woolsack and Sir Leicester Dedlock in his country mansion at the top of a heavy structure all borne in misery at the bottom on the bony, filthy shoulders of Jo, the road-sweeping boy in his rags and fever and ignorance."[39] Slums, workhouses, decaying cemeteries, and creatures in rags do not contribute to a healthy society, do not make for the "greatest happiness for the greatest number," and should not be "let alone" no matter what economic theory might dictate.

Dickens also has a great deal to say in Bleak House about the institution of government. He objects to the aristocratic control of Parliament, and the "do-nothing" tendency of its members. The question of legal reform,

[39] Wilson, p. 231.

especially chancery reform, carries the burden of the plot for the major portion of the novel. The English governmental system found itself a victim of cultural lag; laws and functions which were workable in an earlier feudal, agricultural economy had not kept pace with the tempo of the agricultural and industrial revolutions and the accompanying rise of the middle class.

Some improvements had been made: there was a newly formed police system, and penal codes had undergone some reform. These things were financed by a tax on all who paid the poor rates, thus officially linking crime and poverty as interconnected social problems. The Reform Bill of 1832 had helped to transform England from "an agricultural nation ruled by squires, parsons, and wealthy landowners into an industrial nation dominated by the classes produced by industrial expansion and commercial enterprise."[40] In addition to the Reform Bill there was a whole series of political and constitutional reforms, each one being, in effect, an "attack on the legal privileges of the landed interest which the shift of wealth, power, and population to the towns and factories and ports had already rendered out of date and anomalous."[41] Nevertheless political parties were still led by the gentry and aristocracy, and parliament had only a very few spokesmen of the

[40] Thomson, pp. 73-74. [41] Thomson, p. 58.

rising commercial and industrial interests. Dickens' Sir Leicester is only slightly behind times in his outrage at an ironmaster being suggested as a member of Parliament. By mid-century such a thing was unlikely, but it was possible. Electoral reform had ended the gross over-representation of the rural and agricultural interests, but, while the new urban middle class had acquired a more just share of power in the government, representation was still based on property rather than people.

By mid-century the government had finally accepted the responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. Now the practical work of carrying it out lay ahead. But government found it difficult to act. It seemed stuck in the mud of party politics. Most governments, liberal or conservative, Whig, Tory, or Peelite, were pretty much the same, but still things did not function as Dickens, or the historian Woodward, thought they should. Here is Woodward's comment on the period.

> A long period of confusion and instability followed the break-up of the conservative party. From the beginning of the year 1846 until the passing of the reform bill of 1867 there were nine administrations; between 1846 and 1852, from 1858 to 1859, and from 1866 to 1868 no ministry had a stable majority. In 1852 Russell was beaten by eleven votes, and Derby by nineteen. . . . Party discipline was still very loose; it was impossible, after a general election, to know the exact state of parties until the first division had been taken in a new parliament. In 1852 the estimate of conservative strength varied between 320 and 290. Gladstone put the strength of the coalition

> government at the beginning of 1853 at about 310, liable on occasions, which frequently arise, to heavy deductions; the government was defeated three times in one week even before the budget. The very names of the parties were unstable for a time. The terms "conservative-liberal" and "liberal-conservative" came into use, though Russell thought Whiggism a simpler term than "conservative progress," and the protectionists were inclined to give up the name "conservative party" owing to the "odious associations" with Peel. Lord John Manners spoke of his dislike of "wearing dirty men's dirty linen." Leaders of parties were as undecided in their allegiance as their followers. Palmerston was offered a place in Derby's administration of 1852; a few months later he served with Aberdeen in the coalition, although the two men had quarrelled over foreign policy. Russell was reconciled with Palmerston after no less bitter personal opposition. Disraeli, after attacking Peel for giving up protection, led the way in accepting free trade as an accomplished fact. Gladstone, who distrusted Palmerston almost as much as he distrusted Disraeli, joined Palmerston's administration in 1859 after voting against the motion which overthrew Derby's government.[42]

Is it any wonder that Dickens says "England has been in a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no Government" (p. 606). Woodward's account is pure history, but it is difficult to determine which of the two is, to the modern mind, the more comic.

The reform of the court of chancery was a frequent topic of conversation in England during this period, and,

[42] E. L. Woodward, The Age of Reform: 1815-1870 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 154-155.

although the Chancery Procedure Acts of 1852 did solve some of the problems against which Bleak House protests, the reforms were prolonged by the same sort of delays, corruption, and confusion of government which Dickens satirizes. Wilson describes the situation:

> Chancery was outdated, ramshackle, complacent and parasitical in the number of legal functionaries of all levels living upon the delays, obscurities and costs of litigation; by a slow and cruel process it destroyed the souls and bodies of those who became involved (often through no more active intent than by being named as beneficiaries in contested wills) in its machinery. Exactly such was the state of England's government, as Dickens saw it, with two interchangeable political parties contesting for office, neither concerned with anything but the avoidance of seeing the evils they chose not to reform.[43]

As Evans so succinctly puts it, "in these matters the Government gave no lead."[44] The Parliamentary systems failed to function; and Dickens, in his impatience with the democratic system sought to point out to his readers not only the evils of the system, but the evils of a government which encouraged such human misery by ignoring it. To demonstrate this position, he chose to satirize the workings, or non-workings, of the English court of chancery whose Lord High Chancellor sits "at the very heart of the fog" (p. 36) with the other court functionaries

> mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horse-hair

[43] Wilson, p. 231. [44] Evans, p. 72.

> worded heads against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be--as are they not?--ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it), between the registrar's red table and the silk gown, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, master's reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them.
>
> (p. 36)

Dickens' selection of chancery as a peg upon which to hang his social criticism was intended to shock his readers into understanding. "Englishmen were willing to admit that their political parties and their charitable institutions and even their business economy were vulnerable to criticism; but the traditional superiority of English justice was sacrosanct. Yet Dickens aimed his full barrage at the Court of Chancery, a cornerstone of English law. His smattering of legal training enabled him to cite specific examples of the court's incompetence and to sketch the whole inhuman mechanism with deadly precision."[45]

Dickens' "smattering of legal training" obtained as a law clerk and Parliamentary reporter was, though often maligned, apparently adequate for his purpose. Sir William Holdsworth, author of a monumental History of English Law (1923-38), "asserts that his pictures of the law and lawyers

[45] Stevenson, p. 300.

are 'a very valuable addition to our authorities', since they give us information which we can get nowhere else and 'were painted by a man with extraordinary powers of observation, who had first-hand knowledge.' Dickens's novels provide, indeed 'a source of information which, in its range and lifelike character, is superior to that possessed by the historian of any other period'."[46] Indeed Dickens did have authentic parallels for the cases presented in Bleak House. "Gridley's case is known to have been based upon an actual case in Staffordshire."[47] "The Day case, nowhere near settled at the time Dickens wrote, dated from 1834, had always involved seventeen lawyers and sometimes thirty or forty, and had already incurred costs of £70,000."[48] The Jennings case, upon which Jarndyce and Jarndyce is thought to be based, started in 1789 and "involved 1,500,000 pounds and was still unsettled fifty years later. In fact, it carried on into the twentieth century."[49]

> Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, the long-lasting Chancery case in which so many of the characters are involved, is paralleled by the coming in and going out of the governments of Boodle and Coodle (the system of aristocratic party government which is controlled and faithfully believed in by Sir Leicester Dedlock, the obstinate, out-dated squire of Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire). From these two strands which are

[46] Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime (London: Macmillan and Co., 1962), p. 175, quoting Holdsworth.

[47] Butt and Tillotson, p. 184.

[48] Johnson, p. 771. [49] Davis, p. 199.

> interlocked because Lady Dedlock is one of the claimants in Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, is formed a great web of characters covering every class (and, it almost seems, every profession) of English life.[50]

The reaction of these characters to the machinations of chancery provide Dickens with a major portion of his plot in Bleak House. John Jarndyce carefully ignores chancery in order to keep his life on an even keel; Richard and Ada depend on it and risk catastrophe; Gridley is ruined by it; Miss Flite has been driven mad by it; Jo dies as a result of living in slums tied up in chancery; and a host of lawyers and law clerks live off of its proceeds. And chancery must continue as it is because of all the many people such as Vohles who would starve if it were to be reformed.

All the while, the government, like chancery, refuses to move on. As Dickens says of Jo, the crossing-sweeper, "It is nothing to you or to any one else that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some years, in this business, to set you the example of moving on" (pp. 303-304). Mr. Krook, who with his junk shop is the symbol of chancery, is consumed by spontaneous combustion, the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is consumed in costs, and, Dickens is saying, society also will be consumed by its

[50] Wilson, p. 231.

own self-satisfaction and the inertia which results from it. Society, like Tom-all-Alone's, will crumble to dust.

> Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by low church, or by no church: whether he shall be set to splitting trusses of polemical straws with the crooked knife of his mind, or whether he shall be put to stone-breaking instead. In the midst of which dust and noise, there is but one thing perfectly clear, to wit, that Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. And in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition head foremost in his old determined spirit.
>
> (p. 672)

As we have seen, Dickens had little respect for law and lawyers; he also describes clergymen in something less than a complimentary manner. His "good" characters are kind and benevolent, but they are rarely connected with any sect. Dickens seems to have preferred the middle way of the three main religious movements of his day. Known by various names, these three movements are most easily compared if one considers them as High Church, Broad Church, and Low Church:

(1) The High Church movement is also known as the Oxford Movement, the Tractarians, or the Puseyites. It emphasized the Catholic background of the Church of England and advocated a return to the ritual, pageantry, dignity, and beauty of the medieval church. The movement later

split when Newman and his followers joined the Roman Catholic Church. Those staying within the Church of England were then known as Anglo-Catholics.

(2) The Broad Church movement is frequently referred to as modernist or Latitudinarian. Its followers favored economic security, tolerance, and social justice for all. They felt that a strict acceptance of orthodox doctrines was less important than an attempt to solve everyday problems in a Christian manner.

(3) The Low Church Movement was evangelical, humanitarian, and severely Puritanical. It sympathized with non-conformists and methodists and favored the working classes; it advocated a strict fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.[51]

With the exception of Newman's group of Roman Catholics, members of all of these three movements were able to stay within the established church because of certain reforms which the church had made. Evangelical clergy had been an integral part of the established church since the beginning of Victoria's reign. Through their effort, and with the utilitarian emphasis, many ecclesiastical privileges of the previous century were eliminated and the gap

[51] John D. Cooke and Lionel Stevenson, English Literature of the Victorian Period (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), pp. 61-65. The three divisions are those made by Cooke and Stevenson.

between rich and poor clergy was narrowed. Those within the church who had feared for its existence now began a religious revival of sorts. "Plurality was restricted by law, members of chapters were forbidden to hold more than one benefice or to belong to more than one chapter. The Cathedral clergy were reduced in numbers and in wealth. By such measures one hundred and thirty thousand pounds a year were saved and were applied to raise the stipends of the poorer parsons and curates. The diocesan boundaries were altered, and the Bishoprics of Manchester and Ripon were created to cope with the new industrial population of the north. The great inequalities in episcopal revenues were remedied, and scandalously large incomes cut down."[52] New churches were built in areas formerly non-conformist. The tithe system was overhauled and eased; and a marriage not performed by a Church of England parson now became legal for the first time since 1753.

"Nevertheless, political and social divisions remained very largely religious."[53] The typical Victorian was evangelical, protestant, and individualistic. The evangelical influence was more fashionable and widespread than it had been at the time when English gentry were criticizing the "enthusiasm" of the eighteenth-century Methodists. The rising middle class brought their evangelical ways up with

[52] Trevelyan, p. 49. [53] Trevelyan, p. 51.

them and were soon powerful enough to enforce the ideas of piety, decorum, sobriety, morality, self-restraint, strict Sunday observance, and attention to religious duties. Houghton reports on the state of religion:

> The apparent conformity of reticence was complemented by the actual conformity of profession. More and more as the years passed the Victorian churches were filled by men who did not believe the prayers they said or the creeds they repeated. Many of them, no doubt, were actuated by worldly motives, but some at least found justification in the same "good" reasons that were used in defense of reticence, though the pinch of insincerity was naturally sharper when overt profession was made. They could feel . . . that a church was so vital for social and family stability that their attendance and support was something like a duty--though to many an unpleasant duty, involving, as it did, a consciousness of duplicity.[54]

Many benevolent Victorians were strongly influenced by the worst of Malthus and laissez-faire, and Dickens, in his Latitudinarian manner, objected to the social ramifications of these notions when they were combined with the stricter aspects of evangelical religion:

> Malthus hung over England like a cloud. It is difficult now to realize what it meant to thousands of good and sensible men that they believed his principle of population to be exactly true--believed that as poverty was relieved and the standard of life raised, so surely there would be bred a new race hovering on the misery line, on the edge of starvation. However they might wish it false, they feared it true: they gladly caught for temporary relief at Carlyle's scorn of such a notion; but when the shouting died and the effect of loud words wore off, the ghastly ratios crept back again to haunt them, attended by the ghastlier checks--vice and misery. The only ray

[54] Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 401.

> of hope was in the third check--moral or prudential restraint. Let the poor live hard lives, sober, celibate, and unamused; let them eat the plainest food, pinch to save, and save to lower the rates--then "civilization" might win through. And how aptly it fitted the gloomier Christian virtues![55]

Concerning the institution of religion as it is presented in Bleak House, Dickens shows himself to be among those critics who felt that the typical Victorian brand of morality tended to encourage injustice and neglect of social welfare. His characters range from low church to high church, but most, except Mr. Jarndyce and Esther, seem to possess the characteristics of evangelicalism and be lacking in the actual Christian virtues. As J. Hillis Miller puts the situation, "God had withdrawn himself from the world of Bleak House. He apparently does not exist immanently within things as an ubiquitous Providence ordering all events for good in mysterious ways. He does not exist in many events at all. He has left the human world and the objective world to human beings. It is their responsibility."[56]

Human beings, again with a few exceptions, are doing a rather poor job of accepting and carrying out their responsibilities. Mrs. Barbary and Mrs. Chadband are religious women whose strict Puritanical ideas of virtue have caused them to reject Esther and to curse her with the

[55] House, p. 75. [56] Miller, p. 218.

idea that "'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers;" (p. 51). The Pusseyite Mrs. Pardiggle turns her children into discontented neurotics and inflicts her "rapacious benevolence" (p. 136) on the families of the brickmakers. Mr. Quale has a project "for teaching the coffee colonists to teach the natives to turn pianoforte legs" (p. 76). Mr. Chadband, with his oily affectations of speech so typical of contemporary speakers,[57] can only offer Jo "discourses" and is insulted by Jo's yawn. "'My friends,' says Mr. Chadband, with his persecuted chin folding itself into his fat smile again as he looks round, 'it is right that I should be humbled, it is right that I should be tried, it is right that I should be mortified, it is right that I should be corrected. I stumbled, on Sabbath last, when I thought with pride of my three hours' improving. The account is now favourably balanced: my creditor has accepted a composition. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!'" (p. 309).

Dickens has nothing but contempt for the "telescopic philanthropy" (p. 68) of charitable ladies such as Mrs. Jellyby who advertised their charity. Mrs. Jellyby neglects her husband and children to write appeals for the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, but she is utterly unsympathetic toward the

[57] House, p. 107.

ragged Jo who sits in front of the building of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

> He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs; being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee.
>
> (p. 685)

Dickens' humanitarianism was not sectarian. Like John Jarndyce, his advice to the would-be Christian probably would have been "Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts" (p. 217). As we have seen, he was often involved in the administration and fund-raising procedures of private charities, but there were many which he did not trust.

> His dislike of many charities was part of his destructive Benthamism: when he began to write, the Charity Inquiry Commission was discovering in the administration of the older charities abuses as awful and as comic as those unearthed by the Commission on Municipal Corporations. Funds silently appropriated by officers; funds spent on little else but enormous annual dinners; funds wastefully and inefficiently used; bounties which encouraged hypocrisy and extravagance; endowments so restricted that their purpose would no longer be fulfilled; inquiry revealed such things everywhere![58]

[58] House, p. 92.

Unconcerned with theological doctrine or techniques of worship, Dickens was a New Testament Christian who advocated humanity, kindness, forgiveness, mercy, and benevolence. He preached individual benevolence as a solution to social problems, and believed that God helps those who help themselves. He felt that the emphasis should be, as it was in Bleak House, on works and not faith. Mr. Jarndyce, Esther, Allen Woodcourt, Caddy, Guster, George, and some of the other characters in the novel are kind because they are benevolent human beings, not because they are acting from any learned sense of duty or any expectation of heavenly reward. Chapman discusses Dickens' religious principles:

> Even the most extreme Evangelicals could hardly turn up texts to disprove Dickens's contention that true religion is marked by active love and kindness. As for the doubters and agnostics, his religion was vague enough in its dogmas--or lack of them--to give satisfaction. The break with orthodox faith in the nineteenth century seldom meant a loss of moral earnestness; the outlook, the language, even the imagery of agnostics often remained basically Christian. Like many Englishmen during the last four hundred years, Dickens could express a Protestant viewpoint without getting too deeply involved in the finer details of Christianity.[59]

In comparing the fictional and actual treatment of the four major social institutions in Bleak House one must remember to allow for two very important things: Dickens' satire and his membership in the middle class. Except in these two areas, Dickens' picture of the institutions of

[59] Chapman, pp. 110-111.

the family, economics, government, and religion is fairly accurate. His middle-class bias toward feminine place, virtues, and education and his middle-class idea that family organization should be systematic and orderly both operate in his condemnation of the atypical family life of a great many of the characters. One might almost say that their sufferings, their peculiarities or their disagreeable habits are a result of a family life which does not fit the author's idea of a healthy, middle-class family. Among the poor, family patterns are so distorted by substandard living conditions that even education is not offered as a cure. Dickens' social advice on the institution of the family seems to be simply that slum clearance and social class levelling will make a more "normal" family life possible; then, and only then, can the institutions of economics, government, and religion begin to operate for the benefit of society.

In economics, Dickens' basic concern in Bleak House is with the evils of social privilege which have fostered the oppression of the laboring classes and the poor. His view of his age as a period of transition from aristocracy and agriculture to democracy and industry was historically accurate, and his social reform efforts were aimed primarily at easing the growing pains of the transition process. His emphasis was on the not-yet-obvious fact that all classes

are linked and no class is safe from the evils of the poor which spread to all others.

It is impossible to separate the institution of government from economic considerations, especially in the area of social class, and Bleak House makes no distinct separation. But Dickens felt that an excess of power in any one social stratum was dangerous to society as a whole. We know from his other works that he was just as fearful of Chartist control as he was of feudal or industrial control of government. The satire of Bleak House illustrates its author's disgust with the inability of government to move toward the social reforms which were so badly needed. He was particularly bitter about legal tangles and parliamentary stalemates upon which he blamed the chaotic state of chancery and, by extension, the state of the entire society.

Dickens' treatment of the social institution of religion is evidence that he was exceedingly well aware of the three religious movements active at mid-century. In fact he knew them well enough to satirize the peculiarities of their members. Bleak House is a witness to Dickens' contention that religious aims could only be accomplished through unselfish love and individual (not necessarily organized, impersonal) charity. Buckley points this out:

> Indeed, he had no coherent theology to sanction his art and no positive concept of government to reinforce his political satire. Yet he brought to the early Victorian novel a rich imagination

> kindled by a deep though ill-defined moral consciousness and a broadly "liberal" view of social and economic conditions. If his swinging attack on decadent institutions implied no program for reform, it clearly suggested a Radical distrust of historical precedent and an Evangelical sympathy with the victims of oppression and injustice. For all his superb individual endowment, he was distinctly a child of his time, suspicious of ecstacy, contemptuous of flight from the present into a remote Utopia or the glamour of a "romantic" past.[60]

Dickens was less concerned with party politics than he was with the need for efficient administration of institutions; he did not advocate any specific type of government, but simply wanted to see one which operated efficiently to accomplish desirable ends. He disapproved of the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace because he felt that it would encourage people to accept progress in technology and trade at any price. By the time Bleak House was written, his "vision of society" had grown "from the merely personal and domestic towards an understanding of the complicated interaction of countless social forces."[61] This enlarged understanding of his own society shows itself in the structure of the novel. "Social reform," he seems to be saying, "is not a simple matter of changing one government for another, or one religion for another; it is a complex matter which will require many manipulations of

[60] Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), p. 28.

[61] House, p. 213.

the social structure and many changes in its institutions. We will have to do the best we can with kindness and simple common sense, but, for goodness sake, let's get on with it." "Bleak House is thus an indictment not merely of the law but of the whole dark muddle of organized society. It regards legal injustice not as accidental but as organically related to the very structure of that society."[62] Dickens set out to make Bleak House a "tract for the times," and the reader's recognition of this fact allows him to appreciate even more fully the amazing artistry "which imposed upon a mass of seemingly heterogeneous material a significant and acceptable form."[63]

As evidence of the topicality of the novel, Butt and Tillotson proceed to point out that many of the events of Bleak House were currently being discussed as the novel was in progress: "The fable has indeed been frequently interpreted, but what has hitherto been overlooked is the topicality of Dickens's particularization. This was a fable for 1852, related to a large extent in terms of the events which the previous year had thrown into prominence."[64] Both chancery proceedings and slums were subjects of discussion in 1852, not because Dickens wrote of them,

[62] Johnson, p. 762.

[63] Butt and Tillotson, p. 200.

[64] Butt and Tillotson, p. 179.

but because people were then actually suffering and dying from their effects. "Dickens's indictment of chancery was more than merely topical. It followed in almost every respect the charges already levelled in the columns of The Times. In both we read of houses in chancery and wards in chancery, of dilatory and costly procedure, of wasted lives, and of legal obstructionists. The Times, as befitted a national newspaper, was concerned to report the efforts made in Parliament to procure reform, even while it deplored the delays in Parliament itself. Dickens has no faith in the powers of Parliament to bring any good thing about."[65] He reflected the opinion of The Times that sanitary reform was not only possible, but imperative if the entire community was not to be made to suffer. Probably because more vested interests were involved, The Times was not as active in insisting on sanitary reforms as it was on chancery reforms, but both were stressed, and Parliament was blamed for the slowness of movement toward reform in both areas. Butt and Tillotson give evidence of this: "Dickens's indictment of Boodle and Buffy is that they are content to fiddle while Rome is burning: and The Times would have agreed. On 5 March it declared that the most serious evil of the political deadlock was 'the indefinite postponement or defeat of various measures of great public utility, but yet

[65] Butt and Tillotson, p. 187.

unconnected with the passions, the prejudices or the interest of political parties'."[66] To further reinforce the contention that Dickens' plots, characters, and backgrounds were realistic treatments of actual people and situations, these authors point out that Inspector Bucket may have been suggested to Dickens from his reading of articles concerning the new detective force just established as a branch of the Metropolitan Police Force; that Mrs. Bagnet may have resulted from a Times campaign for better living conditions for soldiers' wives; and Mr. Rouncewell may have come about because of a Times report on the benevolence of an association of ironmasters in times of business reduction.[67]

The question of Dickens' realism may well be in doubt, but as Wagenknecht says "a good deal of evidence can be marshaled in support of the thesis that Dickens was a realist."[68] Buckley reminds us that, "though he could never have appreciated his role, he was among the first and greatest of the 'anti-romantic' Victorians."[69] Certainly his treatment of the "last romantics," Boythorn (modeled after Walter Savage Landor) and Skimpole (modeled after Leigh

[66] Butt and Tillotson, p. 189.

[67] Butt and Tillotson, pp. 198-199.

[68] Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), p. 228.

[69] Buckley, p. 29.

Hunt) in Bleak House, would tend to reinforce the idea that he was not in favor of romanticism. Stevenson says of these two characters that both "illustrate the defeat of romantic individualism by the conformist pressures of the Victorian age."[70] If not pure realism, at least Dickens' method was a combination of the realistic and the figurative. "Mrs. Jellyby, never seeing anything nearer than Africa, Mrs. Pardiggle, forcing her children to contribute to the Tockahoopo Indians, are themselves; but they are also the types of a philanthropy that will do nothing to diminish the profitable exploitation of England's poor."[71] To say that Dickens' diverse characters give the reader an accurate and outstanding panorama of the mid-century social scene, is not to say that he was only a realist. There is much more in Bleak House than verisimilitude. Even his realistic details are symbolic of something more than the real in the way that "a street in London described by Dickens is very like a street in London; but it is still more like a street in Dickens."[72]

Charles Dickens thought of himself as an accurate social historian, and it is important that the reader of

[70] Stevenson, p. 300. [71] Johnson, p. 769.

[72] Lord David Cecil, "Early Victorian Novelists: As They Look to the Reader," Victorian Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Austin Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 48.

Bleak House not allow Dickens' satire and symbolism to obscure the essential truth of this novel of society. His characters represent all levels of society hopelessly entangled in the endless chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The suit, chancery, and Krook are all representative of mid-nineteenth-century society, stalled by human selfishness and vested interests and unable to adjust to a changing world. "The endless lawsuit which no one wants to continue and which no one can stop, whose immensity cannot be encompassed by any one mind, and which spreads random destruction among innocent victims is a criticism of the law, to be sure, but it is also an image of the impersonal 'System' to which governments entrust their affairs. . . ."[73] Just as chancery is symbolic, so are the Dedlocks: "The very name of Dedlock illustrates Dickens' symbolic point, for all of Sir Leicester's friends are dedicated to deadlock in social conflict. By a kind of narrative refraction, Dickens extends this indictment of social deadlock to the general disease which infects the caste system, Parliament, the economic system, and orthodox religion."[74] Tulkington, also, is more than simply a grasping lawyer; he is a symbol of the inhumanity of the law. "Old Turveydrop, Skimpole, and Vholes

[73] Jacob Korg, ed. "Introduction," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 11.

[74] Davis, p. 204.

are not merely amusing minor characters, but also instances of the parasitism that infects society, like the institution of the law, whose first principle is to make business for itself."[75] Mrs. Snagsby is a jealous middle-class matron who suspects her husband of all sorts of indiscretions. She is also a practicing evangelical who thinks nothing of exploiting her epileptic servant who accepts the abuse rather than being obliged to enter the workhouse. Mrs. Barbary and Mrs. Chadband are representative of the stern and unforgiving aspects of Protestantism and Victorian morality. Mrs. Woodcourt represents the misplaced middle-class pride in family heritage, and Volumnia Dedlock illustrates the indolent, ineffective deadwood of aristocratic society. "Mrs. Jellyby and her henchmen are a satire upon impractical welfare projects; the Smallweed family are a horribly comic instance of the utilitarian ideal in education; Mr. Chadband is another specimen of the hypocritical evangelists first represented by Stiggins in Pickwick."[76]

Dickens uses more than characters to symbolize the decay of society. He also extracts a great deal of mileage from locations and incidents of plot. Tom-all-Alone's is a realistic picture of actual slum conditions written by a man who had a burning interest in slum clearance projects. But, in Bleak House, it takes on symbolic meaning as well.

[75] Korg, pp. 11-12. [76] Stevenson, p. 299.

"Tom-all-Alone's is not merely an example of the need for slum clearance, not merely an apparatus for distilling the evils of society into concentrated form, but also a mysterious focus of retribution, 'a secular inferno' that punishes the innocent as well as the guilty in accordance with some covert and terrible system of justice."[77] Krook, in his junk shop, symbolizes all the injustices of a diseased, crumbling society, and his death by spontaneous combustion represents the fate of such a social system. As Johnson points out, "the internal rottenness of the social structure that not merely tolerates but perpetuates Tom-all-Alone's must inevitably destroy itself in the end, die of its own self-engendered diseases, annihilate itself by its own corruption. Such is the symbol of Krook's death by Spontaneous Combustion."[78] Although Dickens, in the preface to Bleak House, takes pains to document the possibility of the existence of death by spontaneous combustion, the incident is important for its value as a symbol and "not because it is a startling and sensational occurrence to be enjoyed for its realistic effect."[79] Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate that Dickens was not speaking with tongue-in-cheek when he describes actual recorded cases of spontaneous combustion. Perhaps he is a more realistic writer than we might suppose.

[77] Korg, p. 11. [78] Johnson, p. 781.

[79] Davis, p. 207.

Certainly there can be no doubt that the evils of chancery, poverty, slums, decaying cemeteries, and "telescopic philanthropy" which existed in 1850 were real or that they were the actual motivating factors for the composition of Bleak House. Dickens' descriptions of these evils are immeasurably enhanced by the knowledge that they were accurate and not greatly exaggerated. In spite of Dickens' overlay of satire and symbolism, Bleak House is a realistic reflection of the major social institutions as they existed at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. As Johnson indicates, "Bleak House is modern England, it is the world of an acquisitive society, a monetary culture, and its heavy gloom is implied by the very adjective that is part of its title."[80] "How bleak," says Davis, "is the house of Victorian society!"[81]

The danger to modern readers in considering Bleak House as "concerned only with an isolated example of ridiculous legal procedure"[82] is avoided when the reader knows and understands the social background of the institutions as they existed when Dickens set out to bring them to national attention. It then becomes obvious that he was objecting to a society in which the law had reached the point where it did exactly the opposite of what it was intended to do. It had become an instrument of injustice rather than of justice.

[80] Johnson, p. 779. [81] Davis, p. 209.

[82] Davis, p. 198.

Dickens illustrates in his plot what he feared would happen if man refused to take the responsibility for the state of his society and continued to pursue his own selfish interests. He opposed the ridiculous machinery of graft and corruption in political elections and the vested interests of certain portions of society, and he wanted to cure them by exposing them, even though Victorian morals would not permit him to describe freely their worst horrors. Modern readers might tend to find his "horrors" unconvincing, but his descriptions become less unconvincing when we know the social background and realize that they were actually worse than Dickens' reading public would allow him to describe. His bitterly-comic satire on "telescopic philanthropy" and evangelicalism tends to become less comic and more bitter when we know that expeditions very like Mrs. Jellyby's planned venture to Borrioboola-Gha and speakers like Mr. Chadband were actually a part of the religious activities of Dickens' time. As Bentley reminds us, "it is difficult in the half-atheistic atmosphere of today to realise just how deep and widespread was the preoccupation with religion in those days, how intense the zeal, how sharp the schismatic bickering, and how boring the theological controversy must have been to a great many."[83]

Bleak House criticizes the social institutions of mid-nineteenth century England, but it does not distort them.

[83] Bentley, p. 44.

It emphasizes their failures and flaws rather than indicating areas in which they functioned smoothly, but this was Dickens' purpose. He wanted to stress to his readers the fact that their society was in need of reform, and he did it by invoking laughter, sympathy, ridicule, and fear. He made his readers intensely aware that anything which affected one small segment of their world must inevitably affect all of it, and he accomplished his purpose with genius and artistry.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding analyses of novels and their social backgrounds, we have been concerned more with what could be found in the novels themselves than with a complete description of the basic social institutions. The primary emphasis was on the aspects of society present in the novels, and the examination of social history was confined to an investigation of only those aspects. Caution was employed to avoid the confusion of what is internal with what is external to the novels. There was no suggestion that the scope of background investigation for novels should always be so restricted; this was merely a part of the operational plan for this study. We have attempted to show how much can be learned from such an examination of social backgrounds which would be of value to the teacher in his effort to illuminate each separate novel as well as other works of corresponding periods. No claim is made that an awareness of such elements as historical atmosphere, theological traditions, social problems, marriage and family customs, economic situations, educational practices, and governmental power structures will give the student a total picture of the work. No single method of analysis will do this. But it is suggested that the investigation, added to other

methods such as the traditional formalistic, archetypal, or symbolic approaches, will help to increase the student's knowledge, enjoyment, and appreciation of nearly all creative works.

Using the sociological approach, the investigation has shown interesting changes occurring over the century of English life considered as background to the novels. These changes are reflected in the literature. If one looks chronologically at the three novels taken together, he will see important shifts in the nature of institutions and institutional functions; education moves from family to government, marriage becomes more a matter of individual choice, subjugation of women is less burdensome, economics acquires a scientific basis, religion becomes less concerned with reason and more emotionally based, government takes on greater and greater responsibility for social welfare, and literature finds itself less concerned with government in the international sphere and more concerned with domestic problems involving social welfare. By Dickens' time, debtors are less frequently imprisoned and laws are considerably more humane and less confused, although the same debate about the efficacy of punishment continues as before. The gap between town and country life and between social classes is considerably narrower than in Fielding's day, and social class is more likely to be based on education and

occupation than family status; wealth, of course, is always an important indicator of social class. Corruption is no longer widely tolerated, and the country's general morals seem to be improving by 1850, although there is still a long way to go in the areas of working conditions and the mitigation of poverty.

Individually, each of the novels reflects an important step in the progress of these changes, and each author proves his worth to the discipline of sociology as a reporter of social developments. The fact that each novel does accurately reflect social backgrounds can be of great value to the discipline of literature as well, for it allows the English teacher to use the novel's descriptions of social history to enrich class discussion and student appreciation without neglecting the concentrated study of primary literary works.

In Tom Jones, for example, a realization of the accuracy of Fielding's background information allows the reader to appreciate the sincerity of his concern for people and their problems. Fielding has been criticized frequently for his "immorality," but often these criticisms come from readers who are unaware of the characteristics of the age which Fielding is describing. His intent was to present human nature as he saw it in his own culture and to promote virtue by demonstrating the realities of his society. His

characters are motivated by the social situations in which they find themselves and with which they attempt to deal rationally. The knowledgeable reader can accept them as "real" persons not only because he realizes that in many cases they are real and not fictional, but because he is also aware of the accuracy of Fielding's references to time, place, and incident.

The Jacobite rebellion, the lack of adequate police force, the enclosure of land which resulted in farmers being forced into the London slums, the laxity of the church, the evils of plurality, the poverty of country parsons, the hazards of travel, and the harshness of game laws--all these things were real concerns of eighteenth century society and not fictionalized problems created to propel Fielding's plot. In view of sexual and marriage customs of the day, Squire Western's attempt to arrange Sophia's marriage was not cruel but typical, and Tom and Sophia had no other alternatives than to react as they did to his decisions. Tom's responses to the ladies were not "sinful" in the light of current acceptance of the double standard in sexual behavior; thus Sophia's forgiveness of him is not unrealistic or out of character, and the reader is not prevented from seeing Tom as a generous and benevolent man. Squire Western ceases to be a caricature when the reader is aware of the power of the country squires and the differences between rural and urban life styles. A

knowledge of the religious views of Fielding's day, and of the fact that the age was one which allowed free rational inquiry, enables the reader to appreciate the artistry of the author's exaggerated characterizations of Thwackum and Square as representatives of the weaknesses in opposing religious doctrines. Derogatory comments about Catholic priests, interspersed with talk of the Jacobite rebellion, are understandable when one is aware of the religious overtones involved in military actions against the civil rebellion. Fielding uses his characters, even the minor ones, not only to further the plot, but often to point a moral about government, religion, and, most importantly, the fixity of the English class system which prevents Tom from marrying Sophia, dictates the rules of inheritance, decides who shall be educated, and reinforces the strength of the country squire over those on his manor and its adjoining village. For nearly every incident in the novel, a knowledge of the actual social background which Fielding was describing increases the reader's admiration for its author's wide view of human affairs and his exceptional ability to portray human nature realistically within the bounds of a work of the imagination.

With Caleb Williams a knowledge of the social background helps to validate the novel as a work of realism rather than psychological romance, Gothic tale, or propaganda novel. The

ability to see society as it actually was gives weight to Godwin's claim to be writing to reform and to his criticism of social conditions. His belief in reason, typical of the intellectuals of his day, caused him to maintain that society could change itself if only it could see things as they really were; and he tried to show that English institutions did not promote the general welfare, but only the welfare of the upper classes. The novel presents not only social criticism, but Godwin's social theories of human benevolence, the lack of necessity for government, and the importance of a right education which would make for a benevolent man who could function in society without the use of various "tyrannies" such as marriage and government. In his study of despotism, Godwin used Squire Falkland to illustrate the tyranny of a wrong education causing a false sense of chivalry and honor which became the motivation for his oppression of the lower-status Caleb. More specifically, a knowledge of the actual position of the English country squire allows the reader to see Falkland's misuse of power as authentic and Caleb's fear of capture, as well as the English system of justice with its farcical trials and hideous prisons, as a very genuine fear and not simply an imagined motivation for a fictional character's adventures. Knowledge of social background also allows the reader to compare Godwin's handling of the country squire, the economics of agriculture, the place of women, the condition of the

justice system, and the position of the poor with the manner in which these things were handled by Fielding before him. The difference in the fictional treatment of these things by the two authors is seen to result from a difference in actual social conditions in which they occurred. Godwin's lack of theological dogma and his unconcern with religion is also seen as typical of his day. It was not in fashion to turn to religion for the solution to societal problems, and Godwin, like others of his day, relied rather on man's reason than God's grace. Thus his characters are motivated more by the tyranny of social institutions than by any religious or superhuman interference with the life of man. In addition to all other assistance which a knowledge of social conditions gives toward the understanding of the novel, a point which dare not be neglected is the emphasis it focuses on Godwin's subtitle, Things as They Are--a title which could be of little significance to the reader who cannot accurately judge the truth of Godwin's discussion of Things as They Are because he is unaware of the actual conditions which Godwin was describing.

Dickens, like Godwin, was describing the evils of English social conditions. In Bleak House he strikes at all levels and aspects of society which prevented or disrupted human welfare. He was motivated to write the novel by a desire to demonstrate to his readers the problems which he

felt were in need of reform if society were to continue to function for man's benefit. His skill in the presentation of social history can only be realized if the reader is aware that such things as poverty, disease, governmental deadlock and corruption, misplaced charity, and an outmoded class system actually did exist in Dickens' day.

It is these evils which motivate the characters of Bleak House. The Pardiggles, Chadbands, and Jellybys of the novel are only slight exaggerations of controversial religious figures, motivated by those aspects of their dogma which Dickens saw as unhealthy and undesirable. The Dedlocks, with their false notions of honor and their attempts to influence parliamentary selection, are representatives of the evils of aristocratic power which allows poverty and injustice to exist. It is their fault, and the fault of society as a whole, that Jo and the brickmakers are forced to live in crowded, disease-ridden urban slums lacking proper housing, drainage, ventilation, sanitation, welfare assistance, education, family life, or parliamentary representation. Just as Dickens uses the slums to point up the evils of society and its system of justice which punishes innocent and guilty alike, he uses Krook's junk shop to represent not only the stagnation of chancery, but also the potential fate of a society which refuses to see the need for social, legal, governmental, and religious

reform. No class escapes the evils of poverty or the law's delay; each of the book's multitude of characters is adversely affected in some way by the contagion of Tom-all-Alone's and Krook's junk shop. Many of Dickens' characters and incidents are modeled on real cases and people which the Victorian reader would have recognized, for Dickens was a novelist of broad social experience which he used to give topicality and emphasis to his themes. All social classes are represented in order to demonstrate the pervasive influence of the evils of the industrial revolution, the Malthusian theory, the philosophy of laissez-faire, and the general Victorian admiration of "progress." It is through the comprehensive knowledge of actual social background involved in this idea of "progress" that the reader is best able to understand the symbolism and satire of Bleak House and to appreciate the tremendous skill of its author's literary style.

Critical analysis has shown that the three novels under consideration--Tom Jones, Caleb Williams, and Bleak House--for the most part quite accurately reflect existing social institutions of their times. Thus the actual research has validated their tentative choice as representative of their periods. These novels are also worthy representations of their genre. They are realistic novels in both form and content, and might well be used by

any instructor to demonstrate the typical realistic novel. Pedagogical discussion could include the difference between realism and romance in the novel, the attributes of formal realism, the question of "truth to life" with all its ramifications, and a demonstration of the hazards of unquestioningly accepting literary realism, or for that matter, social history, as actual fact.

The instructor might wish to base a class presentation of the difference between realism and romance on Wagenknecht's discussion of this question.

> Must a novel be realistic? As far back as 1785, Clara Reeve, herself a novelist, attempted to distinguish between novel and romance. "The novel," she said, "is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it was written. The romance, in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen." Yet for all the battles that have been fought in this field, a complete separation between realism and romance is impossible. Every great writer is both realist and romancer. Surely George Saintsbury was right when he said, "A crowd of fantastic imaginings or additions, to supply the main substance, and a certain commonsense grasp of actual conditions and circumstances to set them upon, and contrast them with--these are the great requirements of Fiction in life and characters."[1]

To further broaden the term "realism," one might emphasize the difficulty of attaching any precise definition to the term in view of the fact that all authors are expressing

[1] Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), pp. xvii-xviii.

something about life and all those who give the impression of truth to life are "realistic" in some sense. The differences among authors are basically differences in technique, but, as Muller emphasizes, "these differences nevertheless lead to important consequences. The realist begins with the concrete and familiar in experience; his inspiration is less a cloudy imagining than observed fact. Although he does not and cannot exactly reproduce actual experience, although as an artist he inevitably recasts and imaginatively shapes, his primary effort is to represent without markedly idealizing, to remain close to actuality and impart its savor."[2] The narrative technique of the realist involves the use of the literary convention which Watt describes as "formal realism." This combination of procedures frequently associated in the novel includes "the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms."[3]

[2] Herbert J. Muller, Modern Fiction (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1937), p. 38.

[3] Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 32.

Although the work of a realistic novelist may appear to be absolutely authentic, he is not simply recording; instead he is imitating reality and writing a model of life. "He is making, it might be said, a facsimile of life as he sees it and feels it, his conclusions about it being expressed in the characters he invents, the situations in which he places them, and in the very words he chooses for those purposes."[4] What the reader receives is the author's impression of the true nature of existence based upon his own conceptions and experiences. Belgion summarizes the arguments against realism being considered as "truth."

> There are three reasons why verisimilitude in imaginative literature is never conformity to the truth of actual life. In the first place, actual life is too vast and various to be brought as a whole within the compass of a novel, a narrative, or a dramatic representation. In the second place, the verisimilitude whereby any piece of imaginative literature moves readers or auditors has to be conformity to what is the truth about life for the readers or auditors, and, as is obvious, the nature of the truth about life differs for different groups of these. In the third place, the imaginative writer is as human as the rest of us: he thinks he is aware of the truth about life, but what he takes to be this truth is no more than one among a variety of conceptions or views of life.[5]

Nevertheless, for years the novel has been considered the literary form best able to recreate the actual quality

[4] Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1955), p. xvii.

[5] Montgomery Belgion, "The Testimony of Fiction," Southern Review, 4 (Summer 1938), 152.

of the life of its time. As Barrett indicates, "the novel was a flexible enough form to permit the writer other effects, like fantasy or the grotesque, but those were fringe benefits, as it were, since the heart of the novel, its self-appointed destiny, had come to be its ability to portray the reality of everyday life more accurately than any other literary form."[6]

Having considered the meaning and characteristics of realism as demonstrated in one or all of the novels representing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the instructor might want to move on to the kindred question of the relationship of art to life, and specifically the relationship of Tom Jones, Caleb Williams, or Bleak House to life in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. He might point out, as Abercrombie does, the fallacy of considering literature as life: "That it is a mistake to equate literature with life is a commonplace of criticism. Life creates its traditions, and literature creates its traditions; they are profoundly and subtly related, but they are not the same tradition."[7] The question of just

[6] William Barrett, Time of Need: Forms of Imagination in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 11.

[7] Lascelles Abercrombie, The Year's Work in English Studies: 1924, eds. F. S. Boas and C. H. Herford (1926; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), V, 13. This is a summary of E. E. Stoll's position in "Literature No 'Document,'" Modern Language Review, April 1924.

how life and literature are related is a major critical issue still widely debated; nevertheless, it is a question which bears investigation in connection with the study of the social backgrounds of realistic literature. Scott-James explored the relationship in The Making of Literature:

> I suggest that it is time to get rid of the misleading current notion that art is not concerned with real life. I find that even Mr. E. M. Forster, in his Aspects of the Novel, lends countenance to this idea and suggests that the reality of a character in a novel depends upon the laws of art, and not the laws of life. "The barrier of art," he says, divides us from Fielding's Amelia or Jane Austen's Emma. "They are real not because they are like ourselves . . . but because they are convincing."
>
> But how will they ever be convincing unless they are like ourselves? The fact that the novelist knows more about his characters, as Mr. Forster tells us, than we can know about living individuals, is only another way of saying that the artist knows more about life than anyone can know without regarding life with the artist's eye. He gives us a semblance of reality which is more characteristic of life than anything which we discover in the duller glances of everyday. The necessity of art for the Spirit lies in just this, that it rescues us from the inattentiveness and obtuseness of so-called real life, from that diminished state of half-awareness in which daily impressions fly past us. Carelessly regarded, dulled by use-and-wont--a matter of sleeping and waking, knives and forks, bus fares and gossip--in which we lose the vividness of experience and miss the characteristics of the life that passes and passes. Art is concentration on those characteristics, those more deeply regarded aspects which might so easily pass unobserved.[8]

[8] R. A. Scott-James, The Making of Literature (London: Martin Secker, 1930), pp. 343-344.

Literature is inseparable from life, and the best literature gains its ability to convince--its power over man's imagination--from its inherent fidelity to life. It is more than art; as E. M. Forster maintains, it is, in a sense, a history of human life and manners, the things people considered significant, how they set about obtaining them, and their accomplishments as well as their mistakes and difficulties. According to Crocker, "because literature is more than art, because it is embedded in the emotional climate of its time, the attitudes towards man and his behavior that characterize a period are inevitably illuminated, in a context of life itself, in the novels of its great writers. This is true even though the novel may not be expressly concerned with the philosophical speculations of the age, but spring simply from a realistic view of human nature as observed in society."[9]

One must be careful, however, in thinking of the novel as history, for it does not fit that classification in every sense. History is plural and collective, while literature is singular and particular.[10] History attempts to illuminate motives and reactions, to locate cause and effect

[9] Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 404.

[10] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. 5.

relationships, by rendering an accurate account of past events. It examines collections of people and facts and generalizes from recorded evidence. Literature is imaginative rather than factual. It presents concrete, individual things and people in an ordered version of life, in an attempt to illuminate the obscure meanings of an overwhelming confusion of daily events. But these distinctions are never pure, for the literary artist may be accurate and factual, while the historian may interpret and comment upon his facts in such a way as to slant or distort the picture which he presents or to find meanings in facts which may or may not be accurate.

The wise instructor will alert his students to the necessity of avoiding the confusion of fact and fiction in the realistic novel, but he will not discount the value of an examination of the social and historical backgrounds of the novel because of the hazards involved. Knowledge of social background helps to enlarge the boundaries of a novel and give it significance. It adds to the ability of the student to make a critical judgment of the work. "The sociological soil," as Schücking warns, "must not be lost to view. The soil does not, of course, create the art. The mud does not create the eel as Aristotle thought, but the generalisation no mud, no eel would be fairly near the

truth."[11] The "mud," to which Schücking refers, is made up of the basic social institutions which have been considered worthy of examination--family, economics, government, and religion--for it is these institutions which have the greatest impact on a people's way of life and provide the subject matter for their literature. "Just as in natural history the characteristics of fauna and flora can only be recognized in association with the peculiarities of the locality, so in the history of literature existence and colouring and individuality proceed largely from the sociological soil from which the literary creation springs."[12]

David Daiches also discusses the value of a knowledge of social background in the evaluation of a literary work:

> We often, in fact, require the assistance of the social historian to explain to us what a work of art really is, as we have noted in discussing the relationships of criticism to historical scholarship. Before we can evaluate anything we must know what it truly is, and that it is one of the links between history (and sociology) and criticism and between the genetic and evaluative approach. Sometimes (though by no means always) if we see how a thing has come to be what it is we are in a better position to appreciate what it really is and thus to evaluate it for what it is.[13]

[11] Levin L. Schucking, The Sociology of Literary Taste (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 17.

[12] Schücking, p. 10.

[13] David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 364.

If we know the social background of a work, we are better able to judge its accuracy and its author's accomplishment. We can avoid making obviously incorrect interpretations, and we can understand the author's jokes and subtleties which help to illuminate the themes of his work. We are brought to realize that the implications of the language of a past age may be different from those of today's language and that "these divergencies of expression are not merely a question of literary allusion, but what entered the minds of educated people every day, coloured the spectacles through which they looked at life, and moulded the form in which they uttered their feelings."[14] According to Dobree, for example, "we of the twentieth century mean very little when we speak of the 'social virtues,' whereas to an eighteenth century writer the phrase implied a whole philosophy of civilization."[15]

For several good reasons, then, the study of social backgrounds is important to student and instructor alike, but both should be aware of certain reservations which we have yet to consider. Both should take care not to unwittingly fall into the platitude of defining any one tendency as a "spirit of age" or considering that "an age is reflected in its literature." In any age there are differing

[14] Bonamy Dobree, ed., Introductions to English Literature, 3rd rev. ed. (London: The Cresset Press, 1961), IV, x.

[15] Dobree, p. ix.

groups of people with varied, and often contrasting, philosophies and theories of society. The literature of an age may not be representative of all of these groups. While conceding that a particular person, problem, or philosophy (such as Bentham and Benthamism in the early nineteenth century) can exert tremendous influence on an age, Dobree nevertheless demonstrates the fallacy of an overly simple explanation of the relationship of social background to literature. He says:

> An age is often much better represented by what is no longer read, than by the work which we still take from our shelves. If, for instance, we try to reconstruct the Restoration period from the plays of the time, we shall get a view which is, to say the least of it, misleading; the age is far better represented by the turgid flood of pamphlets which issued from the inkpots of Penn and Muggleton, Thomas Hicks, John Faldo, and a dozen other forgotten and vituperative sectarians. We tend to read Dryden's plays or certain of the satires, in preference to his other work; but he is far nearer his age in Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther than in his now more popular writings. And if each age brings forth its own recognizable progeny, how is it that Milton and Ethridge appeared together? or Thomas Hardy and Sir Max Beerbohm? Each age has so many facets that it is difficult to pitch on any as being its outstanding mirror, though each age will have certain peculiarities not shared by others. But these peculiarities are often merely the surface of fashion, accidental rather than essential, and until we know something of the age, we cannot tell which peculiarity, when explained, can have any significance for us.[16]

[16] Dobree, pp. x-xi.

Another area which affects the usefulness of social background knowledge and which requires the exercise of caution is that of using the social background to magnify an author's accomplishments or mitigate his faults. Background insights may explain why an author's faults are typical of his period of why an author is great in spite of the typical faults of his period, but the identification of fault or virtue must be made on purely literary grounds.[17] Because we find that an author achieved what he intended, this does not make his work either "true" or "great"; it does help us to understand his motivations and those of his characters. "Greatness" is an elusive quality, not to be isolated or defined by reference to the social backgrounds of a literary work. As R. P. Blackmur writes:

> A first qualifying reflection is that there is not very much great literature; and a second is that, even when a critic is concerned with great literature, most of the problems he handles will not directly affect his estimate of his greatness. Greatness is come up to, felt, discovered; not handled. A critic who tried to handle merely the greatness of Shakespeare or Dante would see it disappear before his eyes. And a critic who attempted to establish the greatness Joyce or Eliot or Yeats would be largely wasting his time; for greatness is established by custom, by time, by the apprehension in the minds of many men of inexhaustibility, and even so greatness is transitory and variable.[18]

[17] Daiches, p. 365.

[18] R. P. Blackmur, "The Enabling Act of Criticism," in American Issues, ed. Willard Thorp, Merle Curti, and Carlos Baker (Chicago: J. B. Lippincott, 1941), II, 877.

Great literature is that which remains significant today and helps to light up the contemporary scene. But its ability to do so is enhanced by the knowledge of the atmosphere and circumstances under which it was written. Such knowledge helps us to understand present human experience, as well as human experience in the context of a specific time and culture limit; and it insulates us against the narrowness of relativism. It gives us a realization of the existence and variety of moral codes which is, after all, as Empson points out, "the central purpose of reading imaginative literature."[19]

A final reservation regarding the usefulness of a study of social backgrounds involves the question of whether such a study is useful for all types of literature and all periods. David Daiches' suggestion that historical background studies might be more important with longer, more complex works than those with a smaller "unit of artifice" seems a valid one, especially for poetry. The shorter works may be "more amenable to close critical analysis" while longer ones are "less likely to submit to close microscopic criticism of detail."[20] Certainly a microscopic, detailed criticism of such a ponderous work as Bleak House, for example, would be not only impossibly lengthy but of

[19] William Empson, "Tom Jones," The Kenyon Review, 20 (Spring 1958), 231.

[20] Daiches, p. 315.

questionable value to all but a rare few Dickens specialists. Also, a study of social backgrounds might not be as necessary with contemporary works where social knowledge is readily available as a part of everyday existence or from sources other than history. Because they are living in the society in which the works are set, instructor and student alike would be more likely to understand the social implications of a work without extensive research, although differences in background, even among contemporaries, do exist. There is also a type of literature, such as the short stories of Poe or the novels of Herman Hesse, which might be termed "introspective" or "psychological" in which the background setting is very narrow, often not stretching beyond the bounds of the individual mind or personality. It would seem that investigation of social backgrounds of this class of literature would be rather fruitless except for the clues it might give to the author's psychological bent at the time of its composition. Generally, however, sociological investigation would be useful for nearly all types of literature and absolutely essential for some works. As Hill points out, "The reader may need special knowledge about the lives and times of authors, or of the traditions within which they wrote." He continues with the following example, "The scholar who knows something about Elizabethan England,

something which Shakespeare's King Lear does not tell him, may use this knowledge to illuminate such things as the use of the character of the Fool, or the attitude of Kent toward Oswald and Cornwall."[21]

Applying Hill's principle to the novels considered in this present study, further specific examples may be cited in which sociological analysis actually illuminates the themes, characterizations, and motivations of the novels. In Tom Jones, on page 882, for instance, at Tom's wedding, Squire Western sings a merry song "which bore some relation to matrimony and the loss of a maidenhead." To the uninformed reader, this is a shocking demonstration of "bad manners," but the reader who understands that such a comment was a rather mild example of eighteenth-century wedding customs is not likely to consider Squire Western's behavior as crude and uncouth. Instead he is able to understand the Squire as a rather typical eighteenth-century father motivated by concern for his only daughter. Another example, also from Tom Jones, is the exchange between Partridge and Tom concerning a Popish priest's opinion of the invasion of England. Such an exchange would be meaningless to the reader who did not realize the significance of the Jacobite rebellion, its connection with

[21] Knox C. Hill, Interpreting Literature: History, Drama and Fiction, Philosophy, Rhetoric (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 3.

Catholicism, and its advocacy of the discarded theory of the divine right of kings.

Examples like these have been demonstrated throughout the paper with each of the three novels, in an effort to emphasize the value of a sociological analysis of the novels; but no claim has been made for this method as the best or only approach to fiction, nor is such a claim implied. Instead, the paper suggests that an instructor employing this method would want to use it in conjunction with other techniques of literary analysis. As Blackmur indicates, "any rational approach is valid to literature and may properly be called critical which fastens at any point upon the work itself. The utility of a given approach depends partly upon the strength of the mind making it and partly upon the recognition of the limits appropriate to it."[22]

Blackmur's statement need not apply solely to the professional critic; for criticism, of course, does more than judge the quality of a work. It functions also to increase esthetic understanding, develop appreciation, and promote the application of literature to life. Every reader is, in at least one sense of the term, a literary critic;

[22] R. P. Blackmur, The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation (New York: Arrow Editions, 1935), pp. 277-278.

but, as Michael Roberts reminds us, "the fullest appreciation of poetry or of any art may require as much training and effort as the appreciation of mathematics, and the effort is justified by the additional delight."[23] In order to develop in a student of literature the full appreciation which Roberts calls for, the instructor must be able to function as a critic teaching critical methods to his students. Thus the broad general aims of criticism and education tend to overlap in the manner indicated by Paul Elmer More:

> All scholars, whether they deal with history or sociology or philosophy or language or, in the narrower use of the word, literature, are servants of the critical spirit, in so far as they transmit and interpret and mould the sum of experience from man to man and from generation to generation. Might not one even say that at a certain point criticism becomes almost identical with education, and that by this standard we may judge the value of any study as an instrument of education, and may estimate the merit of any special presentation of that study? It is at least, in the existing chaos of pedagogical theories, a question worthy of consideration.[24]

If the teacher is to function as a critic, he will be justified in employing any critical method which touches

[23] Robert Wooster Stallman, ed., The Critic's Notebook (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1950), p. 18, quoting Michael Roberts, Critique of Poetry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), pp. 58-59.

[24] Paul Elmer More, Selected Shelburne Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 24.

upon the work under consideration and serves to increase the student's understanding and appreciation of its message. He will try to avoid what Daiches calls "an atmosphere too rarefied for non-professionals to breathe."[25] He will be aware of the fact that, although many professionals tend to accept as self-evident the relationship of literature to life, this relationship is not as obvious to the average student. The average college freshman must be convinced of what good literature is to him. He must be reminded that literature can convey knowledge and values, provide outlets, increase awareness of human nature, demonstrate the significance of the commonplace, restore the past, establish visions of the ideal, give him mastery over language, allow him to experience things which he would find painful or distasteful in actuality, and help him to define his own thoughts and personality by noting how he responds emotionally and intellectually to what he has read. The instructor must beware of the tendency to assume that the student possesses adequate background knowledge to enable him to go directly to a "pure" critical analysis of a work of literature. Few students have had an opportunity to investigate historical and sociological phenomena for any culture other than contemporary America.

[25] Daiches, p. 248.

Daiches warns of the consequences of considering the student as a professional:

> A civilization is judged by its amateurs, by the degree to which intelligent non-experts can discuss with sense and understanding the phenomena of their culture. If the critic becomes too far removed from the reader of literature--not necessarily from the "man in the street," that vague entity, but from the interested and sensitive non-professional--he will tend to develop a technical jargon of his own and to regard himself as a necessary mediator between the creative writer and the ordinary reader. Indeed, in so far as he will be intelligible only to fellow experts, he will not even be a mediator between writer and public, but a barrier indicating the impossibility of non-professional appreciation of good literature.[26]

The instructor of literature cannot, of course, neglect literature to teach history; for, as Dr. Leavis emphasizes, "the only acquisition of literary history having any educational value is that made in the exercise of critical intelligence to the ends of the literary critic."[27] Certain information, although it would not directly affect critical judgment, is necessary before such judgment can take place and plays an important part in increasing the student's understanding and appreciation of a work. Daiches, in examining the complicated issue of the relationship between criticism and background knowledge, asks some important questions:

[26] Daiches, pp. 286-287.

[27] F. R. Leavis, Education and the University: A Sketch for an English School (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 68.

> To criticize a work we have to know it: to what degree, and under what circumstances, is non-literary knowledge necessary before we can fully "know" a literary work? We must of course know the language in which it is written--and this in itself involves more than philological knowledge, as we shall see; we must know what the work is, in the sense that we must have a proper text to it before us, not a text marred by misprints or deliberate tampering. If the work was written in an earlier age, do we require to know anything about the life of the author? Do we need to know the books he read, the kind of society he lived in, the philosophical assumptions he took for granted. Can the practical critic always do his job with only critical tools, such as an understanding of structure, imagery, verse forms, and similar matters? And if he needs other tools, what kind of tools are they, when does he need them, and how are they to be employed in the process of making a purely literary judgment?[28]

Daiches does not imply that close critical analysis is not useful and valuable to the critic, instructor, or student, but he does suggest that it should be assisted by an investigation of the culture and philosophy behind the work in order that a deeper and more accurate interpretation of the author's words can result. Theodore Spencer agrees with Daiches' contention that the job of the critic, and by implication the teacher, involves more than simply the dispensation of technical knowledge about literary genres. Spencer writes:

> It becomes the critic's job first to discriminate between different kinds of literary experience, then to show how the best kind, the kind that is richest and deepest, can be

[28] Daiches, p. 319.

obtained, and only later to explain how an individual work, such as Paradise Lost, is related to the society that produced it, or how its effect on the reader is related to the society that produced him. The critic's job is to boost or jack up the individual reader to as high as possible a level of enjoyment, to move him from the cellar to the pent-house, where he can get a better view. "Society" is only part of the prospect.

The main function of criticism, Mathew Arnold said, is "to see the object in itself as it really is." And it is in trying to achieve that essential vision that the double, if secondary, relation between literature and society plays a part.[29]

Daiches' comment strikes much the same note:

The function of a literary critic is to enlarge the unit observed by the reader until it includes not merely the text of a work, or even a group of such texts, but the whole pattern of influence and causation, of action and reaction, of psychological and sociological forces, of which the given work is the center. But this enlargement is conceived not simply as a contribution to history; it is also intended as a contribution to esthetic understanding and appreciation. If we arrive late at a concert at which the first item played is a set of variations on a theme, and we take our seat as the third variation is being played, imagining it to be the theme, we shall be hearing the wrong pattern, however keen our ear. But if we are familiar enough with the music to supply the main theme mentally as we hear the further variations, or if someone puts a score of the main theme into our hand, this error will be corrected and we shall be able to get the proper significance out of the music.[30]

[29] Theodore Spencer, "The Critic's Function," Sewanee Review, 47 (October-December 1939), 553.

[30] Daiches, pp. 346-347.

Convinced of the value of social background to literary criticism, the teacher will realize that this same knowledge can be useful in helping to illuminate questions of motivation, characterization, and theme to students of literature. He will be more inclined to agree with Dobree that the students need "a clear notion not only of what was written, but, so to speak, of why and how, from what impulses, with what objects, and in what conditions morally speaking . . . to integrate literature with life, and so to give the writings of the past that meaning, without which to read is to be baffled, and to miss the greatest of all pleasures, a sense of unity of feeling with the writer of any work. Lacking this, literature is too far separated from living, and can have but little value."[31] The instructor looking for a way to impart essential background knowledge without focusing too much attention on history or sociology, or otherwise slighting the literature by neglecting one critical method for another, will recognize the feasibility of a method which will allow him to avoid the disadvantages of both the "survey" course and the "author" course. Having determined that the social backgrounds of the three novels under consideration do coincide with those of real life and that each of these novels presents enough of this background to give the student a broad picture of its age, the teacher

[31] Dobree, p. xv.

can use them to familiarize his students with the history of the period. Then, if he chooses, he may proceed to discuss others which are not as descriptive of the social soil but which, nevertheless, may contain elements which could not be understood or appreciated without historical and sociological information. Because Tom Jones, Caleb Williams, and Bleak House are both historically and sociologically accurate and worthy of close critical study, their use allows the teacher to convey an accurate impression of their literary periods without neglecting the essential details of the primary works which he is expected to consider in an English class. He can provide the background information necessary for the appreciation of the literature and yet leave the teaching of history and sociology to these respective disciplines.

This method of teaching literature and social history simultaneously would have additional advantages for the teacher in obviating the tendency of students to de-emphasize the importance of setting in favor of character, or plot and theme--a tendency which may result in the student's misinterpretation of non-realistic as well as realistic novels. In addition, once the student has acquired a total impression of an age, the teacher can examine other individual works as examples to demonstrate the validity of the impression; or the student can put his understanding to

work, not only in applying the same kind of analysis to different works (the texts on social history are readily available in any modest library), but also in learning to recognize when a work, for one reason or another, does not lend itself to this kind of analysis and to suggest a more appropriate approach. Once the student has acquired some conception of the "mud" out of which his literature has grown, he will be better able to understand the historical perspective implicit in each separate literary example. Once again, however, both teacher and student should be aware of the caution which Daiches gives his readers. "A work," he says, "which continues to be dependent for our appreciation of it on historical background--a work, that is, that does not light up in itself, as it were, as soon as our attention has been drawn to the proper way of looking at it--cannot be a successful work of art. . . ."[32]

A work is "great" for reasons other than its verisimilitude, and no single critical method can provide the total explanation of its "greatness," just as no single teaching method can open up a work for every student. This study has emphasized the importance of social background to the English teacher; but its findings might also serve the history teacher as a check upon social historians or be of potential value to the teacher of sociology. In addition, it would

[32] Daiches, p. 265.

seem that anyone teaching interdisciplinary courses in any of these fields would find it useful as a pedagogical tool for the illumination of all three disciplines. Nevertheless, throughout the discussions, the major hope has been that this study might serve the English teacher by reemphasizing the importance of social and historical knowledge and demonstrating the possibility of simultaneously teaching social history and literature in the English course without neglecting the primary works or the purposes of teaching literature.

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