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FIELDING'S IRONY

AND THE CORRUPTION OF LANGUAGE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1964

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English Literature
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The subject of this study is Henry Fielding's preoccupation with language and communication. Its purpose is not only to gather together all of Fielding's more important statements on this subject and to interpret these in the light of the linguistic theory and the psychology of communication of his times, but also to try to show that his concern for such matters was central to his thought and, since the writer is involved with language above all men, crucially relevant to his art. The importance of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century concern with language and communication has been made clear to literary students through the pioneering studies of R. F. Jones and George Williamson. Martin Price, Aubrey Williams, and John Traugott, in their respective studies of Swift, Pope, and Sterne, have shown how deeply this concern was felt in some of the major writers of the period. But Fielding, who, in the words of Leslie Stephen, "more than anyone, gives the essential -- the very form and pressure of his time," has never had his claims to consideration in these terms strongly advanced.

He has not, indeed, in the traditional view, been credited with much sophistication at all in matters of language. As a stylist he has been both praised and damned, but it is an open question whether it is the negative or the positive opinions which have misrepresented him the most. One can dismiss as mere slander such contemporary criticisms as
the one in *Old England* for Sept. 5, 1748, attacking Fielding's "Ignorance in Grammar, his false English, and his Meanness of Language."4 William Godwin's charge that the style of *Tom Jones* is "feeble, costive, and slow" and that it is marked by a "hide-bound sportiveness" which is "hard, pedantic and unnatural" is surely perverse.5 Taine's judgment that Fielding was a "careless," slapdash stylist, an "amiable buffalo" who lacked "even literary vanity" only betrays the Frenchman's lack of sympathy for Fielding's English temperament.6 And William Mudford's editorial opinion that his style was careless, ungrammatical, and full of "inelegancies" and that Fielding must "have studied the art of writing with very little attention" can be relegated to the unattended grave of minor criticism from which it was exhumed.7

But the praise of Fielding's admirers, eloquent and well-intentioned as it doubtless is, is not so handily dealt with. Its dominant effect, placing the emphasis on Fielding's stylistic vigor and "ease" to the exclusion, almost, of everything else, has been to represent him as a writer gifted in his loquacity but without subtlety, sophistication, or verbal sensitivity. George Eliot, in a famous passage in *Middlemarch*, expressed delight in "the lusty ease of his fine English."8 John Stuart Mill declared that Fielding's style combines "in a remarkable degree ease with force."9 Andrew Lang wrote of its "delightful ease."10 Henry Craik noted its "massive carelessness" but praised its "consumate ease," which is entirely free, he added, of "constraint of subtlety."11 J. H. Lobban commended Fielding's "vigorous easy style."12 However valid such criticism may be impressionistically, it fails to take into account the expense of conscious art with which the effect of "ease" was achieved, and it misses
entirely the awareness of medium, the consciousness of the process of communication between character and character and between author and reader, the sheer sensitivity to language, which are the marks of Fielding's writing at least as much as the surface of stylistic "ease" and "vigor."

Not all of his critics, of course, have been so narrow. Leslie Stephen noticed how pointedly Fielding distinguished between the moral codes by which men actually lived and those "by which they affected to be governed in language"; like Dr. Johnson, "he refused to be imposed upon by phrases."¹³ Winfield H. Rogers has pointed out that Fielding's "use of words as satiric or ethical symbols is at once a part of his predilection for symbolism and his desire for exact expression . . . . It was ethically, and frequently satirically, effective to show what terms had, might, or should stand for."¹⁴ Sheridan Baker has found the chief virtue of Fielding's style to lie not in its ease or vigor but in Fielding's "alert attention to the meanings of words."¹⁵ Middleton Murry has noted how this works to clear "our minds . . . of cant."¹⁶ And William B. Coley, in a moment of real insight, has called attention to Fielding's "attitude toward the corrupting word."¹⁷

Fielding's attitude toward the corrupting word is the subject of the present study. Or rather, since Coley appears to underestimate the situation, it is about Fielding's attitude toward the word as both corrupting and corruptible. For corruption, as Fielding saw it, worked both ways. "There is a strict Analogy," he wrote, "between the Taste and Morals of an Age; and Depravity in one always induces Depravity in the other."¹⁸ Debased language contributed to the undermining of soci-
ety, but a debased society also contributed to the undermining of language, and to a man who was both moralist and writer, as Fielding eminently was, the alternative seemed equally bad. "It is possible," he observed in *Tom Jones*, "for a man to convey a lie in the words of truth." The passage, in context, has to do with the unmasking of a hypocrite, Blifil's confederate Mr. Dowling. But it is also typical of Fielding's perpetual awareness that the medium in which he worked and the motives which moved him were both subject to the grim possibility of corruption, of perversion, of prostitution. The problem, then, on the one hand, was to gauge the effects of the abuse of language on the society in which it was practiced. But equally a matter for concern was the question of what happens to the "words of truth," the common stock of language available alike to the hypocrite and the honest man, to the hired hack and the serious writer, when these words are regularly perverted to the service of lies. Do the words escape unsoiled or do they bear the taint of the lie? May the honest man speak them or the serious author write them with the assurance that his own sincerity will scrub them clean and restore their pristine values, or will they remain suspect and spread their rot to the thoughts and sentiments they convey? Is the communication of truth, indeed, in the form of the direct profession, possible at all? The problem was a real one for Fielding, and he was not alone in the eighteenth century in his concern about it. Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to George Washington, complained that he was unable to express his gratitude for Washington's services to his country, "for such is become the prostitution of language that sincerity has no longer distinct terms in which to express her own truths."
Fielding's sensitivity to the linguistic prostitutions of his age and his lifetime search for a means, in the absence of "distinct terms," of expressing the truths of sincerity, are the concerns of this study. For everywhere one turns in his works, from the earliest plays through the great novels, one comes upon expressions of the theme and sees evidence of Fielding's personal struggle with a corrupt and intractable medium. An understanding of his attitude toward language and communication helps account not only for his hatred of hypocrisy, but also for his contempt for Grub Street, his suspicion of politics, his distrust of the learned professions, and his aversion to polite society. Even more important, perhaps, Fielding's preoccupation with language and communication suggests an underlying rationale for some of his most characteristic methods as a writer -- for his self-conscious manipulations of style (the shifts from the plain language of narrative to the mock-heroic or the mock-sublime), for his use of the notorious "interpolated tales," for his elaborate apparatuses of authorial self-dramatization (including those favorite cruxes of the critics, the prefatory chapters, the digressions, and the "intrusive" commentary), and, finally, for his special commitment to the mode of verbal irony.

It will be the business of the succeeding chapters to develop the evidence for these assertions. The purpose of the first chapter, which traces the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critique of language, with particular reference to its literary relationships, from Bacon through Fielding's own time, is to provide a background against which Fielding's attitudes may be viewed in historical perspective. Chapter II examines Fielding's explicit statements about the corruption of language
and related matters. The third attempts to fill in the complex of philosophical assumptions, popular attitudes, and actual linguistic conditions underlying these statements. Chapter IV deals with the interrelationships of language and society implicit in Fielding's attacks on such corruptive forces as polite conversation, hack writing, political propaganda, and professional jargon. The final three chapters constitute a critical examination of the novels from the point of view developed in the preceding chapters. Chapter V considers the "remedies," with special attention to his use of irony, which Fielding sought to apply in his own writings in general and in his novels in particular to insulate them against the corruptions of his medium. Chapter VI concentrates in detail on the case of "prudence" in Tom Jones. Chapter VII discusses the rhetoric of dramatized authorship as an ironic corrective to those corruptions of language inherent not in the medium but in the agent of communication.
NOTES


14 "Fielding's Early Aesthetic and Technique," SP, XL (1943), 541-2.

15 Henry Fielding and the Cliche," Criticism, I (1959), 357.


18 Letter XL, in Sarah Fielding's Familiar Letters Between the Principal Characters in David Simple (London, 1747), II, 298.


CHAPTER I
THE FORM AND PRESSURE OF THE TIME

The eighteenth century, like the twentieth, was a language-conscious age. Everyone in the period, as S. A. Leonard says, "appears to have noted the imperfection of the language and the necessity for remedial measures."¹ The "former Age," by which writers as late as the final quarter of the century invariably meant the period from the accession of Elizabeth to the Restoration, had fought and won the battle for the vernacular, and for a time the dominant attitude toward the English language had been one of confidence and pride. No longer did writers in English have to apologize for its "rude," "barbaric" inadequacy, for its lack of "eloquence" and "refinement," for its inferiority to Latin and Greek. R. F. Jones dates the turning point in this recognition by English writers and rhetoricians of the potentialities of their language as "not earlier than 1575 nor later than 1580." The literary spirit of the Elizabethan age, he says, "was in part determined by the new-found confidence in the vernacular. The creative enthusiasm and the sheer delight in the use of language so characteristic of Elizabethan writers owed much to their discovery of the potentialities of the mother tongue and of the resultant confidence in their medium of expression."²

But the voices of doubt were not long in making themselves heard.
Loudest and most insistent were the spokesmen of science, the "new Philosophy." As early as 1620, Francis Bacon, who still preferred Latin for his own more serious works, had in Novum Organum condemned language in general, under the image of "Idols of the Market-place," as among the major obstacles to the advancement of learning. Existing languages, he insisted, the debased common currency of mankind, were not adequate for scientific discourse. They were illogical, inexact, full of vague abstractions which had little if any foundation in reality and which interposed confusion between man and nature. The Royal Society, taking up the cry later in the seventeenth century, made the scientific reform of language a part of its program. Nothing much came of the committee it appointed in 1664 "for improving the English tongue," even though it included, among other distinguished members, Dryden, Evelyn, and Waller. But another of its members, Thomas Sprat, has left us a statement of the committee's aims which sums up with admirable scientific conciseness the linguistic ideals of the Society and of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science in general. The purpose of the committee and the enduring ideal of the Royal Society, wrote Sprat in his History of the Royal Society (1667), was to bring language "as near the Mathematical plainness" as possible, so as to enable writers to state "so many things almost in an equal number of words." "This linguistic reformation," says R. F. Jones, "was to be achieved by a constant narrowing of terms through strict definition, and by the employment of words that would be exactly equivalent, not to hazy conceptions bred in the minds of men by the loose usage of the past, but to the objective truths of nature." The scientific reformers "were
seeking an objective rather than subjective, materialistic rather than psychological basis for language."

In its more radical form, this aim led to the desire for a new "universal language," a sort of scientific Esperanto such as that projected in John Wilkins' *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668), which would rectify the multiplicity of tongues and avoid the defects of established languages. This universal language, Wilkins promised, would be framed not by reference to "some particular Language," but "according to . . . the nature of things, and that common Notion of them, wherein Mankind does agree, which must chiefly be respected, before any attempt of this nature [can] signify any thing, as to the main end of it." In the more important and influential philosophical writers of the time, however, it took the more practical shape of recommendations to reform the existing language. It was Hobbes, according to George Williamson, who did most to plant the problem of communication in the minds of the Restoration. But though he, too, in the *Leviathan* (1651), insisted that obscurity and confusion must be purged from language and that words must be made to refer to things, the principal reforms he urged were economy and brevity of style and the clear and careful definition of terms. John Locke, who in Book III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) set out the fullest and most sophisticated critique of language yet written, was fundamentally in the same tradition, and his analysis of the most iniquitous "Imperfections" and "Abuses" of words and his program of "Remedies" for these defects left a deep imprint on the linguistic consciousness
of the next century. Bishop Berkeley and David Hume, both taking off from Locke, kept the critique of language alive as a philosophical issue, and Joseph Addison, among others, testified to its popular application:

Mr. Lock's Essay on Human Understanding would be thought a very odd Book for a Man to make himself Master of, who would get a Reputation by Critical Writings; though at the same Time it is very certain that an Author who has not learned the Art of distinguishing between Words and Things, and of ranging his Thoughts, and setting them in proper Lights, whatever Notions he may have, will lose himself in Confusion and Obscurity.

The spirit of science, according to R. F. Jones, was the most powerful force operating on English linguistic attitudes in the seventeenth century, and, consequently, on English prose style. It was largely responsible, he argues, for effecting the transition from the mannerism characteristic of the Elizabethan period and of the early seventeenth century to the dominant "plain style" of the eighteenth century. George Williamson, however, has argued that the original influence in these areas was not science but the "anti-Ciceronian" movement in rhetorical theory. Sprat, he notes, speaks in the History of the Royal Society "both of improving the tongue for philosophy and of polishing it for literature." According to Williamson it was the latter aim, reflecting the disaffection of professional writers and rhetoricians with the various species of formal ornateness of style in the preceding age (Ciceronian imitations, Euphuism, "metaphysical" wit, theatrical bombast, etc.), which was the more deeply rooted and which was taken over by the scientific reformers for their own purposes. Like Jones, Williamson traces the English movement for linguistic and stylistic reform from Bacon, through Hobbes, to Sprat,
and into the neo-classical ideal of a plain prose style, but he discov-
er the principal motive force behind this movement in the Age of Reasen's
distrust of a rhetoric, operating often in the discredited
service of "enthusiasm," which stressed luxury of expression and emo-
tional appeal at the expense of rational directness and truth, and which
valued sound more highly than meaning. Jones and Williamson agree, how-
ever, in recognizing that the spirit of science and the anti-Ciceronian
reaction were both instrumental in forming the linguistic attitudes of
the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their dispute over which
was the more powerful influence need not detain us. The important
thing, for our purposes, is that the two forces worked together to pro-
duce, in Williamson's words, "a new psychology of communication" in the
later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "a new temper in the liter-
ary mind."\textsuperscript{13}

Another sphere in which this "new psychology of communication" was
felt, again beginning with the Restoration but continuing well into the
eighteenth century, was the theory of sermon oratory. Swift's \textit{Letter
to a Young Clergyman} (1721), says Jones, with its emphasis on spareness
and austerity of style, "advances a standard for sermons which is exact-
ly the same" as that developed in a series of Restoration treatises on
pulpit rhetoric strongly influenced, in their turn, by the stylistic
ideals of the Royal Society.\textsuperscript{14} But the distrust of rhetoric, and the
reaction against its employment by "enthusiastic" Puritan preachers and
by such "metaphysical" divines as Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne,
were equally important in shaping the attitudes of the pulpit reformers.
One of the "focuse of attack," as W. Fraser Mitchell has pointed out,
was on figures of speech -- dear to both the dissenting and the "metaphysical" preachers -- which, the reformists charged, at once obscured truth and provoked dangerous emotion. John Eachard, for example, in *The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy* (1670), attacked these "Metaphor-Mongers" for affronting God and clouding truth with their "frightful Metaphors," and Joseph Glanville, in *An Essay Concerning Preaching* (1678), centered his critique on the same point. This anti-rhetorical reaction, moreover, gave the pulpit reform movement an intensity which exceeded even that of its scientific counterpart. For what was believed to be at stake was not only the advancement of scientific knowledge but also the communication of the higher knowledge and the higher truths of religion -- the Word of God itself. The religious factionalism which had rocked the foundations of Church and State in the Civil War and which still divided the nation was now widely attributed, by religious theorists, to the deficiencies and perversions of language. This interpretation, says Jones, "removed the discussion of style from a purely aesthetic and intellectual realm, and proposed it almost literally as a matter of life and death." But the pulpit reformers, Jones concludes, whatever their special motives and interests, were really making the same demands for religious discourse as the scientists were for natural philosophy: "a new medium of expression that would represent real things just as they are, and thus remove controversies caused by mere fancies and the imaginative, empty, and obscuring verbosity with which they were expressed." To both the scientists and the reformers of the pulpit, truth "possessed a vivid reality which was in constant danger of being dimmed when expressed in..."
Language. Language was almost considered a necessary evil of communication. John Wilkins, who, like so many of his contemporaries, was both a clergyman and a Fellow of the Royal Society, expressed this identity of interests when he proclaimed that his design for a universal language, sponsored by the Royal Society, would not only benefit natural philosophy but would also contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in Religion, by unmasking many wild errors, that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases; which being Philosophically unfolded, and rendered according to the genuine and natural importance of Words, will appear to be inconsistencies and contradictions. And several of these pretended, mysterious, profound notions, expressed in great swelling words, whereby some men set up for reputation, being this way examined, will appear to be, either nonsense, or very flat and jejune.

And tho it should be of no other use but this, yet were it in these days well worth a man's pains and study, considering the Common mischief that is done, and the many impostures and cheats that are put upon men, under the disguise of affected insignificant Phrases.

Isaac Barrow, John Tillotson, and Robert South, the most famous preachers of the time and the best exemplars of the plain style of preaching, were all nourished in this tradition of distrust of language and suspicion of rhetoric; and the sermon, according to Mitchell, "was the prime literary influence of the day."

The well-known literary result of these reformative forces at work in science, rhetoric, and sermon theory was the flowering in Addison, Steele, and Swift of the plain prose style, but the psychological effect was the heightened consciousness of eighteenth-century men of letters, mindful of how hard-fought was their victory, of the dangers to which language is prey. For the confidence and pride of language which had accompanied the triumph of the vernacular in the Elizabethan period
did not, upon the victory of the plain style, make themselves felt with anything like the same force. Or rather, that confidence was now tempered by a discontent with the imperfections which remained and by a fear that, unless drastic measures were taken, these could only get worse. Swift, whose mastery of the plain style was complete, could assert that he was speaking "in the Name of all the Learned and polite Persons of the Nation" when he complained "that our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions, that the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities, and that in many Instances it offends against every Part of Grammar." With this declaration, in *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), Swift aligned himself with the movement to establish an English Language Academy, on the model of the French Academy, for the purpose of arresting the progress of linguistic corruption and of "fixing" the language according to some authoritatively derived standard of usage. The idea has obvious affinities with the Royal Society's program "for improving the English tongue," but Swift's advocacy of it gives added weight to Williamson's argument that there were other forces besides science standing behind the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discontent with language. For Swift had notoriously little use for the Royal Society, and indeed it was very likely that august body he had in mind when he referred scornfully to "the Pretenders to polish and refine" the language "who have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities." Moreover, the idea predated the Society by a good many years and often occurred independently of its auspices.
Dryden, for example, in the dedicatory epistle of his *Rival Ladies* (1664), had proposed a language academy the year before he was appointed to the Royal Society committee. Defoe, in *Essay on Projects* (1698), made a similar plea; so did Addison in the *Spectator* No. 135, for Aug. 4, 1711; and despite the evident impracticalities attending such plans, they continued to be advanced, fruitlessly, throughout the eighteenth century. One respected philologist of the mid-century, Dr. George Harris, even declared that if the decrees of an academy were enforced by an act of Parliament, this "would alone be sufficient to preserve our Language entire to the most distant times."²²

Not everyone, of course, was so sanguine, but Dr. Harris' belief in control was characteristic of the authoritarian turn which the concern with language and communication began to take in the eighteenth century. The ancient and honored profession of textual criticism, for example, traditionally concerned with settling disputed readings and deriving reliable texts, developed in the early eighteenth century what Dr. Johnson described as a "rage for emendation."²³ Such practitioners of the art as Richard Bentley, Lewis Theobald, and William Warburton were no longer satisfied with merely determining what authors had actually written in corrupted passages or had meant in obscure ones, but were sometimes moved also to prescribe what they should have written. "Ungrammatical" passages were "corrected," "inelegancies" of expression were purged, and "proper" words were substituted for the "low" or "inexact" phraseology of the originals. The contemptuous reaction of such writers as Swift and Pope to this kind of verbal quibbling and tampering with masterpieces is well known, but for all its presumptu-
ousness, the prescriptive verbal criticism of the eighteenth century could be and was defended in terms well calculated to appeal to the age's deep seated concern for its language. "These seeming Minutities," wrote one apologist, "are by no Means to be despised, since they contribute to the Intelligibleness of Language."24

More widely respected and influential, however, though equally authoritarian in its attitude toward language, was the movement by eighteenth-century grammarians to make English a "ruled tongue." Swift, as we have seen, in citing the "Imperfections" of the English language, called particular attention to the fact that "in many Instances it offends against every Part of Grammar": not, as a later commentator explained, "in its nature," but "as it is spoken by the politest part of the nation, and as it stands in the writings of our most approved authors."25 The feeling, then, was that the grammatical deficiency of English was not merely a question of the offenses of individuals who were ignorant or careless of the rules, but was a condition, albeit a correctible one, of the language itself. The assumption, shared by the majority of Swift's contemporaries, was that the rules of English grammar had not yet been formulated, and one of the tasks he wanted the proposed academy to undertake was to ascertain and prescribe such rules. But if an English Academy empowered to legislate on matters of grammar was to remain an impractical dream, there was yet no lack of individual efforts to accomplish the same end. S. A. Leonard, who has studied "the remarkable inundation of books on language problems during the ... eighteenth century,"26 has found that the majority of these were grammars and that their principal aim was to determine and "fix" a standard
of English usage which would be as "regular" and absolute as the formal grammar of Latin and Greek and as elegant as that of modern French.

The methods of the eighteenth-century grammarians were varied, but nearly all, according to Leonard, were of an authoritarian cast of mind and addicted to ipse dixit pronouncements of "correctness." "The purpose of grammar," wrote one, "is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety, . . . and to be able to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. The plain way of doing this is to lay down rules." Some, especially in the early years of the century, cherished the hope of deriving English standards directly from the classical languages. Others, believing in the independent "genius" of the English language, attempted to apply the principle of internal analogy with the aim of making English grammar wholly consistent unto itself. The most influential school, flourishing especially in the second half of the century, is best represented by the theoretical treatises of James Harris and, later, Horne Tooke, and by the immensely popular grammatical handbook of Robert Lowth. It took something from each of the other schools but placed its ultimate faith in the ability of grammarians, combining empiricism with deductive logic, to arrive at a "Universal Grammar" which, "without regarding the several Idioms of particular languages, only respects those Principles that are essential to them all," and thereby provides an unimpeachable authority for the grammarian of English to apply "those principles to that particular language." The verdict of modern descriptive grammarians, when contemplating their predecessors of the eighteenth century, is likely to be that they were inordinately complacent about the
standards they preached. But however this may be, we should recognize that the impetus behind the movement was far from a complacent one.

The English language [wrote Lowth] hath been much cultivated during the last two hundred years. It hath been considerably polished and refined; it hath been greatly enlarged in extent and compass; its force and energy, its variety, richness, and elegance, have been tried with good success, in verse and prose, upon all subjects, and in every kind of stile; but whatever other improvements it may have received, it hath made no advances in Grammatical accuracy.\(^{31}\)

Addison and Steele were concerned with the subject in the pages of *The Spectator*,\(^ {32}\) and Dr. Johnson, when he declared that he had "found our speech copious without order, and energetic without rules," was speaking for an age which was not at all satisfied with the language it had to make do with.\(^ {33}\)

Dr. Johnson's own dissatisfaction, however, was not so much with the disorders of English grammar (he devoted only a few of the prefatory pages of the *Dictionary* to the subject) as with the anarchy of English diction. Like Swift, he deplored above all else the mutability of language, its susceptibility to change in meaning, in pronunciation, even in spelling. He believed, with Swift and most of the linguistic theorists of the day, in the "corruption of language," the idea that words could be in some sense permanently or temporarily damaged by misuse, and the answer he offered to the problem was *The Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). The answer, of course, was not a new one. Of the relatively few seventeenth-century "dictionaries," most had been merely glossaries of "hard words," with no higher purpose, usually, than to serve as convenient reference manuals for readers of erudite books.
But even Sir Thomas Blount, the compiler of one such work, had to confess that the task of the lexicographer can "find no end; since our English tongue daily changes habit, every fantastical Traveller and home-bred Sciolist being at liberty, as, to antiquate and decry the old, so to coyn and innovate new Words." 34

The eighteenth century, however, as befitted a period whose pride of language was mixed with a sense of its instability, was both more prolific and more ambitious in its lexicography. It was, in the words of James H. Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb, "an age of dictionaries." 35 Most of these were larger than those of the previous century, aiming if not at completeness then at least at some degree of comprehensiveness, and their authors usually professed to be engaged in the battle against linguistic change. Sir James Murray, in The Evolution of English Lexicography, locates the beginnings of this new seriousness in dictionary-making in "the second quarter of the [eighteenth] century," and interprets it as yet another aspect of the movement to consolidate the triumph of the plain prose style and to "fix" the English language at the level of maturity this style was believed to represent. But if the universal desire for a "standard" language, fixed and immutable, presupposed a conviction that English had achieved a perfection worth preserving, it also reflected a fear that this perfection could not last. The reforms called for by the seventeenth century had been, in the opinion of most of the writers and thinkers of the next century, largely accomplished, and though they placed the acme of perfection variously, nearly all believed that the process of linguistic change should now be stopped before the decay, which history taught them had
always been the fate of languages, began to set in. The pressure for
standardization by an academy or a dictionary was strengthened, in fact,
by the sense that the decay had already begun. "The fear," explains
Murray, "was that a . . . fate should overtake English" comparable to
that which had befallen Latin and other ancient languages after they had
reached their golden age -- decay and debasement, the decline from a
golden age into a silvern, and thence into a brazen and finally an iron
age. To avert this calamity, "the only remedy appeared to be to fix the
language by means of a 'Standard Dictionary,' which would register the
proper sense and use of every word and phrase, from which no polite
writer henceforth would be expected to deviate."^{36}

Nathan Bailey's popular and influential *Universal Etymological
English Dictionary* (1721) was based on the assumption that proper and
invariable meanings could be arrived at by historical principles, that
the distortions, accretions, and encrustations of time and corruption
could be stripped away by an etymological process which would lay bare
the pristine "original" senses of words. Benjamin Martin's *Lingua Brit­
nannica Reformata* (1749) carried the promise of linguistic reform in
its title. But it was Johnson's *Dictionary*, of course, which was the
most famous product of the eighteenth-century movement in lexicogra­
phy -- its culmination, indeed, and the grandest of the age's monu­
ments to its preoccupation with language. Its original purpose, as
Johnson had announced in the *Plan of an English Dictionary* (1747), was
to "fix the English language." "All change," he believed, "is of it­
self evil," and he hoped to arrest such change by force of the author­
ity of "grammar," "reason," and the precedents of "the best writers."
"Barbarous or impure words and expressions," he promised, would "be branded with some note of infamy"; and words for which etymological research could not produce respectable pedigrees would be banished so as to "secure our language from being overrun with cant, from being crowded with low terms, the spawn of folly or affectation, and, of which, therefore, no legitimate derivation can be shown." In the Preface to the Dictionary, however, Johnson contemplated the finished work and confessed that his original aims had been such as "neither reason nor experience can justify." No dictionary, nor any other agency of man, "can embalm the language, and secure it from corruption and decay," for it is not in the power of men "to change sublunary nature or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation."

The forces of change, Johnson decided, could not be stopped. "Commerce, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language." Every increase of knowledge, "new or fancied," will produce new words, every novel opinion will "moderate speech," and as old customs die out so will the words which existed to express them. So too, words will continue to be "deflected from their original sense"; some will be elevated, others degraded; "vicissitudes of fashion will enforce the use of new, or extend the signification of known terms." Poetry "will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense"; ignorant hack writers, "not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety." Polite society will continue to legislate its own arbitrary rules of verbal delicacy and vulgarity, of ceremony and form. Such corruptions will go on, said John-
son, because it is the nature of language that they should, however much one might wish that words "might be less apt to decay, and might be permanent, like the things which they denote."

But while recognizing that "the changes that we fear be thus irresistible," Johnson was yet not willing "to acquiesce with silence": "it remains that we retard what we cannot repeal, that we palliate what we cannot cure." If corruption could not be arrested, it could at least be slowed down, and Johnson apparently felt, along with Swift and others, that as it was the accelerated corruptions of his own century which most clearly betokened the decline of the English language from its peak of maturity, so it was incumbent on the reformer of the tongue to try to mitigate at least these corruptions by appealing to the precedent of "the writers before the restoration, whose works I regard as the wells of English undefiled, as the pure sources of genuine diction."

Tongues, it may be, "have a natural tendency to degeneration," but so do governments, and we do not, for that reason, give way to anarchy. "We have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language."

It was perfectly fitting and in keeping with the spirit of the age that this noblest of all its many appeals to "make some struggles for our language" should have come from the acknowledged leader of its literary community. For English men of letters, from the time of Dryden on, had clearly recognized that their stake in the condition of the English tongue was a particularly vital one, and if they did not always agree with the specific goals and methods of the scientists, the textual critics, and others, they nevertheless shared their concern
for the problems of language and communication. Nearly all of the serious writers of the day were in one degree or another conscious of the imperfections and corruptions of the medium in which they worked, and few were willing to "acquiesce in silence." Nor was Dr. Johnson the first literary man of the century who believed that the task of compiling a standard dictionary should appropriately be undertaken by a professional writer. Addison had planned to write a dictionary and had apparently already begun to collect illustrative quotations (chiefly from the works of Tillotson) when he abandoned the project upon being appointed Secretary of State. Pope was interested in Addison's plan, but it was Ambrose Philips, a loyal member of Addison's "little Senate," who seems to have taken it over next, only to drop it later for unknown reasons. In English literary circles as early as 1711, according to Mary Segar, "dictionary-making was in the air." 39

But even before the movement had gotten under way to "fix" the English language as a whole by means of a dictionary, the poets and critics of the age had begun to take steps to standardize and purify the special language of poetry. The rise of the concept of "poetic diction," the belief that the language of poetry, in James Sutherland's words, ought "to be decontaminated from all mean and vulgar associations," 40 was almost exactly contemporaneous with the development of the Restoration and eighteenth-century critique of language. Sprat, the rhetoricians, and the reformers of pulpit oratory were specifically concerned with the style of prose, but surely the movement toward simplicity and purity of diction in poetry could not have been altogether independent of their influence, and must at least, as Thomas Quayle proposes,
have flowed from the same basic impulses -- the discontent of the age with its language and the universal will to do something about it.\textsuperscript{41}

Dr. Johnson, in \textit{The Life of Dryden}, defined poetic diction as a "system of words . . . refined from the grossness of domestick use,"\textsuperscript{42} and Bacon or Sprat might well have summed up their own linguistic ideals in the same terms. In fact, as F. W. Bateson points out,

\begin{quote}
The vocabulary of poetic diction can be paralleled in the numerous technical terms of science, philosophy, and politics that were coined in the eighteenth century. The motives that led the chemists to create a word like "phlogiston" (first used in 1733) were ultimately identical with those that induced Thomson and the rest to call fishes a "finny tribe." Both words could have been replaced by others already in use, but they were not mere synonyms. By restricting a general notion to a particular field they represented a gain in precision . . . . The tendency was therefore a natural development of the doctrine of "perspicuity." That doctrine, as originally formulated, had been that there could be no possibility of obscurity or ambiguity if every word were restricted to a single universally accepted meaning.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

But if poetic diction thus shared the scientific ideal of absolute precision in words, it also reflected, like Johnson's \textit{Dictionary}, the age's fear of the "corruption" of language. It was necessary, most eighteenth-century poets believed, to build out of more enduring stuff than the changing language of ordinary affairs. "Our poetry . . . has a language peculiar to itself," wrote Gray.\textsuperscript{44} "It is not too much to say," declares Geoffrey Tillotson, "that in the eighteenth century part of the English language was rendered temporarily unusable in 'serious' poetry."\textsuperscript{45} Joseph Addison was able to explain why:

\begin{quote}
If Clearness and Perspicuity were only to be consulted, the Poet would have Nothing else to do but to cloath his Thoughts in the most plain and natur-
al Expressions. But, since it often happens that the
most obvious Phrases, and those which are used in
ordinary Conversation, become too familiar to the Ear,
and contract a Kind of Meaness by passing through the
Mouths of the Vulgar, a Poet should take particular
Care to guard himself against idiomatic Ways of Speak­ing . . . . The great Masters in Composition know very
well that many an elegant Phrase becomes improper for
a Poet or an Orator, when it has been debased by
common Use. (My italics)46

The fear that familiar, workaday usage would "corrupt" words by wearing
off their gloss and mystery was widespread and deeply felt, and it was
chiefly to insulate the special language of poetry from this danger that
the ideal of poetic diction existed.

It is scarcely surprising, then, that the problems of language and
communication, so much in evidence in other manifestations of the age
and so especially relevant to the art of letters, should also turn up
among the major themes of eighteenth-century literature. Swift's con­
nection, in A Proposal for Correcting . . . the English Tongue and
Letter to a Young Clergyman, with two of these other manifestations has
already been mentioned, and something of the importance to him of the
matters they dealt with can be gauged by the fact that the Proposal was
the only publication to which he ever signed his name. In a more speci­
fically literary vein, however, was an earlier ironic essay in The
Tatler No. 230, for Sept. 28, 1710, complaining that the evils of "Ig­
norance and Want of Taste," which have long plagued English writers,
have now "produced a Third; I mean the continual Corruption of our Eng­
lish Tongue; which without some timely Remedy will suffer more by the
false Refinements of Twenty Years past than it hath been improved in
the foregoing Hundred." In support of this contention he submits a
letter, abounding in such fashionable modernisms as abbreviations and contractions and full of new words "such as Banter, Bamboozle, ... and Kidney," which, he insists, is "in every Point an admirable Pattern of the present polite Way of Writing" and typical also of "the Books, Pamphlets, and single Papers, offered us every Day in the Coffee-houses." The "timely Remedy" Swift proposes here, however, is not the establishment of an academy or the publication of a standard dictionary, but the installation of The Tatler editor Isaac Bickerstaff (Steele) as Censor of the English Language and compiler of an annual Index Expurgatorius of corrupted words and phrases.\textsuperscript{47}

The "corruptions" Swift cites seem trivial, and the proposed remedy, of course, is an ironic gesture of futility, but Swift's irritation with the "late Refinements crept into our Language" is unmistakably genuine and his criticism basically serious. His Polite Conversations (1728) provides further evidence, though again in a satiric vein, of his "constant interest \[in\] the problems of maintaining the integrity of the mother tongue for the purpose of writing and conversation."\textsuperscript{48} This compilation of fashionable slang, clichés, affected phraseology, false wit, and vulgarisms -- arranged, devastatingly, in the form of continuous dialogues from which all real communication is thereby excluded -- is not simply an attack on the empty-headedness of polite society, but also an indictment of its special contribution to the degradation of language.

In Gulliver's Travels, Part III, Swift satirized another contemporary form of language corruption in his description of the School of Languages at the Grand Academy of Lagado, whose professors, reducing
to absurdity the linguistic reforms urged by the Royal Society, manage
to dispense with words altogether and to discourse entirely by means
of "Things," which they clumsily carry about with them for that purpose.
For despite their common interest in "perspicuity," Swift and other
writers of the age did not share the Royal Society's wish to banish ab­
stractions from language on the grounds that they could not be assigned
concrete referents. They feared, as Aubrey Williams suggests, that
"the moral and spiritual nature of man and the universe, . . . not re­
ducible to such terms," would be banished from discourse too, and that
mankind, left only with the mechanistic vocabulary of a Hobbesian mate­
rialism, would no longer have adequate terms in which to express intan­
gible principles.  

Swift's gloomy view of the mutability of tongues is given expres­
sion in *Gulliver* too, as is his final judgment of the deficiencies of
communication in any language corrupted by human imperfections. One
of the tragedies of the deathless Struldbruggs, also described in Book
III, is that the language of their country is always in such a state of
flux that one generation cannot understand the next, and in Book IV the
problem of communication is dramatized through Gulliver's difficulties
in trying to translate human concepts into the ideal language of the
Houyhnhnms. On one level the superiority of the Houyhnhnm tongue,
which Gulliver twice describes as a very "significant" (i.e., exact and
meaningful) one, is moral rather than strictly linguistic, and Gulliver
is put "to the pains of many Circumlocutions to give my Master a right
Idea of what I spoke; for their Language doth not abound in Variety of
Words, because their Wants and Passions are fewer than among us." They
have no words "to express any thing that is evil," and since Gulliver's descriptions of humanity are expressive of little else, this "made the Difficulties almost insuperable to give my Master any Conception of what I meant," so that "I was forced to define and describe by putting of Cases and making Suppositions." But it is precisely this necessity for being exact and specific, and thereby avoiding the refuge of such perverted abstractions as "Power, Government, War, Law, Punishment," which exposes the corruptions of Gulliver's human tongue. Forcing him to tell the naked truth and to call a spade a spade even against his own desire to give "as favourable a Turn as the Matter would bear," it is the austere concreteness of the Houyhnhnm language which largely accounts for the brutal satiric power of his descriptions. And this despite what Gulliver feels is a weakening of their import in their re-translation back "into our barbarous English," for the conversations as they appear in Gulliver's account are presented as literal translations into English, remembered by Gulliver in the "significant" Houyhnhnm tongue.

The moral corruptions of mankind are thus reflected in its per­versions of language, a point made almost wholly explicit in the famous passage in which Gulliver's Houyhnhnm Master comments on the human addiction to speaking "the Thing which was not. (For they have no Word in their Language to express Lying or Falsehood.)":

The use of Speech [the Master explained] was to make us understand one another, and to receive Information of Facts; now if any one said the Thing which was not, these Ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving Information, that he leaves me worse than in Ignorance;
for I am led to believe a Thing Black when it is White and Short when it is Long. And these were all the Notions he had concerning the Faculty of Lying, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practised among human creatures.  

The lie itself, then, is for Swift a force corruptive of language, and it is interesting that the definition of the true purpose of speech which he offers through the Houyhnhnm Master is almost identical with those put forward by such philosophical critics of the tongue as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. For the difficulties Gulliver experiences in trying to render truth into a corrupted English are precisely those of a reformer of the language. His "translations" of the conversations with the Houyhnhnm Master are models of a style purified of imperfections, and though Gulliver is not aware of it we may be sure that Swift was.

Pope, like Swift and like Johnson, was inclined to feel that any change in language was bad, and he too yearned -- though for more specifically literary reasons, perhaps -- for an immutable tongue. As he complained in An Essay on Criticism,

Our sons their fathers' failing language see,  
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.

The complaint was an old one (Chaucer himself, after all, had said, "Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is change"), and as R. F. Jones has pointed out, Pope's lines are a clear echo of a passage from Edmund Waller's "Of English Verse," written sometime around the middle of the previous century:

But who can hope his lines should long  
Last in a daily changing tongue?  
While they are new, envy prevails;  
And as that dies, our language fails.
But the difference between Waller and Pope is that for the earlier poet the mutability of English, though regrettable, was only one more reason why poets who aspired to the praise of posterity should write in the classical languages:

Poets that lasting marble seek,
Must carve in Latin, or in Greek;
We write in sand, our language grows,
And like the tide, our work o'erflows. 53

But for Pope this alternative was no longer a viable one, not because his classical learning was inferior to Waller's, but because he wrote as a man committed, for better or for worse, to the English language. In this he was altogether a writer of his own time and hence deeply involved in the "struggles for our language."

One of the germs which grew into the Scriblerus Club, according to the modern editor of the Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus, was Swift's plan for a language academy, 54 and though the larger scheme of the Club was to satirize all follies in the world of learning and letters, its members must have also conceived of it as at least in part a defensive action against the corruption and abuse of language. Pope, in The Art of Sinking in Poetry (1728), addressed himself specifically to the linguistic corruptions of his age by composing, in the Scriblerian guise, a mock rhetoric in which he ironically pretended to "recommend to our Authors the Study of the Abuse of Speech" as the surest means to literary success. Obscurity, confusion, mixed metaphors, jargon, hyperbole, anticlimax, vulgarity, tautology, and numerous other rhetorical evils are urged on would-be writers as fashionable modern virtues of style, empirically derived from the practice of the most successful contempo-
rary authors, which should be cultivated. In the chapter "the several Sorts of Style of the present Age," Pope recommends especially "the Florid," "the Pert," and "the Alamode," which latter "is fine by being new and has as its Principal Branch, . . . the Prurient." He also has ironic praise, however, for "the Finical, which consists of the most curious, affected, mincing Metaphors," the "Cumbrous, which moves heavily under a Load of Metaphors, and draws after it a long Train of Words," and the "Buskin, or Stately."

Pope would seem, then, to belong in the anti-rhetorical tradition which George Williamson traces in The Senecan Amble, but in reality, of course, his attack, like any such, is not against rhetoric per se but against the perversions and prostitutions of rhetoric in irresponsible hands. Cicero, Quintillian, and the humanistic tradition which reached its English fruition in Roger Ascham, recognized that rhetoric was an instrument with which men could be moved and led, but they urged always that its power must be exercised only in the service of truth and virtue. The orator, they insisted, must be above all a "good man," and the cause he pleads must be a good cause. But to Pope and others the high principles enunciated in rhetorical theory seemed mocked by modern experience. Everywhere one looked, not only in the world of letters but in all of society, one saw the honored tropes of classical rhetoric being perverted to mean and base ends:

Nothing is more evident than that diverse Persons, no other way remarkable, have a strong Disposition to the Formation of some particular Tropes or figure. Aristotle saith, that the Hyperbole is an Ornament of Speech fit for young Men of Quality; accordingly we find in those Gentlemen a wonderful Propensity to-
wards it, which is marvelously improv'd by traveling. Soldiers also and Seamen are very happy in the same Figure. The Periphrasis, or Circumlocution, is the peculiar Talent of Country Farmers, ... the Ellipsis or Speech by half-words of Ministers and Politicians, the Aposiopesis of Courtiers, the Littole [sic, i.e., litotes] or Diminution of Ladies, Whispers, and Backbiters; and the Anadyplosis of Common Cryers and Hawkers, who by redoubling the same Words, persuade People to buy their Oysters, green Hastings, or new Ballads. Epithets may be found in great plenty at Billingeagate, Sarcaasm and Irony learn'd upon the Water [i.e., from the traditionally abusive Thames watermen].

The point, of course, is that modern authors are learning their rhetoric not from the precepts and examples of antiquity nor from the best writers of the present, but from the corrupt practice of the ignorant and the irresponsible, and in Chapter XIII Pope proposes a sort of mechanistic Academy for the Advancement of Bathetic Literature, with "a Rhetorical Chest of Drawers" which would place the treasured tools of antiquity even more easily within the reach of anyone disposed to rifle it of its contents. 56

In the meantime, however, he offers his own ironic recipes for rhetorical perversion. Declaring that as "Gain or Profit ... must still be remember'd to be the whole end of our Writers and Speakers," he divines that rules for the making of a "Panegyric" are especially in demand. The rhetorical formula he advises is a simple lesson in the corruption of words: that "Every Man is honourable who is so by Law, Custom, or Title" is obvious to all, but requiring more subtlety is the method of turning a Vicious Man into a Hero. ... which consists ... in converting Vices into their bordering Virtues. A man who is a Spendthrift and will not pay a just Debt, may have his Injustice transform'd into Liberality; Coward-
ice may be metamorphos'd into Prudence; Intemperance into good Nature and good Fellowship, Corruption into Patriotism, and Lewdness into Tenderness and Faculty.57

This concern, says Aubrey Williams, "for the rhetorical tradition which both sustained and, to a certain extent defined Augustan humanism, led Pope and others to a concern for the dignity and integrity of the 'word' itself." The grat issue of this concern for Pope was of course The Dunciad, in which his "antipathy to corrupters of the word"58 is apotheosized in the vision of the power of Dulness as the "uncreating Word" before which "Light dies." In Book IV he describes some of the victims of the Goddess Dulness, held prisoner beneath her throne:

There foam'd rebellious Logic, gag'd and bound,
There, stript, fair Rhet'ric languish'd on the ground;
His blunted Arms by Sophistry are born,
And shameless Billingsgate her Robes adorn.59

Sophistry and Billingsgate (which Pope uses here to stand for abused as well as abusive use of language) have usurped the offices of Logic and Rhetoric and stalk abroad in the world under their titles. But the condition of the deposed prisoners is symbolic too. Before Sophistry can enjoy a free hand, Logic must be not only bound but also gagged -- that is, he must be deprived of the use of speech, of language. His consort Rhetoric, therefore, whose marriage to Logic celebrates the classical and humanistic doctrine of the inseparability of words and ideas,60 is dispossessed of her function. No longer able to speak for Logic, she lies "stript" and useless, mere naked verbiage, without value or meaning.

But Sophistry and Billingsgate, who have assumed the names of Logic and Rhetoric, are disinclined to wed. They go, in fact, their
separate ways in the service of Dulness. Pope does not develop the allegory in precisely these terms, but as Aubrey Williams has brilliantly demonstrated in Pope's *Dunciad*, the separation of philosophy and rhetoric is the focus of Pope's attack in Book IV. It is a resumption, or continuation, of the controversies between the Sophists and Plato, between Cicero and the philosophers, between the humanists and the schoolmen, between the poets and the virtuosi of the seventeenth century . . . . To the dialectician, the logician, the scientist, the virtuoso, the "art" of rhetoric quite often, in Plato's terms, becomes little more than an art of cookery, serving up seasonable sauces to titillate the appetites of an audience, not so much concerned with delivering the naked truth as with clouding the issues or functioning for self-display. The boast of the Sophists, that wisdom could be taught by words, met stubborn denunciation from Plato and Aristotle. And there is, of course, always the danger in any rhetoric of a degeneration into mere words, empty and meaning-less verbalism. To the scientist and the logician, who are more interested in things, in the matter, than in words, and who wish to express "so many things, almost in an equal number of words" (as the members of the Royal Society desired to do), the function of rhetoric may appear slight indeed.  

Pope, then, like Swift, believed that the scientific reformers of the language had "chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities," and just as Swift symbolized these absurdities in his picture of the laborious discourses-by-things in the Grand Academy of Lagado, so Pope symbolized them in the bipartite division of Book IV, in which the devotees of things and the adherents to words separately plead their causes. Sophistry, disguised as Logic but divorced from true Rhetoric, is represented in the aimless and inarticulate ramblings of the virtuosi, the collectors of butterflies, the examiners of filth and offal, the researchers after meaningless "facts," the students of trivia and curiosa. These are the votaries of "Things." False Rheto-
ric, the patroness of "Words," is defended by the schoolmaster, the
heir of a medieval scholasticism which elevated pure verbalism into
the science of metaphysics:

Since Man from Beast by Words is known,
Words are Man's province, Words we teach alone.

[We] confine the thought, to exercise the breath;
And keep them in the pale of Words till death. (IV, 149-60)

But this false rhetoric, cut loose from thought and logic, is not
merely the device of schoolmasters concerned to perpetuate their own
dullness or of metaphysicians anxious to spread their confusion. It
is also the tool of the Grub Street hacks, the hireling journalists,
the fawning dedication writers, the quibbling pedants, the ranting non-
conformist preachers, the political pamphleteers, and the other "incom-
petent and commercial-minded manipulators of the 'word'" to whom Pope
satirizes throughout the Dunciad. The debasement of language at the
hands of the dunces heralds the reign of Dulness, because the regres-
sion of a society nurtured on empty verbalism and denied the substance
of thought is inevitable:

First slave to Words, then vassal to a Name,
Then dupe to Party; child and man the same. (IV, 501-2)

"Pope's war with duncery," Williams concludes, "could be called . . . a
battle over words -- over a destructive use of the 'word,' as the poet
saw it, by the dunces in the most important areas of human experience:
literature, education, politics, religion." The Dunciad ends with a
vision of a reign of Dulness by force of the "uncreating Word." It is
a vision of the future, but clearly, for Pope, it was a future whose
seeds were already flourishing in the linguistic corruptions of the
present. It is this tragic urgency of tone which brings Pope's awareness of the problem of communication so close to that of the reformers of pulpit oratory, who saw it, in the words of R. F. Jones, as "almost literally a matter of life and death."

There is no such tragic urgency in Laurence Sterne, who at first blush may appear not to belong in this survey at all. If he lived in the same century with Swift and Pope, he yet seems to have inhabited a different world, as in a sense he did. The world of Swift and Pope was a world dominated by the ideal of Reason. For all their pessimism in face of the reality of linguistic abuse and corruption, the great Augustans could still cling to an ideal which placed a high value on language because it was the medium -- the only medium -- through which the dictates of reason could be communicated. This, indeed, was the function of language. It existed to serve reason; it was reason's vehicle, just as Pope's "Rhetoric" is the consort of "Logic." Swift's belief that the purpose of speech "was to make us understand one another, and to receive Information of Facts" is given its ideal form in the language of the Houyhnhnms, which "doth not abound in Variety of Words, because their Wants and Passions are fewer than among us." The Houyhnhnms not only have no words for "lying" or "anything that is evil," they also have no word for "love." In their conversations, Gulliver reports, "nothing passed but what was useful, expressed in the fewest and most significant Words." Such a language, Swift would probably have agreed, would not be suitable for men, who are emotional as well as reasonable creatures, but it fulfills the ideal all the better for that reason. Both Hobbes and Locke, in setting out their defi-
nitions of the proper ends of language, were suspicious of the language of the passions, and the Royal Society reformers, the anti-Ciceronians, and the pulpit theorists were all as one in treating the expression of emotion primarily as a prostitution of language's true purpose. It would be an oversimplification to assert that the Age of Reason desired a language purged of all emotional expression. But it is a plain fact that it relegated this function to a position far below that of the communication of rational thought, and on the whole distrusted it as a corruptive influence.

But Sterne, the prophet of a new age of sentiment, took a different view. He believed in the expression of emotion and was suspicious of reason. Yet he too looked at language and found it wanting: so much so, in fact, that he adopted an attitude toward it which was much more radical, in its implications, than that of even the most extreme of the Royal Society projectors. For Sterne was not concerned with the corruption of language so much as with its complete inadequacy as a medium of communication. He was aware of the rationalists' objections to language, and he was particularly conversant with Locke's critique and proposed "remedies" in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. But his own objections were different. In Tristram Shandy, says McKillop, "language interposes itself between a man and his own good intentions, and between man and man." Walter Shandy and My Uncle Toby talk to each other incessantly, but they fail utterly to talk with each other. On the plane of language they are ever at cross purposes.

Locke had declared that words were signs of ideas, but that their attachment to these ideas was arbitrary and the ideas themselves existed
not in external reality but only in the minds of individual men. For purposes of philosophical discourse, this presented grave difficulties in communication, but these were not, according to Locke, insurmountable. They only meant that language must be used with greater care. The writer or speaker must make certain that the words he used stood for "clear and distinct ideas" in his own mind, that they were employed consistently in the same sense, and that they were carefully defined so as to make this sense clearly available to the minds of his readers or listeners. But Sterne, turning Locke's theory of human psychology against the philosopher's own doctrine of communication, showed that Locke's "remedies" were not so effective as they seemed. That words are the arbitrary signs of ideas in men's minds, he agreed. But since the ideas themselves are governed, according to Locke's own analysis in the other books of the Essay, by a process of association that is wholly private, attempts to apply his remedies are in Sterne's view futile. A word which suggests one "idea" to Walter Shandy calls up an entirely different image to My Uncle Toby and sets his mind wandering along a train of private associations, leading the two brothers further and further apart, each mounted on his own "hobby horse" of intellectual isolation. Clarity and distinction of idea are shown to be rationalistic illusions, and consistency of meaning is lost in the shifting mental processes which assign the same word different senses according to the association uppermost in the mind at the moment of its entry into the stream of consciousness. Locke's faith in definition is satirized in Tristram's famous discourse on the word "nose," which treats it as a moral term and concludes with the assurance that "by that word I mean a
Nose, and nothing more, or less." But the very process of the Lockean analytical definition creates an ambiguity about the word's meaning which would certainly not otherwise have occurred to the reader.

The gulf between Locke and Sterne -- which is the gulf between the Age of Reason and the Age of Sentiment -- can be measured by the fact that whereas Locke believed language in its imperfect and abused state to be sufficient for ordinary affairs between men but inadequate for rationalistic discourse unless repaired by his "remedies," Sterne felt that rationalistic discourse was in any case an illusion and that the only imperfection of language which mattered, with or without the "remedies," was its inadequacy for ordinary affairs -- which is to say, for the communication of human feelings. For the very reason that language was the servant of reason, and so ruled by the same laws of intellectual isolation, it could not bridge the chasm between man and man. Yet Sterne, in rejecting the efficacy of language, did not despair of the possibility of communication. He works, according to Traugott, from "the constantly implied topic 'How can men express themselves?'" But the problem of communication was not, for Sterne, fundamentally a linguistic or rhetorical one at all. It was a psychological problem. Understanding between men could not be effected through language because reason itself, for which language was the vehicle, failed to find a common ground. Sterne, says Traugott, "used Locke's theory of language as a form to exhibit Toby and Walter as symbols of the human communicative situation." But for the resolution of the problem he turned elsewhere. True communication, he teaches, can take place only on the level of sentiment and human sympathy -- not
through words but only through situations and human actions and responses. "A man is his expression for Sterne. He can communicate only by developing his own rhetoric . . . . Shandean 'humours' are not mere eccentricity, but the very condition of communication in this world."67

The problems of language and communication, then, were very much in the air in the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising that Henry Fielding, whose career overlapped Swift's and Pope's on the one end and Johnson's and Sterne's on the other, should have shared many of the same concerns. He had much in common with all four. He was, on the one hand, "Scriblerus Secundus,"68 the conscious disciple of Swift and Pope and as aware as they were of the Scriblerian mission to protect the English language from the forces which menaced it. He was as indignant as Swift about the encroachments of "false Refinements" in polite conversation and about the threat of would-be reformers to banish abstraction. He was as alive as Pope to the damage wrought by irresponsible rhetoric in the hands of Grub Street hacks and pedantic dunces. He was as skeptical as Johnson about the possibility of arresting corruption and yet as determined not to give up the "struggles for our language." He was also, however, as interested as Sterne in the psychology of communication and as convinced of the final inability of language to bridge the gulf of understanding between man and man. He framed the problem, like Sterne, in Lockean terms, and if he lacked Sterne's high faith in Sentiment, he found something very like it in his own belief in good-nature, which, in judging human motives, valued actions higher than words and trusted the inarticulate goodness of Tom Jones above Blifil's glib professions of virtue.
And yet, of course, Fielding was different too. If he stood, by virtue of his time and his temperament, somewhere between Swift's, Pope's, and Johnson's distrust of language on rational grounds and Sterne's ultimate rejection of it on sentimental grounds, he could not fully accept the solutions of either position. The great difference between Fielding and the prose reformists, from Bacon through Swift, was that whereas they were working towards a "plain" style which would expunge the obscurities of rhetoric and so achieve the ideal of clear expression, Fielding came after this great work had been largely done, both in scientific and philosophical writing and in literature. The reformers thought that by expelling "fine language" they could attain to truth. Fielding saw the vanity of this hope and recognized, in the inadequacy of the plain style itself, the near impossibility of expressing unadulterated truth in language. For he saw, more clearly than most, that there are other elements besides the stylistic ones of clarity, accuracy, brevity, and simplicity. He saw that even language which possessed (or seemed to possess) these virtues could fail to express truth because of (1), the (semantic) corruption of words (i.e., an imperfect medium), and (2), the dishonesty, vanity, or other inadequacy of the speaker or writer (i.e., an imperfect agent). Hence, he concluded, each serious writer had, in effect, to earn his own way to the confidence and understanding of the reader. He had to find a way in language of getting around or cutting through the obstacles of language in order to get at the truth behind language.

Fielding's sense of the corruption of language differs from that of Swift and Pope in that neither of the earlier writers seems to have
felt, in the same way or degree that Fielding did, the consequences of this corruption in the language which they themselves, as writers, had to use. One finds Fielding everywhere complaining, seriously or ironically, about the debility of his medium, and though one can hunt out similar passages in Swift and Pope, they are neither so pervasive nor so central to their thought and practice. To Swift and Pope, the corruption of language was more a threat than an actuality. For Fielding it was an accomplished fact and a perpetual obstacle for the practicing serious writer. To Sterne, who was concerned with the communication of feelings, the corruption of language did not matter. For Fielding, who wanted above all to understand and to be understood, rationally as well as emotionally, it mattered very much. Standing athwart the rational and the emotional distrust of language, he occupied a complex position of his own, out of which he had to manufacture his own solutions.
NOTES

1 Sterling Andrus Leonard, The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800 (Madison, Wis., 1929), p. 11.

2 The Triumph of the English Language, pp. 211-13.

3 Bk. I, Aphorisms XLIII, LIX, LX.

4 Part II, Section 20.


6 "To the Reader."

7 "The Restoration Revolt Against Enthusiasm," p. 591.

8 Ch. IV, "Of Speech."


10 The Spectator No. 291, Feb. 2, 1712.


12 The Senecan Amble, p. 284.


16 pp. 45-6.

17 pp. 68-73.


19 Dedicatory epistle to An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language.

20 English Pulpit Oratory, p. 352.


26 Leonard, p. 231.

27 Lowth, p. 1.

29 Harris, p. 11.
30 Lowth, p. 1.
31 Lowth, p. 1.
32 Nos. 78, 80 (Steele); 135 (Addison).
33 Preface to The Dictionary of the English Language (London, 1755).
36 (Oxford, 1900), pp. 36-7.
38 Preface, pages unnumbered. The "wells of English undefiled" is a paraphrase of Spenser's tribute to Chaucer in The Faerie Queen, Bk. IV, Canto ii, Stanza 32.
42 Cited by Sutherland, p. 131.
44 In a letter to West, 1742. Cited by Bateson, p. 68.

The Spectator No. 285, Jan. 26, 1712.


Herbert Davis, Introduction to Vol. IV of The Prose Works, p. xxxi.

Pope's Dunciad, p. 115.

The Prose Works, XI, 219, 224, 226, 228, 229, 243, 259, 261.

Ibid., 219, 224.

The purposes of speech, according to Hobbes, are "to register and communicate our thoughts"; and "seeing . . . that truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations," using words to "declare that to be [the speaker's] will, which is not" is an abuse of language. Leviathan, ed. A. D. Lindsay (New York, 1950), p. 23. According to Locke, "When a man speaks to another, it is that he may be understood; and the end of speech is, that those sounds, as marks, make known his ideas to the hearer." Thus any man who "designedly" uses words for other purposes, "ought to be looked on as an enemy to truth and knowledge." An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford, 1894), Vol. II, Bk. III, Ch. ii, Sec. 2; Ch. xi, Sec. 5.

Cited by Jones, The Triumph of the English Language, p. 263.


Ibid., pp. 72-4.

Ibid., pp. 77-9.

Pope's Dunciad, p. 112.

60 Cf. Shakespeare, "Divers philosophers hold that lips is parcel of the mind." The Merry Wives of Windsor, I, 4.

61 Pope's Dunciad, pp. 105-6.

62 Ibid., p. 156.

63 Ibid., p. 156.


67 Traugott, pp. 72, 112, 114.

68 Fielding used the pseudonym "Scriblerus Secundus" for The Author's Farce (1730), Tom Thumb, 2nd ed. (1730), The Letter-Writers (1731), and The Grub-Street Opera (1731). On the title page of The Tragedy of Tragedies (1731) he was "H. Scriblerus Secundus."
"Several Words, in all Languages," Fielding wrote in The Champion for Jan. 12, 1739-40, "have, with great Injustice, been wrested and perverted . . . , and, by long Use and Corruption, been brought to convey Ideas foreign to their original Significance." The statement, like so many of Fielding's observations on language, occurs in an ironic context: his subject is turncoats, whom he has undertaken to defend on the ground "that no Man is so good a Judge of the true Merits of a Cause, as he who hath been on both Sides of it." Typically, however, Fielding is conscious of the key term of his discussion as a word. That is, he feels compelled to call attention to it, to isolate it for a moment from its context, and to scrutinize it as a phenomenon in its own right.

The word "turncoat," he solemnly assures his readers, "is an Instance of this Injustice" done to certain words. Originally, he says, it was "intended to express what we generally call good Housewifery," and turncoats were simply men who, "as soon as their Coat was sufficiently soiled on one Side, were wont to order it to the right about, and make a very handsome and decent Figure with the other Side." Later, however, the term was "metaphorically applied to those Gentlemen, who, perhaps, from much the same Reasons, turned from one Party to the other;
changing their Opinions, as the other did their Coats, to the very Re­verse of what they formerly were." It takes its place, then -- like "the Greek Word for Tyrant, which originally signified no more than King; and in our Language the Words Knave, Villain, etc." -- among those "Words which have once been used in a much better Sense than they at present enjoy." But as the apologist for "those Gentlemen" to whom it is now applied, Fielding argues that the term has still "a very strong Title to those frugal Honours which it originally received," and he hopes that "these my labours may again restore it" to that original hon­orific sense.

The passage is interesting for several reasons. No one is likely to misunderstand that Fielding's real purpose in focusing attention on the word and its meanings is not to extenuate the shame of the turncoat but to expose it all the more nakedly. If "turncoat" in its original literal sense meant what Fielding says it did, then it expressed not "good Housewifery," but just the opposite -- the kind of grubby atten­tion to appearances typified by sweeping dirt under the carpet or chang­ing one's collar instead of taking a bath. Thus the metaphorical turn­coat, the trader in political allegiances, is twice condemned by anal­ysis of the word which describes him: his defection is not only "wrong" in some abstract moral sense, it is also sordid and petty and ridic­uluous. We should not, then (as readers of Augustan literature should scarcely need to be reminded), be put off by irony when judging the "seriousness" of such a passage. Fielding is not really trying to res­cue the word "turncoat" from its pejorative associations, but in a very
real and serious sense he *is* laboring to "restore it" to its "original meaning," or rather, he is trying to revive in the word the vivid metaphorical implications which he feels have been worn away by thoughtless usage. If it is not actually, as he pretends to think, one of those words brought "by long Use and Corruption . . . to convey Ideas foreign to their original Significance," it yet has in common with such words the fact of "corruption": it has undergone a diminution of power and immediacy, and the writer who wants it to convey its full potential force to his reader is obliged to pause, as Fielding does, and labor at restoring its "original" sense. Without such reinforcement the word fails to communicate the "idea" the writer assigns it. The corruption of usage has rendered it unfit to carry its rightful burden of meaning.

Despite the ironic tone of the passage, therefore, there is every reason to believe that Fielding's complaint of the "great Injustice" done to words by the wrestings and perversions of usage was seriously meant, and that the doctrine of linguistic corruption it records was for him a valid one. Still, if this were his only statement of the idea one would be justified in taking it as a mere satiric device of the moment, a handy expedient for getting at the turncoats who are the objects of attack, and one would probably be right in not attaching any importance to it as evidence of Fielding's genuine attitude toward language and communication. But it is *not* an isolated phenomenon in his work, and the purpose of the present chapter is to bring together Fielding's more important statements on the subject so that we may make an informed judgment as to the importance of the idea of linguistic corruption in relation to his larger thought and practice, recognize other manifestations
in his works of the same impulses, even when they are not framed explicitly in these terms, and place his attitudes in a just relationship to the attitudes of his age as examined in the previous chapter. As with Swift and Pope and Sterne, Fielding's view of language must be pieced out largely from his scattered references and remarks and inferred from various aspects of his practice. None of the major writers of the eighteenth century -- not even Swift in his *Proposals for Correcting ... the English Tongue* or Johnson in his Preface to the *Dictionary* -- left anything resembling a fully developed theory of language, and Fielding was no exception. But on at least three occasions -- once near the beginning of his most productive period, once near the middle of it, and once near the end -- he put his views down in a form explicit and extensive enough to suggest that the corruption of language was a serious matter to him throughout his career and that it had implications far beyond the immediate applications he makes in any one of these instances. None of these statements is entirely free of the complicating ambiguities of irony, but neither can any of them be lightly dismissed for that reason. The subject, in every case, emerges as a serious one, and Fielding's brand of irony is itself, as we shall see, very often as much an instrument for the critique of language as a weapon against the other vices and follies of mankind.

The first of Fielding's principal statements on the corruption of language appeared in the next issue but one of *The Champion* after the paper on turncoats. Apparently feeling that the idea deserved an essay to itself, Fielding begins (as was traditional in discourses on language) with the question of whether or not the gift of speech is exclusively hu-
man and one of the factors which distinguishes men from animals. He decides that "tho' the Use of Speech be not peculiar to Man, I believe the Abuse of it is." The emphasis here, however, is not on the semantic distortion which had been his pretended subject in the earlier Champion essay, or on the weakening of metaphorical force which had been his real concern in that paper, but on the utter meaninglessness of many words and phrases currently in use in polite speech, professional discourse, and the parlance of tradesmen. "I am inclined to believe," he declares, "that if we could by a kind of Chemical Operation, separate those Parts of our ordinary Conversation, which either leave any Idea in the Mind of the Speaker, or convey any to that of the Hearer, from those which do not, the former would be found scarce to bear the Proportion of a tenth Part to the latter."

Most conspicuously empty of meaning are the conventional forms of compliment, for "What Idea hath any Man in his Head when he says to another, Sir, I am your most obedient humble Servant, I am heartily glad to see you, How does your good Family? I am heartily sorry to hear of the Death of your Father, etc." There is hardly a member of polite society who has not "thrown away half the Words of his Language in this Manner," yet when one uses such a phrase "it signifies no more, nor is any more meant or understood by it, than if he had said Barababatha, or any other Sound, which, in no Language, that we know of, has any Meaning." Similarly, many commonplace phrases, like "very hot, very cold; ... the best in the World, the worst in the World," have, "by long Custom arrived at meaning nothing, tho' very often used"; and pointless swearing and the use of expletives are equally wasteful of words once
pregnant with meaning. "Great Men have peculiar Phrases, which some Persons imagine to have a Meaning among themselves, but give no more Idea to others than any of those unintelligible Sounds which the Beasts utter; such are, upon my Honour, believe me, depend on me, . . . this is promised, . . . and some hundred others of this kind, very frequent in the Mouths of the said great Men." Military and civil titles, "at first used to distinguish particular Degrees of Men," have likewise become "stript of all Ideas whatever. Such are Captain, Dr., Esquire, Honourable, and Right Honourable, the two last of which signifies [sic] no more than if you should pronounce the above-mentioned Word Paraba-batha."

Every profession, moreover, "has laid violent Hands on, some certain Syllables which they use ad Libitum without conveying any Idea whatsoever." Lawyers practice "the noble Art of Tautology, which is one Kind of Extravagance in the Use of Words," whereby ordinary terms are so hedged and qualified that they are rendered senseless; and such favorite legal phrases as "learned in the law, dispatch, reasonable, and many others" are nothing but "Sounds peculiar to themselves without any Meaning." Physicians are equally esoteric in the language of their prescriptions and equally free with empty phrases: "Such are out of Danger, safe Prescription, infallible Method, etc." And even in the mouths and advertisements of tradesmen, a class long noted for its directness of speech, "we shall find . . . several Words and Phrases of as little Meaning as any before mentioned: Such are very cheap, lowest Price, . . . Fair Trader, . . . this cost me, etc."2

Here again the generally facetious tone of the piece and the satir-
...
insincere one, then what becomes of the word "humble" and the word "obedient"? Emptied of meaning in one phrase, can they regain it in another? Will they not always be diminished in strength and redolent of insincerity as a consequence of this "corruption"? If the oath "upon my Honour" has become a mere expletive sworn by villains and good men alike, then does not "Honour," a word traditionally supposed to carry a heavy load of dignity, suffer as well? Can the honest writer or speaker trust such corrupted words to convey his meanings, and, if not, how is one to express the mighty idea for which "Honour" once stood?

Titles are corruptive for the same reason, for though "Honourable" and "Right Honourable" may serve in communication as labels, Fielding's charge that they are "stript of all Ideas whatever" is, like his examination of the word "turncoat" in the earlier Champion essay, a complaint against the use of words without thought of their "original" (or literal) meanings. This, he felt, compounds corruption by leading men to acquiesce in the application of titles to those whose lives and principles are a mockery of the titles' original meanings and so to contribute still further to the debasement of the grand abstractions from which they originally derived. "Doctor," he wants his readers to remember, meant a learned man, and he believed that this knowledge alone was enough to give the lie to the quacks who had appropriated the word as a cover for their own ignorance. Thoughtless usage, in Fielding's view, had a lot to answer for, and he believed that the restoration of words to their rightful values would expose the deceits which masked themselves in meaningless language. A knowledge of the meanings of words
was a protection against the impostures of society.

But if singling out as meaningless such phrases as "learned in the law" and "fair Trader" is an oblique way of saying that lawyers are not so wise as they pretend to be nor tradesmen so honest as they claim, it is also a form of protest against the removal of these phrases from the language of sincerity. Having been pressed into the service of the lie, they are forever contaminated with the suspicion of untruth, and the man who wants to describe a truly learned lawyer or a truly honest merchant is put to the trouble of finding other means of expressing these ideas. But even more disturbing to the man who desired to express a simple truth in the most simple and direct language is the fact that the pretense and the claim themselves, insofar as they are conveyed in words, are corruptive of language -- not just of particular phrases but of the process of verbal communication itself. Fielding, we may be sure, understood why the Houyhnhnms in Gulliver's Travels, shocked at the human predilection for saying the Thing that was not, should have reminded Gulliver that "the purpose of language was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts." If "learned in the law" and "fair Trader" are suspect because they serve other masters than truth, then in a sense all pretenses and claims in language are suspect, and a man whose livelihood and mission in life involved him intimately in the values of language -- "what if Nature hath granted to us, we have . . . barbarously and scandalously abused" could not be expected to accept such a dilemma lightly.

How Fielding's refusal to accept this situation was reflected in other aspects of his work will be the subject of another chapter. For
the present we are concerned merely with examining his explicit treat-
ments of the theme. The next of these, of any length or consequence,
was his Essay on Conversation, which was published in the Miscellanies
of 1743. Fielding's topic was broader than a modern interpretation of
the title might suggest, subsuming the verbal aspects of conversation
within its larger social sense. For to Fielding and his age the word
"conversation" had a much more general meaning than it possesses today;
it meant social intercourse in general and therefore included actions
(social behavior) as well as words. The "art of conversation" becomes,
then, for Fielding, "the art of pleasing or doing good to one another," and is founded on "good-breeding." For this reason Fielding's attitude
toward some of the same linguistic "abuses" he habitually attacks else-
where is here softened by the spirit of toleration. Conventional com-
pliments, forms, and titles, empty as they are, yet serve a useful pur-
pose in society because "the business of the whole is no more than to
convey to others an idea of your esteem of them, which is indeed the
substance of all the compliments, ceremonies, presents, and whatever
passes between well-bred people." Philosophers may point to their lack
of meaning and consequence, but "The truth is, we live in a world of
common men, and not of philosophers."

Yet Fielding's personal contempt for such hollow forms, despite his
official recognition of their social value, is apparent too: "These
ceremonies, poor as they are, are of more consequence than they at first
appear, and, in reality, constitute the only external difference between
man and man. Thus, His grace, Right honourable, My lord, Right reverend,
Reverend, Honourable, Sir, Esquire, Mr., etc., have in a philosophical
sense no meaning, yet are perhaps politically essential, and must be
preserved by good-breeding." And once this contempt is awakened, he
finds it impossible to restrain the ironic virulence which such abuse
of noble and once meaningful words everywhere arouses in him.

If men were to be rightly estimated, and divided into subordinate classes according to the superior excellence of their
several natures, perhaps the lowest class of either sex would
be properly assigned to those two disgraces of the human spe-
cies, commonly called a beau, and a fine lady. . . . I have
myself seen a little female thing which they have called My
Lady, of no greater dignity in the order of being than a
cat, and of no more use in society than a butterfly; whose
mien would not give even the idea of a gentlewoman, and whose
face would cool the loosest libertine; with a mind as empty
of ideas as an opera, and a body fuller of diseases than an
hospital -- I have seen this thing express contempt to a
woman who was an honour to her sex and an ornament to the
creation. (My italics)

It would be a mistake, though, on the basis of even such a fine out-
burst as this, to attempt to read the whole of *An Essay on Conversation*
as ironic. The spirit in which it is written is dominantly permissive,
and its purpose, as Fielding himself specified in the Preface to the
*Miscellanies*, was "to show, that true good-breeding consists in contrib-
uting . . . to the satisfaction and happiness of all." Fielding is
ever the realist, fully at home in a world populated by "common men, and
not philosophers," and a willingness to compromise with the ideal is one
of the hallmarks of his moral realism. Yet he never, let it be said,
loses sight of the ideal, and the significance of the ambivalent lin-
guistic attitude one finds in *An Essay on Conversation* is that even in
the act of compromise he cannot resist calling attention to the corrup-
tion of language which this compromise entails.

Terms like "beau" and "fine lady" may serve a useful function in
society as tags attached to certain types and classes of persons, without any normative connotations, but, even while acknowledging this, Fielding is not willing to let the matter rest. He is compelled to let his readers know that these terms had -- and for him still have -- primary meanings as well, and that judged by these the persons "commonly called a beau and a fine lady" stand condemned for their unworthiness to the titles they bear. For him the so-called "fine lady" is "a little female thing" and "this thing" -- more accurate terms, it is suggested, than her conventional title, and implicit definitions (precise in their very lack of qualification) of the popular sense of the term. But at the same time, the inescapable fact that such persons are "commonly" so called has corrupted the titles themselves beyond redemption, and to attempt to employ them in their original senses, without special precautions, would be insulting to the persons so described. One is forced, then, to search for substitutes. "Gentlewoman" (unlike its companion term "gentleman") has apparently escaped corruption by virtue of its comparative rarity, and, preserving the ideas of "gentleness" and "gentility" among its connotations, serves Fielding as a synonym for "fine lady" without sharing in the obloquy of its indiscriminate popular application. And though we do not know the station in life of the person Fielding sets in opposition to the "little female thing" (one is tempted, from the sheer emotional force of the passage, to suppose it was a real person, and some one close to him), it is surely significant that he refers to her simply as "a woman," allowing the qualifying clause which follows to do the job of implying that it is she who has the juster claim to the title which "this thing" and others of her type
have corrupted. There is no doubt that Fielding recognized the inevitability of the linguistic corruptions he recorded and was even able to appreciate their social necessity, and it is true that he was perfectly capable of using the idea, facetiously or with ironic bitterness, as a means to other ends. But it is also true that he was deeply conscious of the fact of corruption in the words which were his own medium of expression and that he was everywhere involved in a personal decontamination of the English language.

Neither the Champion papers nor the Essay on Conversation, however, really seem to support the implication of the "turncoat" piece that Fielding was concerned with words brought "by long Use and Corruption... to convey Ideas foreign to their original Significance." In each of these essays he seems more occupied with the absence of meaning than with its perversions. In one sense, of course, the reduction of words to meaninglessness is itself a perversion, but it does not fit the examples of "tyrant," "knave," and "villain" which Fielding cites in the "turncoat" paper and would seem to constitute another kind of corruption. Or more accurately perhaps, meaninglessness is the final stage of corruption, the condition of pure verbalism represented by Pope's vision of the "uncreating Word." But surely there are intermediate stages in the corruptive process. A word does not become meaningless overnight, and if "Honour" no longer carried any sense of its "original idea" in the oath "upon my Honour" or in the title "Right Honourable," it yet must have meant something, however diminished by these associations, when used in other contexts. This kind of intermediate corruption of words -- in some ways more dangerous than utter meaninglessness because
conveying perverse ideas rather than no ideas at all — was the subject of Fielding's third and final major treatment of the corruption of language theme in a satiric essay in The Covent-Garden Journal No. 4, for Jan. 14, 1752.

The method, once again, is ironic. Ostensibly the object of attack is "that Privilege which Divines and Moral Writers have assumed to themselves of doing violence to certain Words, in favour of their own Hypotheses, and of using them in a sense often directly contrary to that which Custom (the absolute Lord and Master, according to Horace, of all the Modes of Speech) hath allotted them." The consequence of "this Abuse of Words," says Fielding, is very grave: "For whilst the Author and the World receive different Ideas from the same Words, it will be pretty difficult for them to comprehend each other's Meaning; and hence, perhaps, it is that so many Gentlemen and Ladies have contracted a general Odium to all Works of Religion or Morality; and that many others have been Readers in this Way all their Lives without understanding what they read, consequently without drawing from it any practical Use." But the most striking feature of the paper is the "Modern Glossary" Fielding appends to the essay. This list, he explains, of terms "at present greatly in Use," is intended as an aid not to the readers but to the writers of moral treatises, for it is the latter, after all, who are out of touch with current usage. The glossary will supply this deficiency by fixing to the words "those exact Ideas which are annexed to every one of them in the World," and thus make fruitful communication once again possible between "the learned in Colleges" and "the polite Part of Mankind."
It would be possible, up to this point, to read The Covent-Garden
Journal essay as straightforward criticism, in the tradition, perhaps,
of Eachard's *Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy*, upon
the linguistic abuses of moralists and theologians. Only our knowledge
that Fielding would not have seriously deprecated "the Works of Barrow,
Tillotson, Clark, and others of this Kind," whom he here sets up as rep­
resentative Moralists and Divines whose language needs "the Labour of
a good Commentator," and our sense that he seldom uses terms like "the
World" and "the polite Part of Mankind" as other than ironic corruptions,
make us wary. But we have only to look at the Glossary itself to con­
firm our suspicions that the linguistic abuse Fielding is attacking is
not that of the learned moralists but that of the "Gentlemen and Ladies"
whose usage he pretends to admire. The first word, ANGEL, is "The Name
of a Woman, commonly of a very bad one." Further on, DAMNATION is "A
Term appropriate to the Theatre; though sometimes more largely applied
to all Works of Invention." DEATH is defined as "The final End of Man;
as well of the thinking Parts of the Body, as of all the other Parts." RELIGION is dismissed as "A Word of no Meaning; but which serves as a
Bugbear to frighten Children with." TEMPERANCE becomes "Want of
Spirit"; and VIRTUE and VICE are lumped together merely as "Subjects
of Discourse."

The "words of truth" are suffering here not at the hands of ped­
antry, nor are they necessarily the victims of hypocrisy. They are
simply the verbal products of a corrupt society, measuring by their
semantic distortions the widening distance between the ideal (repre­
sented in the "proper" senses of the great ethical and spiritual
abstractions) and the reality (reflected in the actual usage of these words, as defined by Fielding, in society). As in the cases of "turncoat," the conventional forms of compliment, and titles, Fielding's objection is to a usage that reduces words to mere arbitrary labels and so easily loses sight of their "original" meanings. But here he recognizes that these labels sometimes still do retain significations of a sort. They still have "Ideas" annexed to them, even if these are only shrunken peas of sense rattling about inside the husks of terms once great with meaning. "Captain," one of the titles cited in the *Champion* essay as meaningless, meant to Fielding a headman, or leader -- a sense evident in the etymology of the word and hence, so Fielding reasoned, its proper and original meaning. But in the Glossary he defines it as "Any Stick of Wood with a Head to it, and a Piece of black Ribband upon that Head" -- a sense that (with allowances for satiric depersonalization) was probably an accurate reflection of popular usage in an age in which army officers bought their commissions, and, if they had any political influence, often spent their entire careers swaggering and hectoring in London on unlimited leaves of absence from their regiments. Again the implication is that exposure of the semantic corruption of the word will lay bare also the social corruption which is its cause but which the lingering, vacant dignity of the word itself still masks from view.

But what is most interesting about this Glossary of abused terms is that it is a virtual compendium of Fielding's own characteristic ironic vocabulary, with the ironic values of the words made explicit and specifically identified with "corrupt" popular usage. Despite the
satiric fiction that the Glossary is for the benefit of moral and religious writers, relatively few of the terms are strictly moral or religious. Equally represented is the terminology of the art of letters: AUTHOR ("A laughing Stock. It means likewise a poor Fellow, and in general an Object of Contempt"), CRITIC ("Like Homo, a Name Common to all human Race" [sic]), HUMOUR ("Scandalous Lies, Tumbling, and Dancing on the Rope"), DULNESS ("A Word applied by all Writers to the Wit and Humour of others"), TASTE ("The present Whim of the Town, whatever it be"), and WIT ("Profaneness, Indecency, Immorality, Scurrility, Mimickry, Buffoonery. Abuse of all good Men, and especially of the Clergy"). The world of learning in general fares no better. KNOWLEDGE "... means Knowledge of the Town; as this is, indeed, the only Kind of Knowledge ever spoken of in the polite World." LEARNING itself is simply "Pedantry." WORTH is "Power. Rank. Wealth." And WISDOM, "The Art of acquiring all Three."

Most of the words which appear in the Glossary, however, are merely representative terms from the language of manners, words of diverse meanings in the language in general but having in polite society special senses which reflect the narrowness and triviality of that society's values. They are the technical terminology of high society, its special jargon, its cant. FINE, for example, is "An Adjective of a very peculiar Kind, destroying, or at least lessening the Force of the Substantive to which it is joined: as fine Gentleman, fine Lady, fine House, fine Cloaths, fine Taste; -- in all of which fine is to be understood in a Sense somewhat synonymous with useless." GALLANTRY is seen as a splendid euphemism masking sordid immorality; it is defined as "Fornica-
tion and Adultery." GREAT, "applied to a Thing, signifies Bigness; when to a Man, often Littleness, or Meanness." HAPPINESS is merely "Grandeur"; and HONOUR is narrowed to "Dueling." LOVE is glossed as "A Word properly applied to our Delight in particular Kinds of Food; sometimes metaphorically spoken of the favorite Objects of all our Appetites." MARRIAGE is defined as "A Kind of Traffic carried on between the two Sexes, in which both are constantly endeavouiring to cheat each other, and both are commonly Losers in the End." MODESTY is equated with "Awkwardness, Rusticity." NO BODY refers to "All the People in Great Britain, except for about 1200." A PATRIOT is merely "A Candidate for a Place at Court," and POLITICS is "The Art of getting such a Place." PROMISE means exactly "Nothing." RICHES are "The only Thing on Earth that is really valuable or desirable." SHOCKING is "An Epithet which fine Ladies apply to almost every Thing. It is indeed, an Interjection, (if I may so call it) of Delicacy." And the WORLD, finally, is simply "Your own Acquaintance."

No reader of Fielding will have to be told that there are familiar faces here. Most striking, perhaps, is the word GREAT, in the definition of which, as Austin Dobson observed many years ago, lies "a distinction which has the very ring of Jonathan Wild." But one is reminded also of Tom Thumb, who is referred to as "the Great" both in subtitle and the text of The Tragedy of Tragedies, and who is great in the perverse sense of "littleness" just as Jonathan is in the sense of "meanness":

han't you heard
(What ev'ry Corner of the Court resounds)
That little Thumb will be a great Man made.
Rarely, in fact, does the word appear in Fielding, especially in the epithet "great man," in any but these reverse senses. As early as 1732, he has Capt. Bravemore, in the comedy The Modern Husband, account for a porter's demand for a bribe by explaining, "Sir, the servants of a great man are all great men." Fanny, in Joseph Andrews, asks Joseph, "Are all the great folks wicked?" and Amelia wonders at the inhumanity of "the great." Fanny, of course, is innocent of any ironic intent, and Amelia just as certainly is too grave to indulge in sarcasm. But we may be sure that the ironic distinction implied by the Glossary definition, between the "proper and original" sense of the word and the corrupt popular usage which applies it indiscriminately to any person in high place, is never far from Fielding's mind, whether he puts the word in the mouth of a character or pronounces it in his own voice.

The Glossary definition of "great" thus merely makes explicit the ironic meaning that Fielding habitually assigns the word throughout his works, but the important thing is that it does so in the context of a discourse, however ironic in its own right, on the corruption of language. The implications of this with regard to Fielding's general employment of the ironic method will be considered more fully in a later chapter. Our present purpose in going outside the scope of The Covent-Garden Journal essay is simply to show that Fielding's earlier ironic use of many of the same terms which appear in his Glossary of corrupted words was something more than coincidental. The pervasiveness of such ironic usage would itself, perhaps, prove little. But when the ironic occurrence of these words is repeatedly accompanied by implicit or explicit reference to the corruption of language theme,
it is impossible not to see this as representative of a definite pattern in Fielding's thought and practice -- a pattern which, once we have learned to look for it, we shall be the better equipped to recognize in its other less clearly defined manifestations in his work.

It would be tedious, in pursuing this point, to try to trace through Fielding's works the ironic careers of each of the other Glossary entries, but perhaps a few further examples are necessary. "Honour" is for Fielding almost as inevitably an ironic word as "great," and though the Glossary definition ("Dueling") is not the only ironic sense in which he uses it, it typifies the kind of absurd reduction to which he apparently felt the word had been subjected by popular usage. In the play The Temple Beau (1730), however, this particular sense is not only preserved intact, but is set in precisely the same kind of contrasting relationship to the proper sense of the word (the usage of moral and religious writers) as that implied in the Glossary. The cynical Valentine, questioned by his friend Veromil about the "honour" of his fortune-hunting activities, replies, "Ha, ha, ha! you and I had strange notions of that word, when we read the moralists at Oxford; but our honour here is as different from that as our dress. In short, it forbids us to receive injuries, but not to do them." In A Journey from this World to the Next (published in the Miscellanies of 1743), the narrator meets a departed spirit who announces that the "distemper" he died of was "honour, for I was killed in a duel." More familiar, perhaps, to most readers, will be the episodes in Tom Jones in which Jones, fallen in with a company of soldiers, is urged to fight a duel with the cowardly Ensign Northerton but ingenuously argues, in
protest, that the military "code of honor" seems to him inconsistent with the doctrine of Christian forgiveness. Later, however, when Jones does meet Northerton again, it is the ensign who demands "satisfaction," and Jones is shocked that such a proven villain should dare "to contaminate the name of honor by assuming it."\(^20\) (my italics).

Major Bath, in *Amelia*, is a sort of humours character whose ruling passion, as his blustering never lets us forget, is "honor" in this same reductionist sense: "A man of honor wears his law by his side." Even Amelia herself is affected by the corruption of the term. Begging Dr. Harrison to prevent an impending duel between Booth and Col. James, she urges that he take care, however, not to compromise Booth's "honor." Dr. Harrison, whose concept of honor, like Jones's, reflects the grand abstraction of the moralists, cries, "Again honour! . . . indeed I will not suffer that noble word to be so basely and barbarously prostituted."\(^21\) (my italics).

For Fielding, however, the word not only was "contaminated" and "prostituted," but this circumstance would seem to have been, as in the case of "great," the source of its ironic potential. His awareness, pointedly shared with the reader, that it is also, in its "original" sense, a "noble word," provides the built-in standard of judgment whereby the irony is given moral significance. But if GREAT and HONOUR, in the Glossary and in Fielding's ironic usage, have been narrowed in meaning from grandness to triviality, RELIGION ("A Word of no Meaning") and VIRTUE (among "Subjects of Discourse") are emptied of meaning altogether.

In 1732, moreover, Mr. Modern, in *The Modern Husband*, was already defining "virtue" as "nothing more than a sound,"\(^22\) in 1741, Mammon, in
The Vernoniaid, added coarsely that it was "a name, a bubble, or a fart," and in 1751, in Amelia, Mrs. Matthews was still dismissing both terms on the authority of "that charming fellow Mandeville, . . . [who] proves religion and virtue to be only mere names." But again the most memorable instances of Fielding's ironic exploitation of the meaninglessness of "virtue" and "religion" will for most readers be those in Tom Jones, particularly in the disputes of Thwackum and Square, where these words become, along with "honor," quite literally nothing more than "mere names" and "Subjects of Discourse." "I have asserted," Square sums up at one point, "that true honor and true virtue are almost synonymous terms, and they are both founded on the unalterable rule of right, and the eternal fitness of things; . . . but that this honor can be said to be founded on religion, . . . if by religion be meant any positive law," he rejects as heatedly as though Thwackum's argument to the contrary were not conducted on a plane of empty verbalism equally remote from the real world. And if here the linguistic corruption seems to be laid at the door of the very "Moralists and religious Writers" who in The Covent-Garden Journal essay stand for the proper usage of words, the divine Thwackum and the deist Square are plainly not of the same school as Barrow, Tillotson, and Clark.

Of the other words defined in the Glossary, one might also single out AUTHOR, which Fielding frequently uses, even in serious passages, with an ironic sense of its contamination ("an Author, if we must debase the Name by so applying it"; "the Name of an Author is . . . become an infamous Appellation."); LOVE, which he nearly always, as in the
Glossary, ironically identifies with appetite (that "idecent passion"; "that passion . . . which the gentlemen of this our age agreed to call LOVE"; "... according to the present universally received sense of that phrase, by which love is applied indiscriminately to the desirable objects of all our passions, appetites, and senses, and is understood to be that preference which we give to one kind of food rather than to another."), PATRIOT, which he rarely uses without ironic apology ("It must be confessed, indeed, that this Word Patriot hath of late Years been very scandalously abused"); "The Reader will pardon my using the Word Patriot . . . in a very inadequate and improper Sense."; and WISDOM, which he repeatedly treats as the debased word it has become in the Glossary ("Artful men sometimes miscarry by fancying others wiser, or, in other words, greater knaves, than they really are"); "You insinuated slyly that I was wise, which, as the world understands the phrase, I should be ashamed of"; "By Wisdom here, I mean that Wisdom of this World, . . . [for] I am extremely doubtful whether by a Wise Man is generally meant any other than a Man who is pursuing the direct Road to Power or Wealth, however dirty or thorny it may be."

Fielding's peculiar ironic usage of many of the "abused" words which appear in The Covent-Garden Journal "Modern Glossary" indicates, then, that his preoccupation with language and its abuses was deeply ingrained in his thought and practice. The discourse on the corruption of language which introduces the Glossary is, however, as we have noted earlier, itself ironic. Fielding pretends to identify his sympathies with the loose usage of polite society, which is actually the target of his attack, and to condemn the strict usage of the "Divines..."
and moral Writers" who provide the standard from which the attack is made. But the essay is significant because it throws light, albeit indirectly, on the serious rationale underlying Fielding's position on linguistic corruption and exposes its principal and immediate source.

The paper begins with a reference to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

"One may observe," says Mr. Locke, "in all languages, certain Words, that, if they be examined, will be found, in their first Original, and their appropriate Use, not to stand for any clear and distinct Ideas." Mr. Locke gives us the Instances "of Wisdom, Glory, Grace. Words which are frequent enough (says he) in every Man's Mouth; but if a great many of those who use them should be asked what they mean by them, they would be at a Stand, and not know what to answer: A plain Proof, that tho' they have learned those Sounds, and have them ready at their Tongue's End; yet there are no determin'd Ideas laid up in their Minds, which are to be expressed to others by them."36

Fielding goes on then, in discussing the several causes which Locke assigned for such abuse of words, to turn Locke's critique to his own satiric purposes by asserting that the philosopher had overlooked the abuses perpetrated by moralists and theologians. The quotation, however, is interesting in its own right. Bringing together two separate sections from Chapter 10 of the treatise on language in Book III of Locke's *Essay*, Fielding blurs an important distinction which Locke makes in the original. The first sentence, from Locke's Section 2, has to do with words which, in their original usage, had no distinct referents -- deliberately vague terms such as those coined by the schoolmen. The rest of the quotation, including the examples (Wisdom, Glory, Grace) is from Locke's Section 3, and concerns words which, though originally meaningful, are carelessly used by most men "without any distinct meaning at all." It is actually only this second kind of abuse that
Fielding is concerned with in *The Covent-Garden Journal* essay, but his telescoping of the quotation can be put down to something more than mere carelessness. For, like the rest of the argument, the quotation is adjusted to an ironic context: it must seem to be directed against moral and religious writers guilty of a pedantic abuse of language while at the same time enlisting Locke's authority against the popular abuse that is his real subject. Thus Fielding's appeal to Locke as the sanction of the satiric attack must be given an importance beyond the essay's surface facetiousness of tone. He apparently expected his readers to be familiar enough with Locke's critique to recognize its double-edged appropriateness to the matter at hand, and he presumably intended his own critique to be understood as a serious extension of the Lockean position.

These impressions are strengthened by the circumstance that Fielding had also appealed to Locke in the *Champion* essay on the meaninglessness of phrases worn out by conventional and professional usage:

> Mr. Lock, in his Chapter of the Remedies of the Abuse of Words, says, "That whoever shall consider the Errors and Obscurity, the Mistakes and Confusion, that are spread in the World by an Ill Use of Words, will find some Reason to doubt whether Language, as it has been employed, has contributed more to the Improvement or Hindrance of Knowledge amongst Mankind."

A later *Champion* paper, moreover, makes a very similar appeal in a different connection. The essay in question is the famous one in which Fielding sets out his considered definition of the term "good-nature." It is not true, he begins, that this concept, as some have asserted, can be expressed in no other language than English, but he does allow that the term has, in general usage, a wide and sometimes contradictory
variety of meanings.

I am apt to suspect when I see sensible Men totally differ in Opinion concerning any general Word, that the complex Idea in their several Minds which this Word represents is compounded of very different Simples. "Those gross and confused Conceptions (says Mr. Lock) which Men ordinarily have, and to which they apply the common Words of their Language may serve them well enough in their ordinary Discourses and Affairs; but this is not sufficient for philosophical Enquirers." 36

The Lockean distinction which Fielding here observes -- presumably in order to dignify his own definition of "good-nature" -- between the language of "ordinary Discourses and Affairs," in which a certain amount of carelessness and confusion is allowable, and the language of "philosophical Enquirers," in which precision and consistency of meaning are required, is one which he more characteristically chose to ignore. Moreso than Locke, he recognized that the two levels of language were ultimately one, sharing a basically common vocabulary, and that "corruption" or "abuse" on one level could not fail to affect the other. This, surely, is the point of the "Modern Glossary," as it is of the earlier Champion paper, where the abuses of polite conversation (the empty compliments, etc.) are condemned equally with the learned jargon of doctors and lawyers. But the logical possibility of such a distinction, which Fielding could assume, when it suited his purposes, on the authority of Locke, helps further to account for the internal ambivalence of his Essay on Conversation as well as for its inconsistency with his other utterances on language. Looseness and even meaninglessness could be tolerated in conversational usage when the immediate end of discourse was not the communication of ideas but the conveyance of esteem and pleasure, though as we have seen, Fielding could
not finally conceal his disapproval of such license even in the "world of common men, and not philosophers."

He does not, however, in the Essay on Conversation, invoke the authority of Locke, perhaps for the very reason that here, for a change, he was more concerned with excusing the abuse of language than with exposing it. But apart from the Lockean distinction between levels of language that it assumes, there exists also a curious parallel between one passage of Fielding's Essay and another in an earlier work which suggests that Locke's theory of language could not have been far from his mind even in this case when he chose not to refer to it. Casting about in the Essay for a word expressive of the foundations of conversation, Fielding settles on "good-breeding," but cautions, typically, that this word itself needs definition, "being so horribly and barbarously corrupted that it contains at present scarce a single ingredient of what it seems originally to have been designed to express." His own sense of the word, which he identifies with its "original" meaning, is opposed to the current "corrupt" sense:

The word . . . good-breeding . . . [was] not, I apprehend, at first confined to externals, much less to any particular dress or attitude of the body; nor were the qualifications expressed by it furnished by a milliner, a taylor, or a perrwig-maker; no, nor even by a dancing master himself. . . . In short, by good-breeding (notwithstanding the corrupt use of the word in a very different sense) I mean the art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to the ease and happiness of those with whom you converse.39

But this passage, significant in its own right as another direct statement by Fielding of the doctrine of the corruption of language, becomes doubly interesting when one compares it with a very similar statement which occurs in a note in Plutus, the translation of Aristophanes' comedy
which Fielding had brought out, in collaboration with the Rev. William Young, the year before the publication of the Miscellanies. The term in question here is not "good-breeding" but "good-manners," a close synonym surely, which occurs in Act II, Scene 5 of the text. Poverty argues that she is a better patron of mankind than Plutus, the God of Riches, because, among other reasons, "Good-Manner dwell entirely with me; for all Abuse belongs to Riches." The gloss on "Good-Manners" follows:

The Deficiency and Corruption of our Language, by the Confusion introduced into it from our applying improper and incorrect Ideas to Words, of which Mr. Locke so justly complains, makes [sic] it exceeding difficult to render adequately so copious and exact a Language as the Greek; especially in what regards their Philosophy and Morals. The Greek Word here is ἀριστεύειν, which properly signifies the good Order of the Mind. . . . Hence ἀριστεύειν is used more at large to signify the Behaviour arising from such a Disposition of Mind. When we translate this Good-Manners, we must be understood in the true and genuine, and not in the corrupted Use of the Word. 41

The importance of this note is twofold. Not only does it state Fielding's belief in the corruption of language in a context for once completely free of the ambiguities of irony and facetiousness of tone, but it also makes it unequivocally clear that his authority for this belief was the linguistic theory of John Locke. If the appeal to Locke is missing from the Essay on Conversation, its appearance in this parallel passage in the Plutus notes (which must have been written at about the same time) indicates that Locke's influence was at work in the Essay as well. In each of the other extended statements of the corruption theme, in the Champion papers of 1739 and 1740 and in The Covent-Garden Journal essay of 1752, spanning Fielding's greatest productive years, this influence is made fully explicit, and a still earlier reference in the Preface to the second edition of Tom Thumb (1730) suggests
that Locke was standing behind Fielding's attitude toward language
from the very outset of his career. Noting that "Mr. Locke complains
of confused Ideas in Words," Fielding ironically recommends as a way
of avoiding this confusion the method of the modern preface, as typi-
ified by Colley Cibber, of emptying words of meaning altogether through
gross misuse. Moreover, Fielding frequently echoes Lockean termi-
nology in even his more offhanded remarks on language. Kenneth
MacLean, in his study of Locke's influence on eighteenth-century liter-
ature, cites, for example, the passage in *Tom Jones* in which Square
employs the phrase "abuse of words" and the one in which Fielding
himself, as narrator, observes that Mrs. Waters uses words "without any
fixed ideas."

Such instances might easily be multiplied, and several will be con-
sidered in a later chapter where the relationship of Locke's theory to
some of the specific areas of Fielding's linguistic preoccupation will
be more fully explored. But surely the references cited in the present
chapter are sufficient to establish that Fielding's concern with language
and its corruptions was an earnest and a longstanding one and that it had
a serious philosophical basis in the linguistic theory of John Locke.
Fielding's own statements, not least because they are so often ironically
oblique, are not themselves satisfactory expositions of the linguistic
attitudes they assume. In what sense was language seriously thought to
be "corruptible"? On what kind of conception of language did such a
view depend? Fielding does not himself ever pause to answer such ques-
tions with any degree of completeness. Clearly he expected his readers,
as his many citations attest, to be familiar with the idea as it occurs
in Locke, whose statement was the crowning synthesis of nearly a century of linguistic theorizing and has become the classic document of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critique of language. We have already, in Chapter I, traced the broad outlines of this critique. Now, having considered Fielding's own principal statements of the idea of the corruption of language, we are ready to place him in relation to the tradition of which he is clearly a part and to attempt to separate out those common interests and assumptions which he shared with such disparate and sometimes warring expressions of his age as science and philosophy, the anti-rhetorical movement, the theory of pulpit oratory, lexicography, grammar, verbal criticism, poetic diction, the Scriblerus Club, and the Shandean psychology of communication. The next chapter, accordingly, will deal with the philosophical assumptions underlying Fielding's position, as these found expression in the linguistic theories of Locke and others of the period, and in the not always explicit attitudes toward language and its abuses which these theories presupposed.
NOTES

1. The Champion: Containing a Series of Papers, Humorous, Moral, Political, and Critical (London, 1741), I, 177. Some of the Champion papers have been reprinted in many of the collected editions of Fielding's works, but for the sake of uniformity, as well as reliability of text, my references whenever possible will be to this two-volume 1741 reprint edition. As this edition does not itself contain the full run of the journal, however, I will also, on occasion, refer to certain copies of the original paper which have survived but are not duplicated in the reprint. When no volume number is indicated, the reference is to the original paper. On questions of attribution I have followed John Edwin Wells, "Fielding's Signatures in The Champion and the Date of His Of Good Nature," MLR, VII (1912), 97-8; "Fielding's Choice of Signatures for The Champion," ibid., pp. 374-5; and Arthur LeRoy Greason, The Political Journals of Henry Fielding (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1953).


3. The Champion, I, 195-6, 197.


7. See below, pp. 207-8.


9. Jensen ed., I, 154. For Fielding's debt to and high regard for these moral and religious writers, see James A. Work, "Henry Fielding, Moral Censor," The Age of Johnson (New Haven, 1949), pp. 139-48; and
In The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon (entry for Thur., June 27), Fielding observes that the "tyrant" of a ship "is called the captain; a word of such various use and uncertain signification, that it seems very difficult to fix any positive idea to it; if indeed there be any general meaning which may comprehend all its different uses, that of the head, or chief, of any body of men, seems to be most capable of this comprehension." Henley ed., XVI, 206.


14 Act I, Sc. 5. The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great, with the Annotations of H. Scriblerus Secundus, ed. James T. Hillhouse (New Haven, 1918), p. 102. Hereafter cited as "Hillhouse ed."


16 Book III, Ch. 6. Henley ed., I, 266.

17 Amelia, Book X, Ch. 9. Henley ed., VII, 236.


21 Book IX, Ch. 3; Book XII, Ch. 3. Henley ed., VII, 132, 303-4.


23 Henley ed., XV, 53.

24 Book III, Ch. 5. Henley ed., VI, 127-8. It seems unlikely that Fielding had any specific reference to Mandeville's works in mind; at
any rate, neither I nor a recent annotator of Amelia have been able to find any such statement in Mandeville, though the sentiment, to be sure, is thoroughly characteristic of him. See A. R. Towers Jr., An Introduction and Annotations for a Critical Edition of "Amelia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1952), p. 197, n. 37.

25 Book III, Ch. 3. Henley ed., III, 116. See also Book IV, Ch. 4, and Book V, Ch. 2. Henley ed., III, 152-6, 211-2.


29 Jonathan Wild (1743), Book II, Ch. 8. Henley ed., II, 81.

30 Tom Jones (1749), Book IX, Ch. 5. Henley ed., IV, 178.


32 The Jacobite's Journal No. 8, Jan. 23, 1748.

33 Tom Jones, Book VI, Ch. 3. Henley ed., III, 282.

34 Amelia, Book IX, Ch. 4. Henley ed., VII, 140. Dr. Harrison is the speaker.


37 The Champion, Jan. 17, 1739-40, I, 195. The Locke quotation is from the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Ch. xi, Sec. 4.
The reference is to Locke's *Essay*, Book III, Ch. ix, Sec. 3.

Henley ed., XII, 238.

But cf. Swift on the distinction between the two terms: "I make a difference between good-manners, and good-breeding. . . . By the first, I only understand the art of remembering, and applying certain settled forms of general behavior. But good-breeding is of a much larger extent; . . . it takes in a great compass of knowledge . . . [and] cannot be attained to by the best understanding without study and labour." "On Good Manners and Good Breeding," *Prose Works*, ed. Herbert Davis, IV, 217. Fielding probably recognized the same kind of distinction, but in any case the significant thing is that both writers felt it necessary to define the words, since the definition of familiar terms presupposes a feeling that they could not be trusted to carry their own weight of meaning, i.e., that in popular usage they were "corrupt."

*Plutus* (London, 1742), p. 56. The note, which is unsigned, might, of course, be Young's. But its enunciation of a theme so characteristic of Fielding makes the latter the likelier author.

Reprinted in the Hillhouse ed. of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, I, 49.

Book V, Ch. 2; Book X, Ch. 2. Henley ed., III, 211; IV, 199. Cited by MacLean in *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 112-3. MacLean also cites, of course, most of Fielding's more explicit references to Locke's theory of language which I have quoted above, as well as many passages illustrative of Locke's general influence on Fielding.
The idea of the "corruption of language" is as old, perhaps, as the study of language itself. It takes cognizance of an obvious fact -- the phenomenon of linguistic change -- and it was in this sense that the term was generally used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For Fielding, however, it meant this and something more. He was not interested, so far as we know, in linguistic change as such, and there is little evidence that he was worried, in the manner of Pope, over the possibility that such as Chaucer is would Fielding be. The kind of corruption he was concerned about was that which had already infected and rendered suspect the language of the day, the language which he, as a writer, had no choice but to use.

He was not, then, a reformer of the tongue in the sense that Dryden and Swift, with their visions of an English Language Academy, would have liked to be, and he was probably more skeptical than Dr. Johnson himself of the eighteenth-century lexicographers' aspirations to "fix" the English language. He did not live to see the publication of Johnson's Dictionary, but he was familiar with Nathan Bailey's Universal Etymological English Dictionary and, though the evidence is slim, seemed little impressed with its pretensions of
settling the proper meanings of words. A witness for Colley Cibber, on
trial in The Champion "for the Murder of the English Language," testi-
fies before the Court of Censorial Enquiry that she saw the defendant
"often look in a Book called Bailey's Dictionary, at which there was a
great Laugh"¹ -- though whether at the expense of Cibber or Bailey (or
both) it is not clear. In an earlier Champion paper about the "arcana"
of politics he quotes with apparent approval Bailey's definition of the
word "Mystery," but refers to the lexicographer himself as "the learned
Mr. Bailey,"² the kind of "corrupt" epithet which in Fielding is always
suspect of irony.³ And in Tom Jones, Sophia's flat statement of her
objection to Blifil as a suitor -- "I hate him" -- elicits from
Aunt Western the recommendation that if she is ever to "learn a proper
use of words," she "should consult Bailey's Dictionary" and learn that
"it is impossible you should hate a man from whom you have received no
injury."⁴ Mrs. Western, of course, is the most dubious of advocates,
but it is interesting to note, both as evidence of Fielding's concern
for detail and as an indication of why he may have distrusted the lexi-
cographer's claims to authority, that Bailey's definition of the word in
question supports her quibble. "To hate," according to Bailey (in the
original version of his Dictionary which Fielding must have had in mind),
meant "To bear an ill-Will to" -- a sense which would indeed make the
word inappropriate to describe the feelings of the determined but gen-
erous spirited Sophia. And though Bailey's addition of a second mean-
ing in a later, expanded edition of the Dictionary would accommodate
Sophia's sense of the word ("To have an Aversion to"),⁵ the limitations
of the lexicographer's methods are clear, particularly in the case of a
word like "hate" which could not be referred back to a respectable Latin or Greek "original" and which had therefore to be defined according to the compiler's own knowledge of current usage. Even Dr. Johnson, the first dictionary-maker who tried systematically to register all the various senses of words, would probably not have satisfied Fielding's apparent objections to a method which so conspicuously failed to reflect the subtlety and variety of living speech. Fielding would have agreed, no doubt, with Johnson's own self-deprecating caveat that "to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength." 6

Nor is it likely that Fielding approved, any more than did Swift and Pope, of the Royal Society's efforts to "improve the English Tongue." He continued the Scriblerian offensive against the Society, and, though he never specifically referred to its program of linguistic reform, he directed his ridicule, as did the original Scriblerians, against what he felt to be the scientists' fruitless preoccupation with "things" -- meaningless trivia like the polyp (the overt subject of Some Papers Proper to be Read before the Royal Society [1743]) and curious anomalies like the pullet in Tom Jones "with a letter in its maw" (which, says Fielding, "would have delighted the Royal Society") -- at the expense, it is always implied, of the universal truths of Nature. 7

Of grammarians, the most flourishing breed of language reformers in his own time, Fielding was perhaps more tolerant, though again the evidence is too slight to permit much more than an informed guess at his attitude. Against the legal "Art of Tautology," he cites the authority of William Lily, whose Latin grammar was the standard work on
that subject throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the probable source of many of the rules which English grammarians sought (as Fielding does here) to import into English. The examples in the turncoat essay of "corrupted" words (tyrant, villain, knave) were apparently borrowed by Fielding from Michael Maittaire's *English Grammar* (1712), a work which avowedly set out to "draw a Parallel between [the English] Language and the Learned ones" and which offered the same three words as instances of "how powerful and arbitrary is Use and Custom in abusing . . . the true and original signification of words." The grammarian James Harris was a friend of Fielding's and may have been an occasional contributor to *The Covent-Garden Journal*. His *Hermes* (1751), the classic eighteenth-century statement of the theory of universal grammar, was in Fielding's library at the time of his death. At most, then, we can conclude that Fielding was acquainted with the grammatical reformers of his time and may have sympathized with some of their aims. He associated himself, in another *Champion* paper, with Quintilian's pronouncement "that Grammar is the Foundation of all Science" and included in the indictment against Colley Cibber the charge "that you, not having the Fear of Grammar before your Eyes, . . . in and upon the English Language an Assault did make." But Fielding's actual assessment of the relative importance of grammar is probably reflected in the testimony of the critic who, in support of Cibber's claim "that other Literati have used the said Language more barbarously than I have," produces enough examples of sheer meaninglessness in the works of a certain "very great and eminent Physician" that the hapless Cibber's share in the crime seems small by comparison. For "it may be more
properly called the Murder of the Language to bring Sentences together without any Meaning, than to make their Meaning obscure by any Slip in Grammar or Orthography."^{12}

The grammarians, like the advocates of a Language Academy, the Royal Society theorists, and the other would-be reformers of the age, believed that the rule of language could be imposed from above. "Corruption" for them was mere change, whether in morphology, pronunciation, spelling, or meaning, and so long as this process could be either arrested or directed by some external authority, the language, they believed, was safe. It could be fixed; it could even be improved. But there is no evidence that Fielding shared this assumption. For all his concern about the condition of the language he was not a reformer in this sense because he was too conscious of the fact that language is, above all else, the words which men use, whether they are responsible members of the Republic of Letters like himself, ignorant hacks like Cibber, or obfuscating pedants like the "very great and eminent Physician" who shares Cibber's responsibility for the murder of the English Language. Corruption was change, yes, but not merely the historical process which distinguished the modern Dryden from the archaic Chaucer and which threatened, by the same token, the immortality of all writers. Corruption for Fielding was more significantly the change which was going on in his own time -- the change from meaning to meaninglessness, the change from grandness of import to triviality, the change which was contaminating the vocabulary of sincerity with the suspicion of hypocrisy, the change which rendered "very great" and "eminent" into ironic words not simply by means of a conscious under-
standing with the reader that their senses should be reversed, but by virtue of the current irresponsible use in society which had already made this reversal implicit in the words themselves.

In a passage already quoted from The Covent-Garden Journal No. 4, Fielding declares that the moralists and theologians "offend" by using words "in a Sense often directly contrary to that which Custom (the absolute Lord and Master, according to Horace, of all the Modes of Speech) hath allotted them." The deferential tone, of course, is ironic, and "Custom" is the real object of attack. But the effectiveness of the Modern Glossary depends on our recognizing that the definitions of the terms in question are an accurate reflection (allowing, as always, for satiric distortion) of popular usage -- not what the words used to mean, or ought to mean, but what they actually do mean in common use. The serious point of the essay, then (as of Fielding's other statements of the corruption theme and of much of his irony of "corrupted" words) lies in the juxtaposition of two kinds or levels of usage. One level (represented here by the "divines and moral writers") is traditional and responsible; the other (represented in this instance by the "polite part of mankind") is popular, current, and irresponsible. But even more basically, perhaps, the point of the essay lies in an unresolved tension between a recognition of the power of popular usage and a denial of its right to that power, a belief on the one hand that the meaning of words is inviolable, and a recognition on the other that in practice meaning is arbitrary, inconstant, and frequently non-existent, the product not of inherited culture and wisdom but only of social whim and chance, the mirror not of the permanent ideals of religion, morality, and civili-
zation, but only of the shabby and shifting values of the moment.

The idea that usage (or "Custom") was the ruler of language was by no means new. There was classical authority for it in Horace and Quintilian, and the former's

\[\text{usus}
\]

\[\text{Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi,}^{13}\]

which Fielding cites, was an especial favorite of English writers on language. The Biblical accounts of the origin and evolution of language, to which most of the language theorists (Hobbes among them) paid lip service at least, tended to the same conclusion. Language was the gift of God to Man, the special power given Adam to "name" all the creatures of the earth. These names were at first, by the grace of God, constant and universal, mirroring exactly the things which they described. But at Babel, God's wrath brought down upon Man the curse of dispersal and multiplicity of tongues, and thereafter His blessing on the marriage of words and things was withdrawn. The arbitration of language was left to Man alone, and the result was the mutability and confusion of all modern tongues.

The corruption of language was the inevitable result of its government by a corrupt humanity, and English theorists of language from the early seventeenth century on were well aware of it. "Words are formed at the will of the generality," wrote Bacon, "and there arises from a bad and inapt formation of words a wonderful obstruction to the mind."^{14} Bacon himself offered no remedies for this situation, but the implications were clear: if learning is ever to advance beyond the vague and cumbersome formulations of the present, steps must be taken
either to remove the existing language from the control of "the generality" or else to devise a new medium of discourse altogether free (like poetic diction) of their influence. Some of the attempts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to accomplish these ends we have already examined in Chapter I. Wilkins' project for a philosophical language, for example, was predicated on the assumption that human reason could construct a "universal" tongue close to, if not identical with, the original language invented by the divinely inspired Adam. The belief of such eighteenth-century grammarians as Harris and Lowth in a universal grammar rested on a similar faith but with less reliance on the Biblical underpinnings. Even Sprat conceived of the ideal scientific medium as a kind of reconstruction of a perfect original: a "return back to the primitive purity and shortness" of language.  

But whether the ideal was regarded as a past perfection to be recovered or as a pattern of future excellence to be reached by a gradual process of "refinement," the appeal was always to an authority above current usage -- Reason, "the nature of things," universal grammar, etymology. The eighteenth-century grammarians and rhetoricians, says S. A. Leonard, "frequently quoted with approval the Horatian dictum about usage, or an equivalent, but always they destroyed its entire force in application. . . . Their fundamental difficulty was in philosophy. They built in general upon the neo-Platonic notion of a divinely instituted language perfectly mirroring actuality but debased by man, and they labored to restore its pristine perfection. The prevailing view of language in the eighteenth century was that English could and must be subjected to a process of classical regularization."
Where actual usage was observed and recorded -- even when the theory was promulgated that usage is supreme -- this was, in general, done only to denounce and reform the actual idiom."\(^{16}\) Even Dr. Johnson, who endeavoured in the *Dictionary*, so he said, merely "to discover and promulgate the decrees of custom," could not suppress his doubts as to whether "the sovereignty of words" belonged to custom "by right or by usurpation,"\(^{17}\) and in his actual definitions he decided, as often as not, in favor of the latter by utterly excluding current meanings which he felt were "incorrect." He defined the word "journal," for example, as D. Nichol Smith has pointed out, as "any paper published daily," even though at the time he wrote and for a considerable period before nearly all of the English newspapers so entitled were weeklies.\(^{18}\)

"Every dictionary," observed Anselm Bayly in *An Introduction to Languages* (1758), "is more or less formed upon the principle, that names were imposed from some reason, and that language is ideal."\(^{19}\) In the eighteenth century, at least, this was probably true, and not only of dictionaries but of any approach to the problems of language which appealed to some "original" standard of purity or to some "universal" principle of language. The doctrine of usage as the arbiter of language was everywhere acknowledged, but the whole effort of the reform movement was bent on repudiating its final implications: that authoritative control was impossible for any medium which took its life from the active principle of use. It was perhaps the needs of the new science for a more precise medium, or the reaction against the rhetorical excesses of the "Enthusiasts," which first gave impetus to the campaign to reform the English language, but it was the common struggle
to wrest control away from "the generality" which gave it its real unity of purpose.

Fielding, in his appeals to etymology and in his ironic invocations of the "original" meanings of words, was at one with his age in denying the right of current usage to the rule of language. But he was too much of a realist to underestimate its power and too conscious of the ground the enemy had already won to have much faith in the more sanguine plans of reform. The campaigns to reform the tongue, however successful they may have been by Fielding's time in the formalization of spelling, pronunciation, and grammar, had failed dismally in their attempts to arrest semantic change, or to "settle the significations of words." The vocabulary of the eighteenth century, says Joan Platt, a modern historian of the language, "is remarkable for having adopted a great number of new senses for words already existing, rather than in having acquired many completely new words." The process of "degradation," whereby a word passes out of Standard "good English" and is relegated to use by lower, ignorant classes only, was much more common in this period, she notes, than "amelioration," or the process of a word's rising in respectability, and one aspect of this degradation was an inevitable "deterioration" in meaning. In the course of decline, a word once powerful and serious often became weak and facetious as semi-educated middle class speakers, trying to imitate their "betters," succeeded only in dragging the word in question down from the level of respectability. Another cause she isolates for this "deterioration" is the "rise of journalese" in the early eighteenth century. But the most prevalent kind of semantic change Miss Platt discovers in the
period is the process of "specialization," the change of a word's meaning (the classic example is "wit") from a general or abstract primary sense to a more concrete, specific, or particular one. The process, of course, could work the other way too, and "generalization" was also a factor in the changing meanings of the time, but "the eighteenth century was peculiarly the period in which the restrictive tendency worked in preparation for modern colloquial English." Lord Chesterfield, always a shrewd observer of his times, noticed the same tendencies, though he was inclined to place the blame particularly on the ladies: "Not content with enriching our language by words absolutely new, my fair countrywomen have gone still further, and improved it by the application and extension of old ones to various and very different significations. They take a word and change it, like a guinea into shillings for pocket money, to be employed on the several occasional purposes of the day."

These are the kinds of "corruptions," it is clear, with which Fielding was concerned, and there was good reason for fearing that the forces of popular usage were getting the upper hand. "Great" and "eminent," for all their original power and seriousness, seemed to have been reduced not only in social status but also, as a consequence, in meaning as well, and in so far as they still conveyed any "ideas," these were as likely as not to have a facetious edge, or at least to lend themselves readily to facetiously ironic usage. "Honour," narrowed in popular application to such senses as "dueling," was a great abstraction broken down into the small change of specialized meanings; and "virtue" and "religion," the victims of similar forces, had been re-
duced, according to Fielding, to the condition of sheer meaninglessness. Nor was Fielding alone in singling out such words as the products of debilitating semantic change. "No one in the eighteenth century," remarks Ian Watt, "seems to have spoken about great men . . . without irony." Gay's use of the term, in The Beggar's Opera (1728), as a noble word fallen among thieves, is almost identical with Fielding's in Jonathan Wild; and Steele, in the Spectator, strikes off a parenthetical qualification which is pure Fielding in its identification of the ironic word with its corrupt usage: Louis of France and Peter of Russia, he says, are "the two greatest Men now in Europe (according to the common acceptation of the Word Great)." Again, in the Tatler, Steele lists among his achievements as the "Censor of Great Britain" the separation he has made of "Duellists from Men of Honour." This was one of the themes, of course, of The Conscious Lovers (1722), but here it has particular reference to his essay on duels in the Tatler No. 25, in which he, like Fielding, expresses alarm at the abuse of language involved in "the code of honour." The word he especially marks is "satisfaction" ("this is one unintelligible word which I fear will perplex my dissertation, and I confess to you I find it very hard to explain"), but he concludes that "as the matter now stands, it is not to do handsome actions denominates a man of honour, it is enough if he dares to defend ill ones." Similarly, Robert South, whose Sermons Fielding owned and was intimately familiar with, complained in one of his series of sermons on "The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words" of the "outrageous, ungoverned violence and revenge, . . . passing by the name of sense of honour, . . . which is as much the natural result,
as it is the legal reward of virtue. And yet, in spite of nature and reason, and the judgment of all mankind, this high and generous thing must be that in whose pretended quarrel almost all the duels of the world are fought." South is aware, too, of the corruptive influence on the word of so-called titles of honour: "Princes, indeed, may confer honours, or rather titles and names of honour; but they are a man's or woman's own actions which make him or her truly honourable, ... Honour being but the reflection of a man's own actions." Pope is another witness to the corrupting title when, in The Art of Sinking in Poetry, he ironically reminds would-be authors that "Every Man is honourable who is so by law, custom, or title." Fielding was conscious also of the "generalizing" process in language, which works not to shrink the grand old abstract words but to inflate formerly restricted and trivial terms into false new abstractions, reflecting once again the shabbiness of modern values. In "A Dissertation concerning high people and low people" in Joseph Andrews, he defines the former as "people of fashion," thus distinguishing them from low people, who are "those of no fashion." But, as so often, he pauses to examine the key word of his definition: "Now this word of fashion hath by long use lost its original meaning, from which at present it gives us a very different idea." Formerly, he says, it referred only to "dress," but now it has come to mean birth, accomplishment, social status, and a whole complex of superficial aristocratic values. Yet "the word really and truly signifies no more [than dress] at this day." Again, in The Covent-Garden Journal, he returns to the same phrase and speculates ironically about how the "term, PEOPLE OF FASHION ... first
acquired its present Meaning, and became a Title of Honour and Distinction," defending his mock derivations against "those who have not much considered the barbarous Corruption of Language."²⁹

But plainly it was the process of specialization which Fielding was most seriously alarmed about, particularly when it threatened to narrow words to the point of meaninglessness or to splinter their meanings so finely that the same word would mean radically different things, covering the whole range, perhaps, from greatness to pettiness, to different speakers and writers and, more seriously yet, to speakers and their hearers or to writers and their readers. The special liability of abstract words to such perversion and multiplicity of meaning was recognized by nearly all of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics of the tongue. But the orthodox assumption that language was (or ought to be) the exact mirror of objective reality gave more comfort in a materialistic age to those reformers who wished to banish abstractions from the language altogether than to the humanists who saw in the shifting meanings of such words a threat to traditional immaterial values which, they believed, must be resisted by shoring up the words themselves. Even the humanists' own stronghold of rhetorical theory was plundered of arguments, as in the case of the classical insistence on the identity of res et verba, which could be turned against abstractions. In the usage of Cicero and Quintilian, the word res meant "subject matter," but in the seventeenth century it became confused with res meaning "things," and the phrase was repeatedly used in the context of arguments that words should represent concrete phenomena as opposed to abstract concepts.³⁰
Fielding's interest in language, then, was characterized by his preoccupation with semantic instability in the language of the present, particularly as it affected the great ethical and spiritual abstractions, by his sensitivity to the power of popular usage, and by his distrust of authoritative programs of reform. It was for these reasons, probably, that he was attracted by the linguistic theory of John Locke. For Locke was pre-eminently in the eighteenth century the philosopher of semantics as well as the first of the major theorists of language really to deal adequately with the idea of usage as the matrix and arbiter of speech. An effective use of language, he taught, depended not on rules and methods of control but on an understanding of the psychology of communication. He recognized the desirability of a dictionary compiled on scientific principles, but he thought such a project not feasible and emphasized instead the personal responsibility of each serious user of the language to purify, as it were, his own language. But Locke was also, for all his affinities to the Royal Society and for all his distrust of metaphysics, no enemy of abstractions, and he gave their defenders a philosophy of abstract words which was at once true to the modern experience and expectations of language and loyal to the traditional values which such words were believed to represent.

The main thesis of The Essay Concerning Human Understanding, it will be remembered, is that the human understanding is imperfect and our knowledge limited. Book I develops the basic proposition that ideas are not innate in the mind. Book II establishes that all ideas have their source in either sensation or reflection (the mind's perceptions of its own operations on the ideas received from sensation), and are either
Simple (proceeding directly from sensation), Complex (produced by reflection), or Relations (comparisons of two or more ideas). Book IV exposes the weaknesses and limitations of the human mind, especially the "disease" of the association of ideas. There are no certain truths available to man, but only probability and faith -- except in morality, which is "amongst the sciences [along with mathematics, etc.] capable of demonstration" (IV, iii, 18) and therefore certain. Thus man's understanding and knowledge, though limited by his dependence on sensation and the imperfect workings of the mind, are adequate for his conduct in this world and sufficient for the duties of life.

This, so Locke informs us, was his original plan, and it was not until he had already written the first two books of the Essay that he was struck with the realization that words "interpose themselves so much between our understandings, and the truth, which it [sic] would contemplate and apprehend, that, like the medium through which visible objects pass, the obscurity and disorder do not seldom cast a mist before our eyes, and impose upon our understandings" (III, v, 15). The result of this afterthought was Book III, "Of Words."

A consideration of the nature and function of language was particularly essential to Locke's design because one of his basic assumptions was the reality in objective nature of "particulars" only and the unreality of "universals." Such concepts as "essence" and "species" have no counterparts in nature. They exist only in the minds of men and are built up out of their perceptions of "particulars" in the outer world. But this situation is not, according to Locke, grounds for despair or cynicism, nor is it a reason for spurning abstractions. It is merely
one of the conditions of human understanding -- the peculiarly human (but not therefore contemptible) way of looking at the world. Far from despising abstract universals, in fact, Locke values them as the highest reaches of human thought, and language occupies a crucial place in his system because it supplies the agency whereby the process of abstraction is carried out: "In mixed modes [i.e., abstract ideas] it is the name that seems to preserve essences, and give them their lasting duration. For, the connection between the loose parts of those complex ideas being made in the mind, this union, which has no particular foundation in nature, would cease again, were there not something that did, as it were, hold it together, and keep the parts from scattering" (IV, v, 10).

We do not know whether Fielding subscribed to Locke's view that abstract ideas have no foundation in nature. He was simply not enough of a philosopher to make the point clear. The notion might be suggested by a passage in his early poem, Of True Greatness:

'Tis strange, while all to greatness homage pay,
So few should know the goddess they obey;
That men should think a thousand things the same,
And give contending images one name.

To no profession, party, place confined,
True greatness lives but in the noble mind.

But he is more likely thinking of the quality of greatness than of the idea, and probably he believed, in accordance with the neo-Platonic and anti-nominalistic traditions of Christian humanism, that abstract terms were the audible and visible symbols (however imperfect) of "real" values, independent of any thinking mind. "What we look on as Power, Honour, Wisdom, Piety, etc.," he wrote in The Champion, "are often not
the Things themselves, but the Appearance only." But the assumption underlying such a statement is that "the Things themselves" do have a "real" existence, and the absoluteness of most of his pronouncements on abstract words suggests a similar attitude: "Real greatness . . . is the union of a good heart with a good head;" "The very best and truest honour is . . . goodness." Again his view of the relationship of words and ideas seems close to that of Robert South: "Honour is indeed a noble thing, and therefore the word which signifies it must needs be very plausible. But as a rich and glistening garment may be cast over a rotten, fashionably diseased body, so an illustrious, commending word may be put upon a vile and an ugly thing; for words are but the garments, the loose garments of things . . . But the body changes not, though the garments do."

Still, Locke was not preaching a cynical nominalism of the kind Fielding attributed to Mandeville, who "proves religion and virtue to be mere names." He did not attempt to reduce the great moral and spiritual questions to a simple affair of words. The ideas words stood for were still important to him, however little foundation they might have in objective nature, and if Fielding could not follow him in rejecting "real" universals, there was yet no reason why he could not accept the proposition that it was words which gave these ideas form and permanence in human thought. He may have rejected the notion of nominal essence, but he could still recognize the practical validity of the idea that words "preserve essences and give them their lasting duration" in the cultural tradition, and this was reason enough why they should be valued and preserved intact. Sophia, we are told, "honored Tom Jones,
and scorned Master Blifil, almost as soon as she knew the meanings of those two words" (my italics). 38

The emphasis, so Fielding probably thought, was where it belonged: on the connection between words and ideas in the human mind, for here was where corruption (or "abuse," to use Locke's own term) originated and was perpetuated, and only here could it be effectively resisted. "I am apt to suspect," he wrote in his essay on good-nature, "when I see sensible Men totally differ in Opinion concerning any general Word, that the complex Idea in their several Minds which the Word represents is composed of very different Simples. . . . I will venture to illustrate this by a familiar Instance: Suppose an Apothecary (as perhaps they often do) after mixing up a most pleasant Cordial, and a most nauseous Potion for different Patients, should write the same hard Word (Haustipotiferous Draught, for Example) on each of the Bottles, would not these two Patients ever after conceive very different Ideas of Haustipotiferous?" 39 What Fielding "took" from Locke, as we have already suggested, was not a systematic philosophy of words so much as a working rationale of his own intuitive concerns about language, and these were all directed to the practical questions of its imperfections and abuse.

Locke's analysis was eminently useful in this respect because it provided an explanation not only of how words and their ideas were united but also of how, in the normal give and take of communication, they often became separated and confused. For though he assigned words a high purpose in the system of human knowledge, Locke's concept of language as a man-made structure (as opposed to the traditional view of a
divinely ordained symbolization) also made him acutely aware of its limitations. He seemed to believe of language (as he did of civil government) that it was the artificial result of a contract or agreement among the members of a given society. The connection between "word and things," therefore, is purely illusory. Nor is there any necessary connection "between particular, articulate sounds and certain ideas . . . but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea" (III, ii, 1). Words do not mean something by divine fiat or natural law, but are mere "signs" of ideas in the mind of the speaker. The principal "imperfection" (i.e., inherent defect) of language, then, is simply that "words have no natural signification" (III, ix, 16). Even those standing for simple ideas "refer to a standard in nature which is imperfectly known," while those standing for abstract ideas "have no settled standard anywhere in nature existing, to rectify and adjust them by" (III, ix, 5).

Yet for purposes of communication this connection between words and ideas must be respected and, if possible, preserved. For "there comes, by constant use, to be such a connection between certain sounds, and the ideas they stand for, that the names heard, almost as readily excite certain ideas, as if the objects themselves . . . did actually affect the senses" (III, ii, 4). It is this arbitrary connection, institutionalized by usage, which makes communication possible in language, and "unless a man's words excite the same ideas in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly" (III, ii, 8). The liberty which the originators of language enjoyed "of affixing any new name to any idea," we have still today.
But there is this difference:

that in places where men in society have already established a language amongst them, the significations of words are very warily and sparingly to be altered. Because men being furnished already with names for their ideas, and common use having appropriated known names to certain ideas, an affected misapplication of them cannot but be very ridiculous. He that hath new notions will perhaps venture sometimes on the coining of new terms to express them; but men think it a boldness, and it is uncertain whether common use will ever make them pass for current. But in communication with others, it is necessary that we conform the ideas we make the vulgar words of any language stand for to their known proper significations, . . . or else to make known that new signification we apply them to. (III, vi, 51)

At its best, then, "common use" is the expression of the original compact or "tacit consent" of society which makes communication possible. It is the lawgiver of language and the principle of its continuity. But at the same time it is the lawless force of revolution and chaos, for the constancy of language depends on its individual users, each of whom retains the power to ignore the "agreed" connections between words and ideas and to rearrange them as he pleases. The more abstract the word, the more complex is the combination of ideas it expresses and the more liable it is to be used in private and unusual senses. The result is that the traditional connections are broken down and the words cut adrift from their established meanings. They become, at worst, literally meaningless because the social contract which made their meanings generally available has been violated and the word is reduced to its "natural" state of mere sound. Hence Fielding's frequent assertions that such terms as "virtue" and "religion" were "words of no meaning" or "no more than a sound" were more than just satiric exaggerations. There was a sense, founded on the Lockean theory
of language, in which this was the simple truth.

The first obligation of the responsible speaker or writer, therefore, is to established usage, and when Locke comes to consider the "abuses of words" (those "wilful faults and neglects," above and beyond the natural imperfections of language, "which men are guilty of in the way of communication, whereby they render those signs less clear than naturally they need to be" [III, x, 1]), he gives special prominence to the vice of applying "the words of any language to those ideas different from those to which the common use of that country applies them . . . without defining them" (III, x, 29); and his specific examples of this abuse recall not only Fielding's attacks on the verbal corruptions of hypocrisy but also Pope's ironic recommendation, in The Art of Sinking in Poetry, of "the method [of] converting Vices into their bordering Virtues."40 "I may have the ideas of virtues or vices," says Locke, "and names also, but apply them amiss: v.g. when I apply the name frugality to that idea which others call and signify by this sound, covetousness" (III, x, 33).

But once traditional usage has been violated by enough individual users of a word to make its "agreed" sense uncertain, the appeal to "common use" is no longer valid, particularly for purposes of "Philosophical Discourses," "there being scarce any name of any very complex idea (to say nothing of others) which, in common use, has not a great latitude, . . . and even in men who have a mind to understand one another, [does] not always stand for the same idea in speaker or hearer" (III, ix, 8). This abuse, originating with individuals, is perpetuated by the haphazard way in which words are learned, "espe-
cially the most material of them, moral words." For "the sounds are usually learned first; and then, to know what complex ideas they stand for, [men] are either beholden to the explications of others, or (what happens for the most part) are left to their own observations and industry; which being little laid out in search of the true and precise meaning of names, these moral words are in most men's mouths little more than bare words; or when they have any, it is for the most part but a very loose and undetermined, and consequently, obscure and confused signification" (III, ix, 9).

One "great abuse of words," therefore, is "irconstancy in the use of them." This is a "plain cheat, . . . the wilful doing of which can be imputed to nothing but great folly, or greater dishonesty" (III, x, 5). Another is "an affected obscurity," which may take the form of old words used in new and unusual senses, new words introduced without good reason and clear definition, or ordinary words brought together in ambiguous combinations -- the "learned gibberish" (III, x, 9) which Fielding satirizes in the disputes of Thwackum and Square (ironically recalling Locke in Square's assertion that "It was a mere abuse of words to call those things evil in which there was no moral unfitness"), in his Scriblerian burlesques of literary criticism (whose practitioners "have very confused Ideas, and but few Words to express them"), and in his tireless attacks on professional jargon ("to which it will be very difficult to assign any certain Idea"). Still another abuse -- which Locke allows may not be accepted as such by many of his readers -- is the use of figurative language. For "all the artificial and figurative applications of words
eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats" (III, x, 34).

This was a principle which Fielding, like any imaginative writer (and like Locke himself, whose most famous passage, perhaps, is the one involving the figure of the tabula rasa) could not follow implicitly. But his habit of "translating" his more florid metaphors into "plain English" indicates that he is conscious of the obfuscation figurative language can lead to. This distrust of the metaphor, moreover, is at least partly Lockean in its rationale. As we have seen in the instance of "turncoat," Fielding's objection is not to the device of analogy as such but only to the loss of meaning which occurs when the metaphorical usage of a word becomes habitual and its "original idea" is forgotten.

In the chapter of Tom Jones entitled "A Comparison between the World and the Stage," he explains this objection. He has nothing against the classic comparison of the world and the stage in itself; in fact, he goes on to develop the idea in his own way in the same chapter. But he does feel that "This thought hath been carried so far, and is become so general, that some words proper to the theatre, and which were at first metaphorically applied to the world, are now indiscriminately and literally spoken of both; thus stage and scene are by common use grown as familiar to us, when we speak of life in general, as when we confine ourselves to dramatic performances; and when transactions behind the curtain are mentioned, St. James's is more likely to occur to our thoughts than Drury Lane." As always, of course, one must not overlook the satiric intent of such a passage (here the cut at the covert
political maneuverings which make these terms appropriate to
St. James's), but the satire rests on Fielding's exposure of the
abuse of metaphorical language: the words in question have been cut
loose from their original ideas, and what he asks of his readers is not
that they should stop using the words of the theatre in connection with
St. James's, but rather that they should remain fully alive to the nor­
mative implications of this transference of terms.

For the most basic and iniquitous abuse of language, according to
Locke, is simply "the using of words without clear and distinct ideas;
or, which is worse, signs without anything signified" (III, x, 1). "The
whole mischief which infects . . . our [political] oeconomy," Fielding
writes in The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, "arises from the vague
and uncertain use of a word called liberty, of which, as scarce any two
men with whom I have ever conversed seem to have one and the same idea,
I am inclined to doubt whether there be any simple universal notion
represented by the word."45 And of the word "Humour," in The Covent-
Garden Journal No. 19: "perhaps there is no Word in our Language of
which Men have in general so vague and undeterminate an Idea. To
speak very plainly, I am apt to question whether the greater Part of
Mankind have any Idea at all in their Heads when this Word drops (per­
haps accidentally) from their Tongue."46 But Fielding does not agree
with Locke that this abuse is serious only on the level of philosophi-
cal discourse and that it is of small consequence in the "ordinary
affairs of business and society" (III, x, 4). He is being facetious
when, in Tom Jones, he applies the test of "clear and distinct ideas"
to the words uttered by Mrs. Waters in the comic scene at the inn, but
once again there is a serious edge to his mockery. The occasion is the one in which the jealous Fitzpatrick, searching for his wife, bursts into Mrs. Waters' room and discovers her with Jones. As the two men struggle in the dark, she sits up in bed and begins "to scream in the most violent manner, crying out murder! robbery! and more frequently rape! which last, some, perhaps, may wonder she should mention, who do not consider that these words of exclamation are used by ladies in a fright, as fa, la, la, ra, da, etc. are in music, only as the vehicles of sound, and without any fixed ideas." But the serious implications of such an empty use of words are suggested a moment later when Mrs. Waters, fearful now of her reputation rather than of her safety, continues to scream the same words and, when help arrives, pretends to believe that both Jones and Fitzpatrick had entered the room "with an intent on her honour." Perhaps Fielding, as a magistrate, had had experience with the loose way some women could use the language of accusation -- not to mention that much abused word "honour."

He is also, however, more conscious than Locke of the emotional content of words and of the question of sincerity involved in their use. Locke is inclined to attribute most abuse of words to sheer negligence, and when he turns, in the final chapter of Book III, to a consideration of the "Remedies" for these abuses he is therefore confident that, on the level of the individual speaker or writer, all that is needed is greater care in using words with clear and distinct ideas, more attention to consistency of meaning, and more frequent use of definitions, synonyms, and examples. Fielding, as we shall see in Chapter V, is less optimistic than Locke regarding these remedies, and one of the
reasons for his pessimism is his sensitivity to the non-rational elements of language. We have already seen how Fielding's awareness of these elements causes him, in *An Essay on Conversation*, to defend words and phrases which "in a philosophical sense have no meaning" (i.e., which have been separated from their original ideas) on the grounds that they convey impressions of esteem necessary to the conduct of society. We have also seen, however, that he more often attacks these same words and phrases for their insincerity and that even in *An Essay on Conversation* his defense is grudging and ambivalent. Mrs. Waters' use of words is another case in point. The cry "Rape!" is not the sign of an "idea," but, in the first instance, a way of summoning aid and, in the second, a means of safeguarding her reputation. Such "ideas" as the word conveys are to her purely secondary and accidental; her primary objective is not the communication of thought but the conveyance of emotional attitudes important to her own self-interest. In short, in the second instance at least, she is a hypocrite, and her use of the word is a lie.

But again the "common use" of such words in such contexts is corrupting because it separates the words from their proper ideas and infects them with the suspicion of insincerity. If enough boys cry "Wolf!" when there is no wolf, it is not only the liars who will fall under suspicion but the word itself, and this is also true of ladies who cry "Rape!" Even on the simplest levels of speech this can have serious consequences when the wolf or the rape are real, and on the higher levels of discourse the principle is the same. "Honour," "virtue," "religion," and the other words Fielding identifies as "corrupt" have been reduced in effi-
cacy not only by the process of specialization but also by the erosions of insincere usage, and however much the sincere speaker may try to apply Locke's rationalistic remedies he cannot be certain that his words will be accepted at their face values, he cannot be sure that they have been purified of the associations of insincerity. Certain terms, as a result, are all but removed from the vocabulary of truth: "The Words curious, eminent, learned," for example, are according to Fielding like the false labels which unscrupulous merchants use to pass off cheap wine as champagne: "all of them certain Marks of Perry." The word "grace" (which Locke himself, in a passage quoted by Fielding, identifies as an "abused" word) was similarly contaminated by insincerity. Charles DeLoach Ashmore has observed that "The word grace, as used by the Methodist pickpocket [at the beginning of Amelia] was particularly offensive to the novelist. Not only in the mouths of sectarians, but also on the lips of orthodox clergymen, the word seemed to have an ugly sound in Fielding's ears. . . . Apparently he felt that grace was at best used by men to throw upon God responsibilities that they themselves ought to shoulder. At worst, it was a cant word used by hypocrites as a substitute for Christian virtue in action." The hypocritical Parson Barnabas uses the word in Joseph Andrews, as does Joseph's sister Pamela (repeatedly) at the end of that novel. In Tom Jones, Capt. Blifil attempts to persuade Allworthy to abandon Jones by arguing that grace is more important than good actions; and it is surely no accident that the easy-virtued chambermaid, at the inn where the puppet-show is given, is named Grace -- a living symbol, like Mrs. Honour in the same novel (and like Jonathan Wild's three sisters Grace, Charity, and Honour) of
Fielding, in fact, is nearly always conscious of the "ideas" conveyed by proper names. "Whatever sour Ideas may be annexed to the Name of Vinegar," writes the irascible persona of The Champion, Capt. Hercules Vinegar, "no Family hath been more remarked for Sweetness of Temper than ours; and as for myself, those who know me thoroughly, agree in calling me the best natured Man in the World." And in another Champion paper an explanation of how names acquire "ideas" foreign to their original significations serves Fielding as a sort of paradigm of one of the processes of linguistic corruption. The reason, he says, why some names are regarded as lucky or unlucky, foolish or grave, good or bad, is not "as some think, from any greater Agreement, that certain Sounds bear [to certain ideas], nor from any of the other chimerical Reasons ludicrous Persons assign; but it is, indeed, because the Name hath been made odious by some Person who hath borne it, and hath transformed it to Posterity with his Iniquity annexed" (my italics). This is the same process, clearly, which makes it necessary for Fielding to apologize, in The Jacobite's Journal, for using the words "Patriot" and "Critic": "The Persons who have, without any just Pretensions, assumed these Characters, must answer for the disadvantageous Light in which they have placed these Words."54

It is also very close to the kind of contamination by "the grossness of domestick use" (in Dr. Johnson's phrase) from which poetic diction was supposed to protect the language of poetry, the process whereby a word, according to Addison, may "contract a Kind of Meanness by passing through the Mouths of the Vulgar," and thus become "debased
by common Use." "The best expressions," explained the anonymous author of *The Art of Speaking* (1708), "grow low and degenerate, when profan'd by the populace, and applied to mean things. The use they make of them, infecting them with a mean and abject Idea, causes that we cannot use them without sulllying and defiling those things, which are signified by them." The difference, of course, is that Fielding, who ridiculed the pretensions of poetic diction in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and in innumerable burlesque passages in the novels and who had to defend himself throughout his career against the charge of being a "low" writer, was not troubled by "domestick" use so much as by hypocritical use. But the effect is strikingly similar: the word so contaminated is no longer fit, in the one case, for poetry, in the other, for truth.

But if Fielding was more pessimistic than Locke about the condition of the language, if he used the charged word "corruption" where Locke invariably employed the more neutral "abuse," it was not entirely because he was more sensitive to the emotional content of words. Locke's optimism, for all his emphasis on individual responsibility for effective communication, rested in the final analysis on a faith in the basic solidarity of society. The contract theory of language presupposes a society homogeneous enough to have an "agreed" standard of meaning and responsible enough to observe it. For Locke, it is clear, such a society still existed. He had witnessed social upheaval in his time -- much more than Fielding was to experience in his -- but his belief in the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689 was supreme. Here, so he thought, was the social contract of civil government affirmed in actual fact, palpable evidence of the fundamental unity of English
society under the unalterable laws of Reason. The laws of language, he realized, were neither so reasonable nor so unalterable. In their original framing, in fact, they were quite arbitrary, and men still possessed their original power to use words in an arbitrary fashion. But for practical purposes they no longer had the right to do so, not only because arbitrary tampering with the "agreed" meanings of words would lead to confusion in communication but also because language was itself "the great bond that holds society together" (III, xi, 3) and widespread violation of the linguistic contract could only result in eventual breakdown of the social contract. But Locke, though he recognized the threat of this eventuality, clearly did not see it as present and immediate. He believed that the reasonableness of men would cause them to respect "agreed" meanings and that his "remedies" would suffice for those cases in which "agreed" meanings had already been lost or were otherwise inadequate.

To Fielding, however, a generation later, the situation looked different. He believed as devoutly as Locke in the Settlement of 1689, but he did not find it so easy to believe in the solidarity and reasonableness of English society on which this settlement must rest. Everywhere he looked he saw not homogeneity but factionalism, "interest," and party, not a sense of social responsibility but crass opportunism, not reasonableness but fatuous emotionalism. And nearly always he saw the effect of these forces on language and, conversely, the effect of "corrupted" language on society. From Locke Fielding took a method and terminology of linguistic criticism, but his sense of the corruption and degradation of words was deeply rooted in his own
experience of the language and society of his day. The next chapter will consider that experience as it is given expression in Fielding's attacks on those elements of society he held most responsible for the corruption of words -- the persons who, he was convinced, should be made to "answer for the disadvantageous Light in which they have placed these Words."
NOTES

1 May 17, 1740, II, 226.


3 See below, p. 111.


6 Preface, Dictionary of the English Language.

7 Book XVI, Ch. 3. Henley ed., V, 210. In The Champion for Apr. 27, 1740, Fielding refers in passing to "such as we generally say can hardly write and read, or, in other Words, a Man qualified to be a Member of the R____ S_____y." II, 162. See also The Mock Doctor, Sc. XVII; The Champion, Apr. 29, 1740; The True Patriot No. 5 and No. 22; The Covent-Garden Journal No. 2 and No. 70; and An Attempt toward a Natural History of the Hanover Rat, attributed to Fielding by Jensen in "Two Discoveries," Yale Un. Lib. Gazette, X (1935), 23-32.

8 "I need not mention that Custom so notorious among Gentlemen of the Law, of taking away from Substantives, the Power given them by Mr. Lilly of standing by themselves, and joining two or three more Substantives to show their Signification." The Champion, Jan. 17, 1739-40, I, 197. Lilly's rule is "A Noun Substantive is that standeth by himself, and requireth not another Word to be joined with him to shew his Signification." Lilly's grammar appeared in numerous editions from the time of its publication in 1527 until well into the nineteenth century, and under various titles. The edition I have used is A Short Introduction to Grammar (London, 1742). The Noun Substantive rule appears on p. 1.


15. History of the Royal Society, Part II, Sec. 20.


19. p. 76.


23. No. 139, Aug. 9, 1711.
24 No. 162, Apr. 20, 1710.


26 Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions (Philadelphia, 1884), III, 3-4.

27 See above, p. 34.


31 All references are to An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford, 1894).

32 Henley ed., XII, 249-257.

33 Nov. 22, 1739, I, 20.

34 An Essay on Conversation, Henley ed., XIV, 259.

35 Tom Jones, Book XIV, Ch. 7. Henley ed., V, 123.

36 Sermons Preached on Several Occasions, III, 3.

37 See above, p. 71.


40 See above, p. 34.

41 Tom Jones, Book V, Ch. 2. Henley ed., III, 211.


See above, p. 73.


Joseph Andrews, Book I, Ch. 8; Book IV, Ch. VII. Henley ed., I, 72, 343. Tom Jones, Book II, Ch. V; Book XII, Ch. 6. Henley ed., III, 82; IV, 324.

March 27, 1740, II, 37.

June 7, 1740, II, 311.

No. 8, Jan. 23, 1748.

See above, pp. 26-7.

pp. 50-1.
'"When a man speaks to another," wrote Locke, "it is that he may be understood; and the end of speech is that those sounds, as marks, make known his ideas to the hearer" (III, ii, 2). Fielding never quotes this passage, nor does he ever have occasion to frame his own definition of the purpose of language. But there is no doubt that he shared Locke's view, which was, in this instance, merely the orthodox attitude of the age and the basic assumption underlying the whole of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critique of language: the principal purpose of speech was the disinterested communication of ideas. The notion had been stated by Hobbes in very similar terms, was implicit at least in earlier treatises on language, and, after Locke, was echoed by nearly every eighteenth-century grammian or lexicographer who felt the need of some prefatory remarks on the nature and function of speech. It was also repeated, as we have seen, by such occasional commentators on the subject as Jonathan Swift. In all of the eighteenth century, in fact, there was only one dissenting voice which made itself heard above the general chorus of agreement, and this was, not surprisingly, the voice of that professional cynic Bernard Mandeville. "The first Design of Speech," said the author of The Fable of the Bees (1729) "was to persuade others either to give Credit to what the speaking Person would have them be-
lieve; or else to act or suffer such Things, as he would compel them
to act or suffer, if they were entirely in his Power."\(^3\) Alone in the
age Mandeville provided a statement of the purpose of language which
would accommodate the saying of the thing which was not as a legitimate
function of speech. It is little wonder that he was looked upon, by
Fielding and others, as a dangerous and subversive influence.

For to all the rest what Mandeville called "the first Design of
Speech" was a perversion of its true purpose. Locke, as we have seen,
ascribes the abuse of words chiefly to negligence, but he recognizes
that certain "by-interests" (III, x, 13) are sometimes responsible as
well and in the chapter on Remedies he names three possible motivations
for this abuse which stand opposed to the true purpose of speech.
These are "vain-glory, ambition, or a party" (III, xi, 7). But where
Fielding went beyond Locke was in seeing such deviations from the true
purpose of language not only as an abuse of particular words and phrases
but also as a corruption of the whole process of verbal communication --
a discrediting of language itself as a medium of truthful expression.
He would not have agreed with Mandeville that the use of language as an
instrument of power and self interest was right because it was natural,
but he would have admitted that the age in which they lived furnished
abundant evidence that this kind of use was rapidly displacing the dis­
interested exchange of ideas as "the end of speech." Where Locke saw
reasonable men eager to cultivate an effective medium of discourse,
Fielding, like Mandeville, saw mostly self-seeking opportunists willing
to exploit the powers of language for their own gain. The Orator in the
"Pleasures of the Town" sequence of The Author's Farce (1730) boasts
that he is superior, as a purveyor of nonsense, to any other member of society, and his song is a fairly complete survey of the exploiters of language whom Fielding held principally responsible for its corruption:

The lawyer wrangling at the bar,  
While the reverend bench is dozing,  
The scribbler in his pamphlet war,  
Or grub Street bard composing;  
The trudging quack in scarlet cloak,  
Or coffee-house politic prater;  
Can none come up to what I have spoke  
When I was a bold orator.

The well-bred courtier telling lies,  
Or levée hunter believing;  
The vain coquette that rolls her eyes,  
More empty fops deceiving;  
The parson of dissenting gang,  
Or flattering dedicator,  
Could none of them like me harangue,  
When I was a bold orator.  

All of these diverse members of society have in common the use of language as a means to unworthy ends and hence the power to corrupt it. For all of them language is an important stock in trade, but none of them respects its integrity of purpose. They are concerned not with the communication of ideas but with persuasion, not with understanding but with personal advantage or reward, not with truth but with form or effect.

They may be loosely divided, for purposes of the analysis which follows, into four main categories: Writers, particularly the Grub Street variety (the scribbler, the bard, the dedicator); Politicians (the courtier, the place-seeker, the "coffee-house politic prater"); Polite Society (the coquette, the fops); and the Professions (the lawyer, the quack, and the parson). Fielding attacked these groups repeatedly throughout his career. He did not limit himself by any means to their linguistic transgressions, and frequently, as we have had occasion to remark before, his
exposure of these transgressions is as much a means of getting at some
more general corruption of the age as it is an end in itself. But it
is surely significant that he so often chose this particular method of
attack.

Writers, Critics, and Hacks

In the underworld scene of _The Author's Farce_, recalling Lucian
and anticipating Pope, Fielding has the various literary genres compet­ing
for a prize before the Court of Nonsense. William Coley describes
it as follows: "The irrational modes of art are here at their irra­
tional best. . . . Language is either circumvented entirely [by Monsieur
Pantomime ], . . . or heroically inflated (by Don Tragedio), or confused
and Babel-like (by Sir Farcical Comic, who understands no language at
all), or spoken shoutingly (by Dr. Orator), or, finally, set to music
(by Signior Opera)." Opera wins the contest, probably because it was
a perfect symbol both of the age's degeneracy of taste and of its de­
basement of language: it treated words in literal fact "only as the
vehicles of sound." Fielding was not, of course, in his dramatic bur­
lesques, acting entirely as a disinterested guardian of public taste
and morals when he attacked the opera and other subliterary theatrical
spectacles of the day such as rope dancing, tumbling, and pantomimes. Drury Lane and Covent Garden, both dominated by the author-impresario
John Rich (the "Machine" of Fielding's _Tumble-Down Dick_) were the ri­
vals of Fielding's own theatre, the Haymarket, and his burlesques of
Rich's popular "entertainments" were skirmishes in the incessant
theatre-war of the time. But Swift and Pope, with no such immediate
provocation, were equally alarmed at the threat to "regular" comedy and
tragedy represented by the growing popularity of debased theatrical
forms, and there is no doubt that their concern was sharpened, like
Fielding's, by the anti-verbal implications of these forms. The thea­
tre, so much more integral a part of the cultural milieu in the eight­
eenth century than it is today, was recognized as a formative influence
not only on manners and morals but also on language. Gilbert Burnet,
in the Preface to his translation of More's Utopia (1684), placed the
stage on an equal footing in this regard with the pulpit, for though
"the two places . . . ought not to be named together, much less to
resemble one another; yet it cannot be denied, but the Rules and Meas­
ure of Speech is generally taken from them."

But for Bumet, writing before the heyday of Rich and his "enter­
tainments," the major threat was not the banishment of language from
the stage but its corruption by "false Rhetorick" -- notably the pseudo­s
 sublime bombast of the heroic drama. He believed, however, that "that
florid strain" was by his day "almost quite worn out and is now as
ridiculous as it was once admired." The language of the stage, he con­
fidently concluded, "is now certainly properer, and more natural than
it was formerly, chiefly since the correction that was given by the
Rehearsal." Fielding, who was the principal upholder of the Rehearsal
tradition in his own time, clearly did not agree. Not only had the
revival of the classical ideal of tragedy, in which Burnet apparently
placed his trust, failed to fulfill its promise (Addison's Cato had
been its only major success and even it was ridiculed by Fielding, in
The Tragedy of Tragedies, for its hollow rhetoric), but the heroic drama of the Restoration continued to hold the stage and to wield its influence over contemporary dramatists. Dryden, Lee, Banks, and Otway, still popular in Fielding's time, are burlesqued (and identified in the Scriblerian Notes) in The Tragedy of Tragedies, but so are Young, Theobald, John Dennis, Rowe, Nahum Tate, Charles Johnson, Gay, and other eighteenth-century authors. Whatever Burnet may have thought, the threat to the language of the "false Rhetorick" which had so "much corrupted . . . the Stage" was for Fielding still immediate and even more potent than that of debased entertainments because the language of tragedy was taken more seriously and was more openly admired.

Addison, though he did not in Fielding's view escape it himself, recognized where the fault of the heroic dramatists lay: in the disparity between "the stile . . . [and] the Sentiments of their Tragedies. Their Language is very often noble and sonorous, but the Sense either very trifling or very common. . . . For my own part, I prefer a noble Sentiment that is depressed with homely Language, infinitely before a vulgar one that is blown up with all Sound and Energy of Expression." English writers of tragedy would do well, he thought, to write down their notions first "in plain English" before turning them into verse, and readers should try to separate thought from expression in tragic speeches. "By this means, without being imposed upon by Words, we may judge impartially of the Thought." In short, as Locke would have said, the trouble with the language of heroic tragedy was that it separated words from their proper ideas, and this was precisely its trouble for Fielding as well, who resented being "imposed upon by Words" in any form. Abstrac-
tions like "love" and "honour" acquired "specialized" meanings in the heroic drama not much different from the reductionist senses Fielding assigned these words in his ironic vocabulary. The heroic playwrights "have made the . . . great characters of a Hero to be Love [and] Honour," wrote an anonymous Restoration critic, but "they have made Love to be the hot passion of an hour, . . . [and] their Honour consists in . . . maintaining the fiery ground of Fame; to vanquish Reason and generosity in the contempt of life; gathering the spreading glory of a Hero into a single punctilio" (my italics).^9

But such specialization of "general words" was always, for Fielding, the prelude to pure meaninglessness, the total separation of words and ideas. It is this feature of tragical rhetoric which he most vigorously burlesques in The Tragedy of Tragedies. "Here I shall beg only one Postulation," writes H. Scriblerus Secundus in the Preface, "viz. That the greatest Perfection of the Language of Tragedy is, that it is not understood. . . . What can be so proper for Tragedy as a Set of big sounding Words, so contrived together, as to convey no Meaning; which I shall one Day or other prove to be the Sublime of Longinus."^10

Even the names of the characters (Lord Grizzle, Queen Dollallolla, Princess Huncamunca), as William Coley observes, "are mouth-filling, sense-fracturing, stature-diminishing honorifics that do no honor."^11 This was probably Fielding's complaint against the whole of the heroic drama he was burlesquing -- that its unrelieved hyperbole and sublimity of language defeated its own purpose by draining heroic words of their heroic power and reducing them to empty commonplaces. The Tragedy of Tragedies simply carries this process to its logical conclusion. Tradi-
tionally heroic terms like "soul" and "genius," repeated ad nauseam in every kind of inappropriate context, become feeble and ridiculous echoes of once mighty concepts. "Be still my Soul," emotes the Queen upon hearing Tom Thumb request the hand of Princess Huncamunca; "A Tragical Phrase much in use," comments Scriblerus. Speeches delivered always in the larger-than-life superlative style succeed finally in producing only comic incredulity. When the Queen tells the King that she is weeping for joy, he replies,

If it be so let all Men cry for Joy,
'Till my whole Court be drowned with their Tears;
Nay, till they overflow my utmost Land,
And leave me Nothing but the Sea to rule;

and Scriblerus, citing examples from Lee and others, notes, "These Floods are very frequent in the Tragick Authors." Heroic ranting is exposed as mere alliterated sound: "I'll rave, I'll rant; I'll rise; I'll rush, I'll roar"; and Scriblerus refers the reader to "a late Ode called the Naval Lyric," a bombastic Pindaric poem by Edward Young.

The heroic metaphor, as represented by the lines

He is indeed, a Helmet to us all,
While he supports, we need not fear to fall,

is defended by Scriblerus in a note which makes Fielding's objection to pointless conceits abundantly clear. Against an alleged charge by Dennis that the epithet is confused, Scriblerus ranges a whole battery of equally absurd similies and epithets from Dryden and others and expresses his contempt for "so ignorant a Carper, who doth not know that an Epithet in Tragedy is very often no other than an Expletive." The pretensions of poetic diction are revealed (through the patent Scriblerian device of bathos) by the fact that a single "unpoetic" word can bring a whole pas-
sage of inflated loftiness crashing down to earth in empty ruin: "All Nature wears one universal Grin."  

Critical opinion has always ranked The Tragedy of Tragedies high among Fielding's works as an extraordinarily successful exercise in pure comedy, a sort of magnificent sport. But because its rollicking burlesque seems so far removed from the social and ethical themes which inform his greatest works it has not generally been accorded much attention by students of his thought and method. It is, according to a fairly typical estimate, "a general burlesque. No specific heresy was being hunted. No particular poet was being savaged. . . . [Fielding] was out for a laugh, not for chastisement."  

The play is remarkably free, it is true, of any feelings of rancor or personal animosity, and it would be wrong to try to play down its spirit of good humored comedy in order to claim for it the dignity of thematic seriousness. But the Augustans rarely laughed without some earnest reason, and the name of Scriblerus on a title page was an imprimatur of serious purpose. Viewed in the context of Fielding's lifelong preoccupation with the corruption of language, the theme of the play, the "specific heresy" Fielding is hunting, is the abuse of language by the false rhetoric of the heroic stage, a rhetoric which not only defeated its own purpose as the vehicle of heroic sentiments but, in so doing, weakened the language as a whole by robbing honorifics of honor, rendering powerful words impotent, and so making genuinely heroic sentiments that much harder to express. Defending his use of burlesque diction in Joseph Andrews, Fielding says that such diction does not make the work itself a burlesque any more "than an empty pomp and dignity of words, where every
thing else is mean and low, can entitle any performance to the appella-
lation of the true sublime." What better way to discredit the bale-
ful influence of the heroic drama on the language of the "true sublime"
than by ridiculing it? What better way to expose that "empty pomp and
dignity of words" than by reducing it to the absurd?

The Tragedy of Tragedies, however, is a double-edged burlesque.
The text of the play mocks the linguistic absurdities of heroic tragedy,
but the preface and notes do more than merely identify the real sources
of these absurdities. They also -- again in the best Scriblerian tra-
dition -- satirize the pedantic verbal quibbling of a literary criti-
cism which presumed to justify itself as a contribution to "the Intelli-
gibleness of Language." The annotations of such modern critics and
commentators as John Dennis, Dr. Bentley, Professor Burmann, Lewis
Theobald, Leonard Welsted, and Nathan Salmon are caricatured in the
form of little essays in obfuscation which darken rather than illum i-
nate an already murky text. The satire arises in part from the appli-
cation of pedantic subtlety to so worthless a subject and is therefore
as much at the expense of the modern writing which spawns such com men-
tary as of the critics who perform it so ponderously and self-impor-
tantly. In a long expository note on a heroic simile in The Vernoniad
(which has a similar burlesque apparatus of scholarly annotations),
Fielding ironically calls for more commentary on modern writers. This
might, he explains, prove them superior to the ancients because "certain-
ly it will not be said, that the moderns are less obscure; for though
Persius be the most obscure of all the Latin authors, and Lycophron of
all the Greeks, yet they are, notwithstanding the great distance of time,
to be understood even by foreigners, whereas many of the moderns are not intelligible even to their own countrymen, without the help of some commentator, who with infinite pains . . . arrives at the meaning." To illustrate the point he cites his own "herculian labours" (as Captain Hercules Vinegar in The Champion) as an explicator of "the prosaick works of our Laureate" (Colley Cibber), which otherwise "were by no means to be understood."\(^{16}\)

But Fielding was also aware of the positively harmful job of obfuscation which pedantic criticism could do when turned loose on a really serious work of literature. Having explicated, in a burlesque fashion, a turgid passage from one of Cibber's birthday odes, he concludes "by observing that if Dr. Bentley had never given us his comment on Milton, it is more than possible few of us would have understood that poet in the same surprisingly fine manner with that great critic."\(^{17}\) But if to obscure the language of Milton was a crime against one of the "pure sources of genuine diction," a poisoning of "the wells of English undefiled," then how much more heinous were the crimes committed in the name of verbal criticism against the language of Shakespeare. A "Correspondent" to The Covent-Garden Journal (actually Fielding himself), noting that "there is nothing in this Age more fashionable than to criticise on Shakespeare," submits some emendations of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy in which false principles of "correctness" and "propriety" are allowed to destroy completely the sense and beauty of the original. For example:

Slings and arrows . . . is an Impropriety which could not have come from our Author; the former being the Engine which discharges, and the latter the Weapon discharged. To the Sling he would have opposed the Bow; to the Arrows, Stones. Read
therefore WINGED ARROWS; ... a Figure very usual among Poets. ... The next line is undoubtedly corrupt -- to take Arms against a Sea, can give no Man, I think, an Idea; whereas by a slight Alteration and Transposition all will be set right, and the undoubted Meaning of Shakespeare restored.

Or tack against an Arm 'oth' Sea of Troubles,
And by composing end them.

By composing himself to sleep, as he presently explains himself. What shall I do? says Hamlet. Shall I buffet the Storm, or shall I tack about and go to Rest? ... For natural Shockes, I would read Shakes; indeed I know only one Argument which can be brought in Justification of the old Reading; and that is, that Shock hath the same Signification, and is rather the better Word. In such Cases the Reader must be left to his Choice.'

A similar attack on the travesties of Shakespearian emendation occurs in A Journey from this World to the Next when the narrator reports a conversation between the shades of Shakespeare and some of his commentators and idolaters. The poet is called upon to pass judgment on a disputed line in Othello -- "Put out the light, and then put out the light." Each of the critics offers his interpretation or emendation, the readings becoming more and more ingenious as they warm to their work, until finally Shakespeare interrupts to say that he does not remember what he had intended in the line. But "this I know, could I have dreamt so much nonsense would have been talked and writ about it, I would have blotted it out of my works. ... I marvel nothing so much as that men will gird themselves at discovering obscure beauties in an author. Certes the greatest and most pregnant beauties are ever the plainest and most evidently striking; and when two meanings of a passage can in the least balance our judgments which to prefer, I hold it a matter of unquestionable certainty that neither of them is worth a farthing." 19

For Fielding, who would not, one suspects, have cared for twentieth-
century methods of criticism any more than he did for those of his own age, the ideal of good writing was perspicuity. In that he was at one with the tradition of linguistic reform from Bacon through Locke, and just as the seventeenth century "anti-Rhetorical" reformers fought the influence on language of a "metaphysical" style of poetry and preaching which elevated the "imperfections" of language into rhetorical virtues, so Fielding battled against the same tendencies in the verbal quibbling and ambiguity-hunting of eighteenth-century criticism.

But an over zealous pedantry was not the only evil which threatened language and letters through literary criticism. Even more pernicious was the descent of criticism into the hands of the totally ignorant and irresponsible, the transformation of a highly exacting art, demanding wide learning and a trained sensibility, into a fashionable parlor game at which any number could play, with no qualifications required but those of a carping disposition and an acquired jargon, and with no rules except those imposed by whim and prejudice. "A few general Rules extracted out of the French Authors, with a certain Cant of Words, has sometimes set up an illiterate heavy Writer for a most judicious and formidable Critic," wrote Addison in The Spectator, and it was this thought which led him into the statement (quoted earlier) that critics would do well to study Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding so as to learn "the Art of distinguishing between Words and Things" and thereby avoid polluting the language with further "Confusion and Obscurity." Fielding, who in the Modern Glossary says that "Critic" is "Like Homo, a Name common to all human Race," waged war from the beginning of his career to the end against this leveling of the name
and office of criticism, "the Consequence of which hath been the Disso-
lation of that antient Friendship and Amity which existed between the
Author and the Critic, so much to the mutual Advantage of both People,
... and the great Devastation which hath been made in the literary
World, chiefly by means of a large Body of Irregulars, composed of
Beaux, Rakes, Templars, Cits, Lawyers, Mechanics, School-boys, and fine
Ladies, who have been admitted to the Jus Civitatis by the Usurpers in
the Realms of Criticism." 21 In an early Champion paper, after first
observing (characteristically) that "the Word Criticism" is derived
"from a Greek Word implying no less than Judgment," he sets up "some
Qualifications, without which no person shall henceforth presume to cen-
sure any performance whatever" -- qualifications so ironically minimal
that the modern sense of the word (like the modern art of criticism
itself) is revealed to be a hollow mockery of its ancient original.

But if the name and office of criticism were debased so also was
its special language, and it is hardly surprising to find Fielding re-
turning again and again to the "certain Cant of Words" behind which
modern critics tried to conceal their ignorance and spite. "I would
recommend to all Persons," he writes in the Champion essay just cited,
"to be extremely cautious in the Use of the Words Low, Dull, Stupid,
Sad Stuff, Grub Street, etc. which with some more, I wish heartily were
banished out of our Language, and that it was reckoned as certain a Mark
of Folly to use them, as it would be of Indecency to use some others.
Tho' I must own at the same Time, this might be as fatal to Criticism,
as the Banishment of Indecent Words hath been to Gallantry; and that
some Persons of admired Judgment would be as hard put to talk critically
without the one, as some noted Beaus are to talk wantonly without the
other." What Fielding demanded of critics was simply a genuine exer-
cise of the judgment that their title implied and a forthright expres-
sion of that judgment in specific, meaningful terms. It is true, of
course, that his attacks on the critics were again not altogether free
of the elements of personal resentment, and if he particularly objected
to the use of words like "low" as critical terms it was at least partly
because these were the kinds of terms that hostile critics applied to
his own works throughout his career. The Grub Street Journal branded
him as a "low" writer in the '30s for trafficking with such "low" theat-
rical forms as the farce and the ballad opera (even when he was using
these forms as vehicles for burlesque and satire), and he was still
being charged with "lowness" in his novels twenty years later by Dr.
to such criticism (or at any rate the grounds on which he chose to do
battle with it) was not that it was hostile but that it was vague, that
it was a mere parroting of words which conveyed the hostility but not
the reasons for it, in short, that it used words without clear and dis-
tinct ideas. Captain Vinegar's son Tom is assigned the job of dramatic
critic in the first number of The Champion on the strength of the fact
that "He frequently useth the Words Damned Stuff, That is Low, etc. in
Conversation, with which Words alone, together with his Cat-call, he
often brags he can damn the best Play in the Universe." But this is
to debase criticism to mere indiscriminate condemnation and to reduce its
terminology to the level of the cat-call.

Any writer who broke away from the established genres, as Fielding
did in both his dramatic and his narrative writings, ran the risk in the
eighteenth century of being identified with the retailers of subliterary
entertainments and hence of being classed as a "low" writer according to
the strict neo-classical hierarchy of literary values. The burlesque
and the prose romance were by neo-classical definition "low" forms of
writing. But in actual practice the word was used not merely as a clas­
sification of form but also as a prejudicial means of ranking the pre­
sumed subject matter of such works ("low life" as opposed to "high
life"), the audience (the lower classes to which they were supposed to
cater), and, by extension, the author (who must, it was reasoned, be
himself of "low" mind and morals in order to purvey such "stuff").
Fielding satirized this abuse of the word by putting it in the mouths
of speakers who were as ill-placed to pronounce social judgments on
works of art as they were ill-equipped to pronounce aesthetic ones.
"The lowest of all wretches are the aptest to cry out low in the pit," he
remarks in Tom Jones, and if a scene was natural and true to life,
the "young critics of the age, the clerks, apprentices, etc., called it
low, and fell a groaning." Again, in the puppet-show scene, Jones pro­
tests the retirement of Punch and Judy in favor of an expurgated puppet
version of Cibber's Provoked Husband, but his opinion is roundly con­
demned by the puppet-master, a clerk, and an exciseman, all of whom de­
cry the "low" quality of Punch and Judy; and the exciseman defends the
expurgated Provoked Husband by citing his own experiences of the original
version which he had seen as a footman in London: the "gentlemen in our
gallery could not bear any thing so low, and they damned it."25

It was partly to escape this Kind of prejudicial categorization and
partly to mock it that Fielding proposed, in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, his own half-serious classification of the "comic epic poem in prose," or, in *Tom Jones*, of "prosai-comi-epic writing." He would, as he says in the latter instance, be free under such a classification to lay down his own rules and would not be intimidated by whatever "the modern judges of our theatres mean by that word *low*; by which they have happily succeeded in banishing all humor from the stage, and have made the theatre as dull as a drawing-room." For the real trouble with the word "low" as a critical term (and Fielding's objection to it as a word) was that while masquerading as an aesthetic category it was actually an expression of social prejudice, a confusion of the stultifying genteeleess of the drawing room with the proprieties of art and so separated from its original idea. A footnote in *The Champion* identifies "low" (in a manner which anticipates the definitions of the Modern Glossary a dozen years later) as "A Word much used in the Theatre, but of such uncertain Signification, that I could never understand the Meaning of it." Fielding did not succeed, in his own time, in banishing the word "low" from the vocabulary of criticism, but it was largely due to his relentless ridicule of the term (and even more to his own unparalleled success in "low" forms) that it lost its authority as an expression of critical disdain, and by 1780 George Colman (the elder) could pay him a compliment which would have pleased him both as an author and as a reformer of the language:

When Fielding, Humour's favorite child appear'd,  
*Low* was the word -- a word each author feared!  
'Till chac'ed at length, by Pleasantry's bright ray,  
Nature and mirth resum'd their legal sway."
But though Fielding was willing to defend even Colley Cibber against
the meaningless charge of being "low," he did not spare the laureate on
other grounds. He became, in fact, by virtue of his free wheeling,
devil-may-care literary style, Fielding's archetypal desecrator of the
English tongue. In The Author's Farce Cibber is Sir Farcical Comic,
who, when he is told that his rival Don Tragedio (probably Charles
Johnson) "does not only glean up all the bad words of other authors,
but makes new bad words of his own," replies triumphantly, "Nay, egad,
I have made new words, and spoiled old ones too, if you talk of
that. . . . I have as great a confusion of language in my play, as was
at the building of Babel." We know he is Cibber because, pleading his
suit before the Goddess of Nonsense, he sings,

  Can my Goddess then forget
  Paraphonalia
  Paraphonalia
  Can she the Crown on another Head set,
  Than of her Paraphonalia? 29

The allusion, interestingly enough, is to the Preface of the same Pro-
voked Husband (1728) which Fielding champions in Tom Jones against the
footmen's cries of lowness. Describing Mrs. Oldfield's costume in the
original production of the play, Cibber wrote: "The Ornaments she her-
self provided . . . seem'd in all Respects, the Paraphonalia of a Woman
of Quality," and the mistake, (whether typographical or orthographic) was
quickly taken up by the Grub Street Journal and other self-appointed
guardians of taste and linguistic purity as a symbol of Cibber's igno-
rance of and lack of respect for the English language. No one imagined,
of course (least of all Fielding, whose ridicule of Cibber was always
good humoured), that the blunder was important in itself. But there was
a sense, which Fielding made clear in his Preface to the second edition of *Tom Thumb* (1730), in which such errors represented a serious threat to the purity of the tongue. Referring to Locke's complaint of "confused Ideas in Words," Fielding suggests that an excellent way of avoiding this fault is to cultivate the current "prefatical" style in which words are stripped of all ideas whatsoever, and he offers as an example of this technique Cibber's method of rendering a word meaningless by the simple device of altering one or two letters, as in turning "Paraphernalia" into "Paraphonalia." "For a Man may turn Greek into Nonsense," he goes on, "who cannot turn Sense into either Greek or Latin."30

In part Fielding's contempt (and that of Cibber's other detractors) for the laureate's ignorance of the classical languages was a reflection of the natural resentment felt by the established *literati* against the encroachments on their domain by a man who lacked the accepted credentials of the man of letters. But it also implied a genuine concern over the fate of the language at the hands of uneducated writers who, lacking knowledge of the "original" Latin or Greek roots of words, could inflict real harm on the tongue by using these words in ways which would separate them from their "true" meanings. One of the causes Dr. Johnson mentions in the Preface to his *Dictionary* for the "corruption" of words is that "illiterate writers will at one time or another, by publick infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction and forget propriety."31 Nor was faulty spelling a matter to be taken lightly. One of the fears underlying the seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century campaigns to reform the tongue, says R. F. Jones, was of "the corruption of the language through ignorant misuse and distortion of words, which in their deformed state and misunderstood meaning sometimes reach print and become established in the language," and the "effort at orthographic reform . . . considered bad spelling one cause of alteration in languages." The rationale which George Harris offers in Observations upon the English Language (1752) for his preoccupation with orthography is that the "Manner of Spelling sufficiently declares the Original of the Words in Question," and Anselm Bayly, in An Introduction to Languages (1758) maintains that "uncertainty in Orthography" will introduce "confusion in Roots: and these, the change, ignorance, and loss of a Language. . . . , [for] what would be the consequence but the ignorance of their precise meaning and derivation from the Latin [or other original tongue]? The important thing is to preserve in spelling the original root form of the word, "For if you injure the root, you effectually destroy the tree and its branches."

But Cibber played fast and loose with the English language in other ways besides his orthography. In the Preface to Tom Thumb Fielding offers as an example of a "Second Method of stripping Words of their Ideas" (that of "putting half a dozen incoherent ones together") a paradoxical line from the Prologue to The Provoked Husband asserting that "the People of our Age shall be Ancestors" in which "one discordant Word, like a surly man in Company, spoils the whole Sentence, and makes it entirely Prefatical." In The Opposition, A Vision (1742) he ridicules Cibber's use, in the Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber
(1740), of the "remarkable expression, . . . Here I met the revolution," which he finds so puzzling that, "having considered and turned it every way in my thoughts, I was at last obliged to lay down the book in despair of ever finding out what the Author meant by that extraordinary sentence." And in The Champion he seizes upon the "barbarous instance . . . of the poor Word Adept [also in the Apology]; a Word which I apprehend no School-Boy hath ever wantonly employed, unless to signify the utmost Perfection; for Ignorance they cannot plead who have gone beyond the Accidence, since they must then find that adipiscor vult adeptus: Nay an Englishman may learn from Hudibras,

In Rosicrucian lore, as learned
As he that verè Adeptus earned.

This Word our great Master hath tortured and wrested to signify a Tyro or Novice, being directly contrary to the Sense in which it hath been hitherto used." Actually Cibber's eccentric use of language was probably as much due to a kind of exuberant carelessness as to ignorance, but his willingness to confess to such a fault (not, one suspects, without a certain amount of perverse self-satisfaction) could scarcely have been expected to appease writers like Pope and Fielding who believed that an author had a special responsibility to the language in which he wrote. "I grant," Cibber wrote in the Apology,

that no Man worthy of the name of an Author is a more faulty writer than myself. That I am not a Master of my own Language, I too often feel, when I am at a loss for Expression. I know too that I have too bold a Disregard for that Correctness which others set so just a Value upon. . . . Whenever I speak of any thing that highly delights me, I find it very difficult to keep my Words within the Bounds of Common Sense: Even when I write too, the same Feeling will sometimes get
the Better of me: of which I cannot give you a stronger instance, than in that Wild Expression I made use of in the first edition of my Preface to the Provoked Husband; where, speaking of Mrs. Oldfield's excellent performance in the part of Lady Townley, my words ran thus, viz. It is not enough to say, that here she outdid her usual Out-doing. A most vile Jingle, I grant it. You may well ask me, How could I possibly commit such a Wantoness to Paper? And I owe myself the Shame of confessing, I have no Excuse for it, but that, like a Lover in the Fulness of his Content, by endeavouring to be floridly grateful, I talk'd Nonsense.  

It is probably with this passage in mind (and particularly Cibber's comparison of himself with a transported lover) that Fielding in Joseph Andrews develops a burlesque heroic simile comparing the powers of love to "metamorphose and distort the human sense" with the powers of "the great Cibber, who confounds all number, gender, and breaks through every rule of grammar at his will, ["and so"] hath . . . distorted the English language." Cibber's approach to language was irrational, like love; it was, by his own admission, an enthusiastic approach and therefore subject to the same criticism which the reformers of pulpit oratory lodged against the preaching of the puritan and metaphysical divines: that it was a perversion of the rational purpose of speech. The charge that he flouted grammar, a theme which Fielding pursued relentlessly in a series of papers in The Champion, was in a larger sense an attack on Cibber's lack of respect for this rational principle of language. We have already seen that Fielding seems not to have regarded Cibber's grammatical transgressions as very important in themselves. But a disregard for the logical (as the age believed) laws of language was symptomatic of the irresponsibility of uneducated writers and of the threat they posed to the condition of the tongue.
Fielding opened the attack in *The Champion* for April 22, 1740, by offering to prove that Cibber's *Apology*, despite accusations to the contrary, was written in English, because "Whatever Book is writ in no other Language is writ in *English*. This Book is writ in no other Language. *Ergo*, It is writ in *English*: Of which Language the Author hath shewn himself a most absolute Master; for surely he must be absolute Master of that whose Laws he can trample under Feet, and which he can use as he pleases." In the next issue he returns to the theme by affecting to disagree with Cicero's opinion "That he who commits his Thoughts to Paper without being able methodically to range them, or properly to illustrate them, gives us an Instance of the most intemperate Abuse of his own Time and of Letters themselves." Suggesting Cibber as a notable exception to this rule, Fielding pretends to wonder "whether Learning be of such Consequence to a Writer as it is imagined," and he quotes liberally from the *Apology* "to shew the little Advantage of . . . Grammar, to an Author" and to prove that Cibber "is generally to be understood without, and secondly, that he is sometimes not to be understood with it," taking particular note of the Cibberian rule that "Wherever the VERB OUTDO comes in, the PLEASANT ACCUSATIVE CASE OUTDOING is sure to follow." The next paper, arguing the proposition that "One might almost say, He hath even a Language to himself," concentrates on Cibber's prolixity of style and incoherency of syntax and includes a parody of his prose in which "I have endeavoured to use my Author's own Words in the same Sense which he hath attributed to them." This concludes with a Cibberian simile which makes, however, a serious Lockean criticism of Cibber's style. It is, says Fielding, like a rapid stream
in which "the Waves of Words pass by so quick, that it is very difficult to separate or fix distinct Ideas. . . . You cannot distinguish one Wave from another and you have from the whole, only an Idea of a River." The Champion of May 10th announces that a "Court of Judicature" will be convened in a subsequent issue and that among the cases to be tried is that of "Col. Apol. . . . for the Murder of the English Language." The May 17th number has the first "Proceedings of a Court of Censorial Enquiry held before Capt. Hercules Vinegar, Great Champion and Censor of Great Britain," in which, as we have seen, Cibber is acquitted on the strength of the plea that other writers have done greater damage to the language than he has and that errors of grammar and orthography such as he excels in are not so harmful as the total pedantic meaninglessness which marks certain other literary productions of the day. Citing his own confession in the Apology that he frequently "talk'd Nonsense," Cibber argues that "It is impossible I should have any Enmity to the English Language, with which I am so little acquainted." The indictment itself, in fact, softens the charge against Cibber (though scarcely the satiric insult) by describing the "wounds" which he has inflicted on the English language as "broad . . . but of no depth at all," and this would seem to represent Fielding's real opinion of the harm which a writer like Cibber could do. Ignorance, carelessness, enthusiasm -- the faults which Cibber personified so well -- were a nuisance and, insofar as they were propagated by the writings of popular authors like Cibber and stood a chance of becoming established in the language, a positive danger. But for the most part the harm was not deep. If Sir Farcical Comic made up new words "and spoil'd old ones
too," he did not really strike at the heart of language because his perversions were basically innocent. If he did not use language for the disinterested exchange of ideas, neither did he pervert it systematically to the service of the lie. The ends he applied it to were unworthy, perhaps, but they were not evil. Fielding had personal and political reasons for attacking Cibber. The laureate had called him a "broken wit" in the Apology and had composed hired panegyrics (or so Fielding charged) on the Walpole ministry which Fielding hated. But if there is no malice in Fielding's attacks it is probably because there was clearly no malice or wicked intent in Cibber himself. He made an ideal symbol of the Grub Street threat to language in the person of the ignorant and irresponsible scribbler, but Grub Street's more serious menace, as Fielding realized, lay elsewhere.

To represent the blacker depths of corruption to which Grub Street could sink Fielding turned from Cibber to John ("Orator") Henley. Henley was a free-lance preacher of the day who had established an "Oratory" in London and charged admission for sermons and lectures which were often, so Fielding alleged, merely thinly disguised eulogies of Walpole and (later) Jacobitism. He advertised his "Oratory" programs in the press in a vulgarly sensational and flamboyantly impudent manner which, in view of the quasi-religious nature of their subject matter, was constantly flirting with the blasphemous. He was also an author who wrote treatises on rhetoric in which nearly the whole emphasis was on gesture and modulation of the voice and who, according to Pope, "had an hundred pounds a year given him for the secret service of a weekly [pro-ministerial] paper of unintelligible nonsense called the
Hyp-Doctor."47 "Set up an oratory and preach nonsense," Witmore cynically advises the penniless author Luckless in The Author's Farce.
"If you wou'd receive applause, deserve to receive sentence at the Old Bailey."48 And in "The Pleasures of the Town," Henley is the Dr. Orator who boasts to the Goddess of Nonsense that he is superior to any other corrupter of the language.

If Cibber is the archetype of the upstart scribbler who spoils words out of ignorance and unrestrained exuberance, Henley is the archetype of the unscrupulous hack who perverts them to evil causes for cash received. Something both of his way with language and of his dedication to the profit motive can be glimpsed in a letter he wrote in March, 1723-4 offering his literary services to Sir Robert Walpole.
"My intentions are both honourable and sincere," he concluded graciously, "and I doubt not but they will meet with a suitable return."49 He appears in Fielding's Historical Register of 1736 (1737) as the auctioneer "Mr. Hen" who auctions off a set of abstractions such as a "piece of Patriotism," "three grains of Modesty," a "bottle of Courage," and "all the Cardinal Virtues," getting only very small and niggling bids until he comes to "Lot 8, a very considerable quantity of Interest at Court," which, after some spirited bidding, he sells to "Mr. Littlewit" for a thousand pounds (as compared to eighteen pence for "all the Cardinal Virtues," and that a mistake since the gentleman bidding thought Hen had said "a Cardinal's Virtues").50 In The Champion Henley's doings are regularly reported under "Puffs," a department devoted to pillorying false advertisements, and his paper is generally referred to as "the Quack Doctor." Along with items from the lottery brokers, apothecary
shops, and linen drapers appear such "puffs" as "From the Orator, alias Puff-Master General, two, one to thank his Benches for their Company, and the other to bespeak a ready furnish'd Apartment in Moor-Fields" (suggesting that Henley was not above hawking real estate from the pulpit if there was money in it) and, in a later issue, "the Orator's Panegyrick on his own Modesty." Under the first "Proceedings at the Court of Criticism, held before John Trot-Plaid, Esq; Censor of Great Britain" in The Jacobite's Journal appears "A Petition from Orator Handlie [sic]... praying to be Crier of the Court, offering to write, preach, or swear any thing, and to profess any Party or Religion, at a cheap rate; rejected," and in The True Patriot he becomes "McHenley the Ordinary," the symbol of the hireling Jacobite press. The extent to which Fielding considered such iniquitous service a debasement of the powers of language is suggested by a passage in his anti-Jacobite pamphlet A Dialogue between the Devil, the Pope, and the Pretender (1745), which makes Henley's abuse of rhetoric the climactic instance of the corruptions of the age. The Pope, anxious to please the Devil, predicts success for the Jacobite rebellion by pointing to the luxury of the upper classes, the indifference and apathy of the general public, and the license of the pro-Jacobite Opposition. But "to shew their Profligacy in the highest Light," he cites the example of "one single impudent Buffoon [who] hath for many Years gone on with Impunity, in Defiance not only of Law but of common Decency, to vilify and ridicule everything solemn, great and good amongst them; and, with a Mixture of Nonsense, Scurrility, Treason and Blasphemy, once a Week, in the Public Papers, and once in a Public Assembly (if any be so infamous to frequent it)
to traduce the Persons and Characters of Nobles, Bishops, and even of the King himself. -- If this be the Case, what think you of my Hopes, Brother?"\(^5\)

The immediate occasion for this outburst, of course, was not a concern for the language but a fear (very real to Fielding in 1745) of a victory for the Jacobite cause and an undoing of the Protestant Succession. But it is significant that this fear is expressed, in so climactic a passage, in a form which recognizes both the power of the word to corrupt and its susceptibility to corruption. This is not the kind of good humored mockery which characterizes Fielding's attacks on Cibber's abuses of the language. Henley may be an "impudent Buffoon," but, unlike Cibber, he is a genuinely dangerous one, and as such he is a more potent symbol than the laureate of the menace to language and society involved in the buying and selling of the word.

Fielding's most productive years were exactly coincident with the decline of literary patronage and the rise of a new middle-class reading public, those years of uneasy transition between the time when authors could still harbor the comfortable illusion of independence under an enlightened and disinterested patron\(^5\) and the acceptance of authorship as a profession dependent upon the favor of the reading public and governed by the economics of bookselling. This shift of literary responsibility from aristocratic patrons to popular readership was another evidence of the relaxing grip of the traditional ruling classes on the repositories of culture, language and literature. With the emergence to prosperity and self-awareness of a new commercially minded middle class, with the spread of literacy fostered by the charity schools, new
demands were being made of writers; and when the established authors of the age, schooled in the tradition of aristocratic values and classical learning, were unwilling or unable to supply these demands, a new kind of writer appeared on the scene who was eager to grasp at the opportunity. More often than not he was ill-educated, at least by the standards of a Pope or a Fielding, and, since the pressures of the journalism, political pamphleteering, and other hack activities in which he was principally engaged required haste, he was frequently careless with his language. The clownish Cibber personified these faults to perfection, but more serious was the damage done to the reputation of authorship, and to the efficacy of language, by the commercial orientation of the new kind of writer. Middle class himself in his origins and sympathies, sharing that class's respect for trade and its material rewards, he had little of the traditional writer's sense of responsibility to "truth, ... honour, and ... posterity." He wrote for money. His services were usually for sale to the highest bidder, and, since he was interested in an immediate return for his labors, he wrote wholly for the present, careless of any responsibility to the continuity of thought and language which is the basic principle of literary tradition. The Covent-Garden Journal No. 40, for May 19, 1752, contains a work, supposedly sent in by a "Correspondent," entitled Peri Tharsus -- an imitation of Pope's Peri Bathos, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry. It is described as: "A TREATISE ON THE CONFIDENT and PERT. A Modern Improvement in Writing; or, The Art of Swaggering in Print. A Work useful to all Kinds and Classes of Authors at this Day, but more particularly to Polemic Divines, Paradoxical Historians, Self-taught Commentators, Hypothetical and Heretical
Physicians, Daily-Essay Writers, Quack-Bill Writers, and Advertisers."

The "author" of this treatise shows that the pert style is a modern art, not mastered by the Ancients, who were too much occupied with fame and posterity to cultivate it, whereas the Moderns have mastered it because "they conclude, that a Book [is] calculated not to last Ages, but to produce an immediate Effect."\(^{56}\)

Money, of course, was corruptive of other and more basic values besides those of language and letters, but such was the age's conviction of the interdependence of social, ethical, and linguistic values that corruption in one sphere was certain to be reflected in the others as well. In The Covent-Garden Journal No. 35, for May 2, 1752, Fielding has a "Correspondent" calling himself "Misargurus" writing from Bedlam (where he has been committed for disposing of his money in the Thames) and arguing that as "the certain Cause of all that national Corruption, Luxury, and Immorality, which have polluted our Morals . . . [is] Money," the use of this commodity should be immediately abolished. "Thus a certain Method called Elections, which is of very singular Use in a Nation of Freedom, will be again revived; otherwise it may possibly sink only to a Name." Also, this measure "would restore certain excellent Things, such as Piety, Virtue, Honour, Goodness, Learning, etc. all of which are totally abolished by Money, or so counterfeited by it, that no one can tell the true from the false; the Word Rich indeed is at present considered to signify them all."\(^{57}\)

Grub Street, as both this passage and the excerpts from Peri Tharsus indicate, had no monopoly on the mercenary corruption of language. Politicians, polite society, and the professions, as we shall
see, were regarded by Fielding as equally culpable. But the Grub Street hack was particularly well situated to do harm because, having assumed the title of authorship and taken over the traditional forms of literary expression, he was boring from within. By diverting literature from the service of "truth, . . . honour, and . . . posterity," he was undermining its traditional power as a force for good, discrediting it, rendering authorship suspect in the eyes of the world. The devotion of Grub Street to profit and "immediate Effect" is satirized in the scenes at the writing factory in The Author's Farce. Bookweight, the money-grubbing bookseller (probably modeled on the notorious Edmund Curll) keeps a whole stable of salaried hacks to whom he assigns literary tasks strictly according to the law of commercial supply and demand.

"Do you consider, Mr. Quibble," he chides one of them, "that it is above a Fortnight since your Letter from a Friend in the Country was publish'd-- It is high time for an Answer to come out -- at this rate, before your Answer is printed your letter will be forgot -- I love to keep a Controversy up warm -- I have had Authors who have writ a Pamphlet in the Morning, answered it in the Afternoon, and compromised the matter at Night." Enter Scarecrow, another hack: "Sir, I have brought you a Libel against the Military." Bookweight: "Sir, I shall not take anything against them (for I have two in the Press already.)" Scarecrow: "Then, Sir, I have another in Defence of them." Nor will Bookweight risk publication of Scarecrow's "translation" (copied out of Dryden) of the Aeneid, "for that Bubble is almost down." Mr. Index, however, a specialist in mottos who charges more for Latin mottos ("Six pence per each") than for Greek ones "for as no body now understand [sic] Greek,
so I may use any Sentence in that Language, to whatever purpose I
please," meets with better success. Bookweight tallies up the account:

"For Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus Amori -- Six pence. For Difficile
est Satyram non scribere -- Six pence. Hum, hum, hum -- ah -- a Sum
Total for thirty Six Latin Mottos, Eighteen Shillings; ditto English
Seven, One Shilling and Nine Pence; ditto Greek, Four, One Shilling."56

One consequence of this application of merchandizing techniques to
literature is the degeneration of its special terminology to the level
of advertising jargon. In a passage from The Covent-Garden Journal which
we have already examined in another context, Fielding compares title page
blurbs and booksellers' puffs with the labels of fake champagne: "The
Words curious, eminent, learned, the 6th or seventh Edition. Done into
English from the original French Vessels, etc. written upon the Label,
are all of them certain Marks of Perry."59 Dash, one of the hacks in
The Author's Farce, has "nothing to do but put a set of terrible words
together on the Title Page" of Bookweight's publications. "It becomes
an Author," he muses, "to be diffuse in his Title Page. A Title Page is
to a Book, what a fine Neck is to a Woman -- Therefore ought to be the
most regarded, as it is the Part which is view'd before the Purchase."60
In the "Introduction" scene of The Welsh Opera (1731) a player asks the
author (Scriblerus Secundus) why he calls the play "Welsh" since not a
word of that language appears in it. Will not this disappoint audience
expectations? "No Sir," Scriblerus answers, "the Town is too well ac­
quainted with Modern Authors to expect any thing from a Title. A Trage­
dy often proves a Comedy, a Comedy a Tragedy; and an Opera nothing at
all."61 The Court of Criticism in The Jacobite's Journal hears a plea
in defence of "Porcupinus Pelagius, . . . convicted of having writ a Panegyry-Satyri-Serio-Comi-nonsensi-unintelligi . . . Poem, called the 'Piscopade.'" The defence argues that the conviction is unjust because "the Word Poem was a Misnomer; for . . . whatever was not written in any Numbers could not be called a Poem." Furthermore, "the Word Satire or Satirical is improperly used, . . . for an unmannery Abuse of a whole Body of Men, (as here of the whole Bench of Bishops) is Scandal and not Satire." The court allows the justice of these objections but, being bound by the rules of Equity, pronounces "Sentence of Contempt upon the Author and his Works."\(^{62}\)

But the real trouble, so Fielding seems to have felt, was that the "Sentence of Contempt" was passed not only on the authors and works which were actually guilty of such crimes against language and letters but also, in the public mind, against all authors and all literary works. Even Bookweight in *The Author's Farce* is alarmed because "People begin to be afraid of Authors, since they have writ and acted like Stock-Jobbers,"\(^{63}\) and when Fielding defines the word "Author" in the Modern Glossary as "in general an Object of Contempt" he is not in this case ridiculing the usage of polite society so much as the corruption of the title by hack writers who had "transformed it to posterity with their iniquity annexed." Thanks to "those base and scandalous Writings which the Press hath lately poured in such a Torrent upon us," he complains in *The Covent-Garden Journal*, "the Name of an Author, is, in the Ears of all good Men, become almost an infamous Appellation."\(^{64}\) In 1741, in the poem *Of True Greatness*, he was already attacking "this Gothic Age,"
When wit is banish'd from the press and stage,
...
When nonsense is a term for the sublime
And not to be an idiot is a crime;
When low buffoons in ridicule succeed,
And men are largely for such writings fee'd,

and concluding,

Leave, scribblers, leave the tuneful road to fame,
Nor by assuming damn a poet's name.65

Not only were the "names" of author and poet corrupted by such practices and the names of literary forms (satire, comedy, tragedy, etc.) made meaningless by the inflated claims of title pages, but all literature, the art of writing itself, was brought under suspicion. True authors, Fielding declares in The True Patriot No. 14 (Jan. 28, 1746), are "those . . . who, by their Writing, have either improved the Understanding, corrected the Will, or entertained the Imagination," but as these aims in recent years have been increasingly "attempted by some Men of mean and inadequate Capacities, while others have perverted great Talents to darken and corrupt the Minds of Men, by dressing up Falsehood in the Colours of Truth, and Vice in those of Virtues, such Writers have justly raised the Contempt and Indignation of the Wise and Good, and have been stigmatized with the Appellation of Scribblers; a Name which from the Persons on whom it was properly fixed, hath contracted much Scorn and Abhorrence," but which "likewise hath been applied with great Indifference and Impropriety," until now "the Word is immediately given to all the Gang. Every Method is practised to vilify and decry the Writer and his Works, and Scribbler resounds through all the Coffee-houses in Town." Or again, in The Jacobite's Journal No. 6, for Jan. 9, 1748: "A great Number of loose, idle, and disorderly Persons,
calling themselves Authors, . . . have . . . conspired together to mix up great quantities of Ribaldry and Nonsense; and have afterwards endeavour'd to do their utmost to spread the said Mixtures abroad among the People, often under false Names and Colours; and by means of a certain wicked, base, deceitful, and diabolical Art, vulgarly call'd Puffing, . . . to the utmost Abuse, Disgrace, and Discouragement of Literature, and to the great Scandal of this Nation." The press, he cried in *The Covent-Garden Journal* No. 1, of Jan. 4, 1752, is "in the Possession of an Army of Scribblers, who, at present, seem to threaten the Republic of Letters with no less Devastation than that which their Ancestors the Goths, Huns, Vandals, etc. formerly poured in on the Roman Empire."

Satire, the great moral art of Horace and Juvenal, of Swift and Pope, had become so discredited by the scandal mongering and truthless libel which had assumed its name that it no longer carried conviction. The rhetoric of satire, like Pope's personified Rhetoric in *The Dunciad*, had degenerated into Billingsgate. "Our Satyr," wrote Steele, "is nothing but Ribaldry and Billingsgate. Scurrility passes for Wit."

A session of the Court of Criticism in *The Jacobite's Journal* listens to a dispute between "the Corporation of Grubstreet, Plaintiff, and the Corporation of Billingsgate, Defendant," over "the Right to claim all low, scandalous Invectives, without the least Wit, Humour, Argument, or Fact;" and Article 3 of the "Treaty of Covent-Garden" (ending the "Paper War" between Sir Alexander Drawcansir, of *The Covent-Garden Journal*, and "the low Republic" of Grub Street) declares "That Billingsgate [sic] shall be acknowledged for ever, to be a Fief of the low and unmighty Republic; and
that Sir Alexander, and all the High Allies do renounce any Right, Title, or Claim, to that Fief for ever."⁶⁹

It was not so easy, however, even in allegorical terms, to disassociate the "High Allies" of the true Republic of Letters from the Grub Street debasement of the language of panegyric. Unjust satire could be distinguished from the genuine article by its very crudity, its reliance on billingsgate as opposed to "true wit." But the language of praise, which depends for its efficacy entirely on the reader's belief in the sincerety of the writer and the worthiness of the subject, could be more easily counterfeited and hence was more thoroughly corruptible. "The first quality which every Man ought to be possessed of, who promises himself to make any Figure in this Hemisphere," writes a cynical "Correspondent" to The Champion very much in the ironic vein of Jonathan Wild, "is the Art of Lying. This Word, as it regards our Interest, however it came to be scandalous I will not determine, comprehends Flattery and Scandal, a false Defense of ourselves, and a false Accusation of other People." The latter, he warns, can be overdone and so exposed as untruth, "but this regards only the Le scandalous; if you come to the Le panegyrical you need set no Bounds."⁷⁰ Particularly offensive to Fielding as an author was the application of this principle to the traditional dedicatory epistle. Despite the efforts of Swift and Pope to restore the concept of dedications as sincere, disinterested, and honourable tributes of esteem or expressions of gratitude, the prevailing practice in the first half of the eighteenth century was to dedicate indiscriminately for cash on the line or, in the case of political patrons, for "interest" -- "panegyrics for a pension sung" as Fielding put it in
Of True Greatness.

Grub Street's prostitution of the language of praise was not limited, however, to the dedicatory epistle or the formal panegyric. On a lower but no less pernicious level was its development of the art of advertising, a medium in which the buying and selling of the word was reduced to its purest form. Advertising was in its infancy in the eighteenth century and one wonders what Fielding would have thought of its growth in the twentieth century into a science of public manipulation. But even in his own time it made a useful symbol of the deliberate cultivation of the language of deceit for monetary motives. When Tom Jones is treated respectfully by the landlady of an inn, the author accounts for her solicitude by observing that "this was one of those houses where gentlemen, to use the language of advertisements, meet with civil treatment for their money." But the hollowness of the phrase (and the ironic literalness of the qualifying "for their money") is revealed when the landlady, upon hearing that Jones is a disinherited foundling, abruptly drops her civil attitude. Even in such an early exercise as Part of Juvenal's Sixth Satire Modernised in Burlesque Verse (published in the 1743 Miscellanies but written much earlier) Fielding has a note referring to the phrase "play-bills by Desire" which ridicules the false claims of advertisements and exposes their threat to the language. The phrase in question, he says, is "A constant puff at the head of our play-bills; designed to allure persons to the house, who go thither more for the sake of the company than of the play; but which has proved so often fallacious (plays having been acted at the particular desire of several ladies of quality, when there hath not been a single
lady of quality in the house) that at present it hath very little signification."73

"Puff," which Fielding in another note in The Vernoniad testifies was a word, like "the thing itself, . . . at present in great vogue,"74 had particular reference in the eighteenth century to "the applause that writers and booksellers give their own books, etc. to promote their sale,"75 the kind of self-praise disguised as public commendation which Fielding satirizes in the Letters to the Editor (one of which is signed "John Puff") at the beginning of Shamela, parodying the commendatory letters which Richardson immodestly prefixed to the later editions of Pamela. The desire for literary reputation, Fielding writes in The Champion, is "a Malignancy [which] hath given Rise to several Inventions among Authors, to get themselves and their Works a Name, and has introduc'd that famous Art Call'd Puffing, which, as it is brought to great Perfection in this Age, affords us a constant Article in one Column of our Paper."76 The "article" mentioned is one which does not appear in the reprint edition of The Champion but in the original numbers is called "Puffs," a regular department dedicated to a mocking review of literary publicity as well as, by logical extension, of the hyperbolic advertisements inserted in the back pages of newspapers by tradesmen, purveyors of quack cures for venereal disease, gout, and other maladies of man and beast, teachers of classical and foreign language (who promised painless lessons and quick results), dancing masters, lottery touts, waxworks exhibitors, and others for whom the more or less artfully contrived lie was the essence of salesmanship.77

Here was another potent symbol of the debasement of authorship, for
since the advertisements appeared in newspapers which in their front
pages laid claim to the dignity of literature, it was only logical, in
the absence of a distinct advertising profession, that Grub Street should
bear the onus of their dissemination. Steele, in The Tatler No. 224,
scornfully refers to the writers of advertisements as "diminutive au-
thors" and, developing the proposition that "a collection of advertise-
ments is a kind of miscellany; the writers of which, contrary to all
authors, except men of quality, give money to the booksellers who pub-
lish their copies," wonders what their compositions might yield to the
searching analysis of literary criticism. "The great art in writing
advertisements," he decides, "is the finding out of a proper method to
catch the reader's eye," and he especially ridicules such subverbal
techniques as the use of little pointing hands, asterisks, N.B., etc.
"But the great skill in an advertiser," he concludes, "is chiefly seen
in the style he makes use of," for it is his whole task to boast of
"'the universal esteem or general reputation,' of things that were never
heard of." 78

Fielding, in the Puffs department of The Champion, seizes upon the
same kinds of shams and absurdities, quoting or paraphrasing actual ad-
vertisements currently appearing in the newspapers. The entries in The
Champion No. 58, for March 27, 1740 are typical:

Mr. Lowe's French Grammar exceeds all others, positively,
comparatively, and superlatively, in the Opinion of (one
that should know) -- himself.
Dr. Milward's invitatary Letter to all Orders of Men to buy
his Book, Price 1s.
Mrs. Stevens has receiv'd 5000 l. for discovering a new Meth-
od of making Soap, a round about Way.

Nor does he spare the ads which grace the back pages of The Champion
itself. In the issue for Oct. 11, 1740 (No. 145), for example, he reports a puff for "A Parcel of curious Brown, Copper Tea Kettles to be sold that need no Commendations," an ad which appeared fairly regularly in The Champion both before and after Fielding singled it out for ridicule.\(^{79}\) The italics, which Fielding, according to the usage of the time, uses in a rather haphazard way to indicate direct quotation, call attention not only to barbarous, ungrammatical, or pretentious words and phrases ("Dr. Milward's invitatory Letter") but also to the debasement of good words to mean purposes: "Mr. Vick's lively Representation of Versailles, and beautiful Night Piece, seen and admir'd by great Numbers of the Nobility, and other curious Inspectors into Art and Rarity."\(^{60}\)

A column similar to Puffs called "Appeared" is a regular feature of The True Patriot, but with the difference that here, having perhaps sustained a loss of advertising revenue in The Champion by virtue of his mockery of advertising wherever it might appear, Fielding promises not to ridicule the ads in his own paper. But even in an announcement of the paper's advertising rates and policy he cannot resist a gibe at the insubstantiality of the claims of his prospective customers: "N.B. Mrs. Cooper the Publisher of this Paper is provided with several walking Licenses for Ghosts, by our Authority; which she issues forth to the said Ghosts at various Prices, from Three Shillings to Half a Guinea, according to the Length and Breadth of the respective Ghosts; and all Shadows which for the future shall venture abroad in the Shape of Puffs or Advertisements, without such License, shall be instantly lay'd in this Paper."\(^{81}\) Some typical entries are those in The True Patriot No. 2, for
Nov. 12, 1745: "Appeared. Several Ghosts in the Shape of Puffs, as usual. Particularly, ... Lottery-Mongers, who keep but one Office out of Gratitude to the Public, of which several News Writers think it incumbent on themselves to inform their Readers. ... Brandy Merchants determined to keep their Brandy to its usual Goodness, which has for 10 Years withstood all Contrivances in opposition to it."

Fielding's case against the newspapers was not, however, confined to their back pages. If the "Art of Lying" flourished here in its purest form, it was strongly in evidence in the other pages as well. While Puffs concentrated on exposing sham advertising, other departments of The Champion (Advices, Rumours, Prophecies, Preferr'd) satirized the notorious unreliability of eighteenth-century newspapers, their preoccupation with trivia and ephemera, their rumor mongering, their dependence on biased sources, their distortions, and their pure invention; and similar departments in his later papers, often accompanied by italicized ironic commentary by the editor, served the same function. The newspaper was, to Fielding's mind, the characteristic Grub Street medium for the debasement of the arts of language. Here there was no tradition of "truth, honour, and posterity" to deflect the industrious hack from his pursuit of gain and his cultivation of immediate effect, but here, all the same, was where the modern author most often learned his trade. A newspaper, according to a character in Arthur Murphy's play News from Parnassus (first performed in 1776; first published in 1786), is "a great school of science: most of the modern authors have never been at any other. With a good genius for lying, a tolerable stock of malice, a store of envy, and not a grain of liter-
nature, they write in the Journals, for three or four years; then set up for men of great talents, and from their garrets, or the Fleet, come forth novels, histories, plays, essays upon spirit and matter, whole reams in praise of themselves, and a torrent of abuse against every species of merit. 82

Yet for the very reason that journalism, like advertising, was still an infant science and had therefore, again like advertising, no tradition of its own, no separate system of values and standards, it presented itself to the world as a new form of literary endeavour and seemed to invite judgment in literary terms. "The World, it is certain," writes Fielding in The Covent-Garden Journal, "never more abounded with Authors, than at present; nor is there any Species more numerous than of those Writers who deal forth their Lucubrations in small Parcels to the Public, consisting partly of historical, and partly, to use their own Word, of literary Matter." But what they actually "deal in," he goes on, the "Wares which they . . . vend to the Public," are nothing else but politics, personal slander, scurrility, and "Dullness." 83

The most serious charge Fielding leveled against the newspapers of his day -- that their political bias led them to place "Party and interest" above truth -- will be considered in the next section of this chapter. But that his objections to them were not motivated entirely by his own political commitments is indicated by the fact that he repeatedly attacked them on other grounds as well. Even when politics were not at issue, he felt, they retailed the most baseless rumors, the most fanciful conjectures, and the most pointless gossip under the guise of an objective presentation of the "news" and thereby contributed in no
small way to the growing discredit of the printed word. Justifying his establishment of The True Patriot, Fielding argues ironically that as "no body at present reads any thing but News-Papers," an author who wants to be read has no choice but to write in that medium. And then too, despite the large number of papers already in circulation, "I fancied I had discovered two or three little Imperfections in them all . . . ":

The first little Imperfection in these Writings, is, that there is scarce a Syllable of TRUTH in any of them; . . . 2dly, There is no SENSE in them; . . . 3dly, There is, in reality, NOTHING in them at all. And this must be allowed by their Readers, if Paragraphs which contain neither Wit, nor Humour, nor Sense, nor the least Importance, may be properly said to contain nothing. Such are the Arrival of my Lord ______ with a great Equipage, the Marriage of Miss ________ of great Beauty and Merit, and the Death of Mr. ________ who was never heard of in his Life, Etc., Etc.

Introducing a minor character (Mrs. Miller) in Tom Jones, Fielding explains that he has delineated her in some detail because she will later assume an important role in the story, "as our history doth not, like a newspaper, give great character to people who never were heard of before, nor will ever be heard of again." This aspect of the newspaper, particularly in death and marriage notices, irritated him throughout his life. The Champion No. 46, for Feb. 28, 1739-40, reports puffs on behalf of "Several Persons dead, who were never heard of while they liv'd. And some preferr'd, who will never be heard of any more till they die." The relevance of this practice to the corruption of the language can be seen in Fielding's sardonic use of italics, interpolations, and commentary (in questionable taste, to say the least of it, from the modern point of view) in the obituary notices of his own papers, copied, in accordance with the standard practice of the day, from other newspapers.
The following example is from The True Patriot No. 3, for Nov. 19, 1745:

**Dead. . . Mr. Tillbury, an eminent Scarlet Dyer. Mr. Bick, an eminent Wax Chandler.** The Rev. Mr. Strange, much esteemed by all that knew him. Mr. Samuel Ruffell, an eminent Linen-Draper. . . Thomas Tenkin of Polgar in Cornwall, Esq., universally lamented by his Acquaintances. Upwards of 40 Cows belonging to one at Tottenham Court, universally lamented by all their Acquaintance.

N.B. If great Men and Cattle die so fast, we shall scarce have room to bury them in our Paper.

The question of taste must have been raised by some of his contemporary readers as well, for in any case Fielding in a later issue of the paper attached the following apologetic but not altogether contrite note at the end of the death and marriages column: "Note. To prevent giving Offense to the many eminent dead Persons, as well as to several young ladies of great Beauty, Merit, and Fortune, we shall for the future register all Marriages and Deaths as they come to Hand, and leave all Distinctions to the Public; after having premised that every Word printed in Italics is our own, and of these, and these only we will be answerable for the Truth."86 Hereafter the Married and Dead columns of The True Patriot are distinctly more sober, but the point had been made and Fielding apparently felt that it was worth making again three years later when he inaugurated a new paper. The Jacobite's Journal No. 11, for Feb. 13, 1748 reports:

**MARRIED.** Mess. ______ all eminent, to the Misses ______ very agreeable young Ladies of great Beauty, Merit, and Fortune.


N.B. For the future no Marriages nor Deaths of eminent Persons, whose Names were never before heard of, will be inserted in this Paper, unless Certificates be left with the Printer that such Persons were really born.87
Still later, in *The Covent-Garden Journal*, he notes the wedding of "a Lady of great Beauty and Fortune, and truly possessed of the Sweetness of Mind which is so necessary to the Happiness of the married State," and adds a query of his own which exposes the meaninglessness of such trite compliments: "Q. What are the Accomplishments necessary to render the State truly happy?" A later number ridicules once again the use in death and marriage notices of the word "eminent," particularly as applied to such as "Builders, Soap-boilers, Shoemakers, Butchers, etc." 88

Here was the linguistic process of "degradation" caught in action, the transformation of originally serious and meaningful words into faint and facetious expressions of middle class notions of the genteel. The slatternly Laetitia, in *Jonathan Wild*, is "thought to be possessed of every qualification necessary to make the marriage state happy;" and it is little wonder that the word "eminent" took its place, along with "honour," "virtue," "learned," etc., among the staples of Fielding's ironic vocabulary of corrupt words. When we are told, for example, that Laetitia was once "the handmaid (or housemaid as the vulgar call it) of an eminent pawnbroker," 89 we may understand why Fielding felt it was necessary to "translate" one euphemism in the sentence and not the other. "Eminent" had already been translated by popular usage and reduced to absurdity by the newspapers.

The inaccuracy of contemporary news reporting, which the newspapers presumed to dignify under the title of "history," is ridiculed by Fielding in the same way that he ridiculed inflated advertisements and social notes -- by reprinting or paraphrasing sentences culled from rival papers. A regular feature of *The True Patriot*, for example, is the
"Apocrypha, Being a curious Collection of certain true and important
WE HEARS from the News-Papers," in which are presented excerpts of more
than usual thinness or absurdity (often nothing more than wild rumors)
usually followed by a brief editorial comment from Fielding. A variant
heading for this column is "Gallimatias," which the OED defines (under
Galimatias) as "confused language, meaningless talk, nonsense." He
particularly delights in printing under this heading, during the Jaco-
bite invasion, contradictory accounts of the doings, whereabouts, and
intentions of the Pretender and his followers and in exposing their
inconsistencies. After a passage from The General Advertiser describ-
ing the capture of a certain lord, Fielding adds, "We hope his lord-
ship will not regain his Liberty as easily as he return'd to Life,
after having been killed off by the Historians of last Week." The
emptiness of such reports, founded on rumor and speculation, is sati-
rized in The Coffee-House Politician (1730) when a character reads from
"The Lying-Post" (one of the papers of the day was called The Flying-
Post): "Berlin, January the 20th. We hear daily murmurs here concerning
certain measures taken by a certain northern potentate; but cannot cer-
tainly learn either who that potentate is, or what are the measures
which he hath taken -- meantime we are well assured, that time will bring
them all to light." All in all, Fielding probably felt that he was
not really exaggerating so very much when in An Essay on Nothing (pub-
lished in the Miscellanies of 1743) he takes exception to the "vulgar
error among persons unacquainted with the mystery of writing, who imag-
ine it impossible that a man should sit down to write without any mean-
ing at all, whereas, in reality, nothing is more common."
Politics and Politicians

Captain Vinegar, in *The Champion*, advances the theory that politics "first came into the World at the Building of Babel; . . . the Builders of this Tower have by the best Critics been thought no other than a Set of Ministers, which I suppose to have been collected from their confounding one another by their Language, a Circumstance in which all their Successors have imitated them, it being the chief Excellence, and earnest endeavour of a Minister to avoid being understood by any of his Fraternity." It would be a mistake, of course, to represent Fielding's numerous political utterances as expressions solely or even primarily of his preoccupation with language and its perversions. Just as he was frequently motivated by personal considerations in his thrusts against debased theatrical entertainments, literary criticism, and journalism, so were his pronouncements on political matters often inspired by his own involvement in party politics and sometimes, probably, by hopes of personal reward for his services. The passage just quoted, for example, is not entirely the generalized piece of satire it seems. No reader of *The Champion* in 1740 would have misunderstood that the particular "Set of Ministers" Fielding had in mind was the government of Sir Robert Walpole, then nearing the end of its long hegemony and about to be toppled from power by the election of 1741 -- an eventuality which *The Champion* was wholeheartedly devoted to bringing about.

There is no doubt that Fielding was writing in *The Champion*, as indeed he had in the dramatic satires of the previous decade which had led to the Licensing Act of 1737 and his enforced retirement from play-
writing, in active support of the anti-Walpolian Whig Opposition, the Country Party "Patriots," and that he expected some palpable expression of gratitude for his labors. His turnabout attack on the Patriots themselves in *The Opposition, A Vision* (1742) was motivated in part by his disillusionment with men whose elevation to power had revealed them to be mere self-seeking hypocrites, but he made no secret of the fact that he was also personally stung by their neglect of himself and James Ralph, his collaborator on *The Champion*, and there is some reason to believe that in reaction against this slight he was now writing under the patronage of Walpole -- a circumstance which would explain the surprisingly dignified portrait of the prime minister in this pamphlet. His political tracts of 1745, *A Serious Address to the People of Great Britain* and *A Dialogue between the Pope, the Devil, and the Pretender*, were calculated to awaken a lethargic nation to the perils of the Jacobite uprising in Scotland, and his return to political journalism in *The True Patriot* that same year showed him during this national emergency to be in support (and possibly in the pay) of the Pelham Ministry. He was still defending the Ministry two years later in *A Dialogue between a Gentleman of London and an Honest Alderman* and in *The Jacobite's Journal*, an ironic expose of Jacobitism's lingering existence as a fashionable affectation and as an expression of discontent with the Pelham administration.

But again it is significant that the form of these attacks, whatever Fielding's personal commitments and motivations, is so often one which represents the politician as a corrupter of language. "Whoever can put together a few pompous popular Words and pronounce them well,"
says the gentleman, Fielding's spokesman in the Dialogue between a
Gentleman of London and an Honest Alderman, "may . . . whistle the Pub-
lic together, then get on their Backs and ride them at his Pleasure." The idea, of course, was scarcely novel. Robert South devoted one of
his sermons of 1686 on "The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words" to
" Instances of the Misapplication of . . . Words . . . in Politics," and
the first sermon of the series warned that "the generality of mankind
is wholly and absolutely governed by words or names; without, nay, for
the most part, even against the knowledge men have of things . . . . Only
let [a word] sound full and round, and chime right to the humour, which
is at present agog, . . . and no doubt, with this powerful senseless
engine, the rabble-driver shall be able to carry all before him, or
draw after him, as he pleases. For a plausible, insignificant word, in
the mouth of an expert demagogue, is a dangerous and a dreadful weap-
on." Nor was Fielding alone in viewing the political lie as a corrup-
tive influence on language. Lying, he felt, that most fundamental of
all the perversions of speech, had been cultivated by the Grub Street
hacks and advertisers in a desultory and amateurish way, but it was left
to the politicians to elevate it into profession and a way of life. The
Mayor's wife in the "Election" sequence of Pasquin expresses the politi-
cian's code when she asks, "What has a man's heart to do with his
lips?" The worthlessness of the political "promise" (a word which he de-
fines in the Modern Glossary as "Nothing") is an abiding theme in
Fielding's works. Politicians have "peculiar Phrases," he notes in the
Champion essay on the abuse of words, "which some Persons imagine to
have a Meaning among themselves, but give no more Idea to others, than any of those unintelligible Sounds which the Beasts utter; such are, upon my Honour, believe me, depend on me, I'll certainly serve you another Time, this is promised, I wish you had spoken sooner; and some hundred others of this kind, very frequent in the Mouths of . . . great Men." When the narrator of Jonathan Wild speaks of "those great arts which the vulgar call treachery, dissembling, promising, lying, falsehood, etc., but which are summed up in the collective name of policy, or politics, or rather pollitricks," the word "promising," it will be observed, is the only one of the "vulgar" synonyms which is not properly a pejorative term. But the point of its inclusion in the list, of course, is that its corruption (both as a word and as a political practice) has made it as pejorative as the rest. The Fieldingesque irony of the "translated" euphemism is here double, since it is not only the tenor term (politics) which is treated as corrupt but the vehicle (promising) as well, and Fielding never tires of showing how the political promise has acquired this evil reputation. Parson Adams, we are told, has repeatedly been the victim of betrayed political promises, but he still naively believes in the oily assurances and trite excuses of his latest parliamentary "patron" Sir Thomas Booby: "He promised me a living, poor man! and I believe I should have had it, but an accident happened, which was, that my lady promised it before, unknown to him. . . . Since that time, Sir Thomas, poor man! has always had so much business, that he could never find leisure to see me." Dr. Harrison, however, in Amelia, is not so gullible. When he asks a powerful nobleman to aid Booth, the lord affects great concern. "You may be assured," he
tells Dr. Harrison, "I shall do him all the service in my power." But this, Fielding tells us, was "a language which the doctor well understood; and soon after took a civil, but not a very ceremonious leave." 101

Mrs. Western, in Tom Jones, is associated throughout the novel with the language of politics. "Parliamentary language has been used without doors," wrote Richard Cambridge in an essay on "Fashionable and Court Phrases" in The World five years after the publication of Tom Jones. "Our country squires made treaties about their game, and ladies negotiated a meeting of their lap-dogs." 102 Aunt Western is a perfect example. She manages Sophia's affairs like a cynical diplomat, reading her lectures on "matrimonial politics," persuading the squire that his daughter should not "be treated with such arbitrary power," and demanding his "full ratification of all the concessions stipulated" since he is himself clearly "not qualified for these negotiations. All your whole scheme of politics is wrong." He accuses her of speaking a "Hanoverian linguo" which he cannot understand, but he recognizes her claim to superior political skill and soon "a league was struck (to borrow a phrase from the lady) between the contending parties." But Mrs. Western's affectation of "parliamentary language" is more than just a comic whim of characterization. It is symbolic of the popular influence of the political corruption of language. When Squire Western tells her that Allworthy, despite the obvious advantage to both families, may disapprove of the proposed match between Sophia and Blifil because "money hath no effect o' un," Mrs. Western replies, "Brother, ... your politics astonish me. Are you really to be imposed on by professions? Do
you think Mr. Allworthy hath more contempt for money than other men be-
cause he professes more? Such credulity would better become us weak
women, than that wise sex which Heaven hath formed for politicians.
Indeed, brother, you would make a fine plenipo to negotiate with the
French. They would soon persuade you they take towns out of mere de-
fensive principles."¹⁰³  The words of truth have been corrupted indeed
when even an Allworthy cannot use them without suspicion.

But the meaningless promise and the diplomatic lie were not the
only contributions which politicians were making to the perversion of
language. Equally corruptive was factionalism, which placed party loy-
alty higher than truth and treated language solely as a means of persua-
sion. The common cause of the decline of "our Conversation, our Stage,
and our Press," Fielding declared in The Covent-Garden Journal, was
"the Spirit of Party."¹⁰⁴ Language, the medium of truth, was being de-
based to sloganeering, whitewashing, and propaganda. The passage from
A Voyage to Lisbon quoted in the previous chapter in which he argues
that "the whole mischief" of the British political system "arises from
the vague and uncertain use of a word called liberty" is only one among
many expressions, both serious and ironic, of Fielding's sensitivity to
the perversions of this crucial political word. In A Charge to the Grand
Jury (1749) he apologizes to his distinguished audience for using "this
word liberty," which "I am afraid, gentlemen, . . . though so much
talked of, is but little understood," and then defines it as "the enjoy-
ment of our lives, our persons, and our properties in security."¹⁰⁵ For
he was aware that in political rhetoric the term was frequently nothing
more than an emotional catchword. Is not "our Liberty . . . in danger?"
asks the misguided anti-Hanoverian alderman in the Dialogue between a Gentleman of London and an Honest Alderman, and the gentleman answers, "First let me know what you mean by the Word Liberty; for though it is in every Man's Mouth, I have often doubted whether we have annexed to it any settled and certain Idea. Many indeed seem to understand by it the Liberty of doing what they please." "By the Liberty of an Englishman," replies the alderman, "I mean the Enjoyment of all those Privileges which the Law allows him," and when the gentleman forces him to admit that the present ruling house does not abridge liberty in this sense, the alderman falls back on the form of words which insists that it was nevertheless "in danger." "This of our Liberty being in Danger," says the gentleman impatiently, "is a Cant Phrase invented for the same seditious Purpose with that ever-memorable Cant Phrase of the Church being in Danger" (a notoriously overworked political slogan during the reign of Queen Anne), and is an example of the dangerous political emotions which "Words alone without Truth, nay, without Meaning, are capable of raising." 106

It was thus, for Fielding, a natural candidate for the vocabulary of irony. When Jonathan Wild is imprisoned in Newgate he soon organizes a party to overthrow the reigning bully Roger Johnson. His purpose, of course, is to install himself in Johnson's place and so enjoy the spoils which the "head of all the prigs" traditionally exacts from the other prisoners, but his rallying cry is that Johnson was "under-mining THE LIBERTIES OF NEWGATE." So successful is his campaign that "all Newgate resounded with WILD for ever, . . . and the poor debtors re-echoed the liberties of Newgate, which, in the cant language, signi-
fies plunder, as loudly as the thieves themselves." The "cant language," of course, is the language of politicians, with particular reference to the alleged rule by corruption of Walpole and his faction and their incessant squabbling over the spoils of office. But by logical extension (and it should be remembered that Jonathan Wild was published after Walpole's defeat) it is the language of all politicians. Such words as "liberty" in their mouths never mean what they seem, and if they mean anything to the politicians themselves it is as likely as not to be translatable by "plunder" or some equally base synonym. When the critic Sneerwell in Pasquin suggests that "interest" would be a more accurate word than "conscience" for the Mayor's speech in "The Election," the author Trapwit replies, "Ay, interest, or conscience, they are words of the same meaning; but I think conscience rather the politer of the two, and most used at court."  

Fielding's disillusionment with the Patriot Opposition to Walpole is expressed in similar terms. In the allegorical Opposition, A Vision, the large box labeled "Public Spirit" which the Opposition keeps always on prominent display turns out to be really full of "ambition, malice, envy, avarice, disaffection, disappointment, pride, revenge, and many other heavy commodities." The word "Patriot" itself, which the Modern Glossary defines as "A Candidate for a Place at Court" ("Politics" being "The Art of getting such a Place") was contaminated for the same reason. Robert South, in the sermon mentioned earlier on the "imposture" of political words, had singled out "Patriots" as among those "rabble-charming words, which carry so much wildfire wrapped up in them," and, fulfilling his promise "to lay open the true meaning and
design of them," defined it in its corrupt sense as meaning enemies of the monarchy, and "Liberty" as a cover-word for their "malicious, selfish, and ambitious designs." Pope noted that in "converting Vices into their bordering Virtues" it was no trick at all to transform "Corruption" into "Patriotism"; and Dr. Johnson was later to define "Patriotism" as "the last refuge of a scoundrel" -- meaning, as Boswell hastens to explain, not "a real and generous love of our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest" -- though Johnson had himself written a pro-ministerial pamphlet called The Patriot, the title of which, says Boswell, "to factious men, who consider a patriot only as an opposer of the measures of government, will appear strangely misapplied." For Fielding, then, when he became reconciled with the Patriot party in 1745 and undertook to defend the Pelham Ministry in The True Patriot, the immediate problem (as his title indicates) was to dissociate himself, his paper, and the ministry itself from the corrupt associations which the term had acquired by virtue of having served for so long as a false front for the same kind of vices he had found concealed behind the term "Public Spirit." Walpole himself, in a speech delivered in Commons on Feb. 13, 1741, had accused the Opposition of having prostituted "a venerable word" to their own selfish ends, and apparently Fielding agreed:

It must be confess'd, indeed, that this Word Patriot hath of late Years been very scandalously abused by some Persons. . . . Ambition, Avarice, Revenge, Envy, Malice, every bad Passion in the Mind of Man, have cloaked themselves under this amiable Character, and have misrepresented Persons and Things in unjust Colours to the Public. . . . But, however the Word Patriot hath been abused, or whatever Odium it may have thence contracted among the honest Part of Man-kind, the Word itself, so far from deserving Contempt and
Abhorrence, doth certainly set before us the most amiable Character in human Nature. For what less is meant by Patriotism, than the Love of one's Country carried into Action. . . . The Difficulty is the same in this as in other Virtues, to distinguish Truth from Falsehood and Pretence.

But the particular purveyors of "Falsehood and Pretence" to whom Fielding was concerned, in The True Patriot and later in The Jacobite's Journal, to deny the name of patriots were, of course, those who supported the Pretender in the Jacobite rebellion or who in any way questioned the Hanoverian Succession. "Their Words, 'tis true, are the Words of Patriots and honest Men," he quotes from a contemporary pamphlet on the Tory Opposition, "but their Actions are the Actions of concealed Jacobites." The covert nature of Jacobitism, its refusal to declare itself openly, its hypocritical way of mouthing the very principles (according to Fielding) that it sought to overthrow, made it especially insidious as a perverter of language. In The Jacobite's Journal No. 15, for March 12, 1748, he offers a parody of Ovid's Art of Love, entitled "De Arte Jacobitia," in which he lays out the secrets of this special skill. "First of all," the treatise begins, "learn the Art of Lying, and Misrepresenting. . . . The next thing you are to remember, is to feign a Love to your Country and Religion. The less you have of both, the better you can feign both. O Liberty, O Virtue, O my Country! Remember to have such expressions in your Mouth. Words do Wonders with silly People." The result of such abuse is an inability on the part of the public to distinguish truth from falsehood (since both come clothed in the same "Colours") and a consequent distrust of all political language. "The court, my Friend," argues the honest alderman of the Dia-
ilogue, "hath long cheated us with Names: the term Jacobite is a mere Bugbear, and hath served well to deceive and amuse the Multitude; but empty Sounds will not impose on me." But the grim irony of this, as Fielding sees it, is that in 1747 the term "Jacobite" was not a mere bugbear; it was the name of a real menace. Politicians, like Mrs. Waters shouting "Rape" in Tom Jones, had cried "Wolf!" so often that the watchman who cried true was credited no more than any other.

The political perversion of language was at its worst, however, when it enlisted the aid of Grub Street and availed itself of the pseudo-literary machinery of the hack pamphlet and the hireling newspaper. Of all the kinds of writers who have debased the name of author into a synonym for "Scribbler," Fielding declares in The True Patriot No. 14, for Jan. 28, 1746, "those who meddle with Politics" are the most culpable. For though Grub Street was a power in its own right in the corruption of the arts of language, it became, when it lent its skills to the dissemination of the political lie, a positive force of evil. "If a lying Tongue be so dreadful a Weapon as the wisest of Men seem to think it is," Fielding asks in The Jacobite's Journal No. 43, "in what Light shall we see a lying Pen, which can circulate a Falsehood over the whole Kingdom in a Day, and may be said to be telling Lies in several thousand different Places at one and the same Time?"

The evil of such writing, moreover, was not political alone. It also undermined the very foundations of language as a medium of objective truth, because, as the Generality of Readers consider [newspapers] only as the Relaters of mere Matters of Fact, they are apt
to give almost an implicit Faith to what they read. The Mind is, as it were, put upon its Guard against the Impressions of Argument or Ridicule. But an Author (if we must debase the Name by so applying it) who professes only to tell you the Occurrences which happen from such a Day to such a Day, is sure to be read without any Dif­fidence or Caution. And we no more doubt him when he assures us, that "It appears to be literally true, by authen­tic Accounts from H[anover] . . . , that the Foreign Adm[inistration] of Br[itis]h Affairs, is, at present, in the Hands of a High German Doctor." than when he tells us, in the same Paper, That seven Asses started for the Purse at Newcastle.

But the original evil genius of political propaganda, to Fielding's mind, was not Jacobitism but Sir Robert Walpole, and in his plays and early journalistic writings Fielding expended enormous energy in an attempt to expose that master politician's prostitution of the language. No spellbinding orator, Walpole could not be accused of any extraordinary abuse of words in his own person. If Sir Robert was "Liar Robin" to Fielding (and this is one of the writer's favorite nicknames for him) it was rather because of his alleged mobilization of all the vehicles of political propaganda, well lubricated with the oil of bribery, to the end of his own aggrandizement and lust for power. The familiar image of Walpole as the cynical Machiavellian who hired his supporters and bought out his enemies has long since been put in its proper historical per­spective by students of the period. But there is no reason to doubt that Fielding (at least until he suffered the disillusionment of seeing the self-righteous Opposition adopt the same methods) accepted this image in all sincerity. There was, besides, a good deal of palpable truth in it, and when Fielding depicted the campaign by bribery in the "Election" epi­sode of Pasquin or the assembly of politicians in The Historical Register coming to life only over the question of money, he was not relying alto-
gether on his imagination or his political bias, nor was he exaggerating so very much when he observed in The Champion that "the Argumentum Pecuniarium" was becoming the dominant mode of "reasoning."\textsuperscript{118}

Corruption, however, takes different forms. A "Correspondent" to The Champion sends Capt. Vinegar a description of a dream vision (after the manner of Addison's dream-papers in The Spectator), part of which involves the appearance of "a great Magician [who] with a gentle Squeeze by the Hand, could bring any Person whatever to think, and speak, and do what he himself desired,"\textsuperscript{119} and though Fielding attacked Walpole's corruptions of thought and action as well, he concentrated especially on his ability to bribe anyone to speak (or more properly, to write) "what he himself desired." For Walpole was at his most Machiavellian, perhaps, in his organization of a ministerial press dedicated to defending his policies and promoting his character. The leading ministerial newspaper received direct financial payment from the government, and Walpole himself later admitted spending 5000 pounds a year (out of Treasury funds)\textsuperscript{120} on what might today be called public relations but what Fielding, with an eye for the satiric analogy with trade advertising and publishers' blurbs, called "Ministerial Puffs." In the Champion Puffs department of Feb. 16, 1739-40 (No. 41) appears the following notice:

Whereas many Persons, Novices in the Art of Puffing, have rashly undertaken though greatly to their own Detriment, to puff their own Wares, Writings, Projects, Merits, and Accomplishments: This is to certify, for the Good of the Publick, that I Gustavus Puffendorf, first student under the great Professor of Rose-Street, then Fellow Practitioner with the admir'd antient Pistol, and lastly Co-Rival in Renown, with that consummate Master of Art, erst of New-port Market: This is to certify, I say, that Puffs, secundum Artem, of all Degrees and Magnitudes, for all Arts, Mysteries, and Profes-
sions, are to be had of me, if properly bespoken, at my House, the Sign of the Powder Puff, in Blow-Bladder-Street, and no where else in the Three Kingdoms.

It was in the person of the hireling publicist Puffendorf that Fielding carried on his campaign against the ministerial gazetteers in the back pages of The Champion while he and Ralph were attacking Walpole and his policies direct in the leading articles, and Puffendorf's credentials made it clear that hereafter all attempts at panegyric and whitewashing defences of the ministry would be considered as mere advertising puffs. The "great Professor of Rose Street" was Edmund Curll, who was not only a notorious puffer of his own publications but had taken the unusual step in the eighteenth century of having one of his hacks write the biography of a living man -- the idolatrous Brief and True History of Sir Robert Walpole and his Family (1738) by William Musgrave -- which was printed and sold at Curll's shop in Rose Street. The "admir'd antient Pistol" was Theophilus Cibber, the son of Fielding's archetypal desecrator of the language but also, according to Fielding, no mean corrupter of the word in his own right. His nickname Pistol was not so much a tribute to his memorable success as an actor in the role of Shakespeare's ranting soldier as it was a description of his off-stage character as a blustering man about town and occasional polemicist. In An Apology for the Life of Mr. T. C______, Comedian (1740), a work which has sometimes been attributed to Fielding, the younger Cibber is represented as writing an autobiography, modeled on his father's Apology, in which he boasts among other early accomplishments of how he "shew'd such an uncommon Genius for writing and composing a Playhouse Bill, ... and wrote them in such a promissory Way, (a Way which has
been since call'd Puffing) that they engross'd the Attention of the Town. . . . From such small Beginnings, my Genius soar'd to an unequal Height; and I have had, for this Species of writing, no one hardy enough to become my Competitor in Fame." But it is a later passage, describing how this special gift led him to become a "Writer for the M__st_y" hired to write "occasional Gazeteers," 121 which explains why Fielding singled him out for attack in The Champion.

The Daily Gazetteer was at this time the leading ministerial paper, and though Cibber seems to have been strictly a second-string contributor his twin talents of invective and panegyric made him, for Fielding's purposes, an ideal type of the political hack. The Ministerial Puffs for March 29, 1740 (The Champion No. 59), for example, notices "In Tuesday's Gazetteer, a curious Epitome of the whole Art of Political Billingsgate; with Examples of all the Tropes, Figures, etc. used therein by Antient Pistol," and one is delighted to find the writer of this paper (presumably Cibber) defending himself against the charge that his attacks on the Opposition are "an Endeavour to frighten with hard Words, and to overpower with the superior Force of Noise and Bluster" by arguing that the Opposition writers who make such charges are nothing but "a Tribe of Pretended Patriots, . . . mighty Advocates of Liberty [who] chiefly consist of the very Scum and Refuse of all Nations, Professions, and Religions; Fellows that have beggar'd themselves by their Debaucheries in their Youth, and are obliged to turn to Hackney Writing to support themselves in their Age; Libertines, Atheists, Scotch Presbyterians, Jacobites, Romish Priests, and Irish Papists!" 122 Pistol, it would seem, was Pistol indeed, and though Fielding offers us no examples of his panegyri-
ocal vein we may perhaps take him on trust that it was equally destructive of good words.

The third of Puffendorf's colleagues, "that consumate Master of Art, erst of New-port Market," was none other than Orator Henley, whose Oratory in Newport Market had been closed by a presentment of the Grand Jury of Middlesex in January, 1729, only to be reopened in Clare Market, where the Orator, having raised the admission charge from two pence to one shilling, continued to preach his blasphemous sermons and deliver his seditious orations until he was arrested in 1746 on the charge of "endeavouring to alienate the minds of his Majesty's subjects from their allegiance by his Sunday harangues." He was soon released on bail and was apparently never brought to trial, but the charge would seem to substantiate Fielding's later allegations (in The True Patriot) that Henley was a Jacobite tool. The appropriateness of his appearances in the Puffs column as a promoter of his own sermons and an advertiser of real estate has already been considered, but it was as the salaried author of the pro-ministerial Hyp Doctor that he gained entry to the sub-department of Ministerial Puffs. A particularly labored essay in The Hyp Doctor No. 487, for March 4, 1739-40, for example, in which Henley argued that the Septennial Parliament was more conducive to "Liberty" than the triennial system urged by the Opposition, is noticed by Fielding in The Champion No. 50, for March 8, as "a new World of Words; or a Specimen of a Political Dictionary in the Hyp-Doctor."

Puffendorf himself, if he was intended to represent any real person, was probably modeled on Ralph (or Raphael) Courteville, the chief writer for The Daily Gazetteer, who signed himself (to Fielding's great
irritation, no doubt) "R. Freeman." The Champion No. 42, for Feb. 19, 1739-40, has Puffendorf proclaiming that "I am promised a Patent to be Puff-Master General of Great Britain," and the next issue (Feb. 21) finds him referring to himself as "Puff-Master-General, Elect, of Great Britain." Henley, in an earlier number, is "the Orator, alias Puff-Master General," and Theophilus Cibber appears once as "T________ C , Publisher-General of the Ministerial Society," but neither could be Puffendorf because both are represented as his associates, and Courteville in any case, as chief ministerial writer and as the author of the Memoirs of the Life and Administration of William Cecil, Baron Burleigh (1738) in which he had included a "Parallel between the State of Government Then and Now" lavishly complimentary to Walpole's administration, had a clearer title to the office of Puff-Master General. He was, besides, the organist of St. James's Church in Westminster (a "blower" according to the vernacular of the time) and hence peculiarly well fitted to operate the "Air Pump" which Puffendorf boasts he is master of in The Champion No. 43, for Feb. 21, 1740.

But be this as it may, it is Courteville (or Freeman) who is the main target of Fielding's Puffs notices. "R. Freeman, Esq., his Panegyrick for the Ministry" is almost a regular entry in the column. Of all the ministerial writers, Courteville seems to have been the most adept at the art of whitewashing Walpole's methods and promoting his claims to "honour" and "greatness" -- those spurious Walpolian attributes which Fielding satirizes in Jonathan Wild. The way in which this satiric novel exploits the parallels between Walpole's career and that of the criminal Wild is too familiar to need recapitulation here.
W. R. Irwin, in *The Making of Jonathan Wild*, has admirably explored its broader implications as a satire on the notion of Machiavellian ethics which regarded "the great man" as one whose superhuman ambitions exempted him from ordinary codes of morality. But the extent to which *Jonathan Wild* is also a satire on the political corruption of language, particularly as practiced by Walpole's hired panegyrists, has not been sufficiently noted.

If Walpole was "His Honour" and "the Great Man" it was not because he advanced any special claim to these epithets himself but because these were the terms employed by his publicists. The prime minister whom Julian the Apostate meets in *The Journey from this World to the Next*, it is true, tells him that "honour" and "honesty" are "words without meaning." But the precise process whereby such words are "transformed to posterity" with their "iniquity annexed" is described by Jonathan Wild in his famous discourse on "honor." No man, he tells his gang, can "possibly entertain a higher and nobler sense of that word, nor a greater esteem of its inestimable value," than himself:

But alas! gentlemen, what a pity is it that a word of such sovereign use and virtue should have so uncertain and various an application that scarce two people mean the same thing by it. ... In what then doth the word honor consist? Why, in itself alone. A man of honor is he that is called a man of honor; and while he is so called he so remains, and no longer. Think not anything a man commits can forfeit his honor. Look abroad into the world; the PRIG, while he flourishes, is a man of honor; when in jail, at the bar, or the tree, he is so no longer. And why is this distinction? Not from his actions; for these are often as well known in his flourishing estate as they are afterwards; but because men, I mean those of his own party or gang, call him a man of honor in the former and cease to call him so in the latter condition."
Walpole's own shrewd application of this principle, Fielding implies, lay in ensuring that he would be "called a man of honor" by paying hacks to do just that. Starting with the September issues of The Champion (and occasionally, perhaps, earlier) Walpole is usually referred to, in the leading articles and news reports as well as in the Puffs column, as HIS HONOUR, with obvious ironic emphasis on the inappropriateness of that title. A letter appearing in the Oct. 7, 1740 number (No. 141) underscores the irony by observing that "Your Distinction of HIS HONOUR is certainly very just and applicable, for who is more deserving of that Title than One that never prevaricated, trifled, or falsified his Word in a Public Assembly, and is eminent in all the Courts of Europe, as in his own Country, for his Personal and Political Resolution, untainted Virtue, and Public Spirit." I have not been able to find the original of this statement (if any such ever existed) but it is clearly intended to represent, in keeping with Fielding's method in The Champion of quoting from the ministerial press, the kind of paid panegyric on which Walpole's reputation was supposed to have been built. The satiric technique is to assume the corruption of the italicized words, at least in the context of their applicability to Walpole, and so to rest confident that they will be read as meaning the exact opposite of what they "say."

It was in this kind of panegyrical corruption of words, according to Fielding, that Courteville excelled, and the extent to which the "Puffs" notices in the Champion of his whitewashing of Walpole anticipate the ironic method of Jonathan Wild (whose eulogizing narrator is perhaps Courteville magnified to the n-th power) is remarkable.
"Even Corruption itself affirm'd to be a Virtue in his HONOUR by one of his virtuous Scribes" reports Puffs in The Champion No. 149, for Oct. 25, 1740, compressing the progress from perverse usage to irony (the word "virtuous" being equivalent to "corrupt") into one sentence; and though the notice scarcely does justice to Courteville's defence of Walpole in the paper in question it is close enough to the mark to suggest that Fielding was seriously troubled by the political juggling of words, particularly since Courteville himself chose to make the matter an issue of language. Citing an example from Roman history of a man who prospered so much that he was accused by his neighbors of witchcraft and who defended himself by exhibiting his carts, plows, and harrows and saying, "Behold, O Romans, . . . the Spells and Incantations that I use," Courteville (in The Daily Gazetteer No. 1669, for Oct. 24, 1740) drew a modern parallel:

To me it seems pretty clear that this is the Case of a certain Great Personage amongst us, only that in this Free-thinking Age, Conjuring being no Imputation, it has been thought proper to pitch on a better sounding, tho' full as unintelligible a Term, that is, Corruption. . . . I say, then, gentle Readers, that Corruption in the Mouths of a Minister's Enemies, signifies much the same Thing that Witchcraft did in the Mouth of the Roman mob. It stands . . . for a Cause they know nothing of, but to which they would willingly give an Ill Name, because they do not like its Effects; . . . the very Enemies of the present Ministry allow, that he [i.e., Walpole] is affable, courteous, and easy of Access. These Carts, Ploughs, and Harrows, are so everlastingly in the Way, that there is no charging him with Conjuring. In such a Case what is to be done? Why, . . . charge him with Corruption; that is an Accumulative Vice, and you may give his very Virtues in Evidence.

But an earlier Puffs notice, in The Champion No. 116, for Aug. 9, 1740, is more interesting still. It may well be, in fact, along with the Daily Gazetteer essay to which it refers, the very germ of Jonathan Wild.
"An Acquaintance of Squire Freeman's," Fielding notes, "owes all his Greatness to his many useful, good Qualities, and, in the midst of that Greatness, is as humble as if he had none." The allusion is to The Daily Gazetteer No. 1603, for Aug. 8. "We have often heard it said," Courteville had written,

That the Great do what they have a mind to, That such an Action would be a base thing to a meaner Man, and such an Expression would not have been borne, but from a Person of his Quality; all these Phrases seem to insinuate that a different Kind of Measure is to be made use of, when we compute the Morals of ordinary sort of People from that which is apply'd to Men in a superior Sphere. Yet, I presume to say, that this is far from being grounded either upon Reason or Experience; there ought to be no such Distinction amongst Men, there really is none such. . . . The Intent of Speech is to be understood, and, of consequence, perverting the Sense of a Phrase is a Sort of false Coining in Language, which whoever detects does a Service to the Publick. With this View, I write this Paper: In which I shall attempt to prove, that it is against Reason and against Experience to believe, that those whom we call in common Speech People of Fashion, are looser in their Manners than other People; as by a long Habit in using a Phrase, at first maliciously perverted, the Mass of Mankind usually apprehend. . . . But Men of true good Sense, and of impartial Spirits, . . . esteem such as are Good, tho' they happen at the same Time to be Great; and are especially desirous of honouring that Man who owes all his Greatness to his many Good Qualities, and who, in the Midst of all that Greatness, is as humble as if he had none.

The issue, it will be observed, is once again seen -- by Courteville as well as by Fielding -- as a question of language, and Courteville even appeals to Locke's doctrine of "the Intent of Speech" in support of his own position, a form of defense which must have struck Fielding as an instance of how the Devil may quote Scripture. But two more diametri- cally opposed interpretations of the same set of verbal facts could scarcely be imagined. For Courteville, serving the interests of the Court Party in general and of "the Great Man" Walpole in particular, is
denying that the words in question have been corrupted by "the Persons who have," in Fielding's phrase, "without any just Pretensions, assumed these Characters" and is arguing instead that they have been maliciously perverted by the enemies of these persons. Fielding, though he duly registered the matter in the Champion Puffs column, did not rise to the challenge immediately. We have already seen, however, how first in Joseph Andrews and later in The Covent-Garden Journal he treats the phrase "People of Fashion" as an instance of "the barbarous Corruption of Language," for which, Courteville to the contrary notwithstanding, "those whom we call in common Speech People of Fashion" are themselves plainly held responsible. In Jonathan Wild "greatness" in the sense of social status is regarded in the same ironic light, particularly in the chapters describing Jonathan's courtship of Laetitia, which is conducted "all in the GREAT style."

But it is "greatness" in the sense of political power which is Fielding's main subject in Jonathan Wild, and here again he reverses Courteville's judgment by treating the term as one corrupted not by the enemies of so-called "great men" but by their friends, their sycophants and admirers. When he makes his narrator speak of "greatness, or, as the vulgar erroneously call it, villainy," and has him report that Wild distrusted his henchman Fireblood, "knowing him to be an accomplished rascal as the vulgar term it, a complete GREAT MAN in our language," Fielding intends his readers, of course, to understand "the vulgar" as meaning honest, plain-spoken men and "our language" to be taken as referring to the language of Wild's (or Walpole's) party and, by extension, to that of all indiscriminate eulogizers of the politically powerful.
Jonathan Wild is indeed, then, as W. R. Irwin has shown, a satire on the worship of brute power, but Irwin is mistaken, I think, in taking quite seriously Fielding's distinction between "greatness" and "goodness" and believing that he meant the former term to be understood literally as a pejorative word. It is true that Fielding himself, speaking in his own person in the Preface to the Miscellanies, seems to subscribe to this distinction:

Perhaps some apology may be required of me, for having used the word greatness to which the world hath affixed such honourable ideas, in so disgraceful and contemptuous a light. Now if the fact be, that the greatness which is commonly worshipped is really of that kind which I have here represented, the fault seems rather to lie in those who have ascribed to it those honours to which it hath not in reality the least claim. The truth, I apprehend, is, we often confound the ideas of goodness and greatness together, or rather include the former in our idea of the latter. . . . In reality, no qualities can be more distinct: for as it cannot be doubted that benevolence, honour, honesty, and charity make a good man; and that parts, courage, are the efficient qualities of a great man, so must it be confessed that the ingredients which compose the former of these characters bear no analogy to, nor dependence on, those which constitute the latter. A man may therefore be great without being good, or good without being great.132

But in fact he is using the words "great" and "greatness" here in the same way -- as ironic corruptions -- as he does in the text of Jonathan Wild, for otherwise the moral and verbal incongruity of Jonathan's claim to the epithet "Great Man" would be lost. Actually, then, Fielding himself (as he makes clear in the poem Of True Greatness, first published in 1741 and reissued in the Miscellanies along with Jonathan Wild) "affixed . . . honourable ideas" to the word "greatness" and included the idea of goodness in its meaning. But he felt that in its popular application to Walpole and others of his stripe it was be-
coming debased into a synonym for "power," or rather that its specialized sense (as in "Alexander the Great") of temporal bigness was threatening to drive out its more general and abstract meaning of bigness of soul or mind, bigness of virtue, and it is this corruptive process which he is seeking to expose. Just as in the Modern Glossary paper (in which "great," "applied to a Thing, signifies Bigness; when to a Man, often Littleness, or Meanness") he pretends to champion popular "Custom" against the traditional usage of moral and religious writers, so in the first chapter of Jonathan Wild he has his narrator dissociate himself from that "set of simple fellows, called, in derision, sages or philosophers, [who] have endeavoured, as much as possible, to confound the ideas of greatness and goodness; whereas no two things can possibly be more distinct from each other, for greatness consists in bringing all manner of mischief on mankind, and goodness in removing it from them." But the "philosophers," here as elsewhere in Fielding, stand for the "proper and original" meanings of words, and in fact he makes his belief in such a proper and original meaning of "greatness" all but explicit when he goes on, in the Preface to the Miscellanies, to say,

Now as to that greatness which is totally devoid of goodness, it seems to me in nature to resemble the false sublime in poetry; whose bombast is, by the ignorant and ill-judging vulgar, often mistaken for solid wit and eloquence, whilst it is in effect the very reverse. Thus pride, ostentation, insolence, cruelty, and every kind of villainy are often construed into true greatness of mind, in which we always include an idea of goodness. This bombast greatness is the character I intend to expose.

The ironic distinction in Jonathan Wild between "greatness" and "goodness" is not a surrender to the force of verbal corruption but a way of resisting it by revealing how empty a moral term can be when it is
separated from one of its essential ideas. Fielding in effect is trying to salvage such words from the degradation he believed they had suffered at the hands of writers like Courteville, who could write of Sir Robert Walpole (and Fielding is probably right in reading this passage, for all its pretense of generality, as an allusion to the prime minister) that he owed "all his Greatness to his many useful Good Qualities." Far from acquiescing in silence to the political corruption of words, Fielding was responding in the best way he knew how to the need to "make some struggles for our language."

Polite Society

When in the Modern Glossary paper Fielding pays ironic deference to "Custom (the absolute Lord and Master, according to Horace, of all the Modes of Speech)" he is thinking to some extent of popular usage in general, and the verbal corruptions of literature, criticism, and politics are well represented in the Glossary. But the kind of usage he has chiefly in mind, as the introductory essay makes clear, is that of "the polite Part of Mankind." It is interesting, therefore, to find Bernard Mandeville (the proponent of the subversive view that "the first design of Speech was to persuade others either to give Credit to what the speaking Person would have them believe; or else to act or suffer such Things as he would compel them to act or suffer if they were entirely in his Power") paying tribute to the same kind of Custom and in the same kind of terms, though his tone, to be sure, is entirely different. It is "the beau monde," says Mandeville, "who in all Countries, are the undoubted Refiners of Language," not "the Preachers, Playwrights, Ora-
tors, and fine Writers." The latter "make the best of what is ready coin'd to their Hands; but the true and only Mint of Words and Phrases is the Court; and the polite Part of every Nation are in Possession of the Jus & norma loquendi. . . . Orators therefore, Historians, and all wholesale Dealers in Words, are confin'd to those [terms] that have been already well receiv'd," and their language "must first have the Stamp of the Court, and the Approbation of the beau monde, before it can pass for current, [since] whatever is not used among them, or comes abroad without their Sanction, is either vulgar, pedantick, or obso­lete."136

The idea that the class of society which was generally acknowled­ged (however grudgingly sometimes) to be its arbiter of taste exer­cised also a special power over its language was neither new nor surprising. In Remarques sur la Langue Françoise (1647), an early state­ment of the principle of usage (l'usage) as "le Maistre & le Souverain des langues vivantes" which greatly influenced English language theo­rists of the Restoration and eighteenth century, the French philologist Favre de Vaugelas maintained that "l'élite des voix . . . est verita­blement celuy que l'on nomme le Maistre des langues" and made it clear that by "l'élite des voix" he meant the society of the French court.137 The authors of The Art of Speaking, which survives only in the 1708 English edition but was apparently translated from a French treatise of circa 1668, were of the same opinion. "When we advance Custom to the Throne," they wrote, "and make it Sovereign Arbiter of all Lan­guages, we do not intend to put the Scepter into the hands of the Popu­lace. There is a good, and there is a bad Custom. . . . But it is no
hard matter to discern betwixt the . . . depraved Language of the common People, and the noble and refin'd Expressions of the Gentry, whose condition and merits have advanced them above the other." John Hughes, writing in 1698 of the importance to writers of a knowledge of "the Propriety of Words" that "do justly and exactly represent, or signify, the Thoughts which they stand for," recommends "a diligent and careful Perusal of the most Correct Writers" but suggests that for an understanding of "general Acceptation, which is the only Standard of Speech," they would do well also to familiarize themselves "with the Conversation of People of Fashion."

To the English writers of the Restoration, with their conscious emulation of the refinements of French letters and society, the claims of polite society of the *jus et norma loquendi* did not seem either an encroachment on their own domain or a threat to the condition of the tongue. Theirs was, after all, the age of the "mob of gentlemen" who wrote with ease, and never before nor since in the history of English society have the *literati* and the *beau monde* been on such excellent and intimate terms of mutual respect. "Restoration literature," says James Sutherland, "was dominated by the aristocracy, who set the tone and exercised a control over the mode of expression. Restoration prose is, in the main, a slightly formalized variation of the conversation of gentlemen."

So long, then, as the conversation of gentlemen could be relied upon to furnish a worthy standard of speech, the writers had no reason to complain. It was in their interest, in fact, to do what they could to maintain the high standards which the art of conversation had
achieved, and Fielding's *Essay on Conversation*, with its underlying assumption of the social values of polite discourse, belongs to a tradition of Renaissance and seventeenth-century "conversation books" which includes also Swift's *Hints towards an Essay on Conversation* and, on the negative side, his *Polite Conversations*. As one moves from the Restoration into the eighteenth century, however, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that "the negative side" -- the reaction against polite society's abuse of its privileged position as the arbiter of speech -- was beginning to outweigh the positive celebration of the ideal. The curious ambivalence we have noted in Fielding's contribution to this literature of celebration is partly, at least, a matter of the conflict between his loyalty to the traditional ideal of conversation and his conviction that in the practice of his own time this ideal was forgotten or travestied beyond recognition.

What was happening, the critics of the age agreed, was not that polite society had abdicated the rule of speech but that it was ruling badly, irresponsibly. Swift had still confidence enough in polite society to address his *Proposals* for a language academy to "all the learned and polite Persons of the Nation," but the letter to the *Tatler* abounding in slang, abbreviations, and contractions was offered as "an admirable Pattern of the present polite Way of Writing," and his *Polite Conversations* left no doubt as to which class of society he held most directly culpable for these corruptions of the tongue. Addison, in *The Spectator* No. 135, for Aug. 4, 1711, complained that current slovenly habits of conversation "miserably curtailed some of our Words," reducing them to "all but their first Syllables, as in *mob. rep. pos. incog.* and the like;
and as all ridiculous Words make their first Entry into a Language by familiar Phrases, I dare not answer for these that they will not in time be looked upon as a part of our Tongue." The corruptions cited by Swift and Addison, like many of those reported by Fielding, seem trivial until we remind ourselves once again that to the Augustans language was "the great bond which holds society together" and that any usage which obscured the etymological "original" or "agreed" meanings of words was potentially dangerous. "Abbreviations," warned George Harris, "are destructive of Language," and slang words, whether new coinages or existing terms used in capricious new senses, were to be shunned for the same reason. They were, as Dr. Johnson put it, "the spawn of folly or affectation, and ... therefore, no legitimate derivation can be shown" for them.

"O, Dear, London is quite another World," writes the modish Miss Prudentia Flutter to her provincial friend Miss Lucy Rural in one of Fielding's contributions to Sarah Fielding's Familiar Letters (1747). "Was I to mention half our Diversions to you, you would not even know the Names of them. Here are Drums, and Riots, and Hurricanes. I warrant now, I have set you guessing what a Drum is; nay, I'll leave you a thousand years to guess what it is made of. -- To satisfy your Curiosity then, it is made of a great many Rooms, and a great many Tables, and a great many Candles, and a great many People -- 0, 'tis a charming thing: and, as Mamma told Papa, we had better be out of the World, than not have a Drum." "I own, my Dear, I have not much Idea of a Drum," answers Miss Lucy, with an echo of Lockean terminology that gives serious point to her objection, "and you'll pardon me, if I say, you
don't seem to entertain any very perfect Notion of it yourself. . . . I do not find, you can give good . . . Reason for the Name of your Assembly." The same word, as used by the fashionable personages introduced at Lady Bellaston's, gives Fielding pause again in *Tom Jones*, and the irritating necessity, "notwithstanding our present haste" of narration, to stop and define a term which could not bespeak its own meaning either by etymology or traditional usage ("A drum, then, is an assembly of well-dressed persons of both sexes, most of whom play at cards, and the rest do nothing at all") causes him to take comfort at least in the reflection that "our posterity, it is hoped, will not understand [it] in the sense it is here applied." In *The Covent-Garden Journal* No. 17, however, it is the ephemeral nature of such words which is the object of his ridicule as he imagines what a future historian might make of contemporary accounts of mid-eighteenth century society. The imaginary historian discounts entirely a chronicler of the time who "says that Women of the first Quality used to make nightly Riots in their own Houses," and he is sorely puzzled by another's assertion that "The Ladies of St. James's Parish used to treat their Company with Drums; and this was thought one of their most elegant Entertainments; some Copies, I know, read Drams, but the former is the true Reading, nor would the latter much cure the Absurdity."

The satire in these passages, of course, is striking out in more directions than one, but if the modish terms affected by fashionable ladies and gentlemen are a reflection of the triviality of their pursuits, they are also symbolic of polite society's pollution of the language it was traditionally supposed to refine. A "Correspondent" who
signs herself "an old Gentlewoman" writes to The True Patriot No. 12, for Jan. 21, 1746, to ask about "a new Word being introduced, viz. Intonation. ... You that are a learned Man perhaps can tell me what Idea ought to be affixed to that Word. For I cannot find, in any of the several Dictionaries that I have searched, that there is such a Word in any Language; whether it has been lately imported by a fine foreign Fidler, or is an Epithet uttered only to astonish the Hearers, is too important a Point for me to decide. Though when I recollect, Dr. Taylor the Occultist declared, that he always found himself most admired when he was least understood; I am inclined to think this may proceed from the same Motive, for there are Quacks in Politeness as well as all other Sciences."

Another instance of this pollution was the irresponsible use by polite speakers of modifying words as meaningless intensifiers, a use which tended, so Fielding and others feared, to separate these words from their proper ideas and to reduce them to mere rhetorical counters. Fielding's "high life" characters in his plays and his novels, it will be observed, are particularly guilty of this fault, and indeed, according to a modern historian of the language, the polite speakers of the time "were immoderately fond of emphatic adverbs and adjectives, which they used not only with frequency, but in astonishing variety." Citing from eighteenth-century letters such examples as "perfect," "prodigious," vastly," "frightful," "excessively," "literally," "furious," "unique," and "monstrous," he goes on: "This fashion begot a habit of constant emphasis which ... took the form not only of intensive epithets" but also, in its extreme manifestation, "the ne plus ultra style
of description favored by the Countess of Strafford -- 'the finest that ever I see,' 'the coldest winter I ever felt,' . . . 'My lady indeed is the Best woman in the world,' etc."\textsuperscript{147}

Dr. Johnson, speaking in the \textit{Plan of an English Dictionary} of the distinction between the "strict and critical" meanings of words and their "loose and popular" applications, sportively offered the example of "the word perfection, which, though in its philosophical and exact sense it can be of little use among human beings, is often so much degraded from its original signification, that the academicians have inserted in their works, the perfection of a language, and, with a little more licentiousness, might have prevailed on themselves to have added the perfection of a dictionary."\textsuperscript{148} Lord Chesterfield noted that "the adjective vast, and its adverb vastly mean anything and are the fashionable words of the most fashionable people. A fine woman . . . is vastly obliged, or vastly offended, vastly sorry. Large objects are vastly great, small ones vastly little; and I had lately the pleasure to hear a fine woman pronounce, by a happy metonymy, a very small gold snuff box that was produced in company, to be vastly pretty, because it was so vastly little."\textsuperscript{149} George Colman and Bonnell Thornton, in \textit{The Connoisseur} No. 104, for Jan. 22, 1756, observed that "In our ordinary conversation it is notorious, that . . . confusion has arisen from the wrong application or perversion of the original and most natural import of words. Thus, for instance, the . . . tremendous words, damned and hellish, are usurped equally to signify anything superlatively good, as well as bad."\textsuperscript{150}

Fielding, then, may be regarded as reporting accurately the con-
versational habits of his day when he tells us, in the Champion paper on the abuse of words, that "certain Phrases [have] by long Custom arrived at meaning nothing, tho' often used: such as, it is very early, very late; very hot, very cold; a very good, or very bad Play or Opera; the best in the World, the worst in the World." Some of the entries in the Modern Glossary are clearly of the same type. "Fine," for example, is "An adjective of a very peculiar Kind, destroying, or, at least, lessening the Force of the Substantive to which it is joined: as fine Gentlemen, fine Lady, fine House, fine Cloaths, fine Taste; -- in all of which fine is to be understood in a Sense somewhat synonymous with useless"; and "Shocking" is "An Epithet which fine Ladies apply to almost every Thing. It is, indeed, an Interjection (if I may so call it) of Delicacy." Similarly, when Tom Jones's guide on the road to Coventry insists that it is "impossible" he has lost his way, Fielding identifies the word in question as one "which, in common conversation, is often used to signify not only improbable, but often what is really very likely, and sometimes what hath certainly happened; an hyperbolical violence like that which is so frequently offered to the words infinite and eternal, by the former of which it is usual to express a distance of half a yard, and by the latter, a duration of five minutes. And thus it is as usual to assert the impossibility of losing what is already actually lost." But slang and "hyperbolical violence" were not, to Fielding's mind, the worst of high society's degradations of the language. This distinction was reserved for its reduction of polite verbal forms, originally intended to express the subtle interdependencies of rank and station in
a complex society and to convey the respect of one order for the other, into mere empty formulas, or, worse yet, into polite mockeries behind which operated every species of insincerity and hypocrisy. At its best, conversation was an expression both of the social ideal of an integrated society and of the linguistic ideal of the disinterested communication of ideas, a point which Fielding, in the *Essay on Conversation*, typically makes by appealing at once to the etymological "original" meaning of the word "conversation" and to its traditional "agreed" usage: "The primitive and literal sense of this word is, I apprehend, to turn round together; and in its more copious usage we intend by it that reciprocal interchange of ideas by which truth is examined; things are, in a manner, turned round, and sifted, and all our knowledge communicated to each other." This marriage of the social and linguistic ideals entails the use of certain verbal forms -- titles, compliments, and so forth -- which, while not strictly expressive of "ideas" in the "philosophical sense" (i.e., in the Lockean sense of intellectual constructs) are yet not inconsistent with the purpose of speech because they do convey notions of esteem which are themselves "ideas" of a sort and symbols of social truth as necessary and worthy of communication as philosophical concepts. For conversation, considered as a social as well as a verbal art, is founded on "good-breeding," which, in its original sense, means "the art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to the ease and happiness of those with whom you converse."

This, however, as Fielding's divided attitude in the *Essay on Conversation* makes clear, is the ideal only. We have seen how his manner of referring to "those two disgraces of the human species commonly
called a beau and a fine lady" betrays his contempt for the current usage of such verbal forms and how in the Champion essay on the abuse of words he without reservation considers titles like "Captain, Dr., Esquire, Honourable, and Right Honourable" and conventional compliments like "Sir, I am your most obedient, humble Servant" on the same plane with the empty advertising claims of tradesmen ("very cheap, honest price," etc.) -- as instances of words and phrases which "Custom [hath] stripp'd of their Ideas, and in a Manner annihilated." The proliferation of forms for forms' sake was the characteristic vice of a ruling class which had lost sight of the ideal of social responsibility it existed to fulfill. Most members of fashionable society, Fielding observes in Tom Jones, are "so entirely made up of form and affectation, that they have no character at all, at least none which appears," and the same was true of their speech. If there were "Quacks in Politeness as well as all other Sciences" so were there pedants in politeness. This, in fact, was the original gist of the statement Fielding paraphrases in the passage from The True Patriot quoted above. "There are Pedants in Breeding," wrote Steele in The Spectator, "as well as in Learning." Swift, in a treatise On Good Manners and Good Breeding, elaborated on the thought. "Good Manners," he said (using the term in the same sense in which Fielding and Steele use "good breeding"), "is the Art of making those people easy with whom we converse, . . . but as the common forms of good-manners were intended for regulating the conduct of those who have weak understandings; so they have been corrupted by the persons for whose use they were contrived. For these people have fallen into a needless and endless way of multiplying ceremonies. . . .
There is a pedantry in manners, as in all arts and sciences.¹⁵⁸

In its simplest form this "pedantry in manners" was mere social snobbery, and its most conspicuous manifestation was the deference accorded to titles of rank irrespective of the "original" meanings of these titles and of the worthiness of the persons who bore them. Thus in this instance Fielding is not attacking the use of language in high society so much as the corruption of manners which, having infected the titles appropriate to that class, was threatening to perpetuate itself in the language by "transforming" the titles to posterity with their "iniquity annexed." Protesting in An Essay on Nothing that as "It is extremely hard to define nothing in positive terms, I shall therefore do it in negative," Fielding declares that "Nothing then is not something" and offers the example of a man who, "however well he may be bedaubed with lace, or with a title, yet if he have not something in him, we may predicate the same of him as of an empty bladder." If a nobleman claims his dignity is inherent in his title, "might he not be told, that a title originally implied dignity, as it implied the presence of those virtues to which dignity is inseparably annexed; but that no implication will fly in the face of downright positive proof to the contrary."¹⁵⁹ The confrontation of the empty title with the "downright positive proof to the contrary" is one of Fielding's favorite satiric techniques for dealing with the succession of spindly "beaus," ruffian "squires," boorish "gentlemen," slatternly "ladies," un gallant "gallants," irreverent "Reverends," and dishonourable "Right Honourables" who strut endlessly through his works; and if the ignoble "noble lord" in Amelia, despite his central role in the story, is never referred to by any other
name it is because this ironic confrontation is the more effective for
the relentless reiteration of his title, which, without any overt com-
mentary by Fielding, soon tolls with brazen mockery whenever the "noble
lord" is announced. The ironic distance between the original and the
corrupt sense of the word "noble" is measured in Tom Jones when Mrs.
Western, pleading with Sophia to marry the despicable Lord Fellamar, in-
sists that it is not for her own pleasure she asks, but "from nobler mo-
tives. The view of aggrandizing my family, of ennobling yourself, is
what I proceed from." But the true nature of Lord Fellamar's "nobili-
ty" is revealed when Fielding describes Lady Bellaston's idea that he
should take Sophia by force as "a scheme . . . laid between these two
noble persons." 160

The word "gentleman," judging from Fielding's ironic usage, had
become so divorced from its "original idea" of true gentility and from
the concept of the gentleman as a useful member of society that it cur-
cently signified the mere outward show of dress and manners, particularly
when modified by that "peculiar" adjective "fine," which, it will be
remembered, "is to be understood in a Sense somewhat synonymous with
useless." "The character I was ambitious of attaining," says Wilson in
Joseph Andrews, relating the story of his misspent youth, "was that of
a fine gentleman; the first requisites to which, I apprehended were to be
supplied by a tailor, a periwig-maker, and some few more tradesmen, who
deal in furnishing out the human body." 161 But even when it stood alone
the word signified for Fielding, in its corrupt sense, a useless member,
of society like the landlord in Tom Jones, for example, who "had been
bred, as they call it, a gentleman; that is, bred up to do nothing," or
Fitzpatrick in the same novel, who had been a lawyer's clerk in Ireland but, "choosing a genteeler walk in life, came over to England, and set up that business which requires no apprenticeship, namely, that of a gentleman." 162

The debasement of the word "gentleman" into a term which was, like Jonathan Wild's concept of "honor," appropriate to anyone who "is so called" is a constant theme in Fielding (Wild himself, of course, and his henchmen, like Macheath and his gang in The Beggar's Opera, are "gentlemen" to each other and to their toadying chronicler). Joseph Andrews sees no more inappropriateness in his references to "the gentlemen of our cloth" than does that other footman in Tom Jones in his allusion to "the gentlemen in our gallery" at the theatre. 163 The custom which allowed that all soldiers were "gentlemen" invites Fielding's amusement in Joseph Andrews when a pedlar assures Fanny that despite his present humble circumstances, "I was formerly a gentleman; for so all those of my profession are called. In a word, I was a drummer in an Irish regiment of foot." 164 In both cases he is clearly concerned about the debasement of an important word, and the "gentlemen in red coats" whom Tom Jones falls in with illustrate the same point. Their officers, moreover, who might be expected to advance a more legitimate claim to the title, are shown to be ignorant, uncouth, and quarrelsome -- indistinguishable, except for their titles and insignia of rank, from their men. The only other distinguishing feature is the officers' possession of more money. When Jones settles a bitter dispute among the soldiers over the balance of a reckoning presented to them at an inn by offering to pay it himself, "the terms honorable, noble, and worthy gentlemen, resounded
through the room." But even this dubious standard of gentility is not maintained to the satisfaction of all. The soldiers "call themselves gentlemen," the landlady of another inn complains to Jones, and the officers are called "your honor" by the men, but though they thus put on the airs of squires they do not spend nearly as much money as squires do. From "a good squire's family, ... we take forty or fifty shillings of a night," whereas from a company of army officers -- "la! sir, it is nothing." 165

The claim of mere wealth to the titles of gentility is not allowed by Fielding, of course, any more than any of the other spurious claims he deflates, and the landlady who measures a man's quality by the size of the bill she is able to present him is the same who might advertise, as Fielding says, that her inn was one "where gentlemen ... meet with civil treatment for their money." But "of all the Oppressions which the Rich are guilty of," he writes in The Covent-Garden Journal, there seems to be none more impudent and unjust than their Endeavour to rob the Poor of a Title, which is most clearly the Property of the latter. Not content with all the Honourables, Worshipfuls, Reverends, and a thousand other proud Epithets which they exact of the Poor, and for which they give in Return nothing but Dirt, Scrub, Mob, and such like, they have laid violent Hands on a Word, to which they have not the least Pretence or Shadow of any Title. The Word I mean is the Comparative of the Adjective Good, namely BETTER, or as it is usually expressed in the Plural Number, BETTERS. An Appellative which all the Rich usurp to themselves and most shamefully use when they speak of, or to the Poor: For do we not every Day hear such Phrases as these Do not be saucy to your BETTERS. Learn to behave yourself before your BETTERS. Pray know your BETTERS, etc. It is possible that the Rich have been so long in Possession of this, that they now lay a Kind of Prescriptive Claim to the Property; but however that be, I doubt not but to make it appear, that if the Word Better is to be understood as the Comparative of Good, and is meant to convey an Idea of superior Goodness, it is with the highest Impropriety applied to the Rich, in comparison with the Poor." 166
The word in question here, of course, is relevant to other distinctions besides those of wealth. The insistence that the poor or lower classes have a better right to the title of "Betters" than the rich or upper classes is not a serious argument so much as another instance, like that of the soldiers and the officers, of the ironic identification of high life and low life in a society where distinctions were becoming purely external and verbal. But by focusing attention on the proper meaning of the word as a moral term Fielding is pleading (as he goes on to make clear in the rest of the essay) for the restoration of a sense of responsibility in the upper classes and an effort on their part to be the Betters which they were supposed to be by resuming their traditional role of moral and intellectual leadership. "My be-betters are wo-worse than me," sobs Mrs. Tow-wouse's maid in *Joseph Andrews* with considerable justice, and her sister in *Tom Jones* who is caught in flagrante with the Merry Andrew from the troupe of players defends herself against her mistress' insults on the grounds that she was imitating "the fine lady in the puppet show... . . . If I am a w[hor]e . . . my betters are so as well as I." ^168^ 

"Fine lady," of course, as the preceding quotation suggests and as we have already seen in *An Essay on Conversation*, was itself a corrupt term for Fielding. "The Word Lady," concludes his imaginary future historian in *The Covent-Garden Journal*, "did not then, as it doth now, signify a Woman of great Rank and Distinction, but was applied promiscuously to the whole Female Sex." ^169^ Cross has pointed out how Fielding sharpened the irony of *Joseph Andrews* in the second edition by having the social climbing Pamela refer to herself as Mr. Booby's "lady" rather
than, as in the first edition, his "wife." When Mrs. Matthews' lawyer, in *Amelia*, visiting her in prison, wonders if it is prudent to discuss her affairs at table in the presence of the other prisoners, one of them protests that "I hope we are all persons of honor at this table" and a female prisoner assures him, "D_n my eyes! . . . I can answer for myself and the other ladies; . . . I scorn to rap [inform] against any lady." The irony here does not consist alone in the usurpation of the title by a woman of manifestly low birth and rude manners, for if she who presumes to speak for the "ladies" of the prison is a corrupter of the word so is the well-born Mrs. Matthews, who has forfeited her right to the title by her immoral conduct. Similarly, both Lady Booby in *Joseph Andrews* and Lady Bellaston in *Tom Jones*, not to mention the long list of intriguing "ladies" in the plays, are constantly being shown as unworthy of the "My Lady's" and "Your Ladyship's" which rain about them whenever they appear, and Lady Booty is at one point confronted with the corruption of her title in a manner which is all but direct. "Nothing can be more unworthy in a young man than to betray any intimacies with the ladies," she tells Joseph suggestively in the privacy of her boudoir, but he immediately takes up the word and casts it (unintentionally) in an ironic light: "Ladies! Madam. . . . I am sure I never had the impudence to think of any that deserve that name." The insistence that a lady or a gentleman must "deserve that name" on grounds more socially relevant than those of dress, wealth, or even gentle birth is a central theme of both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The heroes have to earn their own way, so to speak, to the title of a
gentleman, and the enterprise in both cases involves the exposure of the various species of false gentility which have usurped the title and corrupted it. The denouements of the two novels, it is true, discover that the title belongs to the heroes also by right of birth, and in the final analysis gentle birth would seem to be affirmed as indispensable. But it is symbolically important that the discovery takes place only after the heroes have demonstrated that they deserve the title on other grounds as well. Gentle birth may be a necessary qualification for the true gentleman, but it is not the only essential and alone it is nothing. True gentility is shown to consist not in the external trappings of social station but in inner qualities of mind and spirit and in a generous willingness to translate these qualities into active principles of behavior.

Sometimes, however, it was satirically effective to challenge the claims of birth more directly, or even, by implication, to reject them altogether, the better to stress the other and more important qualities of gentility. For this purpose the word "gentlewoman" (which we have already seen Fielding use, in the Essay on Conversation, as a synonym for "fine lady" in its original, uncorrupt sense) was well suited because, less common than "gentleman," its etymological "original ideas" were still fresh and available. In the dialogue between a philosopher and a young lady which appears in The Covent-Garden Journal No. 30, the latter asserts that a certain Miss Bird is no "gentlewoman" and, when the philosopher asks why not, begins to speak of Miss Bird's father. "Her father! Miss!" interrupts the philosopher. "Why we are talking of the young Lady, who appears to be genteel in her Person, and gentle in
her Manners: That she is a Woman, at present, we will take for granted. Now, Miss, according to my Notion of Things, if her Person and Manners are as I have described, I think Miss Bird may be a Gentlewoman." "Lord! Sir," the young lady replies, "you talk . . . to me in a quite new Language." 173

In fact, of course, it is not the philosopher who is speaking a "quite new Language" (he, like the moral and religious writers in the Modern Glossary paper and like the "set of simple fellows called . . . philosophers in Jonathan Wild, represents the traditional values of words) but the young lady and the "polite Part of Mankind." For the language they speak is one which uses words not as the signs of ideas but as pure forms and ceremonies. The perversions of language involved in the empty rituals of gallantry (itself a corrupt word), 174 coquetry, courtship, and marriage afford particularly fertile ground for Fielding's satire. "Vows in love," says Mrs. Plotwell in The Wedding-Day (1743), "have just the same meaning as compliments in conversation; and it is as ridiculous to believe the man who swears eternal constancy, as to believe him who assures you, he is your most obedient, humble servant." 175 A report in The Champion No. 114, for Aug. 5, 1740, by Mr. Job Vinegar, the Gulliver-like traveler of the Vinegar family, is more telling yet. Commenting on the mating customs among the "Ptetgshiumgski," he describes how "The Lover (as they call him)," having entered "into what they call a Treaty" with the parents of the bride in which each party must satisfy the other that he is a true devotee of the god "Mney," calls upon the young lady of his choice and how the pair engage in a ceremony which seems to bear no relation to the "religious" purpose of
the marriage at all. He: "Madam, your Father hath thought me worthy of
the great Honour of being your Husband." She: "Sir, Marriage is a Thing
I have not yet thought of." But the problems of translation into Eng­
lish soon become too difficult for Mr. Vinegar, and he has to resort to
reproducing the rest of the conversation "in the Original, as the
Strains of Compliment are beyond the Power of our Language to reach."
The result is perhaps Fielding's most devastating account of the fate
of words separated from their "original ideas" and reduced to the natu­
rnal condition of mere sound. The suitor, reports Mr. Vinegar, says,

O Mad Dam.
Tu Had Dam.
Tol Lol Dol.
My Gol Mol.
Hoc Poc Us.
All Joc Us.
No Hob Nul.
My All Gal.
Fal Lal Dal.

And the lady replies,

Skur Hush Mush.
Rub Up Blush.

Nor does the ritualistic verbalism of the Pteghsiumgski end with
marriage. "After the sacrifices to Mney are over," Mr. Vinegar goes on,
it would appear that "the wives became in common [and] the least Appear­
ance of Fondness between married People . . . is infamous; on which ac­
count they are always uneasy unless they have an Opportunity of shewing
the Company the Contempt or Hatred they entertain for each other: They
use two Words on this Occasion, which give a most odious Idea to the
Hearer: These Words are My Dear; the horrible Meaning of which it is not
possible to convey to an English Reader." Mr. Vinegar's conclusion that
"My Dear" is a term of opprobrium is a natural consequence of its use in polite circles as a mere form. So corrupt has such usage become that the phrase has not only lost its original ideas of endearment but has been infected with the contempt and hatred it is so often called upon to conceal. Jonathan Wild and Laetitia, whose marriage quickly degenerates into an alliance of mutual contempt, are careful to preserve such outward expressions of devotion, as are those mismatched hypocrites in *Amelia*, Col. and Mrs. James. 176

The insincerity of polite forms of speech and its effect on language as the medium of truth is a subject Fielding returns to again and again, "Your Actions are as much disguised by your Words, as your Skin by Paint," one "fine lady" tells another in *The Temple Beau*, "the virtue in your mouth, no more proceeds from the purity of your heart, than the colour in your cheeks does, from the purity of your blood." 177 In *The Universal Gallant* Mondish persuades his ex-mistress Lady Raffler to be sincere with him so that he may help her in her current intrigue, but she finds it a more difficult matter than she had expected: "Then to deal sincerely with you -- Lud, it is a terribly hard thing to do." "Ay, come struggle a little," urges Mondish, "a woman must undergo some trouble to be delivered of truth." 178 Nor is Lady Raffler's "trouble" entirely that of a woman who has lost the habit of plain speaking. She is also discovering that for one whose language is confined to the vocabulary of polite discourse, "sincerity has no longer distinct terms in which to express her own truths." To the extent that polite society truly enjoyed the *jus et norma loquendi* her plight was one which was shared by the whole age. "What the world generally calls politeness,"
concludes Mrs. Bennet in *Amelia*, "I term insincerity," and indeed the word "polite" is one of the few which, in the generally unironic narration of *Amelia*, Fielding continues to treat as a debased word, particularly in connection with Col. and Mrs. James. The sordid episode in which Mrs. James agrees to help her husband seduce Amelia is described by Fielding as "a very polite scene"; that in which he reveals that Mrs. James has the same kind of designs on Booth is introduced as "polite history"; and the final chapter informs us that "Colonel James and his lady, after living in a polite manner for many years together, at last agreed to live in as polite a manner asunder."  

The measure of polite society's fall from the ideal of conversation founded on true good breeding is the fact that in popular usage the word "good breeding" is itself, as Fielding remarks in the Essay on Conversation, "so horribly and barbarously corrupted, that it contains scarce a single ingredient of what it seems originally to have been designed to express," being now "confined to externals." The "new language" of politeness founded on this corrupt base not only drained polite words and forms of their original ideas but also perverted them to mean and selfish ends, pressing them into the contaminating service of cynicism and deceit. "Good Breeding," declared Mandeville, whose force as a moralist rests on his ability to state matter of factly those propositions which seemed to his contemporaries occasions for the most savage satire -- "Good Breeding is a Fashionable Habit acquir'd by Precept and Example, of flattering the Pride and Selfishness of others, and concealing our own with Judgment and Dexterity." Fielding, who defined the word operatively in his ironic usage, worked on a similar but
simpler equation: "good breeding," in its corrupt sense, meant simply "lying." A woman's looking glass, rhapsodizes Helena in Love in Several Masques (1728), "is so well-bred a thing, that it tells every woman she is a beauty. O! it is the greatest flatterer in the world to our faces, but the reverse in one thing; for it never disparages us behind our backs." The Orator's Song in The Author's Farce gives us "the well-bred courtier telling lies"; and Fielding's first caricature of the aristocratic abuser of language, Lord Formal of Love in Several Masques, defends his cynical flattery, his false gallantry, and his hypocritical use of expressions like "Sir, your most obedient and obsequious humble servant" by appealing to "the principles of good-breeding." The Champion No. 120, for Aug. 19, 1740, makes the equation explicit. In a paper on "the Genius and Temper of the Pteghsiumgski," Mr. Job Vinegar describes "a Custom which prevails almost universally" among the people of this distant but all too recognizable nation "call'd GD BRDNG, a Phrase not to be translated into English by any other (how coarse soever it may seem) than LYING."

But this is not, Mr. Vinegar assures us, to be confused with hypocrisy. "For no one is at all deceived by any of these FRMS (in English Farces), nay the persons themselves rarely intend to impose upon you: For the most known Pickpockets publicly cant of their Honesty, . . . and the Women boast of their Virtue before the Faces of the Adulterers, who had, perhaps a few Hours before, enjoyed them: A Man tells you he hath not a Shilling, with 100 s. in his Pocket; a Tradesman swears he loses by selling at such a Price; a Courtier, that he will give you his Interest, a Lover, that he will be constant; a Friend that he will serve
you; all these are look'd upon as GD BRDNG, and no one is deceiv'd."

But if no one is deceived by the canting forms of polite speech it is not, as Mr. Vinegar generously supposes, because there is no intent to deceive but rather because the intent to deceive is so general and so deeply ingrained that it continues to be practiced even when it has no chance of success. The reader may wonder, says the narrator of Jonathan Wild, that two scoundrels so well known to each other as Wild and Count La Ruse "should have the words honesty, honor, and friendship as often in their mouths as any other man, . . . but those who have lived long in cities, courts, jails, or such places, will perhaps be able to solve the seeming absurdity."

The solution, of course, is that to a society which values nominal virtues more highly than real ones, the true meanings of the words in question no longer matter. "Honor," as Jonathan Wild recognizes, is a useful word, a word to be valued for its own sake, and the pickpocket protesting his "honesty" and the adulteress boasting of her "virtue" are working on the same assumption. For cynicism and hypocrisy, as Fielding knows, have their own code of values, and cardinal among these is reputation. "By Honour," said Mandeville, "in its proper and genuine Signification, we mean nothing else but the good Opinion of others, which is counted the more or less Substantial the more or less Noise or Bustle there is made about the demonstration of it." It is precisely this cynical, reductionist sense of the word which Fielding is satirizing when he treats "honour" as synonym for "dueling" or when he exposes its hollowness in the oaths and exclamations by which it was so thoughtlessly invoked. The importance of this word in the ironic vocabu-
lary of Tom Jones will be considered in a later chapter, but other instances of Fielding's concern for its debasement in "polite" speech are not far to seek. Lord Richly in The Modern Husband (whose mistress, Mrs. Modern, was sold to him by her husband) advises Mr. Modern to beware the attentions to his wife of another rake, "as you love your honour," and the brothel scene of Miss Lucy in Town (1742) subjects the word to an even grimmer ironic exposure. When the old bawd Mrs. Midnight demands cash before she will show her newest "virgin" to the lecherous Lord Bawble, he begins, "If I like her -- upon my honour . . .," but she interrupts: "I have too much value for your Lordship's honour, to have it left in pawn. Besides, I have more right honourable honour in my hands unredeemed already, than I know what to do with. However, I think you may depend on my honour; deposite a cool hundred, and you shall see her; and then take either the lady or the money." Here we see the process of corruption in operation, from the casual oath, already sworn in a dishonorable context and probably a lie to boot, to Mrs. Midnight's final cold-blooded perversion of the word in "you may depend on my honour."

But if it is names, as Locke insisted, "that preserve essences and give them their lasting duration," then the real danger of such abuse of words is that the essences themselves will be lost to view, and when the names in question are moral terms the implications are grave indeed. "Surely it is hardly possible," declared Robert South, "for men to be virtuous or honest, while vices are called and pointed out to them as virtues, and they all the while suppose the nature of things to be truly and faithfully signified by their names, and therefore believe as they
Polite Society had no monopoly on the misapplication of moral words, but where politeness was insincerity and good breeding was lying, euphemism was the normal mode of speech, and euphemism is the very art of calling evil things good or, to recall Pope's phrase once again, of "converting vices into their bordering virtues." "I know not anything more pernicious to good Manners," wrote Steele, "then the giving of fair Names to foul Actions; for this confounds Vice and Virtue, and takes off the natural Horrour we have to Evil." Fielding expresses surprise in Amelia that the capacity in which Capt. Trent and his wife are useful to the noble lord (i.e., procuring) "hath not as yet, ... acquired any polite name," but in The Modern Husband, the play in which he anticipates the more sordid plot elements of the later novel, he shows that the word "virtue" itself, considered as a mere synonym for reputation, could be debased into little better than a euphemism for vice. Mr. Modern urges his wife, now that Lord Richly is tiring of her, to let him sue the nobleman so as to wring still more money out of him, but she refuses on the grounds that this would compromise her "virtue." "Very strange," says Modern, "that a woman who made so little scruple of sacrificing the substance of her virtue, should make so much of parting with the shadow of it." "'Tis the shadow only that is valuable," answers she. "Reputation is the soul of virtue." "To me," concludes her husband, "virtue has appeared nothing more than a sound, and reputation its echo." But the way in which such cynical usage cheapened the word itself, rendering it suspect on all occasions, is suggested later in the play when Lord Richly describes to Mrs. Modern his plan for striking a similar bargain of prostitution with
Bellamant and his wife. "She has the reputation of the strictest virtue of any woman in town," protests Mrs. Modern. "Virtue! ha, ha, ha!"

laughs Lord Richly contemptuously, "so have you, and so have several of my acquaintances; there are as few women who have not the reputation of virtue as that have the thing itself." Similarly in Love in Several Masques, when Vermilia tells Malvil that she is "rigidly virtuous and severely modest," he scoffs, "A blank verse, faith, and may make a figure in a fustian tragedy. Four fine sounding words, and mean just nothing at all."

The final degradation of the word, into a virtual synonym for its opposites, is but a single step of the ironic imagination. Thus Tawdry, in Miss Lucy in Town, complains that "virtuous women . . . come so cheap, that no man will go to the price of a lady of the town," and thus the Argument to Tumble-Down Dick relates how Phaeton seeks "some indubitable mark, that should convince the world that his mother was a virtuous woman, and Whore to Phoebus." The speakers in these cases are not themselves representatives of the "polite Part of Mankind" but the final point of the irony, interpreted in the context of Fielding's lifetime struggle against polite society's abuse of the jus et norma loquendi, is that they are willy-nilly making "the best of what is ready coin'd to their Hands," and that the words they use "have the Stamp . . . and Approbation of the beau monde." However much Shamela may misspell or mispronounce the words she imitates from her "betters," she has no doubt that she has mastered their precise meanings. "I thought once of making a little Fortune by my Person," she confides to her mother. "I now in-
The Professions

Among the spirits recently "imported for the Goddess of Nonsense" in the underworld scene of The Author's Farce are not only the group of authors just "arriv'd from England" (Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical Comic, Mrs. Novell, and the others), a delegation of politicians ("Seven ordinary Courtiers"), and some representatives of the polite part of mankind ("Five People of great Quality"), but also, and in the greatest abundance of all, an assortment of professional men: "Nineteen Attorneys -- Eleven Counsellors -- Twenty six Justices of the Peace; and one hundred Presbyterian Parsons." No member of the medical profession appears on the list, but this, we may be sure, was merely an oversight. For "the trudging Quack in scarlet Cloak" takes his place along with all the other corrupters of the language in the Orator's Song later in the play, and in the allegorical "Life and Death of Common Sense" sequence of Pasquin Physick joins forces with Law and with Firebrand the Priest to lead the rebellion against Queen Common Sense.

Devotion to Nonsense and enmity to Common Sense may take other forms, of course, than the linguistic, and Fielding's attacks on the professions, like his attacks on hack writers, politicians, and polite society, were not confined to their abuse of words. Nor was his exposure of this abuse an end in itself. His ridicule of medical and legal jargon, of ranting sermon oratory, and of the other verbal sins he associates with the professions is nearly always relevant to larger social and ethical evils. The doctor's unintelligible terminology is
shown to be a mask for ignorance, the lawyer's impassioned plea for justice is revealed as a front for cynicism, and the preacher's unctuous exhortations to piety are exposed as a screen for hypocrisy. But the very fact that language could be twisted to such purposes, that the words of truth could be made to do the bidding of ignorance, cynicism, and hypocrisy, was reason for concern about the extent to which these practices were undermining the efficacy of language as a trustworthy medium of communication.

Fielding did not, however, condemn the professions per se. Colley Cibber's charge that his satiric method was "to knock all Distinctions of Mankind on the Head" and that "Religion, Laws, Government, Priests, Judges, and Ministers, were all lay'd flat, at the Feet of this Herculan Satirist" is no more true of his ridicule of professional men than it is of his attacks on other elements of society. Fielding was always the most responsible of satirists, and when he turned his fire against the pedantic doctors, dishonest lawyers, and canting clergymen who crowd his plays and novels it was with quite as clear a conception of and respect for the ideal standards of these professions as his attacks on Grub Street scribblers, ruthless politicians, and effete politeness presuppose of the true Republic of Letters, of "real Greatness," and of "true good-breeding." In The Coffee-House Politician corrupt magistrates are satirized in the person of Justice Squeezum, but Justice Worthy appears in the same play as the representative of the honest ideal of his profession, and the "trading justice" Mr. Thrasher in Amelia is introduced by some "Observations on the Excellency of the English Constitution" which make it clear that he is to be taken as a
disgraceful aberration and not as typical example of the justice of the peace. 197 The Mock Doctor (1732), Fielding's adaptation of Molière's farce about quacks, Le Medecin malgré Lui, is ironically dedicated to Dr. John Misaubin, but this notorious London charlatan is carefully distinguished from "the Brethren of your Faculty" who have denounced him "as an illiterate Empirick." Parson Adams and Dr. Harrison are outnumbered by the many bad clergymen portrayed in Joseph Andrews and Amelia and in Fielding's other works, but it is they rather than the likes of Parsons Barnabas and Trulliber who represent the profession of divinity as defined and defended by Fielding in his "Apology for the Clergy" papers in The Champion of March 29, April 5, 12, and 19, 1740. "There is no practice more unfair," he writes in The True Patriot No. 14, for Jan. 28, 1746,

than to ascribe the Faults of particular Members of a Profession to the Profession itself, and thence to derive Ridicule and Contempt on the whole. Physicians and Lawyers have very sorely experienced this Temper in Mankind; nay the Clergy themselves have felt its Bitterness, to the no small Advancement of Irreligion and Immorality, by lessening that Awe and Respect which we ought to bear towards a Body of Men, who are particularly appointed to instruct us in the Ways of true Piety and Virtue, and who generally deserve the utmost Regard from us. The Method in which these Slanderers have proceeded is artful enough. They at first instituted a Cant Word, by which they pretended to denote Insufficiency and Demerit in the several Professions; and having at length sufficiently affixed those bad Ideas to the Words, they applied them indiscriminately to the Professions themselves: And thus Quack, Pettyfogger and Parson, have at length come to represent the serious characters of a Physician, Lawyer, and Minister of the Gospel.

Yet for the very reason that he held the professions in such high regard, Fielding was acutely conscious of the extent to which they had become infiltrated in his time by the Quacks, Pettyfoggers, and Parsons who thereby threatened to corrupt and discredit them. Just as with the
influx of hack writers all authors were being indiscriminately classified as "scribblers" until finally "author" and "scribbler" were looked upon as synonymous terms, so "doctor" was coming to be considered equivalent to "quack," "lawyer" to "pettyfogger," and "Minister of the Gospel" to "parson," and the ultimate blame lay not with the public which failed to preserve the distinctions originally inherent in these words but with the usurpers to the titles of doctor, lawyer, and minister of the Gospel who have confused their meanings by assuming them. "Names neither do nor can alter things," wrote Robert South, "but ill things will in the issue certainly foul and disgrace the best names."¹⁹⁸ We have already seen that Fielding includes "Dr." along with other titles "at first used to distinguish particular Degrees of Men, but [now] stript of all Ideas whatever," and in the same Champion essay he concludes his examination of the linguistic abuses of physicians with the observation that "Physician itself is a Word of very little, if any Signification."¹⁹⁹

The result of this penetration and growing domination of the professions by individual practitioners unworthy of their titles was to pervert physic, law, and divinity from their true purpose as public guardians of "our Property and our Wealth, both spiritual and temporal,"²⁰⁰ and debase them into agencies of self-interest and personal gain. According to Queen Common Sense in Pasquin,

Religion, law, and physic, were designed
By Heaven the greatest blessings on mankind;
But priests, and lawyers, and physicians made
These general goods to each a private trade;
With each they rob, with each they fill their purses,
And turn our benefits into our curses.²⁰¹

As "general goods," the three learned professions represented, in the
form of practical application in society, the three principal branches of human knowledge -- the physical, the ethical, and the spiritual. Thus one consequence of their degeneration into "private Trades" was the specialization of general truth. For since their practitioners were interested, like hack writers, only in "immediate Effect" they concerned themselves less and less with the universal principles from which their arts derived. The knowledge which the professions were supposed to represent was becoming departmentalized and fragmented. "Doctors" of medicine, far from being the "learned men" which their titles proclaimed them to be, no longer felt it necessary to master natural philosophy and contented themselves instead with being mere technicians or, to use the eighteenth-century term, "mechanicals." Lawyers were not masters of jurisprudence but only of Giles Jacobs' New Law Dictionary (1729), which Fielding scornfully refers to in The Champion for Dec. 25, 1739, as "a modern shortcut to legal expertness." Ministers of the Gospel, corrupted by what Adams in a dispute with Parson Barnabas calls "the detestable doctrine of faith against good works" and with just enough knowledge, as he tells Parson Trulliber, "for your justification," were students not of the Word of God but only of the outward forms and ceremonies of religion.

In fact, just as polite society, having lost sight of the principle of true good breeding, was overcome by an excessive zeal for pure forms, so the professions, cut off from the sources of general knowledge and withdrawn into themselves, were becoming more and more preoccupied with their own specialized forms and techniques, multiplying them for their own sakes. "Most Professions lose their Merit," Fielding wrote in The
Champion for March 15, 1739-40, in a paper on the modern "talent" of overdoing or excess, "and become useless or hurtful to Mankind by this Talent in their Professors." They "have been adulterated with so many needless and impertinent Ceremonies, that they have been too often drawn into Doubt and Obscurity." The test of truth to the eighteenth-century rationalistic mind was universality, and in practical terms this meant the consensus gentium. But the professions, jealous of their special provinces of knowledge, seemed bent on carving truth up into isolated compartments to which the generality of mankind were denied access and in which universal opinion was declared incompetent. Observing in The Champion for Feb. 14, 1739-40, that "the learned Mr. Bailey," in his dictionary, defines the word "Mystery" as "a Thing concealed, a Secret not easy to be apprehended," Fielding remarks how appropriate it is that "the several Professions . . . have laid hold on this Word to signify those Arcana, . . . which are reserved only for the Adepts in them; thus Divinity, Law, and Physic, contain Mysteries which are understood by Divines, Lawyers, and Physicians, though they have no Manner of Idea to any who have not been initiated into them; on which account it may not be improper to observe, that the Greek Word for initiating is immediately derived from that which signifies Mystery in that Language."

The most conspicuous and perhaps the most dangerous form which this cultivation of obscurity and mystery assumed was the development by each of the professions of a language peculiar to itself. For if language is "the great bond which holds society together" and if its usefulness depends on the preservation of "agreed" meanings for words, then any usage which tends to treat words as private symbols is a threat to both lan-
guage and society. "Varieties of Phrases in Language may seem to contribute to the elegance and ornament of Speech," wrote Bishop Wilkins in 1668 in the Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language, "yet, like other affected ornaments, they prejudice the native simplicity of it, and contribute to the disguising of it with false appearances. Besides that, like other things of fashion, they are very changeable, every generation producing new ones; witness the present Age, especially the late times, wherein this grand imposture of Phrases hath almost eaten out solid Knowledge in all professions; such men generally being of most esteem who are skilled in these Canting forms of speech, though in nothing else."²⁰³ The doctor Fielding refers to in The True Patriot No. 12, for Jan. 12, 1746, who "declared that he always found himself most admired when he was least understood" is only one among many professional men in Fielding's writings, from the Physicians' Scenes of the original Tom Thumb to the final book of Amelia, who are shown to have substituted jargon and a "grand imposture of Phrases" for "solid Knowledge."

In large measure, of course, his burlesque of professional jargon is merely a conventional comic device which can be traced back at least as far as the Italian commedia dell'arte, and Fielding's versions owe as much, probably, to the literary tradition represented by Ben Jonson, Molieré, and Samuel Garth (to name no others) as to his own independent concern for the language of his time. But the comic tradition was paralleled by a serious criticism, which also came in with the Renaissance and which Dr. Johnson was still pronouncing in 1755, of the admission into language of "terms of art." Samuel Butler, noting that "this Cant-
ing runs through all Professions," defended his own satiric parodies of the special vocabularies of trades and professions by explaining that "The Terms of all Arts are generally Nonsense that signify nothing, or very improperly what they are Meant to do, and are more Difficult to be learn'd than the things they are designed to teach."204

Thus when Dr. Gregory, in The Mock Doctor, diagnoses a case of dumbness in a barbarous pseudo-Latin intermixed with phrases of French and, when pressed to speak more clearly, declares it is caused "by the acrimony of the humours engendered in the concavity of the diaphragm,"205 it is not likely that Fielding sees the matter entirely as a joke or that he has forgotten Locke's warning against the "affected obscurity" and "learned gibberish" which "perplex and confound the signification of words, and thereby render language less useful than the real defects of it had made it."206

The three professions would seem to differ somewhat, however, as Fielding represents them, in the purposes to which they apply their learned gibberish. For doctors, technical terminology becomes a way of dressing out ignorance in the language of pseudo-learning and thereby of avoiding specific diagnoses or prognoses which might later be called to account. The surgeon who attends Joseph Andrews discourses "in this learned manner" when Adams asks him his opinion of the case: "The confusion on his head has perforated the internal membrane of the occiput, and delvedicated that radical small minute invisible nerve which coheres to the pericranium; and this was attended with a fever at first symptomatic, then pneumatic; and he is at length grown delirious, or delirious, as the vulgar express it"; whereas actually, as Adams learns in
the next chapter, Joseph is suffering from nothing more than a bruised
pate and the effects of "not having eaten one morsel for above twenty-
four hours."207 Similarly in Tom Jones the surgeon called to treat Jones
after his fight with Ensign Northerton is questioned by the lieutenant:

"I hope, sir," said the lieutenant, "the skull is not frac-
tured." "Hum," cries the surgeon, "fractures are not always
the most dangerous symptoms. Contusions and lacerations are
often attended with worse phaenomena. . . ." "I hope," says
the lieutenant, "there are no such symptoms here." "Symp-
toms," answered the surgeon, "are not always regular nor
constant. . . . I was once, I remember, called to a patient
who had received a violent contusion in his tibia, by which
the exterior cutis was lacerated, so that there was a pro-
fuse sanguinary discharge; and the interior membranes were
so divellicated, that the os or bone very plainly appeared
through the aperture of the vulnus or wound. Some febrile
symptoms intervening at the same time (for the pulse was ex-
uberant and indicated much phlebotomy), I apprehended an im-
mediate mortification. . . . -- But perhaps I do not make
myself perfectly well understood?" "No, really," answered
the lieutenant, "I cannot say I understand a syllable."208

And Dr. Harrison in Amelia fares no better when he asks the surgeon who
is summoned to examine the wounded Robinson whether the patient is in
any immediate danger of death. "'I do not know,' answered the surgeon,
'what you call immediate. He may live several days -- nay, he may re-
cover. It is impossible to give any certain opinion in these cases.'

He then launched forth into a set of terms which the doctor [i.e.,
Harrison], with all his scholarship, could not understand. To say the
truth, many of them were not to be found in any dictionary or lexicon."

From which Dr. Harrison concludes "that the surgeon was a very ignorant,
conceited fellow, and knew nothing of his profession."209

Ignorance is often a salient characteristic of Fielding's lawyers
and magistrates too, and to a certain extent their addiction to legal
jargon is seen as a mere affectation, like medical jargon, of a learn-
ing which they do not in fact possess. The worst excesses of legal jargon, the barbarous admixture of law-Latin and law-French parodied by Fielding in The Champion for Nov. 27, 1739, were corrected by a statute of 1733 which required the use of English in all legal documents. In "The Life and Death of Common Sense," Law complains to Physick,

Thou know' st, my Lord of Physic, I had long,
Been privileged by custom immemorial,
In tongues unknown, or rather none at all,
My edicts to deliver through the land;
When this proud queen, this Common-sense, abridged
My power, and made me understood by all.

But the triumph of Common Sense, as her subsequent death as a result of the plot led by Law, Physic, and the Priest indicates, is short lived, and Fielding's lawyers throughout his works testify that the abolition of law-Latin and law-French did not in any way hamper their cultivation of law-English. Far from being "understood by all," they are fully as fluent as his physicians in the language of obfuscation.

But they use it less as a cover for ignorance than as a means of circumventing justice. The lawyer denounced by the "Correspondent" to The Champion of Feb. 12, 1739-40, a steward for a nobleman's estate, robs his employer and bullies his tenants by dazzling them with legal jargon; and Lawyer Scout in Joseph Andrews assures Lady Booty (who is seeking a ruling against Joseph's right to publish the banns of his marriage to Fanny on the grounds that he is not a legal resident of the parish) that neither he nor any other lawyer could alter the law, which is in Joseph's favor, but that it "was in the power of a lawyer . . . to prevent the law's taking effect; and that he himself could do for her ladyship as well as any other." Joseph's case, he explains, rests
on the claim that a year's service in the parish entitled a man to settle there, but "there is a material difference between being settled in law and settled in fact; and as I affirmed generally he was settled, and law is preferable to fact, my settlement must be understood in law and not in fact. And suppose, madam, we admit he was settled in law, what use will they make of it? how doth it relate to fact? He is not settled in fact; and if he be not settled in fact, he is not an inhabitant; and if he is not an inhabitant, he is not of this parish; and then undoubtedly he ought not to be published here."\textsuperscript{212}

Even when the lawyer has no particular motive for impeding justice, his legal jargon clouds the issue, as when in \textit{Tom Jones} Squire Western asks a lawyer's opinion about the right or wrong, in a legal sense, of Blifil's spiteful act of freeing Sophia's pet bird: "If the case be put of a partridge, there can be no doubt but an action would lie; for though this be \textit{ferae naturae}, yet being reclaimed, property vests: but being the case of a singing bird, though reclaimed, as it is a thing of base nature, it must be considered as \textit{nullius in bonis}. In this case, therefore, I conceive the plaintiff must be nonsuited; and I should disadvise the bringing any such action." "Well," says Squire Western, "if it be \textit{nullus bonus}, let us drink about, and talk a little of the state of the nation, or some such discourse that we all understand, for I am sure I don't understand a word of this. It may be learning and sense for aught I know: but you shall never persuade me into it."\textsuperscript{213}

And on a more serious level, when Dr. Harrison in \textit{Amelia}, seeking the title deeds which will prove Amelia's rightful inheritance, applies to a justice of the peace for a warrant to search the house of the wicked
Lawyer Murphy, the magistrate loses sight of justice in his concern for subtleties of terminology: "He said title-deeds savored of the Reality, and it was not felony to steal them. If, indeed, they were taken away in a box, then it would be felony to steal the box." "Savor of the Reality! Savor of the fartalty," explodes Dr. Harrison. "I never heard such incomprehensible nonsense. This is impudent, as well as childish, trifling with the lives and properties of men."214

Verbal quibbling is the inevitable consequence of the substitution of jargon for solid knowledge, and if Fielding complained of the folly of this activity in literary criticism and of the threat it represented to the language, he was even more sensitive to the dangers of word-splitting at the expense of the "lives and properties of men." And sometimes, he knew, it was even their souls which were at stake.

"Learned gibberish," according to Locke, was originally introduced by the scholastic philosophers, but the mischief has not "stopped in logical niceties, or curious empty speculations; it hath invaded the great concerns of human life and society; obscured and perplexed the material truths of law, and divinity, brought confusion, disorder, and uncertainty into the affairs of mankind; and if not destroyed, yet in a great measure rendered useless, these two rules, religion and justice. . . . What has been the effect of those multiplied curious distinctions and acute niceties, but obscurity and uncertainty, leaving the words more unintelligible, and the reader more at a loss?"215

What Locke particularly had in mind were the "comments and disputes upon the laws of God and man," and though Fielding's bad clergymen are guilty of other sins besides those of subtilizing on the Word
of God, it is significant that he always manages to indicate, if only by their names, that they are adepts in this verbal art. Thus we have in The Author's Farce Parson Murder-text, in The Welsh Opera Parson Puzzle-text, and in Shamela Parson Tickletext. Dr. John Eachard, it will be remembered, in The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy (1670), had argued that the false wit and rhetoric which dominated pulpit oratory were among the main reasons for the contempt of the clergy on the part of the general populace: "For when the Gallants of the World do observe, how the Ministers themselves do jingle, quibble, and play the fool with their Texts, no wonder they, who are so inclined to Atheism, do not only deride and despise the Priests, but droll upon the Bible."216

How such quibbling can make nonsense of Scripture and confuse the signification of words is suggested in Amelia by the dispute between Dr. Harrison and a pedantic young clergyman over the meaning of the verse from St. Matthew, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." The interpretation championed by the young clergyman is "that love is not here to be taken in the strict sense, so as to signify the complacency of the heart; you may hate your enemies as God's enemies, and seek due revenge of them for his honor; and, for your own sakes too, you may seek moderate satisfaction of them; but then you are to love them with a love consistent with these things." "That is to say, in plainer words," adds Dr. Harrison sarcastically, "you are to love them and hate them, and bless and curse, and do them good and mischief." He then gives his own opinion of the text in question, declaring that it contains "a very positive precept,
delivered in the plainest words. . . . No man who understands what it is to love, and to bless, and to do good, can mistake the meaning. . . . They do not, indeed, want the comments of men, who, when they cannot bend their minds to the obedience of Scripture, are desirous to wrest Scripture to a compliance with their own inclinations.\textsuperscript{217}

For the effect of such misapplied subtlety was to infuse doubt and obscurity where there originally was none, to dissociate words from their proper and agreed meanings in order to make them fit special and often unworthy cases, and so to treat the great ethical and spiritual abstractions as mere names; and the danger of this virtual nominalism in religion was that words as simple and plain as "love," "bless," and "good" would become so confused that men might, in all honesty, "mis­take their meaning." Parson Trulliber knows "what charity is better than to give to vagabonds," but even while he is thus operatively defin­ing for Adams this key word of \textit{Joseph Andrews}, one of his parish­ioners is entertaining Joseph and Fanny by praising "the goodness of parson Trulliber." Indeed, as Fielding explains, "he had not only a very good character as to other qualities in the neighbourhood, but was reputed a man of great charity; for, though he never gave a farthing, he had always that word in his mouth."\textsuperscript{218} Similarly Thwackum in \textit{Tom Jones} succeeds no better than the quibbling lawyer in satisfying Squire Western as to the question of Blifil's guilt or merit in the case of Sophia's bird. The divine dismisses as "a jargon of words, which means nothing," Square's argument that the act was right according to "the law of nature," but his own defense of it as arising from "a Christian motive" is scarcely more precise. Squire Western -- who whatever his
faults recognizes gibberish when he hears it — again invites the com-
pany to "Drink about. . . . I don't know what you mean, either of you,
by right and wrong. To take away my girl's bird was wrong, in my opin-
ion; and . . . to encourage boys in such practices, is to breed them up
to the gallows."\textsuperscript{219}

The clergy's abuse of words was more serious than that of doctors
or lawyers both because religion was a more important sphere of knowl-
edge and because the pulpit, as Bishop Burnet had pointed out, exer-
cised a more immediate influence over "the Rules and Measure of
Speech."\textsuperscript{220} But the influence of the other professions could be perni-
cious too. Pope, in The Art of Sinking in Poetry, ironically urged all
writers who would affect a modern style to employ "Technical Terms, which
estrange your Stile from the great and general Ideas of Nature; and the
higher your Subject is, the lower should you search into Mechanics for
your Expression."\textsuperscript{221} For Fielding the works of George Cheyne, a Doctor
of Physic of the Royal College of Edinburgh and Fellow of the Royal
Society, illustrated this rule to perfection. For Dr. Cheyne wrote pro-
fusely not only on medical matters (he is the author of the classic
study of melancholia, The English Malady [1733]) but also on philosophy,
which latter subject he approached, however, from the "physical" point
of view and dressed out in the technical terminology of his profession.
He explained why in his best known philosophical work, the title of
which is itself a fair specimen of his mechanistic pretensions: An Essay
on Regimen, Together with Five Discourses, Medical, Moral, and Philoso-
phical: Serving to Illustrate the Principles and Theory of Philosophical
Medicine, and Point out Some of its Moral Consequences (1740). "I choose
to speak in the Mathematical and Medical Language," he wrote, "because
the Analogy, the Similarity, and the Precision, is here so just, so
close, and so luminous, that I think it must penetrate those who can
perfectly understand it, and may by a Dictionary be made plain to others,
if they think it worth the while to deal in such abstracted Conjec-
tures." 222

But to Fielding the question was not whether it was worth while
to deal in abstracted conjectures but whether anyone dealing in them
had the right to use language so specialized and obscure that the ordi-
nary educated reader was required to resort to a dictionary. In The
Champion for May 17, 1740, Cheyne is the "very great and Eminent Physi-
cian" whom the Court of Censorial Enquiry adjudges the real culprit
(instead of Colley Cibber) in the murder of the English Language. A
witness testifies that "the M.D. . . . hath so mangled and mauled it,
that when I came to examine the Body, as it lay in Sheets in a Book-
seller's Shop, I found it an expiring heavy Lump, without the least Ap-
pearance of Sense." A passage from Cheyne's Philosophical Discourses,
as turgid and unintelligible, nearly, as some of the pronouncements of
Fielding's fictional physicians, is quoted in evidence of this asser-
tion; and two more passages are cited in a later paper as examples "in
Physic" of the proposition that "what we write of each particular Pro-
fession will be unintelligible to all besides the Members thereof." But
the real point would seem to be that Cheyne's aspirations, as a popular
writer and a pretender to philosophical discourse, extended beyond the
narrow sphere of his profession and thereby represented a threat to
infect the language as a whole with the very disease of specialization
which had already "eaten out solid knowledge in all professions" and had estranged their styles "from the great and general Ideas of Nature."

"Now all this may be Sense for aught I know," says Fielding of the passages from the Philosophical Discourses, anticipating the very words of Squire Western upon the jargon of the lawyer, "but it can be only understood by a Physician."  

In Don Quixote in England (1734), Lawyer Brief and Dr. Drench dispute in the jargons of their professions over which of them should take charge of Don Quixote. But as William Coley points out, "the cant jargon of the professional men attempts to define something rather great, namely, Quixote's irrepressible idealism, with the result that this idealism is completely and distortedly debased."  

Earlier in the play, when Sancho offends Don Quixote by describing Dulcinea's equipage as he sees it, the knight exclaims, "Sancho, thou wilt never leave debasing the greatest things in thy vile phrases," and Coley sees others in the play, notably the politicians in the election scenes and the "polite" ladies and gentlemen at the home of Sir Thomas Lovel and, as also debasing great things with vile phrases, each of them speaking, as it were, a language of his own and trying to define the world in its specialized and corrupt terms. The doctor and the lawyer, then, prattling in their unintelligible jargons, are not merely conventional figures of fun. They stand for the imminent breakdown of society into disparate groups unable to communicate with each other or to comprehend the "great and general Ideas of Nature" represented by Don Quixote (whom they all dismiss as a mad man), and their jargon symbolizes the loosening of "the great bond which holds society together."  "Many men, many minds,"
Sancho explains sententiously in reply to Don Quixote's admonition — "Many men, many minds; many minds, many mouths; many mouths, many tongues; many tongues, many words." 225

Thus in the Champion paper on the abuse of words it is not technical jargon in the strict sense which Fielding singles out in his attack on the "Word Squandering ... generally practiced by every particular Profession," but rather words and phrases which they have taken over from the language at large and narrowed to their own purposes — jargonized, so to speak — and therefore corrupted: "dispatch," "reasonable," "infallible Method," etc. Thus the other special "languages" considered in the same essay — those of polite society, politicians, and tradesmen — are also jargons of a sort, forms of expression which may, Fielding says, convey meaning within the groups in which they are used but which "give no more Idea to others, than any of those unintelligible Sounds which the Beasts utter." 226 Each segment of society, in effect, was imitating the professions in developing a language of its own, and at the expense always of the agreed meanings, the repositories of general truth and the expressions of social unity, of the words which they redefined to suit their own narrow and often perverse ends.

In an essay in The True Patriot No. 23, for Apr. 1, 1746, deploring the narrowness of opinion in the various orders of society, Fielding begins with a reference to "a Man who believed there was no real Existence in the World but himself." This philosophy, he says, is not much different from that of many of the "orders and Professions" of men. "For tho' they do not absolutely deny all Existence to other Persons and Things, yet it is certain they hold them of no Consequence, and little
worth their Consideration, unless they trench [i.e., appertain] somewhat
towards their own Order or calling." It is surely significant, then,
that the principal example he offers of this tendency in modern society
is that which "may be seen in the monopolizing particular Words, and
confining their Meaning to their own Purposes, as if the rest of the
World had in reality no Right to their Application. A signal Instance
of which is the Adjective Good. . . . Now when the Divine, the Free-
Thinker, the Citizen, the Whig, the Tory, etc. pronounce such an Indi-
vidual to be a good Man, it is plain that they have all so many dif-
ferent Meanings." Thus a surgeon when he speaks of "a very good Sub-
ject" may be referring to a hanged criminal; and some army officers
apply the words "the best Man in England" to one who may well be "the
wickedest Fellow in the whole Regiment." Fielding's objection (as in
the similar case of the word "betters" as used by upper classes) is not
to the specialized meanings of "good" in themselves but to the fact that
such meanings seemed to be driving out the general and essentially moral
sense of the word. The examples, of course, are offered partly in jest,
but if a "good" man to a doctor could be a criminal and to a soldier a
scoundrel, then there was reason to fear that its agreed meaning was
becoming lost and that the writer or speaker who tried to use it in this
original general sense might be interpreted differently by each order
of society. And this, it should be observed, especially since the word
"good" is only one instance of a monopolizing tendency symbolized by the
professions but evident in the other orders of society as well, boded
ill not only for morality but also for the art of communication in lan-
guage.
The professions are, moreover, as Fielding represents them in their degenerate, departmentalized state, the natural breeding places of hypocrisy. For though not all of his doctors, lawyers, and clergymen are hypocrites, it will not have escaped notice that most of them are guilty of cant not only in the sense of jargon but also in the sense of insincerity. The logical link between these two senses of the term would seem to be the feeling that the specialized language of a profession or sect, though not necessarily insincere in its inception, invited imposture by divorcing words from their proper and agreed meanings and putting them at the mercy, as it were, of each individual speaker or writer. If Parson Trulliber's sense of the word "charity" is as good as Parson Adams', then who is to give the lie to his professions of this virtue?

But an even stronger inducement to hypocrisy is that Trulliber, as a clergyman, must profess charity not because he sincerely believes in it but because clergymen are by definition professors of religion, and if this seems to be putting too fine a point on the semantic connection between professions as occupations or callings and professions as claims or avowals it is a point of which Fielding himself, with his sensitivity to the literal meanings of words, is acutely conscious. Communicating his suspicion that the prudish Lady Raffler, in The Universal Gallant, has arranged an assignation with a lover, Mondish mocks Gaylove's incredulity: "What, I suppose you heard her rail against wicked women -- and declaim in praise of chastity -- does a good sermon from the pulpit persuade thee that a parson is a saint? -- or a charge from the bench that the judge is incorrupt? -- If thou wilt believe in professions, thou wilt
find scarce one fool that is not wise, one rogue that is not honest, one
courtier that is not fit to make a friend, or one whore that is not fit
to make a wife." Professing is a verbal act, and professional men,
as people whose business it is to profess, were corrupting language by
using it in the service not of truth but of their own interests, their
own "private trades." They prostitute language to their own ends, and
hence the final "profession" named is that of the whore, for all pro-
fessions, as Fielding sees it, in both senses of the word, are whores of
language.

The doctor is perhaps less culpable in this respect than the lawyer
or the clergyman because language is not for him such a basic tool of
trade. Yet when Fielding gives us "the trudging quack in scarlet cloak"
and the other quack doctors who populate his works we may assume that
even though he may not know the word "quack" was originally an abbrevia-
tion of the Dutch quacksalver, which is "one who 'quacks' or boasts
about the virtues of his salves," he was fully alive to the vivid
metaphorical associations of the English word. For it is in the sense
of the ranting promoter of Walpole rather than merely of an imposter
that his references in The Champion to Orator Henley's Hyp Doctor as
the Quack Doctor gain their point, and the observation in The True Pa-
triot that "there are Quacks in Politeness as well as all Sciences"
occurs in the context of a discourse on language and its abuses.

His objections to the professional use to which lawyers put the lan-
guage, however, is more serious. "Zounds! what shall I say?" demands
Sir George Boncour in The Fathers (published posthumously in 1778 but
written in 1743) when his opinion on a matter under discussion meets with
a cold reception. "Shall I take the other side of the question? for, like a lawyer, I can speak on either." In part, of course, this was an ethical problem and one which Fielding himself, as a lawyer, was probably seriously troubled about, as was James Boswell. But it was also a problem of language. Among lawyers, said the author of Remarques on the Humours and Conversations of the Town (1673), "the Idea of Conversation is commonly very Pedantick, and unpollisht; and in Truth, not worthy of a Gentleman; where men study not so much, things noble and generous, but the arts of paliating wrong, of defeating and deferring right." Swift was of the same opinion. Describing the legal profession to his Houyhnhnm Master, Gulliver observes not only "that this Society hath a peculiar Cant and Jargon of their own, that no other Mortal can understand, and wherein all their Laws are written, which they take special Care to multiply; whereby they have wholly confounded the very Essence of Truth and Falsehood, of Right and Wrong," but also that the members of this society are "bred up from their Youth in the Art of proving by Words multiplied for the Purpose, that White is Black, and Black is White, according as they are paid."

But it is the clergy, as we have already seen in the cases of Parsons Barnabas and Trulliber in Joseph Andrews, Thwackum in Tom Jones, and the young clergyman in Amelia, whose professional perversions of language are most reprehensible. The Ordinary of Newgate in Jonathan Wild, having been plied with punch and flattery, tells the condemned Jonathan, "Never mind your soul -- leave that to me; I will render a good account of it, I warrant you"; and though it is Firebrand the Priest who finally assassinates Queen Common Sense in Pasquin, he never-
theless preaches a funeral sermon in which he deplores "her loss with tears" and praises her "with all my art." Preaching Parson Williams in Shamela, summing up the doctrine of faith as superior to works which all of Fielding's bad clergymen affect. But what they really mean by "faith," as he makes clear time and again, is the mere profession of it.

Thus if the learned professions in Fielding stand for the fragmentation of society, the departmentalization of knowledge, and the specialization of language, they are also symbolic of his distrust of "professions" in the sense of direct avowals or declarations in language. This is not to say, however, they are alone held accountable for this state of affairs. The other orders of society, as we have amply seen, were also guilty. Bookweight and his Grub Street hacks are as ready as lawyers to write on both sides of a controversy. Dedication writers, hawking their panegyrics to the highest bidders, had "prevented the very use of Praise." Orator Henley is represented as offering to "write, preach, or swear any thing, and to profess any Party or Religion, at a cheap rate." Edmund Curll, the puffer of books and of Sir Robert Walpole, is "the great Professor of Rose Street." Mrs. Western, that earnest student of politics, warns Squire Western not to believe that Allworthy "hath more contempt for money than other men because he professes more." And among People of Fashion politeness is insincerity and good breeding is lying. One important aspect of the corruption of language, then, is the professional insincerity of its use by those most dependent on and skilled in its arts -- writers, politicians, and polite speakers as well as the learned professions. The effect is not only to remove particular
words and phrases from the vocabulary of truth but also to bring all
direct professions of virtue or merit into disrepute. "The Difficulty,"
says Fielding in the case of claimants to patriotism, "is the same in
this as in other Virtues, to distinguish Truth from Falsehood and Pre­
tence. This is, indeed, an Art, which requires so great Attention, as
well as Penetration. Hence the Hypocrite finds it so easy to impose on
Mankind. The thinnest Disguise is sufficient to hide the grossest Af­
fectation; and Men have little more to do than to declare they are what
they desire to be thought."236

It is no news, of course, that Fielding was preoccupied with hypo­
crisy. All of his heroes (with the exception of the anti-hero Jonathan
Wild) are in one way or another the victims of this vice, and not just
once but many times over. But hypocrisy works primarily through lan­
guage, exploiting it, perverting it from its true purpose as the medium
of truth and contaminating it with the odor of deceit. "'Tis a phrase
often apply'd to a man, when speaking, that he speaks his MIND," wrote
Fielding's friend James Harris in Hermes, or a Philosophical Inquiry
concerning Language and Universal Grammar (1751); "as much as to say,
that his Speech or Discourse is a publishing of some Energie or Motive
of his Soul. So it indeed is in every one that speaks, excepting the
Dissembler or Hypocrite; and he too, as far as possible, affects the
appearance."237 To Fielding's way of thinking, however, the affecting
of the appearance had become so universal that speaking one's mind no
longer seemed an effective way of publishing the energy or motion of the
soul, and even less could one trust the declarations of others. Summing
up his hero's philosophy at the end of Jonathan Wild, the narrator reports that

The character which he most valued himself upon, and which he principally honored in others, was that of hypocrisy, . . . for which reason, he said, there was little greatness to be expected in a man who acknowledged his vices, but always much to be hoped from him who professed great virtues: wherefore, though he would always shun the person whom he discovered guilty of a good action, yet he was never deterred by a good character, which was more commonly the effect of profession than of action; for which reason he himself was always very liberal of honest professions, and had as much virtue and goodness in his mouth as a saint.238

One of Fielding's objections to Pamela is that the vaunted "virtue" of the heroine rests largely on her own professions. She too has as much virtue and goodness in her mouth as a saint, but her actions, as his own Shamela demonstrates, the sheer facts of her prolonged resistance to seduction, might as easily and perhaps more plausibly be those of a sinner and a hypocrite. "Richardson accepts nominal virtue and vice as the reality," H. V. D. Dyson and John Butt point out, "and makes play with the names of moral qualities rather than with the qualities themselves."239 Similarly Colley Cibber, in his Apology, had claimed all virtues but chastity (an omission for which Pamela more than compensated), and it is this fact rather than, as has been suggested, Fielding's mistaken belief that Cibber was the author of Pamela, which explains why the title of Fielding's burlesque is An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews and why the supposed author is called "Conny Keyber." When a constable in Joseph Andrews with the revealing name of Tom Suckbribe is suspected of having aided a prisoner to escape, Fielding as narrator expresses a personal confidence in the man's innocence because he has been assured of it, he says ironically, "by those
who received their information from his own mouth, which in the opinion of some moderns, is the best, and indeed only, evidence."

Pamela and Cibber, as Fielding reads their characters between the lines of their respective narratives, are both guilty of affectation. But whereas Pamela is a thoroughgoing hypocrite, Cibber is merely an ostentatious ass. "Affectation," Fielding explains in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, "proceeds from one of these two causes, vanity or hypocrisy: for as vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause, so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavour to avoid censure, by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues." Yet both causes result in the distortion of truth and the perversion of language, and Fielding's good characters, it will be observed, are not much more trustworthy as witnesses to their own merits and motives than are his villains. Parson Adams' professions of stoicism are forgotten the moment he hears (mistakenly) that his youngest son has been drowned. In an earlier chapter, moreover, Adams generalizes about the futility of conjectural disputes and then immediately gets embroiled in one himself, and in another he betrays vanity concerning one of his sermons in which, he professes, "I have never been a greater enemy to any passion, than that silly one of vanity." Tom Jones's account to Partridge of the adventures leading to his expulsion from Squire Allworthy's house, though closer to the truth than the version of the same adventures which Blifil had related to Allworthy, falsely suggests that Jones's behavior had been entirely blameless. For "everything now appeared in so favorable colors to Jones, that malice itself would have found it no easy matter to fix any blame on him. Not that
Jones desired to conceal or to disguise the truth; . . . but in reality, so it happened, and so it will always happen; for let a man be never so honest, the account of his own conduct will, in spite of himself, be so very favorable that his vices will come purified through his lips, and, like foul liquors well strained, will leave all their foulness behind. For though the facts themselves may appear, yet so different will be the motives, circumstances, and consequences, when a man tells his own story and when his enemy tells it, that we scarce can recognize the facts to be one and the same."\(^{243}\)

Even an honest man, then, -- as much as the hypocritical Lawyer Dowling later in the same novel -- may "convey a lie in the words of truth,"\(^{244}\) and this fact of the \textit{subjective} element in language was another cause of its perversion, another instance of the contamination of the words of truth. "A man must take heed of words," warned Hobbes, "which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker";\(^{245}\) and Locke placed verbal testimony a poor second to personal experience because the former can be so easily distorted by "passion, interest, inadvertency, mistake, . . . and a thousand odd . . . capricios [of] men's minds."\(^{246}\) The subjectivity of the speaker or writer is not, strictly speaking, an imperfection of language. But insofar as it is reflected in language and perverts it from its proper function as the medium of truth, it must be taken into account.

Nor is subjectivity a problem only in a man's "account of his own conduct." Fielding's recognition, in the passage just quoted from \textit{Tom Jones}, that the enemy's version of the same facts will be distorted too
implies further that any version may reflect the bias of the speaker and so miss objective truth. Thus the third target of his satire in Shamela, after Richardson's Pamela and Cibber's Apology, is Conyers Middleton's Life of Cicero (1741). Middleton, according to Lord Macaulay, was "an idolater . . . composing a lying legend in honor of St. Tully . . . Actions for which Cicero himself, the most eloquent and skillful of advocates, could contrive no excuses, actions which in his confidential correspondence he mentioned with remorse and shame, are represented by his biographer as wise, virtuous, heroic." We need look no further than this for Fielding's reasons for attacking him. Middleton was, like the narrator of Jonathan Wild, a whitewashing biographer, and the fact that his subject was a man whom Fielding admired did not make the author any less guilty as a corrupter and discrediter of the language. But again even basically honest speakers can be guilty of the same kind of faults. When Col. James in Amelia tells Sgt. Atkinson his intention to let Booth stay in jail so that the colonel may pursue Amelia without interference, Atkinson relates the story to his wife and she to Amelia: "And as the sergeant had painted the matter rather in stronger colors than the colonel, so Mrs. Atkinson again a little improved on the sergeant. Neither of these good people, perhaps, intended to aggravate any circumstance; but such is, I believe, the unavoidable consequence of all reports." Rarely, in fact, does Fielding allow any profession or report, however sympathetic the character who delivers it, to pass unchallenged. It is not surprising, therefore, that he is equally conscious of the possibility of subjective bias in his own narrations. In the Voyage to Lisbon
he describes, with some indignation, how he chased from his cabin a flunky officer of the ship who had rudely interrupted himself and his wife at dinner. But he also reports the officer’s version of the incident as related later to the captain. The officer, whose name is Honest Tom, "hastily began his narrative, and faithfully related what had happened . . . ; we say faithfully, tho' . . . it may be suspected that Tom chose to add, perhaps, only five or six immaterial circumstances, as is always, I believe, the case, and may possibly have been done by me in relating this very story, though it happened not many hours ago."250

The problem is different, of course, in fictional narratives, but the principle, if the author is a serious one, is the same. For though his object is general truth rather than particular, his success depends on the degree to which he convinces his readers of his own sincerity and of the objective validity of his judgments. Richardson’s interpretation of Pamela’s "virtue" would not, to Fielding’s mind, have been any more convincing if he had proposed it in his own person rather than through the protestations of his heroine because it would still have rested, like Middleton’s interpretation of Cicero, primarily on verbal professions concerning motives never really submitted to the test of objective action. Thus Joseph Andrews is not a parody of Pamela, nor is it likely that Fielding began it as such. For if he had been interested in burlesquing Richardson’s novel he would certainly not have slighted (as he did not in Shamela) its most imitable feature, the epistolary form. It is rather an alternative to Pamela, exhibiting through action the same
kind of virtue which in Richardson remained largely nominal and hence psychologically unconvincing.

"The only Ways by which we can come at any Knowledge of what passes in the minds of others," Fielding writes in The Champion, "are their Words and Actions; the latter of which, hath by the wiser Part of Mankind been chiefly depended on, as the surer and more infallible Guide," and this introduces a letter from a self-acknowledged hypocrite who boasts of his success in misleading the world by the "Expense of a little verbal Piety" and who, though he does not give himself away by signing the letter, concludes, "I am Sir, (Tho* I care not if you was hang'd.) Your most obedient humble Servant." And again, in An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men (published in the Miscellanies of 1743):

Surely, the actions of men seem to be the justest interpreters of their thoughts, and the truest standard by which we may judge them. . . . And indeed, this is so certain a method of acquiring the knowledge I contend for, that, at first appearance, it seems absolutely perfect and to want no manner of assistance. There are, however, two causes of our mistakes on this head; and which lead us into forming very erroneous judgments of men, even while their actions stare us in the face, and, as it were, hold a candle to us, by which we may see into them. The first of these is, when we take their own words against their actions. . . . This error is infinitely more common than its extreme absurdity would persuade us was possible. And many a credulous person hath been ruined by trusting to the assertions of another, who must have preserved himself, had he placed a wiser confidence in his actions. The second error is still more general. This is when we take the colour of a man's actions, not from their own visible tendency, but from his public character: when we believe what others say of him, in opposition to what we see him do. . . . I will venture to affirm that I have known some of the best sort of men in the world, (to use the vulgar phrase) who would not have scrupled cutting a friend's throat; and a fellow whom no man should be seen to speak to, capable of the highest acts of friendship and benevolence."
There can be no question, then, that Fielding saw the problem of the valid judgment of human character, and hence of literary narration, as in part at least a matter of language and its perversions. He could not, as a writer, repudiate language, however much he distrusted it. But living in "the world of common men, and not philosophers" -- the world of hack authors, politicians, and polite society, of doctors, lawyers, and clergymen, and of countless hypocrites and false witnesses in all orders of life -- he was aware that truth, having to be expressed through language, was susceptible to all kinds of distortions and hazards both of medium (the imperfections and corruptions of the language itself) and of agent (the "interest," bias, ignorance, insincerity, or vanity of the speaker or writer). He recognized therefore, that the serious writer must devise means to make the truths he would express independent of these hazards, or at least to create the illusion of such independence; to insulate truth from the corruptions of medium and agent through which, in an imperfect world, it must necessarily pass. How Fielding met this challenge in his own writings will be the subject of the following chapters.
NOTES

1 See Note 52, Ch. I.

2 See above, p. 30.


4 Henley ed., VIII, 247.

5 Fielding's Comic, pp. 184-5.

6 For other examples, see Pasquin, Act IV, Sc. 1, and Tumble-Down Dick. Henley ed., XI, 209; XII, 30.


8 The Spectator No. 39, Apr. 14, 1711.


11 Fielding's Comic, p. 191.


15 See above, p. 18.

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25. Book VII, Ch. 1; Book XII, Ch. 5. Henley ed., III, 334-5; IV, 323.


27. June 12, 1740. II, 328.


31. "The word illiterate," according to Lord Chesterfield, "in its common acceptation, means a man who is ignorant of those two languages [Greek and Latin]." Quoted by James Sutherland, Preface to 18th Century Poetry, p. 59n., after a citation in OED.

Cibber had written that the play would be remembered "when the People of this Age shall be Ancestors." Pope ridicules the same passage in *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, Ch. XVI.

Cibber meant that he was a member of the party which welcomed William III at Nottingham in 1688. *Apology*, p. 54.

Commenting on the English debut of a certain opera singer, Cibber had written, "Mrs. Tofts, who took her first Grounds of Musick here in her own Country . . . was then but an ADEPT in it." *Apology*, p. 34.

For example: "At the Oratory in Newport Market, tomorrow, at half an hour after ten, the Sermon will be on the Witch of Endor. At half an hour after five the Theological Lecture will be on the conversion and original of the Scottish nation, and of the Picts and Caledonians; St. Andrew's relics and panegyric, and the character and mission of the Apostles. On Wednesday, at six or near the matter, take your chance, will be a medley oration on the history, merits, and praise of Confusion and Confounders in the road and out of the way. On Friday, will be that on Dr. Faustus and Fortunatus, and Conjuration; after each the Climax of the Times, Nos. 25 and 24."

N.B. Whenever the prices of the seats are occasionally raised in the week-days notice of it will be given in the prints. An account of
the performances of the Oratory from the first, to August last, is published, . . . and if any bishop, clergyman, or any other subject of his Majesty, or any other foreign prince or state can, at my years, and in my circumstances and opportunities, without the least assistance of any partner in the world, parallel the study, choice, variety, and discharge of the said performances of the Oratory by his own or any others, I engage forthwith to quit the said Oratory. -- J. HENLEY."

Quoted by Charles Knight, London (London, 1844), V, 44-5.

47 In a note to the 1743 Dunciad, Book III, lines 199-212. Twickenham ed., V, 330. For an example of Henley's oratorical treatises, see his Art of Speaking in Publick (London, 1727).


49 Notes and Queries, 2nd Ser., II, 443.


51 No. 21, Jan. 29, 1739-40; No. 40, Feb. 14, 1739-40. Henley apparently did operate an estates office on the side at the Oratory. Advertisements in The Hyp Doctor for houses frequently direct interested parties to "Enquire . . . of Mr. HENLEY, at the ORATORY, by Lincoln-inns-fields." See, for example, No. 518, Sept. 30, 1740.

52 No. 7, Jan. 16, 1748.

53 p. 12.

54 Fielding himself acknowledges the help of the Duke of Bedford in the Dedication to Tom Jones and probably enjoyed also the aid of George Lyttleton and others. See A. S. Collins, Authorship in the Days of Johnson (London, 1927), pp. 185-6.

55 The phrase is Pope's. Writing to dissuade Swift in 1726 from lending his pen to Pulteney against Walpole, he argued that "They have scoundrels enough to write for their passions and their designs; let us write for truth, for honour, and for posterity." The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford, 1956), II, 413.

56 Jensen ed., I, 360. The treatise is continued and concluded in No. 46, June 9, 1752.

57 Jensen ed., I, 339.
Act II, Scs. 4, 5, 6. The text here is that of the original edition (London, 1730), pp. 24-6, which I prefer in this instance to the version printed in the Henley ed. from a later revised edition of the play. The relevant scenes in the latter version are truncated and considerably weakened, though in all other respects it is superior to the original. For other examples of Fielding's views on the Grub Street commercialization of language and letter, see Amelia, Book VIII, Ch. 5, and The Covent-Garden Journal No. 51, June 27, 1752.


61 p. i.

62 No. 11, Feb. 13, 1748. The Piscopade (London, 1748) was a satiric poem in quantitative verse (probably by William Kenrick) which included an attack on Fielding.

63 Act II, Sc. 6, pp. 25-6.

64 No. 5, Jan. 18, 1752. Jensen ed., I, 163.

65 Henley ed., XII, 254-5.


67 The Spectator No. 451, Aug. 7, 1712.

68 No. 11, Feb. 13, 1748.


71 Henley ed., XII, 255. For an account of the eighteenth century practice of selling dedications, see Collins, Authorship in the Days of Johnson, pp. 180-4. For further examples of Fielding's attacks on the practice, see his mock dedication of Shamela, his dedicatory epistle to The Intriguing Chambermaid, Pasquin (Act III, Sc. 1), and the Lucianic dialogue An Interlude in the Miscellanies of 1743. For Pope's attacks, see The Art of Sinking in Poetry (Ch. XIV) and The Guardian No. 4, for March 16, 1713. For Swift's views, see the Bookseller's Dedication and
the Preface of *A Tale of a Tub*, "Directions for Making a Birth-Day Song," and "On Poetry, a Rhapsody."


73 Henley ed., XII, 313.


75 *The London Magazine*, I, 81 (1732). Cited in OED.

76 March 1, 1739-40. I, 322-3.

77 It is impossible to be sure, of course, whether Fielding was personally responsible for the Puffs department or whether it was compiled by James Ralph or some other editorial assistant on the paper. Criteria of style are of little help here since the bulk of the matter in question is quoted or paraphrased. But appearing in a paper of which Fielding was the chief editor, the column doubtlessly reflects his point of view, and the fact that there are similar departmentalized features in each of his later journals, in which Ralph had no part, strengthens Fielding's claims of authorship. Also, the Puffs column seems to have been discontinued after Fielding left *The Champion* in June, 1741, or at any rate it does not appear in any of the later numbers of the paper which I have been able to examine.

78 Sept. 12, 1710. Addison parodies advertisements in *The Spectator* No. 547, Nov. 27, 1712, in which he prints testimonials from readers of the paper written "in the Stile and Phrase of the like Ingenious Compositions which we frequently meet with at the ends of our News-Papers," particularly the type inserted by physicians and apothecaries "where it is usual for the Patients to Publish the Cures which have been made upon them, and the several Distempers under which they laboured."

79 See, for example, No. 134, Sept. 20, and No. 145, Oct. 16, 1740.

80 *The Champion* No. 61, Apr. 3, 1740.

81 *The True Patriot* No. 6, Dec. 10, 1745.


84 No. 1, Nov. 5, 1745.
Apparently Fielding really meant it when he said that he would hereafter list only important marriages and deaths. Previous numbers of *The Jacobite's Journal* regularly reprint marriage and death notices from other papers, but after the announcement of Feb. 13 the columns devoted to these matters disappear and notices of marriages or deaths are very infrequent.


Book II, Ch. 3; Book III, Ch. 7. Henley ed., II, 65, 118.

*The True Patriot* No. 5, Dec. 3, 1745.

Act V, Sc. 3. Henley ed., IX, 142.

Henley ed., XIV, 314.


p. 43.

Sermons Preached Upon Several Occasions, II, 222-3.


Book II, Ch. 5. Henley ed., II, 73.


102. Book VI, Ch. 2; Book XV, Ch. 6; Book XVI, Chs. 4, 7. Henley ed., III, 279; V, 167, 214-5, 230.


106. Jonathan Wild, Book IV, Ch. 3. Henley ed., II, 152-4. In *The Covent-Garden Journal* No. 49, June 20, 1752, Fielding mentions as one of the causes of the present power of "the Mob" in English politics "the mistaken Idea which some particular Persons have always entertained of the Word Liberty" and promises to treat the matter "in a future paper." Jensen ed., II, 35. No full paper on the subject appears, but he does return to it briefly (and in the same vein) in Nos. 55 and 58. See also *The Champion* No. 98, June 28, 1740, where the explorer Job Vinegar, describing the strange language of the Pfghsiumgski nation, cites the word "Liberty" and comments that "During my whole Stay among them, Tho' I often heard this Word repeated, I could never comprehend what they meant by it."


113. *The True Patriot* No. 2, Nov. 12, 1745.

p. 7.

Sept. 24, 1748. The quoted passages are from The London Evening Post, Aug. 11, 1748.


pp. 13, 118.

The Daily Gazetteer No. 1486, Tuesday, March 25, 1740.


Cross and Dudden identify Freeman as one Thomas Pitt (Cross, I, 266; Dudden, I, 163-4), confusing him, apparently, with the James Pitt who also wrote for the Daily Gazetteer, under the name of Francis Osborne. But the anonymous author of An Historical View of the Principles, Characters, Persons, Etc. of the Political Writers of Great Britain (1740) declares that "The Gazetteer is wrote chiefly by one Mr. C... His political name is... R. Freeman" (pp. 52-3); and Fielding himself makes the same identification by punning on Courteville's name. A burlesque advertisement in The Champion No. 145, for Oct. 16, 1740, announces "proposals for printing, by Subscription, an Apology for the Life, Actions, and Writings of RALPH FREEMAN, alias, COURT EVIL, Esq.; containing an authentic History of the several wonderful Stages, thro' which he hath passed in the World; together with the successful Progress of Corruption, Baseness, and Treachery, during his Time. Written by HIMSELF."

The Champion No. 21, Jan. 29, 1739-40; and No. 145, Oct. 16, 1740. The report in The Champion No. 144, Oct. 14, 1740 of "Puffendorf press'd into HIS HONOUR'S [i.e., Walpole's] Service by the Political Hyp Doctor" refers to The Hyp Doctor No. 520, Oct. 14, in which Henley played into Fielding's satiric hands by appealing fortuitously to the
theories of the German philosopher Samuel Puffendorf as sanction for Walpole's peace policy. A long letter signed "Gustavus Puffendorf" is the leading article in The Champion for Dec. 19, 1741, but this was after Fielding had left the journal and the piece bears none of the marks of his style.

126 See J. E. Wells, "Fielding's Political Purpose in Jonathan Wild," PMLA, XXVIII (1913), 1-55.

127 Book I, Ch. 10. Henley ed., II, 257.


129 See above, pp. 96-7.

130 Book II, Ch. 3. Henley ed., II, 59.


132 Henley ed., XII, 244-5.

133 See above, p. 100.


135 Henley ed., XII, 246. Cf. An Essay on Conversation (also published in the Miscellanies) in which Fielding writes, "There are [some] who consider [pride] as the foible of great minds; and others again who will have it to be the very foundation of greatness; and, perhaps, it may be of that greatness which we have endeavoured to expose in many parts of these works; but to real greatness, which is the union of a good heart with a good head, it is almost diametrically opposite, as it generally proceeds from the depravity of both, and almost certainly from the badness of the latter." Henley ed., XIV, 259-60.


137 Preface.

138 p. 41. The first edition is referred to in Pepys's Diary, Dec. 6, 1668.


144. II, 328-9, 334.


150. Colman and Thornton also note that "the Word Devil is used at present only as a bugbear for children" (Cf. Fielding's Modern Glossary definition of Religion: "A Word of no Meaning; but which serves as a Bugbear to frighten Children with.") and that despite its "warlike sound," the word "drum" has "long been adopted by the fashionable world without any design to alarm us with the notion of a campaign or a battle, but only to call us . . . to more peaceful engagements." They also cite the current indiscriminate use of the word "ruined."


See above, pp. 55-6.

Book XIV, Ch. 1. Henley ed., V, 94.

No. 266, Jan. 18, 1712.

The Prose Works, ed. Davis, IV, 213-5. The treatise was first published by Dr. Delany in 1754 but may have been written before Steele's Spectator piece. See Davis' Introduction, p. XXXVI. It may, like many of Swift's unpublished pieces, have been circulated privately in manuscript and so have come into Fielding's hands. For Swift's distinction between good manners and good breeding in the same essay, see above, Ch. II, n. 40.

Henley ed., XIV, 312, 316.

Book XV, Ch. 3; Book XVII, Ch. 4. Henley ed., V, 150, 263.


Book VIII, Ch. 7; Book X, Ch. 7. Henley ed., IV, 89, 226.


Tom Jones, Book VII, Ch. 11; Book VIII, Ch. 2. Henley ed., IV, 27, 67.


Book I, Ch. 17. Henley ed., I, 98.

Book XII, Ch. 6. Henley ed., IV, 324. See also The True Patriot No. 28, May 13, 1746, in which a footman, speaking of "the gentlemen of our cloth," warns that "we are very near as bad as our betters."


The corruption of terms of endearment is also a theme in Fielding's plays. See, for example, The Author's Farce and An Old Man Taught Wisdom. Henley ed., VIII, 230; X, 336.
191 Act IV, Sc. 3. Henley ed., VIII, 66

192 Henley ed., XII, 35.

193 Henley ed., XII, 10.


195 pp. 34-5.

196 Apology, p. 164.

197 Book I, Ch. 2. Henley ed., VI, 14.

198 Sermons, II, 507.


203 p. 18.


206 An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Ch. iii, Sections 8, 9, 10.


209 Book XII, Ch. 6. Henley ed., VII, 321.


Book IV, Ch. 4. Henley ed., III, 155.

Book XII, Ch. 7. Henley ed., VII, 328.

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Ch. x, Sec. 15.

pp. 130-1. For a general treatment of Fielding's relationship to the Contempt of the Clergy tradition, see Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art, pp. 130-49.


See above, p. 124.

Steeves ed., p. 62.

p. 318.

The Champion, June 12, 1740. II, 330.

Fielding's Comic, p. 170.


O.E.D. Cf. Gulliver's definition of "physicians" as "a Sort of People bred up among us, in the Profession or Pretence of curing


231 p. 114.


233 *Book IV, Ch. 13*. Henley ed., II, 195.


236 *The True Patriot* No. 2, Nov. 12, 1745.

237 p. 15.


240 *Book I, Ch. 16*. Henley ed., I, 85.

241 Henley ed., I, 22.

242 *Joseph Andrews*, Book II, Ch. 11; Book III, Ch. 3; Book IV, Ch. 8. Henley ed., I, 174, 243, 350-2.

243 *Tom Jones*, Book VIII, Ch. 5. Henley ed., IV, 81.

244 *Tom Jones*, Book XVIII, Ch. 8. Henley ed., V, 334.

245 *Leviathan*, Ch. IV.

246 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Ch. xvi, Sec. 11.

247 See Baker's Introduction, pp. xxiv - xxvii.


250 Henley ed., XVI, 303-4.


CHAPTER V

IRONY AND ACTION

"The very best Advocate a good Cause have," says the Gentleman of Fielding's Dialogue Between a Gentleman of London and an Honest Alderman, "is plain-spoken Truth." But the communication of truth in plain, unequivocal words, the ideal that Fielding shared with the whole seventeenth- and eighteenth-century movement of linguistic reform, was not, he knew, a simple matter. The Gentleman himself discovers that even the plain statement of fact that the Alderman's candidate is a "known Jacobite" fails of its purpose when the Alderman dismisses the term Jacobite as "a mere Bugbear," and refuses to be imposed on by such "empty sounds" because of his distrust of political professions: "The Court, my Friend, has long cheated us with Names." Not only is the plain word Jacobite without a clear and distinct agreed meaning (the Alderman insists that he is himself a "Jacobite upon republican principles"),¹ but all direct professions of truth are suspect of insincerity.

The victory, in fact, of the Augustan plain style over the baroque rhetoric of the seventeenth century had in a sense merely exposed the basic problems of communication in language more nakedly. "The clarity of the new style," as Martin Price has observed, "makes for a sharp awareness of the oppositions of terms and of the latent implications in a general term. . . . Terms were now to be scrutinized carefully for

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both their sincerity and their practical consequences."² Price's point is that the achievement of the plain style in the early eighteenth century cleared the way for the development of Augustan irony, created the necessary conditions in which the ironic art of a Swift could flourish as it could not have done in the time of Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne. "Irony had come in with the plain prose style," as Saintsbury pointed out even earlier, "without which it is almost impossible,"³ and Ian Watt, more recently, has maintained that "eighteenth century irony both required and stimulated the development of a prose style perspicuous enough for its double meanings to be sufficiently transparent."

Watt, like Price, notes that one consequence of the plain style is the prominence it gives to the general term and observes that "the use of abstract words in itself often creates an ironical effect . . . whether intended or not." But neither he nor the other critics who have recognized the connection between the development of the plain style and the rise of irony have sufficiently emphasized that as well as being an exploitation of the resources of the new style, irony was also, in writers like Swift and Pope and Fielding at least, sometimes a critique of that style -- or rather, of the imperfections and abuses of language which the plain style brought into inescapable prominence.

Watt's notion that the "generalizing tendency of eighteenth century vocabulary" was itself "ironigenic"⁴ is merely another way, in fact, of describing the process which Fielding and his contemporaries called the corruption of language. Shaftesbury, complaining of the "prostitute" manner of the modern encomium, declared that "in reality the Nerve and Sinew of modern Panegyrick lies in a dull kind of Satir; which the
Author, it's true, intends shou'd turn to the Advantage of his Subject; but which, if I mistake not, will appear to have a very Contrary effect. And Pope, who argued that as a result of "this prostitution" the serious author "can find no Terms . . . but what have already been used, and rendered suspected" and that "even Truth itself . . . will appear a Cheat by being so drest like one," turned the same principle to positive advantage in The Art of Sinking in Poetry by making it the basis of a mock rhetoric which was really a strategy of resistance to the ironigenic corruption of language. The principle he taught, as William B. Coley has excellently expressed it, was "to beat dullness at its own game, to put on more leads and outsink it, to formalize its imperfections."

Fielding, as we have seen, was also concerned lest the fawning panegyrists of his day should "prevent the very use of praise," and the examples he offers in Joseph Andrews of Colley Cibber's powers to "metamorphize and distort . . . the English language" by making "cowardice brave, avarice generous, pride humble, and cruelty tender-hearted" are not much different from those cited by Pope in The Art of Sinking to illustrate his ironigenic formula for converting "vices into their bordering virtues." Or again, in Love in Several Masques, Lady Matchless tells Wisemore that in high society "Merit is demerit, constancy dulness." The ironigenic effect of the language of high society, in fact, is sometimes evident even to Fielding's characters themselves. "To be called a coxcomb by a woman," says a character in The Temple Beau, "is as sure a sign of sense, as to be called a rogue by a courtier is of honesty. . . . I rejoice in the irony."
The ironic manner which is a distinguishing characteristic of so much of Fielding's writing is not, then, as Austin Dobson once said, "his natural speech" so much as a deliberate response to the corrupt state of the medium in which he had to work, an attempt, in the best Augustan tradition, "to formalize its imperfections." Irony, for Fielding, is a means of coming to terms with the corrupt language of his day, a way of accommodating it to the ideal of plain-spoken truth. To a certain extent, of course, as the above discussion has suggested, this is true of the other great ironists of the age as well, and it can be seen as one of the factors underlying the use of verbal irony in any age. As G. C. Sedgewick has remarked, irony "is, so to speak, language mocking itself." But to a much greater degree than any of his predecessors or contemporaries, Fielding is conscious of this function of his irony. More so than Swift or Pope, or Lucian or Cervantes, or any of the other masters of irony to whom he acknowledges a debt, he treats the ironic term as a "given" quantity, a product of social and linguistic forces beyond his control, and more so than any of the others he works with a recurring set of terms that can be identified as his ironic vocabulary.

The Covent-Garden Journal Glossary, while it does not include all of this basic ironic vocabulary, is a central document for the study of Fielding's irony not merely because it brings together in one list so many of the terms he regularly uses in ironic senses, but also, as we have seen, because it explicitly identifies them as corrupt words and thus provides a rationale for his characteristic technique of the ironic definition. And it is no accident that most of these terms, in
their "original" senses, are representative of the social, moral, and religious values which Fielding holds most dear, for it is in these areas, of course, that corruption of language does the most damage and is most dangerous. Irony, which permits the writer to treat "great" as a synonym for "little" or "mean," "honor" as equivalent to "dueling," and "religion" as "a word of no meaning," is a means of combating the corruption of language while seeming to acquiesce to it. For the ironic definition, translating the sanctifying abstraction into its plain English "real meaning" (i.e., the corrupt sense in which it is used in popular speech), is in reality an act of purification, a surgical separation of the diseased growth of corruption from the healthy tissue of original meaning. It is a way of at once exposing the corruption of words and of rescuing them from the debased condition into which they have fallen. It is a way of speaking truth in a corrupt medium.

"The satiric method Fielding takes from Swift," says Professor McKillop, "is to set up and isolate an absolute standard denoted by noble words which are then deprived of content or taken to mean the opposite of themselves." But even when he is imitating Swift quite frankly, as for example in a paper in The Covent-Garden Journal modeled on A Modest Proposal, there is evidence that he is more concerned than Swift was with the function of irony as critique and purification of language. The essay, a "projection" for providing for the London poor, opens in a true Swiftian vein with the observation that Dr. Swift's scheme, however "proper and humane" it might be in Ireland, would not work in London because "here, as the Children of the Poor are very little better than a Composition of Gin, to force their Parents to eat
them would in Reality be to force them to poison themselves." But when
he gets to his own proposal, a plan for the revival of human sacrifice,
Fielding slips into a kind of irony that is not Swiftian at all. There
is historical precedent for his scheme, he argues, because originally
"these Sacrifices were no other than an Invention of Politicians to
provide for, or rather to remove those redundant Members in every So­
ciety, for which the better (that is the Richer) Sort had no Manner of
Use, and who were consequently in the Language of the Law become chargea­
ble." And in imitation of Swift's concluding assurance that he has "no
other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade,
providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to
the rich," Fielding ends with the claim that his proposal "is for the
Good of the Nation in general; that is to say, for the richer Part."

Both writers exploit the ironic potential of political clichés like
"providing for the poor" and "the public good" and both spell out the
kind of brutal particulars these can be made to cover. But if Fielding
goes further and explicitly "defines" the ironic term, "translates" it
into its corrupt "real meaning," it is not entirely because he lacks
Swift's subtlety and cannot resist the temptation of explaining a joke.
He also wants to call attention, in a way Swift seldom finds necessary
or desirable, to the real corruptions of speech of which his ironies are
mocking imitations. Swift, it is true, sometimes focuses on the
strictly linguistic implications of his irony too, most notably perhaps
in An Argument Against the Abolishing of Christianity, where nominalism
is made the central issue; in the ironic definition of the "true critic"
in A Tale of a Tub; and in the sections already referred to of Gulli-
ver's Travels where Gulliver's translations into the plain and "significant" language of the Houyhnhnms give the lie to such hollow abstractions as "power, government, war, law, punishment, and a thousand other things [which] had no term wherein that language could express them." But even in these and similar instances Swift is not as ready as Fielding is to make the corruption of language itself the main rationale of his irony.

Swift's irony, it may be freely admitted, is more profound and more complex than Fielding's, more deeply rooted in a philosophical awareness of the disparity between the ideal values implicit in a phrase like "the public good" and the grim reality it is made to stand for. Its source, finally, is his sense of the corruption not of language but of human nature, as represented, usually, by a satiric persona whose abuse of words is merely one aspect of a larger projection of evil or stupidity, a revelation of character which is in turn a revelation of human nature. What "the public good" means to the persona of A Modest Proposal cannot be defined in a parenthetical aside because it is too integral a part of a whole moral and psychological conception of character. It is ironic not so much because it is corrupt in itself but because its user is corrupt.

To the extent, of course, that Fielding makes use of fully developed satiric personae or characters (as in Jonathan Wild and in the early numbers of The Jacobite's Journal, before he abandoned the John Trot-plaid mask) he too conceives of the ironic speaker as a vicious or stupid personage. But the creator of Parson Adams and Squire Allworthy, though he was fully alive, as we have seen, to the social causes and
effects of corrupt language, did not see degenerate human nature as its ultimate source. He tends to look on the corruption of words as a condition of language itself which the serious writer must cope with as best he can. If one is to achieve the ideal of plain-spoken truth he must reclaim the words of truth -- particularly the abstractions which according to Locke give form and coherency to intangible values -- from the erosions of specialization and the contaminations of insincerity. "Better" is defined as "richer" in the Projection for the London Poor essay not just because it fits Fielding's immediate satiric purpose to so define it but because he was apparently convinced, as we have seen earlier, that this (or some other purely social reduction of an originally moral term) was what the word was actually coming to mean in popular usage, and "the Good of the Nation" (or variant forms of the cliché) has a similar ironic career that can be traced throughout his works. 16

Even the moral inversions of Fielding's most Swiftian persona, the fawning, hero worshiping narrator of Jonathan Wild, are presented primarily as verbal confusions, and both the narrator and the "great" characters he admires are conscious of their language in a way that would be grossly out of character in Swift. They are constantly defining and commenting on their terms, and the whole vocabulary of political clichés and polite euphemisms which make up the ironic language of the book is merged and identified with the underworld cant of Jonathan Wild's real-life counterpart which has to be glossed for the benefit of uninitiated readers. Just as the term "prig" must be translated into "plain English" ("thief") for the sake of those readers
whom the narrator contemptuously refers to as "the vulgar" (i.e., honest men), so must terms like "greatness," "great man," "honor," "liberty," and "love" be translated. The debtors who fall under Wild's influence in Newgate, reports the narrator, "now grew so great, i.e., corrupted in their morals, that they spoke with the utmost contempt of what the vulgar call honesty. The greatest character among them was that of a pickpocket, or, in truer language, a file." And it is Jonathan Wild's own awareness that "we have no name to express it by in our Cant Dictionary" which causes him to appropriate and define for his cohorts that "word of such sovereign use and virtue, . . . honor." 17 "Nearly every time Wild delivers a major oration," Thomas Charles Kishler observes, "the effect is not so much an intimate revelation or a subtle individualization of character as it is a laying bare of the absurdity, hollowness, or hypocrisy which lies below the surface meanings of words," and the same is true of the narrator. "The central satire," as Kishler rightly sums up, "is focused primarily on the meanings of words or concepts." 18

Jonathan Wild, which is the most purely ironic of Fielding's major works, is also, significantly, the most language conscious. But Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones also abound in turns of phrase like "that is to say," "what is called," "to wit," "viz.," "or rather," "as it is generally expressed," "in other words," "in common phrase," "in short," "in plainer words," "in a word," and (most ubiquitously of all, perhaps) "to say the truth" and "in plain English" -- the net effect of which is to make the reader aware of the language of narration as language and to keep him constantly alert to the meanings of words.
It would be no great exaggeration, in fact, to maintain that the meaning of words is a central preoccupation in nearly all of Fielding's works -- even those which are entirely non-ironic. The most interesting of his early poems printed in the Miscellanies of 1743 ("Of True Greatness," "Of Good Nature," "Liberty") are verse essays in definition of some of the words and concepts which were to be so important to him throughout his career and which were also destined -- no doubt for this very reason -- to become among the most familiar terms of his ironic vocabulary. The prose essays in the same collection are also much concerned with the meanings of words central to his system of thought. The "Essay on the Knowledge and Characters of Men" contains the famous definition of hypocrisy, "Of the Remedies of Afflictions for the Loss of Our Friends" focuses on such key words as virtue, religion, and philosophy, and even the burlesque exercise "Of Nothing" is framed as an essay in definition.

Some of the definitions in the Essay on Conversation, also printed in the Miscellanies, illustrate the proposition that it was the words that mattered most to him which Fielding was most inclined to use ironically. We have already traced the conversion of "good breeding" into "lying," and the central term of the treatise, "conversation," undergoes a similar ironic transformation. He argues in the Essay that its proper meaning is broader "then what is commonly meant by conversation" by appealing to "the origination of the word itself, the only accurate guide to knowledge. The primitive and literal sense of the word is, I apprehend, to turn round together; and in its more copious usage we intend by it that reciprocal interchange of ideas by which truth is
examined, things are, in a manner, turned round and sifted, and all our
knowledge communicated to each other." Yet in Tom Jones, where con-
versation in this larger sense of fruitful social intercourse is seri-
ously proposed in the prefatory chapter of Book IX as one of the four
essential qualifications of the "true historian," what the word "com-
monly meant" is repeatedly brought to the reader's attention too. Par-
ticularly in the later chapters, when Jones and Sophia are in the
milieu of fashionable society, Fielding seldom lets the word in the nar-
rower sense of polite talk, whether used by himself or one of the char-
acters, pass without a challenge. "The conversation," he tells us in
a typical instance, "began to be, as the phrase is, extremely bril-
liant," but he refuses to record it because it is "not material to this
history" and because "I have known some very polite conversations grow
extremely dull when transcribed into books or repeated on the stage."
Even Sophia is made the occasion for a satiric commentary on the frag-
mentation of great words in fashionable society when, having promised
her aunt that she would "not see or converse with any person without
her knowledge and consent," she nevertheless decides it is permissible
to write a letter to Jones, even though "this, perhaps, is included in
the word conversing." But this already specialized sense is further
narrowed and debased by a recurring pun on "conversation" as a euphe-
mism for sexual intercourse, which Fielding exploits by regularly
treating it as another kind of conversation which need not be reported
because it is dull and irrelevant to the story. An excellent example
of this kind of critical play on the word occurs in the account of
Jones's first adventure with Lady Bellaston and is a fitting conclusion
for a scene of polite assignation which is itself a study in the corrup
tive use of language by fashionable society -- the kind of communica
tion by opposites and insinuation which Fielding's irony imitates and
mocks. Lady Bellaston's invitation, couched in negative terms of rebuke
and dismissal, is, however, well understood by Jones, who reveals a gift
for gallant speech himself here ("The fellow hath words," murmurs Lady
Bellaston appreciatively), and when he follows her to the prearranged
meeting place Fielding closes the scene by reporting that "a conver-
sation" took place "which lasted from two till six o'clock in the morn-
ing" but which he will not describe because "it would be tedious to
give the particular conversation, which consisted of very common and
ordinary occurrences." The sexual innuendo is even plainer, however,
in the next chapter but one, when the author tells us that Jones met
his lady again "and a long conversation again ensued between them; but
as it consisted of the same ordinary occurrences as before, we shall
avoid mentioning particulars, which we despair of rendering agreeable
to the reader; unless he is one whose devotion to the fair sex, like
that of the Papists to their saints, wants to be raised by the help of
pictures."20

There are more full length essays in definition in The Covent-
Garden Journal than in the political journals, but it is remarkable how
many of even the earlier papers, either in whole or in part, take off
from analyses of words. The whole of The True Patriot, in fact, can be
looked upon as an extended definition of true patriotism, a purpose
which Fielding makes explicit in the second number. His aim, he an-
nounces, "however the Word Patriot hath been abused, or whatever Odium
it may have thence contracted among the honest Part of Mankind," is to restore the word to its original meaning and dignity. We have already examined the background of Fielding's distrust of this political term and considered some examples of his ironic use of the word in its abused senses. But this essay is also interesting as a statement of his philosophy of definition. "The Difficulty," he explains, "is the same in this as in other Virtues, to distinguish Truth from Falsehood and Pretence," and the purpose of the journal is "to arm my Countrymen . . . by lending them some Assistance to discover the true Patriot from the false."

Nearly all of Fielding's definitions assume a similar difficulty and serve a similar purpose. Always he is concerned with sets of contrary ideas or values which have become so confused in popular usage that one word is used to express both the true (or original) meaning and the false (or corrupt) meaning. The very fact that one must reinforce a word like patriot by affixing to it a qualifying "true" implies a feeling that the term in question has been contaminated to the point that it can no longer be trusted to stand alone. But this kind of shoring up of words, as Swift's ironic definition of the "true critic" had amply demonstrated, was a temporary measure at best since the nature of usage is such that it is only a matter of time before the reinforced term becomes corrupt in its turn. What is needed rather is an analysis of the word as it is actually used which will distinguish between its true and false meanings and thereby allow scope for the exercise of judgement, a term which Fielding, in a later True Patriot essay, defines as "no other than the Distinction of Right from Wrong,
or as Mr. Locke hath more accurately described it, 'The separating carefully Ideas wherein can be found the least Difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and Affinity to take one Thing for another.'"\textsuperscript{21}

Definition thus becomes a negative as well as a positive process, and, in fact, since corrupt meanings multiply so profusely, it is likely to devote more attention to the false meanings than to the true. A paper on Wisdom, for example, in The Covent-Garden Journal, deals less with "that Wisdom of which Solomon was possessed [and] which was the Deity of the Antient Philosophers" than with that which is possessed by "those to whom the common Voice gives the Appellation of Wise Men, . . . that Wisdom of this World, which St. Paul expressly tells us is Folly, . . . mock Wisdom." For only after he has explicitly rejected the latter false meaning ("A Wise Man, in short, in the common Estimation, is he who becomes great or rich; nor are all the Labours he undergoes, or all the Frauds and Villanies which he commits ever taken into Account or in the least considered as any Objection to his Wisdom")\textsuperscript{22} will Fielding trust the word to carry the weight of approbation that he wants it to communicate and that he believes is its true and original meaning. The definitions of conversation and good breeding in the Essay on Conversation are constructed on a similar true vs. false pattern, as are -- to cite only some of the more notable examples -- the essay on good nature in the Champion for March 27, 1740, the analyses of the false sublime in the Preface to The Tragedy of Tragedies and the Champion for April 29, 1740, the observations on the true ridiculous in the Preface

There was nothing unique or original, of course, in Fielding's use of the true-false formula of definition. Fielding himself, announcing in his essay on good nature that his approach will be "really no more than to show first what Good-nature really is, and secondly, what it is not," declares that this is "according to Aristotle's Method," and everyone familiar with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century criticism will recognize that his distinctions between true and false wit are part of a tradition that goes back at least as far as Cowley's ode "Of Wit" (1656) and which received its most famous expression in Addison's Spectator papers and in Pope's Essay on Criticism. But the very existence of such a tradition testifies that Fielding's sense of the corruption of this key term of neoclassical aesthetics was not a mere personal crotchet but a feeling shared with some of the best critical intelligences of his age that "The word was sinking," as Stuart M. Tave says, "into common, trifling, and narrow usages -- mere quickness and sharpness in the making of similitudes, the odd metaphor, the lucky simile, the wild fetch, epigrammatic turns and points, quibble, conceit." In this case, at least, then, Fielding was not alone in seeking to rescue a once noble word from the ignominy of specialization and contamination by systematically exposing its false meanings, for he saw even more clearly perhaps than the others that the word "wit," as Tave adds, had also "become so degraded by its association with the unimportant and even the profane that it was more and more difficult to use it with grave connotation." Fielding, however, is engaged in a last ditch
effort to restore to "wit" its own original dignity and gravity of connotation. The difficulty, he declares, is that "we constantly mix the Idea of Levity with those of Wit and Humour, [and] . . . in like Manner, and with like Error we unite the Ideas of Gravity with Dulness." But actually, he argues, wit and humour in their true and original senses have been possessed by "the gravest of Men" and have been exerted "on the most solemn Subjects with very eminent Success." He cites the examples of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, St. Paul, and Dr. South, "whose Writings do in my Opinion contain more true Wit, than is to be found in the Works of the unjustly celebrated Petronius." But most of the remainder of the two essays is devoted to that "airy and brisk Kind of Dulness" which is passed off as wit and to the several varieties of activity which are "called Humour" but are really usurpers of the name -- "the dullest chitchat" of stage, the merely "risible," "a facetious Countenance, a salacious Leer, . . . somewhat of a Drollery in the Voice, . . . a merry (i.e. b__y) Catch, . . . practical Jests," and the sadistic kind of ridicule which is "called Roasting."\(^{25}\)

The negative definition, then, for Fielding, is merely a more explicit and systematic form of the same kind of purification of words which in his satiric and narrative works he achieves through the use of irony. For Fielding's irony also assumes the confusion within a single word of jarring contrary senses and also seeks to effect a separation of the true meaning from the false. This is why he so often makes the negative meaning of his ironic term explicit by translating it into "plain English." The "translation," like the negative defini-
tion, empties the word of its alien denotations and exposes it as a mere honorific husk, and the positive meaning is simply the denotation which the reader supplies (often, as we shall see, with Fielding's guidance) to account for the honorific connotations and fill the emptiness. And even when he does not provide a parenthetical gloss to initiate the process, he plainly expects the context (as in the case of "conversation" in Tom Jones) to supply the false or corrupt sense. Moreover, just as in his periodical essays it is naturally the key words of the subject which are singled out for definition, so in the satiric and narrative works it is always the words representative of central thematic values which are subjected to the severest ironic treatments. Often, indeed, as we have remarked before, they are the same words, and Fielding's ironic vocabulary is merely his serious vocabulary turned inside out. Thus "Humour" in the Covent-Garden Journal Glossary is ironically defined as "Scandalous Lies, Tumbling, and Dancing on the Rope," and thus the brutal squire in Joseph Andrews who amuses himself by setting his dogs on Parson Adams and later subjects him to a cruel "roasting" at his home "was generally said to be a great lover of humor."26

But before we examine the relationships of irony and theme in the novels, we would do well to consider Fielding's plays, particularly the comedies. For though his dramatic burlesques and satires are rich in satiric attacks on the corrupters of language it is in his more serious comedies of manners that we see him for the first time actually involved in the attempt to purify by irony the very words which he wants to carry the main burden of thematic import. Nearly all of the
comedies, in fact, can be read, in part at least, as dramatic essays in definition of abstract social and moral virtues, and their plots frequently turn on questions of words and their meanings. Again, as in the periodical essays, true and false meanings of the same words are brought into conflict, and negative or corrupt senses are exposed through the unmasking of hypocritical pretenders to the virtues in question or through the disabusing of characters honestly misled by corruptive specialization or nominalism.

The most obvious example, perhaps, is The Fathers, or The Good Natured Man, which, as the subtitle indicates, is an attempt to define in dramatic terms the central concept in Fielding's thought of good nature. But though Fielding is concerned, as always, with the concept that exists independently of the word used to express it, he also recognizes the practical necessity of repairing any split between concepts and the words which, according to Locke, "preserve essences" of abstract ideas "and give them their lasting duration." In his formal essay on the same term in The Champion, he defines good nature as "a Delight in the Happiness of Mankind, and a Concern at their Misery, with a Desire, as much as possible, to procure the former, and avert the latter; and this, with a constant Regard to Desert." But he also emphasizes that it "is not that Weakness, which, without Distinction, affects both the virtuous and the Base," nor is it "that Cowardice which prevents us from repelling or resenting an Injury." Furthermore, "it is impossible for a Fool, who hath no distinguishing Faculty, to be good-natured." 27 Clearly it is these false meanings of the term that Fielding believed were contaminating the name of good nature and therefore threatening to
discredit the concept itself. Indeed John Hughes (whose ambition, like Fielding's, was "in the Course of my Writings, to restore, as well I was able, the proper Ideas of Things") was already insisting in The Spectator No. 525 for Nov. 1, 1712, that "good-nature" had been "rendered Suspicious, and in danger of being transferred from its original Sense, to so distant an Idea as that of Folly."

In The Fathers Boncour is the good natured man in the true sense, the kindly father whose generous indulgence of his son and daughter is contrasted with the tyrannical severity of Old Valence toward his children and proved to be the sounder system. For Old Valence good nature is a weakness, and for his son, Young Valence, a sort of Blifil-figure who conceals his selfish will under the hypocritical pose of unquestioning obedience, it is a form of cowardice. But it is Boncour's brother Sir George who is the harshest critic of good nature, because, though a good man himself, he honestly confuses good nature with folly and suspects that it is only the honorific ring of the word itself which prevents his brother from recognizing this folly for what it is: "Good-nature! Damn the word; I hate it." But though Boncour's good nature is not represented as perfect (his over-indulgence of his wife, which is not corrected till the end of the play, is an instance of how the impulse of generosity, when the "distinguishing Faculty" is relaxed, may indeed degenerate into folly), the working out of the plot demonstrates that it is a genuine and practicable virtue, not to be confused with folly or weakness or cowardice, and in the end even Sir George is convinced that the word and the idea it represents are worthy of respect.
The special problem to which *The Fathers* addresses itself, to recall again Fielding's paraphrase of Locke's theory of judgment, is that of "separating carefully Ideas wherein can be found the least Difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by Affinity to take one Thing for another," or, in Pope's phrase, of distinguishing "vices from their bordering virtues." But the problem is a relatively simple one here because though the characters in the play represent different attitudes toward good nature, none of them apart from Boncour (and perhaps his son and daughter) claim to possess the virtue themselves. The sentimental plot is a single-minded testing of the concept of good nature as personified by one man. There is no complicating confusion of pretended or merely nominal good nature in others. But in Fielding's other comedies the situation is usually more complex. Not only do their Congrevian plots of gallantry and intrigue in fashionable society involve a wider range of abstract virtues (love, honor, good breeding, virtue, etc.) to be dramatically defined and separated from their bordering vices (lust, hypocritical regard for appearances, flattery, prudishness, etc.), but also a broader scope for the exhibition of such abuses of language as insincerity, hollow professions, and cynical nominalism.

Fielding's first play, for example, *Love in Several Masques*, is an examination of "love" in high society, but such related terms and concepts as "right," "merit," "constancy," "virtue," "modesty," "good breeding," and "honor" are also brought under review, and the key word "love" itself is submitted to a much more rigorous regime of dramatic definition and ironic purification than Fielding found necessary in the
case of good nature. Not only does the play reject the prudish notion of one character that love is an "indecent passion" and the cynical view of another that it is "an out-of-fashion Saxon word, which no polite person understands," but before the title of true love can be finally settled on the virtuous alliance of the hero and heroine, the "several masques" of love must be torn off such hypocritical claimants of the title as carnal desire, dalliance, and fortune hunting. The play is a defense not merely of the concept of virtuous and honorable love between the sexes but of the words which are essential to its preservation as a vital social and moral ideal.

The words to which Fielding devotes most attention in his comedies, however, and which he would seem to be most concerned to rescue from the bad company of degrading associations and restore to their rightful meanings, are "honor" and "virtue." His second play, The Temple Beau, is particularly concerned with the separation of true honor as a noble ideal of Christian morality from the false honor of masculine pride and feminine vanity. Veromil and Valentine, two friends, are both in love with Bellaria, though neither has informed the other of his lady's name. Veromil, for whom honor is equated with the Golden Rule of Christianity, thinks Valentine lacks honor because he is willing to try to steal the unnamed lady away from the man she loves. For Valentine, however, honor is as different from "the strange notions of that word" they had had "when we read the moralists at Oxford . . . as our dress. In short, it forbids us to receive injuries but not to do them."

"Fine honour, truly!" cries Veromil. "Just the reverse of Christianity."

Thus Valentine's "honor" is offended when he learns that it is
Veromil who is his rival, and he challenges him to a duel. Confronted with this challenge in the name of honor, Veromil protests that to accept would be to act against religion, but Valentine answers, "Preach not religion to me. -- Oh! it well becomes the mouth of hypocrisy to thunder Gospel tenets to the world, while there is no spark of honour in the soul. . . . He that has not honour wears but the mask of piety." But Veromil, stating what is clearly Fielding's own view of the matter, replies, "You speak the meaning of a libertine Age; the heart that throws off the face of religion, wears but the mask of honour." And if Valentine represents a corrupt specialization of the word (the kind of reductionism that Fielding hit in the Glossary by defining honor as "dueling"), other characters in the play stand for its contamination by hypocrisy and cynical nominalism. Lady Gravely, for example, outwardly prudish but secretly lascivious, agrees to keep a secret so long as it "is not contrary to virtue and honour," and her sister, the cynical coquette Lady Lucy Pedant, replies, "Nay, but I am afraid that you refine too much on those words." 31

Fielding, however, continued to refine on them throughout his career. Miss Lucy in Town explores the relationship of virtue and honor to social degree, concluding that the "noblest birth without these, is but splendid infamy; and a footman with these qualities, is a man of honour." 32 The Modern Husband distinguishes between virtue and honor on the one hand and mere reputation on the other, and The Universal Gallant demonstrates that an "honourable passion" is not a contradiction in terms. The latter play is particularly interesting because the hero Gaylove, like Tom Jones, is himself torn between conflicting senses
of the word, and his actions are in part motivated, like Jones's, by
the semantic confusion. A reformed rake returned to London after two
years retirement in the country, he is resolved to win Clarinda, the
lady who had earlier spurned him, by proving that his conduct is now
strictly "honorable." He therefore repudiates the cynical view of the
foppish Captain Sparkish that "in my sense of the word dishonourable,
. . . nothing dishonourable can pass between man and woman." But he
falls prey to a more insidious corruption of the term as used by his
rakish friend Mondish, who tells Gaylove that Mrs. Raffler is in love
with him and convinces him that it would be "dishonourable" for Gaylove
to refuse her, despite his "honourable engagement" to Clarinda. For
Mondish honor is simply the arbitrary rules of gallantry, for Captain
Sparkish it is a code of arms irrelevant to sexual morality, for Mrs.
Raffler it is appearance or reputation, and for Lady Raffler it is
prudishness. The irony which thus surrounds the word and makes it
suspect through most of the play is sharpened by the fact that the dia-
logue is peppered with such hollow oaths and empty forms as "upon my
honour," "do me the honour," and "I have not had the honour," which,
in context, are often heavy with innuendo, as for example when a jeal-
ous husband says of his wife's secret lover, "I think he does us the
honour of making this house his own," and the lover replies, "I have
indeed, sir, lately done myself that honour." Only for Clarinda is
honor an active and universal principle of moral conduct, but it is this
positive meaning of the word which the irony assumes as its standard
and which is affirmed at the end after Gaylove has painfully extricated
himself from the web of contradictory false meanings and is able at last
to realize with Clarinda the true honor of faithful and lawful love.

It would appear, then, that it was in his plays that Fielding first began to exploit the ironigenic potentialities of corrupt language as a means of isolating thematic concepts to be defined through dramatic action. The very words which must carry the heaviest thematic freight are systematically turned inside out, not in order to proclaim cynically, in the manner of Mandeville, that emptiness is their natural condition, nor to measure, in the manner of Swift, the impassable distance between the reality and the ideal, but to create a vacuum of meaning which cries out to be filled. Irony, which depends on our recognition of incongruity between the honorific word and its ignoble application, or between the virtuous profession and the vicious act, thus becomes a kind of negative test of truth. For only when the word is united with its "proper idea," only, that is, when a meaning is provided that fulfills the word's implicit promise and accounts for its dignity of connotation, will the ironic alarm fail to sound.

But the positive definition, the reunification of the word with its "proper idea," is effected primarily through the dramatic action itself, by the exhibition in practice of the idea the word properly stands for. Locke, like most other reformers of language before and since, had urged among his "Remedies of the Imperfections and Abuses of Words" the use of examples either in support or in lieu of certain kinds of definition. But according to the author of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, moral terms, as mixed modes or abstractions, could be rendered fully clear and distinct only by analytical definitions, for "they being combinations of several ideas that the mind of man has arbi-
trarily put together, without reference to any archetypes," the use of examples to represent them is impossible. Locke, naturally, was thinking in terms of the formal philosophical treatise whereas Fielding was writing imaginative literature dealing with the world of "common men and not philosophers." But also, as we have seen, Fielding did not in any case share Locke's Nominalist disbelief in the "real" existence of abstract ideas, and in fact he often treated moral abstractions as though they were simple ideas which could be communicated, as Locke phrased it, "by presenting to [the hearer's or reader's] senses that subject which might produce [the idea] in his mind, and make him actually have the idea that word stands for."³⁴

In Fielding's actual practice, of course, the reader's recognition of this proper idea and hence of ironic deviations from it depends in part on his sharing the author's sense of the traditional values of words to begin with. But as a critic and purifier of the language Fielding also seeks, through the objective representation of the idea, to invoke it direct in the reader's mind and thus to invite him to discover for himself that this, rather than any of the corrupt alternate senses provided in the ironic vocabulary, is the true meaning of the word and the only one which can support its dignified connotations. "Honor," for example, in Miss Lucy in Town, though never defined in formal terms, is shown to reside not in pride of station or in worldly fame but rather in the kind of moral superiority displayed by the footman Thomas in contrast to Lord Bawble -- just as true nobility in Amelia is dramatically defined as the moral superiority of Sgt. Atkinson to the "Noble Lord."
The "good-natured reader" Fielding habitually addresses in the novels is not one who necessarily agrees in advance that words like "honor" and "nobility" are primarily moral rather than social terms, but one whose inner experience of the dramatized ideas of honor and nobility will dispose him to recognize this crucial distinction once it has been pointed out to him. Fielding does not insist that such ideas are "innate in the mind." But he is closer to Shaftesbury than to Locke in his belief in an innate potential of moral sympathy to which one can appeal directly through examples when the words that traditionally represent the moral ideas in question are too corrupt to be depended upon.

His expectation would seem to be that this experiential exposure to the idea, in combination with the purification by irony of the word, will make possible a reunification of word and idea that will restore the word to the vocabulary of truth and rescue the idea from a contaminating confusion with its bordering vices. Tom Jones, for example, "loves" both Molly Seagrim and Sophia, and both he and the author, in the early chapters of the novel, apply the word indiscriminately to both relationships. But in Chapter V of Book V, when Jones discovers Square crouched behind the draped rug in Molly's loft and Fielding, by way of explanation, reports that Molly, though she indeed "loved" Jones, also "loved" Square and that Square "loved" her (not to mention that she had formerly been "loved" by a certain "country gallant" who had still earlier been the "lover" of her sister Betty), the word "love" emerges from the chapter so charged with irony that its cynical ironic sense threatens to insinuate itself into our understanding of Jones's "love" for Sophia as well. But the title of the next chapter, in which Jones
declares his feeling for Sophia in a scene as tender as the ones involving Molly are coarse, announces that by comparing this chapter with the former THE READER MAY POSSIBLY CORRECT SOME ABUSE WHICH HE HATH FORMERLY BEEN GUILTY OF IN THE APPLICATION OF THE WORD LOVE.

It is not, however, till the prefatory chapter of the next book, OF LOVE, that Fielding pauses long enough to offer an extended commentary on the distinction between the two kinds of love which has already been exemplified in the dramatic action: "What is commonly called love, namely the desire of satisfying a voracious appetite with a certain quantity of delicate white human flesh, is by no means that passion for which I here contend" (though genuine love between the sexes is not inconsistent with that "appetite"), true love being instead that "benevolent disposition," present in many, but not all human breasts, "which is gratified by contributing to the happiness of others," and "if we will not call such a disposition love we have no name for it." But on those readers who deny the existence of love or who continue to equate it with lust he refuses to waste more time. He is addressing only those who, because they have themselves the capacity to experience it, will respond to its "exemplification." For "to treat of the effects of love" to those who lack this capacity would be "as absurd as to discourse on colors to a man born blind, since possibly your idea of love may be as absurd as that which we are told such blind man [sic] once entertained of the color scarlet; that color seemed to him to be very much like the sound of a trumpet: and love probably may, in your opinion, very greatly resemble a dish of soup, or a sirloin of roast beef."³⁵
Like so many of Fielding's remarks on language, the example of the blind man comes from Book III of Locke's _Essay Concerning Human Understanding_, where it is used, however, to illustrate the proposition that _simple_ ideas, such as of color, cannot be defined or even communicated unless the hearer has himself experienced them as sensations. But Fielding goes beyond Locke and implies that a formal definition is equally futile in the case of a _complex_ idea like love if that idea does not rest on an experiential base, and it was perhaps for this reason that he had earlier insisted he was himself "greatly in love with Sophia" and that "many of our readers will probably be in love [with her] too before we part." We have seen that he was more conscious than Locke of the emotional content of words, and if he distrusted the philosopher's rationalistic method of definition it was not only because that method treated moral concepts as "nominal essences" but also because it seemed to neglect entirely their true essence of human feeling. This true essence, Fielding seems to have felt, could not be fully conveyed by formal definition but only, like the essence of a simple idea in Locke, through "exemplification."

Fielding's sense of the inadequacy of the purely rationalistic definition of a moral term is best seen, however, in connection not with "love" but with "honor," a word which in _Tom Jones_, as in the plays, is subjected to a merciless series of ironic tests even while it is being seriously urged as a central term of the novel's theme. Honor is one of the indispensable virtues which Jones must achieve before he can rightfully claim his inheritance as a true gentleman, and it therefore has to be carefully defined, chiefly in terms of his actions, and dis-
tAx, the many species of false honor which have corrupted and confused its name. The question of the meaning of the word is first raised early in the novel when Jones, caught poaching on Squire Western's estate, admits his own guilt but in order to protect Black George declares untruthfully that he was alone. He "scorned a lie as much as anyone," he explains later, when the truth (thanks to Blifil) comes out, but having promised the gameskeeper not to betray him, "he thought his honor engaged." Squire Allworthy punishes Jones for lying and then quickly forgives him because he sees that his motive was "a mistaken point of honor." But this sets Thwackum and Square off on a dispute over the meaning of that term. Locke's rationalistic theory of definition is recalled at the outset through Square's insistence that "it was impossible to discourse philosophically concerning words till their meaning was first established." Thwackum, rising to the challenge, thereupon defines honor as "that mode of Divine grace which is . . . dependent upon . . . religion," by which he means "the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England."

Square, not to be outdone, asserts that honor is "the true natural beauty of virtue" and so "independent of any religion whatever." Both however agree that "true honor cannot support an untruth" and thus that Jones could not have acted from an honorable motive.

Thwackum's definition, as his progressive narrowing of the term's application comically suggests, is an example of corruptive "specialization," and Square's prating about Nature is an example of corruption by overgeneralization, or, as Thwackum says, less charitably, in
another context, of a "jargon of words, which means nothing." But Fielding's more serious objection to such definitions can be glimpsed in Squire Allworthy's impatient interruption, "very coldly" spoken, to the effect that "they had both mistaken his meaning; for that he had said nothing of true honor," and in Fielding's earlier observation that the two disputants really agreed on only one point, "which was, in all their discourses on morality, never to mention the word goodness." Their definitions miss the essence of honor not only because of their bigotry and pedantry and hypocrisy but also because neither of them has ever felt in his own breast the intrinsic quality of goodness on which all moral ideas must rest. Even a "ruffian," as Shaftesbury explains in a passage which anticipates Fielding's example, "who out of a sense of Fidelity and Honour of any kind, refuses to discover his Associates, has certainly some Principle of Virtue, however he may misapply it." But this "Principle of Virtue," since it is of its nature irreducibly experiential, is precisely what their formal definitions of honor -- and, Fielding seems to imply, any formal definition -- fail to register. "There are a sort of persons, he says later, "who, as Prior excellently well remarks, direct their conduct by something Beyond the fix'd and settled rules Of vice and virtue in the schools Beyond the letter of the law." And this "something" -- call it "goodness" or "good nature" or a "Principle of Virtue" -- must be "presented to our Understanding," as Shaftesbury said, in the same way that "the common subjects of Sense,
Shapes, Motions, Colours, and Proportions, are presented to our Eye — through "Behavior and Action."41

Jones himself, later in the novel, tells his friend Nightingale that the "very best and truest honor . . . is goodness." But a synonym is not a definition, and the meaning of honor, in this context as in the whole moral system of *Tom Jones*, depends on the various exhibitions Fielding provides of honor in action. Nightingale seeks Jones's advice, as "a man of honor," regarding Miss Nancy. He loves and has promised to marry her, but now that it has become known she is pregnant by him he wonders if he can "think of such an alliance with honor." Jones assures him that "the very best and truest honor, which is goodness, requires it of you." The fear of what the world will say, he argues, of how his reputation may suffer, is "false honor." His generous impulses awakened, Nightingale eagerly acts on them, and neither the angry opposition of his father, who pronounces "sentence of beggary on him" for thwarting his hopes of a more economically advantageous match for his son, nor the cynical attempts of his uncle to dissuade him by appeals to snobbery and family pride, prevent him from marrying Nancy the very next morning.

But here as elsewhere the positive definition by action operates in collaboration with the negative purification by irony. When Nightingale tells Jones of his father's avaricious designs for him, Jones replies (with politeness, we may be sure, on his part, but with irony, certainly, on Fielding's), "I have not the honor to know your father." And when his uncle, after failing to convince Nightingale that "honor is a creature of the world's making" and so "not concerned in these engagements," invites his nephew to his lodgings with the intention of
getting him so drunk that he will not be able to keep his morning's appointment with Nancy, the uncle politely requests "the honor of your company home." 42

Jones himself, though his instinctive equation of honor with goodness is clearly an improvement over the reductionist definition of Thwackum or the inflationary one of Square, and though his rather rudimentary sense of honor is proof against the even narrower usage of the soldiers he meets in Books VII and IX who identify it with the code of dueling and so "contaminate the name of honor by assuming it," is not freed from the corruptive influences of false applications of the word until the end of the novel. Significantly, since honor as a social value is an aristocratic term, it is the high life scenes of the last books of the novel which submit the word to its most rigorous test. Jones's confusion over the "mistaken point of honor" in the Black George poaching incident was comparatively innocent, but there is no reason to believe that Fielding in any way condones his hero's involvement with Lady Bellaston or sees it as anything but a sordid and dishonorable alliance. Jones himself is concerned when he meets Sophia at Lady Bellaston's house that she will learn of "the ignominious circumstance of [his] having been kept." But like Gaylove in The Universal Gallant, Jones has become so blinded by the false code of gallantry that he finds himself faced with the dilemma of trying to behave honorably in dishonorable circumstances, and it is the tortuous complications and contradictions of this paradox which expose the confusion of values inherent in the corrupted word: "As his necessity obliged him to accept [Lady
Bellaston's money], so his honor, he concluded, forced him to pay the price."

Nor does Fielding himself, speaking in his own voice but confident that the ironigenic effect of corrupt usage will define his attitude, hesitate to take the word at the same value. He has divulged the information that Jones is receiving money from Lady Bellaston, he says, so that we will not suspect he has come by it in some criminal way: he has revealed the true source of his income "in order to clear . . . the honor of Mr. Jones." And when Jones later keeps an appointment with Lady Bellaston instead of going with Nightingale, as he would have preferred, to a new play, Fielding explains that "his honor got the better of his inclination."43

The appearance of Sophia in London intensifies Jones's dilemma by reminding him of his truly honorable obligation to her, but as with "love" earlier in the novel, Jones's sense of honor with regard to Sophia has to be distinguished, both for his sake and for the reader's, from the false honor of his relationship to Lady Bellaston. The issue is brought to its ironic head when Lady Bellaston comes to Jones's rooms and, berating him for his coldness, accuses him of having "betrayed my honor." Jones insists that "If there be honor in man," he has done nothing to merit her anger, but before he can go further Mrs. Honour (who is a kind of grotesque personification of the corrupt word and its ironic potential) arrives to deliver a message from Sophia and a coarse polemic of her own against Lady Bellaston, who is concealed within easy earshot. Protesting that he will not listen to slander against "a lady of such honor," Jones gets rid of Sophia's maid only to have to face renewed
charges from Lady Bellaston that he is responsible for her ruin: "my reputation, my honor -- gone for ever!" She demands, in recompense for her "sacrifice," that he show her Sophia's letter, but Jones's reply reintroduces the word at its true value and so equates his conflict between true and false honor with his choice between Lady Bellaston and Sophia: "And can your ladyship . . . ask of me what I must part with my honor before I grant?"44

But though the following chapters show him guiding Nightingale to a proper understanding of the word and its inseparability from goodness, Jones is still not able to extricate himself from his own web of moral and semantic confusion. Nightingale's plain-spoken account of Lady Bellaston's history, which "contained many particulars highly to her dishonor" hitherto unknown to Jones, convinces him at last that it is he rather than she who has been debauched, and that his only real obligation is to Sophia, his "honorable mistress." He is uneasy, however, about the "handsome pretence" he seizes to break off the affair. Lady Bellaston, as he had expected, indignantly refuses his proposal of marriage, thus delivering him from any further obligation to her. But "there was in this scheme too much of fallacy to satisfy one who utterly detested every species of falsehood or dishonesty; nor would he indeed have submitted to put it in practice, had he not been involved in a distressful situation, where he was obliged to be guilty of some dishonor, either to one lady or the other."45 And significantly, it is this same letter of proposal, with its insincere appeals to Lady Bellaston's "honor, . . . as dear to me as my own," that later falls into Sophia's hands and convinces her that Jones had betrayed her not out of
mere weakness, which she could have forgiven, but out of conscious dupli-
city.

The difficulty here is not, as in the Black George incident, a matter of an overly generous impulse of loyalty but of a false alle-
giance to a corrupt code of gallantry, and the consequence is not just a "mistaken point of honor" but a positively dishonorable act which continues, justly in Fielding's view, to haunt Jones until he has suc-
cceeded in demonstrating to even such a discriminating sensibility as Sophia's that he has since conducted himself by a more infallible stand-
ard. What that standard is, is suggested when he receives a letter of proposal himself from the wealthy and attractive widow Arabella Hunt. In view of his desperate financial condition and the apparent hopelessness of his situation regarding Sophia, he is strongly tempted to accept, persuading himself for a moment that this course would be best not only for himself but also for Sophia. "He had almost determined to be false to her from a high point of honor." But the falseness of this "refine-
ment," however compatible it might be with the rationalistic definitions of "honor" of a Thwackum or a Square or with the "fix'd and settled
rules / Of vice and virtue in the schools," is brought home to Jones by its incompatibility with "the voice of nature, which cried in his heart that such friendship [to Sophia] was treason to love." Only when Jones has learned to obey the voice of nature, the innate moral sense, and to act upon it under the guidance of the "distinguishing Faculty" of pru-
dence that Fielding insists is essential to good nature, does he achieve true honor.

In part, Fielding's insistence on the test of action is the conse-
quence of a Miltonic distrust of cloistered virtues. Good nature, he
declares in *Tom Jones*, "is an active principle, and doth not content it­
self with knowledge or belief only." And later, taking exception to the
idea that "virtue is the certain road to happiness . . . in this world,"
he distinguishes between passive and active virtue in a manner which
makes it clear that in his opinion only the latter genuinely deserves
the name. If the moralists who have preached this "comfortable doctrine
. . . mean the exercise of those cardinal virtues which like good house­
wives stay at home, and mind only the business of their own family," he
concedes that happiness may well be the result -- though "I could al­
most wish . . . to call [this] rather by the name of wisdom than by that
of virtue." But "if by virtue is meant (as I almost think it ought) a
certain relative quality, which is always busying itself without-doors, and
seems as much interested in pursuing the good of others as its own,
I cannot so easily agree."47

In *Joseph Andrews* it is precisely this comfortable doctrine of "Vir­
tue Rewarded" (as Richardson's subtitle to *Pamela* has it) that provides
Fielding with his point of departure for a thoroughgoing examination of
the word "virtue." Not only is Joseph not rewarded for the same kind of
virtue which had made Pamela's fortune: he positively suffers as a re­
sult of it; and the pointed artificiality of the novel's happy ending,
far from being a flaw, drives home the moral that there is no necessary
cause and effect connection between virtue and worldly happiness or
prosperity.

But Fielding is also critical of Richardson's use of the word "vir­
tue" in the reductionist and fundamentally passive sense of chastity.
Fielding does not deny that chastity is a virtue, and his substitution of male for female chastity is not the cynical joke that it has so often been taken for. It rather raises the question of whether passive virtue of the kind that Joseph exhibits in the early chapters of the novel, before he is turned "without-doors" and forced to take an active and manly role in the world, is really the essential stuff, the _virtus_ in the original sense which we may be sure was never far from Fielding's mind, out of which heroes are made; and if Joseph is a clown rather than a hero in these early chapters this is the reason. There is nothing inherently comic in his resistance of Lady Booby's attempts to seduce him. What is ridiculous are his naively pompous protestations, conspicuously derived from Pamela, of his _virtue_. When Lady Booby coyly asks him whether his passions might be inflamed if she were to kiss him, he stuffily replies, "Madam, if they were I hope I should be able to control them without suffering them to get the better of my virtue."

"Your _virtue_!" cries Lady Booby, after a moment of stunned silence.

"Did ever mortal hear of a man's _virtue_? Did even the greatest or the gravest men pretend to any of this kind? . . . And can a boy, a stripling, have the confidence to talk of his _virtue_?" "Madam," says Joseph, "that boy is the brother of Pamela, and would be ashamed that the chastity of his family, which is preserved in her, should be stained in him."

Such rhetoric from a Pamela, given the traditionally passive role of heroines, might pass without challenge. But spoken by a man whom the author has taken pains to designate as "our hero," it is exposed as a corruptive specialization of language. To equate _virtue_ with
chastity, as Richardson had in effect done by resting Pamela's claims to heroic stature and moral excellence almost exclusively on her resistance to seduction, was to reduce a great moral principle to a single facet of its true meaning. What Fielding does in the opening section of Joseph Andrews is to put this specialized usage to the test by simply applying it to a man. The result, as with his other adoptions of corrupt words, is irony. The Richardsonian denotation of chastity is absurdly out of proportion to the grandiose connotations the word "virtue" is given in Joseph's heroic speeches, and the stage is set for the positive definition by action which will restore the balance.

Joseph himself, of course, is not aware that his adventures are in part a quest for the meaning of true virtue. But almost from the moment he is turned out of Lady Booby's house he finds himself in a world in which passive virtue appears either irrelevant or hypocritical and in which he is dependent for both his physical survival and his self-respect on active virtue. His very first adventure on the road leaves him naked and bleeding in a ditch, the victim of robbery and violence, and in vital need of active aid. But the respectable persons in the coach who discover him are not disposed to give it. The old gentleman fears for their own safety, the lawyer is afraid they may be suspected of some part in the crime, the coachman thinks only of Joseph's inability to pay his fare, and the lady refuses to ride in the same coach with a naked man -- a manifestation of passive "virtue" that she shares with Joseph himself, who is "so perfectly modest" that he refuses to enter unless he is "furnished with sufficient covering to prevent giving the least offence to decency." But when the others fail to meet even this minimal
condition of active virtue, "the postilion (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a henroost) . . . voluntarily stript off a great-coat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by the passengers), 'That he would rather ride in his shirt all his life than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition.'"^49 Judged by the conventional standards of passive virtue, the postilion, who, as Fielding emphasizes in his parenthetical asides, is capable of bad as well as good acts and who has none of the sense of verbal propriety and respect for appearances of the other passengers, would seem the least likely candidate for an exemplar of true virtue. But he alone acts, and from this point on in the novel it is action, as opposed to passive belief or mere verbal profession, which defines the positive meaning of virtue.

Even chastity is relegated to a secondary level of importance on this active scale of values, for though Joseph never for a moment wavers, Fielding gives us in Mrs. Tow-wouse's maid Betty a character who, despite her conspicuous lack of chastity, nevertheless emerges, like the postilion, as more virtuous in the larger sense of the word than those who look down on her. "My be-betters are wo-worse than me," she sobs when Mrs. Tow-wouse discovers her in bed with her husband, and though it is certainly Mrs. Tow-wouse who is the injured party here (Is this, she asks, "the reward of my virtue?") Betty's paradoxical statement of her relationship to her "betters" forces us to see this word, as elsewhere in Fielding, in its moral as well as its social sense and strikes us as basically just. For of all the people at the inn where Joseph lies sick and penniless, she alone is generous in action, first admitting him to
a room despite his inability to pay, and then, despite Mrs. Tow-wouse's grumbling pronouncement that "common charity [is] a f__t! . . . [and] teaches us to provide for ourselves, and our families," bringing him "a shirt from the hostler, who was one of her sweethearts." Fielding does not condone Betty's promiscuity, but his mention of the source of the shirt in the same sentence which records her generosity sets it in its proper perspective. It is not chastity which is the quintessential virtue but charity.

And of course it is Parson Adams, whose first words, almost, in the novel are a reminder to the surgeon attending Joseph that "it was the duty of men of all professions to apply their skill gratis for the relief of the poor and necessitous," and whose first act, upon discovering Joseph at the inn, is to postpone his journey to London until Joseph's health is restored and to offer him the nine shillings and three halfpenny in his pocket, who is the personification of charity. He is also, as the more traditional formulation has it, the incarnation of good nature. But his pastoral office allows Fielding to develop the positive definition of virtue in specifically Christian terms. Good nature, as Martin Battestin has observed, "is finally subsumed within a larger more exalted concept. It is the natural predisposition to charity, which is the end of morality -- and to Fielding a distinctively Christian virtue." The theological basis of Fielding's emphasis on charity as the archetypal Christian virtue -- derived, as Battestin has shown, from the latitudinarian divines -- is established in Adams' debate with Mr. Barnabas on Methodism, in which he denounces Whitefield's "detestable doc-
trine of faith against good works." For Adams the only test of the true Christian is virtue in action, and virtue in action is charity. When Parson Trulliber, refusing to lend his destitute fellow clergyman the fourteen shillings he has asked for, self righteously tells Adams, "I know what charity is, better than to give to vagabonds," Adams answers, "I am sorry . . . that you do know what charity is, since you practice it no better; I must tell you, if you trust to your knowledge for your justification you will find yourself deceived, though you should add faith to it, without good works. . . . Whoever . . . is void of charity, I make no scruple of pronouncing that he is no Christian."

But Parson Trulliber (who "was reputed a man of great charity; for though he never gave a farthing, he had always that word in his mouth") is not the only character in the novel whose use of "charity" in a corrupt sense works to purify the word by irony even while Fielding is defining it positively through the benevolent actions of such characters as Adams himself, the postilion, Betty, and the pedlar, who gives Adams the six shillings and six pence he has in his pocket just as Adams is lamenting that "it was possible, in a country professing Christianity, for a wretch to starve in the midst of his fellow-creatures who abounded." The lawyer's laughing declaration, in the face of Joseph's distress, that "charity began at home," Mrs. Tow-wouse's coarse definition of charity as "a f__t," the lavish professions of charitable intentions, never fulfilled, by the gentleman at the inn, the "honest elderly man" in Mr. Wilson's story who urges Wilson to challenge a rival and offers, "out of pure charity," to arrange the duel ("A very charitable person, truly!" cries Adams) -- these and other appear-
ances of the word in compromising contexts sustain the ironic counter-
point of word and action which is central to Fielding's method of dra-
matic definition.

But it is Adams' dispute with the miserly Peter Pounce near the
end of the novel that brings the positive definition of charity into its
sharpest confrontation with the negative corruptions of the word. "You
and I," Peter tells Adams, "have different notions of charity. I own,
as it is generally used, I do not like the word, nor do I think it be-
comes one of us gentlemen; it is a mean parson-like quality; though I
would not infer many parsons have it neither." "Sir," says Adams, "my
definition of charity is, a generous disposition to relieve the dis-
tressed." "There is something in that definition," answers Peter, "which
I like well enough; it is, as you say, a disposition, and does not so
much consist in the act as in the disposition to do it." But as
Martin Battestin points out, the original definition, as it appears in
a sermon by Isaac Barrow, adds that "we should really express that dis-
position in our practice;" and in a similar dispute with Captain
Blifil in Tom Jones, Squire Allworthy admits that he is not learned
enough in Biblical Greek to answer the captain's arguments "as to the
ture sense of the word which is translated charity; but that he had
always thought it was interpreted to consist in action."56

The central moral term which Fielding sets out to purify and def-
ine in Tom Jones, however, is not "charity" or "virtue," nor is it
"good nature." It is "prudence." But since the process of ironic puri-
faction and positive definition of "prudence" in Tom Jones is at once
the most interesting and the most misunderstood of Fielding's exploita-
tions of the ironigenic corruption of language, it had best be treated,
perhaps, in a separate chapter.
NOTES

1 pp. 7, 73.

2 Swift's Rhetorical Art, pp. 13-14.


4 Ian Watt, "The Ironic Tradition in Augustan Prose from Swift to
Johnson," Restoration and Augustan Prose: Papers Delivered by James R.
Sutherland and Ian Watt at the Third Clark Library Seminar, 14 July,

5 Characteristicks, I, 226.

6 Prose Works, I, 76-7.

7 "The Background of Fielding's Laughter," ELH, XXVI (1959), 244.

8 Book I, Ch. 7. Henley ed., I, 46. For Pope's examples, see
above, pp. 34-5.


Henley ed., XVI, 176.

12 Of Irony, Especially in Drama ("University of Toronto Studies:

13 Alan Dugald McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction

14 The Covent-Garden Journal No. 11, Feb. 8, 1752. Jensen ed., I,
202-3.
15Prose Works, XI, 228.

16See Jonathan Wild, Book I, Ch. 12. Henley ed., II, 39; A Journey from this World to the Next, Book I, Ch. 7. Henley ed., II, 244; and the Introduction to A Voyage to Lisbon. Henley ed., XVI, 189.


19See above, pp. 211-3.


21The True Patriot No. 8, Dec. 24, 1745. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Ch. xi, Sec. 2. Fielding misquotes slightly. Locke wrote, "... in separating carefully one from another Ideas ..., " etc.

22No. 69, Nov. 4, 1752. Jensen ed., II, 125-6, 127.

23The Champion, March 27, 1740. II, 39.


27March 27, 1740. II, 40.

28Act III, Sc. 3. Henley ed., XII, 199.

29One of Pope's own examples concerns the conversion of "Intemperance into Good Nature." See above, p. 35.


32 Henley ed., XII, 63.


34 An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Ch. xi, Sec. 4.


36 Book III, Ch. iv, Sec. 11.

37 Book III, Ch. 10. Henley ed., III, 141.


39 Characteristicks, II, 39.

40 Book XV, Ch. 10. Henley ed., V, 187. The quotation is from Prior's "Paulo Purganti and His Wife."

41 Characteristicks, II, 29.


46 Book XV, Ch. 11. Henley ed., V, 193.

47 Book XV, Ch. 1. Henley ed., V, 141.


51 Cf. Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (Book XII, lines 584-5):
"... charity, the soul/Of all" the virtues.


54 Book I, Ch. 17; Book II, Ch. 14. Henley ed., I, 96, 192.

55 Book II, Ch. 15; Book III, Ch. 3. Henley ed., I, 195, 232-3.


58 Book II, Ch. 5. Henley ed., III, 83.
In the Dedication to Tom Jones, Fielding declares that his purpose is not merely "to recommend goodness and innocence" but also to "inculcate that virtue and innocence can scarce ever be injured but by indiscretion; and that it is this alone which often betrays them into the snares that deceit and villainy spread for them." But the operative term of this moral theme in the text of the novel proper -- and the word which, accordingly, is subjected to the most grueling regimen of ironic decontamination as a corruption of language -- is "prudence." But also, as always in Fielding, the negative purification by irony is accompanied by a positive definition, by precept and example, of the "proper and original" moral meaning of the word.

In Joseph Andrews Fielding is concerned with the definition of virtue as the expression, in the active form of charity, of instinctive good nature, and the assumption is that this active virtue, though it may not be rewarded in the Richardsonian material sense, is sufficient unto itself and its own reward. Even the good nature of a Parson Adams, constantly teetering on the brink of folly, is somehow proof
against the manifold evils of the world. But the moral system of Tom Jones is more complex:

It is not enough that your designs, nay, that your actions, are intrinsically good; you must take care they shall appear so. If your inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair outside also. This must be constantly looked to, or malice and envy will take care to blacken it so, that the sagacity and goodness of an Allworthy will not be able to see through it, and to discover the beauties within. Let this, my young readers, be your constant maxim, that no man can be good enough to enable him to neglect the rules of prudence; nor will Virtue herself look beautiful unless she be bedecked with the outward ornaments of decency and decorum. And this precept, my worthy disciples, if you read with due attention, you will, I hope, find sufficiently enforced by examples in the following pages.

The "comfortable doctrine" that "virtue is the certain road to happiness" (to which Fielding has but one objection, "namely, that it is not true") continues to be an object of the author's scorn in Tom Jones, as does the concept of virtue as a passive quality which, "like good housewives, stay at home, and mind only the business of their own family"; and true virtue continues to be defined, both by precept and example, as "a certain relative quality which is always busying itself without doors, and seems as interested in pursuing the good of others as its own." But in Tom Jones Fielding gives us a hero whose good nature is not sufficient unto itself. Tom Jones, it is true, is neither so perfectly innocent as Parson Adams nor so perfectly self-disciplined as Joseph Andrews. But Fielding's view of his imperfections would seem to be expressed by Mrs. Miller when she pleads his cause to Allworthy near the end of the novel: "I do not pretend to say that the young man is without faults; but they are all the faults of wildness and youth; faults which he may, nay, which I am certain he will, relin-
quish, and, if he should not, they are vastly overbalanced by one of the most humane, tender, honest hearts that ever man was blessed with." And Allworthy himself, when Blifil's plot against Jones is exposed, tells him, "You now see, Tom, to what dangers imprudence alone may subject virtue. . . . Prudence is indeed the duty which we owe to ourselves; and if we will be so much our own enemies as to neglect it, we are not to wonder if the world is deficient in discharging their duty to us; for when a man lays the foundation of his own ruin, others will, I am afraid, be too apt to build upon it."

It is Jones's neglect of this principle, in his failure to make his outward actions mirror his inner goodness, which accounts for his progressive loss of the sympathy and respect of his true friends from the time he tells the lie to protect Black George (and gives Blifil his first opportunity to discredit him with Allworthy) to the lowest point of his fortunes when he is jailed as a murderer, believes himself guilty of incest, and receives a letter from Sophia renouncing him for his letter of proposal to Lady Bellaston -- all of which calamities, as Fielding himself remarks, are "owing to his imprudence." For had Jones not been imprudent enough to be in Mrs. Waters' bed on the eventful night in Upton when Fitzpatrick, searching for his wife, mistakenly burst into the room and attacked him in the dark, he would not have had to fight that hot-tempered gentleman again in London and inflict on him, though in self-defense, an apparently mortal wound; nor would he have to bear the awful guilt of incest upon the revelation that the same Mrs. Waters is supposed to be his mother. And had he been more open in his means of breaking off the affair with Lady Bellaston, he would not have im-
prudently put into her hands the apparently damning evidence which convinces Sophia that he is not only weak but a double-dealing hypocrite as well.

Allworthy, after his reconciliation with Jones, distinguishes between "those faults which candor may construe into imprudence, and those which can be deduced from villainy only," which seems to imply that all of Jones's faults, including even the shameful alliance with Lady Bel- laston, are basically the result of his imprudence. For true prudence will always counsel virtue, not out of crass self-interest and mere attention to appearances but because prudence is the guardian of innocence. This does not mean, however, that Fielding excuses Jones's faults as inconsequential or implies that they are not vices. Like Jones himself, who tells Allworthy that "I have not been punished more than I have deserved," he sees that his hero has committed "follies and vices more than enough to repent and to be ashamed of." All he is asking us to recognize is that these vices proceed, in Jones's case, not from a wicked nature but from a defective wisdom. But imprudence is dangerous because others, not privy to the minds and motives of the actor, must judge him only by his actions, which, in Jones's case, seem to argue precisely the kind of wicked nature which he does not have. When the wicked Lord Fellamar, upon seeing Sophia for the first time after having made a violent (and unsuccessful) attempt on her virtue, delivers himself of "many declarations of the most pure and ardent passion," Sophia says, "My lord, you must be yourself conscious whether your former behavior to me hath been consistent with the professions you now make." But even after the letter of proposal and other matters have been explained, Sophia, judg-
ing Jones by the same standard, has difficulty believing his renewed declarations of "the purest passion" also: "Indeed, you have acted strangely. Can I believe the passion you have professed to me to be sincere?" And when he argues that he has repented and reformed, she replies, "Sincere repentance, Mr. Jones, ... will obtain the pardon of the sinner, but it is from one who is a perfect judge of that sincerity. A human mind may be imposed on; nor is there any infallible method to prevent it."^4

This is the human condition of judgment which makes prudence necessary for the good man. It is not enough to have basically good motives; prudence must see to it that one's actions appear good as well (or at least that they do not appear positively evil) or else suffer the situation of Jones in regard to Sophia: "guilty as I am, my guilt unfortunately appears to her in ten times blacker than the real colors."^5 The "real colors" here represent the extent of Jones's vice; the appearance to Sophia represents the extent of his imprudence.

So far as worldly rewards and punishments are concerned, then, it is not so much virtue or vice which determine them as prudence or imprudence. Sophia's original estrangement from Jones is not so much the consequence of his sexual adventure with Mrs. Waters at the inn in Upton (which again she is willing to forgive) as of his loose tongue and his imprudent trust in Partridge, which result in Sophia's name being dragged publicly through the whole sordid affair and which causes Jones to appear in the character of a rake vulgarly boasting of his success with the ladies. "So delicate was he with regard to Sophia," Fielding says ironically, "that he never willingly mentioned her name in the presence of many
people" (my italics). Jones's motives here are pure enough. He had toasted her among the soldiers "as it were, from the overflowings of his heart." But his prudence is not pure: "the reader may remember how difficultly he was prevailed upon to mention her surname." Moreover, he had foolishly told Partridge about Sophia. Fielding himself chides Jones for his good natured belief in Partridge's professions of devotion and discretion, calling it "a blamable want of caution and diffidence in the veracity of others," and indeed it is Partridge's boasting to Mrs. Honour about his master's relationship with the high born Miss Western and of his present success with Mrs. Waters which results in Mrs. Honour telling Sophia -- reminding her in passing of the earlier episode with Molly Seagrim -- that Jones is under the same roof and in bed with another woman. But "in reality," the author informs us, "Sophia was much more offended at the freedoms which she thought (and not without good reason) he had taken with her name and character than at any freedoms, in which, under his present circumstances, he had indulged himself with the person of another woman." Some readers, Fielding says, may consider the calamity of Sophia's flight from Upton and her renunciation of Jones "a just punishment for his wickedness with regard to women," and others "may comfort themselves in their vices by flattering their own hearts that the characters of men are rather owing to accident than to virtue." But the moral which Fielding himself discovers "would alike contradict both these conclusions, and would show that these incidents contribute only to confirm the great, useful, and uncommon doctrine which it is the purpose of this whole work to inculcate"6 -- namely, the necessity of prudence.
Jones's reconciliation with Sophia is not effected by his renewed professions of love and virtue, then, but by the new evidence supplied by his London friends -- Nightingale, Nancy, and Mrs. Miller -- of the benevolent actions which reveal his true goodness of heart. He is still "guilty of a great indiscretion," as he tells Sophia himself, in the matter of the letter to Lady Bellaston, but with this exception (which is complicated, as we have seen, by his dilemma of trying to extricate himself honorably from a dishonorable situation) Jones's actions demonstrate that he has at last acquired the prudence of outward behavior that is the necessary complement of his intrinsic good nature.

He manages to tell even the trusted Mrs. Miller "his whole history, without once mentioning the name of Sophia," and when Mrs. Fitzpatrick advises him to make sham addresses to Mrs. Western in order to procure an easy access to Sophia, he indignantly refuses to involve Sophia in "an imposition of this kind." But even more importantly, he resists the ardent advances of Mrs. Fitzpatrick herself, and the experience "confirmed his resolution of returning to her no more; for, faulty as he hath hitherto appeared in this history, his whole thoughts were now so confined to his Sophia that I believe no woman upon earth could have now drawn him into an act of inconstancy." Jones, of course, had "vowed eternal constancy" to Sophia before, after the episode with Mrs. Waters at Upton, as he had earlier yet before the episode with Molly Seagrim, and in both instances he meant what he said -- at the time. But now for the first time his actions themselves support his professions, and when Mrs. Waters, now the mistress of Fitzpatrick, visits him in prison (bringing the welcome news that Fitzpatrick is not dead but only slightly
wounded), Jones not only tells her his adventures from the time he last saw her in Upton, "concealing only the name of Sophia," but also resists her renewed attempts at seduction. Mrs. Waters' distaste for his present attitude is testimony to the change which has taken place in Jones, "whom she had, at her first interview, conceived a very different opinion of from what she now entertained of him."\(^8\)

But it is not Jones, of course, who is the exemplar of prudence in the novel. He acquires prudence in the end, but through the greater part of the story he is rather the representative of imprudence. Nor can Squire Allworthy be considered the ideal prudent man. He is never so wildly imprudent as Jones, but he too has a "blamable want of caution and diffidence in the veracity of others" and his good nature is too easily imposed on by the pious professions of such as Thwackum and Square and Blifil. "Thus is the prudence of the best of heads often defeated by the tenderness of the best of hearts," Fielding remarks when Allworthy allows Blifil to persuade him, against his better judgment, to let him continue his suit to Sophia. There are only two ways, he explains, by which men become possessed of the "caution and diffidence" of prudence: "The one is from long experience, and the other is from nature; which last . . . is infinitely the better of the two, not only as we are masters of it much earlier in life, but as it is much more infallible and conclusive. . . . As Jones had not this gift from nature, he was too young to have gained it from experience; for at the diffident wisdom which is to be acquired this way, we seldom arrive till very late in life."\(^9\) Allworthy is presumably an example of one who, like Jones, lacks
the natural gift of prudence and, having to learn it from experience, remains fallible.

But there is one character in the novel who, while not absolutely infallible in the matter of prudence, comes as close to the mark as Fielding probably believes possible in an imperfect world. It is Sophia rather than Allworthy who is the model of the kind of prudence he is recommending in *Tom Jones*, and thus she is a more important character in the thematic scheme of the novel than has generally been recognized. She is thoroughly good and innocent, but unlike Allworthy and Jones she sees through Blifil from the very beginning. When, jealous of her preference for Jones, he maliciously releases her pet bird and then defends the act by pleading the cruelty of the bird's confinement and its natural right to liberty (an argument Fielding neatly refutes by having the bird carried off by a hawk the moment it is freed), no one except Sophia, who imputes the "action of Mr. Blifil to his anger," sees the true inner motive behind the outward act. Though Jones and Squire Western agree in condemning Blifil, neither is concerned with his motive so much as with the act itself: it caused pain to Sophia; therefore it must be wrong. Thwackum and Square, of course, defend the motive as well as the act, Thwackum by arguing that Blifil's behavior proceeded from "a Christian motive" and Square that it was according to "the law of nature," and even Allworthy, though he is "sorry for what his nephew had done," believes that "he acted rather from a generous than an unworthy motive. . . . (For as to that malicious purpose which Sophia suspected, it never once entered into the head of Mr. Allworthy.)." Sophia alone, apparently, has the gift of prudence from nature: "She honored Tom Jones,
and scorned Master Blifil, almost as soon as she knew the meaning of
those two words," and when Blifil begins to call on her as a suitor,
with the blessing of both Squire Allworthy and her father, Sophia again
is the only one who recognizes his true motive -- the prospect of inher­
itng Squire Western's fortune. "For simplicity, when set on its
guard," Fielding explains, "is often a match for cunning." 10

Earlier he had defined "simplicity," as applied to Sophia, as mean­
ing not that she was "silly" (which is how the word is "generally under­
stood"), but that she lacked "that useful art which females convert to
so many good purposes in life, and which, as it rather arises from the
heart than from the head, is often the property of the silliest women."
Sophia is not without "art," but it is the good art of genuine prudence
and arises not from her heart, which is pure and innocent, but from her
head, which must, in the interests of virtue, sometimes borrow the cun­
ning that is usually associated with the vicious. Thus when Sophia,
determined to flee to London rather than be forced into marriage with
the man whom she alone recognizes as the villain he is, persuade Mrs.
Honour to help her prepare the escape by getting herself turned out of
the house by Mrs. Western, Fielding observes that Sophia "indeed suc­
cceeded admirably well in her deceit, considering it was the first she
had ever practiced. And, to say the truth, I have often concluded that
the honest part of mankind would be much too hard for the knavish, if
they could bring themselves to incur the guilt, or thought it worth
their while to take the trouble." 11

Fielding's use of the words "deceit" and "guilt" is not ironic in
the usual sense, but it would seem to reflect his sense of the inade­
quacy of absolute moral categories in the world of "common men and not philosophers" and his appreciation of the complexity of a morality "Beyond the fix'd and settled rules/ Of vice and virtue in the schools,/ Beyond the letter of the law." Only the cloistered, stay-at-home, passive virtue which never busies itself "without-doors" can afford to disdain the necessity for beating the knavish at their own game. Once Sophia resolves to leave home and make her own way in the world her virtue becomes the "certain relative quality" which Fielding plainly regards as true virtue, and this active virtue requires an active prudence for its protection. When he tells us later that Sophia is guilty "of what may be called a kind of dishonesty" in suppressing all reference to Jones from the account she gives to her cousin Harriet Fitzpatrick of her flight, he is really commending her for the very kind of prudence which Jones, with his naive trust in the good faith of others, so conspicuously lacks. In the next book, in fact, when Lawyer Dowling (Blifil's secret confederate) asks Jones to tell his story, Fielding explicitly points up the contrast between his hero and heroine by observing that "Jones, who in the compliance of his disposition (though not in his prudence) a little resembled his lovely Sophia, was easily prevailed on to satisfy Mr. Dowling's curiosity."12

But the crucial distinction between "deceit" in defense of virtue, which is prudence, and deceit in defense of vice, which is hypocrisy -- the separation, in short, of the virtue from its bordering vice -- is effected in Fielding's account of the arrival in London of Sophia and Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Sophia's cousin had also told Sophia her story, so similar to Sophia's in outward circumstances, of her flight from a
tyrannical husband, and in fact it is because of "the apparent open­ness and explicit sincerity of the other lady" that he pretends to be embar­rassed by Sophia's "dishonest" omission of Jones from her own narrative. But when Mrs. Fitzpatrick is met at the inn by a "friend," a nobleman who was not mentioned in her story but is obviously her lover ("as the lady did not think it material enough to relate to her friend," says Fielding coyly, "we would not at that time impart it to the reader [or] interrupt her narrative by giving a hint of what seemed to her of too little importance to be mentioned") he clearly intends the surface parallels between the situations of Sophia and Mrs. Fitzpatrick to accentuate the vital difference between prudence and hypocrisy in relation to their inner motives. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, continuing to play the role of virtue in Sophia's presence, "would by no means consent to accept a bed in the mansion of the peer," and Fielding, in one of the richest ironic passages of the novel, comments:

"The most formal appearance of virtue, when it is only an appearance, may, perhaps, in very abstract considerations, seem to be rather less commendable than virtue itself without this formality; but it will, however, be always more commended; and this, I believe, will be granted by all, that it is necessary, unless in some very particular cases, for every woman to support either the one or the other."

Fielding is clearly rejecting here the notion that prudence is mere attention to appearance. Mrs. Fitzpatrick is one of the prime examples of this kind of false prudence -- which is really the bordering vice of hypocrisy -- and is contrasted with Sophia in this respect through­out, just as Jones's imprudence is played against Sophia's prudence in the alternating chapters which detail their roughly parallel adventures on the road and in London. But the most difficult distinction Fielding
must make in defining the nature of true prudence is to show that Sophia's gift of penetrating false appearances is not the kind of cynical distrust of human nature which causes Mrs. Western, for example, to scoff at Squire Allworthy's professions of contempt for money or Lady Bellaston to "admire the extreme quickness of the young lady in inventing such an excuse" when Sophia returns from the theatre just at the time Lady Bellaston is receiving Jones and explains, quite truthfully, that she has come home early because of a disturbance at the play-house.

Fielding's other exemplary characters -- Parson Adams, Joseph Andrews (in the beginning at least), Squire Allworthy, even Amelia and Dr. Harrison -- are victimized by hypocrites because their own goodness makes them in one degree or another blind to the wickedness of others. Their innocence, in fact, is in part at least defined by their lack of suspicion. So in making Sophia the model of prudence, Fielding takes great pains to assure us that her shrewdness is a matter of a natural sagacity of mind which in no way compromises her basic innocence and goodness of heart. When she begins to entertain doubts that Mrs. Fitzpatrick is all she professes to be, he asks us not to "fix the odious character of suspicion on Sophia ... till we have first suggested a word or two ... touching suspicion in general." There are, he says, "two degrees" of suspicion. The first is "from the heart" and "seems to denote some previous inward impulse" which "often forms its own objects; sees what is not, and always more than really exists." It "observes not only upon the actions, but upon the words and looks of men; and, as it proceeds from the heart of the observer, so it drives into the heart of the observed." But because this kind of suspicion often
projects its own guilt on others, it causes "many sad mischiefs and most grievous heart-aches to innocence and virtue" and is therefore "a very pernicious evil in itself." But there is "a second degree of this quality" which "seems to arise from the head. This is, indeed, no other than the faculty of seeing what is before your eyes, and of drawing conclusions from what you see." It judges men, in short, by their actions; and if it is therefore not infallible, since even actions are sometimes misleading, the fault, as in the case of Sophia's mistaken judgment of Jones, is usually not with the prudence of the beholder but with the imprudence of the actor. This kind of suspicion is "altogether as bitter an enemy to guilt as the former is to innocence," and "to confess the truth, of this degree of suspicion I believe Sophia was guilty. From this degree of suspicion she had, in fact, conceived an opinion that her cousin was really not better than she should be."\footnote{15}

Fielding's confidence in Sophia's purity of soul, then, allows him to excuse her a measure of deceit, and, in one instance at least, an outright lie, in the prudent interests of arming her virtue against the more practiced and cynical cunning of Mrs. Western and Lady Bellaston. We have already seen how she deceives her aunt, and with Lady Bellaston she is equally on her guard. When she encounters Jones in that Lady's house, she prudently pretends not to know him, and when Lady Bellaston (who, thanks to Mrs. Honour's indiscretion, knows all about their relationship), enjoying her discomfiture, suggests that it is he, Sophia, "affecting a laugh," sticks to her story, even when Lady Bellaston says, "I . . . almost question whether you have dealt ingenuously with me."

There is no doubt that Fielding sees Sophia's deception as entirely jus-
tified, but she herself, he tells us, "was not perfectly easy under this first practice of deceit [actually it is her second at least]: upon which . . . she reflected with the highest uneasiness and conscious shame," and in fact it is by means of her uneasiness and shame that he convinces us that her basic innocence remains intact, "for the frame of her mind was too delicate to bear the thought of having been guilty of a falsehood, however qualified by circumstances."

Again, when she takes advantage of the ambiguity in her aunt's prohibition against "conversing" with anyone and writes to Jones because this was "not expressly forbidden," she feels the guilt that is attendant on any deceit, however minor and however rationalized, and "cannot but consider this as a breach of her generous confidence in my honor." Jones, it is true, on the parallel occasion of his false letter of proposal to Lady Bellaston, also feels not "perfectly easy in his mind."

But the difference, of course, is that Sophia's dilemma, unlike Jones's, is not of her own making, and further, that while her deception is in itself prudent, his, though equally pure in motive, merely compounds his original imprudence by supplying Lady Bellaston with the means of making him appear even more guilty in Sophia's eyes than he actually is.

Always the realist, Fielding is willing to grant that not even Sophia is perfect, for "we do not pretend to introduce any infallible characters into this history." But in the real world he is trying to describe, the good in any case must learn from the bad some of their techniques if they are to survive in that world. The point is, however, that Sophia, in so doing, never really compromises her purity of soul, and she is deceitful, unlike Blifil, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Western, Lady
Bellaston, *et al.*, only in self defense. This is the true prudence which Fielding the realist advocates, and the condition of the good person who lacks Sophia's ability to adapt the weapons of deceit to the defense of virtue is suggested in Betty, the girl who replaces Mrs. Honour as Sophia's maid when the latter defects to the service of Lady Bellaston: "This poor creature might, indeed, be called simplicity itself. She was one of that order of mortals who are apt to believe everything which is said to them; to whom nature hath neither indulged the offensive nor defensive weapons of deceit, and who are consequently liable to be imposed upon by anyone who will only be at the expense of a little falsehood for that purpose." And dramatically this proposition is proven by the ease with which Mrs. Western gets from the well-intentioned Betty all of Sophia's secrets.

The benefits which come to Jones at the end of the novel in the shape of the discovery of his true parentage and thus of his eligibility to marry Sophia are not the consequences of his virtue but rather, as in *Joseph Andrews*, of chance. But his worthiness to bear the title of a gentleman, to be the heir of Allworthy, and to be the husband of Sophia has been proven by his actions. "Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice," Fielding assures us in the second to the last paragraph, "has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man, and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia. He hath also, by reflection on his past follies, acquired a discretion and prudence very uncommon in one of his lively parts." The ideal goodness Fielding is trying to define in *Tom Jones* is the union, symbolized, perhaps, by the marriage of Jones and Sophia, of the warm liveliness of good nature with
the cooler "distinguishing faculty" of prudence, or, to adapt Fielding's own definition of true greatness, "the union of a good heart with a good head." The marriage is intended, presumably, to show not only that these two qualities are not incompatible but that they are in fact complementary. Jones, we are assured, for all his acquisition of prudence, remains a lively character, and though we may have some difficulty imagining him in this new character we do not, even here, have to take it on faith that such a "very uncommon" phenomenon is possible. For in Sophia we are given a dramatic example of a prudence in action that is as lively as the imprudence of Jones and provides a positive alternative to his reckless and undiscriminating good nature at nearly every turn.

Yet, in spite of Fielding's careful dramatic definition of this key moral term, many readers of Tom Jones have found its moral theme offensively shallow. Dr. Johnson was almost certainly thinking of Tom Jones -- and particularly, perhaps, of Fielding's statement in the Dedication that he has taken the inculcation of prudence for his moral because "it is much easier to make good men wise, than to make bad men good" -- when he wrote in The Rambler No. 4 for March 31, 1750, that "that observation which is called knowledge of the world," which too many modern writers of fiction seem to have taken for their province, "will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good." As a result, he explained, these writers have not yet learned "to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by TREACHERY for INNOCENCE, without infusing any wish for that superiority with which the betrayer flatters his vanity; to give the power of counteracting fraud, without the temptation to practice it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in
the art of necessary defence, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue." The Reverend Edmund Cartwright introduced his sonnet on "Prudence" early in the next century with the remark that Fielding "and other loose moralists" consider prudence "but as a sneaking virtue at the best," and the philosopher T. H. Green was apparently reflecting a similar view when he wrote in 1862 that Fielding's moral, "if moral it can be called, is simply the importance of prudence."21

More recent critics who have tried to come to terms with the prudence theme of Tom Jones have usually been more sympathetic, but there is reason to believe that their comprehension of Fielding's use of the word is still incomplete. A. E. Dyson maintains that "the ridicule in Tom Jones is used in support of a particular moral theory which prefers 'good nature' to prudential calculation"22 -- a reading which ignores Fielding's insistence on the union of the good heart and the good head and which, looking only at the portrait of Tom Jones, whose goodness Fielding clearly regards as only half-formed, ignores the contrastive study of Sophia as the model of prudential good nature. Ethel Thombrebury, guilty of the same oversimplification, declares that "prudential morality, a narrow, unhealthy performing of what is conventional just because it is prudent, is made to seem thoroughly absurd and thoroughly bad"23 -- which can be accepted only if one rejects Fielding's positive definition of prudence and treats his negative definition, the examples of false prudence, as representing the true meaning of the word; and this, surely, is the opposite of his intention as a reformer of corrupt language.

Even Eleanor N. Hutchens, whose recent article "'Prudence' in Tom
Jones" is by far the most intelligent and thoroughgoing study of this neglected aspect of the novel that has yet appeared, does not seem fully to understand Fielding's purpose. She recognizes, refreshingly, that "the necessity for prudence as a concomitant of goodness is one of the major themes of Tom Jones," and she places her finger squarely on the source of traditional critical confusion when she observes, "Yet . . . the words 'prudence,' 'prudent,' and 'prudential' are used unfavorably three times as often as they are used favorably. Nearly every unadmirable character in the novel is described as prudent or is shown advocating prudence." Almost from the beginning of the novel, Miss Hutchens shows, sometimes in passages which follow hard upon its serious use by sympathetic characters or by the author himself, the word appears in a bad or ridiculous light. In the second chapter we are informed that Miss Bridget Allworthy, despite her conspicuous lack of temptation, is "yet so discreet . . . in her conduct, that her prudence was as much on the guard as if she had had all the snares to apprehend which were ever laid for her whole sex. Indeed, I have often observed, though it may seem unaccountable to the reader, that this guard of prudence, like the trained bands, is always readiest to go on duty where there is the least danger." In the next chapter the word is applied to Mrs. Deborah Wilkins, Allworthy's aging housekeeper, in the same sense of old-maid prudishness, and in Chapter V it appears, in the same connection, with the added sense of selfishly motivated deception.

It would be pointlessly repetitious to review all of Miss Hutchens' examples, and no reader of Tom Jones will have much difficulty recalling others or discovering them for himself by opening the novel almost at
random. If the "prudence" of Miss Bridget and Mrs. Deborah is prudishness, Partridge's "prudence" is cowardice and timidity. Mrs. Western is "prudent" in the sense of ruthlessly ambitious, and is particularly interested in arranging for Sophia a "prudent" (i.e., materially and socially advantageous) marriage. But as Miss Hutchens points out, it is "the arch-villain of Tom Jones, young Blifil, [who] is the most 'prudent' character in the novel." Repeatedly Fielding describes Blifil's cunning, hypocritical concern for appearances as "prudent," and just as Mrs. Fitzpatrick's hypocrisy is played against Sophia's genuine prudence, so is Blifil's calculating attention to the appearance of virtue at the expense of the substance played against Jones's careless disregard for the appearance of his actions even when they are intrinsically good. "It is one of the larger ironies of the novel," as Miss Hutchens says, "that part of the task of the hero is to acquire one of the chief traits of the villain." But Miss Hutchens is mistaken when she implies that this trait is prudence. For the point is that though Jones, to be sure, lacks prudence, Blifil lacks it as well. For surely the lesson of Mrs. Fitzpatrick is that cunning without virtue is false prudence. What Jones must acquire is Blifil's attention to appearances while retaining, like Sophia, his own basic commitment to virtue, this combination being, in Fielding's view, true prudence.

For all her excellent analysis of Fielding's ironic variations on the prudence theme in Tom Jones, in fact, Miss Hutchens' explanation of why he uses the word ironically is ultimately unsatisfactory. "We know that for him its normal connotations are favorable; we know that he wishes to convince us of its desirability. Therefore his being able to
treat it ironically shows a daring, and a confident control of his mate-
rial, which inclines us to trust in his ironical view without mental
reservation. . . . We respect [him] for having the confidence to toy
with a word that represents ideas valuable to him." But her conclusions
cast doubt on the extent to which she has herself been willing to trust
in Fielding's ironical view without reservation: "While teaching the
desirability of prudence, Fielding wishes to say at the same time that
it is not all-sufficient and should not be allowed to get in the way of
more important qualities. Its desirability he teaches directly, by
straightforward exposition and illustration; its dangers he illuminates
obliquely through connotative irony." But in fact it is not the dangers
of prudence that Fielding's irony illuminates. It is the dangers of a
hypocritical cunning that in popular usage is called prudence. His iro-
ny, here as elsewhere, is an attempt to reclaim an important moral term
from the corruptions of language.

In a footnote at the end of her article, Miss Hutchens speculates
that "a study of the general eighteenth-century idea of prudence would
probably show a somewhat ambivalent attitude to have prevailed -- an
attitude tersely reflected by Fielding in his ironic use of the word,"
and after citing a few examples suggestive of such ambivalence, observes
that "a few years after Fielding's death, Charles Churchill noted a com-
plete change in the use of the word:

"Prudence, of old a sacred term, implied
Virtue with godlike wisdom for her guide,
But now in general use is known to mean
The stalking-horse of vice, and folly's screen.
The sense perverted we retain the name;
Hypocrisy and Prudence are the same."26
But Miss Hutchens misses the point of Fielding's irony and does him an injustice which is itself ironic when she wonders if Tom Jones "influenced" this perversion of the word. For of course, as with "virtue" and "honor" and "love" and "patriotism," it is the perversion of the word which brings it into his ironic vocabulary. He does not, as Miss Hutchens thinks, take a word with "favorable" connotations and make it ironic by putting it in an "unfavorable" context. He rather takes a word which, by virtue of the abusage of "custom," has already a kind of built-in ironic potential, and playing this corrupt sense against the "proper and original" meaning of the word that is developed in the definition by action, seeks to restore the word to its rightful dignity of meaning.

Miss Hutchens mentions Baltasar Gracian's seventeenth-century treatise Oraculo Manual y Arte de Prudencia (translated into English in 1694) as an example of the "ambivalence" of the age in its attitude toward prudence. But its maxims of worldly expediency, professedly moral in purpose but actually cynical in effect ("To have a care not to out-do one's Master," "To find out a Man's Foible, or Weak-side," "To be able to cast the Blame and Misfortunes upon Others" and yet "Not to pass for a Crafty Man" because the reputation for craftiness "begets Distrust"), might better serve as examples of the kind of ironigenic corruption of language that Fielding is combating. For "prudence" (prudentia) was in its original sense, like "charity," one of the cardinal virtues, with an honorable geneology that can be traced back as far as Plato and that comes through Aristotle and the Stoics into Cicero's De Officiis and thence into St. Ambrose's De Officiis Ministrorum and the mainstream of
Christian ethics, where it meant, traditionally, the practical wisdom (as opposed to speculative or theological wisdom) of moral conduct. To the "divines and moral writers" whom Fielding regularly takes as his standard of proper usage, "prudence," as a historian of philosophy sums up the traditional meaning, was "involved in moral excellence; for it is required to determine in any particular case that due limitation of feeling and action in which perfect virtue consists, and it cannot be conceived as existing apart from moral excellence -- we do not count a man practically wise for such mere intellectual cleverness as a vicious man may exhibit. The man we count wise must be not merely skillful in the selection of means to any ends; his ends must also be rightly chosen." And until the end of the seventeenth century this appears to have been the sense in which the English word was dominantly used.

Charles Herle, in 1665, treats "worldly Wisdom" and "Moral Prudence" as entirely distinct categories; Bunyan, in Pilgrim's Progress (1678) makes Prudence one of the damsels at the Palace Beautiful (along with her sisters, Piety and Charity) and does not suggest that she has anything in common with Mr. Worldly Wiseman; for Milton, according to Arnold Stein, "wisdom and prudence are not separable"; and Sir John Denham declared near the close of the century,

He's truly Prudent, who can separate
Honest from Vile, and still adhere to that.

But Fielding was not alone in sensing that the word was falling into disrepute. In Humane Prudence (1680), William de Bretain comes so close to stating what was to be the theme of Tom Jones -- and in language that is echoed by Fielding -- that one is tempted to consider it as a possible source of the novel: "Prudence is an Armory, wherein are as well
Defensive and Offensive Weapons . . . Policy and Religion, as they do well together, so they do as ill asunder; the one being too cunning to be Good, the other too simple to be Safe; therefore some few Scruples of the Wisdom of the Serpent, mixt with the Innocency of the Dove, will be an excellent Ingredient in all your Actions." But he warned too that "Knavery and Cunning pass sometimes for Prudence, and true Wisdom for Silliness and Simplicity." And Thomas Manningham, in a sermon preached in 1693, declared that "tho' Prudence in the common acceptation of the World passes now for any Cunning Contrivance, for any dextrous Management of an Affair, whatever means are us'd; yet the ancient Moralists never allow'd a wicked Man to be call'd Prudent."31

These, of course, are the very distinctions which Fielding, in his contrastive studies of Blifil and Jones, Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Sophia, insists on in Tom Jones. But the extent to which the separation of the virtue of prudence from a contaminating confusion with its bordering vices was a preoccupation of the age has not been appreciated. "Since we are fallen into an Age full of Artifice; wherein Words, which were invented to express our Thoughts, seem now to be applied only to the concealing them with a good Grace," wrote Thomas Fuller in Introductio ad Prudentiam (1726), "it must be confessed, that Innocence had need of a Mask. . . . Honesty ought to have Wisdom (tho' not ill Craft) for its Guard."32 Nathaniel Lardner, in Counsels of Prudence for the Use of Young People (1735) -- taking for his text, like de Bretain before him, the Biblical injunction (Matthew x.16) "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" -- argues that "Good men therefore are obliged to be upon their
guard, and make use of some methods of defense and security," but re-
minds his readers that "Prudence . . . supposes the maintaining of inno-
cence and integrity" and that "we are not out of a pretense of discre-
tion to desert the cause of truth."33

Swift, elaborating on the same idea in A Letter on Mr. McCulla's
Project about Halfpence (1729), both echoes de Bretain and provides a
model himself for Fielding's assertion in the Dedication of Tom Jones
that "it is much easier to make good men wise, than to make bad men
good," when he observes that "those who are honest and best-intentioned
may be the instruments of as much mischief . . . , for want of cunning,
as the greatest knaves; and more, because of the charitable opinion which
they are apt to have of others. Therefore, how to join the prudence of
the serpent with the innocency of the dove . . . is the most difficult
point. It is not so hard to find an honest man, as to make this honest
man active, and vigilant, and skilful."34 Pope, in the same Peri Bathous
passage which advocates "converting Vices into their bordering Virtues,"
suggests as one example of this rhetorical art that "Cowardice may be
metamorphos'd into Prudence" — a corruption of the word that Fielding
registers in his portrait of the "prudent" Partridge -- and in The
Dunciad, where the four Cardinal Virtues in their perverted sense appear
as guardians of the throne of Dulness, Prudence has become the cynical
expediency "whose glass presents th' approaching jayl."35 Dr. Johnson,
who defined "prudence" in the Dictionary as "Wisdom applied to practice"
but seems to have believed that the effect of Tom Jones would be "to
make men cunning [rather] than good," nevertheless recognizes, in The
Vanity of Human Wishes, published the same year as Tom Jones (1749), the
same distinction which Fielding makes between prudence and cunning and the same possibility of confusion with its bordering vices which informs Fielding's irony. When Virtue is missing, Johnson says, its "guardians yield, by force superior plied;/ By Interest, Prudence; and by Flattery, Pride." 

But if we want to isolate the most likely immediate source of Fielding's own conviction that the word in his time was becoming corrupt, we need look no further, probably, than the work which also provided, in a more conspicuous way, the corrupt sense of "virtue" to which he addressed himself in Joseph Andrews. For next to "virtue" itself, the quality which Richardson's Pamela most often claims for herself is "prudence." Writing to her mother and father in the opening letters of the book, she proudly recounts Squire B's opinion that she "had a good share of prudence," and, a little later, Mrs. Jervis' declaration that "she was very well pleased to see my prudence and modesty, and that I kept all the fellows at a distance." To which Pamela adds, by way of commentary on her prudence, "I am sure I am not proud, and carry it civilly to everybody; but yet, methinks, I cannot bear to be looked upon by these men-servants, for they seem as if they would look one through." And when Squire B asks Mrs. Jervis if Pamela is never molested by these same male servants, Mrs. Jervis replies (as Pamela reports it), "No, indeed, sir, . . . she keeps herself so much to herself, and yet behaves so prudently, that they all esteem her, and shew her as great a respect as if she was a gentlewoman born" (my italics). 

Richardson, we may be sure, was as sincerely moral, according to
his own lights, in his conception of Pamela's "prudence" as he doubtlessly was in his conception of her "virtue." But the recurrent appearance of the word in such compromising contexts -- so similar to the ironic contexts in which Fielding uses it in Tom Jones -- is not likely to have escaped Fielding's contemptuous notice when he read the novel. Richardson's use of the word betrays his own, if not his heroine's, association of "prudence" with social rank and its material rewards. "Prudence," like "virtue," is clearly for Richardson primarily a social value, a means to a social end, and if Joseph Andrews is Fielding's attempt to rescue "virtue" as a moral term from its degradation in Richardson's popular and influential novel, Tom Jones may be regarded as a similar attempt to reclaim the "proper and original" moral sense of "prudence."38
NOTES

1 Henley ed., III, 131-2.

2 Book XVII, Ch. 1; Book XVIII, Ch. 10. Henley ed., V, 251, 346-7.


5 Book XVIII, Ch. 10. Henley ed., V, 349.

6 Book VIII, Ch. 7; Book XII, Ch. 8. Henley ed., IV, 89, 336-7.


8 Book X, Ch. 7; Book XIV, Ch. 5; Book XVI, Ch. 9; Book XVII, Ch. 9. Henley ed., IV, 227; V, 114, 239, 242, 291.

9 Book VIII, Ch. 7; Book XVI, Ch. 6. Henley ed., IV, 89; V, 229.

10 Book IV, Chs. 3, 4, 5; Book VII, Ch. 6. Henley ed., III, 150, 153-4, 157, 352.


12 Book XI, Ch. 8; Book XII, Ch. 10; Book XV, Ch. 10. Henley ed., IV, 283, 344; V, 187.

13 Book XI, Chs. 8, 10. Henley ed., IV, 283, 288-9, 295-6. Cf. The Champion for Nov. 22, 1739 (I, 23): "I would . . . by no Means recomm­end to Mankind to cultivate Deceit, or endeavour to appear what they are not. . . . I would only convince my Readers That it is not enough to have Virtue, without we also take Care to preserve, by a cer­tain Decency and Dignity of Behaviour, the outward Appearance of it

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also." Elsewhere, however, Fielding seems to disallow to true virtue even thus much of "ostentation." "There is nothing so oppugnant to True Virtue, and true Understanding," he wrote in The True Patriot No. 12 for Jan. 21, 1746, "as Ostentation. The innate Dignity which always attends these, will not stoop to mean and laborious Acts to inform others of what they conceive must be sufficiently apparent to them. Cunning, on the contrary, is eternally teaching the Counterfeits of . . . a thousand little painful Tricks, to represent Falsehood as Truth, and to gain a Belief and Admiration by Imposition."

14 Book XIII, Ch. 11. Henley ed., V, 86.
17 Book XV, Ch. 9; Book XVI, Ch. 5. Henley ed., V, 185, 219.
18 Book III, Ch. 5; Book XVII, Ch. 8. Henley ed., III, 125; V, 283.
20 Henley ed., III, 12.
21 Both cited by Blanchard, pp. 293, 446.
26 The Churchill poem is "Night: An Epistle to Robert Lloyd" (1762).
There is no evidence, however, that Fielding's efforts in behalf of "prudence" succeeded in practical terms in arresting the degeneracy of the word into the sense of worldly policy that has been its dominant meaning ever since. Only two years, in fact, after the publication of *Tom Jones*, the moralist John Milner, in *Instructions for Youth, Prudential, Moral, and Divine* (1751), was opposing worldly "prudence" to "Moral Wisdom." "The sense perverted," as Churchill put it in 1762, "we retain the name," and when Sheridan has Rowley denounce the scandalmongers in *The School for Scandal* (1777) as "a set of malicious, prating, prudent gossips" it is without any of the ironic reservation that qualifies similar passages in Fielding. Jane Austen, it is true -- that last of the great Augustans -- can still insist on the "original" meaning of the word. "You shall not endeavour to persuade yourself or me," declares Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), "that selfishness is prudence"; and later she asks rhetorically, "What is the difference in matrimonial affairs between the mercenary and the prudent motive?" But for practical purposes the battle for the restoration of "prudence" to the serious vocabulary of ethics had already been lost, probably, before Fielding joined it in *Tom Jones*. 
Fielding's use of dramatic technique in the novels is not, then, as has sometimes been suggested, merely a kind of habitual carry-over from his career as a playwright, any more than irony is his "natural speech." Both are conscious and deliberate attempts to approximate in his fiction the condition of truth in a hypocritical and nominalistic world where it is "the actions of men," as opposed to "their own words" or to "what others say" of them, that are "the justest interpreters of their thoughts and the truest standard by which we may judge them." Even in his formal definitions, to be sure, Fielding insists on the test of action: Patriotism is not just the love of one's country, but "the Love of one's Country carried into Action." Virtue is "not the bare knowing the right way, but the constant and steady walking in it." But dramatic "exemplification" allows the writer to treat moral ideas, which, as precepts, have been rendered all but meaningless by the corruption of language, as Shaftesburian "subjects of Sense ... presented to an Eye." For as Fielding explains in the Dedication of *Tom Jones*, "an example is a kind of picture, in which virtue becomes, as it were, an object of sight." And in a review in *The Covent-Garden Journal* he finds Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*
inferior to Cervantes' original because the story of the former "is conveyed, as it were, through our Ears, and partakes of the Coldness of History or Narration," whereas Don Quixote "hath all the force of a Representation; it is in a Manner subjected to the Eyes." 5

Yet one of the principal objections which has been brought against Fielding's own novels, from his time to the present, has been that they depend too much on "precept" and "cold" narration. There is too much which is not "subjected to the Eyes" -- too many stylized set speeches and stilted interpolated tales, too much direct moral and aesthetic commentary and obvious manipulation of plot and style. These stylistic inconsistencies and authorial intrusions destroy, according to Lord Monboddo, "the probability of the narrative." 6 Ian Watt, complaining almost two hundred years later of Fielding's inability "to convey larger moral significance through character and action alone," arrives at nearly the same conclusion: the effect, he says, is "to diminish the authenticity of the narrative." 7 Another recent critic, Irma Z. Sherwood, concludes that the result of Fielding's shifting style and of his failure "to fuse commentary with action and character . . . [is] to focus attention on the mechanism of the work and on the author's attitude toward his material, rather than on the material itself." 8 But an interesting corollary to this traditional view of Fielding's "failure" as a narrative artist is the general concession by those who have held it that this very failure is somehow productive of his finest artistic effects. "His remarks," as Leslie Stephen put it, "are often so admirable that we prefer the interpolations to the main currents of narrative." 9 Even Ian Watt, though he continues stubbornly to regard
the authorial intrusions as a sin against "formal realism," allows that "our residual impression of dignity and generosity comes mainly from the passages where Fielding is speaking in his own person."¹⁰

But who is to say that effects so arrived at are less legitimate or otherwise of a lower order of achievement than the more or less pure realistic illusionism of Defoe and Richardson, or that "the author's attitude toward his material" cannot be a proper part of "the material itself"? Alan D. McKillop, noting how in Richardson's _Pamela_ Squire B intercepts Pamela's letters and later gains access to her journal, and how the information he gleans often influences his own subsequent behavior, observes that "thus not only the earlier action but the record of the earlier action and the analysis and reception of that record condition the story. The writing of the novel is part of the action of the novel."¹¹ This is an interesting and useful insight, but it is inaccurately expressed. For surely in _Pamela_ it is the writing of the _journal_ which is part of the action, not the writing of the novel, which is never overtly acknowledged by Richardson at all. It is rather Fielding -- in his prefatory chapters and digressions, his self-conscious shifts of style, his mocking chapter headings, his frank manipulations of plot -- who truly makes the writing of the novel a part of its action.

If we therefore find that the author, struggling with his materials, is the most dramatic "presence" in the novel, the sharpest objective image, this is not a flaw but a triumph of Fielding's art, a victory over the forces of linguistic corruption which have made precept and narration and history "cold" and suspect verbal forms. The
corrupt medium of truth is purified by verbal irony; the corrupt agent of truth is purified by the irony of dramatized authorship. And in both instances the effect is the illusion of objectivity. The ironic vocabulary and the burlesque diction, always in one way or another at odds with the objective facts the reader is allowed to perceive beyond the words, stand for the falsifying surface of language which the reader must break through if he is to discover the reality of character and event underneath. The pointed rephrasing of ironic passages into direct statement (Captain Blifil "was one of those wise men who regard beauty in the other sex as a very worthless and superficial qualification; or, to speak more truly, who rather choose to possess every convenience of life with an ugly woman, than a handsome one without any of these conveniences"), the renderings of polite euphemisms into specific terms ("Sophia, finding all her persuasions had no effect, began now to add irresistible charms to her voice. . . . In a word, she promised she would reward him to his utmost expectations"), the translations into "plain English" of heroic similes or other passages of mock-sublime rhetoric ("Twelve times did the iron register of time beat on the sonorous bell-metal, summoning the ghosts to rise and walk their nightly round -- In plainer language, it was twelve o'clock") -- all work to bring the process of verbal purification and the author's struggle with a corrupt medium into the forefront of the reader's awareness and to equate plainness of language with bedrock truth. Burlesque diction, Fielding argues in the Preface to Joseph Andrews, does not "make" the characters and sentiments of the comic epic poem in prose any more than clothes, except "in vulgar
opinion," make the man. On the contrary, to understand the mock-heroic and other ironic passages we must in effect separate style from content, and this creates the illusion that we are independent of the verbal medium, that we have seen through it to the objective truth underneath. But it also conditions us to accept the surrounding language of straightforward narration, in which style and content appear harmonious, as above suspicion. The ironic vocabulary and the burlesque diction are verbal sacrifices offered up to the reader's (and Fielding's) distrust of language so that his "ordinary style" (as he himself calls it after one of the mock-heroic interludes in *Joseph Andrews*) may have by contrast all the force of plain-spoken truth.

The interpolated tales serve a similar function, though here it is not merely the "literary" language that is mocking itself but also the whole conventionalized art of narration. William B. Coley compares Fielding's method to that of Gide, for whom "the i'ereal work of art must contain within itself a paradigm or parody of itself. Properly devised, such a parody will appear to resolve the rivalry between the real world and the representation art makes of it in favor of the artistic representation. The effect is achieved by heightening the superlative and minute artifice of the parody, so that what surrounds it, the bulk of the work, seems 'real' by comparison." The tales are examples of "cold" narration, conveyed "through our ears," but the act of narration itself, the telling of the tale, is "subjected to the eyes."

When the lady in the coach in *Joseph Andrews*, after a lively exchange of dialogue between Parson Adams and Mrs. Slipslop which con-
contrasts sharply with the sudden stiffening of style in the tale that follows, launches into her ponderous account of "the unfortunate Leonora, if one can justly call a woman unfortunate whom we must own at the same time guilty and the author of her own calamity," Fielding does not let the world of Leonora displace, even temporarily, the world of Parson Adams and his companions. Not only does he interrupt the tale himself with a chapter in his own most robust narrative style detailing the comic adventures of the company at the inn, but each of the passengers also interrupts the lady at various intervals in a manner which reminds us, even while we are attending to it, that the world of Leonora is at a considerable remove from the more immediate world in which her tale is being told. The tale itself, though not without a certain genteel irony in its own right, is one of romantic pathos; but the reactions of the listeners are broadly comic. Mrs. Grave-airs, the lady who had earlier been scandalized at Joseph's nakedness, is priggishly censorious. "I never knew of these forward sluts to come to good," she says of Leonora's quite innocent fondness for Horatio. Mrs. Slipslop is a fountain of malapropistic cynicism. "More fool he," she says of Horatio's timidity in pressing his suit; "it is a sign he knew very little of our sect." Even the loud groans of sympathy with which Adams punctuates each new revelation of Leonora's folly are at comic variance with the elegant pathos of the tale; and his requests for details of dress and other irrelevant particulars, and his pedantic corrections of the lady's account of legal proceedings ("It is not very material," she says, hastening back to her story) and of her pronunciation of classical names, undercut its
The interruptions, in fact, are all of them comic variations on the theme of vanity which is also the moral of the cautionary tale, but the counterpoint of comedy and gravity enlarges that theme and frees it from identification with the artificial narrative form in which it is clothed.

Adams' interruptions of Mr. Wilson's story, which provides still another variation on the vanity theme, are generally more in harmony, perhaps, with the tone of Wilson's narrative ("the gentleman fetched a deep sigh, which Mr. Adams echoed very loudly"), but even here the informal language of the interruptions contrasts with the formal style of the tale and has the effect of making Adams' remarks more immediate and "real" than the narrative he is commenting on. We do not really listen to the tale so much as we watch Adams listen to it. And Wilson's homiletic observations on vanity ("Vanity is the worst of passions, and more apt to contaminate the mind than any other: for . . . the vain man seeks pre-eminence") are both extended and qualified by Adams' comic reaction:

Adams now began to fumble in his pockets, and soon cried out. "O la! I have it not about me." Upon this, the gentleman asking him what it was searching for, he said he searched after a sermon, which he thought his masterpiece, against vanity. "Pie upon it, fie upon it!" cries he; "why do I ever leave that sermon out of my pocket? I wish it was within five miles; I would willingly fetch it, to read it to you . . . . I am confident you would admire it; indeed I have never been a greater enemy to any passion than that silly one of vanity." The gentleman smiled, and proceeded.17

We also smile; and in the basic innocence of the kind of vain seeking for pre-eminence that even a Parson Adams can be guilty of we discover the comic corrective to Wilson's moral severity.
Similarly, the Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones*, though his story occupies the better part of six chapters, is not suffered to tell his tale in peace. Partridge's comic interruptions, along with Jones's attempts to silence Partridge (At one point Partridge interrupts the Man of the Hill to tell a story of his own, which is interrupted, in turn, by Jones) disrupt the pessimistic mood of the tale and undermine its misanthropic implications. Like the History of Leonora and Wilson's story, the Man of the Hill's tale is thematically relevant to the novel in which it occurs. His adventures demonstrate the ill effects of imprudence. But our awareness of Jones and Partridge as listeners enables us to be more than listeners ourselves. While the story is being conveyed through our ears, the circumstances of its telling are subjected to our eyes, and this gives us an added perspective on the total situation that creates an illusion of objectivity. Our consciousness that the story is being told by a fallible human being and that other points of view are possible, as suggested by the tonal and stylistic variations of the interruptions, encourages us to separate the "objective" elements of the story (those consistent with the more immediate world of Jones and Partridge) from the subjective (those at odds with that world). The moral that the hermit draws from his tale is that human nature is universally corrupt, but the moral the reader discovers is that one of the consequences of imprudence may be a mind so embittered by experience that it sees corruption even where it is not.

The most complex and extended use Fielding makes of this kind of juxtaposition of contrary points of view, however, is in *Amelia*, but
here it is not the conflict of comedy and gravity which gives us the illusion of independence from the medium and agent of narration, but rather the conflict of sentiment and cynicism. The greater part of the first three books of the novel is given over to Booth's long and (in the opinion of most readers) tediously formal and undramatic account of his life with Amelia. But Fielding does not lose sight, even here, of the dramatic context in which Booth's story is being told, and it is only by taking this context into account that one can explain and justify Fielding's reliance on the method of "cold" narration. The scene is a London prison, and Booth, who has been arrested and unjustly sentenced for assaulting a watchman, is telling his story to Miss Matthews, an adventuress who has been committed to prison for the murder of her lover. Against this grimly ironic backdrop Booth's sentimental story of his courtship and marriage unfolds. Sandwiched between the sordidly realistic glimpse of prison life in the opening chapters and the scene immediately following the conclusion of Booth's narrative in which he bribes the jailer and retires into a private cell with Miss Matthews and a bowl of rack-punch to pass the evening "in a manner inconsistent with the strict rules of virtue and chastity," the vision of the saintly Amelia and her world of conjugal love and domestic happiness is not only placed at a decided stylistic remove from the immediate world represented by the prison but also, because it is so at variance with the cynical tone of that world, seems a falsely sentimental idealization of reality.

Miss Matthews' cynical interruptions of Booth's story, moreover, like the comic interruptions of the grave interpolated tales in the
earlier novels, have the effect of subverting this sentimental view of the world even while it is being presented. When Booth praises Amelia's "simplicity," for example, Miss Matthews interrupts to say that "it is highly generous and good in you to impute to honesty what others would perhaps call credulity."\(^{19}\) In love with Booth herself and already resolved to seduce him, Miss Matthews' strategy is to flatter the husband and denigrate the wife. But it is rather as a representative of the apparently "realer" world of cynical self-interest that she is a serious rival to Amelia, and since the heroine does not appear herself as an immediate dramatic character until almost the middle of Book IV, we do not know at this point whether Booth's sentimental judgment of Amelia and the world or Miss Matthews' cynical view is the one Fielding wants us to accept.

It is significant, too, that many of Miss Matthews' interjections, like the substitution of "credulity" for "honesty," take the form of cynical inversions of Booth's sentimental vocabulary. In this novel, in which Fielding largely abandons the devices of verbal irony -- probably because he had decided that verbal wit would be inconsistent with the high seriousness of tone that he here essayed for the first time in his fiction -- Miss Matthews' corrections and emendations of Booth's words appear to have almost the same function as Fielding's ironic "translations" and definitions in his earlier works. But the difference is that just as he reverses his usual procedure in *Amelia* by making the point of view he wants us eventually to accept (Booth's) less immediate and dramatically "real," at first, than the alternate point of view he wants us to reject (Miss Matthews'), so neither does
he follow here his customary method of using a word first in a corrupt sense and then "translating" it into "plain English." Instead, he usually allows Booth to introduce the word in its "proper and original" sense, and then lets Miss Matthews "corrupt" it. When Booth praises "love," for example, as "the best passion the mind of man can possess," Miss Matthews ardently agrees -- but only, as the subsequent dialogue reveals, because she takes the word in a baser sense. Her own experience, she declares, is proof of the power of "love." "I will join with you, madam, in that," says Booth. "'Will you join with me?' answered she, looking eagerly at him -- 'Oh, Mr. Booth! I know not what I was going to say -- What -- Where did you leave off? -- I would not inter­rupt you.'"20

But when Amelia does at last appear as an objective presence, the dramatic equal, finally, of Miss Matthews and in the same grim milieu, significantly, of the prison, she instantly becomes a concrete realization of the true values of the words which Fielding had appeared to be trying to undermine. When Amelia rushes into the prison room, Miss Matthews expects from her the insults "of which virtuous women are generally so liberal to a frail sister." But she finds instead that Amelia's "virtue could support itself with its own intrinsic worth, without borrowing any assistance from the vices of other women; and she considered their natural infirmities as the objects of pity, not of contempt or abhorrence."21 "Virtue," which under the influence of Miss Matthews we had perhaps been ready to equate with priggish self-righteousness, is here restored, in the person of Amelia, to its proper meaning, and though Miss Matthews and the other corrupt charac-
ters in the novel (the Noble Lord, Colonel and Mrs. James) continue to supply an alternative cynical point of view which sees Amelia as a prude and her values as hypocritical or naive, the sentimental point of view objectified in Amelia (and in Dr. Harrison and Sgt. Atkinson) is never again displaced as the higher standard of truth. Booth's surrender to Miss Matthews immediately after the conclusion of his story may seem at first to give the lie to the sentimental affirmation of true love and virtue of which he has been the spokesman. But the ultimate effect, after we have seen this sentimental view supported by dramatic exemplification, is once again rather to separate the objective truth from its subjective narrative agent. Booth may be personally weak and vacillating, but his sentimental view of life is confirmed by our own objective experience of the world of the novel. If the happy ending of Amelia seems false, as most of Fielding's critics have complained, it is not because it is sentimental betrayal of a pervasive cynicism in the novel, but rather because the melodramatic machinery of the forged will and the recovered inheritance fails to render in terms of plot Fielding's actual resolution of these conflicting points of view. For all his impatience with the doctrine of Virtue Rewarded as a serious moral principle, he can never resist rewarding his own heroes and heroines, and though the patent artificiality of his happy endings may be his way of dissociating the reward from the virtue (the worthiness of Booth and Amelia to enjoy a life of happiness and prosperity is the consequence of their virtue, but the actual opportunity is the consequence of the chance discovery of the false will), the effect in Amelia is to distract us from the genuine
triumph of the sentimental overview that he insists on. For it is not by means of the happy ending that Fielding earns his right to this overview but by means of the dramatic realization of goodness that is Amelia.

But if the interpolated tales and other internal narrations are surrogates of the narrative process, sacrifices to Fielding's distrust of verbal professions, they are not the final surrogates or the final sacrifice. The critics who have complained that Fielding's "intrusive" authorial commentary is more vivid than "the main currents of narrative" have read him correctly in spite of themselves, for just as Parson Adams' commentary on Wilson's story is more immediate, more "real," and, finally, more significant than the narrative it interrupts, so are Fielding's "intrusive" interruptions of his own narration. The author who appears in the novel himself as an overt and "interested" commentator and who is constantly making his presence felt through ostentatious elevations of style, through the self-ridicule or mocking self-congratulation of the chapter headings, and through what Ian Watt calls an "intrusive patterning of plot" — this intrusive author is the final surrogate. "He comes in effect to stand for the 'reality,'" as William B. Coley puts it, "that we always suspected was behind the mystery of artifice." He is the objective representative within the novel of the human agency of truth.

One of the most interesting developments of Fielding's career as a dramatist is his movement away from the conventional realistic comedy of manners toward a hybrid form of satiric burlesque in which an author-character appears as a kind of chorus to comment on a play within the
The device, of course, is not original with Fielding, anymore than is the apparatus of the dramatized author in the novels. The dramatic burlesques are firmly in the tradition of the *Rehearsal* comedy; and Cervantes, Scarron, Marivaux, and LeSage provide ample precedents for such narrative mannerisms of the intrusive author as the ironic commentary, the conversations with hypothetical readers, the facetious chapter headings, and the burlesque diction, as well as for the use of interpolated tales as narrations within narrations. But Fielding's refinement on these devices reveals a consistency of serious purpose which would seem to go beyond the spirit of pure literary burlesque in his predecessors and contemporaries. As early as 1739, before he had even begun his career as a novelist, we find him in *The Champion* already exhibiting a philosophical interest in the problem of authorial self-knowledge and self-objectification, and looking, as always, to Locke for a possible solution:

Writing seems to be understood as arrogating to yourself a Superiority (which of all others will be granted with the greatest Reluctance) of the Understanding. In which, as the Pre-eminence is not so apparent as in Beauty or Riches, Pride is often able in our Minds a long while to maintain the weaker Side of the Argument. The Understanding, like the Eye (says Mr. Lock) whilst it makes us see and perceive all other Things, takes no Notice of itself; and it requires Arts and Pains to set it at a Distance and make it its own Object. This comparison, fine as it is, is inadequate: For the Eye can contemplate itself in a Glass, but no Narcissus hath hitherto discovered any Mirrour for the Understanding, no Knowledge of which is to be obtained but the Means Mr. Lock prescribes, which as it requires Arts and Pains, or in other Words, a very good Understanding to execute, it generally happens that the Superiority in it, is a Cause tried on very dark and presumptive Evidence, and a Verdict commonly found by self Love for ourselves.  

With the exception of the whitewashing biographer of *Jonathan Wild*,
whose corrupt values and vocabulary must be regularly inverted by the reader, none of Fielding's narrators are full-blown satiric personae. They are rather projections, part caricature and part idealization, of Fielding's own authorial mind. The intrusive commentary, the digressions, the chats with hypothetical readers, the self-conscious rhetorical flourishes, and other mannerisms are not just comic tricks at the expense of the narrative tradition. They are the "Arts and Pains" required to set the author's mind "at a Distance and make it its own Object." They are a "Mirrour for the Understanding" in which the thinking mind that assumes responsibility for the artifice and the rhetoric as well as for the ethical norms of the narrative is itself made an objective image, a sharper and more compelling image, often, than any of the characters of the fictional worlds for which he is the agency because he is closer to the reality which we ourselves inhabit. Henry James observes that Tom Jones as a character lacks "reality of mind" but that "his author -- he handsomely possessed of a mind -- has such amplitude of reflexion for him and round him that we see him through the mellow air of Fielding's fine old moralism, fine old humour, and fine old style, which somehow enlarge, make every one and every thing important." We do not have to take Fielding's superiority of understanding on faith. It is abundantly exhibited in the prefatory chapters and other authorial digressions, and those critics who have complained that these too often lack "any organic connection with the story" have missed the point of Fielding's careful separation of commentary and narrative which, like the division of words and meanings in the ironic vocabulary, is a separation in the interests of an
ultimate and higher reunification. The drama of the author in the act
of composition and cogitation, theorizing about his art and about the
human nature that is his subject, makes the author and the narrative,
the theory and the practice, the precept and the example, the reality
and the fiction, the word and the action parts of a single continuum
of truth.

The trouble with "mere narration," as Fielding says in his defense
of the "introductory chapters" of Tom Jones, is that it can be imitated
more or less successfully by any competent hack, however ignorant or
insincere, and that in fact the very success of narration may conceal
the author's lack of such basic qualifications of "the true history
writer" as "genius" (the union of "invention and judgment" which makes
possible "a quick and sagacious penetration into the true essence of
all the objects of our contemplation"), learning (which will enable
the writer to test his own insights against the standards of "history
and belles-lettres"), "conversation" (experiential knowledge of the
world at all levels of society), and "a good heart, . . . capable of
feeling." But the introduction into the novel of essays and reflective
passages where the author must step out from behind the protective il-
lusionism of the narrative and confront the reader direct with his
claims to genius, learning, conversation, and good nature may enable
the reader "to distinguish what is true and genuine, in this histor-
ic kind of writing, from what is false and counterfeit." 28

The "trite but true observation" at the beginning of Joseph
Andrews "that examples work more forcibly on the mind than precepts" 29
is not discredited by the author's ironic choice of Pamela and Cibber's
Apology as illustrations. Instead it is given a surprising new vitality which emphasizes the truth of the observation as idea even while Fielding exposes its triteness of language. For his real point is that works like these are dangerous precisely because the bad examples they provide are more forcible than the pious precepts their authors profess, or, to put it another way, because the liveliness of the narrations blinds us to the shallowness of their authors. The author of Joseph Andrews, on the other hand, though he first appears, in keeping with the parodistic purpose of the early chapters, in the familiar persona role of the naive innocent, admiring Pamela and the Apology, deferring to the rank of Lady Booby, and in general mistaking appearance for reality and profession for truth, soon begins to reveal positive qualities of mind and depths of understanding which complement and reinforce the values implicit in the narrative. The narrator, in a sense, grows and develops in moral awareness and understanding of human nature in much the same way that Joseph does. When he tells us at the beginning of Chapter X that "Joseph would not have had an understanding sufficient for the principal subject of such a book as this if he had any longer misunderstood the drift of his mistress," he is not only announcing an important stage of Joseph's development but is also signaling a significant shift in his own point of view; and when he explains to the reader that Joseph did not recognize the truth about Lady Booby sooner because of "an unwillingness in him to discover what he must condemn in her as a fault," we are provided with a rationale for Joseph's earlier naivete that also serves to account for the naive pose of the narrator in the opening chapters and yet is consistent with
the more serious function of both hero and narrator in the rest of the novel. For the author as much as the characters is an exemplification of the doctrine of good nature, and his tendency to accept characters at their face value until they condemn themselves by their actions is as objective an instance of the virtue of charity as an author who wants to show that he practices what he preaches can supply. "Upon the whole," he says in *Tom Jones*, explaining why he does not condemn Black George for stealing Jones's purse, "the man of candor and of true understanding is never hasty to condemn." And what is true of moral condemnations is also true of aesthetic ones. "In a word, they are the same folly, the same childishness, the same ill-nature, which raise all the clamors and uproars both in life and on the stage. The worst of men generally have the words rogue and villain most in their mouths, as the lowest of all wretches are the aptest to cry out low in the pit." The naïvete of his narrators in the face of vice and folly is not Fielding's naïvete, but the benevolent disposition of good nature which this pose of naïvete at once caricatures and idealizes and so sets "at a Distance" is intended, we may assume, as a reasonably faithful mirror of his understanding.

But Fielding's sense that the implicit authorial claim to "Pre-eminence" of the understanding may often be merely an expression of "self Love for ourselves" is reflected in his constant self-mockery and in his readiness to allow for alternate points of view. For authors, like other men, and like other "professional" users of language in particular, are prey to bias, interest, insincerity, ignorance, and the other hazards of agent which contribute to the corruption of language,
and especially are they subject to the temptation of vanity. "The
vanity of knowing more than other men," Fielding says in the Preface
to the **Voyage to Lisbon**, "is, perhaps, besides hunger, the only induc-
ment to writing, or at least to publishing, at all." But if this is
so, and if the problem of the serious writer, then, is to make his
commitment to objective truth transcend his desire for self-aggran-
dizement, the way of coping with the problem is not to try to efface
the author (for this would be merely to dodge the issue) but to make
the truth independent of the author -- not to pretend that he is free
of vanity and the other subjective limitations of agent, but to disarm
suspicion by making his subjectivity itself a dramatic fact which the
reader can apprehend objectively as part of the total truth of human
nature that the novel exists to illuminate. Even in the **Voyage to
Lisbon**, which is not a novel but a personal memoir where the narrative
voice is surely his own, Fielding deliberately involves himself in the
general vanity of authorship by declaring that his purpose is "to bring
about at once, like the revolution in the Rehearsal, a perfect refor-
mation of the laws relating to our maritime affairs." But the allu-
sion to Buckingham's burlesque play (in which a government is toppled
by a gentleman usher and a doctor who simply brandish their swords and
then seat themselves in the chairs of state), and the use of the terms
"at once" and "perfect," do not weaken Fielding's serious criticism of
English maritime laws any more than Gulliver's fatuous expectation of
"seeing a full Stop put to all Abuses and Corruptions" in England
within six months of the publication of his **Travels** weakens the force
of Swift's attacks on those abuses and corruptions. The effect in both
cases is to free the truth of the criticism from too close identifica-
tion with the fallible human voice that must deliver it, and though
Fielding's "authors" are not, except in Jonathan Wild, fully developed
satiric personae like Gulliver, his constant self dramatization, self-
caricature, and self-mockery, especially in Joseph Andrews and Tom
Jones, serve a similar function of dramatic objectification.

Thus in Joseph Andrews, in which vanity as "the common denomina-
tor of human kind" is a central theme, Fielding provides one of many
narrative exemplifications of this truth in the scene in which the
apparent zeal of Barnabas and the surgeon for public justice (in the
prosecution of Joseph's assailant) turns out to be really a desire to
display "their parts . . . before the justice and the parish." But
the author, as Fielding never lets us forget, is a member of "human
kind" too, and instead of resting content with the narrative repre-
sentation of vanity Fielding pursues it beyond the world of the narra-
tive into the more immediate world of the author himself. The narra-
tive illusion of reality is shattered by the sudden intrusion of an
invocation to Vanity in which the author not only advertises his pres-
ence through the radical elevation of style but carries the personal
involvement even further by finally turning the implications of the
address to Vanity against himself:

    I know thou wilt think that whilst I abuse thee I court thee,
    and that thy love hath inspired me to write this sarcastic
    panegyric on thee; but thou are deceived: I value thee not
    a farthing; nor will it give me any pain if thou shouldst
    prevail on the reader to censure this digression as arrant
    nonsense; for I know, to thy confusion, that I have introduced
    thee for no other purpose than to lengthen out a short chapter,
    and so I return to my history.
The spectacle of the author seemingly fleeing from the widening implications of his own theme and absolving himself of guilt only by denying the value of the digression in which the theme is stated is sufficiently diverting and paradoxical that our skepticism in the face of special pleading is effectively disarmed. The responsibility of final judgment as to the truth of his observations on Vanity and as to the validity of the narrative exemplification of the theme is shifted from the author to the reader. It is we who decide whether the digression is "arrant nonsense" or not, and in so doing we free the author from any suspicion on our part or his own that his superiority of understanding is "a Cause tried on very dark and presumptive Evidence, and a Verdict found by self Love." For even if we decide against him, we discover that our decision confirms his judgment. The self-mockery of Fielding's narrators does not negate the moral and aesthetic norms they stand for but rather lends them a more objective dimension of reality.

The narrator of Joseph Andrews, as we have seen, develops from a naive persona into a positive spokesman for Fielding's moral and aesthetic norms. The author who in the early chapters labors mightily "to preserve the character" of Lady Booby out of consideration for her social class, is able, by the middle of the novel, to offer a "dissertation concerning high people and low people" which is a witty anatomy of social snobbery; and the author who in the prefatory chapter to Book II (the first instance of Fielding's use of the prefatory chapter) defends the practice of chapter divisions with a mixture of pedantry and duncery reminiscent of the hack-persona of Swift's Tale of a Tub,
has become practically indistinguishable in the introductory chapter
to Book IV ("Matters Prefatory in Praise of Biography") from the author
of the Preface, where Fielding, learned and wise but carrying his eru-
dition and wisdom as lightly as charm, unabashedly speaks in propria
persona. The verbal irony of the first part of the novel, as when he
tells us that "it was by keeping the excellent pattern of his sister's
virtues before his eyes, that Mr. Joseph Andrews was chiefly enabled
to preserve his purity in the midst of such great temptation," is usu-
ally as much at the expense of the narrator as of the characters; but
in the later chapters, as when he says of the squire who sets his dogs
on Parson Adams that "This gentleman was generally said to be a great
lover of humor; but, not to mince the matter, . . . he was a greater
hunter of men," it is primarily an irony of corrupt language in which
the author's translations into "plain English" become the standard of
truth. The author of Joseph Andrews earns his own way, through self-
objectification, into our trust and confidence. He earns the right,
through the purifications of irony, to speak truth directly and to be
taken at his word. But he is mindful to the end of the hazards of au-
thorial vanity and of the dangers of taking himself too seriously.
Rarely does he allow any profession or precept, however faithfully it
may represent his own belief, to pass without a challenge. Joseph is
clearly speaking for Fielding when he delivers an eloquent speech to
Parson Adams on charity, articulating not only Fielding's basic moral
theme but also his Shaftesburian philosophy of ridicule as the test
of truth: "I defy the wisest man in the world to turn a true good action
into ridicule." But instead of arousing Adams to applause, Joseph's
eloquence (which is also, of course, Fielding's) puts him fast asleep, and anticipating that it may affect some of his readers the same way, the author announces at the end of the preceding chapter that "Joseph made a speech on charity, which the reader, if he is so disposed, may see in the next chapter; for we scorn to betray him into any such reading without first giving him warning." Even when he is most anxious that his readers should take him seriously Fielding does not abandon the objective perspective which allows for other points of view, and in so doing, of course, he reinforces our confidence in his own fairness, and hence in his own judgment, even while persuading us that we are independent of it.

The surrogate author of Tom Jones, though in general less a caricature than the narrator of Joseph Andrews and more of a positive spokesman for Fielding, similarly refuses to take himself too seriously. "I never make my readers laugh heartily," he declares, "but where I have laughed before him; unless it should happen at any time that instead of laughing with me he should be inclined to laugh at me." The latter possibility is particularly emphasized in the chapter headings, which Fielding uses as a kind of extra-textual commentary not only on the narrative but also on the internal commentary which accompanies it and on the deportment of the author as both narrator and commentator. The author of the chapter heads is coequal with the narrator ("Being Much the Longest of All Our Introductory Chapters"), but he is closer yet to the world of the reader because he is himself operating now as a critical reader of the finished text, providing an extra ironic dimension on the material by offering his own partly detached, partly
"interested" afterthoughts. These second thoughts are sometimes vain ("A Short History of What We Can Do in the Sublime"), sometimes modest ("Containing Little or Nothing"), but the effect, when the heading is anything more than a neutral description of contents, is nearly always to undercut the seriousness or pretensions of the author as he appears in the text proper and make his human limitations a part of the objective scene we are invited to judge. It is the author himself who assumes responsibility for Squire Allworthy's solemn lecture to Jenny on the virtue of chastity, "Containing Such Grave Matters that the Reader Can Not Laugh Once through the Whole Chapter, Unless Peradventure He Should Laugh at the Author." 39

Even in Amelia, where the narrator would seem for the most part to speak directly for Fielding and where most of the playful mannerisms of self-objectification have disappeared, the chapter headings are still sometimes facetious enough to supply an objective overview which sets both the author and his gravity of tone at an ironic distance: "In Which the Author Appears to be Master of that Profound Learning Called the Knowledge of the Town." 40 But the author of Amelia is most clearly seen in his dialogues with hypothetical readers. For in seeking to objectify the process of narration in his novels Fielding does not forget that the reader is a party to this process as well as the author. Just as the presence of listeners representative of alternate points of view gives us an objective perspective on the interpolated tales which allows us to be more than listeners ourselves, so the dramatic interplay between author and assumed readers of the novels enables us in a sense to be more than mere readers because we seem to stand out-
side a completed circuit of communication. We read, as it were, over the shoulders of the assumed readers within the novel and so are able to view the whole process of communication as a dramatic action which may be judged, like other actions, objectively. The story, as with the interpolated tales, may be conveyed through our ears, but the telling of it is subjected to our eyes.

As in the other novels, the narrator of Amelia addresses a divided audience of "good natured," sentimental readers on the one hand and of cynical, "critical" readers on the other, and is concerned lest the latter should be bored or disgusted by scenes of sentiment or passages of moral seriousness. "This little dialogue," he says of the tender scene in which Amelia instructs her children in the elements of morality, "we are apprehensive, will be read with contempt by many." But unlike the narrators of the earlier novels, the author of Amelia assumes that the majority of his audience (like the "good-natured reader" he addresses in the Dedication, who, "if his heart should be here affected, will be inclined to pardon many faults for the pleasure he will receive from a tender sensation") are "with" him already and do not need to be persuaded or cajoled into sympathy with his sentimental and moralistic point of view.

The narrator of Jonathan Wild, by contrast, is writing primarily for readers who share his own inverted values and vocabulary. He refuses to describe a "scene of tenderness" between Mr. and Mrs. Heart-free because it is "too low and contemptible to be recounted to our great readers." He recognizes that some of his audience belong to "that pitiful order of mortals who are in contempt called good-na-
tured," and in fact it is for the benefit of these "vulgar" readers that he supplies the "plain English" translations of the corrupt language of "greatness": "And, should I speak in the language of a man who estimated human happiness without regard to that greatness which we have so laboriously endeavoured to paint in this history, it is probable [Wild] never took (i.e. robbed the prisoners of) a shilling which he himself did not pay too dear for." But he clearly regards these good-natured readers as a minority.

In *Amelia* this minority readership has become the majority, and even greatness itself is offered an opportunity to redeem itself by identifying with good nature. When Booth bribes a war office toady whom the author refers to as a "great man," Fielding invites "my good-natured reader" to reflect on the injustice of such abuse of public office and then adds, "And if any such reader as I mention should happen to be in reality a great man, and in power, perhaps the horror of this picture may induce him to put a final end to this abominable practice of touching, as it is called." Some accommodation, it is true, is still made in *Amelia* for hypothetical readers of other persuasions. When Booth, telling his story to Miss Matthews, begins to describe the tender scene of his parting with Amelia, the narrator interrupts to announce that he will "place this scene in a chapter by itself, which we desire all our readers who do not love, or who perhaps do not know the pleasure of tenderness, to pass over." But the dichotomy of viewpoint between sentimental and "critical" readers is made to parallel that between the sentimental Booth and the cynical Miss Matthews. Having concluded his account of his departure, Booth apologizes to
Miss Matthews for "having obtruded upon you" a scene which may have "been tiresome to you," for "no one is capable of tasting such a scene who hath not a heart full of tenderness, and perhaps not even then, unless he hath been in the same situation." The alternate point of view is allowed for, but, identified with Miss Matthews, it is discredited.

But if Fielding speaks more directly through his narrator in *Amelia* than in the earlier novels, relying less on both verbal irony and the irony of dramatized authorship, it is also because he is assuming a continuity with the earlier novels that makes any elaborate scheme of verbal purification and self-objectification unnecessary. At the beginning of the second chapter the author interrupts the account of Booth's trial to "premise some things which it may be necessary for thee to know," and this, he says, is "after our usual manner."

When he offers to set the scene of Booth's leavetaking in a separate chapter, he says he will, "according to our usual custom, endeavour to accommodate ourselves to every taste." And when he invites the "critical reader" who "may have the same doubt with Miss Matthews" about the validity of Booth's sentimental view of human nature, to use the chapter break to consider "Whether we have, in this place, maintained or deviated from that strict adherence to truth which we profess above all other historians," he is referring not to any profession made in *Amelia* but to the frequent claims by the author of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* that he is determined "to guide our pen throughout by the direction of truth." The first Book of *Amelia* establishes a continuity with the "usual manner" by means of a pref-
atory chapter in the manner of Tom Jones, a digression in Chapter II on public magistrates in the familiar ironic style ("I own I have been sometimes inclined to think that this office of a justice of peace requires some knowledge of the law"), and a mock-heroic simile in Chapter VI describing Miss Matthews that is as ludicrous as any in Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones. But with the principle of continuity of authorship thus established, Fielding is able after Book I to dispense for the most part not only with the burlesque apparatus of self-objectification but also with the ironic rhetoric of the earlier novels, both of which he no doubt felt would be inconsistent with his high seriousness of tone and purpose in Amelia.

Many of the same words and locutions that he had habitually used ironically in his previous writings, in fact, appear in Amelia as straightforward expressions of truth. When Booth bursts into tears upon describing Amelia's courageous acceptance of the fact that her beauty has been spoiled by a broken nose, the author assures us that his tears were such "as are apt to flow from a truly noble heart at the hearing of anything surprisingly great and glorious." The natural response of the reader who has come to Amelia from Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones is to read such a passage ironically. But he will soon find that there is no support given for such a reading. When Fielding says that Amelia's courage was "great and glorious" he means precisely and literally that, and he is choosing his words, we may be sure, with deliberation. But at the same time we cannot assume that he was unaware of the reader's temptation, on the basis of the author's previous practice as well as the reader's natural suspicion of hyperbole, to read a
mocking intent into such a passage. Perhaps Fielding wants (or at least expects) his reader to be misled until such time as Amelia herself is allowed to appear on the scene and reveal the justness of the language applied to her, just as he probably expects us to find Miss Matthews' cynical view of Booth's matrimonial adventures more "realistic" at first then Booth's sentimental version. But when, toward the end of the novel, Booth guiltily tells Amelia, "I can't sup with you to-night" (because he has a secret engagement with Miss Matthews), and Fielding uses a heroic simile to describe Amelia's disappointment --

As in the delightful month of June, when the sky is all serene, and the whole face of nature looks with a pleasing and smiling aspect, suddenly a dark cloud spreads itself over the hemisphere, the sun vanishes from our sight, and every object is obscured by a dark and horrid gloom; so happened it to Amelia, . . . and with a faint trembling voice she repeated her husband's words, "Not sup with me to-night, my dear!"50

-- he clearly expects us to be sufficiently committed to the sentimental point of view to accept the sublimity of language at its face value as wholly appropriate to the expression of domestic pathos.

The narrator of *Tom Jones* is equally in earnest in his sublime introduction of Sophia. The elevated passage beginning "Hushed be every ruder breath" contains not a single false note of the bathos which Fielding elsewhere employs to puncture his own inflated rhetoric, and the concluding invocation of his own beloved first wife, "one whose image never can depart from my breast, and whom, if thou dost remember, thou hast then, my friend, an adequate idea of Sophia," can certainly not have been meant in a mocking vein. Yet the afterthought commentary
of the chapter heading -- "A Short Hint of What We Can Do in the
Sublime" -- provides the objective perspective which sets even the most
heartfelt and sincere effusions of the author at an ironic distance;
and the disquisition on the rhetorical license permitted the writer of
a "heroic, historical, prosaic poem" in the preceding prefatory chap­
ter, distinguishing between the "similes, descriptions, and other kinds
of poetical embellishments" and the "plain matter of fact" of the narra­
tive proper, frankly identifies such "ornamental parts of our work" as
expressions of the author's sensibility. He pleads, with some serious­
ness we may assume, the precedent of "our tragic poets, who seldom fail
to prepare their audience for the reception of their principal charac­
ters," but then proceeds to undercut his own pretensions by also citing
the precedents of theatre managers with their kettle-drums and troops
of scene-shifters, and, finally, of politicians, who, like the lord
mayor in his annual procession, recognize the utility of pomp and page­
eantry. His own intention, he concludes, is thus "to introduce our
heroine with the utmost solemnity in our power, with an elevation of
style ... proper to raise the veneration of our reader," for "I must
confess that even I myself ... have yielded not a little to the im­
pressions of much preceding state."  

A similar distinction between
the rhetoric of the author and the objective "matter of fact" of the
narrative action is implicit in the Preface to Joseph Andrews when
Fielding declares that though he has admitted burlesque "in our diction,
we have carefully excluded it from our sentiments and characters," and even the narrator of Jonathan Wild recognizes the sacred obligation
of the "historian" to adhere "faithfully to the matter, though he em-
bellishes the diction with some flourishes of his own eloquence."53 Only in *Amelia* does Fielding treat matter and diction as an inseparable unity. Only in *Amelia* does he permit himself the unqualified luxury of expressing the truths of sincerity in her own "distinct terms."

"Now, it is well known," he says in the prefatory chapter to the last book of *Tom Jones*, comparing the relationship of author and reader to that of travelers who, after a long journey together, are now arriving at the parting of the ways, "that all jokes and raillery are at this time laid aside; whatever characters any of the passengers have for the jest-sake personated on the road are now thrown off, and the conversation is usually plain and serious."54 The privilege Fielding claims in the last book of *Tom Jones* to lay aside his irony and his mock rhetoric and to throw off the character he has "personated" as narrator, he also claims in his last novel. He does not have to "purify" his medium by irony or erect an elaborate mirror for his understanding because that work has already been done. In *Amelia* he demands nothing less than the right he has earned in his earlier writings to use language directly and literally -- to deliver himself at last of the plain-spoken truth that he had made it the business of his life to rescue from the contaminating corruptions of language.
NOTES


2. *The True Patriot* No. 2, Nov. 12, 1745.


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In The Author's Farce, for example, Luckless, the "Master of the Show," watches a production of "The Pleasures of the Town," his written-to-order farce, and comments cynically from the wings on its moral and aesthetic implications. In Tumble-Down Dick the author Fustian discusses a performance of his tragedy "Phaeton in the Suds" with the impresario Machine and the critic Sneerwell; and in Pasquin Fustian and Sneerwell are joined by the comedian Trapwit to provide a running commentary on Trapwit's comedy "The Election" and Fustian's tragedy "The Life and Death of Common Sense." The burlesque classical tragedy of Eurydice is accompanied by the comments of an anonymous Author and Critic, The Historical Register has remarks by Medley and Sourwit, and Sourwit appears again as commentator in the afterpiece Eurydice Hissed. Fielding's most famous burlesque play, Tom Thumb, is not of the Rehearsal type, but in its expanded version as The Tragedy of Tragedies the pseudo-editor Scriblerus Secundus performs a similar function in the prefatory matter and notes; and in The Grub-Street Opera Scriblerus appears in the Introduction scene as "a sort of walking Notes" (p. iii of the 1731 London edition retitled The Welsh Opera) similar to the "Author" who appears in the Introduction scene of Don Quixote in England.
25 The Champion, March 1, 1739-40. I, 322. The Locke quotation is from the Introduction to An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Sec. 1.


27 Cross, II, 103.


30 Henley ed., I, 56.


32 Henley ed., XVI, 183.

33 Henley ed., XVI, 186.

34 Book I, Ch. 15. Henley ed., I, 82-3.

35 Book I, Ch. 8; Book II, Ch. 13. Henley ed., I, 47, 179-82.

36 Book I, Ch. 1; Book III, Ch. 6. Henley ed., I, 27, 269.


39 Book I, Ch. 7; Book III, Ch. 1; Book IV, Ch. 2; Book VIII, Ch. 1. Henley ed., III, 36, 105, 145; IV, 58. Italics added.

40 Book IX, Ch. 7. Henley ed., VII, 155.

41 Book IV, Ch. 3. Henley ed., VI, 191.

42 Henley ed., VI, 12.

43 Book II, Chs. 1, 7; Book IV, Ch. 3. Henley ed., II, 51, 73, 157.

45 Book III, Chs. 1, 2. Henley ed., VI, 111, 117.

46 Book I, Ch. 2; Book II, Ch. 2; Book III, Ch. 1. Henley ed., VI, 15, 75, 111. Italics added.


48 Henley ed., VI, 17.


52 Henley ed., I, 19.


54 Book XVIII, Ch. 1. Henley ed., V, 293.
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