CHAPTER III
FIELDING

Fielding was the greatest novelist of the eighteenth century. He has a claim to be regarded as the father of the English novel. He was born at Shapsham Park near Glastonbury in 1707. He presents a remarkable contrast to his contemporary Richardson, in person, disposition and pedigree. He was an aristocrat unlike Richardson who came of humble stock. The House of Fielding claimed kinship with that of Hapsburg and dated from the twelfth century. His great grandfather was the first Earl of Desmond. His grandfather Canon of Salisbury; his father one of Marlborough's Generals. On the mother's side, his grandfather was a justice of the King's bench and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was his cousin.

He was tall and good-looking. He had abundant animal Spirits, a fine wit, and a general disposition, which was clouded somewhat by the poverty of his patrimony. After preliminary education at home, he was sent to Eton, which he left probably in reaction against book study. Then he planned an elopement with a Miss Sarah Andrew. But that amorous plan failed. Sometime later he journeyed to Leyden to study law. But he could not pursue his study of law owing his father's failure to send him money regularly. He then returned to London and took the most lucrative business of those days, namely writing of plays.

He is the first novelist to analyse the nature of his art and
lay down its rules. He regarded fiction as a high type of art in an age wherein even Dr. Johnson thought that it was a form of literature written chiefly to the young, the ignorant and the idle. Besides Fielding give a comprehensive picture of life on a wide canvas. No other novelist in the eighteenth century attempts to portray life on such a vast scale. Richardson is wholly preoccupied with inner consciousness, and Smollet with surface peculiarities, that is, with eccentricity and oddity of behaviour. Fielding’s portrayal of life is more comprehensive and includes both inner consciousness and external oddity. He depicts not only individual peculiarities, but also basic and common truths of life. He presents both the society and the individual who forms a part of it. Among the novelists of the eighteenth century, Fielding, therefore occupies the highest position.

But the precept and practice of Fielding were not followed by his successors. The reason lies in the lack of critical faculty both in the reviewers and the reading public. The critics of the age failed to make a correct estimate of Fielding’s art. He is not only a great artist, but also a great theorist. In fact, he is the first novelist to evolve the rules of his art. The novelists before him practised their art without any clear knowledge of its nature and scope. Fielding analyses, the nature of the novel, and defines its scope and bounds. Thus, he had an even more contribution to make the growth of the novel, as we know it today.

His first novel Joseph Andrews was first conceived as a
satire on Pamela, its situations and values. Fielding decided that Pamela should have a brother, a virtuous footman Joseph, who would repulse the advances of Lady Booby as his sister had done those of Lady Booby’s nephew, Richardson’s Mr. B. It was, as it turned out, a false start for, having discovered the form of the novel, Fielding went on to do something quite different from merely poking fun at Richardson.

Fielding shared with his half brother, Sir John Fielding, who succeeded him at Bow Street, the distinction of being the best magistrate London had during the eighteenth century, and the quality and experience of life that he brought to his office would have been remarkable in any epoch. His cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote of him:

"I am sorry for H. Fielding’s death, not only as I shall read no more of his writings, but I believe he lost more than others, as no man enjoyed life more than he did, though few had less reason to do so, the highest of his preferment being raking in the lowest sinks of vice and misery. His happy constitution (even when he had, with great pains, half demolished it) made him forget everything when he was before a venison pastry, or over a flask of champagne, and I am persuaded he has known more happy moments than any prince upon the earth."

Our first impression of Fielding, then, is of a man with an

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22. Allen, p. 50
enormous zest for living, spendthrift, both of his money and his health. Despite the aristocratic origins, Fielding had experienced at first hand the appalling economic and social insecurity of an age that still retained and almost Elizabethan brutality and lack of inhibition. But his bodily vigour and appetite for life were allied, with an intellectual energy and a generosity of spirit no less strong. Keats’s famous phrase, the holiness of the heart, affection, might have sounded strange on his lips, but his belief in it was passionate, as his life and his books alike show. And he knew from his own experience as well as from observation, what the real canker of the age was; the prevalence at all levels of society the unconditioned and therefore tyrannical power.

Like Richardson, he became a novelist almost by accident. The passing of the licensing Act of 1737, that curious censorship of the stage which is still with us and which Fielding’s own dramatic satires on Sir Robert Walpole had brought into being, had put an end to his unsuccessful career as a playwright.

Driven out of the theatre, he had become a barrister practising on the western circuit and then a political journalist until he was appointed justice of the peace for Westminster and Middlesex. It was not regarded as an especially honourable office, but he was indefatigable in the course of his duties. was the investigator of many reforms in the administration of justice and prevention of crime and wore himself out in public service.
His novels may, in a sense, be seen as a by-product of a busy career, but the immediate end he proposed for them was not so very different from the ends for which he worked as the most fearless and honest magistrate of his day, the reform of the manners of the age. In this respect Tom Jones and an inquiry into the cause of late increase of Robbers are as one.

Fielding's work was, with that of his friend Hogarth, the most powerful artistic expression of the social conscience of the age. It is not easy to overrate the brutality and squalor of much of the eighteenth century life which may be summed up in the public executions on a vast scale (Many cart-loads of our fellow creatures, in the words are Fielding - late once in six weeks .... carried to the slaughter! hand gin (drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence); but we do well to remember the reforming zeal which was already active. J. H. Plumb in his England in the eighteenth century has reminded us that in 1735, there were 99380 actions taken out by the Society of Reformation of Manners in the London area alone.

Fielding, both as novelist and magistrate, was a society for the reform of manners in himself, and it was only natural that when writing Joseph Andrews, he should not long be content with reforming Samuel Richardson's manner alone.

Like most of the greater eighteenth century writers, he saw himself as a moralist and a satirist, but he was much more besides. What he was besides was as it were, the fine flower of his didactic
purpose. The first English theorist of the novel, his criticism falls short of his creative achievement; he did more than he knew. This is plain from his preface to Joseph Andrews. He knew that he was doing something new in the English prose fiction. He was writing, as he says, a comic epic, a form differing from comedy as the serious epic from tragedy; its action being more extended and comprehensive containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters, it differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this: that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters, by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners .... lastly in its sentiment and diction by presenting the ludicrous instead of the sublime. At one level, the level at which it has worn least well, Joseph Andrews with its burlesque of the similes of classical epic, was an excercise in the mock heroic, like Swift's The Battle of the Books and Pope's The rape of Lock. But as he points out, the mock-heroic, what he calls burlesque, is admitted in his style and diction only; it is carefully excluded from the characters. The characters are modelled from the life; life everywhere furnishes in accurate observer with the ridiculous.

Joseph Andrews, indeed in all Fielding, is Parson Adams, and he is a creation of pure humour. Perhaps he owes something to Don Quixote, but he is in every sense, an original character, one of the archetypal characters in English fiction; and the secret of pleasure
he gives us can no more be reduced to a critical formula than Falstaff can, Adams with his absent-mindedness, his small pedantries and vanities, his native trust in human goodness, which is always being betrayed, is the heart of the novel. Fielding - and the reader - laugh at his innocence, which is constantly getting him into one series after another of misunderstanding and imbroglios; yet it is Adams, with his simple belief that Christianity is to be practised as well as preached, who is the measuring rod for all the other characters; he is the reagent submission to which expose the true nature and the composition of the rest of the dramatics personal.

He is, in fact, largely the source of satire in the book:

'I suppose, sir, msaid the bookseller, m'The sermons are of a different time;' Aye, Sir, l said Adams, m'The contrary, I thank Heaven, is inculcated in almost every page, or I should also belive my own opinion, which has always been, that the virtuous and the good Turks or heathen, are more acceptable to the sight of their Creator, than a vicious and a wicked Christian though, his faith was perfectly as orthodox as St. Paul himself. m'I wish you success,msays the bookseller,m'but must beg to be excused, as my hands are so very full at present, and indeed, I am afraid you will find a backwardness in the trade to engage in a book which the clergy would be certain to cry down'".23

That is a simple instance. A better one would be the whole

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23.. Allen, pp. 52-53
wonderful scenes between Adams and Parson Trulliber, who is more concerned with his pigs than the cure of souls, and who believes, at first, that Adams too must be a pig dealer.

Written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote, says the title page of the novel, an important piece of information often omitted from modern editions. The Quixotic figure is Adams, but the structure of the book also follows Cervantes. Joseph Andrews is a novel of adventures met while travelling on the road. Joseph, thrown out of his foot man employment in Lady Booby's service in London, for showing himself adamant, against seduction either by her ladyship or by her women Mrs. Slipslop, sets out to walk home to his sweetheart Fanny. He meets Parson Adams, whose reaching has so fortified his virtue, walking to London in the hope of getting his sermons published, but Adams has characteristically forgotten to bring his sermons with him and so returns with Joseph. They run the gauntlets of dishonest innkeepers, irresponsible and brutish country gentlemen, pompous, sycophantic, and sometimes equally brutish clergymen. It would be foolish to attempt to synopsise the plot, which is a parody of romantic plots in general, with missing heir, babies stolen and exchanged at birth and birthmarks to be discovered and foundlings restored to their heritage in the last Chapters. The plot, though well handled, is not important. What matters is Fielding's endless fertility of comic invention. According to Fielding, Homer had written a comic epic, which had, it not been
lost, would have been a model of its kind as his epics are in tragedy. Elizabeth Jenkins, in her admirable study of the novelist, comments on this:

"The scene in Lady Booby's house .......... where Beau Didapper steals to Mrs. Slipslop's bed in mistake for Fanny and Parson Adams hearing a Scream, rushes in the dark to the bedside, where, mislead by the beauty delicate skin and of Mrs. Slipslop's beard, he starts punching the latter unmercifully, is a scene on what one might venture to call a Homeric scale. And it could be paralleled elsewhere in the novel. Fielding had the gift which is the prerogative of great comic writers, of being able to cap absurdity of situation on absurdity of situation in a single scene and to go on doing it beyond what we expect to be the climax." 24

Joseph and Fanny, his sweetheart, are much more than lay figures or are meant to be. But the other characters, though not drawn so completely in the round as Adams, are terrifically and often terrifyingly alive; they have the distinctive individuality of the figures in Hogarth's print, of the half-naked drunken Virago sprawled on the steps with her baby falling from her arms, in the Gin Lanem plate, for instance.

At first sight Fielding's fierce eye for externals appears to be that of the caricaturist. We should, therefore, expect his characters to be flatmin E. M. Froster's sense of the word. But this is not so

24. Allen, p. 53
at all. Flat characters are representations of ides fixes: typical flat characters are smollette's Hawser trunnion and Dickens Mrs. Macabre. They are characters incapable surprising us. Now most of feelings personages in Joseph Andrews are episodic; they appear only once, met and passed in the course of Joseph or Adam's peregrination. But we feel, of Mrs. Tow Wouse, Parson Trulliber (the finest of them all, after Adam himself, Mrs. Slipslop and the rest, that they would be capable of surprising us, if they were given the opportunity. If describe, said Fielding, not men, but manners; not an individual but a species. But he always describes the species in terms of the individual. Trulliber may stand for every boorish, semi-illiterate parson of the day who was more a farmer than a priest; but in the first instance he is Trulliber. He appears in one chapter only, but he is rendered with such fierce intensity that we feel that he, and the type he represents, have been caught and pinned down forever and for good. We do not need to know more of him; but we are persuaded that if we wished, we could.

Another source of the vitality of Fielding's character is the element in which they live. Fielding's mind and the style like the style of Thackeray, who learnt much from him but not enough, Fielding's is that of a man talking to us at his ease.

It is direct unaffected, the product of a mind stored with knowledge, of men and of books - he is always driving a point home, with an apt quotation, from the classics or from Shakespeare. He is
telling a story the action of, which has been long over. Action and characters, therefore, exist not only in the context of the story, but also in the context of the author's mind, a mind decisive in quality, with firm views on human nature and behaviour. We feel that Fielding knows everything there is to know about his characters even though he does not tell us all. They are so real to him that, even though he may give us no more than a glimpse of them, they become real for us. Behind every simple statement of Fielding, we feel the force of a deep and varied experience of life, an experience that however bitter as may have been, has not darkened the essential humanity of his nature.

This wholehearted acceptance of life is nowhere more apparent than in the irony with which his mind is pervaded. It gives his every word tremendous authority, because we feel nothing can escape it. It is his great weapon against pretence, vanity, hypocrisy, and inhumanity; his great weapon in defence of generous feeling. It cuts all ways, as the following passage shows. Joseph has been robbed, bitten up stripped and left unconscious by the roadside. A coach comes by. Joseph is unwilling to enter until he is furnished with sufficient covering to prevent giving the least offence to decency; so perfectly modest was this young man; such mighty effects had the spotless example of the amiable Pamela, and the excellent sermons of Mr. Adams, wrought upon him:

"Though there were several great coats about the Coach,
it was not easy to get over this difficulty which Joseph had started. The two gentlemen complained they were cold and could not spare a rag; the man of wit saying with a laugh that charity began at home: and the coachman, who had two great coats spread under him, refused to lend either, lest they should be made bloody the lady’s footman desired to be excused for the same reason, which the lady herself, notwithstanding her abhorrence of a naked man approved; and it is more than probable that Joseph, who obstinately adhered to his modest resolution, must have perished unless the postillion (a lad who has since been transported for robbing a hen roost) had voluntarily stripped 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 passenger to lie in so miserable a condition.²⁵

The brief story of Joseph Andrews has been given as following,

Joseph is a servant of Squire Booby, an office to which he has been appointed, on account of his strength and courage, and his good looks, by Lady Booby, the aunt in law of Pamela who is now married to Squire Booby, after the events related in Richardson’s novel. He has always been supposed to be Pamela’s brother, and has read her letters with admiration and has resolved to be chaste like her.

²⁵ Allen, p. 55
Sir Thomas dies; Lady Booby takes the household, including the handsome footman, to London. Like his sister's resistance to the Squire Joseph is depicted indignantly repelling the advances of his mistress, another wicked person of quality and a member of the same family. The lady indignantly dismisses him and Joseph sets out on foot for his village in the west where his fellow servant and sweetheart, Fanny has been left behind. He falls among highwaymen is robbed and beaten. He is then shifted half dead to an inn kept by the two wouses. He would have been in serious trouble but for the accidental arrival of Parsons Adams at the same inn. This is the end of the first book.

In the second book, Parson Adams, one of the immortals of literature, is the prominent figure. He was on his way to London to sell nine volumes of his sermons to a publisher, but discovering that, with his usual absence of mind, he had forgotten to bring the sermons with him, he determines to go home with Joseph. They are joined unexpectedly by Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby's elderly handmaid, who is also in love with Joseph. She had discovered her Ladyship's secret love for Joseph and had threatened to make it public. In the meanwhile, Fanny, the beloved of Joseph, in anxiety on Joseph's account, sets out to seek news of him in London. She falls into the hands of a ruffian, who tries to violate her chastity, but Parson Adams intervenes, in the nick of time with his stout stick and the ruffian is scared away. Thus, four of the persons chiefly concerned
are now altogether. But jealous Slipslop soon leaves them for the sight of Joseph and Fannay's fondness for each other is more than she can bear. The novel moves on from one adventure to another and variety of characters of every nature and social strata appear at every turn.

Fanny, Joseph and the Parson are joined in the third book by the benevolent Mr. Wilson, who tells them the story of his misguided youth, his downfall and reformation and his retirement to a life according to nature. This instructive story, like the earlier tale of Leonara, related by a fellow passenger in the stagecoach, has been introduced in o imitation of the manner of Don Quixote. It is not particularly interesting; but the groan and the outburst of Parson Adams at the wickedness of the world are truly comic, and appearance of Mr. Wilson, the good fairy of the plot, is justified in the end.

In the fourth book, all the chief persons are brought together as in the last act of a well-knit comedy. Lady Booby, her insulted passion for Joseph battling with her resentment, comes home again, to find Joseph and Fanny preparing for their marriage. Indignant, she forbids Adams publish the barns. When she fails to move him by arguments or threats, she takes the help of a wicked lawyer to have Fanny turned out of the Parish and get Joseph sent to Jail. But her schemes are interrupted by a visit from Squire Booby and his wife.
Booby does not want that Joseph should marry Fanny. It would be a terrible insult to him that his brother-in-law should marry a girl of doubtful origin. But it is now suddenly discovered that Fanny is the daughter of the Andrews Couple and therefore Pamela is her sister and Joseph her brother. The disclosure brings no joy to the impatient lovers. But a further disclosure sets everything right. Mr. Wilson reappears. Years ago, as he has already recounted, he had lost a son. That son is Joseph who was stolen by gypsies and afterwards exchanged for Fanny who was sold to Sir Thomas Booby. He is recognised by the famous strawberry mark on his left breast. He is as good a gentleman as the good Squire is. He is now married to Fanny and all are happy together. Even that humblest of men, Parson Adams, being presented with a living of one hundred and thirty pounds a year - wealth for him beyond the dreams of avarice.

The main charm of the novel lies in its humour, and in the characters of Parson Adams, one of the immortals of literature. Joseph would have fared ill but for the appearance on the scene of his old schoolmaster, Parson Abraham Adams. The interest now shifts from the handsome Joseph to the quixotic curate whose shabby exterior hides one of the noblest hearts in literature. Adams is a fine creature even in an age, which specialised in characters. He owes much to Cervantes, and author Fielding loved but even more to Fielding's observation and understanding of genuine Christianity at a time when fanaticism and indifference divided the kingdom unequally
between them. Goodness, Charity, learning and simple piety are compounded with an endearing naivete in a man who believes good of everyone, is incapable of malice and is at all times a chivalrous defender of the weak. He can be fooled but never defeated.

The loosely constructed but complex plot moves after many entertaining incidents to a complicated climax. Lady Booby tries to prevent the marriage of Joseph to his boyhood sweetheart Fanny Adams, and there is a sudden sinister discovery that they are really brother and sister. To cut the Gordian knot, Fielding calls in a familiar device from the old Byzantine romances. Joseph has a strawberry mark on his shoulder. It serves to reveal his true identity and he is restored to his father from whom he had been stolen away by gypsies many years ago. In the happy denouement, Parson Adams is not forgotten and, as an earthly reward for simple Christianity, he acquires a living valued at 130 pounds a year

Here was something indisputably new in fiction, for never before had the reader been offered such a harvest of characters in one book. Joseph Andrews throbs with life. The characters, boldly and brilliantly observed are drawn from all classes of society. There are effeminate fops, cheating lawyers and brutal Squires. Amorous and unlovely waiting women are presented with rare skill, and situations are neatly contrived to expose their foibles, their absurdities and their contradictions.

In this novel sparkling with wit, and yet tender towards
weakness, and profoundly tolerant of the mixture of good and bad in all of us. The author dropped the familiar pretence of presenting actual life in the guise of fiction. Fielding boldly declared that his story was fictitious and his characters were invented. His construction betrayed the dramatist's hands and effects were obtained by situations and climaxes, which gave scope for dialogue. There was no interest in psychological subtlety and all the characters often contrasted in pairs as Adams and Trulliber, the good and the bad parson, are most healthily extrovert.

His next book Jonathan Wild, the Great (1743) was an easy criminal biography purporting to be the life of the notorious highwayman who had already attracted the pen of Defoe. It contains a veiled attack of Fielding's old enemy Walpole, and the manner of writing is savagely caustic. The thesis on which the book rests is that the qualities that made the great criminal can be shown to be identical with those that animate the; i.e., greatness without goodness is curse to mankind.

Irony is implicit in Fielding's view of life. In the history of life of late Mr. Jonathen Wild, the Great, it is explicit single minded, and sustained some pages of Swift apart, it is the grimmest and the most brilliant prose satire that we have; and perhaps it is even more effective than Swift's because it is not the work of a misanthrope.

Its theme is the greatness as conventionally interpreted the cult of success for its own sake. Whether it was intended as an
attack on Walpole is now of merely academic interest; Jonathan Wild can never in all its history have had more point than it has acquired during the last twenty-five years of dictators and totalitarian politics. The great man whose career Fielding relates was a thief and an organiser of robberies, a racketeer in crime itself who had been hanged at Tyburn in 1725. He is presented throughout in terms of the utmost admiration; He is great not good. 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.

Wild is, as it were, the superman of crime, beyond good and evil; Fielding is constantly showing us how his greatness might have been compromised had he allowed himself to be swayed by merely human considerations of generosity or pity; but Wild never succumbs. To the last, his progress through the underworld of London is triumphant.

Against him is set his old school friend, the shopkeeper Heartfree, whom he swindles and robs and whose wife he abducts; a man so pusillanimous as not even dare to commit murder in order to escape from prison. His low and pitiful behaviour in loving his family and trusting his friends rightly earns the contempt of the whole jail.

A brief summary of Jonathan Wild is as follows:

Jonathan is represented in a mock geneological table as
the last member of a very ancient family of thieves. He learns to steal almost before he is out of the cradle, and takes the lead among the schoolfellows in their expeditions to rob orchards. Having completed his education with a course of reading in picaresque literature, he goes on the grand tour of the colonies, and returns to make himself, by his superior wits and invincible courage the secret but despotic ruler of a gang of thieves, who carry on their operations all over London. Wild never takes part in any robbery. He receives the stolen property, which he disposes of to the owners or other people, giving only a small fraction of the amount realised to the actual thief. He shows his greatness by his complete control, which he enjoys over his followers. If any of them shows signs of dissatisfaction with him, he is handed over without remorse to the authorities and hanged. Blueskin, for instance, tries to keep a watch that he has stolen, instead of surrendering it to the leader, Jonathan Wild, and he also puts himself at the head of conspiracy against him. Blueskin is sent to Newgate prison. The others are terrified and the profoundest submission is re-established.

Jonathan was an outlaw around whom a host of stories and legends has collected. Much in the Fielding novel is in record worth popular stories about this notorious figure. But the novelist has enlarged the story with episodes of the rascal capacity in emptying the card table. Wild uses his talents even on the wily Count La Ruse, who cheats him at cards, but is himself robbed of
his gains without being able to convict it by the friend Jonathan whom he knows to be the culprit. However, Wild is not happy in his love affair. He nurses a passion for Mrs. Laetitia Snap, daughter of the keeper of the gambling house. She repels his attention with chaste indignation, but as soon as Wild's back is turned, lets another admirer out of the cupboard. Eventually, however, Wild marries this girl, who is probably a character out of a little known comedy of the seamy side of life.

The plot now gains interest with the affair of the heart and we get a number of thrills and sensations. Heartfree is a London jeweller who has been a schoolfellow of Wild. Wild takes complete advantage of his honesty and the confidence of the old friendship to induce him to entrust a quantity of valuable jewellery to his accomplice Count La Ruse, who runs away with it. Heartfree is even robbed of large amount of money, and finds himself ruined, more than half the jewels being the property of other tradesmen. He is thrown into Newgate prison. Wild has cast evil eyes on the poor man's wife and now entraps her into fleeing with him in a ship to the continent, under the pretence saving her husband from bankruptcy. A forcible attempt to violate the chastity of the lady is defeated through the intervention of the captain of the ship and wild for the sake of punishment, is cast adrift on a boat. In this predicament, the intrepid rogue plays the part of the conventional romantic hero. But this is the finest exploit to regain the confidence of his victim, Heartfree.
now languishing in gaol. The jeweller, however, rejects his offer of aid; he is too much of a gentleman to attempt to escape by murdering one or two keepers.

Wild then determines to have Heartfree put out of the way, and prepares a case against him on false charges of fraudulent bankruptcy. Hearfree is found guilty, and is on his way to the gallows, when Mrs. Heartfree reappears. She has recovered most of the stolen property; and when Firebrand, a member of Wild's gang turns against his chief and discloses the whole plot, the prisoner is released and the Heartfrees are restored to their former prosperity.

Life is at length brought to book. He is tried and sentenced to be hanged, and being foiled in an attempt to cheat the gallows by taking poison, mounts the scaffold in the midst of an enthusiastic crowd and with admirable firmness swing out of this world. The novel is in the tradition of picaresque with a marked element of the melodramatic. In the novel Fielding has made good use of his experience as a magistrate.

Apart from the interlude describing Mrs. Heartfree's return from Africa, a flaw in the construction of the novel but fascinating as a glimpse of Fielding's idea of Utopia, the intransigent grimness of the comedy never relaxes. It is continuous when Wild is off the field as when he is on. One may quote the instance of the behaviour of the prison officer who charges Heartfree, at the moment he is to be led out to the execution, five guineas, as to spend ten minutes with
his wife and then twenty to make it an hour, and having accepted the money discloses when the time is up that a reprieve has already arrived.

What gives Jonathan Wild its endearing power is the single-mindedness, with which the theme is treated, the unrelenting way in which Wild, the gangster, is made to stand for greatness at all levels. In his other novels, Fielding attacks unbridled power and its attendant evils incidentally and their local manifestations, corrupt magistrates, prison officers, noblemen who are a law to themselves and so on; in Jonathan Wild he shows it by implication, as a principle operating throughout society, and he does so in terms of a comedy which, however remorseless, is still a comedy.

Yet fine as Joseph Andrews and Jonathan Wild are, they scarcely prepare us for so great an achievement as the history of Tom Jones, which after two centuries, remains among the handful of supreme novels. The new element in Tom Jones is Fielding's architectonic quality no plot has ever been carried through with more consummate skill, and the skill can be truly appreciated only after the book has been closed. In reading, one is delighted with the swiftness of the narration, the economy, the nimble and the inexhaustible invention. Fielding has learnt much from his experience in the theatre, specially how to break up the narrative, set his scene in minimum of words, and carry on the action, in short, Swift passages of dialogue. But it is only after reading that we realise how every
detail has its place in action, is a preparation of what is to come, the full significance of which can not be apparent until the novel has reached its end; then what seemed at first glance a happy stroke of invention reveals itself as a part of essential structure of the book, without which the whole could not exist. Fielding was a superb craftsman in his own way as Henry James. There is only one blot on the novel judged as a formal whole, the introduction of the extraneous story of the man of the Hill, and even that can be plausibly, if not convincingly, be justified.

Fielding was innovator not only technically. Tom Jones was a new kind of a hero, one might say the unheroic hero. He is handsome, brave, generous, and well meaning, it is true; though he did not always act rightly, yet he never did otherwise without feeling and suffering from it; but though his heart is in the right place, his instincts are not always in his control. He is a depiction of an ordinary weak man. When we first meet him he is foundling mysteriously placed in Mr. Allworthy's bed assumed, therefore, to be a bastard: as Mr. Deborah Wilkins, the servant says:

"It goes against me to touch these misbegotten wretches whom I do not look upon as my fellow creatures. Faugh! How it stinks; it doth not smell like a Christian. If I make so bold to give my advice, I would have it put in a basket, and sent out and laid at the churchwarden's door."26

26. Allen, p. 57
But Mr. Allworthy brings up the child as his ward. Tom's enemy throughout boyhood is Mr. Allworthy's heir and nephew, Master Bilful, a youth a year younger than Tom who constantly tells tales about him, and finally when Allworthy is ill, lies about him to such effect that Tom is turned out of the house. By now he is in love with Sophia, the neighbouring Squire Western's daughter. He thinks first of going to sea, then decides to join the army marching North to meet the Scots forces of the year 145. At upton-on-seven, he sees Sophia again; she is staying in the same inn, having run away from her father who is for compelling her to marry the detestable young Bilfil. Tom follows her to London with the intention of returning a pocket book of hers that he has found. In London despairing of ever marrying Sophia, knowing indeed that he can do her only harm, he meets an entirely fresh set of adventures; he becomes the lover of Lady Bellaston, an elderly woman of fashion, and something which has drawn the indignation of many critics down on Fielding - accepts money from her. It is not until after he has broken with her and been thrown into Jail at the instigation of Lady Bellaston and Lord Fellamar who wishes to marry Sophia, that everything is set right, the truth about his birth revealed, Bilfil banished in disgrace and he is able to marry Sophia.

Tom Jones may claim to be the first novel written to a theory. It was epical in structure or rather an alternation of epic and dramatic, the narrative complicating itself so as to bring various
conflicting interests and rival intrigues to a close encounter, and then, by means of a sudden disclosure, unravelling the complications. In other words, Tom has a series of involved adventures, which are shaped towards their climax by the hand of a dramatist. The rigid linking of cause and effect lies partly in the nature of comedy and is partly the direct result of Fielding’s philosophy. Taking a point of vantage outside the story, the author, inspired by the comic spirit, directs his analytical intelligence to the point where the planes of o beingp and o seemingp intersect, and he reverberates with thunderous laughter at the contradictions and hypocrisy suddenly revealed. Behind all the chance encounters, the incongruities and anomalies that make up [the affairs of man is a scheme, a pattern perhaps a little too artfully contrived but due at all events to deliberation.

In contrast to the concentrated inwardness and brooding shadows of Richardson’s Clarissa, we are offered a panorama flooded with warm light basking in the sun at noonday. Tom Jones is in the eighteenth century before the mists of sentiments clouded its hard outlines and softened its stark conflicts, the reader is soon on familiar terms with a broad cross section of society in the period immediately after the second Jacobite Rebellion while the country was still convulsed by that romantic upheaval. Many references to this event are woven into the story; Patridge is a foolish Jackobite; troops are constantly on the move; the heroine, Sophia, fleeing from her father, is actually taken for Jenny Cameron, Prince Charlem’s Mistress.
The story falls naturally into three parts. The first strongly reminiscent of the oldest stratum of romance fiction, begins with the mysterious discovery of an infant in Mr. Allworthy thumbed after that gentleman has been away for business in London. This part presents life in the country, full flavoured and rich in healthy animalism.

The stage is dominated by hard drinking, hard swearing, fox hunting Squires, gamekeeper turned poachers, obsequious villagers and their much seduced daughters, cantankerous pedagogues and Censorious ladies of all classes. Tom’s origin remains a mystery, but Mr. Allworthy takes pity on him and brings him up with his own nephew, young Blifil, an odious hypocrite who seeks to harm the generous and manly Tom. The boys are educated by Thwackum and Squire. Philosophical progenitors of so many eighteenth century theory mongers:

".......... Their tenets were indeed diametrically opposite to each other, Squire held human nature to be the perfection of all virtue, and that vice was deviation from our nature, in the same manner as deformity of the body is. Thwackum, on the contrary, maintained that the human mind, since the fall was nothing but a sink of inequity till purified and redeemed by grace. In one point only they agreed, which was in all their discourses on morality, never to mention the word goodness".²⁷

²⁷. Neil, P. 72
The favourite phrase of the former was the natural beauty of virtue, that of the latter was, the divine power of Grace. The former measured all actions by the unalterable rule of right, and the eternal fitness of things; the latter decided all matters by authority; but in doing this he always used the scriptures and their commentators as the lawyer doth his coke upon Lyttleton, where the comment is equal authority with the text.

Tom falls in love with the companion of his childhood, the beautiful Sophia Western, daughter of a neighbouring Squire, but the romance that began so lyrically ends with a reversal of fortune for the hero. Betrayed by the unscrupulous and jealous Blifil, Jones is turned away by Mr. Allworthy, and takes to the road, penniless and rejected.

The second part of the story records the Swift dramatic succession of adventures on the road, in which the various threads of the narrative become inextricably entangled and a host of new characters are encountered, each one of whom contributes the story of his experiences. There are many digressions and the author intrudes at intervals to harangue the reader on some point of philosophy or construction.

The third and the last part is set in London, where Tom established himself - thanks to his good looks, gallantry and charm - under the protection of Lady Bellaston, and whether Sophia flees to avoid being forced into a marriage with Blifil. Her father pursues
doing so. General impulses rooted in unselfishness and respect for others, he thinks best guarantee of virtue.

**Tom Jones**, the longest of Fielding's novels, was also his major contribution to the development of English fiction. Inspite of the large number of characters and many changes of scene, the plot is constructed with great care, but it is the plot of a dramatist, however, and it is interesting that Coleridge - no mean student of the novel - asserted that there were only two better plots in existence, those of *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles and the Alchemist of Ben Johnson.

Plot of *Tom Jones* is compact and not discursive and rambling like that of Joseph Andrews. Its plot is perfect according to Coleridge. o What a master of composition Fielding was, he says, o Upon my word, I think *Oedipus Tyrannous*, the Alchemist, and Tom Jones three most perfect plots ever planned.p

But the compact and organic plot of the type of Tom Jones is likely to have some drawbacks. For one thing it may be so mechanically put together that its very cleverness may impress us with a sense of laborious artifice. Then it may make frequent use of coincidences and thereby lack plausibility. The plot of Tom Jones is no doubt very compact. There are only two digressions within the story. One of them is the squire Allworthy homely on the benefits of matrimony, and other the story of the man of the hill. Taking into consideration the fact that the eighteenth century novels bristle with
digressions, the two digressions in a voluminous novel like Tom Jones are almost negligible.

But on the whole the plot gives the impression of a laborious artifice. Events are cleverly manipulated, there are too many coincidences so that the novel puts too great a strain on our credibility. Tom Jones is well enough constructed, says Somerset Maugham:

And the various incidents follow one another with a happy invention. Fielding was little concerned with probability as the picaresque novelist who were his predecessors in genre, and the most unlikely events occur. The most outrageous coincidences bring people together; yet he bustles you along with such gusto that you have hardly time, and in any case little inclination to protest.

According to Scott, Tom Jones is "a story, regularly built and consistent in all its parts in which nothing occurs, and scarce a personage is introduced, that has not some share in tending to advance the catastrophe." But this very regular structure of Tom Jones is indicative of its artificiality. The world in which all events and characters tend to advance the catastrophe can not be said to be a natural world.

There are numerous instances of coincidences and improbability in Tom Jones. To mention only a few, Tom loses his bank notes immediately after he is turned out of his patron's house. Again by a happy accident, Sophia's pocket book with the bank note in it falls into his hands. When Lord Fellamar attempts to violate
Sophia, she shrieks and of all persons, her father enters the room to save her. These and similar other instances of coincidence will be found in the summary of Tom Jones which is appended to this essay.

The artificiality of the plot of Tom Jones will be still further apparent if we examine its end, which is theatrical in nature. As in the last act of a Comedy, all the characters appear on the stage, in the same way towards the end of Tom Jones, all the characters meet in London besides before the novel ends.

FIELDING AND THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

The term o picaresquep is derived from the Spanish word l "picaro" which means a rogue. The term was originally applied to a class of romances that dealt with rogues and knaves. The earliest example of the "picaresque" novel are Lazarillo de Torms and Guzman de Alfarache. Gil Blas is the most famous picaresque novel in French.

Tom Jones is written in after the manner of the picaresque novel and possesses some of its important characteristics. Its hero is, however, not a rogue. But the essential feature of the picaresque novel is the travel and adventure of the hero. Like the hero of the picaresque novel Tom Jones undertakes a journey and meets with a succession of adventures on the way to his destination. As Edwin Muir points out, o In the eighteenth century, the novel had not freed itself from the trammels of the story centred on a single figure who
had always to be present, and through characterisation was then considered the main thing, the narrator remained on the centre of the stage. Perhaps he doubted the capacity of his characters to hold the reader's interest and felt that an exciting stories containing adventures was necessary. In any case, a tale centred on a hero had to be kept going and at the same time a number of characters had to be given an excuse for appearing. So we have the hard worked travelling hero posting from inn to inn, now in the country, now in London, knocking at the doors of the great foregathering with rogues and thieves, languishing in prison or on board ship, suffering every vicissitude, good and bad; and enduring them all not because the novelist has any tender regard for his hero's suffering, or fortunes, but because he is arid of variety, and is determined to get a pass to as great number of contrasting scenes as he can.

The object of the picaresque novel then is to take a central figure through a succession of scenes, introduce a great number of characters, and thus build up a picture of society. This exactly is the pattern, which the story of Tom Jones follows. The hero is taken through a succession of scenes and situations, and has a number of adventures on the roads and inside the inns. He meets persons of different types and tempers. In this way a picture of society is gradually built up. The novel, which follows this design, is known as picaresque novel

The novelists of the eighteenth century commonly follow the
pattern of the picaresque novel. Fielding follows the picaresque tradition and so does Smollet. Fielding's first novel, Joseph Andrews is a picaresque novel. When the story begins, Joseph Andrews, the hero is employed as a footman in Lady Boobyhouse. He is a very handsome young man and the lady falls in love with him. But since he refuses to yield to her carnal desire, he is turned out of the lady's house. Thus begin the travels of Joseph Andrews. On the way he meets accidentally a kind friend, Parson Adams, and his sweetheart Fanny. The three now travel together. Since each is almost penniless, they are compelled to travel on foot. Their progress, therefore, is slow. They stop at various roadside inns where they meet both good and bad persons. On the road they encounter thieves and scoundrels who rob them of whatever small money they possess. They frequently fall into trouble but and are every time saved by some good and kind man. Fanny is forcibly taken away by the agents of the wicked Squire, but is rescued from their clutches by friends who accidentally appear on the scene. Thus, the story moves on from one adventure to the other, the Hero Joseph Andrews being present in every scene and situation.

"Tom Jones, the hero of the novel, is a foundling mysteriously discovered one night in the bed of wealthy virtuous and benevolent Mr. Allworthy. The kind Squire brings him up and educates him. But Tom incurs the wrath of his benefactor with the result that he is turned out of his house. Now begin the travels of
Tom Jones. Accompanied by a schoolmaster, Partridge, he sets out for London. On the way he meets a number of adventures, some of which are of amorous nature. He goes from place to place, stopping at numerous inns on the way. He joins the army, as a volunteer, but being seriously wounded in a fray, can not accompany the soldiers with whom he wants to go. He meets several strange persons. One of whom is the man of the Hill who wilfully leads a lonely life. He falls among gypsies in whose camp he spends a night. Finally he reaches London. But his adventures do no come to an end there. He meets Lady Bellaston, a lustful woman, who for some time supports him in London. Misfortune, however, persistently dogs his heels and he is imprisoned in London. In this way the story of Tom Jones is a long string of adventures in different scenes and situations”.

Smallet sends his hero on still longer travels and the adventures that befall them are of harrowing nature. For instance, Roderick Random, the hero of the novel of that name is sent to West Indies. His father suddenly disappears leaving Roderick to fend for him self. His uncle, Tom Bowling, comes to his rescue but he, too, goes on one of his long voyages leaving Roderick as poor and destitute as before. After a number of mishaps and adventures, Roderick is appointed a surgeon’s mate and a man-of-war, which sails with the Carthagena Squadron. Roderick has a number of horrible experiences

on board the war ship. While returning from the West Indies, the hero is ship wrecked, is robbed by his mates and left naked on the shore. He takes service with a middle-aged lady with whose niece Narcissa, he falls in love. But on the appearance of a powerful rival, he has to flee the scene. After a series of mishaps he is arrested and cast into a prison. But now fortune begins to smile on him. His uncle returns and secures his release from the prison. Finally, he meets his father who is now a very wealthy man. His money enables him to marry Narcissa.

We have given above a brief analysis of the plots of Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Roderick Random. In each, the hero has been sent on travels by which device he comes across host of characters of diverse types and temperaments. The travelling hero meets persons pursuing different occupations, and belonging to different social strata. Besides, he has a long succession of adventures, most of which befall, him on the road or inside the inn. Now a novel in which a hero is sent on travels for the sake of adventures and in which he passes through different scenes and meets different sort of persons is called a picaresque novel. The novels of Fielding and Smollet mentioned above are o picaresque novelsp

The Picaresque Novel offers a criticism of an age whose picture it presents. Cervantes in his great picaresque novel Don Quixote gives a smashing blow to the tradition of chivalry. It ridicules
knight-errant by making his hero Don Quixote charge windmills. The novels of Fielding and Smollet, too, offer a criticism of their age and society

In Joseph Andrews, for instance, Fielding ridicules the ways of a corrupt society. The laws of that society are meant to oppress the poor. Its lawyers are selfish and egocentric. Its priests are worldly-minded. Its aristocracy is dishonest and lustful. A similar satirical picture of a corrupt society is presented in Tom Jones too. Tom Jones is a good man and yet he suffers, for he falls a victim to deceit and treachery, cruelty and revenge. Smollet himself explains the moral purpose of his Roderick Random. It is to represent modest merit struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed from his own want of experience as well from the selfishness, envy, malice and base indifference of mankind. The picture that Smollet offers to our view is that of selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind. The picaresque novel therefore is not purely a novel of adventures. It has an innate moral or satirical purpose. It exposes the vice corruption in inherent in a society. It ridicules its folly and frivolity. If its purpose is wider and more universal as in Tom Jones, it ridicules the folly and frivolity, vice and weakness of mankind in general.