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Genre Evolution in Fielding's Dramaturgy

If at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century investigators of Fielding's works were apt to ignore his dramatic heritage, of late there is a tendency towards a certain reappraisal of values.¹ And no wonder: for the greatest novelist of English Enlightenment began his literary career as a playwright and devoted ten years of his life to the stage, during which period he wrote over twenty plays.

The importance of Fielding's dramatic works has been much debated.² Irrespective of the substance of the matter, it may be averred that the evolution of Fielding as a playwright is extremely characteristic of England in the Augustan age. No serious study of English drama can possibly overlook Fielding's dramatic works, striking primarily for an extraordinary diversity of genres: the comedy of manners and the dramatic parody, the farce and the dramatic pamphlet, the ballad opera and adaptations of Molière. In his plays Fielding did not follow a constant pattern, and if at the threshold of his dramatic career he adopted the recognized literary standards, he later turned to new forms. The problem of genre evolution in the dramaturgy of Fielding merits serious consideration.

A writer of comedies by nature, at first Fielding undoubtedly took his cue from the specimens of comedy popular in the twenties of 18th century England. In the last third of the 17th century a peculiar kind of comedy of manners originated and developed in England — Restoration comedy. Nowadays hardly anyone would overestimate the public resonance of the plays by Wycherley, Farquhar, Congreve and Vanbrugh, but their comedies were extremely popular with the theatre-goers; much more so than serious classicist drama (from Dryden's heroic plays to Addison's *Cato*).

Today the Restoration Comedy may be more impartially appraised. On the one hand — well-made entertaining plots and brilliant dialogues, on the other — moral indifference as a natural reaction to Puritan didacticism: the creators of the Restoration comedy impassively transferred the loose morals of society to the stage. For instance, Lord Macaulay wrote about the theatre of those days:

It is as essential to his (gentleman's — M. S.) breeding and to his place in society that he should make love to the wives of his neighbours as that he should know French, or that he should have a sword at his side . . . The hero intrigues just

as he wears a wig; because, if he did not, he would be a queer fellow, a city prig, perhaps a Puritan. All the agreeable qualities are always given to the gallant. All the contempt and aversion are the portion of the unfortunate husband . . . The dramatist does his best to make the person who commits the injury graceful, sensible, and spirited, and the person who suffers it a fool, or a tyrant, or both.³

The profusion of indecent jokes and scabrous situations on the stage aroused the protests of some Puritan writers. Of these the best known is Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, published in 1698, and causing stormy polemics.⁴ Collier, as well as some other writers, attacked the immorality of Restoration Comedy. This criticism could not but leave its impress, and frivolity became considerably less prominent in plays. Some writers began to introduce a moral strain into their comedies: take, for instance, the works of Farquhar and Vanbrugh written at the beginning of the 18th century. Nevertheless, having rejected an overdose of sanctimony and didacticism the comedy remained a merry comedy of manners and on the threshold of the 18th century it founded the traditions of English comedy writing of the new age.

Fielding was largely subject to this tradition, particularly at the start of his career. *Love in Several Masques* shows the influence of Congreve and Vanbrugh. In the Prologue Fielding praises the talents of Wycherley and Congreve with all the reverence of a docile pupil. Both the Prologue and Dedication show that the gallant comedy of manners served as a model for Fielding. H. Banerji justly remarks (quoting the first chapter of the 14th book of *Tom Jones*) that "he has much in common with writers like Congreve and Vanbrugh. But he has nothing but contempt for their imitators whose characters and descriptions often appear to him to be as absurd as Hogarth's pictures would be if he painted a rout of a drum in the dresses of Titian and of Vandyke . . ."⁵

The action of Fielding's first play, typical of a Restoration comedy, is confined to London society. The play abounds in amorous collisions, and the word "love" in the title is by no means accidental. The frivolous situations give one a notion of the morals and manners of the English nobility of that period; take, for instance, the "comedy of errors" in the second act, where Lady Trap pretends to be her own niece to steal the affection of the young gentleman Merital. As for Merital and his friends Malvil and Rattle, they are very much like Valentine, Scandal and Tattle from Congreve's comedy *Love for Love*.

The tradition of the previous epoch is also plainly perceptible in the structure of the comedy with the inevitable prologue and epilogue written in verse, and five acts, each ending in rhymed verse. The names provide a key to characters; Lady Matchless, Merital, Sir Apish Simple, Rattle, Lord Formal etc.

Except for the moralizing monologue there is hardly any didacticism in Fielding's first play. The comedy shows, as A. Yelistratova rightly observes, that "the playwright Fielding is a stranger both to the false patriotic, tragic loftiness of

Addison and the moralizing sentimentality of Steele and Cibber, by means of which they sought to 'sanify' the Restoration comedy . . ."⁶

Viewed retrospectively, and with Fielding's later dramatic works and prose taken into consideration, *Love in Several Masques* displays specifically Fieldingian moments. Thus, his heroine Lady Matchless mentions Fielding's favourite novel *Don Quixote*. All the satirical characters worship the Italian Opera, which Fielding, following Gay, scoffed at. The comedy in general is notable for a satirical trend characteristic of Fielding but not at all requisite for the traditional comedy of manners. "I sometimes look on my drawing-room", says Lady Matchless, "as a little parliament of fools, to which every different body sends its representatives. Beaux of all sorts . . ." Of one of these beaux, who in vain aspires to the hand of the rich widow, she speaks as follows: "Sir Plume always walks in the minuet-step, and converses in recitativo."

These beaux, their appearance, manners and tastes are ridiculed in the comedy. All these "representatives of the little parliament of fools" are admirers of the opera, of affected French, and of high life in general. They value the person's manners above all. They do not take the trouble to read books. Lord Formal (played at Drury Lane by Colley Cibber himself), for instance, considers reading to be the most harmful thing for the eyes; but he frequents the book shop and listens to what others might say about literature so that he might keep up conversation in drawing-rooms. No better are Rattle or Sir Apish Simple, the affected descendant of Shakespeare's Andrew Ague-cheek.

Among the satirical characters of the play there is a provincial, Sir Positive Trap, who opens the gallery of Fielding's country squires leading to Squint Western. Sir Positive is coarse and ignorant, he sets his title, income and "glorious" name of Trap above everything else, believing that Julius Caesar himself was a maternal connection of the Traps. Still Fielding is more tolerant of provincial fools than of London ones. The country boor Wisemore wins the favour of the spectators as well as that of the charming Lady Matchless. The virtuous Vermilia thinks that the country preserved a more romantic idea of love, and this is not at all bad. Deriding London society, the young author by no means idealizes country life. Lady Matchless tries to modify Vermilia's delights with the words:

Oh! Vermilia, . . . there is more danger in woods and purling streams, than in an assembly or a playhouse. When a beauteous grove is your theatre, a murmuring cascade your music, nature's flowry landscapes your scene, heaven only the spectator, and a pretty fellow the actor — the Lord knows what the play will be . . .

The content of the monologue needs no comment, but let us consider the imagery. The monologue is rhetorical, the source of Fielding's imagery being the theatrical world which provided the material for the metaphors. This is characteristic of Fielding's style; in his prose the theatre is likewise often the source of his imagery.

We see that Fielding's first comedy is not modelled after Congreve's or Vanburgh's works: in form a Restoration comedy, it has the stamp of an original talent. If formally all the rules of the comedy of manners are complied with, the satirical accent in the dialogues is much more marked than in the works of his predecessors. Thus in the second act Vermilia's maid, bribed by Malvil, expresses her dissatisfaction with the fee: "You are in my debt at least five hundred pound at the rate of a guinea a perjury: if I had carried them to Westminster Hall I had made a better bargain." The political nature of such disclosures was an element alien to the popular comedy of manners. Though seldom yet, the Swiftian trend, so manifest in Fielding's mature books, is already noticeable in his early works. Fielding's plays *The Temple Beau*, *The Coffee-House Politician*; *Rape upon Rape; or, the Justice Caught in his own Trap*, *The Old Debauchees*, *The Modern Husband*, *The Universal Gallant; or, the Different Husbands* are written in the same genre.

In *The Temple Beau* there are plenty stereotyped components of the Restoration comedy. For instance, the play is centred round the figures of three young noblemen (Veromile, Valentine, Wilding) not unlike the characters of Congreve: the scene where the young men converse has a strong resemblance to the first act of *Love for Love*. True, the dialogues are not as frivolous as those in Congreve's plays and Fielding's first comedy, but there are many suggestive names, the end is as happy and the epilogue, in verse, is as edifying. The events making up the plot are, as a rule, motivated by love or the affairs of everyday life.

There is greater skill in the contrasting of characters in comparison with the first comedy, where only occasionally two groups are opposed (the metropolitan aristocrats to the country squires, or men of common sense to affected fools), whereas the main character of *The Temple Beau* is included into two opposite groups. On the one hand young Wilding, a beau and philanderer, is opposed to his father, a provincial nobleman, who naively believes his son to be studying law at Temple (that is, the *modus vivendi* of the beau as opposed to his father's illusions), on the other hand he is contrasted with young Pedant, a brain-fagged worshipper of logic and philosophy. This simultaneous inclusion into two opposite groups gives a certain salience to the character of the fashionable "picaro" Wilding.

Fielding's satirical talent is manifest in *The Temple Beau*, which is not lacking in mockery of the servants of the law. Swindling is declared the pledge of success in a legal career; the valets of lawyers are better versed in law than their masters; a lawyer's oath is unreliable — this is what the spectator learns from the dialogues and dramatic situations. However, it is not these social themes⁷ that dominate in the arrangement of the dramatic material, but the intrigue, traditional for the comedy of manners.⁸

Social satire becomes more ponderable in the comedies of manners written by Fielding in the thirties. Typical in this respect is the play *The Coffee-House Politician* constructed on the whole in accordance with the rules of the comedy

of manners. Here are the indispensable three young gentlemen round whom the events are centred, the edifying epilogue, numerous events motivated by amours, an incredible amount of "recognitions" in the end, etc. However, the prologue shows that the author must have had something more important in mind when he dissociated himself from contemporary comedy writing:

While beaux, and cits, and squires, our scenes afford,
Justice preserved the rogues who wield her sword;
All satire against her tribunal quash'd
Nor lash the bards, for fear of being lash'd.

The playwright declares his adherence to satire, which was not usual for the English drama in his day. Thus the Poet Laureate Colley Cibber, more than once ridiculed by Fielding, wrote: "When a master in the art is angry, then indeed we ought to be alarm'd . . . I allow the satyrist to have had personal provocation, yet, methinks, for that very reason, he ought not to have troubled the Public with it . . ." ⁹ In this respect, as in several others, Fielding was the antipode of Cibber.

In *The Coffee-House Politician* social satire is to be observed not only in separate remarks, but likewise in the development of the plot. The corrupt judge Squeezum with his train of constables-extortioners and perjurers, shown in action and exposed, is not an unpleasant exception. Fielding goes still further in his dialogues, in which he not only denounces the venality of individual attorneys, but general corruption as well. "The laws are turnpikes, only made to stop people who walk on foot, and not to interrupt those who drive through them in their coaches", Squeezum remarks cynically. And the judge Worthy bitterly declares: "... but golden sands too often clog the wheels of Justice, and obstruct her course . . ."

The plot and structure of this comedy are more complicated than those of *The Temple Beau*. The author concentrates on two points, as the title shows. Accordingly the characters fall into the following groups: the main humorous character — the Politician with his group (Dabble, Porer, Faithful); the main satirical character Squeezum with his group (Mrs. Squeezum, Staffs, Quill, the witnesses, watch); the young people (Constant, Ramble, Sotmore, Isabella, Hilaret and her maid) who make up the "comedy of intrigue", and, finally, deus ex machina — Judge Worthy. The artistic space of the comedy ¹⁰ is marked by considerable variety. The action is frequently taken out of the fashionable salon or bourgeois home into the street, the public-house and even the jail.

The Coffee-House Politician differs essentially in many respects from Fielding's earliest comedies of manners. But it should be borne in mind that the play was created at the end of 1730, whereas *The Temple Beau* was written at the end of 1729. In the lapse of time the playwright composed two plays quite different in genre from the Restoration comedy. The title of the first play indicates the genre: *The Author's Farce, with a puppet-show called 'The Pleasures of the Town'*. By turning to the farce the playwright escaped from the influence of the Re-

oration comedy. Besides, by introducing the eccentric into the play he pursued a satirical purpose, the objects for satire being taken from theatrical and literary London.

The play easily falls into two parts. Elements of the farce are to be found already in the first part — the ordeal of the playwright Luckless, whose serious plays are rejected both by the theatre directors and the publishers. Farcical are the self-characterizations by the Marplays, father and son (caricatures of Colley and Theophilus Cibber). Marplay senior, for instance, has his own "conception" of communication with spectators — "I'll keep them to their old diet" — and his own "conception" of literary composition which he explains to his son: "The art of writing, boy, is the art of stealing old plays, by changing the name of the play, and new ones, by changing the name of the author." Of a farcical nature is the third scene of Act II, which is laid in a bookshop crowded with hack writers.

The second part of the drama — Luckless's puppet-show "The Pleasures of the Town" — is pure farce. The show has a simple plot of its own; its satirical trend, however, blends with the whole farce. Besides the traditional Punch and Judy, there are several characters that are not merely comical, but satirical and allegorical. Such are the spirits brought by Charon to the underground kingdom of the Goddess Nonsense from the world of art: Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical, Dr. Orator, Signior Opera, Monsieur Pantomime, Mrs. Novel. They vie for the title of the first votary of the Goddess Nonsense.

In describing those characters Fielding makes wide use of satirical detail. "Monsieur Pantomime", says one of the spirits to the Goddess, "is dumb . . . He is the only one of your votaries that sets people asleep without talking." Farcical's farces are a babel of tongues, for the author himself does not know a single language properly. And it is Opera who finally becomes the first votary of the Goddess Nonsense.

The prototypes of these personages are well known: the creator of pantomime John Rich, the popular preacher John Henley, the opera singer Farinelli, the authoress Eliza Haywood, formerly criticized by Pope. They were all ridiculed by Fielding; and not only they. A certain generalization marks the whole play, including its second part, written in the best traditions of "Narrenliteratur". It was not so much persons as phenomena that Fielding derided — the cheap commonplace books and plays intended for entertainment.

The fact that Fielding turned to farce may at first sight seem paradoxical. Had he not denounced this genre, as well as the opera and pantomime, as a shallow, empty entertainment worthy of Sir Farcical? But John Gay, who also mocked at the general passion for the opera, himself used the form of the ballad opera! For Fielding, too, it must have been not so much the form as the content that he derided. He rejected farces like Samuel Johnson's *Hurlothrumbo*,¹¹ introducing into his puppet-show a fool named Hurlothrumbo. And at the same time he wrote a satirical farce, *The Author's Farce*, showing the possibilities of this old but exceedingly capacious dramatic form.

In 1730 Fielding once more turned to farce: on April 24, as afterpiece to *The Author's Farce*, his two-act farce *Tom Thumb* was staged. It had a run of 37 nights. Somewhat later Fielding produced a new, three-act version entitled *Tragedy of Tragedies; or, the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. This comedy was to have a longer run than any other of his plays.¹² Fielding wrote his comedy under the pseudonym of H. Scriblerus Secundus — a clue which leads us to the first Scriblerus, whose name was given to the Swiftian circle. For the second time, after signing his poem *Masquerade* with the name of Lemuel Gulliver, Poet-Laureat to the King of Lilliput, Fielding intentionally evokes associations with Swift. His new work proved it possible to combine social satire with the farce quite successfully.

The author of *Tom Thumb* has two objects of ridicule. The first one comprises the "great" people — kings, generals, statesmen. The subject of alleged greatness, which attracted Fielding already in the twenties, later became the leading theme in *Jonathan Wild*. The second butt for derision is the heroic classicist tragedy.

At the beginning of the 18th century the tragedies of Dryden, Lee, Otway, Banks were still popular on the English stage, most of them were short-lived, and already in Fielding's days their false pathos and pomposity seemed anachronistic. Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies* is a parody from the first to the last line. The characters, the situations, the dialogues of the heroic tragedies are all parodied. Among the plays at least partly parodied are Lee's *Sophonista*, Bank's *Cyrus, the Great*, Dryden's *Conquest of Granada* and *All for Love*. Fielding supplies his play with mystifying references to the texts of Dryden, Lee, Otway and even Shakespeare himself, who had allegedly been influenced by *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and had borrowed certain lines from it.

There are elements of the parody even in the introduction to the play, where Fielding parodies Colley Cibber and the dedication of *The Provoked Husband* to the Queen. Such dedications were quite in the spirit of the pathetic tragedies of the English imitators of Corneille. Fielding was one of the first to toll the bell for this dramatic form, and in doing so displayed his skill as a parodist. Quite in the tradition of Swift, Fielding makes effective use of the hyperbole and litotes. His main character, the glorious conqueror of the giants, is a tiny man. The captive Queen of the giants Glumdalca is a caricature of the long-suffering heroine of the classicist tragedy: first she suffers because her twenty giant husbands are all killed, then because of her passion for Tom Thumb. In the tragedy everybody is in love: Tom Thumb is in love with the Princess Huncamunca, the latter loves both the tiny hero and Lord Grizzle, the King loves the captive Glumdalca and so on and so on. The pompous style — the tragedy is written in iambic pentameter — is in striking contrast with the numerous obscenities. This unusual play might be classed as a dramatic burlesque.

Of the same genre is *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* (1732). Here Fielding parodies Ambrose Philips's *Distressed Mother* — an English adaption of Racine's *Andromaque*. The author reconstitutes the relations between the classical Pyrrhus and

Andromaque, Hermione and Orestes, transferring the scene to one of the Covent Garden brothels. Pyrrhus is transformed into Lovegirlo, Andromaque into Esinda, the characters are all haunters and inhabitants of bawdy-houses. The ethos is even more emphatic than in *Tom Thumb*. Later on the novelist Fielding will give up the form of the burlesque and resort to it only in the diction of the work. But in the early 30s the puppet-farce and burlesque helped Fielding to overcome the strong influence of the Restoration comedy and to expand his satirical stock by new means such as the literary parody.

The use of various genres led to interesting results in Fielding's later dramatic works. Signs of genre integration are to be found already in *The Coffee-House Politician*. Farcical are the dialogues of the Politician and his friends about world affairs; there is a farcical (comical-eccentric) element in the intrigue of the young people to teach the Justice a lesson. Here, as well as in Fielding's later work *The Wedding Day*, some literary critics find signs of the Jonsonian "comedy of humours"¹³; this manner, for instance, is employed in drawing the character of the Politician. It is noteworthy that John Gay had also passed on his way to his *Beggar's Opera* through the stages of parody and farce: in 1715 he had created his "tragicomi-pastoral farce" *The What d'ye Call It*. The genre integration is likewise reflected in the author's definition.

A new genre was established in the contemporary English drama by Gay's *Beggar's Opera* — the ballad opera, where dramatic dialogues alternate with musical arias, songs, duets. Between 1728 and 1733 this genre was in full flourish. Fielding was a great admirer of *The Beggar's Opera*, and already in 1731 tried his hand at the new genre. His play was entitled *The Welsh Opera*.

If in the farces of 1730—31 political satire was at times second in importance to literary and theatrical parody, *The Welsh Opera* was conceived as a satire upon certain movements in the political life of the country. It is no coincidence that in May 1731 this play was performed as an afterpiece to *The Fall of Mortimer* — a tragedy written by William Mountfort after a fragment left by Ben Jonson. In the tragedy there were political allusions easily understood: the spectators readily associated the dissolute courtier Mortimer with the insolent, corrupt prime minister Walpole. Walpole was also attacked by Fielding in his *Welsh Opera*, soon converted into *The Grub-Street Opera*.

The new title requires a comment. Grub Street in London was once inhabited chiefly by needy authors and literary hacks, hence it came to stand for hack-work, pulp literature. From 1730 to 1738 a periodical "Grub-Street Journal" used to be published in London, concerned mainly with literary subjects. In 1730—32 there was a polemics between Fielding and the journal.¹⁴

In the opening dialogue the author — the selfsame Scriblerus Secundus — says to the actor: "This opera was writ, sir, with a design to instruct the world in economy." True, at first sight Fielding's opera does not pretend to any seriousness. Comical are the characters — the illiterate Welsh landowner Sir Owen Apshinken and his niggardly wife, their profligate son, the uneducated

parson Puzzletext, the somewhat light-fingered servants. There are jolly songs, amusing dialogues, and a happy end. However, these comical characters, the humorous situations and certain of the remarks were interpreted by Fielding's contemporaries allegorically. In the Welsh couple of Apshinkens who spoke poor English the author ridiculed the royal couple, in the thievish butler Robin¹⁵ it was Robert Walpole who was derided. Fielding keeps playing upon the similar sounding of the name „Robin“ and the word “robbing”; the thefts committed by the butler are allusive to the unscrupulous use Walpole made of the treasury. Significant was the hint at the intimacy of Robin and Lady Apshinken.

Besides these direct allegories and hints, of interest is the critical pathos of the play reflected in several remarks as well as in the portrayal of Puzzletext who thought that “religious charity teaches us rather to starve the belly of our friend than feed it”. The dialogues abound in witticisms directed against the nobility, against the sham piety of the clergy, and in socially significant paradoxes. For instance, dubious is the compliment paid to statesmen, lawyers and priests in the frank and rather eccentric dialogue between Robin and his love, the maid Sweetissa:

Robin: Mine (love — M. S.) is as deep as the knowledge of physicians.

Sweetissa: Mine as the projects of statesmen.

Robin: Mine as the virtue of whores.

Sweetissa: Mine as the honesty of lawyers.

Robin: Mine as the piety of priests.

Sweetissa: Mine as — I know not what.

Indeed, it must have been not only the subtlety of the plot and the melodiousness of the songs that ensured the success of the performance of *The Welsh Opera*. (*The Grub-Street Opera*, even more pointedly satirical, would have been a still greater success, but, unfortunately, it never appeared behind the footlights). Thus, in his ballad operas of 1731—1732 Fielding, following Gay, remained primarily a satirist. However, in his *Grub-Street Opera* and *Lottery*, unlike *The Beggar's Opera*, not every scene nor every character is entirely subordinated to the purpose of satire. Satire does not yet dominate in the artistic system of Fielding's ballad opera.

Speaking of the teachers of the dramatist Fielding, we must mention, besides the Restoration dramatists and John Gay, another name — that of Molière. In 1732 Fielding wrote a play *The Mock Doctor; or, the Dumb Lady Cured*, which is easily recognizable as an adaption of Molière's *Le Médecin malgré lui*. In those days Molière's comedies were extremely popular all over Europe, including England. Among the English dramatists of the Augustan age there were imitators of Molière, such as Lacy or Mrs. Centlivre. Colley Cibber himself wrote his didactic comedy about a Jacobite priest (*The Non-Juror*) in imitation of Molière's *Tartuffe*.

Fielding's approach to Molière was essentially different. He did not endeavor to copy the French classic closely by transferring the situations of Molière's

comedies into his own plays. Although Fielding indicated on the title-page that the play was "Done from Molière", and in the Preface he qualified it as a mere translation, in fact he introduced plenty of his own jokes and even several original scenes (e. g., the scene with newly devised character Dr. Hellebore). And, finally, Fielding had his own prototype of the mock doctor, one Misaubin, whose crackery had already drawn the attention of the newspapers. Much later, in *Tom Jones*, Misaubin once more gets his deserts, and the writer's friend Hogarth drew a caricature of the "legendary doctor" in one of the plates of the "Harlot's Progress". Fielding's play also differs in genre from *Le Médecin malgré lui*: it is a ballad opera rather than a classicist comedy.

In 1733 the Drury Lane theatre produced Fielding's play *The Miser*, considered by many to be an adaptation of Molière's *L'Avare*. But this work may even less than *The Mock Doctor* be regarded as simply a British version of the French comedy. In *The Miser* the English playwright departed even further from the original, and this time he stated on the title-page: "A Comedy Taken from Plautus and Molière". The difference in the subtitles reflects the difference between the two plays, whose fates were also different. *The Mock Doctor* soon disappeared from the stage, whereas *The Miser* was a great success and had quite a long run on the English stage. In the Prologue to the play Fielding, without concealing his admiration for Molière, opposes his works to the comedies of the "modern bards" which represent "a dull collection of insipid jokes".

Speaking of Molière's themes in Fielding's works, scholars often mention two more plays, the source of which must have been Molière's comedies. They are *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734) and *The Old Debauchees*, not without reason called "the English Tartuffe" by Fielding's contemporaries.

It is not so much the school of Wycherley and Etherege, as the school of Molière that is perceptible in Fielding's mature comedies. The task set by Molière in the Preface to *Tartuffe* was much after Fielding's own heart: "Les plus beaux traits d'une sérieuse morale sont moins puissants, le plus souvent, que ceux de la satire; et rien ne reprend mieux la plupart des hommes que la peinture de leurs défauts . . ." ¹⁶ The English follower of Molière echoes his teacher in the Prologue to the comedy *The Modern Husband*, where he declares that the stage "was not for low farce design'd, but to divert, instruct and mend mankind". There are analogous statements in the prologues to *The Temple Beau* and *The Lottery*.

In Fielding's mature comedies which are far from moralizing there are nevertheless elements of didacticism. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of Molière. It is easy to note the increasing didacticism of Fielding's dramatic works by comparing the plays in chronological order and even different versions of the same plays. Thus, M. Irwin considers that, with the exception of *The Grub-Street Opera*, each new version of Fielding's plays was made more didactic than the previous one. ¹⁷

Fielding was certainly not a mere imitator of Molière. Besides, he did not think

it obligatory for himself to adhere to the rules of the classicist drama observed in most of Molière's comedies. Fielding's opponents frequently accused him of an ignorance of these rules. Thus, in 1732, one of the writers of "The Grub-Street Journal" gave the following criticism of Fielding's *The Modern Husband*: "... its author has not the slightest idea of what comedy should be . . . There is no unity in the fable . . . (Dramaticus was unquestionably brought up on the classicist models! — M. S.). Several of the characters are old ones purloined from other comedies, and all the rest lie outside of nature . . ." Fielding's friend T. Cooke responded in the monthly "The Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer": "... that is a comedy which gave me pleasure, tho it is not entirely conformable to the rules of the drama. By the rules of the drama . . . I presume the rules of critics who have no right to impose rules."¹⁸ In a later play *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* Fielding created the image of the narrow-minded critic Sourwit, who says to the playwright Medley: "... doubtless, sir, you know the rules of writing, and I can't guess how you can bring the actions of a whole year into the circumference of four-and-twenty hours . . ." As for Fielding himself, he entirely disregarded the views of all sorts of Sourwits.

The traces of Molière's influence may be detected in the comical figure of Dr. Drench from the comedy *Don Quixote in England* (1734). But this comedy calls for special comment as it is one of the three most interesting plays by Fielding, as well as the most complicated as to its genre. Besides *Don Quixote in England*, two of Fielding's mature plays — *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register* (1737) — are no easier to class than Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. Here are elements of the comedy of manners, the farce, the parody and the ballad opera, but the dominant element is most certainly political satire, which permeates every scene and every character. (Not without reason Fielding provided *Pasquin* with the subtitle "A Dramatic Satire on the Times".) These plays of Fielding are usually termed "political satires". This definition, however, is applicable to multifarious varieties of the drama; it seems apter, perhaps, to define this genre as a "dramatic pamphlet". The dramatic pamphlet has no rigid structure, in our opinion, and so far the genre is determined on the level of content only. The dramatic pamphlet has all the distinctive marks of the non-dramatic pamphlet: the satirical colouring, the political trend of the satire, the definiteness of the object of satire, the burning actuality, etc. The specific distinction of the dramatic pamphlet is that it is written for the stage.

The synthetic character of these plays in relation to most of Fielding's plays is apparent even from their satirical problems. The satirist attacks not only the morals and manners, as in the comedy of manners, not only events of theatrical and literary life, as in *The Author's Farce*, not only the lawyers, as in *The Temple Beau*, or justices, as in *The Coffee-House Politician*, not only Walpole, as in *The Grub-Street Opera*, but all of these and a lot more. And if formerly Fielding ridiculed only certain magistrates and priests, he now derides the lawyers and clergy in general (*Pasquin*). Besides, he attacks universal social phenomena and

the social order: the Parliamentary elections, the taxation policy, etc. It will be no exaggeration to say that in these plays the object of Fielding's satire is the political system of England, and this brings his dramatic pamphlets close to *The Beggar's Opera*.

Fielding's constant mockery of the pantomime, the opera and the theatrical squabbles is not at all socially insignificant. This is confirmed by the following discourse from *The Historical Register* where Fielding, like Shakespeare's Jaques, compares the stage with the world; true, a narrower one, — the political world:

... there is a strict resemblance between the states political and theatrical; there is a ministry in the latter as well as the former; and I believe as weak a ministry as any poor kingdom could ever boast of; parts are given in the latter to actors with much the same regard to capacity as places in the former have sometimes been — in former ages I mean; and though the public damn both, yet while they both receive their pay they laugh at the public behind the scenes ...

One of the main reasons why the genre of the pamphlet, even in prose, is so difficult to describe is the fact that this genre is seldom contrasted with other forms of prose. The only genre that is brought into opposition with the pamphlet is that of the pasquillo.¹⁹ It is easy to show that in the dramatic heritage of Fielding only pamphlets and not pasquillos are to be found. Our arguments will be derived from the play *Pasquin*, the title of which seemed to give Fielding's opponents grounds for accusing the playwright of pasquilling.²⁰

There are two manifest distinctions between the pamphlet and the pasquillo: 1) in the pamphlet the criticism is well-founded, whereas the charges in the pasquillo are groundless and false; 2) the pasquillo is usually directed against an individual persons, the pamphlet being directed against a certain social evil. The applicability of this to *Pasquin* hardly needs confirmation. Fielding mercilessly derides the English electoral system and both of the parties, and he ridicules ignorance and its vehicles — the clergy and the lawyers. The attacks on Gibber, Rich, etc., are demonstrative of the aesthetic views of the author of *Pasquin*, and even the constant object of satire — Walpole — is interpreted by the playwright as an element of the utterly corrupt State system.

The validity of Fielding's criticism may be once again ascertained by comparing his judgements with the evidence of contemporary essayists, memoir writers, artists. Thus Robert Walpole was severely criticized not only by the opposition; "Sir Bob" was noted by Swift as well and immortalized in his rhapsody *On Poetry*; he got the deserts from the author of *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*, too. The author of *Don Quixote in England* and *Pasquin* was not the only one to make Parliamentary elections the object of his satire; they were sarcastically exposed by Hogarth in "Elections" series.

A pragmatic confirmation of the justice of Fielding's criticism was the triumphant success of *Pasquin*. In those days not a single play except *The Beggar's Opera* had such a long run. Triumphs like these never fall to pasquillos. Let us recall, for comparison, the fate of a pasquillo by John Rich who was strongly

attacked in *Pasquin*. On April 10, 1736, Rich's theatre in Covent Garden staged the play *Marforio, A Theatrical Satyr, being A Comi-Tragical Farce Call'd the Critic of Taste; or a Tale of a Tub*. Inopportunely taking Swift's title, Rich puts into the mouth of his Marforio the answers to his "witty brother" Pasquin. Among the characters there was the Great Mogul (a caricature of Fielding), who was accused of plagiarizing from Rich! The play was performed once and quietly sank into oblivion.

It is interesting to note that the dramatic pamphlet called forth the pamphlet in prose. That very year (1736) a pamphlet *Key to Pasquin* by an unknown author appeared.²¹ The pamphlet elucidated the conformity of the play to political life, perfectly obvious as it was. The reaction of the official circles to Fielding's political attacks shows that the playwright had hit his mark. Thus in "Daily Gazetter" of May 7, 1737, someone writing under the pseudonym of "An Adventurer in Politics" warned the playwright of the danger threatening him if he continued in the same spirit. The writer regretted that they were not in France where the author of such plays could be put into the Bastille.

Fielding answered to the accusation in the oppositional "Common Sense", and then started the publication of *The Historical Register* which opened with a "Dedication to the Public" — a kind of "key" to *The Historical Register*. Besides giving a scoffing retort to the scribber from "Daily Gazetter", it discloses the corruption pervading the social organism and indicates the main social danger, namely, the policy of a group of "patriots" at the top, who ruthlessly trampled down the free rights of the people and were capable of selling "the liberties and properties of their country" for a miserable pittance. The Dedication also contains some attacks on Walpole-Quidam. In a word, the affinity between the two pamphlets — prosaic and dramatic — is quite obvious.

The domination of political satire in the artistic system is common to all three pamphlets. Nevertheless the plays differ greatly from one another as to form. *Don Quixote in England* is closest to the ballad opera; *The Historical Register* and *Pasquin* are constructed like the rehearsal plays. This modification came into fashion in England after the appearance of Buckingham's comedy *The Rehearsal* (1671), and as late as the 20th century prominent playwrights (e. g. Pirandello) made use of this form, and more often of the device "play within the play". Fielding himself first employed this device in *The Author's Farce*, recalled later by the audience of *The Historical Register*: two characters of the latter — the Ground-Ivies — are genetically connected with the Marplays of the earlier farce.

Since the form of rehearsal plays is being considered, note should be taken of the compositional difference between *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*. *Pasquin* clearly falls into two parts: the comedy "Election" and the tragedy "The Life and Death of Common Sense". The play may be studied both in its vertical and horizontal sections, for the play has not only two parts, but likewise two planes: that of the plays themselves, which are being rehearsed, and the interlude — the remarks of the playwrights, critics, actors. The second plane is

an important comment on the "inner plays". Owing to this division the audience experiences the "alienation effect"; neither Trapwit's comedy, nor Fustian's tragedy can be taken seriously.

Similar in structure is *The Historical Register*, a work of greater integrity than *Pasquin*: here the rehearsal of one play only is shown. The second plane in *The Historical Register* can hardly be called an interlude; it is as essential as the "inner play". Three of the scenes of the comedy (one in each play), are political ones in the proper sense: the sitting of the politicians on Corsica, the auction, and the dance of the patriots. None of them is lengthy — the satirist has mastered the art of dramatic laconicism — nor more allegorical than is necessary in order not to be too direct.

Allegorical are the two plays contained in *Pasquin*, not equally, however, but to an extent depending on the degree of generalization. In the comedy "Election" the allegory is of a monosemous character, whereas in the tragedy the allegorical image is more remote from the actual object of satire and therefore more generalized (only the episodic character of Harlequin is monosemously allegoric). The comedy and tragedy are quite different in style, nor do their plots have anything in common. They are united structurally by the second plane, the interlude.

In Fielding's dramatic pamphlets, besides the formal attributes of the ballad opera and the rehearsal play, the elements of multifarious genres previously known to the playwright are blended. In *Don Quixote in England* there is, as usual in the comedy of manners, a skilful intrigue in which the main character is involved by the efforts of Dorothea and Fairlove. The farcical characters of the play are the lawyer Brief and the doctor Drench. Elements of the farce become more frequent in the later dramatic pamphlets. Farcical is the scene of auction in *The Historical Register*, as well as some remarks by Ground-Ivies; farcically eccentric are the images of several spirits and that of Harlequin in the second part of *Pasquin*. In general the tragedy "The Life and Death of Common Sense", just like the show "The Pleasures of the Town", is reminiscent of the traditions of the English puppet-show; on the other hand, certain of the dialogues are a travesty of the classicist tragedy and call forth associations with *Tom Thumb*. It was not only in the dramatic material itself that farcical elements were to be found; they were premediated for the staging: take, for instance, the scene of the "patriots" dancing to Quidam's fiddle — Fielding had taken into consideration the plasticity of his actors.

It should be observed that the farcical scenes are also subordinated to one common satirical aim. "When my politics come to a farce", declares Medley, "they very naturally lead me to the playhouse, where, let me tell you, there are some politicians too, where there is lying, flattering, dissembling, promising, deceiving, and undermining, as well as in any court in christendom." Once again two worlds — the theatrical and political ones — are placed in unambiguous juxtaposition.

Incidentally, the enlightening, didactic accent is very strong in the dramatic

pamphlets. Take, for instance, Don Quixote's last monologue, or Fairlove and Dorothea's song about the madness of mankind or the persistent defense of Common Sense in the two subsequent plays. True, in these works the moralizing is not as artificial as in the epilogues to the comedies of manners. The epilogue is now an integral whole with the principal part of the play. Besides, this accent does not in the least contradict Molière's view on the task of the dramatist: "ridendo corrigere mores".

Fielding, as Gay had done before him, proved that political problems and the drama are not incompatible. He may rightly be considered one of the creators of the dramatic pamphlet, a new genre in world drama in which were synthesized the elements of many forms of the 17th and 18th century drama. The 19th century did not adopt this genre; in our century, however, it became extremely popular. Among those who developed it are such masters as Bernard Shaw and Bertolt Brecht.

"I left off writing for the stage at the point where I ought to have begun", Fielding wrote later on. The most popular playwright of England was only 30 when the Licensing Act compelled him, as Bernard Shaw put it, to leave "the trade of Molière and Aristophanes and take to that of Cervantes". One can imagine how brilliantly Fielding's talent as a dramatist would have developed had he had the possibility of pursuing the path he had chosen. But what he has achieved in dramaturgy substantiates F. H. Dudden's view that Fielding

in certain directions exercised an influence on the development of English drama. Thus he rendered service negatively by ridiculing various absurd or objectionable features of the contemporary theatre — the bombast of heroic tragedy, the pedantry of pseudo-classicism, the imbecility of pantomime, the enormity of Shakespearean mutilation, the stupidity of the conventional prologue and epilogue. Positively, by his example, he encouraged the production of short plays, which the 18th-century custom of appending an afterpiece (usually a farce or a pantomime) to a regular drama was helping to bring into fashion . . . Far more important, however, was the strong impulse which he gave to the dramatization of the real life of the time. What Lillo achieved in tragedy Fielding accomplished in comedy. He drew his characters and subjects from the actual world which he observed about him . . . All this was in Fielding's own phrase, a return "to nature and to truth". He stood, in short, for dramatic realism . . .²²

¹ F. H. Dudden: *Henry Fielding. His Life, Works and Times*. In 2 vols, vol. I. Oxford 1952. M. P. Alekseev: *Iz istorii anglijskoj literatury*. Moskva-Leningrad 1960, pp. 135—218. N. Ja. D'jakonova, "K voprosu o Fildinge kak satirike i prosvetitele", *Vestnik LGU*, No. 2, 1956, pp. 95—105. Ju. I. Kagarlickij: *Dramaturgija Fildinga*. Moskva 1954 (unpublished dissertation).

² See: *Henry Fielding. The Critical Heritage*. Edited by R. Paulson and J. Lockwood. London 1969. M. P. Alekseev: *Ukaz. soč.*, pp. 136—144.

³ Lord Macaulay: *Critical and Historical Essays*. In 4 vols., vol. 3, London 1888, pp. 224—225.

⁴ See: J. W. H. Atkins: *English Literary Criticism. 17th and 18th Centuries*. London 1951. A. Anikst: *Teorija dramy ot Aristotelja do Lessinga*. Moskva 1967, pp. 286—288.

- H. K. Banerji: *Henry Fielding. Playwright, Journalist and Master of the Art of Fiction*. New York 1962, pp. 3—4.
- A. Elistratova: *Dramaturgija Fildinga*. Ežegodnik instituta istorii iskusstv AN SSSR, Moskva 1948, p. 211.
- Applied to a dramatic work, the term "theme" is used in the sense imparted to it by S. Balukhaty (S. Baluchatyj: *Problemy dramaturgičeskogo analiza*. Leningrad 1927).
- A. Nicoll qualifies this comedy from the point of view of genre as a "comedy of intrigue". A. Nicoll: *A History of English Drama*. Vol. 2, Cambridge 1952.
- Colley Cibber: *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian*. London 1756. Vol. 1, p. 29.
- It is not the space of the stage, but the artistic space of the text of the play that is meant.
- Samuel Johnson, an actor and ballet-master, was namesake of the well-known scholar and writer Dr. Samuel Johnson.
- *The Tragedy of Tragedies* was produced in England in the middle of the 19th century, and, in a slightly modified form, at the Malvern Festival in 1932.
- See, for instance: A. Nicoll, op. cit.
- See: W. L. Cross: *The History of Henry Fielding*. New Haven 1918. Vol. 1.
- Walpole was likewise nicknamed „Robin“ at that time by the writers of the oppositional periodical *The Craftsman*.
- Molière: *Oeuvres Complètes*. Paris 1938. Vol. 1, p. 678.
- M. Irwin: *Henry Fielding. The Tentative Realist*. Oxford 1967, p. 31.
- Quoted from: *Henry Fielding. The Critical Heritage*. Pp. 37—38.
- This opposition is underlined by the authors of some literary reference publications. See, for instance: St. Sierotwinski: *Słownik terminów literackich*. Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1966, p. 180.
- See: M. P. Alekseev: *Ukaz. soč.* Pp. 205—206.
- Unfortunately, not a single copy of this pamphlet has come down to our time.
- F. H. Dudden: Op. cit. Vol. 1, pp. 228—229.