

**FIELDING ON THE WILDE SIDE? OR, WILDE ON THE
FIELDING SIDE?; CONTAINING A FEW COMMON
MATTERS, WITH A VERY UNCOMMON
OBSERVATION UPON THEM**

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The only real people are the people who never existed.

Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying."

But this is not a simple hermeneutical exercise, since the analyst's task is not only to lay bare the meaning of a distorted text, but to expose the meaning of the text-distortion itself.

Terry Eagleton (on Freud), *Criticism and Ideology*

New modes of interpretation, seriously practised, are less of a problem than "wild" practitioners...

Frank Kermode, *Essays in Criticism*

THE INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK, OR BILL OF FARE TO THE FEAST

On the surface, Oscar Wilde and Henry Fielding would seem, like Parson Adams and Fanny, to make unlikely literary bedfellows. However, I shall argue that Wilde's art theory, especially his inversion of the mirror of mimesis ('Life imitates Art more than Art imitates Life') has an ironic and, for Fielding, "grotesque" relevance. The broad framework underpinning the essay will be a study of some of the relationships between a selection of Fielding texts and authorial and general ideology: what may seem, at a glance, as a ludic(rous) nexus between Fielding's political opinions and Wilde's art theory, weighted down with a little subtextual ballast of wider references to Fielding's works and classical precedent. In order to give an account of the principal textual strategy that underlies this study it is necessary to acknowledge the following *sauce* (being not so much an origin as a preparation or dressing): Macherey's

A Theory of Literary Production. Macherey's study, however, is not accepted at face value (particularly his notions of ideology²): Macherey's work being a reference point, providing some useful metaphorical and theoretical notions (those familiar with Macherey's text will recognise that I merely appropriate his means of literary production). What is offered here, then, is an essay-sized 'symptomatic' reading (which inevitably expropriates Freudian notions), which is an attempt to probe the political unconscious (in a loose Jamesonian sense³) lurking in one aspect of Fielding's style; to give voice to what Macherey refers to as the inevitable gaps, lacks and silences which inhabit literary texts⁴ (although this will be extended here to what I shall provisionally term the "unliterary" autobiography). The space or silence is not regarded here as something which *necessarily* reveals ideology (or anything else). The filling of the spaces is like any attempt to fill what Wolfgang Iser (following Roman Ingarden) has called the 'virtual dimension' of the text: the space or silence is a meeting place between linguistic structures (causes) and 'realizations' (interpretive effects).⁵ Although involved in this interpretation is Macherey's notion that 'the text says what it does not say', the reading offered here is neither entirely subjective: it is restricted by the words on the page (Fielding's texts) and a series of interpretive practices; but by the same token, neither, as Stanley Fish would argue, does it reveal anything objective: it is implicated in the hermeneutical problems of *any* reading.⁶

A FURTHER EXPLANATION OF THE FOREGOING DESIGN

Wit. "...wild[e] pairings without a priest. If there is a priest, it is the author – whose authority, however, is what is put into question by such promiscuous yokings."

Geoffrey Hartam, "Monsieur Texte II: Epiphany in Echoland."

To some extent I shall start with revealing the silences; that is to say, with an analysis of Fielding's 'An Enquiry into the Late Increase of Robbers' (1751).⁷ This will be used as a means of providing an outline of Fielding's political opinions and the metaphorical basis upon which they rested. This will allow me to approach the crux: Fielding on the Wilde side. With some fortuitous use of Wilde, (and, incidentally, Freud, Saussure, Shklovsky, Bakhtin and Eagleton –the choir of voices that will help me to make some of the silences sing) I shall offer an answer to the following two-fold question: what is behind Fielding's stylistic tendency to depict members of the trading classes as mere grotesques or caricatures? Or, put another way, why is his autobiographical portrayal of the commercial classes (who often serve as symbols of the lower classes in general) of the same stylistic order as his fictional representation of them? I want to emphasise that what I am offering here is an interpretation based on a mere pin-prick of Fielding's style. Finally, referring to Bakhtin, I shall offer some comments on the (extra) literary/rhetorical function of Fielding's defamiliarization of the trading classes as grotesques and suggest that Fielding can be seen as a kind of blundering Faust. The spirit of the essay, in juxtaposing titles, texts and critical strategies, is not simply *jouissance* but "ecological": its spirit could be summed up by the German toilet-roll "Danke" –every so many sheets epigraphed to remind us that it is 100% recycled (often written as "recy-

cling” in German)– the greying paper (from which the ink could not be entirely erased) refabricated for the present: for new uses and consumption. The spirit here being closer to the German appropriation of the word “recycled”, not used in its native past participle form (*recycled*, which gives the impression of a process paralysed in the past) but with the gerundive suffix “recycling”, suggesting that the material (the essay’s content –its intertextuality) is part of a continuing and replaceable process of seeing: in opposition to the myth challenged here that presents a certain reality as “natural”; as the only one possible or desirable. A final comment on the form: Fielding’s politics has, of course, been the subject of much study, and in an attempt to offer a re-reading of the subject I have adopted a textual strategy which is, to some extent, ‘Hartmanesque’: i.e. I employ rhetorical devices associated with literary texts.⁸

PART ONE: WHICH THOSE FULLY CONVERSANT WITH FIELDING’S OFT STUDIED SOCIAL PAMPHLETS MAY OVERLOOK, BUT WHICH JUDICIOUS READERS MAY GIVE THEMSELVES SOME PAINS TO OBSERVE.

Fielding begins ‘An Enquiry’ by asserting that the customs, manners and habits of the people form a vital part of the political constitution and that if these are altered, then the political constitution must also change. It is significant that the metaphorical basis of Fielding’s argument (which is clearly Aristotelian and which, of course, was a commonplace in contemporary political thought) imparts a negative view of change: the constitution is visualized as a body, and the changes as ‘disorders’ which affect the whole.⁹

As is easily recognized, implicit in Fielding’s argument is the (constantly recycled) classical notion that the status quo is preserved for the sake of general advantage, that existing social relationships should not be subject to evolutionary change. After Fielding has outlined the history of the commonalty and their transition from being servile vassals, sometimes little more than slaves,¹⁰ to what he feels is their more exalted status in the mid-eighteenth century, he is able to identify the direct cause of what he sees as a contemporary malady and list its effects:

But nothing hath wrought such an alteration in this order of people as the introduction of trade. This hath indeed given a new face to the whole nation, hath in a great measure subverted the former state of affairs, and hath almost totally changed the manners, customs, and habits of the people, more especially of the lower sort. The narrowness of their fortune is changed into wealth, the simplicity of their manners into craft, their frugality into luxury, their humility into pride, and their subjection into equality.¹¹

I shall suggest in part two of this paper that the political attitudes which lie behind this series of generalizations and non-sequiturs about the ‘lower sort’ of people may go some way to explain Fielding’s presentation of traders as grotesques.

Fielding, *The Man of Feeling: Containing Scenes of No Very Uncommon Kind*

In 'The Enquiry' Fielding's humanitarian feelings are aroused by the social injustice which the following question reveals: 'for what can be more shocking than to see an industrious poor creature, who is able and willing to labour, forced by mere want into dishonesty, and that in a nation of such trade and opulence?' Fielding goes on to assert that not only public safety but 'common humanity' should exact the reader's concern –i.e. in the context of seeing the six-weekly spectacle of cart-loads of criminals 'carried to slaughter'.¹² Morris Golden, however, has commented on how Fielding's humanitarian instincts could be bridled. If Fielding 'completely subscribed to the humanitarianism which was more and more characteristic of English thought in the period, he had far too strong a sense of the existence of evil and of the dangers of society to be a moral or philosophical sentimentalist; too great an abhorrence of the commercial ethic to make the bourgeoisie admirable...'¹³ Yet, there is a problem here for critics who may feel sympathetic towards Fielding's abhorrence of the commercial ethic. As Malvin Zirker has noted (following a long line of social historians), there is always the conceptual problem of deciding quite who is the object of discussion when the social pamphleteers of the age coin words like "poor" or "common People".¹⁴ Although Fielding does make contradistinctions the accuracy of his terminology is erratic: he has the tendency to conflate 'the lower sort' or 'commonality' (other epithets include 'the lower branches of the constitution' and 'the inferiour part of humanity'), often making no distinction between different social strata. This vagueness often has the effect of making it seem as if the pronoun "their" (note the antecedent in the above quotation to 'and their subjection into equality') refers to *all* the members of the 'lower sort', whether traders or not. Thus, even if Fielding thought that the trading classes had achieved 'equality', it seems absurd to suggest land labourers had accomplished it (yet see the following quotation from 'An Enquiry'), let alone the partially or unemployed, which is to say nothing of the paupers. However, as I will try to show, conceptual vagueness serves an important function: by isolating and condemning one strata of the 'lower orders' (the traders) and then sliding into less specific terminology (e.g. 'the inferiour part of mankind'), *all* those below the level of the "rightful" rulers can be tarred with the same brush. So, what appears, superficially, as an attempt to restrict the power and possibilities of the bourgeoisie is, in fact, an attempt to halt *any* kind of social change –no other form of society is either desirable or workable.

One possible objection may be that I have omitted to mention how Fielding can equally turn a withering eye on other classes in society. However, Fielding views the sins of 'the great' (the traditional ruling classes) as less politically divisive, for Fielding, as a social critic, is concerned to reform the ills of the established class system. In 'An Enquiry' the cause of the contemporary increase in crime is seen, to some extent, as a product of necessity brought about by economic hardship. However, Fielding puts his main emphasis on the ruling class's failure to preserve their hegemony over the merchant and labouring classes. As long as Fielding rejects the notion of greater social mobility (a disruptive idea which had cast its sinister shadow in Richardson's *Pamela*) he is able, in 'An Enquiry', to offer the following remedy, inscribed in which is, from Fielding's perspective, a system of "fair" double standards:

Could luxury be confined to the palaces of the great, the society would not, perhaps, be much affected with it... With regard to such evils, therefore, the legislature [as regards the ruling classes] might be justified in leaving the pun-

ishment, as well as the pernicious consequence, to end in the misery, distress, and sometimes utter ruin, of a private family. But when this vice descends downward to the tradesman, the mechanic, and the labourer, it is certain to engender many political mischiefs...¹⁵

This quotation contains the essence of what might be called Fielding's libertarian dialectic: i.e. because the 'great' hold the means to their own punishment and, through their incontinence, offer no real threat to the social order, Fielding can feel justified in pointing an accusing judicial finger at the 'commonality'. (Of course, eighteenth-century notions of the corrective role of satire would also give Fielding an excuse to ignore the privilege of luxury among 'the great' while 'luxury' among the lower orders can be seen to be the 'parent of theft and robbery'.¹⁶)

Fielding not only deplores the conduct of the 'inferiour part of mankind', but offers remedies: the production of gin should, as much as possible, be eradicated; demarcation between the classes, e.g. the removal of the lower classes from the 'temples of idleness' (the masquerades), will provide a circumstance in which they will have less inclination to aspire to the exalted position of their *bettors*; the laws against the 'destructive vice of gaming' amongst the labouring classes, established since the days of Henry VIII, should be enforced and strengthened; where laws are deficient, as in the case of voluptuousness, they must be revised, i.e. by restricting luxury and idleness.¹⁷

Of the SERIOUS in writing, and for what Purpose it is introduced; or, Containing such grave Matter, that Readers cannot laugh once through the whole Chapter, unless peradventure they laugh at the Author.

As Zirker has observed, 'Fielding's appearance in 1751 among the ranks of the pamphleteers on the poor doubtless seems incongruous to the casual reader of *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, who cannot easily reconcile the social criticism of fashionable life and the apparent exaltation of the unfashionable hero characteristic of the novels'; the reader might suspect 'the presence of the familiar tongue-in-cheek narrator inviting the initiated to share his joke while blandly assuring the less quick-witted he speaks in all seriousness.'¹⁸ Although there are localized examples of irony, the conclusion drawn here is Zirker's: that as far as the political content is concerned, Fielding argues in all seriousness; there being no evidence to suggest that the social pamphlets are in the tradition of *A Modest Proposal* (any doubts about this can be allayed by reading *A Voyage to Lisbon* on the same topic). It is not a question of oversimplifying the text, of failing to recognize that Fielding's irony frequently turns on the vices and hypocrisy of the ruling classes. Although irony is present, a distinction can be made between irony which effectively satirizes the 'persons of fashion and fortune' and the underlying political values which seek to reinforce their preeminence. In Northrop Frye's terms the satire here is 'militant irony': 'its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured.'¹⁹ Thus, these examples of general irony can be distinguished from political or ideological content. This may be especially important when encountering menacing and seemingly indestructible political myths –menacing, in the Bakhtinian sense, because these metaphors (like that of the body politic) are often mistaken for unchangeable social relations which are 'reality'; myths which have, or may, reinforce or encourage repression– or support it with facile argument.²⁰ In this

context, Macherey's opening up of silences will serve to disclose the metaphor of the fixed system, the body politic –that social enforcer of frustration– a convenient representational/ideological instrument for the social or political commentator who is always loitering within its vicinity, ready to exploit its seeming “naturalness”, and exercise its seductive power.

An Enchanting chapter in which appears the ghost of Sigmund Freud: Containing much clearer Matters –but which flow from the same Fountain with those in the preceding Chapter

Fielding's development of the argument in 'An Enquiry' sheds further light on his attitude to the potentially disruptive power of trade. He offers the following distinctions: political power can be divided into four types: according to the power of the 'body', the 'mind', the 'purse' or the 'sword'. Under the second of these divisions, that of the mind, 'may be ranged all the art of the legislator and politician, all the power of laws and government.'²¹ This constitutes civil power, and Fielding is in harmony with classical precedent when he adds that, 'a state may be said to be in good order when all the other powers are subservient to this.'²² The greatest force of disruption is the power of the purse which effectively delivers inordinate powers into the hands of 'the commonality' (again terms slip from the more specific to the general). Its influence can be seen very clearly when Fielding deplores the reduction of civil power:

In some countries, perhaps, you may find an overgrown tyrant... who is as regardless of the law as he is ignorant of it; but as to the magistrate of less fortune and more knowledge, every riotous independent butcher or baker, with two or three thousand pounds in his pocket, laughs at his power and every pettifogger makes him tremble.²³

Fielding's body politic is like Freud's "geographical" metaphor of the mind. As long as the "regions" (Id, Ego and Super-Ego) carry out their proper functions there will be no dramatic disruption of the organism. Giving power to the purse (which involves the 'lower orders') is like turning Freud's scheme on its head: this is to allow society to be dominated by pure instinct rather than be policed by the proper region (the Super-Ego acting like Plato's philosopher kings). The slipperiness of Fielding's terms means that to agree to any restrictions on the 'commercial ethic' is tantamount to accepting the political myth of the body politic' because the 'independent' butchers and bakers etc. (symbols of the power of the purse) often find themselves less independently merged into the 'lower sort'; so to restrict the one is necessarily to restrict the other.

Another aspect of Fielding's argument is his concern for the ultimate political consequences of what he sees as increased wealth and liberalization. Fielding's notion of "liberty" contains its own dialectic, for he opposes those 'wild notions of liberty that are inconsistent with all government, and those pernicious schemes of government which are destructive of true liberty.'²⁴ What Fielding sees as excessive individual liberty must end in anarchy which itself 'is almost sure to end in some kind of tyranny'.²⁵ The balance of this dialectic, however, is unequal: Tyranny is not so

much the direct product of usurpation, oppression through gross egomania, or the unjust or despotic abuse of power, but the effect of a process of liberalization and a change in traditional social relationships. Although this idea can be traced back to Plato, the essential germs of the idea, in this context, are recycled from a passage Fielding cites from Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero* (1741), which, in describing the fall of the Roman Empire, supplies a convenient classical precedent for the process of decay, which leads to complete cultural dissolution and tyranny:

...this remote country [is] yet running, perhaps, the same course which Rome itself had run before it; from virtuous industry to wealth; from wealth to luxury; from luxury to an impatience of discipline and corruption of morals; till, by a total degeneracy and loss of virtue, being grown ripe for destruction, it falls a prey at last to some hardy oppressor, and with the loss of liberty, losing everything else that is valuable, sinks gradually again into its original barbarism.²⁶

Again this is like the Freudian mind which has not successfully passed through the Oedipal phase, and although may enjoy a period of stability, is violently thrown into neurosis. Fielding's power of the purse (like the displacements associated with dreamwork) is able to fool the "censor" allowing the "repressed" (in this case a menacing degenerate bourgeois community) its reign of terror.

PART TWO: FIELDING ON THE WILDE SIDE. CONTAINING MUCH MATTER TO EXERCISE THE JUDGEMENT AND REFLECTION OF THE READER

No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did he would cease to be an artist.

Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying'.

They [the ancients] are not, indeed, so properly said to turn reality into fiction, as fiction into reality.

Henry Fielding, *A Voyage to Lisbon*.

Paradoxically, and almost inevitably, history lags behind the project of describing it, and this delay contaminates the narrative itself.

Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*.

When Wilde claimed in 1889 that life imitates art more than art imitates life, he probably felt he was at the forefront of the avant garde; however, Fielding, by the end of his life, may have already "discovered" this for himself. There is a certain irony that when Fielding wrote the autobiographical *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* in 1754, his portrayal of the petty bourgeois mentality, which manifested itself in his novels in the shape of creatures of mean behaviour and great physical ugliness, should confront him in the "living" flesh and blood of the Francises, the innkeepers at Ryde on the Isle of Wight. Life, indeed, seemed to have imitated art: here is Fielding's description of Mrs Francis:

She was a short, squat woman; her head was closely joined to her shoulders, where it was fixed somewhat awry; every feature of her countenance was sharp and pointed... her complexion, which seemed to be able to turn milk to curds not a little resembled in colour such milk as had already undergone that operation.²⁷

This passage is stylistically reminiscent of the grotesqueries accorded to Fielding's fictional archetype of the landlady, Mrs Tow-Wouse, with her crooked body and her 'forehead projected in the middle, and thence descended in a declivity to the top of her nose, which was sharp and red, and would have hung over her lips, had not nature turned up the end of it. Her lips were two bits of skin... Her chin was peeked...' etc.²⁸ When Fielding describes Mr and Mrs Francis it is also in terms of calculated formal balance: '...nature or fortune, or both of them, took care to provide a proper quantity of acid in the materials that formed the wife, and to render her a perfect helpmate for so tranquil a husband. She abounded in whatsoever he was defective... She was indeed as vinegar to oil, or a brisk wind to a standing pool...' and for just as 'it was impossible to displease him, so it was as impossible to please her; and as no art could remove a smile from his countenance, so could no art carry it into hers'.²⁹ The similarities between the Tow-Wouses and Francises are not merely a question of style, but behaviour. Mrs Tow-Wouse's metamorphosis from novel to the Isle of Wight is in keeping with Wilde's statement that, 'Facts are usurping the domain of Fancy and have invaded the kingdom of Romance'.³⁰ Indeed, that class of the 'lower' orders', the innkeepers, are no longer figures in an idyllic golden age of virtuous subjection, with Mrs Francis displaying all the "Tow-Wousian" qualities of pretence, vanity, meanness, lack of common charity, sarcasm and hypocrisy.³¹ It is as if Fielding, like Wilde in his own autobiographical work, showed that 'the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence' and treated, 'Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction.'³² Or put another way, here is a case of where political attitudes have some direct effect on the creative and "non-creative" (autobiographical) vision.

From these stylistic tendencies it is tempting to surmise that what Fielding conceived as the pettiness and guile of the traders, whether symbolic Tow-Wouse or "actual" Francis, was so distasteful to him that the only way he could confront them, and their effects (especially political) on society as a whole, was to displace them as grotesques – as fictional caricatures (this interpretation is borne out to some extent by Fielding's dehumanization of Mrs Francis as 'insect' or 'rattlesnake').³³ This reading may be further justified by the fact that Fielding's descriptions from "real life" were no more "realistic" than his comic-epic creations: the symbolic-fictional concept and the stylistic embodiment of the referent blend into a seamless homogenized vision.

Containing a very surprising Adventure indeed: A dialogue between Mr Fielding and Mr Eagleton, with some interjections by Messrs Wilde, Saussure and Shklovsky; or, Containing infallible Nostrums for procuring universal Disesteem and Hatred.

Thus, using terms drawn from Saussure, the first part of this essay attempts to fill in the spaces between the signifier, signified and the elusive referent, which, given the Wildean character of the process ('art' prefiguring 'life'/reality' - its direct referent) involves this parenthetical series of terms in a complicated tangle of relations. An attenuated version of Eagleton's recycling of Saussurian terminology should help to

clarify this. The literary work's signified, as argued by Eagleton, is the 'pseudo real': 'the imaginary situations which the text is "about"'; the text, as opposed to e.g. History, produces its own object. So, 'what the whole process signifies is ideology'³⁴ (the relevance of this shall be explained in the following analysis). In this context, if Fielding could be given a voice (this, of course, is not absurd as critics are always giving him a 'voice') and be persuaded to use Saussurian terms –and enter into dialogue with Eagleton, he might argue that his signified (the 'pseudo real') is a distillation of a multitude of possible referents which express concealed truth– the universal (given his not entirely waggish neo-Aristotelian comic-epic-in-prose theory of narrative fiction). From this it may be asserted that the Tow-Wouses both exist (as metaphysical ghosts –as dispersed referential atoms), and, at the same time, do not exist (they are still Eagleton's 'pseudo real'). Fielding stylistically, through caricature, (to coin Shklovsky's phrase³⁵) "defamiliarizes" the 'pseudo real'– paradoxically embodying the universal, not by pretending to a real particular referent, but by a technique which "foregrounds" its signifiers.³⁶ Yet when Fielding refers to the Francisces, genre expectations (the autobiography/travel book) would, despite eccentricities of style, lead to the assumption that the text does not produce its own object –that the signifiers are a representation of an historical situation (the direct referent). However, Fielding uses the same defamiliarization technique that he used for the depiction of the Tow-Wouses, and like them, the Francisces appear to exist as garish caricatures of the 'actual' –and yet not exist, because the defamiliarization seems to demarcate them as imaginary objects– they do not even seem to even possess the "naturalized" quality associated with the classic Barthesian "realist" text.³⁷

A Bathetic but NOVEL Farewell; being the Conclusion of the foregoing adventure and Containing an extraordinary coincidence, in which Mr Eagleton and Mr Bakhtin (with a little help from Mr Wilde and Webster's International Dictionary) uncharacteristically provide a *simple* solution.

What is the answer to this tangle, and how can the notion of ideology be neatly tied in to this, the denouement? The possible answers may be found in a number of ideas recycled from Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* and Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. The implications of Eagleton's assertion that 'Defamiliarization may revitalize an ideology for reactionary ends...'³⁸ not only inserts the first part of this essay into the stylistic silences opened up in the second, but it offers an explanation as to why the 'pseudo real' and the 'real' appear, through literary production, to be identical. 'Life' only imitates 'Art' because the two terms are united by the same ideological impulse. They are but two facets of a hidden agenda ('a strategy of containment') where all, whether 'art' or 'life', is subjected to a stylistic filter (which is itself, filtered through a filter –this essay with its network of recycled theories). Thus the attempt to reveal the latent content of the repressed in one aspect of Fielding's style which is, following Eagleton, an effort to lay bare the meaning of the distorted text while exposing the meaning of that text-distortion (see the second epigraph at the head of the essay). Furthermore, the term "defamiliarization" also provides a point of union between 'art' and 'life' because it contains its own "familiar" (in the demonic sense). The definition of the word 'familiar', taken from *Webster's International Dictionary*, should help to clarify this point. A familiar (spirit) is 'a spirit or demon supposed to be constantly at the command of some person; the spirit of a deceased per-

son summoned by a medium to advise or predict'. The 'lower orders', as defamiliarized by the Tow-Wouses, prefigure the defamiliarized Francises because they are essentially ideological; that is to say, they are the 'spirits' (manifestations/essences/referential atoms), of 'a deceased person [they are, through text-distortion, the ghosts of the 'real'] summoned by a medium [Fielding] to advise or predict'; Fielding's familiars are spirits or demons 'supposed to be constantly at the command of some person'.³⁹ ('Supposed' is the operative word here for according to this reading, Fielding reveals himself as a blundering Faust, a sorcerer who has the power to call up 'familiars' but who is ultimately overwhelmed by them.) Thus life follows art because the two terms are a duality hermetically sealed from the stylistic point of view, with no discernable difference between shadow and substance, form and idea. (For what is the familiar – if not the ghost of the real?) In this context, Fielding's vision, whether novelistic or autobiographical, would certainly have won Wilde's approval: Fielding would have been, like Wilde's vision of Christ, at one with the poets, because his whole conception of humanity 'sprang right out of the imagination [with all its ideological impulses] and can only be realized by it'.⁴⁰

One other question left to be addressed is the literary function of the grotesque. At the simplest level it derides, criticizes, belittles and uglifies through its defamiliarizing and dehumanizing of the subject. Yet the grotesque, as it appears in the cited passages from *Joseph Andrews* and *A Voyage*, also serves one of the functions Bakhtin ascribes to images of the Romantic grotesque which '...usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with fear.'⁴¹ Again Fielding's political fears sketched out in the first part of the essay (society overrun by anarchy owing to an excess of luxury or liberty given to the lower orders) may be seen to lurk in the silences of the grotesque imagery. The symbols of the lower orders overreaching their "proper" station, surface as caricatures which serve, rhetorically, to repel the reader by their physical ugliness and behaviour, while this physical ugliness and behaviour is itself a manifestation of ideological predilections and distaste. Thus, in the context of attempting to analyse the rhetorical function and nature of Fielding's grotesque characterizations, the grafting together of Freud, Macherey and Bakhtin, rather than producing a three-headed interpretive monster, provides a tripartite method which is able to take account of the manifest (visible/present) and the latent (invisible/absent) aspects of one element of Fielding's style. It must be admitted, however, that Fielding makes the task of interpreting the manifest relatively uncomplicated. This is because he was more than a creative writer: his social pamphlets (as the latent) can be inserted directly within the Macherayean spaces whether in creative novel or "non-creative" autobiography.

Finally, according to Bakhtin, one essence of (medieval-carnival) grotesque realism was its challenge to the idea of the stable world: 'reality' was not presented as static. In contrast, it is Fielding's 'grotesque' depiction of the traders that reveals the tension between the fixed political metaphor that Fielding attempts to impose on society (as the only 'valid' reality) and the forces of historical change which threaten in the shape of the traders –grotesque, repellent caricatures which also herald the triumphant march of the bourgeois revolution in motion. What I have claimed is the repressed in Fielding's grotesque imagery, and what would be, according to Bakhtin, repressed by the bourgeois system which established itself as 'static reality' in its place, is precisely what is expressed by the carnival spirit. That is to say that which 'offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of

all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things; the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an, as yet, unfinished metamorphosis....'⁴² It is this 'unfinished metamorphosis' (the bourgeois revolution –the establishment and consolidation of economic man) which, although registered as an outside threat in, for example, Fielding's essays, constitutes one of the textural silences that I have been trying to detect in this limited view of Fielding's style. Seen in this context, Fielding, in presenting the trader as grotesque, was 'clowning wisely'⁴³ because his grotesque images, born of fear, were indicators of the (r)evolution of the middle classes which would reach full political fruition in the years following 1832.

Fielding, then, at the end of his life, witnessed, what was for him, the grotesque spectacle once contained by him in fictional form (the Tow-Wouses); however, in the shape of the Francises, the participants of the grotesque spectacle have burst out of the aesthetic form which once incarcerated them. Fielding, through aesthetic form (grotesque/caricature), psychologically resists the unpleasant political implications of historical change by putting the Francises into the aesthetic sphere –they are defamiliarized as grotesques and therefore "aestheticized" out of concrete existence; thus the stylistic similarity between Tow-Wouse and Francis. Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, claims that the clowns and fools of medieval carnival 'stood on the borderline between life and art'⁴⁴; so it is with Fielding's caricatures. However, there is one significant difference, which I have hinted at above, which necessitated incarceration in the grotesque: the traders in *A Voyage* (as bourgeois symbols) had usurped the domain of the 'real' and were in the process of practising another important aspect of the carnival: liberating themselves from prevailing truth and established order; only, of course, according to the marxist theories which guide this interpretation, to fulfil their historical role: to deny the very essence of the carnival spirit; that is to say: to establish their own dominion and thereby establish their own order and prevailing truth.

Notes

1. Oscar Wilde (1966) "The Decay of Lying"; all refs. to the *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, introduction by Vyvyan Holland, London, p. 982.
2. Terry Eagleton's critique of Macherey is accepted here that '...it is not invariably true that a text is thrown into grievous internal disarray by its relation to ideology, or that such a relation consists simply in the text's forcing ideology up against the history it denies.' See Terry Eagleton (1976) *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London, p. 93. A number of Althusser's notions are assumed here: e.g. ideology as being omnipresent and intrinsic to any social practice and, importantly, representations of reality, and that these practices authenticate or naturalize constructions of reality. See (1971) "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York, pp. 127-86.
3. Loose in that I am interested in 'strategies of constraint'; there being no attempt here to apply Jameson's theoretical frameworks as outlined in his (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* London; I merely appropriate the term.
4. See Macherey's introductory chapters for his use and definition of these terms.
5. See Wolfgang Iser (1974) *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, p. 274f.

6. For Macherey see (1978) *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall, London, p. 82f, and Stanley Fish (1976) *Is There a Text in this Class?* Harvard.
7. The full title of the essay is (1903) 'An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers etc, with some Proposals for Remediating the Growing Evil'. *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding*, W. E. Henley Ed., London. All references will refer to this work as 'An Enquiry'. For an outline of Fielding's politics see the work of Morris Golden (1966) *Fielding's Moral Psychology*, University of Massachusetts, and Malvin R. Zirker (1966) "Fielding's Social Pamphlets", *English Studies*, No. 31, University of California. Two other books of general interest are Brian Mcrea (1980) *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Century England*, University of Georgia, and Thomas R. Cleary (1984) *Henry Fielding: Political Writer*, Ontario.
8. See Geoffrey Hartman (1980) *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Baltimore.
9. 'An Enquiry', p.760. Fielding's political views are, of course, saturated by his reading of Aristotle; close similarities, not only in terms of content, but also in method, show that Fielding may have been drawing on Aristotle directly. See the *Politics*, bk I, for the Aristotelian view that associations are instituted for some general good. *The Ethics* tends to support this, see bk.IX. For Aristotle's theoretical metaphor for the constitution as a body see chapter five of the *Politics*. A reading of chapter one of the same work suggests that Fielding adopted Aristotle's method. However, see chapter 1 of Morris Golden, quoted above (n. 5) for possible contemporary sources.
10. On the surface Fielding shares a number of Aristotle's views on what might be termed the 'slave classes': he seems to regard them as 'inanimate instruments' who need a master's guidance (see the *Politics*, pp. 9-18), although, of course, Fielding is not without compassion.
11. 'An Enquiry', p. 761.
12. 'An Enquiry', pp. 292-3.
13. *Fielding's Moral Psychology*, n.7, p. 153.
14. See Zirker, n. 7, p.5f.
15. 'An Enquiry', p. 763.
16. *Ibid.* p.763; indeed, Fielding's (rather slim) evidence is his recollection that a highwayman once confessed to him that his motive for robbery was the payment of a bill 'that was shortly due', *loc. cit.*
17. *Ibid.* all quotations from p. 765. Double standards are everywhere apparent with society ossified into two clearly defined classes. Yet elsewhere Fielding suggests that mankind are one and that there is no intrinsic distinction to be observed between "high" and "low". For example, Amelia utters a somewhat vitiated version of Diogenes' sentiments (when he looked upon the skull of a king and that of a poor man and saw no difference between them) when she offers to suffer common labour in order to support the ailing fortunes of her family. To Booth's question 'do you really think you can support such a life?' she answers, 'Why should I complain of my hard fate, while so many, who are much poorer than I, enjoy theirs. Am I of a superior rank of being to the wife of the honest labourer? Am I not partaker of one common nature with her?' (*Amelia* [all refs. to Penguin ed.], bk. VII, chap. viii, p. 539); see also bk. VII, chap. x, p. 310 where Mrs Bennet sees 'instances of as great goodness, and as great understanding too, among the lower sort of people...' Yet, in works like 'An Enquiry', Fielding's answer seems firmly in the negative; even in *Amelia* he is able to side-step the real question because Amelia's speech is merely an indication of character, it residing at a pivotal point in the narrative between the Booth's bad and good fortune. Significantly, Amelia's sentiments hardly enter Fielding's field of vision when discussing the fountain-head of crime.
18. See Zirker, n.7, p. 30.
19. Northrop Frye (1957) *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, p. 223.
20. See the end of this paper for references to Bakhtin in this context.
21. 'An Enquiry', p. 762.

22. *Loc. cit.* Fielding's views of the 'lower sort' are comparable to Aristotle's on mechanics and labourers: they are merely necessities of the well run (aristocratic) state, providing the material basis of it. They are not to be part of any ruling body. See *The Politics*, bk. III, chap.v., p. 109.
23. 'An Enquiry', p. 762. Fielding goes on to bewail the insufficient powers given to magistrates to enforce the law against the rising tide of social change and upward mobility. In general terms this reflects Fielding's interest in the problems and abuses of the legal and judicial systems, as shown by the novels which embody fictional examples of corruption of this kind. This process works both ways: Booth, in *Amelia*, can be imprisoned in Newgate for coming to the defence of a helpless man, just as Squire Booby can free Joseph Andrews and Fanny (who have been brought to a justice on a trumped-up charge), not through the proper channels of justice, but by wielding merely social or economic power. See *Joseph Andrews* (all refs. to Penguin ed.), bk. IV, chap. v, p. 271. Fielding's irony is clear from the chapter heading: 'Containing Justice Business; curious precedents of depositions, and other Matters necessary to be perused by all Justices of the Peace and their Clerks.' For Fielding's comments on the law in *Amelia* see bk. I, chap. ii, p 14f.
24. 'An Enquiry', p. 762. This also Plato's conclusion, see *The Republic*, book VIII.
25. *Ibid.*, p.762.
26. 'An Enquiry', p. 762. That the lesson to be drawn from Middleton's account made a strong impression on Fielding's mind is clear from the fact that he duplicated the greater part of the same argument in a more metaphorical and ironic form in *Amelia*; see bk. XI, chap. ii, p. 468f. where the cynical nobleman begins this attack on Dr. Harrison's 'utopianism'; he says of the kingdom: 'In its youth it rises by arts and arms to power and prosperity. This it enjoys and flourishes with a while; and then it may be said to be in the vigour of its age... At length this very prosperity introduces corruption; and then comes on its old age. Virtue and learning, art and industry, decay by degrees. The people sink into sloth and luxury...'
27. (1964) *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, Everyman, p.236. All references are to this edition which will be cited as *The Journal*. C.W. Rawson, sees this as a 'relic of style' or habit of mind; see (1972) *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress*, London, p. 62, whereas I see it more as a psychological reaction, where style reveals ideology.
28. *Joseph Andrews*, bk. I, chap. xiv, p.77, cf. Fielding's grotesque characterization of Mrs Slipslop who also (significantly) has pretensions above her station.
29. *The Journal*, p. 235-6.
30. 'The Decay of Lying', p. 980. See n. 1 above.
31. For example in book one of *Joseph Andrews*. Joseph, who has been stripped and beaten, and who has received short shrift from the more well-to-do travelling in the coach, then suffers further callousness at the hands of Mrs Tow-Wouse who conceives him to be a footman, and therefore unworthy of her attention –or one of her husband's shirts. Mrs Tow-Wouse's duplicity and grasping nature are underscored when, on sniffing money in the air (she has been informed that Joseph is very probably a gentleman), she does a quick about turn declaring that, 'God forbid she should not discharge the duty of a christian, since the poor gentleman was brought to her house.' (*Joseph Andrews*, bk. 1, chap. xv, pp. 80-81). For another example of the Tow-Wouse's lack of common charity see bk. 1 chap. xii p. 72f. Cf. *Tom Jones* (Penguin, 1966), bk. IX chap. iii, p. 444f., where 'The Battle of Upton' is caused mainly by the pretensions of the landlady to keep a 'respectable house'. Her belief that Mrs Walters is merely a whore 'in rags', and not a captain's wife and the victim of an attempted rape, provokes her unfeeling attitude, hypocrisy –and the fight. Fielding brings out her hypocrisy and rapacious tendencies when she later simpers up to Tom and Mrs Walters, realizing they are not the 'poor shabby vermin' she took them for.
32. *De Profundis*, p. 912, see n. 1.
33. *The Journal*, p. 236. It is interesting from this point of view that Fielding himself referred to *The Journal* as a novel without a plot.
34. Terry Eagleton, n.2, pp. 73-80.

35. See Victor Shklovsky (1965) 'Art as Technique' in Lee I. Lemon & Marrion J. Reis Eds. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Nebraska.
36. Words adapted from Eagleton, *ibid.*, p.79.
37. See "Evaluation", Roland Barthes (1975) *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, Jonathan Cape, p. 3f.
38. *Ibid.* p. 79.
39. Phrases adapted from the definition of a 'familiar' in (1973) *The New Grolier Webster International Dictionary of the English Language*, Grolier.
40. *Op. cit.* p.923.
41. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.39.
42. *Ibid.* pp. 34 & 24 respectively.
43. *Ibid.* p. 60, Etienne Paquier's phrase referring to Rabelais.
44. *Ibid.* p. 10.