

JONATHAN WILD,  
"GREATER" THAN A PICARO

---

YUKO YOSHIMURA

---

*The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, one of Henry Fielding's novels dealing with the life history of a male hero, has not won the popularity as *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* from either common readers or literary critics. What puzzles the common reader, especially the reader who has enjoyed reading *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones* before, are the random qualities of the novel. Fielding's manipulation of the plot and characters, which works so dynamically and systematically in the two more popular novels, does not fully apply to *Jonathan Wild*. Developing quite haphazardly with less elaborate characters, the story may well disappoint the reader who expects another "comic epic-poem in prose" from *Jonathan Wild*. Many critics, because of the peculiarities of the novel, are frustrated in their attempt to decide on a position for *Jonathan Wild* in Fielding's writing career, particularly in relation to *Joseph Andrews*. In 1743, one year after the publication of *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild* first appeared in the third volume of the *Miscellanies*, but there is not a firm consensus regarding its date of composition.<sup>1</sup> This unsettled situation is likely to keep critics prudent in their approach to the novel.

To judge *Jonathan Wild* by the standards of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, however, may lead to a misguided interpretation. The author's handling of his critical spirit differentiates *Jonathan Wild* from the two novels. Fielding was a novelist whose discerning eye enabled him to be also an active journalist and successful playwright of many burlesques. Whereas in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* his criticisms of society or manners are well

controlled and do not disturb the unity of the fictional worlds, in *Jonathan Wild* Fielding ventures to distort the plot and characterization in order to display his critical spirit. In short, *Jonathan Wild* gives priority to satire. Not only are small parodies to be found in various parts, but the novel as a whole satirizes the picaresque novel. We should observe how remarkable the novel stands as a satire rather than regret that it is not a "comic epic-poem in prose" like *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. I intend in this article to discuss the quality of *Jonathan Wild's* satire by examining first the loose structure and characterization of the novel, and then by investigating how far they are justified in the light of satire.

Fielding's novels contain a great number of episodes, each of which has its own independent relish. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* these episodes are not simply exhibited in a haphazard sequence but are knit, as cause and effect, into a large schematized order. Fielding effectively uses geography in both novels to systematically organize his plot. The story of *Joseph Andrews* consists of three well-balanced parts: the first covering Joseph's experience in London, the second his journey from London to the country and the third his experience in the country. The pattern of *Tom Jones* is the same, only the course is reversed. In constructing the two novels this way, Fielding is in accord with Aristotle, who considers literature to be an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole which has a "beginning, middle, and end." The heroes' developments are reflected in their geographical movements.

The structure of *Jonathan Wild* is less architectonic than those of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The story goes on without the geographical regulation of the other two novels, nor is any other structural device substituted for that. After a short introduction of his childhood, Jonathan's life is almost always in London, and though there are at least three scenes

which change Jonathan's location, Fielding does not make the most of these changes.

One of the three scenes is in Book I, Chapter VII, whose head title reads: "Master Wild sets out on his travels, and returns home again. A very short chapter, containing infinitely more time and less matter than any other in the whole story."<sup>2</sup> It is Fielding's usual practice to decide the length of a chapter not by the duration of time but by the importance of its content, as the narrator of *Tom Jones* plainly declares:

When any extraordinary Scene presents itself (as we trust will often be the Case) we shall spare no Pains nor Paper to open it at large to our Reader; but if whole Years should pass without producing any thing worthy his Notice, we shall not be afraid of a Chasm in our History; but shall hasten on to Matters of Consequence, and leave such Periods of Time totally unobserved.<sup>3</sup>

The case of *Jonathan Wild*, however, is problematic. In the short chapter Jonathan goes abroad (to America) for the first time in his life, and that for seven long years. Giving no proper account of the course of events, the narrator ascribes the deficiency of his description simply to the uncertain information available to him. His poor excuse and too hasty manner leave the reader to suspect that the narrator wants to spare pains and paper, and eventually to wonder on the necessity of the chapter since it has little relationship with either the preceding or the following chapters.

The second scene that fails to serve for a decisive change of situation is Jonathan's drifting on the sea (Book II, Chapters X-XIII). In order to plunder Mrs. Heartfree together with her property, he skilfully succeeds in taking her on board for Holland. However, as soon as Jonathan's wicked design is discovered, the captain of the ship punishes Jonathan by committing him to the mercy of the sea. The chapters, appearing halfway through the novel, may work as a sort of diversion, but nothing more than that. What should be

remarkable in this part is that Jonathan, unlike a "great" rogue, reveals a fear of death and the hell which is awaiting him. The description of his anguish is, however, not enough to strike the reader with Jonathan's human weakness. The scene would have more tension if Jonathan, whose despair drives him even to attempt suicide, were not rescued in such an insipid manner:

Now, Nature having originally intended our great man for that final exaltation which, as it is the most proper and becoming end of all great men, it were heartily to be wished they might all arrive at, would by no means be diverted from her purpose. She, therefore, no sooner spied him in the water than she softly whispered in his ear to attempt the recovery of his boat, which call he immediately obeyed, and, being a good swimmer, and it being a perfect calm, with great facility accomplished it. (p. 80)

The whole scene, failing to become the real turning point in Jonathan's career, remains rather flat.

Neither the hero's journey to America nor his drifting alone on the sea affects the structure of *Jonathan Wild*, and a real change of situation is expected at length in Book IV, in which the hero is finally taken to jail. The scene should be equivalent to Joseph Andrews' arrival at the country and Tom Jones' at London. The difference is that while Joseph's and Tom's arrivals are the anticipated, natural result of the heroes' preceding actions, and yet keep the reader anxious about future developments, Jonathan's imprisonment occurs too abruptly and, nevertheless, gives the reader no real excitement. The shift to the climactic phase is very artificial:

In short, there seems to be a certain measure of mischief and iniquity which every great man is to fill up, and then Fortune looks on him of no more use than a silkworm whose bottom is spun, and deserts him. (p. 126)

The sudden reversal of circumstances by Fortune, who decides to punish Jonathan as whimsically as she rescued him too easily from drowning in the sea, does not heighten the dramatic effect. Moreover, Jonathan's life inside jail is simply an extension of his life on the outside; the procedure in which Jonathan cunningly raises himself to the highest position among his fellow-prisoners is all the more tedious because we have been already told more than once of Fortune's determination to hang him.

The absence of the architectonic structure in *Jonathan Wild* is closely bound up with the problem of characterization. At the outset of the novel, the narrator reveals his observation on human nature:

. . . we shall often find such a mixture of good and evil in the same character that it may require a very accurate judgment and a very elaborate inquiry to determine on which side the balance turns, for though we sometimes meet with an Aristides or a Brutus, a Lysander or a Nero, yet far the greater number are of the mixt kind, neither totally good nor bad; their greatest virtues being obscured and allayed by their vices, and those again softened and coloured over by their virtues. (p. 3)<sup>4</sup>

Jonathan's character goes against this premise: from his childhood when "If an orchard was to be robbed Wild was consulted, and, though he was himself seldom concerned in the execution of the design, yet was he always concerter of it, and treasurer of the booty" (p. 9) to his last day when, even death near at hand, he picks a bottle-screw from the chaplain's pocket, Jonathan consistently remains a rogue throughout his life. While Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones grow maturer and worthier as they accumulate various experiences, Jonathan, like Blifil in *Tom Jones*, does not develop at all. The hero's unchangeability has an important bearing upon the flat structure of *Jonathan Wild*.

Only once in his life does Jonathan show real humanity, but the scene is considerably awkward. The news that his victim, Heartfree, will be soon

executed brings Jonathan an intense agony:

... the blood forsook his countenance, and in a cold still stream moved heavily to his heart, which had scarce strength enough left to return it through his veins. In short, his body so visibly demonstrated the pangs of his mind, that to escape observation he retired to his room, where he sullenly gave vent to such bitter agonies, that even the injured Heartfree, had not the apprehension of what his wife had suffered shut every avenue of compassion, would have pitied him. (pp. 135-36)

Jonathan's remorse is not in keeping with his character as it is established at this point. Lacking in probability, the scene may well impress the reader not so much with the complexity of Jonathan's character as with the inconsistency of Fielding's characterization. It is our sole consolation that Jonathan's remorse does not last as long as to have the whole novel transformed.

Instead of elaborating the structure and characterization, the author seems particularly concerned with establishing the narrator. The narrators of *Jonathan Wild*, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are all self-conscious narrators, showing their own personalities by addressing the reader directly and expressing their opinions. Yet, whereas in the latter two novels Fielding restricts the narrators' spheres as fairly as possible in order to keep the plot undisturbed by their presence, the narrator of *Jonathan Wild* is too talkative and self-assertive to let the hero's life story flow spontaneously. Almost everytime Jonathan starts the action, the narrator interferes with the plot to make a comment on it. Distracting the reader's attention from the immediate scenes, he frequently becomes absorbed in his own opinions on "greatness" and "goodness" as if his task were to preach a sermon, not to dramatize the story. The natural flow of the plot is severely affected by the narrator's manner.

The haphazard structure of *Jonathan Wild*, observed so far in comparison

with *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, should be investigated first in the light of the picaresque tradition. Jonathan Wild, who educates himself by reading various picaresque tales in his boyhood, can be called a picaro for several reasons. Like most conventional picaros, Jonathan makes his way more through his quick wits than through hard work, and, following a picaresque code set by Frederick Monteser, restricts his activities "to minor criminal acts, refraining from deliberate violence for its own sake, and foregoing murder or pointless evil."<sup>5</sup> Since he does not have any ambition beyond making easy money, Jonathan gives no heed to Count la Ruse's advice that he should, with his "great" capacity, aspire to a superior station like that of statesman. This attitude is another testimony of a picaro, whose movements are "normally in a horizontal social pattern."<sup>6</sup> For all his acting power, Jonathan remains, like other picaros, rather Fortune's plaything.

The basic pattern of a picaresque novel is the succession, rather than the integrality, of actions. That is, the primary concern of the novel is how exciting and entertaining each constituting scene is, not whether all the scenes are well unified or not. Arnold Kettle's observation on Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* is valid for *Jonathan Wild*: the novel is "a series of incidents held together by no informing plan, by nothing save the presence of the hero, who is himself a vagabond whose life has no centre and no pattern."<sup>7</sup> Also, Robert Alter's observation on *Roderick Random* helps us understand Jonathan's desultory movements:

Romance, to begin with, is not a picaresque forte. The movement of the picaroon is always toward a variety and abundance of experience, and he is not very adaptable to the single focus of an all-consuming passion.<sup>8</sup>

In this respect, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* inherit more from *Don Quixote* than from the picaresque tradition. Just as the knight-errant charges himself with the mission to serve Dulcinea del Toboso, so Joseph devotes his life to

Fanny, and Tom to Sophia. Involved in many accidents, both heroes always devote their hearts to the beloved. On the other hand, Jonathan Wild, as well as conventional picaros, lives a precarious and claptrap life without any profound emotion.

To add to these elements concerning the rogue, the narrator's excessive interference in the plot is also explained in the light of the picaresque tradition. If the significance of literature has two aspects, that is to teach and to delight, the balance of a picaresque novel turns on the latter side. Not instructing but entertaining the reader is the prior motive of the novel. Yet, a picaresque novel often assumes an air of didacticism in order to avoid getting accused of its substantially amoral inclination.<sup>9</sup> *Jonathan Wild* is much affected by the explicit didacticism of the picaresque narrator, who quite officiously evaluates the characters with his moral vision.

The haphazard structure of *Jonathan Wild* can be thus defended, to some extent, as characteristic of the picaresque tradition, and yet further investigation proves that the novel distorts the tradition in some crucial respects. Seemingly a picaro, Jonathan possesses some qualities which eventually prevent *Jonathan Wild* from becoming a real picaresque novel. A picaro is usually of low birth, his parents perhaps unidentified, or perhaps very poor and, as Frank W. Chandler puts it, "not often troubled with gracing their union by a ceremony, nor particularly pleased at his advent."<sup>10</sup> Because no one protects him, the picaro is obliged to learn how to make a living by himself. His means to survive—not hard labor but cunning—is never admirable, and yet his struggle with starvation is, in a way, quite pitiable. Reflecting unfavorably on the environments in which a picaro is obliged to live, a picaresque novel may well consequently become a satire on society. In the case of *Jonathan Wild*, by contrast, the hero is a rogue not *a posteriori* but *a priori*. His descent is quite finely identified: it can be traced up to Wolfstan Wild, who lived around as early as the fifth century. Coming from

this ancient family which had produced many rogues, Jonathan is a sort of pedigreed rogue. His parents neither abandon little Jonathan nor force him to earn a living by himself; no environmental factor necessitates nor excuses Jonathan's playing the knave. From the outset of his life Jonathan never makes an attempt to pursue an honest career. Society, for all its moral deterioration, does not particularly victimize him; considering his identification with Robert Walpole, Jonathan is a minion, rather than a scapegoat, of society. If *Jonathan Wild* reflects unfavorably on society where Jonathan lives, it is not because society treats him cruelly but because it provides a cover for the rogue, letting him speak out boldly:

... how easy is the reflection of having taken a few shillings or pounds from a stranger, without any breach of confidence, or perhaps any great harm to the person who loses it, compared to that of having betrayed a public trust, and ruined the fortunes of thousands, perhaps of a great nation! (p. 18)

Jonathan's final fate conclusively differentiates him from conventional picaros. Though a picaro usually amends his conduct and eventually starts to live a new life, Fielding's stern realism does not allow Jonathan to follow the tradition. Most ironically presented is the scene where the rogue, in drifting on the sea, suddenly reveals a fear of death, or the scene where he abruptly becomes conscience-stricken by the news that his victim, Heartfree, will be soon executed. If Jonathan amended his conduct with either scene as a turning point, the novel would look more like a true picaresque novel. Fielding gives a twist to the picaresque tradition by making his rogue absolutely incorrigible: unlike an ordinary picaro, Jonathan is too "great" to be terrified into true, effectual repentance. While traditional picaros refrain from deliberate violence for its own sake because they even vaguely realize that mischief is too abominable to be done for some other reasons than

keeping off hunger, one of Jonathan's maxims reads: "Never to do more mischief to another than was necessary to the effecting his purpose; *for that mischief was too precious a thing to be thrown away*" (p. 173, my emphasis). In the end the rogue, "greater" than a picaro, is put to death by hanging. We take the conclusion with little sympathy, much less admiration. Whereas we feel some affinities with Roderick Random and Moll Flanders because Smollett and Defoe represent in these rogues some humanity, which the reader more or less shares, the absence of humanity in Jonathan Wild does not allow the reader to identify himself with or feel compassion for the rogue. If we laugh at Jonathan's picking a bottle-screw from the chaplain's pocket even on the point of departing this life, the laughter arises more from our contempt for, than from our affinities with Jonathan.

The narrator, surely didactic as his manner is, upholds the moral vision entirely opposite to the normal one. Admiring Jonathan's "greatness" and disdaining Heartfree's "goodness," the narrator is the ironical spokesman of the implied author. His function is not to moderate but to aggravate the amoral inclination of the rogue's life story. As Jonathan is a rogue far "greater" than an ordinary picaro, so the narrator displays much "greater" didacticism than a picaresque narrator.

Jonathan's character would be richer if the author felt more sympathy for him, or at least took a more positive interest in his nature. Unlike the narrator he adopts, Fielding is far from enthusiastic about Jonathan's "greatness." In the Preface to the *Miscellanies* he gives a warning to the reader:

... I solemnly protest, I do by no means intend in the Character of my Hero to represent Human Nature in general. Such Insinuations must be attended with very dreadful Conclusions; nor do I see any other Tendency they can naturally have, but to encourage and soothe Men in their Villainies, and to make every well-disposed Man disclaim his own Species, and curse the Hour of his Birth into such a Society. For my

Part, I understand those Writers who describe Human Nature in this depraved Character, as speaking only of such Persons as *Wild* and his Gang; and I think it may be justly inferred, that they do not find in their own Bosoms any Deviation from the general Rule. Indeed it would be an insufferable Vanity in them to conceive themselves as the only Exception to it.<sup>11</sup>

Fielding will not share some writers' ethical view that human nature is evil. After the real Jonathan Wild was executed in 1725, these writers tried their hands at romancing the popular rogue in order to satisfy people's curiosity. Arthur Pollard distinguishes Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* from other writings dealing with the same model:

*Jonathan Wild* is then, in the first place, a reflection on such literature and its readers. It is a comment on their sense of values in choosing to bestow a quite spurious glorification on such an utter rogue.<sup>12</sup>

A picaresque writing is supported by those who take a "certain vicarious satisfaction,"<sup>13</sup> that is, amoral entertainment from the picaro's history. Fielding will not approve of the entertainment, because he cannot help thinking, with some fear and indignation, that Jonathan's "greatness" is shared by Robert Walpole or other politicians whose names are commonly honored in society:

But without considering *Newgate* as no other than Human Nature with its Mask off, which some very shameless Writers have done, a Thought which no Price should purchase me to entertain, I think we may be excused for suspecting, that the splendid Palaces of the Great are often no other than *Newgate* with the Mask on. Nor do I know any thing which can raise an honest Man's Indignation higher than that the same Morals should be in one Place attended with all imaginable Misery and Infamy, and in the other, with the highest Luxury and Honour. Let any impartial Man in his Senses be asked, for which of these two Places a Composition of Cruelty, Lust, Avarice, Rapine, Insolence, Hypocrisy,

Fraud and Treachery, was best fitted, surely his Answer must be certain and immediate; and yet I am afraid all these Ingredients glossed over with Wealth and a Title, have been treated with the highest Respect and Veneration in the one, while one or two of them have been condemned to the Gallows in the other.<sup>14</sup>

The uprightness of Fielding, who later became a Justice of the Peace for the district of Westminster by the way, is such that his Jonathan Wild is condemned to death without reserve.

*Jonathan Wild* is a moral fable in essence. The author's supreme consideration is his moral vision, and his characters are derived from the vision, whereas a picaresque novel takes prior interest in the very texture of its rogue's life. The characters of *Jonathan Wild* are, in this sense, the products of satiric allegory. *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, indeed, also have an allegorical quality: regarding *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding declares: "... I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species,"<sup>15</sup> just as he remarks upon *Jonathan Wild*: "Roguary, and not a Rogue, is my Subject..."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Fielding successfully furnishes characters of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* with distinct habits, such as Slipslop's malapropisms, Abraham Adams' pedantic knowledge of Greek and Latin literature as well as his uncommon forgetfulness, and Mr. Western's craze for hunting. Abraham Adams, for example, may be an Abraham who recognizes the necessity of absolute submission to God, or an Adam whose weakness is named Original Sin. Yet, Abraham Adams is Abraham Adams, nothing else. Since most characters of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are so vividly realized that their individuality keeps the allegorical element at a minimum. The narrator of *Tom Jones* makes us understand how careful he is in describing characters:

Another Caution we would give thee, my good Reptile, is, that thou dost not find out too near a Resemblance between certain Characters

here introduced . . . . Thou art to know, Friend, that there are certain Characteristics, in which most Individuals of every Profession and Occupation agree. To be able to preserve these Characteristics, and at the same Time to diversify their Operations, is one Talent of a good Writer. Again, to mark the nice Distinction between two Persons actuated by the same Vice or Folly is another. . . .<sup>17</sup>

So Parson Barnabus is described differently from Parson Trulliber, and Square the Philosopher from Thwackum the Divine. The characters of *Jonathan Wild*, by contrast, are suffocated by the burden of their allegorical missions: the author manipulates them and their actions to be comprehended in terms other than their surface appearances and meanings. Each character lacks a fixed individuality, so that it is hard for the reader to distinguish Bagshot from Fireblood or Blueskin, James Sly from Thomas Fierce or Tom Smirk.<sup>18</sup> As to Jonathan's identity, Aurelien Digeon says: "A famous thief, Charles I, Charles XII, Walpole, Wilmington, and others still, these are not contradictory interpretations; they are all gathered into Fielding's Jonathan Wild."<sup>19</sup> And then, who *is* Jonathan Wild? Where in the world is his own original identity? Nowhere. As an allegory of "greatness," Jonathan need not be anything more than a jumble of "great" elements. Becoming a true moral fable with allegorized characters, *Jonathan Wild* satirizes the plastered-on morality of a picaresque novel.

*Jonathan Wild* is a burlesque, applying the non-picaresque rogue to its picaresque structure. The essential quality of burlesque is discrepancy between style and subject matter, and many small scenes scattered in *Jonathan Wild* provide variations of burlesque. The worth of Jonathan's travel to America, for example, is understood only when we recognize that the scene, implying that the rogue is actually exiled there, satirizes the Grand Tour which was then much in vogue with high society. Very paradoxical is

Jonathan's father's thought that His Majesty's plantations in America are "freer from vices than the courts and cities of Europe, and consequently less dangerous to corrupt a young man's morals" (p. 22). A number of scenes, like the one showing the prisoners' scramble for administrative power in the jail, are burlesques on the corrupted politics of that time. These small scenes, though they are not necessarily correlative to one another, originate from the same critical spirit.

Fielding often inserts some digressive episodes into the main plot, such as Wilson's story in *Joseph Andrews* or the Man of the Hill's in *Tom Jones*, in order to exhibit the novel's theme in a condensed manner; and Mrs. Heartfree's adventure story is regarded as this kind of episode in *Jonathan Wild*. In her modesty, chastity and beauty, Mrs. Heartfree is supposed to be equal to Fanny in *Joseph Andrews* or Sophia in *Tom Jones*. Relating her adventures over as long as four chapters, the wife of the good man describes in detail how admirably she could refuse many seductions she suffered. Though the first two or three seductions sound really critical and thrilling, her story gradually becomes boring because it merely enumerates the same kind of seduction; her virtue becomes faded by degrees, for the more she tells about the seductions, the more self-absorbed she sounds with her own destiny as a romantic heroine. Most unpleasant to the ear is her description of the hermit's seduction:

"I should have now sunk with despair had he not accompanied these professions with the most vehement protestations that he would never offer me any other force but that of entreaty, and that he would rather die the most cruel death by my coldness than gain the highest bliss by becoming the occasion of a tear of sorrow to these bright eyes, which he said were stars, under whose benign influence alone he could enjoy, or indeed suffer life." She was repeating many more compliments he made her, when a horrid uproar, which alarmed the whole gate, put a stop to her narration at present. (pp. 154-55)

Right after an interruption of her story, Mrs. Heartfree continues:

“If I mistake not, I was interrupted just as I was *beginning* to repeat some of the compliments made me by the hermit.” “Just as you *had finished* them, I believe, madam,” said the justice. “Very well, sir,” said she; “I am sure I have no pleasure in the repetition. He concluded then with telling me, though I was in his eyes the most charming woman in the world, and might tempt a saint to abandon the ways of holiness, yet my beauty inspired him with a much tenderer affection towards me than to purchase any satisfaction of his own desires with my misery . . .” (p. 157, my emphases)<sup>20</sup>

Her story continues in this manner until we cannot help having some doubts about her identity. Her vanity is too excessive to be extenuated as what is more or less observed generally in women; the defect does not belong to the same quality with Fanny’s inability to read and write or Sophia’s unshapeliness in tumbling down from a horse. Mrs. Heartfree looks not like a really meek woman but rather like another Pamela Andrews. Furnishing most exciting scenes full of hardships to the heroine least prone to gain our sympathy, the digressive episode becomes a burlesque on many extravagant adventure stories which, like a picaresque novel, appealed to the eighteenth-century reading public’s unrefined taste. We recognize discrepancy between style and subject matter here within this episode as well as in the whole novel.

In seeing *Jonathan Wild* as a burlesque, assuming the style of a picaresque novel but ultimately becoming a moral fable by its subject matter, we should examine the crux of this moral fable, that is, how convincing the fable is. The principal purpose of the novel is to show how “greatness” is antithetical to “goodness” by making Jonathan the protagonist and Heartfree the antagonist. Needless to say, “greatness” here is synonymous with “wickedness.”

Since Jonathan is punished with death, whereas Heartfree is restored to his happy life in the end, the novel perfectly observes poetic justice. Still the conclusion leaves in our mind some uneasiness, which occurs when we ask ourselves, "Then, should we become Heartfreees?"

Heartfree's "goodness" is attended by passiveness, excessive credulity and poor judgment. Incapable of penetrating Jonathan's wicked nature, the good man digs his own grave, or more accurately, looks on with his arms folded while his grave is being dug. What is worse still, he succumbs too easily to fate. Separated from his beloved family, Heartfree makes a long soliloquy:

Suppose then I have lost the enjoyments of this world, and my expectation of future pleasure and profit is for ever disappointed, what relief can my reason afford? What, unless it can shew me I had fixed my affections on a toy; that what I desired was not, by a wise man, eagerly to be affected, nor its loss violently deplored? . . . The delights of most men are as childish and as superficial as that of my little girl; a feather or a fiddle are their pursuits and their pleasures through life, even to their ripest years . . . (pp. 87-8)

Pronouncing all sublunary enjoyment to be vanity, the good man looks toward the future:

Where is to-morrow? — In the other world.  
To thousands this is true, and the reverse  
Is sure to none. (p. 88)

Heartfree takes things philosophically and stands aloof from this world. Yet, is it true that he had fixed his affections on a toy? Should his wife and daughters be compared to a feather or a fiddle? The good man knows how to resign himself to his lot, but is this resignation all that we should seek? Joseph Andrews, when he is robbed of his beloved Fanny, lets his heart be torn with anguish, no matter how earnestly Abraham Adams tells him to

submit to Providence. The tone of his soliloquy is slightly different from that of Heartfree's:

Yes, I will bear my sorrows like a man,  
 But I must also feel them as a man.  
 I cannot but remember such things were,  
 And were most dear to me. —<sup>21</sup>

Joseph is not going to run away from this world; he would rather undergo agony as it is in this world. Heartfree's words, compared with Joseph's, sound too passive and weak. If he became really disillusioned and attained higher perception of human nature through the soliloquy, Heartfree would not be deceived by Jonathan again a short time later.

The point is not whether the teaching of the moral fable is right or not but whether it is convincingly presented or not. The ending of the story, the moral fable's formulaic "and the good lived happily ever after," unfortunately is the most awkward element of the novel. A sudden reversal of fortune for characters, what is called *peripeteia*, is the technique Fielding cares to use: both Joseph Andrews' and Tom Jones' discoveries of their true parentages are of this kind. The *peripeteia* in *Jonathan Wild*, however, is much less convincing than those examples. Heartfree's recovery of his happiness, as well as Jonathan's destruction, has not been prepared by any elaborate foreshadowing. It is only within one paragraph that his innocence comes to be proved: Fireblood, one of Jonathan's fellow gangsters, happens to be arrested during a robbery, and the Justice before whom Fireblood is carried happens to be the same Justice that committed Heartfree to prison on Fireblood's denunciation, and the Justice happens to be so inquisitive and fair as to re-examine the former denunciation made by Fireblood. Heartfree's liberation is based on so many "happen tos" that we cannot but be struck by his incomparable luck rather than by his virtue rewarded. This kind of

*peripeteia* does nothing but spoil the significance of a moral fable. Certainly the good man was saved, but more certainly we know all good men will not always be saved in such a lucky way.

Actually, Fielding himself recognizes the limit of Heartfree's "goodness." Though in the novel he presents "greatness" and "goodness" as opposed to each other, the author maintains in the Preface to the *Miscellanies* that there is no absolute repugnancy between them, and that besides the great and the good there could be another type of people, namely, the great *and* good. "Benevolence, Honour, Honesty, and Charity," which compose a good man bear no analogy to "Parts and Courage,"<sup>22</sup> which compose a great man. "Parts and Courage" in themselves are, however, not necessarily synonymous with "wickedness" unless they are devoid of the former four virtues. Those who possess both "greatness" and "goodness" are not many, but most admirable; Fielding calls them "Perfect Work," which fills us with "Love, Wonder, and Delight."<sup>23</sup> In comparison with them, the good leave something to be desired:

The Second [a good man] falls greatly short of this Perfection, and yet hath its Merit. Our Wonder ceases; our Delight is lessened; but our Love remains; of which Passion, Goodness hath always appeared to me the only true and proper Object. On this Head I think proper to observe, that I do not conceive my Good Man to be absolutely a Fool or a Coward; but that he often partakes too little of Parts or Courage, to have any Pretensions to Greatness.<sup>24</sup>

Heartfree could be a perfect work, wonderful and delightful as well as lovable, if only he had more courage and better insight.<sup>25</sup> The weakness of *Jonathan Wild* as a moral fable satirizing a picaresque novel is that the contrast between Jonathan's "greatness" without "goodness" and Heartfree's "goodness" without "greatness" is merely posed, but by no means really convincingly settled. The absence of great *and* good ultimately makes the

moral fable hollow at the core.

*Jonathan Wild* differs from *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* in its treatment of satire. While the latter two novels sublimate satire into "comic epic-poems in prose" by elaborating characters and the plot, *Jonathan Wild* thrusts satire forward by artificially distorting characters and the plot. The random structure of the novel is understood as a parody of a picaresque novel: the hero's actions form not a configurative but a serial pattern and the talkative narrator frequently interrupts the plot with his didacticism. In order to ridiculously exaggerate the effects of a picaresque novel, *Jonathan Wild* does not humanize but allegorize its rogue and makes the narrator's didacticism abnormal. To say the plot and characterization of the novel are inferior to those of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, therefore, does not do *Jonathan Wild* justice. The novel chooses to be a burlesque rather than a "comic epic-poem in prose," and the contortion of plot and characterization is the essence of a burlesque:

Indeed, no two species of writing can differ more widely than the comic and the burlesque; for as the latter is ever the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprising absurdity, as in appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or *à converso*; so in the former, we should ever confine ourselves strictly to nature, from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader.<sup>26</sup>

What Fielding satirizes by parodying a picaresque novel is the amoral tendency of human nature. A picaresque novel is for those who, putting morality aside, draw joy from the picaro's wicked deeds. Fielding criticizes unprincipled human nature by robbing his rogue of any chance to be pitied or applauded. "Greatness" without "goodness"—seen not only in *Jonathan Wild* but also in some illustrious politicians like Walpole—should never be

glorified. Imitating the pattern of a picaresque novel, *Jonathan Wild* paradoxically becomes a moral fable with strict poetic justice. If the novel looks somewhat weak, it is because Heartfree is too fragile to become a true antagonist of Jonathan. We are obliged to ironically realize that "goodness" allegorized in Heartfree, unless it is attended by some courage and infallible judgment, tends to be easily corrupted in this world. Fielding is, in a way, hoist with his own petard. In order to emphasize satiric allegory, he oversimplifies the characters till he deprives Heartfree of any degree of "greatness."

#### Notes

- 1 Not a few critics, like Pat Rogers, suspect that Fielding had withheld the publication of *Jonathan Wild* for a few years:

... he [Fielding] wrote in a *Champion* leader (4 October 1740) that he had once accepted a few 'pills' from a quack named Roberto, 'to stop the publication of a book, which I had written against his practice, and which he threaten'd to take the law against me, if I published'. Nobody is certain quite which book was involved. The likeliest candidate seems to be *Jonathan Wild*, first published in 1743 but--as many suppose--drafted some time earlier.

(Pat Rogers, *Henry Fielding: A Biography* [London: Paul Elek Ltd., 1979], pp. 104-05.)

The conjecture implies that ur-*Jonathan Wild* might possibly have been composed even earlier than *Joseph Andrews*, which must have been written after Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was published on November 6, 1740.

- 2 Henry Fielding, *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great, in Jonathan Wild and The Voyage to Lisbon* ("Everyman's Library"; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960), p. 21. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to the novel will be from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in my text.
- 3 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones a Foundling*, eds. Martin C. Battestir & Fredson Bowers ("The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding" Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), pp. 76-7.

- 4 This view is later reaffirmed by the narrator of *Tom Jones*:  
 . . . we must admonish thee, my worthy Friend, (for, perhaps, thy Heart may be better than thy Head) not to condemn a Character as a bad one, because it is not perfectly a good one. If thou dost delight in these Models of Perfection, there are Books enow written to gratify thy Taste; but as we have not, in the Course of our Conversation, ever happened to meet with any such Person, we have not chosen to introduce any such here. (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 526.)
- 5 Frederick Monteser, *The Picaresque Element in Western Literature* (Birmingham, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1975), p. 18.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 7 Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1961), I, 25.
- 8 Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 76.
- 9 Monteser explains the relationship between a picaresque novel and didacticism as follows:

The pícaro is concerned with survival in a hostile world, the author with telling a good tale, and usually neither is sociologically or didactically inclined. . . .

The charge of excessive didacticism is often leveled against the picaresque novel because of the long and often prosy sermons inserted among the thieves and beggars. This is a misinterpretation, or rather a lack of understanding of the pressures on the 16th century Spanish author. The lighthearted scribbler who took such obvious and vociferous delight in the immorality and dishonesty which characterized the pícaro would shortly find himself before a disapproving representative of the Inquisition, who was quite capable of declaring not only the book but the author as well to be a menace to public morals, and touching an ecclesiastically ignited match to both.

The ideal answer, obviously, was to write the story and placate the Church at the same time. Without changing the approach or concealing their tacit approval of the scamps about whom they wrote, authors found through experience the expedient of embodying distinct moral lectures in their tales, conveniently placed so that the reader might disregard them if he wished.

- (Frederick Monteser, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.)
- 10 Frank Wadleigh Chandler, *Romances of Roguery. An Episode in the History of the Novel*, pp. 45-6, quoted in Harry Sieber, *The Picaresque* ("The Critical Idiom"; London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 2.
  - 11 Henry Fielding, "Preface" to the *Miscellanies*, ed. Henry Knight Miller ("The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding"; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 9.
  - 12 Arthur Pollard, *Satire* ("The Critical Idiom"; London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 29.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
  - 14 Henry Fielding, "Preface" to the *Miscellanies*, p. 10.
  - 15 Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*, in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 159.
  - 16 Henry Fielding, "Preface" to the *Miscellanies*, p. 9.
  - 17 Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 525.
  - 18 Admiring the characterization in *Jonathan Wild* George Saintsbury says: "And Mr. Bagshot, overcrowded by the superior greatness of Wild! . . . And Mr. Fireblood and Mr. Blueskin, those greater Bagshots and only inferior Wilds!" (George Saintsbury, "Introduction" to Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, p. ix.) This admiration implies, though Saintsbury himself seems unaware of it, that there is no real distinction between the rogues: the characters differ simply in degrees, not in kind.
  - 19 Aurelien Digeon, *The Novels of Fielding* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 109.
  - 20 The first edition of *Jonathan Wild* includes another chapter of Mrs. Heartfree's adventures, which is completely eliminated in the revised edition published in 1754. The expurged chapter contains many incredible, extraordinary monsters described by Mrs. Heartfree, such as the enormous beast which is as big as Windsor Castle, and whose eye is "very near equal to the capaciousness of a large hall"; or the snake-like reptile which extends near a quarter of a mile and whose largeness is "no more than about six times the size of a moderate ox"; or the lark-like bird which "could not weigh less than thirty stone." See Leslie Stephen

(ed.), *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1882), V, 171-72.

21 Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 226. Regarding the quotation, Professor Battestin, the editor of the text, says: "Joseph's quotation is a rough version of *Macbeth*, IV, iii. 258-62, where Macduff laments the murder of his wife and children" (p. 363).

22 Henry Fielding, "Preface" to the *Miscellanies*, p. 11.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

25 Professor Battestin insists:

The ultimate objective of Fielding's ethic was, first and last, the practical benefit of society, "the good of the general." Accordingly, a fundamental feature of his benevolism is the significant interrelationship between heart and head, sensibility and judgment.

(Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of "Joseph Andrews"* [Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959], p. 74.)

26 Henry Fielding, "Author's Preface" to *Joseph Andrews*, p. 8.

