HENRY FIELDING
FORM, HISTORY, IDEOLOGY

Jiaming Han

Peking University Press

Beijing

First Edition 1997

ISBN 7-301-03382-6/I • 424
Henry Fielding Form, History, Ideology
by Jiaming Han

Published by
Peking University Press
Peking University, Beijing
100871, China

Printed in the People's of China

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

菲尔丁小说的叙事形式、历史观和意识观/韩加明著. 北京：北京大学出版社，1997.4
ISBN 7-301-03382-6

Ⅰ.菲… Ⅱ.韩… Ⅲ.菲尔丁 H.小说-文学研究
Ⅳ.I561.074

书　　名：菲尔丁小说的叙事形式、历史观和意识观
著作责任者：韩加明
责任编辑：周学艺
标准书号：ISBN 7-301-03382-6/I·424
出 版 者：北京大学出版社
地　　址：北京市海淀区中关村北京大学校内　100871
电　　话：出版部 62752015　发行部 62559712　编辑部 62752032
排 印 者：北京大学印刷厂
发 行 者：北京大学出版社
经 销 者：新华书店
850×1168毫米　32开本　7.5印张　240千字
1997年4月第一版　1997年4月第一次印刷
定　　价：60.00元

Acknowledgements

The original version of this book was my Ph. D. dissertation, and I thank my advisor Professor Laura Brown and the other members of my special committee, Professors Mary Ann Radzinowicz, Neil Saccamano, and Harry Shaw for their stimulation, criticism and encouragement. I owe special thanks to Hugh Jenkins for his critical reading of the draft of several chapters; I have also benefited from the discussions with other fellow graduate students in two dissertation reading groups. I am very grateful to the K. C. Wong Education Foundation, which provided financial support for my first four years' study at Cornell University; I thank the Cornell Graduate School and the English Department for providing me with additional support to finish my degree program. The publication of the book was subsidized by the State Education Commission's Research Fund for Scholars Returning from Abroad and the Kamiyama Fund for Publishing of Peking University. Finally, this book is dedicated to my teachers.

Table of Contents

Introduction

History, once eagerly shunned by many critics, has been making a forceful comeback in literary studies today. Fredric Jameson was speaking as a radical Marxist when he asserted in the early eighties, "Always historicize! This slogan—the one absolute and we may even say 'transhistorical' imperative of all dialectical thought—will unsurprisingly turn out to be the moral of *The Political Unconscious* as well,"[1] but he was soon followed by critics of various commitments, the foremost among whom were the new historicists. Indeed, the 1980s might well be characterized as the decade that saw the rise of new historicism, which studies literature not to consolidate a harmonious text or consistent author, but to view it as a resonance of social reality with all of its contradictions. At the end of that decade, Stephen Greenblatt, who gave the new approach its name, wrote:

> The new historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance; that is, my concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own.[2]

The impact of history's return is so powerful that even deconstructionists, often seen by their opponents as anti-historical, are explicitly addressing the issue of history now.[3] The present book is a historical study, and I will begin by reviewing the issue of history in contemporary literary studies.

First we must answer the question, "What is history?" Critics and historians have defined the term in various ways; for convenience I will briefly discuss three notions of history. Primarily, history means the reality of the past, the idea of history we

employ when we refer to historical events or contexts. Contemporary literary theory, however, has severely challenged this ontological view of history, arguing that we can only know about the so-called real history by exploring historical texts—writings and other discursive remains of the past. Such a slippage then leads to a second notion of history, history as writing, a subject I will discuss further presently. The word "history" in my title is used in a third notion: history as a concept denoting one's view of change in human society from the past through the present to the future. This notion of history embodies a totalizing world view about the pattern of human existence.[4] My study is primarily concerned with the third notion of history, but history as writing needs to be discussed a little further since it is crucial to the current debate about history and literature.

The relationship between history as writing, and literature, is a close one. Lionel Gossman has observed:

> For a long time the relation of history to literature was not notably problematic. History was a branch of literature. It was not until the meaning of the word literature, or the institution of literature itself, began to change, toward the end of the eighteenth century, that history came to appear as something distinct from literature.[5]

Before the divorce, both literature and history had been seen as primarily concerned with rhetoric and representation. After the divorce, however, due to the emphasis on their difference—science versus art—their similarities have been neglected; in traditional studies of literature, written history was treated as an unproblematic, objective rendering of the historical past, serving as the background for literature. But in the last few decades, in response to the rise of structuralism in linguistics and literary studies, history as text or artifact is again foregrounded, as is shown in Hayden White's works. Against the conventional distinction between history and literature, White argues:

> The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play.[6]

Commenting on White's theory, Vincent B. Leitch remarks, "Ultimately, White construes all history as *writing*. History is writing in two senses: it derives from a tropological constitution and it deploys a generic mode. In the first case, history is textuality; in the second, it is literature."[7] For the present study, the significance of White's work is that it makes the reader see the textuality of history.

White's structuralist interpretation is pushed further by Dominik LaCapra's deconstructive and Bakhtinian reading of history. In "Rhetoric and History," LaCapra notes that the documentary model of historiography has been severely criticized partly because it "diverts attention from the way 'documents' are themselves texts that 'process' or rework 'reality' and require a critical reading. . . ."[8] The alternative is the rhetorical model:

> Rhetoric involves a dialogical understanding of discourse and of "truth" itself in contrast to a monological idea of a unified authorial voice providing an ideally exhaustive and definitive (total) account of a fully mastered object of knowledge. Historiography is dialogical in that, through it, the historian enters into a "conversational" exchange with the past and with other inquirers seeking an understanding of it.[9]

If LaCapra emphasizes the "conversation" between the historian and the past, new historicist literary critics stress a similar conversation between the modern critic and the historical text or

texts. Thus Stephen Greenblatt writes at the beginning of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, "I began with the desire to speak with the dead."[10] Literary critics and historians are on an equal footing, but there is a significant difference in emphasis between them: while historians are concerned with the "textuality of history," literary critics primarily deal with the "historicity of the text."[11]

To explore the "historicity of the text" requires that we take history seriously. We must study the text in history, to restore as much as possible the specificities of the time and place in which a particular text was written. As Michael McKeon points out, to historicize a literary work is "not just to situate it 'against' a 'background,' since this would be only to provide a static focus on the work with a static historical setting. The aim of historicizing is instead to remind us that the literary 'work' itself partakes of historical process."[12] In other words, viewing the text in history means not only that a text is created in history but also that it plays a role in history. Moreover, the development of a literary genre is often greatly indebted to social and economical developments in history. For example, the rise of the English novel clearly owes much of its early success to the growth of a larger reading public and the development of modern printing industry.[13] Therefore, literary study must be in an important sense historical study. Finally, as a literary work is created by an author living in history, it will be necessarily influenced by the author's view(s) of history and ideological beliefs. Although we should not allow the study of the author to replace the study of the literary work, the literary work is a human creation and should not, therefore, be treated as a natural object in the sense scientists treat nature. While literary works are not expository statements of an author's views, the two are closely related: an author's historical and ideological views affect his literary work, and, at the same time, the requirement of literary conventions may also make the author modify or highlight his

views of history and ideology.

Since in discussing Fielding's novels I will frequently refer to history, politics, and ideology, these three terms should be carefully distinguished. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, one's views of history are very closely related to one's views of politics, especially in the early eighteenth century when proper historicism had not come into being.[14] But views of politics and views of history are not the same. A view of politics, in its narrow sense, is mainly concerned with changes of government and rivalries between political parties; a view of history, on the other hand, can include opinions about the present government, views of contemporary society in general, and, above all, ideas about the shape of historical process.[15] If one's view of politics is often characterized by its formlessness, one's view of history is characterized by its consistency despite interruptions and distortions.

The relationship between views of history and ideology is more complicated. Ideology is often understood as "certain 'definite forms of social consciousness' (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic, and so on) . . . [and functions] to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society."[16] In other words, it is "false consciousness." Examining twentieth-century studies of ideology, Raymond Williams notes that "the concept has been commonly used, within Marxism and outside it, in the relatively neutral sense of 'a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group.'"[17] Such a definition makes it possible to talk about different ideologies not only in society but also among different groups of the same class. Furthermore, considering ideology as a set of beliefs or ideas, we can discuss alterations in ideology in one individual author—here Fielding—throughout his writing career, for as the historical circumstances change one's beliefs change as well. Views of history, as noted above, are about how one understands historical process. Thus, while ideology is mainly concerned with contemporary society, views of history are related to both the present and human history as a whole.

In *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon distinguishes three kinds of ideology: aristocratic, progressive, and conservative, the latter two prevalent in the early eighteenth century. Progressive ideology, held by the bourgeoisie, is characterized by a belief in a sense of honor dependent on personal virtue rather than family status, an interest in money or mutable wealth gained by one's industry instead of aristocratic landed wealth, and a desire for social mobility legitimized by providential grace.[18] For example, "What is crucial about Robinson Crusoe's achievement of social success is not the degree of his elevation but his capacity to justify each station to which he attains as the way of nature and the will of God."[19] Conservative ideology, as represented by Swift and Fielding, who were more closely related to the declining aristocracy, is skeptical of the bourgeois progressive ideology and often tries to undermine it, though this critique is not always reactionary but often involves a sophisticated intellectual inquiry.[20]

These different ideologies are connected with different views of history, but they are not identical. While Defoe may be a staunch progressivist in his view of history, the case with Richardson is more problematic.[21] Similarly, Swift apparently believes in historical degeneration,[22] but Fielding seems to be more inclined to the progressive view of history. Therefore, I will maintain the distinction between one's views of history and one's ideology and discuss these issues in different sections, though I will stress their interrelationship. In order to avoid terminological confusion, I use the term "progress" or "progressive" only in discussing views of history, employing another set of terms to be described shortly for ideology.

Henry Fielding's interest in history is well known, and his knowledge of the literature of history is remarkable. In 1931 Ethel M. Thornbury reprinted the Sale-Catalogue of Fielding's library, in which history books composed the second largest cat-

egory, next only to law, which was his profession.[23] This reprint did a great service to later Fielding studies. Robert M. Wallace, in the forties, offered a thorough documentation of Fielding's knowledge of history by studying the Sale-Catalogue and the references to history in Fielding's writings; he concluded that the primary model for Fielding's novels is neither epic nor comedy of manners, but history, from which he learned the techniques for treating facts, narrative unity and sequence, and plot structure.[24] Philip Stevick, in the sixties, was not merely concerned with drawing formal parallels between history and Fielding's works but dealt with larger issues about the writing of history in general. He demonstrated that Fielding is very much concerned with historical truth, the necessary selection and use of minute details, the issue of cause and effect, and the meaning of history.[25] Putting Fielding in the context of eighteenth-century history writing, Leo Braudy argued that for Fielding public history is bankrupt and hope lies only in writing private histories.[26] In the late seventies, Leland E. Warren, addressing the issue of history again, contended that Fielding and eighteenth-century historians were equally concerned with the issue of historical authority. Although Fielding recognized the defects in contemporary history writing, he did not give up history but tried to redress it by writing fictional histories.[27] All these studies concentrate on Fielding's knowledge of history and his use of history as a model genre for his novels.

At the same time, Fielding's modern biographers, especially Wilbur L. Cross and, most recently, Martin C. Battestin, have shown to what extent actual historical events and historical figures influence Fielding's novels.[28] Thanks to their studies, we know today that Fielding himself figures prominently in the young Wilson and Tom Jones, Adams is modeled on Fielding's friend Parson Young, the Rebellion of 1745 and Fielding's writing *The Jacobite's Journal* give a specific historical setting to *Tom Jones*, and Booth resembles both Fielding and his father. In other

words, modern scholars have extensively confirmed Richardson's contemptuous remark that Fielding drew his heroes and heroines from himself and his wife, but with a crucial difference: while Richardson thus believed that Fielding "has little or no invention,"[29] modern critics correctly see the autobiographical model as one aspect of Fielding's realism, which is deeply rooted in his personal experience.

These two kinds of study are concerned with the technique of Fielding's novels on the one hand and the content on the other, but little has been said about Fielding's views of history, let alone how his views of history influence the form of his novels. Given Fielding's great interest in history and the diversity of his works, it is surprising that the only extended study focusing on Fielding's views of history is "Fielding and the Meaning of History" by Philip Stevick in which he argues that Fielding views "history as development" and that this view "leads to an embracing of the present."[30] Stevick contends that in eighteenth-century England there were primarily three views of history: the primitivist, the anti-progressivist, and the progressivist. Following Raymond Aron's theory of history,[31] Stevick asserts that the progressivist view generally sacrifices the present for the future, while the primitivist and anti-progressivist views sacrifice the present for the past; but "the man without a philosophy of history, in the linear sense, can afford a pleasure in the contemplation of his own time that neither the progressivist nor the anti-progressivist can enjoy" (565). Since Fielding, instead of adopting any of these views, cherishes the present, his notion of history is mere "development." Stevick then correlates the different views of history with different genres: romance for the primitivists, satire for the anti-progressivists, and Fielding's comic art, which includes elements of romance, satire, and laughter, for his developmental view

I owe much to Stevick's study, but I cannot agree with some of his ideas and his conclusion. First, his definition of the differ-

ent views of history needs further refinement. The distinction between what he terms primitivism and anti-progressivism is not clear; they are almost synonymous. On the other hand, Stevick pays no attention to the cyclical view of history, which was still very influential in the eighteenth century. It seems to me more logical and cogent to follow the traditional three-fold division of views of history: degenerative, cyclical, and progressive.[32] Second, one reason that Stevick declines to see Fielding as a progressivist is that although Fielding often speaks of a perfect society in the future, such a society "is not seen as the end product of a lawful working out of history. There is nothing inevitable about the judicious use of the talents in a society" (565). Stevick apparently assumes that the progressive view of history sees historical progress as "inevitable." This assumption is valid to progressivists since the late eighteenth century, but not so to Fielding and his contemporaries.[33] Third, the belief that the progressive view necessarily sacrifices the present for the future is questionable. Noting the difference between the progressive and the cyclical views of history, Charles Van Doren writes:

> [A]ll the theories of cycles we have examined concur in holding that the human race is "now" (i. e. at the time of appearance of the theory) in the down-ward or regressive phase of a cycle of history. We know of no cyclist who asserts, at the time when he proposes his theory, that the human race is moving upward or forward.[34]

On the other hand, the progressivist, though believing in a better future, considers that the present is the outcome of a continual process from the past and is superior to the past; he does not sacrifice the present for the future, but only views the present with a critical eye and sees its problems as well as its achievements. In this respect, the progressive view seems to fit Fielding well since he both celebrates and criticizes the present, whereas the developmental view, as Stevick shows, is primarily "an affir-

mation, a celebration of [one's] own time" (568). Therefore, though Stevick's is the best study to date on Fielding's views of history, I must acknowledge my disagreement and attempt to address the problem of Fielding's views of history anew. Furthermore, I will explore how his views of history are related to the form and the ideological implication of his novels.

In addition to the Introduction, this book consists of five chapters. Chapter I defines Fielding's views of history; the other four chapters deal with his four major novels respectively. In the first chapter, I trace the development of the idea of progress and specify a few characteristic features, many of which Fielding shares. Afterwards, I examine Fielding's plays and other non-fictional work to define the trajectory of the change of his views of history throughout his writing career. I conclude that though Fielding occasionally appeals to the degenerative and cyclical views, the progressive view is dominant.

The other four chapters are devoted to specifying the form of Fielding's novels and the relationship between narrative form and his views of history and ideology. The term "form" in my title does not mean the traditional definition of form, which assumes a clear distinction between form and content, nor does it derive from the Russian Formalist tradition, which sees form as the pure literary (linguistic and stylistic) form and content as only serving to realize form. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton suggests that form

> is always a complex unity of at least three elements; it is partly shaped by a "relatively autonomous" literary history of forms; it crystallizes out of certain dominant ideological structures. . . [and] it embodies a specific set of relations between author and audience.[35]

All three elements are applicable to Fielding's use of novelistic form. Each of his four novels is related both to the history of the

novel and to other older genres, ideological issues are crucial to these novels, and Fielding is particularly concerned with the author-audience relationship. In addition to this Marxist definition, I am also indebted to the Chicago School critics, who have used Fielding to formulate their idea of form. The combination between the Marxist and the Chicago traditions is aptly put by Laura Brown in the following passage:

> [F]orm is the meaningful aesthetic shape that men and women of a particular historical time and place give to their understanding of reality. It is not a simple reflection of social history. In fact, the connection between literature and society may be invisible, complex, or indirect. But literary form is ultimately imprinted with the ideology of the age.[36]

This provides me with a good working definition of form, and I will proceed forward with this guideline.

I also draw on theories of other critics, notably Northrop Frye and Hayden White, in ways that need to be clarified. In *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye defines five major fictional modes: myth, romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire. What distinguishes each from the adjoining modes is the difference in the status of the hero. Myth is about divine beings, superior both to man and circumstance; romance about heroic beings superior to man but not to all circumstance; tragedy about (often human) beings superior to ordinary man but not to circumstance; comedy about ordinary human beings; and satire about inferior men.[37] Frye believes that though all five modes may exist in any period, there is a general downward process from myth to satire in Western civilization. This theory groups the major literary modes and explains, to a certain extent, the decline of myth, romance, and tragedy in the modern world, and an accompanying rise of comedy and satire. Later in the book Frye discusses four of the five modes (excluding myth) as the archetypal *mythoi* of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. "We have thus answered the ques-

tion: are there narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary genres? There are four such categories: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic."[38] Discussing these categories, Frye specifies their formal differences other than the difference in the status of the hero, and thus offers us some practical tools for literary analysis. Frye's theory is not, however, without problems. Frank Lentricchia summarizes critiques on Frye and remarks:

> Frye's notion of tradition, to borrow some appropriate words from Michel Foucault, "makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same." More specifically, his conception of generic history, though it highlights the constraints imposed upon, say, Ezra Pound (who would, by attempting the long poem, necessarily be imposed upon by Homer, Virgil, Milton, and other athletes of epic intention), ignores the more immediate and local constraints (imagism, economics) pressuring Pound's writing.[39]

That is, the theory of modes tends to isolate literary works from the social and historical contexts in which they appear, and consequently, Frye's theory has the same weakness as the New Criticism's close textual analysis which he aims to fight against. Although I use Frye's theory of narrative modes to explore the formal differences among Fielding's novels, I differ from him in emphasizing the close connection between narrative form and historical context. Indeed, I would argue that each of the narrative modes Fielding uses is a particular response to a particular historical context.

Hayden White adopts Frye's modal classification in his study of nineteenth-century historical imagination, *Metahistory*. To Frye's model, which is now seen as "Mode of Emplotment," White adds "Mode of Argument," "Mode of Ideological Implica-