

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD—AN INTERPRETATION

By KAZUHIRA YAMAMOTO

Lecturer of English

I

Two years after *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1761-2), Goldsmith published a long poem, *The Traveller*, in which he concludes as follows:

Our own felicity we make or find:
With secret course, which no loud storms annoy
Glides the smooth current of domestic joy.¹

This poem reminds us to some extent of the story of the "Blue Bird," a story which infers that we mortals certainly cannot realize where true happiness lies before wandering far away in quest of the "Blue Bird." The traveller concludes thoughtfully from his bitter experiences in European countries that "true felicity lies in domestic joy." And it seems to me that this, at the same time, is the moral theme of *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Now, at first, I shall examine the significance of 'domestic joy' in *The Vicar*.

The morale of the Vicar's family is based on 'the simplicity of his country fireside.'² And what is purposed through this novel is to point out the economic and moral conflict between the country and the city and to defend the merits and values of rural England. The 'fireside' is, therefore, regarded as the opposite of the luxurious parlour of a sophisticated townsman, and it must have been pictured in Goldsmith's own mind as a vivid, sweet image signifying 'domestic joy.'

The 'fireside' is indeed often made mention of in this novel: the Vicar, just before learning of the elopement of his elder daughter, Olivia, says, "I think myself happier now than the greatest monarch upon earth. He has no such *fire-side*, nor such pleasant faces about it."³ On his way home with Olivia, whom he has finally found, he remarks that "as a bird that has been frightened from its nest, my affections outwent my haste, and hovered round my little *fire-side* with all the rapture of expectation."⁴ And his eldest son, George, writes in a letter to the Vicar, "I have called off my imagination a few moments from the pleasures that surround me, to fix it upon objects that are still more pleasing, the dear little *fire-side* at home."⁵

It is thus manifested that his 'domestic joy' is closely connected and mingled in his mind with the image of the 'country fire-side' and that true happiness for him is not to be found in luxurious city life, nor in worldly fame, nor in individual achievement, but in simple

¹ *The Traveller*, ll. 432-4.

² Advertisement.

³ Chapt. XVII, p. 105 (The World Classics).

⁴ Chapt. XXII, p. 154.

⁵ Chapt. XXVIII, p. 196.

‘domestic’ companionship whose symbolic center is ‘fireside.’

A family or household may generally be looked upon as the smallest unit of community; and Goldsmith had at least a definite conception of a ‘family’ as being related to the idea of ‘community,’ a conception which I believe is worthy of especial notice. Each member of his community is supposed to be deprived, or originally destitute, of his own independence, his free will; his will ought to be in accord with, or ruled by, the will of community. The foundation of community will be shaken by any anti-communal act on the part of its members. Olivia’s elopement disturbs the Vicar’s family, but her return restores stability and order not only to the family but also to the community.

This view of the Vicar’s family as ‘community,’ therefore, seems to me to be very important for understanding the plot and moral theme of the novel.

The central figure of this community is Dr. Primrose, the Vicar. In the ‘Advertisement’ Goldsmith prescribes his character in the following way:

The hero of this piece unites in himself the three greatest characters upon earth; he is a priest, an husbandman, and the father of a family.⁶

As a ‘priest’ he is a moral or spiritual leader of the community (family, parish, and nation); as a ‘husbandman’ he is an essential supporter of the national economy and of moral stability according to his Tory principle of physiocracy; and as a ‘father’ he is head of the family in which ‘our own felicity we make or find.’

Playing the part of ‘father’ in his household, the Vicar must control it according to definite rules in order not to disturb the secret course of domestic joy:

The little republic to which I gave laws, was regulated in the following manner: by sunrise we all assembled in our common apartment; the fire being previously kindled by the servant. After we had saluted each other with proper ceremony, for I always thought fit to keep up mechanical forms of good breeding, without which freedom ever destroys friendship, we all bent in gratitude to that Being...⁷

Thus, the family or ‘republic’ regulated by the Vicar’s laws is clearly not a democratic, modern one in which every member is allowed individual freedom and responsibility, but bears some resemblance to patriarchy in which it is taken for granted that the father is supreme with respect to domestic and religious matters within the family.

The Vicar, though a patriarch as sincere and patient as Job, has a sense of humour. Catching sight of his wife and daughters getting ready to walk to church in their best clothes, he humourously thwarts their desire to be admired in the neighbourhood by ordering their coach.⁸ And his sly humour is clearly exhibited when he cleverly frustrates their attempts to make themselves attractive:

I...approached my chair by sly degrees to the fire, and grasping the poker, as if it wanted mending, seemingly by accident, overturned the whole composition (*i.e.* ‘wash’ for the face).⁹

The Vicar as a patriarch is thus occasionally disappointed in his hope to carry all his

⁶ P. v.

⁷ Chapt. IV, p. 20.

⁸ Chapt. IV, p. 22.

⁹ Chapt. VI, p. 33.

family along on his (or the community) principle. But it seems unfortunate that only his wife and daughters are blamed for the inclination to vanity which is to be an obstacle to communal or domestic felicity. The Vicar himself, with his self-importance, should also bear the blame.

His ideal of a family as the only community where true felicity can be perfectly realized on earth may be an unattainable ideal, a grand illusion. And, as an illusion, it is not far different from the longing of his wife and daughters for urbanity. Yet he is destined to carry out his ideal in the belief that he is a patriarch "uniting in himself the three greatest characters upon earth."

Goldsmith seems to accept the Vicar and his self-importance with a smile. He seems to adore him nostalgically as an amiable image of the ideal father and seems to dream of an ideal community led by this patriarch.

The successive episodes of the novel, on the contrary, show that the smallest unit of community, in spite of the Vicar's efforts and hopes, can hardly be firm and stable enough to hold out against several attacks from the outside world. The family, the communal, not individualistic, relationship which the Vicar and Goldsmith believe promises us the only and the greatest happiness on earth, can not remain a closed utopia isolated from the stern reality of the outside world. And, therefore, the ideal of a family as community—an idea he is eager to entertain—is nothing but an illusion.

Why is it, then, that although every one of the unfavourable episodes disillusion the Vicar and drives our Don Quixote to extremes on several occasions, he manages happily to struggle through the various difficulties and bring about the realization ultimately of his heart's desire, 'domestic joy?'

The lack of realism, or rather romanesque quality, of this novel is considered to result from the fact that the communal idea of human relationships was really outworn in the late eighteenth century and remained only the form of nostalgia and an ideal in the author's mind and at the same as a moral and political ideal to be wished for in defiance of the natural tendency of contemporary English society to break such communal ties.

Goldsmith showed his open hatred of the bourgeois society of his day in *The Deserted Village* (1770). Here he described nostalgically the simple rural community of the past and set it against a contemporary village deserted as a result of bourgeois supremacy, commercialism, the concentration of wealth, 'luxury,' enclosure, and the decrease in rural population.

Certainly the weapon which Goldsmith employed in his criticism of bourgeois society was Tory conservatism, an aristocratic system of values which, as history shows, produced no remarkable effect upon the course of the development of English society. In short, Goldsmith's ideal based on Toryism was nothing but an illusion.

Yet we should not neglect the value or use of illusion in general, for if we do, we will inevitably miss the very *raison d'être* of literature, one of the genuine products of the grandest illusion. We may conclude from the political and literary activity of Jonathan Swift, for example, that such an outworn system of thought as Toryism (not in terms of its out-datedness but in terms of its opposition to bourgeois supremacy) may sometimes play a positive role in spiritual and moral improvement and bring the dark aspects of the bourgeois reality to light.

But illusion is still illusion, not reality; Tory principle was quickly being destroyed by bourgeois realism. A communal sort of human relationship as seen in old Auburn in *The*

Deserted Village was being torn asunder by the influx of commercialism into villages and by the flow of rural population to the cities. Thus, the old happy 'fire-side' was being deserted in proportion as the family as community was becoming less significant than each individual member, who was going to shut himself up in his own closet.—This was modern individualism, which Goldsmith endeavoured to ignore as the source of social evil.

Then, regarded as a social novel, a roman *à thèse* in view of its attempting to avert a social crisis through literary activity, this well-known, amiable and humorous novel will reveal a different aspect of meaning to us and convince us of the fact that in characterization and plot-making a certain amount of irrationality, unreality, and fantasticness is inevitable.

The Vicar of Wakefield is, in short, a pastoral novel intended to defend the decline of rural England and its morality, the value of pastorality. In this sense the Vicar is not presented as an actual human being but rather as an ideal figure, a Don Quixote, living his author's vision and unlike the ordinary type of man of his age.

Goldsmith was, however, realistic and faithful enough to social reality not to present the Vicar as a wholly positive figure. But, at the same time, he was too conservative, even obstinate in defending his deep-rooted sentiment, to give him a tragic end, and to make him a figure to be defeated ultimately. The Vicar is an ideal figure of a man (to be looked for because lost in reality) supremely created through the subtle intermingling of the 'sight' of a novelist whose life had been rich in experience and the 'thought' of a Tory aristocrat. And *The Vicar* may be defined as a 'pastoral' novel which was intended to be a presentation of the fact that in reality bourgeois individualism and economic policy were destroying the rural community and its pastoral virtues.

II

Let us now examine the novel in more detail. This community, the Vicar's household, consists of Mr. and Mrs. Primrose and their six children, George, Olivia, Sophia, Moses, Dick, and Bill, whose common character is "generous, credulous, simple, and inoffensive."¹⁰ The conflict between this family and the outside world is exhibited chiefly by means of money and marriage problems.

If something remarkable is to occur in this simple, close-knit community, some extrinsic thing must be introduced in order to bring the family into contact with the outside world, for the family never has moments in which its members come into conflict with each other, either because of their natures or because of its commonness. This community in presupposed by the author to be, ideally at least, under the guidance or control of the Vicar, its patriarch.

The 'outside world', which is, in a sense, the greatest threat to the vicars's family, is a non- and anti-communal or highly sophisticated world which numbers among its members not only young gentlemen from the city who seduce and corrupt country maids, but also all that tend to destroy rural virtues and economy. The family misfortunes begin when they lose their money. We are informed of this occurrence by one of the Vicar's relatives:

The merchant in town, in whose hands your money was lodged, has gone off, to avoid

¹⁰ Chapt. I, p. 5.

a statute of bankruptcy...¹¹

Thus, his family, except for George who is going 'naked into the ampitheatre of life,' is obliged to leave Wakefield to live 'in humbler circumstances.'

Here is clearly observed Goldsmith's favourite theme, that of the opposition of town and country, and the bourgeois threat to pastoral domestic joy.

Now, how is the theme of marriage developed in relation to this basic theme?

Pride and Prejudice and *The Vicar* are alike in that both novels concern daughters of country families who are confronted with the problem of marriage by casual visitors from the 'outside world.' As we compare these novels with each other with respect to marriage, certain features of *The Vicar* will be revealed.

What differences and similarities are there between the relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* and that in *The Vicar*?

The setting of both novels is the simple and serene atmosphere of the rural countryside, a setting which the visitors intrude upon, almost by accident, and then disturb. They are rather sophisticated persons of high rank and naturally become the objects of everyone's curiosity and concern. In *Pride and Prejudice*, on the one hand, the disturbance is considered and judged chiefly by Elizabeth. In *The Vicar*, on the other hand, Olivia responds unguardedly ('credulously and simply') to the exciting, new situation. Olivia is presented as credulous, perhaps in order to demonstrate the danger which credulity courts (and moral instruction is one of Goldsmith's intentions in this novel), and at the same time to emphasize the urban wickedness (of a sort that violates rural naïveté) and sophisticated mentality which cannot be understood by the simple minds of pastoral peoples. Since the author, at the outset of this story, characterized the Vicar's family as a patriarchal one, Olivia has been deprived of the personal liberty and responsibility which would allow her to see and think and act for herself. She therefore seems the victim of the author's moral scheme.

Olivia is, as it were, manipulated so as to exemplify a credulous maid in Goldsmith's moral scheme, while Elizabeth shares the 'eye,' the faculty of observation and the point of view, of her author. One of the chief reasons why Elizabeth is able to conduct herself according to her own individual judgment and is not subjected to manipulation by the author is that for the female writer marriage is a very serious subject on which almost all the happiness of a woman's life depends and which, therefore, must be tackled with every possible means of observation and analysis she can muster. The construction of *Pride and Prejudice*, which has always been considered to be perfect, was made possible by Austen's earnest desire and effort to examine the truth about marriage.

Now, Thornhill and Darcy have something in common: sophisticated mentality; yet, Darcy's character has something in it so subtle and incomprehensible that it is misinterpreted by the intelligent Elizabeth, though he is never portrayed as a symbolic figure of urban wickedness; while Thornhill characteristically remains a representation of bourgeois devilishness all through the story.

In Austen's mind sophisticated mentality is accepted as a matter of common knowledge, and something to be watched out for by alert minds but not something to be flatly rejected, for behind men's sophisticated and therefore beguiling behaviours there is buried a precious unknown truth worthy to be sought after earnestly.

¹¹ Chapt. II, p. 9.

The difference in the characterization of the heroes and in the estimation of their mentality may be attributed to the difference in the views of man and his contemporary civilization held by the two novelists, as well as to the difference in degree of the authors' personal interest in 'marriage.' The female writer is naturally destined to concern herself with the problem of marriage all the more seriously because woman's happiness in life practically depends on marriage, and the male writer intends rather to present in the form of a novel the social and moral conflict between the city and the rural community from a less personal and highly nationalistic point of view.

Goldsmith, as has been mentioned before, bitterly criticized the social tendency (perhaps inevitable) toward the destruction of the English rural community, as seen in his *Deserted Village*, while Austen took no account of what her rural society really was or how it was formed historically. Goldsmith's concern is continually directed to the reality of contemporary society and civilization, whereas Austen is interested exclusively in personal relationships within the bounds of her static society.

Thus Goldsmith is acutely conscious of the deplorable state of English society and of the necessity for its improvement, while Austen, exclusively engaged in personal problems, is almost indifferent to such a public problem. Goldsmith looks upon man as having a fixed, unchangeable character, while Austen looks upon him as being capable of change once he has discovered his true self (by means of a fresh supply of information and the analysis of it).

Such differences in the views of man and of society will naturally lead to differences in the structures of the two novels. In *Pride and Prejudice* the plot is developed through several compact relationships of characters seen almost always from the critical point of view of Elizabeth, the heroine, whereas *The Vicar*, narrated by an omniscient author, digresses leisurely from the main story, sometimes touching on moral and political problems and sometimes touching on literary and theatrical subjects. And besides, some of the plot is arranged in so wilful and unnatural a way that the author is obliged to excuse himself for those 'accidental meetings.'¹² In addition to these differences, another important difference, that of the father's position in each family, is clearly exhibited.

In *The Vicar*, 'family' as community is of course an absolute prerequisite to happiness on earth. All the members of it are to be organized according to the principle of patriarchy and all are required, ideally at least, to be kept under the spiritual bonds of the community. Therefore, except for the Vicar, the patriarch, they are not allowed to have their own remarkable individuality. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, the family consists of a number of individuals equally endowed with free will. Thus Mr. Bennett, compared with the Vicar, looks more liberal and less competent as a father and husband. Certainly the Vicar's well-intentioned attempts are often thwarted by anti-communal behaviour on the part of members of his family, and he himself sometimes exhibits ludicrous faults. Yet he, in spite of all this, is to be ultimately welcomed with our endless applause as a dear old hero. Mr. Bennett, degraded into a poor member of his family, is a mere sarcastic observer or critic of the foolish conduct of some of its female members. In this regard, his family is not a 'community' but rather a mixture of separate, selfish individuals.

The difference seen in the development of the common theme, that of marriage and family, may be attributed not only to their authors' different outlooks on society or civilization and on man, as mentioned above, but also to their different views of the novel as a literary *genre*

¹² Chapt. XXXI, pp. 222-3.

or to their different attitudes toward the use of the narrative.

I have spoken of *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a *roman à thèse* in so far as it contains as its urgent intention the elucidation of a definite moral thought, as well as trenchant criticism of the state of society in late eighteenth century England. And inasmuch as he expresses his social criticism through literary activity, Goldsmith's work is permeated with an ethical flavour. In this respect, *The Vicar* may be regarded as a didactic novel. The novel is a secular sermon in a sense, the vehicle for communicating a moral thought in an amusing way.

Such a view of the use of the novel was held by Fielding, too. As is generally recognized, the literature of the eighteenth century was almost entirely concerned with moral problems. Goldsmith, like his contemporaries, had a decidedly universal thought or doctrine to rely upon and to convey to his readers, and his task was to illustrate and embody it impressively in the form of a novel.

Austen, on the other hand, set to work almost without any specific purpose or any moral thought to preach. She had nothing particular to rely on except her own 'eye,' a faculty of acute observation and analysis like that of a detective. The story proceeds almost with the inevitable steps which Elizabeth is forced to take after considering newly acquired information and situations which have changed accordingly.

III

Let us now delve a little more deeply into the story.

The story may be divided into three parts: the first (Chapters I-VIII), a description of domestic life and Olivia's elopement; the second (Chapters IX-XXII), the Vicar's search for Olivia and successful return; and the third (Chapters XXIII-XXXII), the events occurring between the Vicar's arrest and the happy ending.

The first part introduces the basic theme, the conflict of two contrary forces and values—those of the pastoral and the urban, in descriptions of simple rural life and the permeation of urban affectation through it.

The domestic trouble is caused by the flight of a London merchant with whom the Vicar had lodged his money, a flight which drives the Vicar's family from Wakefield.

Unconscious now of the destructive element in bourgeois commercialism that has deprived them of the 'domestic joy' of Wakefield, the Vicar's wife and daughters are still fascinated by urban vanity, rejecting the 'primaeval simplicity'¹³ of country life. The Vicar preaches to his stray sheep, like an advocate of 'pastoral' virtues, warning them against this undesirable inclination. And when his preaching does not produce the expected effect in them, he gives rein to his sly, natural humour, as we have already seen.

(As is easily observed, this novel is studded here and there with moralizing passages, especially at the opening or closing of each chapter, and, moreover, the author's moral and social opinions are directly stated. Certainly these parts, when taken individually, are more characteristic of the essay than of the novel, but they do not seem so incongruous to us in terms of the whole structure of this novel because the narration is in the first person and the narrator's profession is that of a preacher who is deeply involved in moral and spiritual education, a patriarch upon whom the life and death of his community depend.)

¹³ Chapt. IV, p. 19.

It is now that urban sophistication or wickedness, introduced into the 'community' in the form of the visits of Thornhill and his female companions, incites the Vicar's wife and daughters to act against his expectations.

The representative of the city is, of course, young landlord Thornhill. He says frankly: "My fortune is pretty large, love, liberty and pleasure are my maxims," to which the Vicar declares, "Honour, Sir, is our only possession at present."¹⁴

It is on this plane, that of a fundamental conflict between the new bourgeois and the old aristocratic orders of ideas, that the subject of marriage is raised and considered.

Rural simplicity, to be defended under the standard of aristocracy, is often shown to yield easily to urban craftiness. Examples of this occur when the Vicar's son Moses falls victim to a horse dealer's fraud¹⁵ and when the Vicar himself is deceived by the same sharper.¹⁶

The 'pastoral' side, led by the Vicar, fights with the 'urban' side, headed by Thornhill. The tide of war is against the Vicar, as he is fighting almost without support.

Now there is a person whom we must keep in mind: Mr. Burchell. He is regarded as the most important of all the characters whom we shall discuss later. In short, he is a disguised magistrate named Sir William Thornhill, uncle of the young landlord Thornhill.

Although his real character is suggested to the readers early in the novel,¹⁷ his power as a magistrate is kept concealed until the last perilous moment. In the beginning his part is to play a man who borrow some money from the Vicar upon his departure from Wakefield with his family, who saves Sophia from drowning, who is well acquainted with Sir William Thornhill, and who appears to have a fondness for Sophia. He is, at best, only a good neighbour to the Vicar's family.

Unexpectedly Mr. Burchell dares to thwart Olivia's chance of going up to London (a chance welcomed by all her family) by sending a letter to the friends of Thornhill's who had encouraged Olivia to come up, and, in this way, angers the whole family, including the Vicar himself.

The purport of this letter seems to denote precisely the scheme of Goldsmith's own thought and the moral nucleus of this novel:

"As I would neither have simplicity imposed upon, nor virtue contaminated, I must offer it as my opinion, that the impropriety of such a step will be attended with dangerous consequences,... And seriously reflect on the consequences of introducing infamy and vice into retreats where peace and innocence have hitherto resided."¹⁸

In this severe warning there is a touch of the splendid temper which becomes a magistrate. Ironically, however, the well-intentioned deed is not appreciated at all by the Vicar's family, and, strangely, Mr. Burchell, thanklessly upbraided, is banished from the Vicar's home before being given a chance to justify himself. (It would certainly be possible for Mr. Burchell to reveal his true character, that of a magistrate, if he were only allowed to act upon his own initiative. But he is subjected to the author's scheme and is granted, therefore, no freedom to act spontaneously.)

Thus, by means of Burchell's well-intentioned (yet for the Vicar's family seemingly

¹⁴ Chapt. IX, p. 52.

¹⁵ Chapt. XII.

¹⁶ Chapt. XIV.

¹⁷ Cf. Chapt. III.

¹⁸ Chapt. XV, pp. 86-7.

ill-intentioned at present) intervention, the Vicar's family appears to have narrowly escaped from danger and maintained its order and felicity. But just when the Vicar is happy, surrounded by members of his family and thanking heaven 'for thus bestowing tranquility, health and competence,'¹⁹ Olivia is reported to have gone off with two gentlemen. The Vicar is perturbed. In this way, the order of his family, his pastoral 'republic,' has been actually upset.

The second part of the novel, the search for Olivia, the stray sheep, begins at this point.

A journey is essentially attended by the indefiniteness that makes various accidents seem inevitable; every improbable occurrence and every unlikely meeting is admitted tolerantly to have been probable. Picaresque novelists, as is well known, make use of 'accidents' in the course of the picaresque's journey for the purpose of presenting and judging various aspects of human nature.

In the second part, Goldsmith makes as full a use of accident as any picaresque writer.

It is of course useless for us to look for any emotional or psychological activity in this father, as he looks for his lost daughter, because it is not at all the author's intention to describe the minds of his characters.

Goldsmith utilizes the journey as a perfect opportunity to express his own opinions freely in digressions. Examples of this are to be seen when the Vicar enters into a discussion of 'the present state of the stage' with a member of a strolling company of actors who he has happened to meet²⁰ and when, soon afterwards, he enters into a discussion of contemporary politics with a gentleman.²¹

The Vicar is completely unconscious of his search for his daughter during these discussions; and the secondary concerns (political and theatrical ones) are placed in juxtaposition with, not in subordination to, his concern for his daughter, a concern which is both urgent and important for the Vicar himself and for the reader.

Seen from another angle, however, these digressions, certainly at odds with the development of the main theme, seem to present to us another equally interesting subject, Goldsmith's journalistic concern with current topics.

Indeed, these digressions, which may be regarded as short essays in themselves, may be judged by some critics to be an intolerable offense against the rudimentary rules of novel-writing; and further, some formal (puristic) literary critic may judge that *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a contribution to the literary *genre* of the novel, is not mature enough to be differentiated from the essay. Yet, we should not condemn as impure a story which in its development is not straightforward, but full of digressions—that is, some heterogeneous elements (something like essays) not directly connected with the main theme, for the novel has been from the beginning the most flexible form of literature, and each novelist is allowed to use any method he wishes to present reality. (Chapter XX, by the way, can be regarded as an independent 'picaresque' story. Narrated by George, it describes the eventful years he spent in London and on the continent.)

Now, towards the end of the Vicar's journey a number of unexpected things (which Fielding termed 'marvellous')²² occur successively. The discovery of the unexpected, a

¹⁹ Chapt. XVII, p. 105.

²⁰ Chapt. XVIII, p. 112.

²¹ Chapt. XIX.

²² *Tom Jones*, Bk. VIII, Chapt. I.

favourite device of comic dramatists, is frequently employed by Goldsmith here. The gentleman with whom the Vicar discussed politics is discovered unexpectedly to be a butler; a niece of his host, who just happens to be present, turns out to be Miss Arabella Wilmot, George's former fiancée; and an actor in the strolling company, whose performance the Vicar and Miss Arabella go to see, is found by accident to be George himself.

Such a succession of accidents may be explained as being part of the above mentioned character of a 'journey.' But it is also a conventional method of comedy, whereby the movements of various characters are assumed to be subject to dramatic convention and the ingenious, unexpected manipulation of the omnipotent author, since the stage or scope of action was originally limited in space and time. The entrances of Arabella and George seem quite impossible from a realistic point of view (which assumes that reality is expressed by means of sticking to the quotidian, the familiar), and quite beyond the reader's expectations, yet they function as a means of gratifying the reader's curiosity and of taking him by surprise. Unsophisticated readers generally will not expect logical development or realistic representation in the novel, but rather wonderful, unexpected occurrences. Furthermore, it was necessary for the author to revive the reader's memory of half-forgotten characters in the middle of the story.

Now, the scene in which the butler was pretending to be the master of the house and which was much confused by the true master's sudden home-coming, is an example of comic judgment—a satiric function of the comedy—for in this scene both the gentleman-butler's personality and his political doctrine are ridiculed at the same time. The argument on politics between the butler's liberalism and the Vicar's monarchism is concluded thus by disclosure of the former's real position in the household; his liberalism, even though logically consistent and progressive, and capable of defeating the Vicar's monarchism over-whelmingly, is beaten down laughingly and indirectly through the discovery of his true personality. He is revealed as a contemptible impostor.

Now, the Vicar's journey in search of Olivia proceeds thus leisurely but ends abruptly with the accidental discovery of Olivia. For the first time, the Vicar is informed of the circumstances surrounding Olivia's elopement and of the real personality of Thornhill.

At this point the second part of the novel comes to a close, with all the Vicar's problems apparently solved. But actually the fatal conflict between the 'pastoral' and the 'urban' is not yet resolved. The 'urban' side headed by Thornhill does not cease to attack the 'pastoral' and aims from now on to make a sacrifice of the Vicar himself.

Thornhill, whose selfish proposal was rejected flatly, devises a plan to drive the Vicar and his family into an economic dilemma by demanding that he pays the rent and debt immediately. The Vicar's family urges him to make a compromise with Thornhill, but he emphatically refuses to take part in such a dishonourable transaction. Therefore he is sent to debtor's prison with the family. There he behaves like a perfect preacher, believing in the essential goodness of all the prisoners and trying to guide them to something 'social and humane.'²³

In Chapter XXVIII, the Vicar's family is at the bottom of fortune's wheel, having learned of Olivia's death, Sophia's abduction and George's imprisonment. At this critical moment, the Vicar preaches to his family and the prisoners that our true happiness lies in religion.

The solution of their difficulties is very abrupt. Sophia is returned to her family by Burchell, who turns out to be Sir William Thornhill and to whom she becomes engaged.

²³ Chapt. XXVII, p. 185.

Olivia is not dead; her death was only feigned. Sir William's nephew, Thornhill, is proven a rascal. George's innocence is demonstrated, and he becomes engaged to Miss Arabella Wilmot, who happens to call at the prison to see the Vicar.

Thus the grand illusion, the 'domestic joy' of the 'country fire-side,' is ultimately realized in the Vicar's family.

It is unnecessary now to be critical of the succession of coincidences, of accidental meetings, and of the fortuitous entrances and exits of characters, which are introduced (very innocently!) into the third part of the novel so as to bring the story to a happy ending, for the author himself, seems worried about the succession of events, so much so, in fact, that he inserts an apology:

Nor can I go on, without a reflection on those accidental meetings, which, though they happen every day, seldom excite our surprise but upon some extraordinary occasion. To what a fortuitous occurrence do we not owe every pleasure and convenience of our lives. How many seeming accidents must unite before we can be clothed or fed. The peasant must be disposed to labour, the shower must fall, the wind fill the merchant's sail, or numbers must want the usual supply.²⁴

IV

Thus far, I have pointed out several problems concerning the form of the novel and its relationship to social thought in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a relationship which is clearly different in the structure and plot of the later English novel.

In conclusion, this chapter will first treat Goldsmith's view (or consciousness) of the 'state,' a view which is clearly outlined, especially in Chapter XXVII (an excellent 'essay' on penal law in itself). It will then concern itself with the characterization of Mr. Burchell=Sir William.

The author criticizes English penal law in Chapter XXVII when he remarks that it was not enacted in order to reform criminals, but in order to deal out harsh punishments to them, and that the law is for the benefit of the rich and the preservation of their property: "All our possessions are piled up with new edicts every day, and hung round with gibbets to scare every invader." Goldsmith wishes to "make law the protector, but not the tyrant of the people," for "creatures, now stuck up for long tortures..... might, if properly treated, serve to sinew the state in time of danger."²⁵ It seems to me rather remarkable that a Vicar should manifest his social thought in this way, a way which clearly shows that he is not merely concerned with his private world, the 'secret course of domestic joy.' Here is a public-minded man taking the responsibility of improving society upon himself, a rather patriotic critic of the contemporary state of a civilized nation. The image of a public-minded Vicar is defined even more clearly in his defence of monarchy in Chapter XIX.

In short, the Vicar is presented as no more spiritual leader of individual souls, but as a kind of prophet who discerns and judges social conditions from a public (or political) point of view. (Probably in Goldsmith's consciousness, the 'private' is connected closely with all

²⁴ Chapt. XXXI, pp. 222-3.

²⁵ Chapt. XXVII, pp. 186-7.

personal concerns, such as the pursuit of private interests and the maintenance of private property, and completely excludes an interest in public matters.)

The human relationship which he wished so devoutly to be realized was of course a communal relationship in which all members' wills are subordinated and are assumed to harmonize effortlessly, as opposed to strictly personal relationships in which individuality is of prime importance. Accordingly his wish for happiness within such a communal relationship must have been limited in the eighteenth century to the 'family,' the smallest unit of community.

He conceived of both 'state' and 'family' as communities, and naturally, inasmuch as he was and wished to be constantly conscious of himself in this kind of communal relationship, he regarded this kind of relationship as the means of achieving the greatest happiness on earth. The story clearly shows his almost entire lack of private interest and his innocent and ardent consciousness of himself as a public-minded man (patriarch, preacher and patriot).

Now 'community,' which is originally a sociological concept, is an organic whole inspired by public mentality, in which the 'private' ought to be purged as completely as possible for the maintenance of internal unity and so that moral ties can be as tight as possible. In Goldsmith's mind, as pointed out above, the 'state' was regarded as a community, whereas in reality, the state was deprived of its economic and social foundations because of the supremacy of the bourgeoisie over the landed aristocracy (which is clearly demonstrated in his own *Deserted Village*). The 'state' as community survived merely in his mind, his idealism, and his illusions.

The second problem this chapter deals with is the characterization of Burchell and Sir William Thornhill and the way in which these two figures are brought into focus on our retina as a unified image. The resolution of the conflict depends on how these two figures behave themselves and on what part they play in relation to the vicissitudes of the Vicar's family.

It may be safely said that Burchell plays the part of a good-natured friend while Sir William behaves like a justice of the peace, and that Burchell and Sir William make two different impressions on our minds instead of one:

We now found the personage whom we had so long entertained as an harmless amusing companion was no other than the celebrated Sir William Thornhill, to whose virtues and singularities scarce any were strangers. The poor Mr. Burchell was in reality a man of large fortune and great interest, to whom senates listened with applause...²⁶

Indeed, in Chapter III it is suggested that Burchell may be Sir William in disguise,²⁷ yet the identities of these two persons are never ultimately united to form a single personality, for no connections can be found between them. Generally speaking, one of the reasons why we are allowed to recognize person P as P and not as another—regardless of his external circumstances—is that we can glean a single image of his personality from his various actions. Therefore, Burchell and Sir William, having separate patterns of behaviour and not being described as a unified personality, can not be naturally recognized as a single person.

Generally, to understand a man is to form a pattern of him through observations of his various actions. The pattern may be revised according to continual variance in the image of the man, produced by successive stages in his behaviour. Thus the image is at times more

²⁶ Chapt. XXX, pp. 213-4.

²⁷ P. 17.

blurred and at times more clear-cut. ('Character' in the so-called 'character novel' may be safely said to be a rigidly set 'pattern' of his action.) This mental process, involving the formation and revision of a personal image, goes on constantly and unconsciously in our minds not only with respect to the analysis of a man or woman, but also with respect to every other aspect of our daily life. Probably it is impossible for us to live among people who are unfamiliar to us and whom we cannot understand. Therefore, we endeavour to turn what is unfamiliar and indefinite into the familiar and the definite. In other words, we attempt to discern distinct patterns in their behaviour.

If we assume that to understand a man is to assign him a peculiar pattern of behaviour, it is natural that when two distinct patterns are presented to us as representing the same person, we find it difficult to convince ourselves that this really is one and the same person (especially if we view the characters as we would those in a realistic novel).

The surprise the Vicar feels when Burchell turns out to be Sir William in disguise must be due to the width of the gap between the two patterns of behaviour and to his being forced to close the gap and revise his former image of Burchell as a good-natured (though once ungrateful) acquaintance to the image of him as a beneficent and mighty magistrate. But the shock, which leads not to misery but to felicity, is immediately forgotten and replaced by a feeling of exultation in the reader. Yet, if we draw back and reflect upon the duality of this personality within the structure of the novel and try to find a single aspect in the two personalities which seems to connect the two—that is, if we search for some embryo in Burchell's behaviour which anticipates the later Sir William, we find nothing but a mere clue, which is given in Chapter III and is of service only to the development of the plot and not to the development of a single personality for Burchell and Sir William.

Thus, we are obliged to conclude that Goldsmith has neither the intention nor the awareness necessary to identify Burchell with Sir William and to make him a unified personality. The author was not able to accept the character of a man or woman as dynamic and independent of his (often wilful) manipulation. In other words, he could not see human beings as organic units, full of contradictions, resulting from the conflict between man's self and his outer world, that is, from his potential development, but instead saw men and women as possessing definite, static patterns of behaviour, which we call "character."

Why, then, he was unable to comprehend man as a dynamic organism is a very difficult question. To regard man as a pattern of behaviour is to recognize him as unchangeable in time; therefore, the question of cognition of 'time,' which is necessarily connected with a sense of the 'history' of Goldsmith and of his contemporaries, arises. To answer this question properly is far beyond my reach.

But considered within the context of the history of comedy in literature, this simple duality of personality is revealed as a conventional device.

One of the two distinct characters, which actually constitute a single person, is intended to be concealed at first so as to appear in a time of crisis as a *deus ex machina*—in the author's words, 'the good man that comes to relieve it.'²⁸ Burchell has been a 'disguised spectator' in the Vicar's family.

'Disguise' is, of course, a conventionally effective device of comedy; so, seen from the perspective of 'comedy,' not from the perspective of the 'novel,' which is to be essentially realistic and ordinary, the problem of the dual personality is rather easily solved. The technique

²⁸ Chapt. XXX, p. 212.

of disguise and its ultimate discovery is generally employed in comedy to develop or conclude the plot. No to speak of the occurrence of disguise in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure* or in *As You Like It*, Goldsmith effectively makes use of this technique in his own comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*. Miss Hardcastle, the heroine, plays two distinct parts alternately, a would-be fiancée and a maid servant

Thus, a certain artificiality in the structure, resulting from the abrupt entry of Burchell as Sir William and the unexpected discovery of his identity, is by no means unnatural when viewed as comedy. Furthermore, when we consider that Sir William is cast in the role of a justice of the peace who wields great power in the parish of his circuit, the description of him as an almighty being, is properly said to be possessed of a convincing, and realistic quality. (By the way, in Fielding's *Jonathan Wilde*, too, it was a *deus ex machina* in the form of a good magistrate who rescued a good man, Heartfree, from his predicament.)

Anyhow, judging from the ways the story concludes with the misfortunes that befell the Vicar's family, overcome at a stroke comically effected through the intervention of a *deus ex machina*, we cannot regard *The Vicar* as a genuinely realistic novel. The world of this novel is permeated with the faint atmosphere of pastoral fantasy.

In brief, *The Vicar of Wakefield* may be safely defined as a pastoral *roman à thèse* which has the didactic purpose of supporting the values of an aristocratic system rapidly declining before the ascendancy of the *bourgeoisie* and of realizing the ideal of a communal relationship within the 'family' through the varied employment of several literary *genres*—the short story, the essay, the picaresque novel, and poetry—as well as the conventional and saving device of comic surprise. (Originally written in Japanese in September, 1961)