It is a relief to turn from the unremitting horror of Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* to Mrs. Inchbald’s *Nature and Art*. *Nature and Art* is a book of great charm, but the quickness of Inchbald’s satire does not obscure the bitterness of her portrait of English society. Like Holcroft and Godwin, she sees much that needs reform, and like them she decries the corruption in all walks of English life. She too is shocked at the callousness and injustice manifested by a society that proclaims itself humane but that acts only according to self-interest and pride. Rather than using Holcroft’s method of enumerating faults, or Godwin’s of piling dramatic detail upon detail to create a suffocating atmosphere of dismay, Inchbald cuts down the pretensions of her society with wit. *Nature and Art* is a revolutionary novel, but it dresses the strength of its statement in a tone of good-humored irony.

The good humor is deceptive. Inchbald did not find it easy to support herself and her yet poorer sisters, and in the struggle to make ends meet, she was forced to see a good deal of the less pleasant side of her society. Her novel in large part pleads against individual and societal callousness, much of which she had seen at firsthand.

She finds that society does not provide a supportive structure for its members. On the contrary, as soon as a person attains a position of any power, he is corrupted by it, and those who are born to wealth and position are educated to callousness and irresponsibility. We have seen the complaint against the education of the rich in many of these novels, *The Fool of Quality* and *Sandford and Merton* especially. Inchbald’s criticism is even more
far reaching, for she shows that the corruption is not a matter only of class education but of the attainment of high position.

*Nature and Art* is the story of two generations, the elder brothers William and Henry, and the younger cousins William and Henry. We meet the brothers as they leave their village to make their way in the world after the death of their father. The elder William and Henry have no resources or friends but each other. The only negotiable talent they have between them is the younger brother’s ability to play the fiddle, a talent that enables Henry not only to support himself but to see William educated and placed as a clergyman. Once he has become a clergyman, William is ashamed of Henry’s fiddling, not to mention Henry’s unpretentious wife, and they separate. While William rises ever higher in the church, Henry goes to sea and is shipwrecked among savages. Years later, Henry manages to send his son, also Henry, to the care of his brother, and for the remainder of the novel we watch William from the older generation and the two children, young Henry and William’s son William, as they act in and react to society.

The two young brothers start out essentially equals. They are ready to work to make their way, but society provides no useful employment for them. As Inchbald observes, “To obtain a permanent livelihood, is the good fortune but of a part of those who are in want of it.”¹ This is a criticism we have not often seen in these novels (except perhaps by implication in *Amelia*), which for the most part seem to assume that if one wants to work, employment is available—even Caleb, hounded from town to town, always manages to find something. At worst, the problem of employment is seen, as in the story of Mr. Clement in *The Fool of Quality*, as that of the individual who simply is not educated to any useful occupation; it is a matter of individual lack of foresight rather than social fault. Inchbald makes a quite different point. William and Henry can only find chance employment, an errand to run or such, for regular employment depends on the caprice of the employer rather than the qualification of the employee. Without influence or means, even the lowest occupations are closed:
If they applied for the place even of a menial servant, they were too clownish and awkward for the presence of the lady of the house;—and once, when William (who had been educated at the free grammar-school of the town in which he was born, and was an excellent scholar) hoping to obtain the good opinion of a young clergyman whom he solicited for the favour of waiting upon him, acquainted him “That he understood Greek and Latin,” he was rejected by the divine, “because he could not dress hair.” (vol. I, pp. 6–7)

The only service society does find useful from the two brothers is Henry’s ability to “play upon the fiddle.” His fiddle playing opens all doors, not only for himself, but through the contacts he makes, for William as well. Inchbald devotes a paragraph to Henry’s sudden rise—the last sentence points to Henry’s having achieved the ultimate goal in society:

No sooner was it publicly known that Henry could play most enchantingly upon the violin, than he was invited into many companies where no other accomplishment could have introduced him. His performance was so much admired, that he had the honour of being admitted to several tavern feasts, of which he had also the honour to partake without partaking of the expence. He was soon addressed by persons of the very first rank and fashion, and was once seen walking side by side with a peer. (vol. I, p. 9)

Inchbald’s insistence on Henry’s ability to “play upon the fiddle” suggests that Henry was not an accomplished artist but rather an entertainer, one who could play at a tavern supper. Such is the sort of talent society respects, an entertaining spectacle, a diversion, and for this it dispenses its rewards. Henry can enter circles that any other—and greater—talents could not gain him, and he becomes acquainted with “persons of the very first rank and fashion” (vol. I, p. 12), finally attaining that great honor of being seen “walking side by side with a peer.” Inchbald mocks the distorted values represented by Henry’s success when she notes that “yet, in the midst of this powerful occasion for rejoicing, Henry . . . had one grief which eclipsed all the happiness of his new life:—his brother William could not play on the fiddle! consequently, his brother William . . . could not share in his good fortune” (vol. I, p. 10).
William refuses to let Henry teach him to play; he does, however, accept Henry's offer to "go down to Oxford, or to Cambridge" (vol. I, p. 13). Inchbald equates Henry's accomplishment in music with that of William in learning, suggesting that what William will bring back from the university will be no more valuable than Henry's fiddling. At the university, says Henry, "no doubt they are as fond of learning, as in this gay town they are of music" (vol. I, pp. 13-14). Henry's following increases, and as he becomes more popular he continues to help William. Finally, "in return for the entertainment that Henry had just afforded him," a "great man" (vol. I, p. 17) promises him a living for his brother as soon as its present incumbent, then on his death bed, vacates it. William passes his examinations, takes his orders, and becomes the incumbent in his turn. After a number of years, Henry with his fiddle procures a deanship for William.

Inchbald creates an incisive portrait of William the churchman. These early scenes, in which we see how William comes to his vocation and by what means he rises in his profession, lay the groundwork for the later descriptions of William's remarkably uncharitable career. William becomes a churchman because it is one of the few ways a man of his interests, that is, the classics and literature, can make a living, and such virtues as kindness, compassion and devoutness are not even relevant. As Inchbald comments, Henry, "possess [ed] the virtues of humility and charity, far above William, who was the professed teacher of these virtues" (vol. I, p. 22). Because these requisites do not affect the choice of profession or the entrance to it, we should not expect them to affect advancement in it, and indeed they do not. William rises in the church simply through influence, his brother's influence at that. Inchbald's phrasing is exact: Henry "had the gratification of procuring for [William] the appointment to a deanery" (vol. I, p. 23). Once he has been placed, William advances his own career. He becomes intimately friendly with his bishop, the two men of religion "passing their time in attending levees and in talking politics," the dean's wife, "passing hers in attending routs and in talking of herself . . ." (vol. I, p. 44). There is no suggestion in their talk or
their actions that these curates are men whose responsibilities extend to care of their spiritual charges; rather, they are concerned with living fashionably and well. The dean and the bishop, whether deliberately or as a result of their manner of living, are entirely out of touch with the realities of life that the poor experience. Whenever young Henry and the dean converse, this remarkable perspective is apparent. Inchbald uses these conversations to expose the institutionalized selfishness of the churchman and to catalog many of the injustices and distortions of English society.

For example, young Henry overhears his uncle, in a fit of rage, telling the coachman that he will never drive again. Henry is very confused, not understanding how the man will be punished by not being allowed to do what seems to him an unpleasant job. His uncle decides that he had better instruct the child, and calls Henry to him:

"There are in society rich and poor; the poor are born to serve the rich."
"And what are the rich born for?"
"To be served by the poor."
"But suppose the poor would not serve them?"
"Then they must starve."
"And so poor people are permitted to live, only upon condition that they wait upon the rich?"
"Is that a hard condition? or if it were, they will be rewarded in a better world than this."
"Is there a better world than this?"
"Is it possible you do not know there is?"
"I heard my father once say something about a world to come; but he stop short, and said I was too young to understand what he meant."
"The world to come,"(returned the dean) "is where we shall go after death; and there no distinction will be made between rich and poor—all persons there will be equal."
"Aye, now I see what makes it a better world than this. But cannot this world try to be as good as that?"
"In respect to placing all persons on a level, it is utterly impossible. God has ordained it otherwise."
"How! has God ordained a distinction to be made, and will not make any himself?" (vol. I, p. 78)
William is so accustomed to the concept of privilege that he is sure "God has ordained it." His role as a churchman, then, is not to interfere in any way with the relations between rich and poor, and further, it is no part of his duty to help the poor. Young Henry's puzzlement that God would ordain a distinction to be made on earth that is not to be maintained in heaven remains unanswered.

Although the criticism in the book is blunt, Inchbald avoids sermonizing, as Holcroft in *Anna St. Ives* does not. She manages to walk the fine line between blunt commentary and preaching partially by resorting frequently to the device I have just examined, a dialogue between Henry and his uncle, in which Henry's simple logic demolishes the careful complexity his uncle builds to mask the unfairness and brutality of society. Inchbald implies that the failings of society should be apparent to anyone who looks at the institutions with eyes undimmed by prospects of the convenient, the self-serving, the traditional, and the simply avaricious.

William is hardly used to his new role as cleric before he begins to draw lines between himself and those "less worthy." When he first becomes a churchman, he immediately develops a dislike for Henry's fiddle—a first step toward separating himself from a brother whose occupation is no longer sufficiently dignified. When he becomes dean, he distances himself from Henry still further. As Inchbald says, Henry's procurement of a deanship for William "at once placed between them an insurmountable barrier to all friendship, that was not the effect of condescension on the part of the dean" (vol. I, p. 23). The dean marries for prestige; Henry marries for love. The dean and Lady Clementina refuse to associate with Henry's simple and virtuous wife, and the break finally becomes complete. The last comment on this aspect of William's snobbery and the distortion of perspective it entails comes when William hears of the death of Henry's wife. William thinks to himself that "had he known she had been so near her dissolution, she might have been introduced to Lady Clementina. . . . They would have had no objection to have met this poor woman for the last time, and would have descended to the familiarity of kindred, in order to
have wished her a good journey to the other world” (vol. I, p. 30).

Inchbald exposes the pretension of people like the dean and his wife. Little Henry bows to his uncle’s wig and his aunt’s earrings because aunt and uncle put so much stock in these adornments; as the dean explains, wigs are worn “as a distinction between us and inferior people: they are worn to give an importance to the wearer” (vol. I, pp. 64–65). Henry dutifully respects the wigs, although he does mention that this wearing of things to give a person importance is “just as the savages do; they hang brass nails, wire, buttons, and entrails of beasts all over them, to give them importance” (vol. I, p. 65). Either through Inchbald’s observations in her own voice or through Henry’s comments, every aspect of William’s family life is ridiculed. William marries his wife “merely that he might be proud of her family; and, in return, suffer that family to be ashamed of his (vol. I, p. 29). She is everything he could want in a wife—snobbish in the extreme and motivated only by vanity. Her interests precisely match her husband’s for “that, which in a weak woman is called vanity, in a man of sense is termed pride—make one a degree stronger, or the other a degree weaker, and the dean and his wife were infected with the selfsame folly” (vol. I, p. 36). Their son, young William, in every respect satisfies his parents. As a child, he is precocious but not kind; as a man, he is successful but callous. It is this younger William who, as a judge on the bench, sentences to death the very woman he had seduced and betrayed.

The dean himself exemplifies distorted values rather than evil. After the death of his wife, when Henry leaves the country, William sincerely repents their angry parting and wishes to see his brother again, but as time passes and that event grows less likely, the desire cools. Inchbald rather ironically notes that “the avocations of an elevated life erase the deepest impressions” (vol. I, p. 42). Somewhat along the same lines, Inchbald remarks that although William was in general a “man of integrity,” in certain instances, as when he wants to please those above him in the church, “he was a liar” (vol. I, p. 89).

Inchbald, like Holcroft in Hugh Trevor, is disgusted by the
practices she sees in the upper echelons of the church, among them men signing their names to other men’s work. William cheerfully prostitutes himself for the bishop, giving him his own writings and, even in the case of those few things he brings out under his own name, attributing the best parts of the work to his superior. From the context of the discussion, it is clear that the corruption in the church is only one of the series of corruptions that permeate the upper level of society. In both the religious and the secular world, truth is of little import. William’s friend the bishop has “the desire of fame, and [the] dread of being thought a man receiving large emolument for unimportant service.” (vol. I, p. 87). William, on the other hand, would do anything to gain “noble acquaintance” and giving his work away seems small price to pay for having important friends. Inchbald puts it most uncharitably:

“The elder William was to his negligent or ignorant superiors in the church, such as an apt boy at school is to the rich dunces—William performed the prelates’ tasks for them, and they rewarded him—not indeed with toys or money, but with their countenance, their company, their praise.—And scarcely was there a sermon preached from the patrician part of the bench, in which the dean did not fashion some periods, blot out some uncouth phrases, render some obscure sentiments intelligible, and was the certain person, when the work was printed, to correct the press.

In particular, “the Honourable and Right Reverend Bishop of* * * * delighted in printing and publishing his works: or rather the entire works of the dean, which passed for his. . . .” Inchbald is furious that William sacrifices his integrity: “So degradingly did William, the shopkeeper’s son, think of his own honest extraction, that he was blinded, even to the loss of honour, by the lustre of this noble acquaintance . . .” (vol. I, pp. 87–89).

Holcroft in Hugh Trevor attacks the same corrupt practices in the church. Hugh, like William, gives his writing to his superiors for publication under their names. The implications of this particular kind of corruption are particularly damaging to the perception of church as somehow separate from the failings of
the world, for the inability of the great men of the church to produce anything by themselves points to a bankruptcy of thought within the body. The church, with its dealing, hypocrisy, and outright lies, is no different from the secular world, except that it is doubly disgusting to find these corruptions in the church. Both Holcroft and Inchbald make a major point of examining accepted customs like these, and neither has much taste for the polite deceptions that damage the essential honesty not only of the institution but of the individual. Inchbald sees such games as yet another perversion of the relationships between men that corrupt social institutions foster, for William's willingness to prostitute his talents for the bishop is not conditioned solely by the desire to rise in his profession but is in at least equal degree a product of his pleasure—his wonder—at finding himself the intimate of those socially superior to himself.

Although Inchbald essentially is using the established church as an example of a typical upper-class institution, some comment must be made here about perspectives on the church in the late 1700s as well as about the role Inchbald's own Catholicism might play in shaping her viewpoint. The Catholicism can be dealt with briefly. As a Catholic, she would have had reason to resent the establishment that ran the Church of England. Catholics, of course, had long been discriminated against in England, both in the private and public spheres; in 1796 she would still have been victim to some degree of that discrimination. The discomfort Inchbald evidences in her view of the Anglican hierarchy was not confined to Catholics, however. Much of the suspicion she and many of her contemporaries show can be attributed to the position the church had long held in society. The Anglican church was the established church, and it was, indeed, very established. It was, and certainly appeared to be, very comfortable; its clergy would draw little sympathy—and perhaps a certain amount of suspicion—for the sacrifices they might claim to make for mother church. It had been a good while, after all, since the Anglicans had had any martyrs. Also, because of its long-standing relationship
with the ruling structures of the society, the church would inevi-
itably be viewed with whatever suspicions were entertained
about government and governors. The appraising eye Inch-
bald casts on the church, then, might be shared by many of her
contemporaries, Catholic or not.

With respect to the particulars in the portrait of the church
and its clergymen that we have seen in *Nature and Art*, Inchbald
seems in her broad outlines to be reflecting long established
prototypes. The steps in William's career follow what seems to
have been a quite common pattern. D. R. Hirschberg in his
work on "Social Mobility in Early Modern England" describes
some of the trends in church service and advancement for the
years 1660 to 1760, trends which, if we judge from *Nature and
Art*, had not much changed by the end of the century. What he
finds, first of all, is that most of the bishops do not come from
the aristocracy; the majority of successful churchmen come
from the less exalted ranks of the population. Thus William's
rise from undistinguished beginnings is not unusual. The first
step in the evolution of a churchman is his education, and
Hirschberg's research supports Inchbald's portrait, for he finds
that the most important element in providing for the education
of a cleric is what he calls "seed money," that is, money to get to
the university and begin. Once there, as he notes, "the talented
might find ways to survive." Again, William's career follows
just this pattern: it is Henry's "seed money" that allows William
to go to the university; once he has begun, he manages to
complete his studies.

We remember that William's decision to be a clergyman is the
result not of calling but of calculation: the church seems to be a
good choice of livelihood for one who likes to study and not to
do much else. Hirschberg notes that "for many [joining the
church] was a calculated decision;" a decision that considered
the fact that the church offered a decent (or better) income for
moderate investment.

Once in a church post the incumbent was fairly secure. If not
overly well paid, at least he need not fear losing his livelihood with
the fall of a patron. University and church officials were readier
than most courtiers or politicians to promote talented outsiders to patronage in their gift. The cost of a university education was at least comparable to the sums necessary to purchase office in other fields, and there were greater prospects of quick returns through college fellowships. Even if the typical rewards of a clerical career might be moderate, so too were the stakes required.

Churchmen knew full well that fellowships and livings served to entice young men, and in fact valued them as a way to convince the worthy to join the church.\(^5\)

When Hirschberg summarizes his findings on patterns of careers in the church, he might be describing William’s rise:

> What was the nature of bishops’ social mobility? Surely the bishops themselves are proof that occupational and vertical social mobility were possible in this period. The majority were of undistinguished birth, yet rose to become princes of the church. Even if the rewards of episcopal service were not so great as many believed, men who had talents but few other resources were able to turn their abilities into professional success and a more substantial social position than their fathers’. Future bishops sought mobility consciously, to take advantage of one part of the occupational/social system that appeared relatively accessible to newcomers.\(^6\)

Just so, William rises from obscurity and poverty to substantial social position and financial security. Whatever the truth of the personal characteristics Inchbald gives William, her portrait of social mobility via the church seems accurate. Some of the implications of this relatively exposed social position—the observation of private, domestic matters to which men in public positions are vulnerable—seem also to have been accurately recorded by Inchbald. William’s wife is a common type; the wives of clergy seem fairly frequently to have drawn a good deal of negative comment.

Finally, we come to the matter of William’s writing assignment for his bishop. Inchbald and Holcroft, as I have noted, complain that it is an established and somehow immoral custom for younger churchmen to write sermons and other works to be presented under the signature of the bishop. It is difficult to
determine just how frequently this type of work was required, and perhaps more interestingly, we might also ask how it was viewed by both the younger clergymen and their bishops. Taken from the clergy's perspective, this preparation of texts may simply have been part of the younger clergyman's work, not to be viewed as anything dishonest at all. If, as Hirschberg suggests, it was the rule for the higher level churchman to be interested in fostering the successful flowering of the younger cleric's talent, such writing chores may simply have been among his assignments, perhaps even viewed as special opportunities to prove his talents. The extent of the practice and its place in the relations between the clergyman and his superior have not been adequately documented, and present a fruitful area for further study.

Although it is easy to see Inchbald's delineation of William, his family, and his bishop as an attack on the corruption of the church, it is an attack on the church as only one of many corrupt social institutions. Inchbald insists on that perspective by making William and his lady so clearly part of the world. Thus, Inchbald juxtaposes to this discussion of the practices of men in the church the practices of men in the secular world. Discussion of lies in the church is followed by discussion of libel in high society.

Inchbald explicitly links the two by using the dean's wife as the connecting device. While the dean is being a churchman, she is out being a lady, with the inevitable result that her name, having become "known," becomes an object of gossip. "The dean's wife being a fine lady—while her husband and his friend pored over books or their own manuscripts at home, she ran from house to house, from public amusement to public amusement; but much less for the pleasure of seeing than for that of being seen" (vol. I, p. 89). One day she came home from her visits in tears; "three ladies accompanied her home, entreating her to be patient under a misfortune to which even kings are liable,—namely, defamation" (vol. I, p. 90). The delicious conversation goes on with innocent little Henry trying to
comfort the vain, silly woman, who, it seems, has been accused in print of gambling.

"[I]f only one believe it, I shall call my reputation lost. . . ."

The dean, with the bishop (to whom he had been reading a treatise just going to the press, which was to be published in the name of the latter, though written by the former) now entered, to enquire why they had been sent for in such haste.

"My reputation is destroyed—a public print has accused me of playing deep at my own house, and winning all the money."

"The world will never reform," said the bishop: "all our labour, my friend, is thrown away."

"Here it is in print," said she, holding out a newspaper.

"The dean read the paragraph, and then exclaimed "I can forgive a falsehood spoken—the warmth of conversation may excuse it—but to write and print an untruth is unpardonable.—and I will prosecute this publisher."

"Still the falsehood will go down to posterity," (said Lady Clementina) "and after ages will think I was a gambler."

"Comfort yourself, dear madam," said young Henry, wishing to console her: "perhaps after ages may not hear of you; nor even the present age think much about you." (vol. I, pp. 91–93)

This conversation is a commentary on the passages that precede it about William’s writing for the bishop. William and the bishop come running in together, and Inchbald emphasizes that William had just been reading the bishop his newest treatise—to be published under the bishop’s name. William’s indignant assertion that spoken falsehoods may be excused as the product of the moment but “to write and print an untruth is unpardonable” underscores his blindness towards his own actions.

Lady Clementina is a lady of fashion. Her interests and her problems are those of the social world, and her husband, like her, is also very much involved with reputation and rank. Not only are the dean and his wife part of this society that is the subject of the scandal sheets and gossip mongers, but the lady’s actions do not protect her from the attacks such organs might make. Inchbald’s taunt about those who have to make much
ado about guarding their reputations—because the reputations are open to some mockery—not only calls attention to the failure of the dean’s wife to maintain a fitting decorum but to the view she and the dean have of themselves: they are figures of society, and their place in the church hierarchy assures their rank in that society.

This identity between the church and the secular world is apparent in the pamphlets the dean writes, his own “state of the union” essays. They are pegged directly to his satisfaction with his own advancement in the church. He writes of a joyous, productive, happy land but reserves the intention, should he not be promoted, to reverse his position. The dean’s pamphlet
glowed with [his] love for his country; and such a country as he described, it was impossible not to love. “Salubrious air, fertile fields, wood, water, corn, grass, sheep, oxen, fish, fowl, fruit, and vegetables,” were dispersed with the most prodigal hand,—“valiant men, virtuous women; statesmen wise and just; tradesmen abounding in merchandise and money; husbandmen possessing peace, ease, plenty; and all ranks, liberty.” (vol. I, pp. 99—100)

When Henry overhears his uncle talking about people who have only a bit of bread to eat, he is shocked to hear that such poor people live in England, for he doesn’t remember them being mentioned in his uncle’s pamphlet. When he looks again at the “luxurious details” of the riches talked of in the pamphlet, it seems to him that there must be enough for all:

“Why do not they go and take some of these things?”
“They must not,” said the dean, “unless they were their own.”
“What! uncle, does not part of the earth, nor any thing which the earth produces, belong to the poor?”
“Certainly not.”
“Why did not you say so, then, in your pamphlet?”
“Because it is what every body knows.” (vol. I, pp. 101—2)

The dean’s answer reflects no sense of responsibility and, even further, no awareness that anything could be wrong in this division of the wealth of the nation. Clearly William sees his pamphlets as political rather than spiritual commitments; they
bring him literary reputation and success. William and his church are comfortable in the service of the powerful. The poor, having no power, are of no interest. Inchbald sees the dean's callousness as part of a social pattern. The rich are generally insensitive to the poor, and she makes that point even more forcefully in the second half of the book. Her sympathies are with those worthy and very human poor. One of the most effective moments in the book is when the returning elder Henry meets some of William's parishioners. They inform him that William is dead, and it is terribly obvious that they have never been fooled by his show of dignity. They had always understood that he did not care for them, and they clearly express the reciprocity of their own feelings.

The rich in *Nature and Art* are almost entirely unpleasant characters, with the exception of the older William, who, occasionally, exhibits a degree of decency. Most typical of these characters are such people as Clementina or another charming lady we meet, the wife of Lord Bendham, who

took her hue, like the chameleon, from surrounding objects. . . . At court, humble, resigned, patient, attentive—At balls, gaming-tables, and routs, gay, sprightly, and flippant—At her country seat, reserved, austere, arrogant, and gloomy.

Though in town her timid eye, in presence of certain persons, would scarcely uplift its trembling lid, so much she felt her own insignificance; yet, in the country, till Lady Clementina arrived, there was not one being of consequence enough to share in her acquaintance; and she paid back to her inferiors there, all the humiliating slights, all the mortifications, which in London she received from those to whom she was inferior. (vol. I, pp. 120–21)

Inchbald has a marvelous time with the lady's hypocrisies. When she is in town, she admits to her house "the acknowledged mistresses of a man in elevated life" (vol. I, p. 123), although in the country she sees to it that a fall from chastity of any parish girl is publicly and severely punished. Inchbald explains that

it was not . . . the crime, but the rank which the criminal held in
society, that drew down Lady Bendham's vengeance: she even carried her distinction of classes in female error to such a very nice point, that the adulterous concubine of an elder brother was her most intimate acquaintance, whilst the less guilty unmarried mistress of the younger, she would not sully her lips to exchange a word with. (vol. I, p. 123)

Such a woman has the pretension because of her rank to set herself up as the arbiter of morality in the village. Even more, Lord and Lady Bendham pass not only on the morals but the economics of the poor. The lord and lady are indifferent to the suffering they see around them because that suffering affects the poor and not themselves. The rich simply do not accept the idea that the poor can have the same needs and feelings that they have, a point to which Inchbald returns with increasing anger as William sacrifices the innocent Agnes to his own feelings. Such episodes as this with Lord and Lady Bendham are used by Inchbald to show that the insensitivity and hypocrisy of the dean’s family are typical of members of their class.

Inchbald notes that “one single day of feasting” in the castle “would have nourished for a month all the poor inhabitants of the parish,” but the plenty is not shared. The lord and lady have “ample fortune” but, somehow, “had never yet the oeconomy to be exempt from debts.” Although they are not able to live within their means, they do “contrive and plan excellent schemes 'how the poor might live most comfortably with a little better management.'” Lady Bendham notes that, after all, “those people never want to dress—shoes and stockings, a coat and waist coat, a gown and a cap, a petticoat and a handkerchief, are all they want—fire, to be sure, in winter—then all the rest is merely for provision.” And she does give them presents in addition: “last year, during the frost, a hundred pounds” (vol. I, pp. 125–26). Young Henry, listening to all this at dinner one evening, is not impressed by Lady Bendham’s generosity, although, as we might expect, his uncle the dean is moved to exclaim, “how benevolent.” Henry’s reaction is “how prudent.” When pressed, he elaborates that “it was prudent in you to give a little; lest the poor, driven to despair, should take
185

NATURE AND ART

all” (vol. I, p. 127). That is an inflammatory, even revolutionary, statement. Nature and Art was published only seven years after the French Revolution, and one can guess which poor Inchbald might have had in mind.

The remainder of the discussion is as heavily ironic. Lord Bendham retorts that such actions by the poor would be punished by hanging, and Henry replies that “hanging . . . was formerly adopted as a mild punishment, in place of starving” (vol. I, p. 127). That the poor, to escape starvation, must accept charity from the rich instead of being able to earn a subsistence for themselves is for Inchbald an almost insupportable injustice. When Lady Bendham insists that the poor should consider themselves “much obliged” to the rich for charity, Henry considers that “that is the greatest hardship of all.” As he sees it, it is most unjust that “what the poor receive to keep them from perishing, should pass under the name of gifts and bounty. Health, strength, and the will to earn a moderate subsistence, ought to be every man’s security from obligation” (vol. I, p. 128). This was one of the first criticisms Inchbald had enunciated in Nature and Art; remember that it was only the accident of Henry’s luck with the fiddle that had kept Henry and William from starving. Inchbald finds such a lottery for the primary necessities of life horrifying, and she suggests that these conditions could be ameliorated by governmental intervention. Henry notes that if Lord Bendham “would only be so good as to speak a few words for the poor as a senator, he might possibly for the future keep his hundred pounds, and yet they never want it” (vol. I, p. 129). But Inchbald is sure that such help, logical as it seems, will not come from men like Lord Bendham.

People like the dean and his wife, like the Bendhams, are in control of society. Inchbald is dismayed at the quality of the life to which they condemn the poor, and she is saddened by the emptiness of their lives as well. Further, the evils of the system perpetuate themselves generation after generation, for William’s son is even more callous and unfair than William, and the son’s life is even emptier. Much of the problem is that the
rich are educated to respect the wrong values. Inchbald does not develop the elder William's character very carefully, although it is clear that he does not become distanced from his brother Henry until after he has gone away to the university. She is explicit, however, about the role of education in shaping the younger William and Henry; Inchbald attributes the difference in the characters of the younger generation directly to the differences in their education.

When he first sees him, young Henry is angered by his cousin William, for William seems to Henry to be a little man. William has been brought up with great care, but the care is all to the wrong ends. William has been taught always to be clever, and never natural. His upbringing has everything of art and nothing of nature, and the result is a child who is a little man, and a man who has no moral measure except self-interest. Such a prodigy takes much work in the making. Inchbald details for us the process employed by William's parents:

Young William passed his time, from morning till night, with persons who taught him to walk, to ride, to talk, to think like a man—a foolish man, instead of a wise child, as nature designed him to be.

This unfortunate youth was never permitted to have one conception of his own—all were taught him—he was never once asked, "What he thought?" but men were paid to tell him "how to think." He was taught to revere such and such persons, however unworthy of his reverence; to believe such and such things, however unworthy of his credit; and to act so and so, on such and such occasions, however unworthy of his feelings.

Such were the lessons of the tutors assigned him by his father—Those masters whom his mother gave him, did him less mischief; for though they distorted his limbs and made his manners effeminate, they did not interfere beyond the body. (vol. I, pp. 44–46)

Inchbald's conclusion is that "considering the labour that was taken to spoil him . . . it was some credit to him that he was not an ideot, or a brute" (vol. I, p. 47). William grows up to be just the sort of man his education should make him: he does not think for himself but he accepts the empty judgments of soci-
ety. As a child he is taught to "revere such and such persons," and in his adult life he lives by the rules of rank and favor.

Young Henry's education is the opposite of William's. The elder Henry and his child had been shipwrecked on an island inhabited only by savages, and in the years there he educated his son as well as he could. Little Henry's education essentially consists of informal lessons in morality and the value of inquiry; his father omits specifics of rank and society in the belief that should young Henry need to know them, he could learn them at that point. The elder Henry describes the education he has given his son in a letter to William:

"Pray, my dear brother, do not think it the child's fault, but mine, that you will find him so ignorant—he has always shown a quickness and a willingness to learn, and would, I dare say, if he had been brought up under your care, have been by this time a good scholar—but you know I am no scholar myself. Besides, not having any books here, I have only been able to teach my child by talking to him, and in all my conversations with him, I have never taken much pains to instruct him in the manners of my own country; thinking, that if ever he went over, he would learn them soon enough; and if he never did go over, that it would be as well he knew nothing about them.

"I have kept him also from the knowledge of everything which I have thought pernicious in the conduct of the savages, except that I have now and then pointed out a few of their faults, in order to give him a true conception and a proper horror of them. At the same time I have taught him to love, and to do good to his neighbour, whoever that neighbour may be, and whatever may be his failings. Falsehood of every kind I included in this precept as forbidden, for no one can love his neighbour and deceive him.

"I have instructed him too, to hold in contempt all frivolous vanity, and all those indulgences which he was never likely to obtain. He has learnt all that I have undertaken to teach him; but I am afraid you will think he has learned too little." (vol. I, pp. 54–56)

The character of young Henry is precisely what we would expect from his education: he is spontaneous, honest, sensitive, and open-minded. His conception of worth is based not on the rank but on the humanity of a person. Unlike his cousin
William, as a child he has the freshness of childhood, and as a man the depth of maturity. Henry is far the better human being. The presumption is that had young William been removed from the pernicious influence of his vain parents, he would have grown up a better person. In Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* and Day’s *Sandford and Merton*, we have already seen these assumptions: Brooke and Day indeed do remove the children from such parents for their education, and in each case the child develops into a fine, caring human being.

In *Nature and Art* young William receives just the education to be expected from the dean and Lady Clementina, and he fits perfectly into society, for he is a prodigy of reflection. Even as a child, his is a voice in echo of his father’s, and indeed, he has been so educated that he can see nothing wrong with this kind of unthinking acceptance. Henry, his cousin, questions the assumptions of society and finds much to puzzle over in the relations between rich and poor, rank and worth, honor and truth:

Their different characters, when boys, were preserved when they became men: Henry still retained that natural simplicity which his early destiny had given him; he wondered still at many things he saw and heard, and at times would venture to give his opinion, contradict, and even act in opposition to persons, whom long experience and the approbation of the world had placed in situations which claimed his implicit reverence and submission.

Unchanged in all his boyish graces, young William, now a man, was never known to infringe upon the statutes of good-breeding; even though sincerity, his own free will, duty to his neighbour, with many other plebeian virtues and privileges, were the sacrifice. (vol. 1, pp. 114–15)

The difference in character is of vital importance not only to the individual but to the larger society. William’s actions toward the young girl he seduces and abandons cause her death; Henry’s compassion and generosity save the life of the girl’s infant.

The criticism in the first half of the book is directed at general targets: pretension, vanity, lack of discrimination, ambiguous morality. It is a pleasant irony in that the reader laughs comfortably with Inchbald at the foibles of the society described.
The second part of the novel shows the human consequences of this skewed moral vision in the upper classes, and Inchbald's tone is harsh and tragic as she describes the set of parallel relationships between William and Hannah and Henry and Rebecca. William seduces and destroys the innocent Hannah, while Henry cherishes and protects his Rebecca. William's carefully detailed destruction of Hannah becomes a symbol of the callousness, cruelty, and stupidity with which the upper class acts in relation to those less powerful than themselves.

During a summer which the dean and his family are spending in the country, both William and Henry fall in love with lower-class girls of the neighborhood, William with Hannah Primrose and Henry with Rebecca Rymer. William immediately sets out to make Hannah his mistress. He is quite open about the limit of his relationship both to Henry and to Hannah, but Inchbald makes the point that William only assures Hannah he "could never make her his wife" after it was obvious that "he had obtained her heart, her whole soul entire—so that loss of innocence would be less terrifying than separation from him . . ." (vol. I, p. 145). Henry cannot understand William's actions. To William's complaint that Hannah still holds back from having sexual intercourse with him and so treats him with "unkind moderation," Henry asks, "You design to marry her then?" William asks how Henry can "degrade [him] by the supposition?" As the dialogue goes on, Henry tries to suggest that marrying a woman you love is not degrading but that seducing her is. William is unshakeable: Hannah, the daughter of simple cottage folk, is not of sufficient rank to be considered for his wife. All of the prejudices of his education come pouring from him as he debates with Henry:

"Would it degrade you more to marry her than to make her your companion? To talk with her for hours in preference to all other company? To wish to be endeared to her by still closer ties?"

"But all this is not raising her to the rank of my wife."

"It is still raising her to that rank for which wives alone were allotted."
"You talk wildly!—I tell you I love her; but not enough, I hope, to marry her."

"But too much, I hope, to undo her?"

"That must be her own free choice—I make use of no unwarrantable methods." (vol. I, pp. 147–48)

William is not to be moved; his education has taught him that he has the right to whatever he wants and that considerations of rank take precedence over human considerations when responsibility must be taken. Although he "loves" Hannah, William does not see her as a suffering human being; rather, he is aware that she causes him frustration. This is the same callousness and lack of responsibility that we have already seen, for example, in the discussions at Lord Bendham's table. But in the episodes with Hannah such lack of simple humanity is even more horrifying, for we are concerned not with general discussion of the poor but with the destruction of one particular young woman. What in a summary of the plot sounds like soap opera does not in the book read that way, for Inchbald has so well prepared the ground for something like this that Hannah's destruction by William has poignancy and dignity.

Part of Inchbald's point, although clearly not the center of her sympathy, is that the rich harm themselves by confining themselves behind these barriers. William is truly fond of Hannah and would have a happy home life with her as his wife. But he marries for "connections, interest, honours" a woman in whom he has no personal interest. Their life together from its inception is devoid of any meaning, and Inchbald suggests that this sort of arrangement is a commonplace of marriage in the upper classes. William marries the niece of Lord Bendham, Miss Sedgely. He "had never seen in her whole person, or manners, the least attraction to excite his love. He pictures to himself an unpleasant home with a companion so little suited to his taste . . ." but nevertheless agrees when the dean explains "what great connections, and what great patronage" (vol. I, pp. 165–66) the marriage would bring. The bride-to-be feels quite as William does and consoles herself that "I shall not care a pin for my husband . . . and so I will dress and visit, and do just as I
like—he dare not be unkind because of my aunt . . . ” (vol. I, pp. 167–68). This is the bargain William makes in place of marrying Hannah. As for any worry he might have had for Hannah, “business, pleasures, new occupations, and new schemes of future success, crowded to dissipate all unwelcome reflections” (vol. II, p. 10).

Hannah tries to murder the child she bore William, but faltering at the last moment, she leaves the infant uncared for but alive in the forest. Henry accidentally finds the infant and brings the baby to Rebecca to be cared for. The infant is discovered; Rebecca is accused of being the mother, and several very ironic scenes take place in which the dean and his son William with great moral indignation examine the supposed unwed mother. Only Henry notes that he finds the unknown father much more culpable than the mother.

When Henry later discovers that the infant is the child of Hannah and William, he asks Hannah to clear Rebecca’s reputation. She is brought before the dean and forced to name the father. Inchbald describes the scene:

While Mr. and Mrs. Norwynne, just entered on the honey-moon, were sitting side by side enjoying with peace and with honour conjugal society; poor Hannah, threatened, reviled, and sinking to the dust, was hearing from the mouth of William’s father the enormity of those crimes to which his son had been accessory.—She saw the mittimus written that was to convey her into a prison—saw herself delivered once more into the hands of constables, before her resolution left her, of concealing the name of William in her story. (vol. II, p. 62)

The dean insists that she publicly name the father of her child; overcome by his relentless questioning, she admits that “one of your family is my child’s father.” When he has ascertained that the culprit is not one of his servants nor his nephew, he holds the rest of the talk in private, for

in all particulars of refined or coarse treatment, he would alleviate or aggravate according to the rank of the offender. He could not feel that a secret was of equal importance to a poor, as to a rich
person—and while Hannah gave no intimation but that her delicacy rose from fears for herself, she did not so forcibly impress him with an opinion that it was a case which had weighty cause for a private conference, as when she boldly said, “a part of his family, very near to him, was concerned in her tale. (vol. II, pp. 64–65)

Hannah refuses the dean’s order to give up her child, and because she had disobeyed him, the dean refuses to help her. The dean, as Inchbald puts it, “candidly” tells the few witnesses to Hannah’s questioning that it was

an affair of some little gallantry, in which, he was extremely sorry to say, his son was rather too nearly involved, requir[ing], in consideration of his recent marriage, and an excellent young woman’s (his bride’s) happiness, that what had occurred should not be publicly talked of. . . .

The clerk and the two constables most properly said—“His honour was a gentleman, and of course must know better how to act than they. (vol. II, pp. 69–70)

And so the affair is hushed up. It is of no import to anyone in the dean’s family. Certainly William is untouched by Hannah’s plight; indeed, even his name is not dirtied. Because of their position, the dean and his family are immune from the effects of their actions.

William goes off in honor and comfort with his new bride; Hannah goes home in shame to her parents and watches them suffer and die because of her dishonor. Forced from her home, she seeks employment in the city and, because of the stigma of her illegitimate child, is thrown out of even the worst servant positions. The only place she is not an outcast is in a whorehouse, and from serving there she eventually learns to steal. Jailed for theft, she is brought before the successful and respected judge William, who not recognizing the wretched woman before him, sentences her to death. She leaves behind a note, pleading not only for her life but for the care of her son; it is delivered to William after her execution and after the demise from grief of their son. Finally, Inchbald notes with some asperity, William is subject to Remorse. Inchbald clearly finds William’s punishment less than satisfying.
In the characters of the younger and the elder Williams, Inchbald has drawn bitter portraits of those who have the “appearance of moral excellence” rather than “moral excellence itself” (vol. II, p. 108). They are conscious only of externals, and although they stand in society as arbiters of morality, they are themselves essentially amoral. The dean waits cheerfully, if perhaps impatiently, for his good friend the bishop to die so that he can move up into his position; the son William, putting all his energies into study to avoid “that domestic encumbrance called his wife,” joins his application “to the influence of the potent relations of the woman he hated” (vol. II, p. 128) and rises quickly in his profession. Their personal lives are empty of love and friendship; their professional lives are devoid of commitment to morality and compassion. We have seen the dean dispensing justice; the son acts in the same way. Judge William speaks to Hannah as she stands before his bench in a voice that “was mild, was soft, compassionate, encouraging.” But, Inchbald notes, “this gentleness was the effect of practice, the art of his occupation. . . . In the present judge, tenderness was not designed for the consolation of the culprit, but for the approbation of the auditors” (vol. II, p. 139). William pronounces Hannah’s sentence—death—and “adjourn[s] the court to go to dinner” (vol. II, p. 142). Inchbald, like many of her contemporaries, is horrified that the social system can be so cruel in its workings. Once Hannah has been victimized by William, she seems not to have any recourse from continuing victimization. William’s private vice is hurtful, but it alone does not cause Hannah’s destruction. Rather, William is a part of a powerful social machine, and it is the machine in its entirety that crushes. Like Caleb in Godwin’s novel, once Hannah is caught in the machine she can expect no escape from its grinding gears. In a sentimental novel Hannah’s letter of appeal to her judge and lover would reach him and effect a pardon, but in this novel, rather more realistically, her appeal is considered the delirious delusion of a lost woman; what possible connection, her jailors reason, could there be between the destroyed wreck of a poor woman they hold for her death and the successful, respected
judge who had pronounced her sentence? Hannah is executed on schedule.

The death of Hannah gives increased weight to a novel that might otherwise rest simply as a satire on the manners of the English upper classes. Her death is a real tragedy, and the origins of that tragedy lie unmistakably with William and with the social and legal institutions that protect the powerful and destroy the helpless. Inchbald sees Hannah's tragedy as a man-made disaster, and as such she can have no pity for the perpetrator. Hannah is destroyed because she trusts William, but William's entire education, socially dictated as we have seen, explicitly has taught him to be lacking in the elements of character that would make him trustworthy. It is true that perhaps Hannah should have known better, but Inchbald makes it clear that every element is against Hannah being able to defend herself from the older, better educated, more worldly William's seduction. She is not equipped to reason against William, and he uses his advantage deliberately. William's seduction of Hannah is not, as he and his family would have it, merely a youthful indiscretion; it is a murder.

William, finally made aware of his crime, is left to suffer the rest of his days in remorse. For once Inchbald writes with understatement: "[William] envied [Hannah] even the life she struggled through from his neglect—and felt that his future days would be far less happy than her former existence. He calculated with precision" (vol. II, p. 157). The remainder of the book, unfortunately, is anything but an understatement. Inchbald thumps her reader with a simplistic, moralizing summing up that pulls together all the strings of the plot, accounts for the last days of each of the main characters, and even supplies the almost obligatory eighteenth-century happy ending: after an absence of nineteen years, Henry returns and marries the unchanged Rebecca! The moralizing becomes syrupy, and Inchbald's moral perspective dissolves into a totally unconvincing statement that what is wrong with the way the Williams of the world live their lives is that they are removed from nature.
The solution to human problems is for everyone to return, as do both Henrys, to the simple life:

Each morning wakes the father and the son to cheerful labour in fishing, or the tending of a garden, the produce of which they carry to the next market town. The evening sends them back to their home in joy; where Rebecca meets them at the door, affectionately boasts of the warm meal that is ready, and heightens the charm of conversation with her taste and judgment.

[They then partake of] a supper of roots from their garden, poultry that Rebecca's hand had reared, and a jug brewed by young Henry. . . . (vol. II, pp. 196–97)

Clearly this return to a "hut, placed on the borders of the sea" (vol. II, p. 196) and a simple, self-sufficient existence complete within the family unit is neither practical nor desirable for everyone; as a solution to the problems Inchbald had exposed in *Nature and Art*, it is simplistic. The moral vision of the book collapses in the last chapters. Henry and his family merely retreat from society and leave the world to its own devices. They live their quiet, comfortable existence and philosophize that the poor are really much better off than the rich—the rich are to be pitied, not the poor—for the poor just need to be educated to esteem poverty instead of wealth and then they would be perfectly happy! Inchbald obviously is espousing the doctrine that nature is better than art, that simplicity is more wholesome than artifice. Throughout the book, the Williams represent the excesses of the artificial and the Henrys are the types of wholesome simplicity. Inchbald's dichotomy works well in most of the book when she uses the Henrys as foils for the Williams. Young Henry's different perspective from his uncle and cousin William, as we have seen, affords Inchbald ample scope to examine the pretensions of society. But when she describes "nature" rather than "art" at the end of the book, Inchbald does so without any hint of irony. She commits herself to absurd statements. If the poor "have not always enough," Henry equates that with the fact that his uncle William was always striving for "more" also. It seems to escape Henry that the poor
man’s "enough" implies necessities such as food and shelter while uncle William’s "more" is on a clearly less basic level. After one of their cheerful days of fishing and gardening, the two Henrys and Rebecca sit together contentedly and philosophize about the poor.

"My son," said the elder Henry, "where under heaven, shall three persons be met together, happy as we three are? It is the want of industry, or the want of reflection, which makes the poor dissatisfied."

"I once," replied the younger Henry, "considered poverty a curse—but after my thoughts became enlarged, and I had associated for years with the rich, and now mix with the poor, my opinion has undergone a total change—for I have seen, and have enjoyed, more real pleasure at work with my fellow-labourers, and in this cottage, than ever I beheld, or experienced, during my abode at my uncle's; during all my intercourse with the fashionable and the powerful of this world."

"The worst is," said Rebecca, "the poor have not always enough."

"Who has enough?" asked her husband. "Had my uncle? No—he hoped for more—and in all his writings sacrificed his duty to his avarice. Had his son enough, when he yielded up his honour, his domestic peace, to gratify his ambition? Had Lady Bendham enough, when she staked all she had, in the hope of becoming richer? Were we, my Rebecca, of discontented minds, we have now too little. But conscious, from observation and experience, that the rich are not so happy as ourselves, we rejoice in our lot."

He continued: "I remember, when I first came a boy to England, the poor excited my compassion; but now that my judgment is matured, I pity the rich. I know that in this opulent kingdom, there are nearly as many persons perishing through intemperance as starving with hunger—there are as many miserable in the lassitude of having nothing to do, as there are bowed down to the earth with hard labour—there are more persons who draw upon themselves calamity by following their own will, than there are, who experience it by obeying the will of another. Add to this, that the rich are so much afraid of dying, they have no comfort in living."

"There the poor have another advantage," said Rebecca, "for they may defy not only death, but every loss by sea or land, as they have nothing to lose."

"Besides," added the elder Henry, "there is a certain joy, of the most gratifying kind that the human mind is capable of tasting,
peculiar to the poor, and of which the rich can but seldom experience the delight.”

“What can that be?” cried Rebecca.

“A kind word, a benevolent smile, one token of esteem from the person whom we consider as our superior.”

To which Rebecca replied, “And the rarity of obtaining such a token, is what increases the honour.”

“Certainly,” returned young Henry: “and yet those in poverty, ungrateful as they are, murmur against that Government from which they receive the blessing.”

“But this is the fault of education, of early prejudice,” said the elder Henry:—“our children observe us pay respect, even reverence to the wealthy, while we slight or despise the poor. The impression thus made on their minds in youth, they indelibly retain during the more advanced periods of life. . . .”

“Let the poor, then” (cried the younger Henry) “no more be their own persecutors—no longer pay homage to wealth—instantaneously the whole idolatrous worship will cease—the idol will be broken.” (vol. II, pp. 197-202)

And so ends the book.

The absurdity of these remarks is manifest. It is only “the want of industry, or the want of reflection” that makes the poor unhappy. They need only work and reflect on their good fortune, and they will be content; this from the same Inchbald who had opened her book with the complaint that “a permanent livelihood is the good fortune but of a part of those who are in want of it.”

The absurdities mount as Inchbald goes on. Why should we pity the poor for starving when, “in this opulent kingdom there are nearly as many persons perishing through intemperance as starving with hunger?” Henry fails to recognize that starvation is not by choice but that gluttony is. Similarly, he equates the hardships of “being bowed down to the earth with hard labour” with “being miserable in the lassitude of having nothing to do”—hardly, one would think, in the same category. But, of course, even if the poor die from their labor or from starvation, they are still better off than the rich, since “they may defy death . . . as they have nothing to lose.” And, finally, that last
“most gratifying kind” of pleasure that only the poor can taste: “a benevolent smile . . . from the person we consider our superior.” Pity the rich who never can taste of this most exquisite of human pleasures.

It is tempting to assume that Inchbald is being ironic in these last passages and that she must see the falseness of such arguments, but there is no hint that she is not serious. The last chapters build almost poetically to her conclusion. According to Inchbald it is only because everyone, rich and poor, has been educated to revere wealth that the poor are unhappy; indeed, it is an intellectual unhappiness the poor experience. If the poor could rid themselves of this false estimation of value, they would be happy. Inchbald is really serious: it is not starvation or brutal labor which makes men miserable, it is lack of perspective.

The collapse of Inchbald’s witty satire into this silly panegyric on poverty is difficult to explain. Inchbald is very clever at exposing the pretensions of the rich, and her bitterness against the distortions in personal relationships, and in the structure of society that they create, gives her criticism an incisive edge. Her sympathy is as heavily on the side of the poor as her ire weighs against the rich, but her critical vision does not extend so far as to see that the fact that the rich can be gluttonous and unhappy does not make poverty a positive state. She loses her perspective entirely and fails to realize that one may respect the poor without praising their poverty. Where earlier in the book she had insisted that if the rich would but share some of their wealth the poor would not need to go hungry, at the end she loses that critical, reforming perspective and says, instead, that hunger is really not a bad state—it isn’t, after all, any worse than gluttony. If earlier in the book she had hinted at the changes necessary to make society more equitable and to help the poor to a more decent life, at the end, in her revulsion at the excesses of the rich, she praises poverty itself. But while she glorifies poverty, she does not really image it, for although she says that hunger isn’t worse than gluttony, she does not draw any picture of starvation. Henry and his family are quite com-
fortable. It is from the safety of their “enjoyment of every [simple] comfort which such distinguished minds knew how to taste” (vol. II, p. 195) that they discuss poverty. Simplicity of lifestyle and poverty are not the same, but Inchbald confounds them in her last scenes.

We ought not to fault Inchbald too severely for her failure of perspective in these last pages. She lives in a time when many, and sometimes conflicting, social theories vie with each other for the humanitarian’s attention. Inchbald reflects the most important of them, but she does not assimilate them into a unified vision. Nearest at hand are the revolutionary ideas of the Godwin circle, and these fuel her dismay at the hypocrisies and inequities she sees in society. The Rousseauean ideal of the noble savage, of course, informs her central distinction between nature and art. She is aware of and sympathetic to other reform movements of the time; the prison reformer John Howard, for example, shows up as Mr. Haswell in her play *Such Things Are*. Indeed, *In Such Things Are* the lines of nature versus art are even more emphatically drawn than in the novel. But Mrs. Inchbald is, at the same time, influenced by much more conservative thinkers as well, in particular, it would seem, that great apologist for “things as they are,” Soame Jenyns. The last pages of *Nature and Art* essentially restate Jenyns’s explanation of the advantages of poverty in *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*:

> Poverty, or the want of riches, is generally compensated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments, than those who possess them are usually bless’d with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly compensated by a more useful kind of common sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling world. The sufferings of the sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, and sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in that rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none
but madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty . . . is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals; and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of divine wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive; in man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philosopher and peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations.\(^9\)

Inchbald contradicts much of her own criticism of society earlier in the book; note that she even restated Jenyns' argument that it is only the faulty education to value wealth that makes the poor unhappy. This is quite different from her earlier discussion of education, in which she had argued for an education in such humane values as honesty, simplicity, lack of pride, and so on. Earlier she spoke of educating the young to despise artifice and hypocrisy and to value simplicity and truth; at the end of the book she, like Jenyns, thinks that education must simply teach people not to aspire to more than they have. It is a most unrevolutionary ending to an otherwise very critical book.

It is tempting to explain Inchbald's last chapters as a withdrawal from political confrontation, as a "blind" designed to protect her from any prosecution her criticism might draw, similar to Godwin's revised last chapter of Caleb Williams; this is not, I think, the case. To tone down her criticism, Inchbald did not have to commit herself to such a panegyric on poverty. Rather, her turn in these last chapters seems simply to mark the influence on Inchbald's writing of some of the most conservative thought of her time. She does not seem to feel the need to reconcile the different schemes of thought she reflects; indeed, she seems unaware that her statement in these last chapters of Nature and Art does not fit with what came before. Her ending indicates a failure not only of social but of artistic vision.
In the history of ideas, though, the confusion that Inchbald evidences here is itself of interest, for it reflects clearly the conflicting forces on a benevolent person's view of society as the end of the century approaches. Inchbald is not a careful thinker, and her humane instincts lead her to espouse, in the hope of alleviating misery, sentiments that are—simply—contradictory.


2. “Social Mobility in Early Modern England: The Anglican Episcopate, 1660–1760.” Unpublished paper. Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1979. These findings will appear in the forthcoming D. R. Hirschberg, *Patronage, Professionalization, and Social Mobility: The Anglican Episcopate, 1660–1760* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press). The following discussion owes much not only to Professor Hirschberg's excellent article, but to several long conversations as well. It should be noted that his research ends at the year 1760; I have not discovered any studies of this subject that deal with the last part of the century.

3. Hirschberg, p. 3.


5. Hirschberg, p. 11.


7. Inchbald's comment recalls Pope's famous couplet from the *Rape of the Lock*, “The hungry Judges soon the Sentence sign,/And Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine” (Canto III, ll. 21–22).

8. Inchbald's argument recalls the debate about luxury that had been so prominent in the early part of the eighteenth century. Addison, for example, wrote in *Spectator* 574 that "All the real Pleasures and Conveniencies of Life lie in a narrow Compass; but it is the Humour of Mankind to be always looking forward, and straining after one who has got the Start of them in Wealth and Honour. For this Reason, as there are none can properly be called rich, who have not more than they want; there are few rich Men in any of the politer Nations but among the middle Sort of People, who keep their Wishes within their Fortunes, and have more Wealth than they know how to enjoy. Persons of a higher Rank live in a kind of splendid Poverty, and are perpetually wanting, because instead of acquiescing in the solid Pleasures of Life, they endeavour to outvie one another in Shadows and Appearances. Men of Sense have at all times beheld with a great deal of Mirth this silly Game that is playing over their Heads, and by contracting their Desires, enjoy all that secret Satisfaction which others are always in quest of" (*The Spectator*,...
ed. Donald F. Bond [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965], p. 563). But Addison does not advertise poverty. His point is that men should be satisfied with what they have rather than constantly goading themselves with ideas of more. This is not the same as suggesting that poverty itself is a positive value or that to be hungry is merely the reverse of being a glutton. Within this context too, then, Inchbald's conclusion must still be viewed as a failure of perspective.

9. In his famous review of *A Free Inquiry*, Samuel Johnson quoted this passage and answered it: "Poverty is very gently paraphrased by want of riches. In that sense almost every man may in his own opinion be poor. But there is another poverty which is want of competence, of all that can soften the miseries of life, of all that diversify attention, or delight imagination. There is yet another poverty which is want of necessaries, a species of poverty which no care of the publick, no charity of particulars, can preserve many from feeling openly, and many secretly.

"That hope and fear are inseparably or very frequently connected with poverty, and riches, my surveys of life have not informed me. The milder degrees of poverty are sometimes supported by hope, but the more severe often sink down in motionless despondence. Life must be seen before it can be known. This author [Soame Jenyns] and Pope perhaps never saw the miseries which they imagine thus easy to be born. The poor indeed are insensible of many little vexations which sometimes imbitter the possessions and pollute the enjoyments of the rich. They are not pained by casual incivility, or mortified by the mutilation of a compliment; but this happiness is like that of a malefactor who ceases to feel the cords that bind him when the pincers are tearing his flesh." Richard B. Schwartz's *Samuel Johnson and the Problem of Evil* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975) provides a full discussion of the Jenyns review as well as a facsimile of the whole of the original printing of it.