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Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments*

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Abstract. This paper posits the influence of Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* on the development of characters and episodes in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* using the close analogies between the two texts, particularly the later chapters of the novel, the time lapse between the sale to the publisher and the eventual publication of the novel that allowed for revisions and additions to the text, and the spread of Beccaria's ideas in England prior to the English translation of his work.

Keywords. Prison Reform, Death Penalty, Social Contract, John Rice.

INTRODUCTION.

Two almost contemporaneous authors, Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) and Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), both published works in the 1760s which treated the then popular issue of penal reform. Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764)¹ «provided a model [...] of how the criminal justice system could be rationally and critically examined»², and it «took intellectual circles in Europe by storm»³: The publication of the original Italian text and the first translation, into French⁴, preceded the publication of Goldsmith's novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in March, 1766⁵. Prior to undertaking writ-

¹ All future references will be to the English title and translation: *On Crimes and Punishments*, translated from the Italian in the Author's original order with Notes and Introduction by David Young, Hackett, Indianapolis 1986. All references are to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by A. Friedman, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1966, vol. IV.

² H. Dunthorne, *Beccaria and Britain*, in D.H. Howell and K.O. Morgan (eds.), *Crime, Protest, and Police in Modern British Society*, University of Wales, Cardiff 1999, pp. 73-96: 85.

³ Bender, *Prison Reform and the Sentence of Narration in "The Vicar of Wakefield"*, in F. Nussbaum and L. Brown (eds.), *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, Methuen, New York and London 1987, pp. 168-188: 170.

⁴ *Traité des délits et des peines* transl. by Abbé Morellet, 1766. See R. Loretelli, *The First English Translation of Cesare Beccaria's On Crimes and Punishments. Uncovering the Editorial and Political Contexts* «Diciottesimo Secolo», II, 2017, pp. 1-22: 3, DOI <10.13128/ds-20618> (03/2019).

⁵ For background on the writing and reception of *On Crimes and Punishments*, see M. Maestro, *Cesare Beccaria and the Origins of Penal Reform*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1973, in particular chs. 1 and 2, and T. Rawling Bridgwater, *Cesare Bonesana, Marquis di Beccaria. The*

ing a novel, presumably around 1760⁶, Goldsmith had spent a number of years writing for periodicals⁷. Thus, it is not surprising that when he turned to writing a novel, he incorporated ideas and subjects current in the popular press into the plot⁸. The plot itself works out the convoluted love affairs of two sisters. Perhaps responding to mention of Beccaria in the popular press, which further ignited the already prevalent interest in penal reform, as well as to the influence Beccaria's work, even in Italian, had in England⁹, Goldsmith included his own version of prison reform in Chapters 26 and 27. Unlike Beccaria, however, Goldsmith not only examines the problems in the abstract, but he also implements methods of reform through Dr. Primrose, the Vicar of Wakefield. Having been imprisoned for debt, Primrose, the father of the sisters involved in the love affairs, sets out to reform the prisoners and the prison¹⁰. The two chapters dealing with Primrose's prison reform as well as Chapter 19, a debate on political systems, became the most popular and most excerpted sections of the novel and were frequently reprinted in the popular press¹¹. Therefore, both Beccaria and Goldsmith addressed the issues of crimes and punishments in works that were widely disseminated, read, and discussed. Though they differ in genre and approach, they make strikingly similar points.

Great Jurists of the World, «Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation», 8, 1907, 2, pp. 219-228.

⁶ *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., vol. IV, pp. 1-8, and R. Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith. A Georgian Study*, Macmillan, New York 1967, p. 101.

⁷ S. Bäckman, *This Singular Tale. A Study of The Vicar of Wakefield and Its Literary Background*, Berlingska Boktrycketiet, Lund 1971, p. 141; R.M. Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith*, University of Kansas, Lawrence 1957, pp. 75-38, and A. Dobson, *Oliver Goldsmith: A Memoir*, Dodd, Mead, & Co., New York 1899, pp. 64-123. See also, R.C. Taylor, *Goldsmith as Journalist*, Associated University Presses, Cranbury (NJ), London, and Mississauga (CDN) 1993.

⁸ In particular, see M. Golden, *Goldsmith, "The Vicar of Wakefield", and the Periodicals*, «The Journal of English and Germanic Philology», 76, 1977, 4, pp. 525-536: 535. See Bäckman, *This Singer of Tales*, cit., pp. 25-28, for Goldsmith's opinions on contemporary novels expressed in part by his reviews in the periodicals.

⁹ Loretelli, *The First English Translation*, cit., pp. 4-7, and A.J. Draper, *Cesare Beccaria's Influence on English Discussions of Punishment, 1764-1789*, «History of European Ideas», 26, 2000, pp. 177-199: in particular, p. 182.

¹⁰ Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., notes the publication of Beccaria's work in 1764 and its French translation of 1766, just prior to the publication of *The Vicar of Wakefield* as one reason for the popularity of the novel. See in particular p. 177.

¹¹ In particular, see Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit., pp. 525-536. Golden gives a breakdown of excerpts taken from the novel and reprinted in periodicals, pp. 525-526. He concludes, «*The Vicar of Wakefield* itself was the hit of the spring 1766 in the periodicals, substantially excerpted both with and without acknowledgments» (p. 525). See also M. Golden, *Contemporary Reprints of Goldsmith's Writings*, «Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900», 19, 1979, 3 (*Restoration and Eighteenth Century*), pp. 475-491, <<http://www.jstor.org>> (03/2019).

This paper focusses on Primrose's experiences in prison, the conclusions he draws from these experiences on the current nature of punishment and imprisonment, and his remedies to reform them. Once imprisoned, Primrose, the narrator, functions as both a victim of the current penal system and a legislator working to reform this system¹². Though English as well as French roots have been established for Goldsmith's ideas¹³, many of Primrose's experiences and the reforms he institutes in the prison echo Beccaria's work. Despite a lack of any record of the two meeting, or even of Goldsmith having read Beccaria's work, similarities and echoes between *On Crimes and Punishments* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* suggest more than an accidental overlap of the two. Indeed, they suggest that Goldsmith was familiar with Beccaria's theories if only as the result of the «easy dissemination of social and political theories» throughout eighteenth-century Europe¹⁴. These similarities and echoes will be discussed first, followed by a brief investigation of the probability of direct or indirect influence of Beccaria on Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

I.

Both Beccaria and Goldsmith detail systemic flaws in the current penal system and suggest reforms, albeit with different motivation and in a different way. Beccaria says that he feels compelled to fight against «the cruelty of punishment and the irregularity of criminal procedure», while Goldsmith uses the character, Dr. Primrose, who is driven by compassion and a sense of duty, to make his points. In his «Introduction» to *On Crimes and Punishments*, Beccaria notes that even though the present conditions should have merited the notice of others, «very few people [...] have examined and fought

¹² Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., p. 182 describes Dr. Primrose, the Vicar, as «a character who is at once the apparent narrator [and] the chief actor». Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., p. 110, describes the Vicar in the second half of the novel, which is the focus here, as «a straight-faced narrator who is himself completely involved in the action». M. Harkin, *Goldsmith on Authorship in "The Vicar of Wakefield"*, «Eighteenth-Century Fiction», 14, 2002, 3-4, pp. 336-337, DOI <<https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2002.0034>> (03/2019), suggests Goldsmith's view of authors «as social reformers» and desiring «legislative and social power» as a force driving the development of Primrose's character.

¹³ Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., notes a commonality in French sources between Beccaria and Goldsmith, pp. 170-171. For Beccaria's French sources see: Bridgwater, *Cesare Bonesana*, cit., pp. 219-222; A. Lytton Sells, *Les Sources Françaises de Goldsmith*, Slatkin Reprints, Geneva 1977 (1924); and M. Maestro, *Voltaire and Beccaria as Reformers of Criminal Law*, Columbia University Press, New York 1942, <<https://www.babel.hathitrust.org/>> (03/2019).

¹⁴ Draper, *Cesare Beccaria's Influence*, cit., p. 182.

against the cruelty of punishment and the irregularity of criminal procedure». He adds that «indivisible truth has compelled [him] to follow the shining footsteps of this great man [the immortal President de Montesquieu]»¹⁵. He feels that he is addressing an issue which has – inexplicably – been virtually ignored. One of Beccaria's objectives was to clarify the purpose of punishment which, he says, should be deterrence through the fear of the inevitability of punishment¹⁶. Goldsmith, while also working to uncover abuses, has both a different impetus and approach to his work. Through Primrose, he describes the experience of imprisonment and voices the motivation for reform: duty and the hope of «reclaiming» the humanity of the prisoners. Once Primrose himself experiences the character and the environment of the prisoners, he reflects, «It even appeared a duty incumbent upon me to attempt to reclaim them [the prisoners]»¹⁷, and continues, «I [...] actually conceived some hopes of making a reformation here; for it had ever been my opinion, that no man was past the hour of amendment»¹⁸. Through Primrose, Goldsmith not only offers specific plans for reformation, but he also implements these plans and shows the hypothetical outcome. Like Beccaria, he considers the intent of punishment not as torture or affliction. Rather than a deterrence from crime, however, Goldsmith focuses on reformation. He considers that prisons themselves should be reformed into «places of penitence and solitude» as a means to reform the prisoners¹⁹. Beccaria speaks as an abstract theoretician while Goldsmith, through Primrose, speaks as an agent who offers practical plans because of his own firsthand experience.

Despite these initial differences, however, the two works make remarkably similar points. Perhaps the most striking similarity is found in their arguments against the death penalty. Beccaria argues,

*How could this minimal sacrifice of the liberty of each individual ever include the sacrifice of the greatest good of all, life itself? And even if such were the case, how could this be reconciled with the principle that a man does not have the right to take his own life? And, not have this right himself, how could he transfer it to another person or to society as a whole*²⁰?

¹⁵ *Author's Introduction*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶ Ch. XII, p. 23.

¹⁷ Ch. XXVI, p. 144.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

¹⁹ Ch. XXVII, p. 149. Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., p. 171, notes the similarity of Goldsmith's ideas here to «Fielding's plan for a Middlesex County House in *A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor* (1753)». He also suggests that Primrose «establishes a proto-penitentiary within his old-style jail» (p. 179).

²⁰ Ch. XXVIII, p. 48.

Primrose, echoes the argument that man does not have the right to take his own life, and that he cannot therefore give that right to another, when he says,

*Natural law gives me no right to take away his life, as by that the horse he steals is as much his property as it is mine. If then I have any right, it must be from a compact made between us, that he who deprives the other of his horse shall die. But this is a false compact; because no man has a right to barter his own life, no more than to take it away as it is not his own*²¹.

In addition to this similarity in the conclusion and language of Goldsmith with the most oft cited point of Beccaria's treatise, the argument against the death penalty, are many equally significant similarities between the two works. For example, to use the terminology of Beccaria, as an «insolvent debtor», Primrose must be taken into custody. Nevertheless, he is also an «innocent bankrupt» in so far as his inability to pay his debts resulted from no fault of his own. Beccaria says, «The good faith of contract and the security of commerce oblige the legislator to take custody of the persons of insolvent debtors on behalf of their creditors. I believe it is important, however, to distinguish the fraudulent from the innocent bankrupt»²². Beccaria characterizes «the innocent bankrupt [as] the person who has proved before his judges after a rigorous examination that he has been stripped of his substance, either by the malice or misfortune of others or by vicissitudes that human prudence cannot avoid»²³. Goldsmith's Primrose is clearly the debtor of Squire William (Mr. Thornhill), his landlord, since he is unable to pay his annual rent, but the loss of almost all of his possessions through a fire has also left him bankrupt. In this instance, it is not Primrose's words, but the narrative of events that echo Beccaria. Prior to the fire, Primrose went in search of his abducted daughter, Olivia. While away, he became ill and incurred the consequent expenses of housing himself until he recovered enough to travel again. After he found Olivia, they returned home only to find the family house and corn burning. Although the family is saved, their possessions are lost. Thus, Primrose and his family are left in Beccaria's state of «the innocent bankrupt». The following day, Squire William comes to Primrose with an offer of friendship. As the Vicar's landlord, Squire William is also his creditor. It is, however, Squire William who abducted Olivia and, when he tired of her, had tried to turn her to prostitution. His offer of friend-

²¹ Ch. XXVII, p. 150. This is noted by Dunthorne, *Beccaria and Britain*, cit., p. 80.

²² Ch. XXXIV, pp. 64-65.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

ship and reconciliation consists in a demand that Primrose agree that Olivia's «excursion» with Squire William had nothing «criminal in it»²⁴. Further, Primrose must agree to marry her to someone else in the near future and not to interfere with Squire William's incipient marriage to an heiress. Primrose's refusal and his contempt lead Squire William to note that his steward will be coming soon for the rent and that he himself has no money he can spare at the moment to help the Primroses²⁵.

As presented by Goldsmith, the bankruptcy of Primrose seems to be the product of what Beccaria calls «malice» and «the vicissitudes that human prudence cannot avoid». The expenses incurred by Primrose followed by the «threatening» visit of Squire William seem to comprise acts of malice on the part of the Squire. Primrose's loss of his home and all of his possessions through a fire at the very moment he is returning home is either an unavoidable «vicissitude» or an act of «malice». By imprisoning Primrose in these circumstances, Squire William deprives him of the means to make restitution of the monies owed since he no longer has the ability to work. To circumstances such as these, Beccaria poses the question:

*Upon what barbarous pretext can he be thrown into prison where, deprived of his one poor remaining possession, bare liberty, he experiences the agonies of the guilty and, with the desperation of downtrodden honesty, he perhaps repents of the innocence that permitted him to live peacefully under the tutelage of the laws he broke through no fault of his own? Such laws are dictated by the powerful out of greed and endured by the weak for the sake of that hope which usually shines in human hearts*²⁶.

In this instance, the greed of the powerful is Squire William's greed for the inheritance he will gain by marrying an heiress²⁷. His fear of Primrose or Olivia somehow wreaking havoc on that possibility leads him to the imprisonment of Primrose.

Although Primrose seems to personify Beccaria's «innocent bankrupt», he also gives substance to Beccaria's claim that «the good faith of contracts and the security of commerce oblige the legislator to take custody of the persons of insolvent debtors on behalf of their creditors»²⁸. Squire William justifies his imprisonment of Primrose with the words, «If he has contracted debts

and is unwilling or even unable to pay them, it is their [the attorney's and the steward's] business to proceed in this manner [imprisoning the debtor], and I see no hardship or injustice in pursuing the most legal means of redress». He then dares Primrose to contradict his claim of being owed monies, and Primrose is forced to remain silent since he «could not contradict [Squire William]»²⁹. Sir William Thornhill, his uncle, to whom Squire William makes this justification, agrees that the actions were «equitable», but he adds that his nephew's «conduct might have been more generous in not suffering this gentleman [Primrose] to be oppressed by subordinate tyranny»³⁰. With the use of the words «oppressed» and «tyranny», Goldsmith suggests the innocence of Primrose. This innocence is proven through a mock trial under the aegis of Sir William with witnesses who unmask the reality of Squire William's actions. Ultimately, Sir William concludes, «All his guilt is now too plain, and I find his present prosecution was dictated by tyranny, cowardice and revenge»³¹. Included in this declamation is the substance of Beccaria's comments on the present abuses that threaten the social contract and necessitate the investigation of the penal code and punishments: «the unbridled course of ill-directed power» and «the barbarous and useless tortures multiplied with prodigal and useless severity for crimes that are either unproven or chimerical»³².

In addition, the contrast between the tyranny of Squire William and the justice, compassion, and generosity of Sir William in the prison scenes serves to solidify the different characteristics of the two suggested from the beginning of the novel. As portrayed, they illustrate Beccaria's political idleness and political usefulness respectively: «Political Indolence [is] that sort that contributes to society neither with work nor with wealth...»; in contrast, a person «is not indolent in the political sense if he enjoys the fruits of the vices or virtues of his own ancestors and if he offers bread and livelihood to industrious poverty in exchange for his immediate pleasures»³³. From his first introduction as a «young gentleman who enjoys a large fortune» to the rumors suggesting that he is the sort who plots «intrigues» against beautiful young women³⁴, Squire William is politically indolent. On the other hand, Sir William uses his inherited wealth to alleviate the distress or misery of others, unwittingly as a young man so that his own

²⁴ Ch. XXIV, p. 137.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 137-138.

²⁶ Ch. XXXIV, p. 65.

²⁷ Squire William admits, «It was her [the heiress's] fortune, not her person, that induced me to wish for this match» (ch. XXXI, p. 176).

²⁸ Ch. XXXIV, p. 64.

²⁹ Ch. XXXI, p. 171.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

³² See Beccaria's *Introduction*, pp. 5-6.

³³ Ch. XXIV, p. 42.

³⁴ Ch. III, pp. 27 and 29, and ch. XVIII, p. 109.

fortune is temporarily depleted, but, after learning from his errors, with prudence and discrimination. Therefore, through the mechanics of both the plot and the characters, Goldsmith enacts the reality of Beccaria's abstractions.

The prison scenes included in *The Vicar of Wakefield* provide another example of Goldsmith's bringing the philosophical abstractions of Beccaria to life. Beccaria gives a stark idea of penal conditions through the use of freighted terms to express the conditions of prisons: «the squalor and horrors of a prison»³⁵, «the squalid condition of a prisoner»³⁶, the «squalor and hunger» of prison³⁷. He notes that «the accused and the convicted are thrown into the same cell indiscriminately»³⁸. Primrose experiences these «squalid» conditions for himself³⁹. As he is led into the prison, Primrose finds that it «consisted of one large apartment, strongly grated, and paved with stone, common to both felons and debtors at certain hours in the four and twenty»⁴⁰, and notes the «execrations, lewdness, and brutality that invaded [him] from every side»⁴¹. He describes the prisoners' time as «divided between famine and excess, tumultuous riot and bitter repining»⁴². Given the conditions he finds in the prison, including the mixing of those convicted with those merely accused of crimes of every sort and awaiting their trial, Primrose concludes that the «present prisons, which find or make men guilty, [...] enclose wretches for the commission of one crime, and return them, if returned alive, fitted for the perpetration of thousands»⁴³. He might have added Beccaria's observation that because the accused and the convicted are held together, the accused, though not yet convicted, is undergoing punishment through his imprisonment.

Nonetheless, the imprisonment of Primrose does not result in his «experiencing the agonies of the guilty» or «the desperation of downtrodden honesty» as suggested by Beccaria. Instead, after a close consideration of his new environment, he uses his observations as motivation to reform it. When his family objects to his planned

reforms, Primrose responds to their objections by stressing the humanity of the prisoners and the equality of all men and says, «The heart that is buried in a dungeon is as precious as that seated upon a throne»⁴⁴. Here, too, he echoes Beccaria's claim about the necessity of equality in the face of the law, so that punishments «should be the same for the first citizen as for the least. In order to be legitimate, every distinction, whether it be in honor or wealth, presupposes an anterior equality founded upon the law, which considers all subjects as equally dependent upon itself»⁴⁵. In undertaking his reforms, Primrose seems to embody the legislator as described by Beccaria: «Let the lawgiver be gentle, indulgent, and humane. Let the legislator be a wise architect who raises his building on the foundation of self-love, and let the general interest be the result of the interests of every person»⁴⁶. In his actions among the prisoners, Primrose shows himself to be «gentle, indulgent, and humane». He recognizes Mr. Jenkinson, one of the first prisoners with whom he converses, as the man who not only swindled his middle son, Moses, at the neighboring fair, but Primrose himself. He further discovers that Mr. Jenkinson also swindled his neighbour, Farmer Flamborough, on an annual basis. In fact, it is Flamborough who is prepared to bear witness against Jenkinson at his trial. On learning this, despite the harm done to him previously by Jenkinson, Primrose sends his son Moses to try and persuade Flamborough to suppress his evidence. Finally, despite the «goal tricks» the prisoners perpetuate against him, Primrose «took no notice of all [...] [they] could do»⁴⁷.

Primrose's reformation includes trying to make their situation in prison «more comfortable» by moderating the prisoners' behavior and regularizing their activities. First, he systematized their idle pastime into a form of paid employment, and then he «instituted fines for the punishment of immorality, and rewards for peculiar industry»⁴⁸. As a result of these actions, Primrose concludes: «In less than a fortnight I had formed them into something social and humane, and had the pleasure of regarding myself as a legislator, who had brought men from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience»⁴⁹. In these actions, Primrose mimics his actions at the start of the novel. After the Primrose family migrated from Wakefield to a rural habitation, Primrose orders their daily life. Primrose discusses how he «regulated» each day's activities and calls his fam-

³⁵ *Author's Introduction*, p. 5.

³⁶ Ch. XIX, p. 36.

³⁷ Ch. XXXIX, p. 54.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

³⁹ Neither Beccaria's generalized «squalor» nor Primrose's description of his surroundings seems to aspire to any true representation of the conditions in prisons at that time. See, for example, O. Sherwin, *Crime and Punishment in England of the Eighteenth Century*, «The American Journal of Economics and Sociology», 5, 1946, 2, pp. 169-199, <<http://www.jstor.org>> (03/2019).

⁴⁰ Ch. XXV, p. 141. He goes on to note that the prisoners have separate cells to sleep in at night.

⁴¹ Ch. XXVI, p. 144.

⁴² Ch. XXVII, p. 149.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 148.

⁴⁵ Ch. XXI, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Ch. XLVI, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁷ Ch. XXVII, p. 148.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

ily, «The little republic to which I gave laws»⁵⁰. So, from the outset of the novel, Primrose describes himself as a legislator. Goldsmith's use of the term, «a republic», to describe the Primrose family brings to mind Beccaria's chapter, «The Spirit of the Family», in which he distinguishes between «the spirit of the family» and «the spirit of the republic». In the latter, as Beccaria says, «the good of the majority» is the goal⁵¹. Therefore, Primrose is a wise legislator who considers the interest of each the interest of the whole.

At the outset of the novel, before the loss of his fortune, Primrose appears to personify Beccaria's claim that the «luxury and easy living» of the past few centuries has resulted in «the sweetest virtues –humanity, benevolence, tolerance of human errors»⁵². In his initial prosperity, Primrose depends on his own fortune to live and practices humanity and benevolence by giving his livelihood «to the orphans and widows of the clergy»⁵³. Even as his family journeys into the country to their new and much reduced life, Primrose shows his customary benevolence when he offers to pay the bill of a stranger who has given his own money away in an act of charity and, consequently, is left unable to pay his expenses at the inn. This stranger tells the Primroses about their future abode and mentions Sir William Thornhill about whom Primrose cries, «a man whose virtues, generosity, and singularities are so universally known [...] one of the most generous, yet whimsical, men in the kingdom; a man of consummate benevolence»⁵⁴. Primrose identifies his own characteristics in Sir William: generous, humane, and benevolent. Not surprisingly, both also serve in the role of legislator: Primrose as previously described in his reformation of prison life and the prisoners, and Sir William in the prison when he takes over the role of legislator from Primrose and imposes order on the chaos of claims and counter claims, and distributes just punishment⁵⁵. Thus, both Primrose and Sir William function as the legislator, or Beccaria's «good architect», who lays down simple and clear boundaries for behavior, rewards good behavior, and establishes punishment specific to different types of deleterious behavior. Goldsmith seems to be following Beccaria's precepts: «Do you want to prevent crimes? See

to it that the laws are clear and simple»⁵⁶, and, «Another way of preventing crimes is to reward virtue»⁵⁷. Sir William, in bringing justice at the end by unmasking Squire William's infamous plots and treacherous actions, and decreeing punishment in a gentle and yet effective way, as Primrose before him, acts so that «the general interest [is] the result of the interests of every person».

II.

Despite what seem to be clear parallels between the theory of Beccaria and the characters and events that Goldsmith develops in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, there is no proof of a direct relationship between the two authors. Nonetheless, there is enough opacity in Goldsmith's life and in his composition of *The Vicar of Wakefield* to suggest the likely influence of Beccaria's ideas on the novel.

As noted before, it is commonly agreed that Goldsmith was working on *The Vicar of Wakefield* in the early 1760s, and that the manuscript of the novel was sold in 1762. In the often cited story, when Goldsmith was in despair over obtaining funds to pay his rent and faced the threat of prison, he told Samuel Johnson that he had a completed novel at hand. To mitigate Goldsmith's problems, Johnson sold the manuscript of the novel⁵⁸. The novel, however, was not published until 1766. During this gap, Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* was published in Italy in 1764. A French translation followed in December 1765⁵⁹, though the first English translation did not appear until 1767⁶⁰. Two questions, then, emerge: whether or not Goldsmith continued to work on the novel in the gap between its sale and its publication, and whether or not it is reasonable to surmise that Goldsmith was influenced by Beccaria either directly, or indirectly. The lack of reliable detail about the sale of the manuscript in 1762 and its state at that time leave room for speculation though, perhaps, not a definitive answer⁶¹.

⁵⁰ Ch. XLI, p. 75.

⁵¹ Ch. XLIV, p. 79.

⁵² Dobson, *Oliver Goldsmith: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 132-141, summarizes this anecdote from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* as well as other variants of the same story, and describes the mechanics of the «selling» of the novel, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/>> (03/2019). More recently, Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., p. 101. See also *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., vol. IV, pp. 1-8.

⁵³ Although the title page bears the date of 1766.

⁵⁴ For the first English translation, see Loretelli, *The First English Translation*, cit., pp. 1-22.

⁵⁵ Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., p. 102, summarizes the conundrum: «One further question remains, and unfortunately it must go unanswered. Was *The Vicar* complete when sold in manuscript, or was it fin-

⁵⁰ Ch. IV, p. 33.

⁵¹ Ch. XXVI, p. 44.

⁵² Ch. V, p. 13.

⁵³ Ch. II, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁴ Ch. III, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁵ Harkin, *Goldsmith on Authorship*, cit., pp. 342-343, notes the shift of legislator from Primrose to Sir William in her larger argument that Goldsmith, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, investigates the changing role of the author in the eighteenth century, a topic he had addressed in earlier writings.

On the basis of parallels between current events in the 1760s and details included in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, scholars have long surmised that Goldsmith was «tinkering» with it in the years prior to its publication⁶². As early as 1899, Dobson noted a correlation between contemporary events and fads, and details in the novel. He used this correlation to establish that Goldsmith was still completing or further developing the novel in 1762, and that he continued to refine the content at least until 1764. As evidence he gave two examples of current detail included in the novel: a «reference in Chap. xix to The Auditor, which began its career in June of that year [1762]» and «the mention in chap. ix of the musical glasses then in vogue»⁶³. Dobson also noted the inclusion of the poem, «Edwin and Angelina», the composition of which he limits to sometime between 1764 and its private printing for the Countess of Northumberland in 1765⁶⁴. All of these details point to Goldsmith's continual revision of his manuscript. More recently, Morris Golden has cited «striking» similarities between passages on politics and penal law in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and those found in Goldsmith's *History of England, in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* for which he received payment 11 October 1763. He suggests that the latter work is the source for the material in the novel⁶⁵, in which case, Goldsmith could still be revising in 1763. In a subsequent study⁶⁶, Golden notes other details in the novel based on popular topics and events that post-date its 1762 sale. These suggest even more strongly that

Goldsmith continued to adjust the manuscript after its sale. Golden, too, notes the mention of musical glasses in the novel and further clarifies the duration of the discussion of performances on musical glasses by the popular press to the following: April 1762, August 1763, and February 1764. Likewise, Golden notes the inclusion of a poem on the use of green spectacles in «James's Magazine» for June 1764⁶⁷. He also develops the suggestion made by Friedman «that Goldsmith probably intended at first to use the Vicar's theological pamphleteering as the cause of his removal to Wakefield but for some undetermined reason changed his mind» by citing the «notorious» case of a broker, John Rice, who «absconded» to the continent only to be captured and returned to England and the available monies were repaid to the clients. The case was treated in the periodical press as late as March 1763⁶⁸. Based on the press coverage of the case, Golden suggests it as the impetus for Goldsmith overriding the significance of Primrose's pamphleteering as a cause for the Primrose family being forced to retreat to Wakefield in order to include the loss of Primrose's fortune at the hands of a «merchant in town [...] who has gone off to avoid a statute of bankruptcy»⁶⁹. As Goldsmith resolves the various subplots at the end of the novel, Primrose receives news that the merchant «was arrested in Antwerp» with financial means so that his creditors, including Primrose found their «lost» money returned to them⁷⁰. Golden uses the story of John Rice, publicized as it was in the press throughout 1762-1763, as another example of current events and popular topics suggesting that Goldsmith was fiddling with the details of his narrative to include references to events in the years following the sale of the manuscript. In addition to details such as those just mentioned, Goldsmith also includes topics of immediate concern that appeared in the periodicals such as: the release of harmless prisoners (1762), the religious needs of convicts (1763), the humane treatment of prisoners (1765), and objections to imprisonment for debt (1765). Here, subjects developed in Chapters 26 and 27 of *The Vicar of Wakefield* appear in the popular press in the months and years after the sale of the manuscript, and suggest an ongoing process of revision as Goldsmith reacts to timely events and issues⁷¹.

ished, or revised, or in any way added to later on prior to publication?». Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., p. 142, notes early reviews which suggest that «additions were intended which were never made». Dobson, *Oliver Goldsmith: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 133 and 141, suggests that the manuscript was not fully completed at the time of sale. However, an earlier biographer, James Prior, *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith, M.B. from a Variety of Original Sources*, E.L. Clarey & A. Hart, Philadelphia 1837, p. 307, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/>> (03/2019), includes the following, «It [*The Vicar of Wakefield*] may have been delayed likewise with the expectation of undergoing careful revision, and altering objectionable circumstances in the story; a task which however the author declined, alleging it is said, – and the argument must be considered powerful in the estimate of an author militant, – that whatever time or labour should be expended on the alterations, no increase would be made to the purchase money. That he corrected the language afterwards appears by the variations between the first and subsequent editions». More recently, Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit., p. 528, notes, «The charges of carelessness in plotting and inconsistency of observation, both usually attributed to haste and changes of plan, have continued to our day».

⁶² The term, «tinkers», is taken from Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit., p. 527.

⁶³ Dobson, *Oliver Goldsmith: A Memoir*, cit., pp. 140-141.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 141. Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit., p. 531, expands on Dobson's observation by calling attention to Goldsmith's own opinions previously expressed in his periodical writings.

⁶⁵ M. Golden, *Image Frequency and the Split in "The Vicar of Wakefield"*, «Bulletin of the New York Public Library» LXIII, 1959, pp. 473-477: 474, ft. 5, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/>> (03/2019).

⁶⁶ Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 530. Golden mentions Friedman's comment on the inclusion of musical glasses as proof of composition of the novel in 1760-1761, but extends that date significantly in light of the more inclusive detail he gives about the mention of musical glasses in the press.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 529. Golden cites Friedman's comments from *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, cit., vol. IV, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Ch. II, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Ch. XXXII, p. 182.

⁷¹ Golden, *Goldsmith*, cit., p. 535, concludes, «In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Goldsmith was subjecting the traditional romance plot to the imagina-

If, as suggested above, Goldsmith was tinkering with *The Vicar of Wakefield* in the years prior to its publication, the question of Beccaria's influence, direct or indirect, remains. The swift and easy transmission of ideas from the continent to England in the eighteenth century has been frequently noted⁷², so it is not implausible to suggest a knowledge of Beccaria's ideas in England prior to the appearance of the text in English. The first English review of the original Italian edition of Beccaria's book appeared in «The Monthly Review» 32, 1765, slightly before the publication of *The Vicar of Wakefield*⁷³. More important than this, perhaps, is the indirect influence of Beccaria on Goldsmith through the works of William Blackstone. Though Blackstone makes specific references to Beccaria only in volume four of his four-volume, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), his work as a whole seems to be influenced by Beccaria⁷⁴. Blackstone based his work on the lectures he gave as the Vinerian Professor of Law at Oxford from 1758-1766. His student, Robert Chambers, was a friend of Samuel Johnson, who, in turn, was Goldsmith's friend. Among other common interests, Goldsmith and Johnson shared an interest in law. Through this chain of friendships, Goldsmith could well have known about and been discussing Beccaria's ideas prior to the publication of *The Vicar of Wakefield*⁷⁵. Though Bender suggests that such knowledge «would have come too late to affect [Goldsmith's] revision of the novel»⁷⁶, given the analogies between Beccaria's observations and theories and the way in which Goldsmith develops events and characters in the novel, it seems reasonable to posit at least an indirect influence of Beccaria. The widespread belief that Goldsmith was revising, adding to, or at least tinkering with the novel in the years between 1762 and 1766 supports the possibility of his incorporating ideas from Beccaria's work. Finally, while the general interests Goldsmith shares with friends and associates suggest one way in which Beccaria's ideas may have been trans-

mitted to him, the details of events and ideas presented in the popular press after the sale of the novel yet before its publication that are incorporated into the novel suggest another.

tive daily world of magazines and newspapers».

⁷² See for example, Dunthorne, *Beccaria and Britain*, cit., pp. 73-74. See also L. Radzinowicz, *Cesare Beccaria and the English System of Criminal Justice. A Reciprocal Relationship*, in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale su Cesare Beccaria Promosso dall'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino nel secondo centenario dell'opera «Dei delitti e delle pene»*, Accademia delle Scienze, Torino 1966, pp. 57-66: 57. For a discussion of the Italian Molini family of publishers with branches in Florence, Paris, and London as an example of the ways in which ideas not only could be but were disseminated internationally, see Loretelli, *The First English Translation*, cit., pp. 5-8.

⁷³ Dunthorne, *Beccaria and Britain*, cit., p. 93, ft. 30. See p. 91, ft. 12, for a complete list of reviews.

⁷⁴ Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., pp. 171-172, and Draper, *Cesare Beccaria's Influence*, cit., pp. 182 and 184-185.

⁷⁵ Bender, *Prison Reform*, cit., pp. 171-172.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 172.