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**Joseph Andrews and the problem of decorum**

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# 2 *JOSEPH ANDREWS* AND THE PROBLEM OF DECORUM

Under the influence of Ian Watt's study, *The Rise of the Novel*, Henry Fielding has often been presented as Samuel Richardson's counterpart in a dichotomy of two rival early novelists who responded to the changing sensibilities and interests of the reading public in very distinct ways. Drawing on the commentaries of contemporary critics, especially Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, Watt stresses the difference between their techniques of portraying characters and the types of realism they create. Whereas Richardson is marked as a founder of psychological realism who 'takes us deeper into the inner workings of the human machine', Fielding is concerned with the external view and 'engaged in the exploration of a vaster and equally intricate mechanism, that of human society as a whole'.[1] Even though Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* has shown that Richardson's work was praised more by Johnson and also that it was more significant for the development of the novel of domesticity, Fielding sold more volumes than Richardson, and was by no means less important as an influence over the readers of the time.[2] Since the frequent comparison of Fielding's work with Richardson's sometimes reduces his writings into a mere reference for Richardson's moral-forming project, it has been suggested by Fielding scholars such as Robert Hume and Angela Smallwood that there is an urgent need to present Henry Fielding under a new perspective, liberating him from the assigned role of Richardson's counterpart, which would allow us to see his work in a different light. As Robert Hume claims:

1 I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957, p. 289.

2 J. Raven, *British Fiction, 1750-1770: A Chronological Check-List*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1987.

> Fielding and Richardson are both fundamentally moralistic writers, but seeing Fielding mostly in juxtaposition to his great rival severely distracts us from his greater social and generic range, his originality, his sociopolitical agendas and his consistently adventurous experimentalism.[3]

This chapter therefore aims to present Fielding as a unique artist, focusing on the way his work adapts to the requirements of politeness and other new sensibilities of his time.

Apart from being a playwright, a columnist and a novelist, Fielding was, above all, a satirical writer. Fielding's contemporaries saw satire as 'a dangerous weapon, dangerous not only to society generally, but also to the satirist' himself.[4] Since satirical writers were often severely penalised for challenging the powerful, reflecting society through satire did not always put Fielding in the easiest position. As Martin Battestin documents in Fielding's biography, openly politically satirical performances like Gay's *The Beggars' Opera* and Fielding's *Pasquin* as well as *The Historical Register* did not go unnoticed by the ministry, who regarded Fielding 'as the all too effective instrument of the Opposition'.[5] His open criticism of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, whose political practices he saw as corrupted and cynical, as well as complaints about indecency of Fielding's plays, resulted in the closing of most of the theatres in London under the Licensing Act in 1737. As Battestin writes, 'no one either in or out of the government doubted that, whatever other convenient uses the minister might put it to, the Theatrical Licensing Act was instituted to put a stop to Fielding's play-writing'.[6] His rocketing career of a popular playwright, consequently, fell into pieces when he lost his theatre in Drury Lane and was suddenly deprived of his usual means of sustenance. With a family to feed, Fielding had hard times supporting himself financially and had to take up several hack-writing jobs in order to survive. In fact, when he began his career as a prose writer with his short piece *Shamela* (1741), he did it in a sponging-house where he was imprisoned for failing to pay his debts. Considering the very often base content of his plays and his careless lifestyle, which came along with his sociability and love of merry company, Fielding had a lot of trouble persuading the novel-reading audiences that he might be a respectable writer who has something to say about the manners of the time or that he could moralize to the newly forming society.

3 R. Hume, 'Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?', *Modern Philology*, vol. 108, no. 2, 2010, p. 236.

4 P. K. Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 44.

5 M. C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding – A Life*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 223.

6 Ibid., p. 234.

His personal reputation as a profligate, cheeky playwright was, nevertheless, not the only difficulty he had to overcome when assuring the public about his respectability. As it generally dealt with human flaws and failings, the genre of satire itself was considered naturally suspicious and associated with slandering and scandals. The works of Swift and Pope's *Dunciad* (1728) were especially and severely criticized at the time for their explicitness and bitterness.[7] For example, Richardson found Swift insufferable, and recommended some of his writings to be burned by the Common Hangman.[8]

On the other hand, satire as a literary form was not completely condemned, and most writers to a smaller or greater extent used it in their work. It follows that the requirement of the age was not abandonment of satire as such, but refinement and adjustment of satire to the new sensibilities. As Elkin states, 'the obscene antics of Pope's dunces and Swift's yahoos were too much for those Augustans who cherished standards of refinement and propriety, and who were advocating satire which would be both gentler and more genteel'.[9] Therefore, Addison, Steele, Richardson and later modern writers who criticised satirists of the first decades of the century were very specific in their complaints and never abandoned ridicule as a viable way to influence the reader.

Despite the general negative connotations of satire as a genre, Fielding fell back on his previous successful career as a satirist and did not hesitate to use comical mockery to draw attention to human vices in his novels. His work remains indebted to the preceding tradition of Augustan satire – namely, to Jonathan Swift, 'who influenced Fielding in forming his own ironic style and his sense of the uses of ridicule'.[10] Fielding's great esteem for ancient satirists, like Virgil and Ovid, to whom he frequently and proudly refers in his later novels, led researchers like Philip Ayres[11] to explore his writings in connection with the Ancients. From the 1960s until the 1990s, Fielding's work was linked to the tradition of the Ancients and read in this context by the most influential critics, like Martin Battestin, Ronald Paulson, Claude Rawson and J. Paul Hunter. Nevertheless, Fielding's effort to boost his reputation by putting his prestigious Etonian learning on display and associating himself with the well-established literary circle of the previous era did not make much of an impression on the new generation of readers, who often did not share his educational background. Instead, Fielding had to prove himself capable of bringing new ideas into the

7 Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, p. 44.

8 Ibid., p. 54.

9 Ibid., p. 59.

10 Battestin, *Henry Fielding – A Life*, p. 405.

11 P. Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

ongoing debate established by Addison and Steele about the requirements of bourgeois taste which were being formed at the time. How Fielding did so will be the focus of this chapter.

As Ashley Marshall pointed out, even though Fielding openly admired the work of Swift and Pope, there are many differences between the satire written by the Scriblerians and the satire written by Fielding. In Marshall's own words:

> however familiar he may have been with the work of these writers, he does not appear to have been very directly influenced by them. Finding general parallels between his works and theirs is easy enough for a well-trained critic, but that an impartial arbiter presented with the relevant primary material would identify Fielding as a Scriblerian manqué seems highly unlikely. Fielding is doing something different.[12]

Although the Augustans generally believed that 'smiling satire instructs and reforms more effectively than savage satire because it pleases more readily',[13] Swift's otherwise entertaining commentaries on human society often appeared very resentful and almost misogynist to later generations. Influenced by the Hobbesian view of human nature, which states that self-interest is the single motive of all behaviour, Swift's satire is Juvenalian and portrays good men as defeated and isolated in chaos. As Ronald Paulson put it:

> to the Augustan a man is evil if he follows his own dictates even if they lead him against family, church and state. To the new generation evil is becoming external restraint on an individual's natural bent for self-fulfilment.[14]

The greatest influence of a Swiftian outlook is traceable in Fielding's first short satirical prose, *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great* which was published in 1743 but written between 1737 and 1741 as a critical reaction to Walpole's ministerial policies, especially the Licensing Act. In this short piece, Fielding sets up the infamous criminal Jonathan Wild as an allegory to the prime minister, making a much more straightforward statement on the crudity of human nature, and portraying manners as a necessary but potentially false mask. On the one hand, the character of Jonathan Wild serves as a parody of a glorified epic hero in his brutal greatness and power. In his Preface to *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding uses an allusion to classic examples from history to illustrate such greatness:

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12 A. Marshall, 'Henry Fielding and the Scriblerians', *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2011, p. 44.

13 Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 146.

14 R. Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteen-Century England*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967, p. 85.

> In the histories of Alexander and Caesar, we are frequently, and indeed impertinently, reminded of their benevolence and generosity, of their clemency and kindness. When the former had with fire and sword overrun a vast empire, he had destroyed the lives of an immense number of innocent wretches, had scattered ruin and desolation like a whirlwind, we are told, as an example of his clemency, that he did not cut the throat of an old woman and ravish her daughters, but was content only with undoing them.[15]

On the other hand, though, Claude Rawson has shown in his essay 'Hero as a Clown' that the character of Wild is 'much more of a not unengaging comic figure, drawn on a smaller and more human scale'.[16] Fielding himself describes his criminal hero in the first chapter with biting irony:

> Though he had much of the admirable in his character, as much perhaps as is usually to be found in a hero, I will not yet venture to affirm that he was entirely free from all defects, or that the sharp eyes of censure could not spy out some little blemishes lurking amongst his many great perfections.[17]

Jonathan Wild is thus not a picture of a terrorizing demonic evil, but only a ruthless criminal mastermind with smooth manners, whose designs and schemes keep him in power and ruin everyone in his way. When Fielding calls him great, he refers to his strength, cunning and skill, which made him excel above all the others and brought him the reputation of the greatest thief in the town.

Nevertheless, despite his extraordinary success, his greatness brings ruin and death to his henchmen as well as victims, which redefines the supposedly heroic meaning of the word great. Fielding further illustrates the difference between the discourse and reality of manners when he has Wild comment on the complexity of the word 'honour':

> It is, indeed, the essential quality of a gentleman, and which no man who ever was great in the field or on the road (as other express it) can possibly be without. But alas! Gentlemen, what pity is it that a word of such sovereign use and virtue should have so uncertain and various an application that scarce two people mean the same by it? Do not some by honour mean good nature and humanity, which weak minds call virtues? How then! Must we deny it to the great, the brave, the noble, to the sackers of towns, the plunderers of provinces, and the conquerors of kingdoms! Were not these men of honour?[18]

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15 H. Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, New York, The New American Library, Inc., 1961a, p. 23.

16 C. Rawson, *The Hero as Clown: Jonathan Wild, Felix Krull and Others*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1973, p. 19.

17 Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, p. 22.

18 Ibid.

Therefore, in *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding clearly contrasts the qualities of greatness – in the sense of being powerful at all costs – and of goodness, 'for greatness consists in bringing all manner of mischief on mankind, and goodness in removing it from them'.[19] His pun on the double meaning of the word 'great' then sets the foundation for his future treatment of models of masculinity, which redefine the ideas of evil as more human and stealthy. In contrast to Swift's critical and rather bitter satirical attacks on human vices, Fielding's satire thus targets social norms rather than individual wickedness, and becomes Menippean in his later prose.

Also, Fielding does not make the same pledge to preserving the classical ideal of a reasoned and orderly society that the previous literary generation had made. As Elkin claims, Englishmen in the late seventeenth century felt

> they could discern beyond the realities of the present and the immediate past the ideal of a society founded on permanent principles of order, and infused with the radiance and grandeur of the heroic world of antiquity, though without the embarrassing imperfections of that world, such as its moral lapses and fantastic superstitions.[20]

Unlike, for example, Swift and his Houyhnhnms, Fielding does not offer any visions of an ideal society based on reason and order. Moreover, his treatment of heroes involves mockery, and he generally challenges the traditional notions of heroism. All in all, lacking in seriousness and devotion to previous ideals, his style is inclined to comedy, which 'encourages us to laugh freely ... for it enlarges our sense of the possibilities of life' rather than satire, which 'is always fundamentally judicial'.[21] Thus, one striking distinction from the work of the Augustans is Fielding's focus on comicality and burlesque, which very much differs from the punitive and often angry tone characteristic of the previous tradition.[22] Under the influence of the stage, closely associated with comic realism, Fielding breaks free from the severe satirical tone of his predecessors while still following the aim of 'satirical exhibition of the improprieties and follies of mankind'[23] – the aim both comedy and satire shared.

In his second attempt at prose, *Shamela* (1741), he openly parodies, among others, Richardson's best-seller about the honourable servant Pamela Andrews, who became an admired model for young girls. As he portrays a rather crude and down-to-earth version of the servant's love story with her master, he 'travesties romance by revealing the real schemer beneath the pious phrases and coyness of

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19 Ibid.

20 Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, p. 7.

21 Ibid., p. 13.

22 Marshall, 'Henry Fielding and the Scriblerians', p. 42.

23 Elkin, *The Augustan Defence of Satire*, p. 15.

Richardson's heroine'.[24] Whereas in Richardson's original story, Pamela is a victim of her master's uncontrolled desires, in Fielding's parody, he is depicted as a fool, manipulated by a clever poor girl into elevating her social status through marriage. By turning the implausibly honourable maid into a smart country wench, who uses the unlearned language of the common people and looks for ways to better her situation, Fielding exposes the artificiality of Richardson's scenarios and invites the reader to have a good laugh at both master Booby's weakness and Shamela's base reasoning.

To achieve the desired comic effect, Fielding makes Shamela misspell words in her letters 'as any lady's maid in her nonage would be expected to,' but also shows her to be 'a vulgar horror – though a most amusing horror'.[25] Not only does she compare favourably with her master in the cunningness of her plotting, she rivals him in the coarseness of his provocations when, for example, to his angry exclamation 'I have a great mind to kick your a—', she replies: 'You, kiss —', and then, when she flees from his arms to safety, she mockingly sighs, describing the situation in a letter to her mother in the manner of Pamela's self-pitying commentaries: '*Oh what a prodigious vexation it is to a woman to be made a fool of!*' Finally, after her fellow servant advises her to turn Mr. Booby's affection into some good money, she opposes her, exclaiming: 'No, Mrs. Jervis, nothing under a regular taking into keeping, a settled settlement, for me, and all my heirs, all my whole life-time, shall do the business'.[26] Fielding's mockery of Pamela's pathetic passivity in dealing with her master's advances, which he distorts into sham and calculation, is therefore always presented in a humorous way, asking the readers to sober up from Richardson's elevated prototype.

As could be expected, debasing the generally beloved *Pamela* did not meet with a positive reception from middle-class readers. Although joyfully lauded in *The London Magazine* by a short anonymous poem, the parody was scorned by the influential literary circle surrounding Richardson, especially by Aaron Hill, who praised *Pamela* and, in his commentary, referred to 'the oblique reputation weaker writers endeavour to draw, from a distorted misuse of her name'.[27] Despite the popularity the parody enjoyed among Londoners, *Shamela* thus did not help its author in his ambition to become a respected novelist.

After the scornful reception of his anonymous piece, Fielding was fully aware that he needed to seek approval of the new audiences and carefully position himself between genres. While experimenting with new types of narrative and

24 Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteen-Century England*, p. 111.

25 M. O. Johnson, *Fielding's Art of Fiction: Eleven Essays on Shamela, Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961, p. 25.

26 H. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, Boston, Riverside Editions, 1961b, pp. 312-313.

27 R. Paulson and T. Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 117.

satirical methods, he had to adjust the style of his prose to the set requirements of the age. In the famous preface to *Joseph Andrews*, the first prose work published under his name, he carefully distances his comic romance from serious romance, defining his narrative as

> a comic epic poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this; that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently, of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us: lastly, in its sentiments and diction; by preserving the ludicrous instead of the sublime.[28]

As McKeon argues, in Fielding's novels 'the critique of the old, romancing histories is supplemented by a critique of the 'new romance' of naïve empiricism and its modernized methods of imposing on the credulity of the reader'.[29] Fielding therefore establishes comic satire as a better method of reflecting on society and communicating with his readers than merely providing them with a love story, which might by its example result in creating more illusions than understanding.

The preface to *Joseph Andrews* also carefully explains his satirical method. Although he makes an effort to distance himself from common romance and assures the audiences that his novel should not be mistaken for second-rate entertainment, Fielding admits that his work contains burlesque, which was regarded as a trait of rather low types of literature. Therefore, remaining on thin ice with his critics, Fielding stresses that he

> carefully excluded it from our sentiments and characters ... Indeed, no two Species of Writing can differ more widely than Comic and Burlesque: for as the latter is ever the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, ... in the former we should ever confine ourselves strictly to nature, from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader.[30]

The entertaining elements of burlesque in Fielding's work – that is, his use of exaggerated imitation or parody – are handled with care and usually associated with some of the marginal characters, so that the main figures of the story can

28 H. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 4.

29 M. McKeon, *The Origins of English Novel*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 383.

30 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 4.

be taken seriously and still serve their purpose in the writer's commentary on modern manners.

One good example of such a character which bears marks of burlesque in the story is Beau Didapper, modelled on John, Lord Hervey,[31] who serves as a caricature of city beaus in general and gets mocked directly by the narrator as

> not entirely ignorant; for he could talk a little French and sing two or three Italian songs; he had lived too much to be bashful, and too much at court to be proud: he seemed not much inclined to avarice, for he was profuse in expenses; nor had he all the features of prodigality, for he never gave a shilling: no hater of women, for he always dangled after them; yet so little subject to lust, that he had, among those who knew him best, the character of great moderation in his pleasures.[32]

Beau Didapper's physical features are distorted; he is ridiculously thin, he hops rather than walks, and his overall inabilities are topped with a lack of self-reflection and an aptitude to laugh at any imperfection in another. Yet, his monstrosity is fully revealed when he tries to rape Fanny, taking advantage of pitch darkness in an inn where the whole company of travellers is staying on their journey. However, at the same time, his poor attempt is ridiculed when, by mistake, he enters the room of an unattractive, middle-aged maid, Mrs. Slipslop, who gets a firm hold on him and accuses him of violating her chastity.[33] Therefore, although Fielding includes an exaggerated depiction of a city beau in all the ugliness of his demeanour, he makes sure the character is treated with comicality and only plays an episodic role in the story.

Since burlesque was a literary trait typical of Fielding's previous career as a playwright and it was a basic element in the great success of his plays, it was a technique he did not want to part with. As W. R. Irwin confirms:

> the venture into prose fiction ... was for Fielding a change of method, not of spirit ... Fielding's comedy is essentially a recasting and an expansion of what have already been seen as the main characteristics of his literary satire.[34]

Fielding's techniques therefore reflect the ambivalence between the previous literary tradition and the emerging, more flexible literary environment he became so comfortable with. On the one hand, he fully respects Shaftesbury's strict

31 Ibid., p. xxiii.

32 Ibid., p. 312.

33 Ibid., p. 331.

34 W. R. Irwin, 'Satire and Comedy in the Works of Henry Fielding', *ELH*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1946, p. 180.

refusal of burlesque as something not 'to be found in the writings of the ancients', but, at the same time, he tolerates its use in the writings of the moderns because, in his opinion, 'it contributes more to exquisite mirth and laughter than any other; and these are probably more wholesome physic for the mind, and conduce better to purge away spleen, melancholy, and ill affections, than is generally imagined'.[35] Fielding's prevarication between the theoretical restrictions on humour and his well-established know-how, which had won him popularity from theatre audiences, is thus present not only in the early stage of his transition from a scandalous playwright to a respectable novelist and a public figure, but throughout his subsequent career. Although he generally complied with the commonly accepted new standards, he was always looking for new possibilities to keep his audiences entertained.

Apparently, he was not the only artist of the age facing such difficulties. As Ian A. Bell claims in his book *Authorship and Authority*, 'accusations of "low" style of writing quickly became a commonplace'.[36] Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* preface invokes the example of his friend, William Hogarth, whose work he claims illustrates the difference between the crude principle of burlesque based on a caricature of certain traits, in painting represented by *caricatura*, and Hogarth's cycles on vices, which seem 'to express Affections of Men on Canvas' and '*appear to think*'.[37] Many times, both Fielding and Hogarth had to defend themselves against critics who disparaged them as 'either "low" or simply good at comedy, so that any aspirations they showed (in, say, painting sublime histories, writing serious art treatises or serious novels) were ridiculed or deplored'.[38] However, their work, as Fielding took great pains to stress, was aiming to do much more than merely entertain the reader. The two men's approach to satire shares another quality – they both point to the consequences of their character's actions. Instead of using the technique of caricature, depicting a distorted trait, which makes something, or someone, appear monstrous, Hogarth portrays stories that show the consequences of characters' behaviour. Fielding writes about him in *The Champion* of June 1740:

> I esteem the ingenious Mr. Hogarth as one of the most useful Satirists any Age hath produced. In his excellent Works we see the delusive Scene exposed with all the Force of Humour, and on casting our Eyes on another Picture, you behold the dreadful and fatal Consequence. I almost dare affirm that those two Works of his, which he calls the *Rake's* and the *Harlot's* Progress, are calculated even more to serve the cause of

35 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 5.

36 I. A. Bell, *Authorship and Authority*, London, Longman Publishing, 1994, p. 9.

37 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 7.

38 P. J. de Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1981, p. 10.

> Virtue, and the Preservation of Mankind, than all the Folios of Morality which have ever been written.[39]

As Voogd remarks about the two satirists: 'Hogarth, too, forces the reader to reassess his initial interpretations all the time, to peer under the mask presented, and discover the reality hidden under the glittering surface'.[40] Hogarth's less explicit techniques of moral satire therefore proved to be inspirational for Fielding's concept of satirical writing, since both artists use humour to expose the sham and affectation which they see as the basis of human vice, but they also refrain from using the criticised explicit and vulgar techniques of the previous era. So, in order to fulfil the expectations of social and literary critics, Fielding had to find a golden mean between the popular but offensive burlesque and the desired yet moralising satirical narrative.

As the most discussed danger of satire was the possible misuse of ridicule and the overall malice of laughter, he made sure to distinguish between mean laughter and 'the true ridiculous'. In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding insists that 'the only Source of the true Ridiculous ... is Affectation', which 'proceeds from one of these two Causes, Vanity or Hypocrisy'.[41] Thus, he establishes the notion of ridicule as a weapon against social evils, something that helps reveal and correct the follies of mankind, as opposed to mere buffoonery, something designed purely to make somebody laugh.

The concept of the true ridiculous also figures in the work of Lord Shaftesbury, to whom Fielding refers in the preface. Shaftesbury sees humour as 'a means of liberation from patterns of action or thought that are life-destroying rather than life-giving'.[42] He also implies that humour allows the mind 'to view problems from various perspectives, and thus, it is the enemy of all pretence and falsity'.[43] Consequently, Shaftesbury proposes to ridicule what is pretended, and offer different perspectives, which should lead to the exposing of falsity. To what extent it is possible to rely on ridicule as a test of truth remained unclear in Shaftesbury's texts, and it was disputed by other thinkers throughout the century.[44] Nevertheless, his view of ridicule greatly overlaps with Fielding's concept of the true ridiculous, as does his method of exposing his readers to various points of view by contrasting scenes, characters and stories so that they can see the problems he criticises in

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39 Ibid., p. 42.

40 Ibid., p. 139.

41 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 8.

42 S. Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics*, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1967, p. 120.

43 Ibid.

44 L. E. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1989.

a different light. This exercise of readers' minds was crucial to Fielding's aim to expose the vices of society and get his readers to laugh their way into refining their manners. Shaftesbury's inspiring but also controversial idea that wit should be exercised freely stayed at the core of Fielding's art, and indeed at the core of the eighteenth-century struggle for refinement. As Shaftesbury states in his *Characteristics* (1711), 'all politeness is owing to liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision'.[45] The satirical approach Fielding took in his novel-writing embraces such freedom and targets individuals as well as various social groups. Interactions between his characters, therefore, allow for a more complex reflection of society and show that he is willing to make fun of human vices in general, as well as the concrete unwritten rules which bind us to create a certain public self-image.

The way Fielding uses his characters to mock social beliefs was very often entertaining, but his demand that the reader constantly engage in judgement-making was also quite confusing for his audiences. In *Joseph Andrews*, he creates the character of a gullible priest, Abraham Adams, whom he depicts in several humiliating situations. For example, on his way to the city to visit his fellow cleric, Parson Adams is attacked by dogs, loses his wig, is splashed with hot pig blood and even worse, ends covered in pig dung. Moreover, he is tormented by the Roasting Squire, who invites him into his house only to play several practical jokes on him. In his analysis of the novel, Simon Dickie explains such depiction as the influence of Fielding's previous career as a playwright, who excelled in entertaining the public with humorous characters and elements of slapstick comedy. As he argues, when 'Adams is mocked, mimicked, tumbled to the ground, and scalded with hot soup, ... Fielding provides his readers with a strikingly similar sequence of their favourite stage pranks'.[46] Dickie also reminds us in his *Cruelty and Laughter* that

> eighteenth-century Britons – or a high portion of them – openly delighted in the miseries of others. Women as well as men laughed at cripples and hunchbacks. Wife beating was a routine way of maintaining order within marriage . . .They tormented lunatics and led blind men into walls. ... Gentlemen beat their servants and scoffed at the hungry peasants who crouched along the road outside every major town.[47]

For Fielding's audiences, it was, therefore, quite natural to laugh at a noble-minded idealist like Parson Adams and the pranks of his tormentor. As a result,

45 A. A. Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1964, p. 46.

46 S. Dickie, *The Cruelty of Laughter*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 165.

47 Ibid., p. 1.

'to a vast majority of its initial readers, *Joseph Andrews* was farcical and irreligious. Many simply ignored its claims to moral or literary seriousness, delighting in its comic brawls, beatings, and bawdy incidents at coaching inns'.[48]

Jill Campbell, in her *Natural Masques,* reads the roasting of Parson Adams as Fielding's exploration of 'the possibility that satiric aggression is continuous with crude physical abuse',[49] which remained a part of readers' expectations. Although Fielding uses well-worked satirical customs to entertain his audiences, Parson Adams is not the real subject of satirical derision in the novel. When compared with other clerks – Parson Barnabas and Parson Trulliber, who indulge in drinking and even abuse people around them, Abraham Adams comes out as a slightly distracted but a good-hearted fellow at whom we might laugh at times but whom we pardon and love. Even in the preface to the novel, Fielding finds it important to explain his treatment of the character:

> It is designed a character of perfect simplicity; and as the goodness of his heart will recommend him to the good-natured, so I hope that the character's good-heartedness will excuse me to the gentlemen of his cloth; for whom, while they are worthy of their sacred order, no man can possibly have a greater respect. They will therefore excuse me, notwithstanding the low adventures in which he is engaged, that I have made him a clergyman; since no other office could have given him so many opportunities of displaying his worthy inclinations.[50]

It follows that the character of Adams does not represent a satirical portrayal of the clergy itself, but incorporates some comic elements which criticise concrete traits of absent-minded self-serving preachers.

Although Parson Adams's imperfections make him end up in a few laughable situations, the rather simple and crude type of comedy generated by the treatment of this character was not supposed to be the source of the true ridiculous in the book. As ridiculousness, in Fielding's concept, comes from affectation, the revealing moment that discloses the ridiculous in the character is not the one when the parson slides into the mud of a filthy pigsty, but rather when he is disgraced by his own hypocrisy. For instance, when Joseph's beloved Fanny is kidnapped by the Roasting Squire and Joseph weeps over the situation, Adam reproaches him for inappropriate behaviour and advises him to remain calm and reconcile to his misfortune.[51] However, later in the story, when Adams is informed that his son

48 Ibid., p. 157.

49 J. Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 103.

50 Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 11.

51 Ibid., p. 265.

has probably drowned, he bursts into tears himself and starts weeping. Like all of Fielding's characters, Parson Adams cannot escape the principle of the true ridiculous and the criticism of affectation. Fielding's parson is therefore portrayed as a character we laugh at and accept as good at the same time, but certainly not as a character we would see as a model of a priest. On the other hand, as Fielding destroys the expected decorum of this priest-like figure without turning him into a truly despicable character, he makes him more approachable and human.

Maintaining the decorum of certain types of characters while exposing their hypocrisy remained a challenge for Fielding, especially as far as highly positioned women are concerned. Besides contrasting characters, as he does with Adams and other priests in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding takes to paralleling scenes to attack the well-established conventions abused by people in higher social positions. For instance, when Lady Booby seduces Joseph, she is described with appropriate delicacy as a woman of high social status, who, when tempting Joseph, 'accidentally put her hand on his' and 'discovered one of the whitest Necks that ever was seen'.[52] Although her attempt to seduce Joseph might seem sophisticated and innocent, the whole perspective changes when we read the very next chapter, in which the same attempt is made by Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby's waiting woman, who is a much coarser and more straightforward version of her superior. Since she is of a lower social rank, Fielding can freely describe her crudity and the awkwardness of her attempts, which parallel and highlight the similar nature of the two acts. As opposed to Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop is described as 'a hungry Tygress' or 'a voracious Pike', who bribes Joseph with 'Tea, Sweetmeats, Wine and many other Delicacies',[53] tries to impress him with sophisticated expressions, which she constantly confuses, and reproaches the poor Joseph for not being grateful enough for such advances. By paralleling Lady Booby's actions with a more naturalistic scene, where another woman does essentially the same thing but with less pretention, Fielding therefore strips her act of the pretended innocence and mockingly debases her without openly destroying the decorum of her position.

Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood's collection of reviews of Fielding by his contemporaries offers both positive and negative responses to the novel. Critics generally praised his characters and dialogues, but also commented on the lowness of his style. For example, Dr. George Cheyne talks about Fielding's 'wretched Performance' which 'will entertain none but Porters and Watermen';[54] on the other hand, in her letter to Catherine Talbot, the 18th century poet Elizabeth Carter shows a lot of respect and admiration for *Joseph Andrews*, stressing the author's in-

52 Ibid., pp. 29-30.

53 Ibid., pp. 32-33.

54 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, p. 118.

tention to point to 'some particular instances of inhumanity which can only be hit in this kind of writing' and 'certainly cannot be represented in too detestable a light as they are so severely felt by the persons they affect, and looked upon in too careless a manner by the rest of the world'. She is also persuaded that 'it must surely be a marvellous wrongheadedness and perplexity of understanding that can make anyone consider this complete satire as a very immoral thing, and of the most dangerous tendency' even though she 'met with some people who treat it in the most outrageous manner'.[55] Therefore, the lowness of some of Fielding's characters and style was understood by Carter as a part of his depiction of coarse realities of the lives of the lower classes – not necessarily something which is meant to be frowned upon or scandalise fine people.

Elizabeth Carter was not the only admirer of the novel; other 18th-century public figures and French translators of the novel gave it a lot of credit and saw it as a moral piece of writing rather than an offensive one. For instance, Pierre Francois Guyot Desfontaines, who translated *Joseph Andrews* into French, comments on the novel in a fictive letter from an English Lady to Madame ***:

> This Novel ... is considerably superior to all of your French novels ... What a tissue of insipidities and trifles is La Vie de Marianne! Le Paysan Parvenu is worth a little more: But what coarse features! What lowness! What descriptions! ... This is certainly not a Book of simple pleasures for the crowd: this is a Book of science and of unadorned morality, available to every one and in addition, it is a book in which one comes to understanding how we live in England.[56]

The striking variety of responses to the novel reflects how unstable the expectations of polite representation of social groups were at the time. Fielding's introduction of characters from the lower ranks of society into the novel was met with both scorn and appreciation as a realistic representation of society, and even though *Joseph Andrews* was criticised by some for its use of low humour, to many others it transgressed the limits of burlesque and developed into a complex satirical novel.

The criticized ambiguity of Fielding's characters, whose depiction breaks the laws of decorum but who still win the hearts of the reader through their goodness, reflects the evasive nature of satire and its limited power to effectively influence the reader's judgment on everyday realities. As Lady Luxborough puts it when she writes about Fielding:

55 Ibid., p. 123.

56 Ibid., p. 128-129.

> I think he produces personages but too like those one meets with in the world; and even among those people to whom he gives good characters, he shews them as in a concave glass which discovers blemishes that would not have appeared to the common eye, and may make every modest reader fear to look in such a glass. ... If Mr. Fielding and Mr. Hogarth could abate the vanity of the world by showing its faults so plainly, they would do more than the greatest divines have yet been capable of: but human nature will still be the same, and would, I am afraid, furnish them, if they lived till the world ended, with such imperfect objects to represent.[57]

Even though his characters were more difficult to understand as statements on morality than, for example, Richardson's Pamela, Fielding refused to create exemplary characters without flaws. Moreover, since he was well aware of the limits of comic satire as an effective means of communication with the reader, he did not rely only on his method of the true ridiculous to affect the audience. He also employed other techniques and principles, like introductory chapters and interpolated stories, to guide his readers in understanding the complexity of his characters and help them see politeness as more than a convention which pushes people towards a desired public self-presentation.

In conclusion, Fielding's satirical writing was influenced by his unique position between the Augustan tradition and the newly developing sensibilities of his own time. As opposed to Swift, whose satirical criticism, in Rawson's view rests on

> a traditional assumption ... about the human condition: that it is prey to subversion and unhappiness from within, that men are by mental constitution restless, irrational and unsatisfied, congenially prone to false needs and driven to supererogatory and destructive satisfactions[58]

Fielding presents a more positive view of human nature, which stresses its fallibility but also its innate goodness. Although he uses ridicule and irony like his predecessors, because he wanted to avoid the severe criticism Swift and Pope's satirical methods received, Fielding had to come up with new techniques which would be more appropriate for the modern taste. As a result, he presented the unconventional satirical method of the true ridiculous, which was based on holding up a faithful mirror to the reader rather than distorting a trait that should be mocked. Provoking his audience to laugh themselves out of their follies rather than punishing human vices with the proverbial lash of satire, he creates characters who are not strictly virtuous or vicious, but ambiguous, and

57 Ibid., p. 160.

58 C. Rawson, *Order from Confusion Sprung*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1985, p. 3.

who hardly ever escape the satirical comments of the narrator. This treatment makes them less acceptable as models of proper conduct, but also more relatable and realistic. At the same time, he carefully guides readers' judgments, asking them to reconsider their first impressions of his characters by revealing more and more layers of pretence and false moralities.