

Hochmanová, Dita

Conclusion

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5 CONCLUSION

The struggle for social refinement and the establishment of politeness as a base for creating an image of the forming middle class were dominant traits of eighteenth-century culture. This great social project became an opportunity for journalists and writers to influence the future social models for a vast portion of society. The magazines *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, run by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, offered the most popular venue for articles on modern manners, and the genre of the novel became an integral part of modern education. Therefore, the novel writers of the era took on a dual role, entertaining their readers but also influencing their values and attitudes. Since Henry Fielding incorporated a great range of influences, his work occupies a unique space between the disappearing classical worldview of the Ancients and the progressive standards of the modern age. Like Addison and Steele and other writers of the time, he consciously participated in the battle over new gender and social models while offering a rich perspective on human nature and various possible models of exemplary behaviour. As reading audiences widened, Fielding had to adapt to a broader variety of readers and develop new techniques which would address different social groups.

The growth of readership also raised an important question about the suitability of prose as an educational tool, as well as worries about readers' abilities to correctly interpret texts. These concerns are reflected in Fielding's cautious commentaries and narratorial strategies, which he used to establish his position on the market and guide readers toward making the right judgments about his prose. By using chains of cause-and-effect events complete with guidance in the form of short essays, striking parallels, antagonistic characters and other techniques,

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Fielding engages the reader in a game of judgment-shaping and evaluating characters and their acts. As he constructs a complicated and often consciously ambiguous system of ironies and satirical contradictions which he asks the reader to navigate, he invites them to use critical thinking to attain moral growth, as opposed to blindly following exemplary models.

This book explores the role of Henry Fielding's novels in the context of the general project of reformation of manners, and focuses on the development of the models of masculinity in his novels, which parallels the shifts in understanding of politeness in the years 1742–1751. It considers several viewpoints related to the changing economy, politics and aesthetic requirements of the time and uses them to analyse how Fielding's models of masculinity dealt with these complex perspectives.

The first chapter considers Fielding's difficult position at the start of his career as a novelist and describes his attitude towards the growing demand on decency in prose. It delimits his work from the values of the Augustans and traces the influences on his new uses of satire in the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, and in the paintings of his friend, William Hogarth. Their views on the free exercise of wit and ridicule as a weapon against social evils were behind Fielding's formulation of the comic epic in prose as a new genre and the principle of the true ridiculous as his satirical tool. The chapter further analyses Fielding's portrayal of two key characters in his first novel, *Joseph Andrews*, the titular character and Parson Adams. By combining sweet looks, sensibility, bravery, and mental strength in his new male hero Joseph, Fielding comments on the evolution of male heroism from a more stoic approach to an expression of emotion as a proof of genuine goodness and potential for empathy. And although the character of Parson Adams, Joseph's mentor, was not taken very seriously by his contemporaries for his absent-minded behaviour, he functions as an embodiment of charity, representing an important trait in modern masculinity, and shows the influence of Christianity on the modern conception of manhood.

The second chapter is concerned with Fielding's ambiguity in portraying masculine heroes, which reflects an ambivalence between the traditional view of a male as a warrior, a survivor and a cavalier, and the modern demands of refinement, empathetic attitude and generous social behaviour. This clash also corresponds with a shift in cultural preference for forms of politeness – from a set of required learned manners, towards a sensibility understood as inner goodness as a prerequisite for social etiquette. This shift is demonstrated with the antagonist characters Tom and Blifil, whose stories also reflect Fielding's ideas of virtue and vice in men. The concept of Fielding's main hero Tom is additionally complicated by his excessive generosity towards women, which he must reconsider in order to find the right measure of self-interest and be reunited with his love Sophia.

The final chapter concentrates on Fielding's change in narrative strategy from comic satire to a more serious tone in *Amelia*. That novel's hero, Billy Booth, further illustrates the clash between older patterns of masculinity and those newly forming against the backdrop of an increasingly complex London society full of elaborate schemes and disguised threats. While employing the motif of a young man's journey through the perils of society, Fielding describes Billy's tenderness and good-hearted nature in a harsh urban environment, showing how his sentimental attitude brings about a lot of suffering to his dearest. Fielding, therefore, explores the limits of sentiment as a rhetorical strategy in literature as well as in life, and challenges the view that sentiment is an effective motivator for social refinement. By exploring the theme of self-interest and depicting his heroes in the context of a complicated network of social relationships, he shows that excessive individualism is a potentially isolating and damaging social force, a criticism which still resonates with the problems of our contemporary society. Even though his conscious portrayal of characters with imperfections made them more difficult to read and be accepted by his readers, Fielding was reluctant to offer straightforward examples of vice or virtue, since such a treatment did not suit his purpose of changing his readers' minds through a game of judgment-shaping – a strategy which defines his role in the debate over politeness as one of a teacher rather than a preaching moralist.

