

## ***Joseph Andrews* Lecture II Joseph as hero and the novel's socio-legal critique**

Joseph's insistence on chastity leaves him open to the criticism that his virtue is passive and negative, consisting simply in 'not doing something'. During his adventures on the road, adventures we would associate with a picaresque hero (hero of the picaresque novel with its panorama of life and the associated 'spice'), Fielding is able to show that Joseph has a more active side to his virtue: he shows charity and what Fielding refers to as 'good nature'. Tom Jones is perhaps Fielding's ultimate embodiment of 'good nature', that is, the ability to empathise with others and feel their joys and their misfortunes. Tom doesn't have Joseph's chastity or his spiritual standards but, like Joseph, he cares for people and actively helps them. Wilson learns to appreciate this active virtue (III,chs.3-4,pp.179-204) and marries someone who embodies charity: he fell in love with a coquette but learns to value the goodness of the daughter of the man who bought his lottery ticket. It wins and she sends him £200 when he is destitute - huge amount of money in those days. They marry and live in peaceful and virtuous retirement.

This idea of virtue as charity is related to the latitudinarian teaching that salvation is earned by good works. See Adams's comments re good works and Whitfield's 'detestable Doctrine of Faith against good Works' in I,ch.17,p.72. See also III,ch.13,pp.244-6. Fielding is espousing the idea that chastity and charity are complementary: eighteenth-century society tended to concentrate exclusively on chastity as the only necessary virtue but latitudinarians and indeed Christian teaching argues that chastity, a personal virtue, and charity, a social virtue, are both necessary.

These qualities are represented in the biblical figures of Joseph and Abraham. Fielding's Joseph is to be partly interpreted in a scriptural context and is clearly reminiscent of the biblical Joseph and his temptation by Potiphar's wife, whom he resisted. Adams, whose first name is Abraham, like his biblical namesake, expresses his faith in good works, as opposed to empty words. Abraham's faith manifested itself in works such as preparing to sacrifice his beloved son in obedience to God. Joseph and Adams are of course comic figures but there are vestiges of the dignity of the biblical figures and the very fact that we inevitably think of such figures in the same context as Fielding's characters, gives them at least a degree of moral weight.

Joseph has heeded Adams's teaching that 'Chastity is as great a Virtue in a Man as in a Woman'(I,ch.10,p.41). The fact that Adams is a rather ardent husband may be amusing in this context but it reminds us that he is not advocating cold or prudish chastity but scriptural chastity, which celebrates sexuality within marriage. Joseph is an attractive young man and feels natural passion for his beloved but endeavours to live according to the Christian precept of chastity, which is different from the superficial code of chastity in vogue during the eighteenth century, which was concerned with reputation and property, rather than morality. See for eg IV,ch.7,p.274: the Ravisher 'tore her Handkerchief from Fanny's Neck' and so she stands 'bare-neck'd in the Presence of Joseph'. He is divided between 'the greatest Delight which the Organs of Sight were capable of conveying to his Soul' and respecting her embarrassment, 'so truly did his Passion for her deserve the noble Name of Love'(IV,ch.7,p.274). Adams lectures Joseph about his desires: 'All Passions are criminal in their Excess, and even Love itself, if it is not subservient to our Duty, may render us blind to it'(p.277). Adams tells him his love 'savours too much of the Flesh'(p.279) but Mrs Adams retorts, 'A Wife hath a Right to insist on her Husband's loving her as much as ever he can', reminding him, 'I am certain you do not preach as you practise...you have been a loving and a cherishing Husband to me'(p.280).

As the novel progresses, Joseph matures and takes the role of hero, although never as convincingly as Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. Joseph's presentation is double-edged: his apparent heroism is sometimes undercut by humour. When the huntsmen encourage their hounds to chase Adams, Joseph steps in (III,ch.6,p.213). Yet his heroic potential is somewhat battered by the long paragraph telling us all about his cudgel - we expect an immediate and dramatic account of his heroic action but first we have the history of his cudgel! It distances us from the drama and enables us to regard things somewhat wryly. After this long and rather gratuitous paragraph, Fielding gives us what we'd expected all along: 'No sooner had *Joseph* grasped this Cudgel in his Hands, than Lightning darted from his Eyes; and the heroick Youth, swift of Foot, ran with the utmost speed to his Friend's assistance.' Lightning may remind us of Jove and 'feet of foot' inevitably makes us think of Achilles: the term is often applied to him in the *Iliad*. The references to the gods and the

heroic vocabulary would, in a different context, give Joseph heroic status but Fielding continues to undercut this in the next paragraph. Rather than telling us what Joseph did, he gives us another digression, relegating Joseph's 'heroic' action to a subsequent, less important, part of the paragraph. Fielding interjects, using the royal 'we' of the magisterial author: 'we would make a Simile on this Occasion, but for two Reasons: The first is, it would interrupt the Description, which should be *rapid* in this Part', although he claims, 'that doth not weigh much, many Precedents occurring for such an Interruption', admitting that he is not averse to a little authorial intrusion into the text! He argues that the second and most important reason for not giving a simile is 'that we could find no Simile adequate to our Purpose'(p.213) to show 'the Idea of Friendship, Courage, Youth, Beauty, Strength, and Swiftness'(pp.213-4). Lest we take his comments at face value, he gives us a warning by using language which is increasingly over the top: these qualities 'blazed' in Joseph, whom he likens to lions, tigers 'and Heroes fiercer than both', ultimately commenting that Joseph is 'above the reach of any simile'(p.214).

Fielding describes the 'battle' between Adams, Joseph and the dogs with a variety of little asides, comically concluding, 'Thus far the Muse hath with her usual Dignity related this prodigious Battle, a Battle we apprehend never equalled by any Poet, Romance or Life-writer whatever, and having brought it to a Conclusion she ceased; we shall therefore proceed in our ordinary Style'(pp.214-5). The style is deliberately inflated to the point of comedy: it is not 'dignified'. The battle is of course not 'prodigious' - the sort of word one would use to describe the Greek gods and their battles. Joseph is a kind young man helping his friend - there is nothing unusually impressive about the way he does so. By comparing Joseph and his exploits to the gods, Fielding parodies the aforesaid divine exploits and by use of inflated vocabulary, renders Joseph rather absurd, albeit affectionately. Even the dogs have names reminiscent of classical gods and heroes: Thunder makes us think of Jove; Plunder and Wonder sound vaguely grand and rhyme comically with Thunder; the bitch is referred to as 'Amazonian'. The whole thing degenerates into farce when Fielding returns to what he refers to as 'ordinary style', which is suspiciously akin to that describing the battle. Significantly, their antics threw the Squire into 'a violent fit of laughter'(p.215) and although there is some real violence, the chapter ends with the Squire's companions commenting, 'Parson-hunting was the best Sport in the World' and appreciating Adams's spirited defence not in terms of classical gods but as 'standing at Bay...as well as any badger'(p.216). Fielding is clearly not advocating such attitudes but such comments lessen the impact of potential tragedy. Fielding uses this technique on a number of occasions. Even when he rescues Fanny from rape, we again have the over the top references to Joseph as 'like a Cannon-ball, or like Lightning...with Fire flashing from his Eyes'(IV,ch.7,p.273).

### Legal Satire

Eighteenth-century novelists were obsessed by law, particularly by its many defects, absurdities and injustices. Their interest in law reflected public interest in legal issues, particularly trials and laws which were known to be unjust. Fielding was in a peculiarly good position to exploit this interest because he was trained in law. He was deeply concerned with the practice of law and the many problems within the eighteenth-century system. *Joseph Andrews* dramatises the problems inherent within the legal system, in particular, the bias of the system in favour of the rich and influential (for a discussion of the issue of rank, see II,ch.13,pp.140-2) and the role of those working within the system, for eg Justices of the Peace.

Fielding's narrative technique is rather similar to his role as magistrate: he controls the narrative, intervening when he sees fit with a profoundly authoritarian, albeit benevolent voice. He punishes and rewards characters, not necessarily as the law would in reality but in accordance with the laws of comic romance: when Joseph 'steals' a twig, he is in danger of being imprisoned and in reality, he might be sentenced, but within the world of the novel, Joseph must be rescued from danger. Heroes suffer hardship but must ultimately reach happiness, usually in the form of marriage to a virtuous woman, for example, Fielding's Tom Jones marries Sophia. Marriage within the world of romance has always represented harmony in both personal and social terms - it's a reconciliation of personal and social goals.

This traditional harmony is nearly frustrated by the pedlar's story of Fanny's parents. He tells us that a woman he lived with was once a gypsy and kidnapped a child from the Andrews family. Sir Thomas, Lady

Booby's late husband, bought Fanny when she was about 3 years old from this pedlar. They all assume she's Joseph's sister. Booby tells Joseph that 'if he loved *Fanny* as he ought, with a pure Affection, he had no Reason to lament being related to her'. Adams fatuously 'began to discourse on *Platonic Love*' while '*Pamela* and her husband smiled on one another'(IV,ch.13,p.297), seemingly sneering. Joseph and Fanny determine that 'if they found themselves to be really Brother and Sister, they vowed a perpetual Celibacy, and to live together all their Days, and indulge a *Platonick Friendship*'(IV,ch.15,p.303). Mr and Mrs Andrews differ amusingly about the number of their children: she gave birth to a daughter while he was at sea and the gypsies took this child and left a sickly boy in exchange. She looked after him as if he was her own, calling him Joseph. When her husband came home she said nothing 'for fear you should not love him as well as I did'(p.305). Joseph has a birthmark on his chest in the shape of a strawberry. Mr Andrews, 'a comical sly old Fellow' who 'very likely desired to have no more Children than he could keep', comments, 'you have proved...that this Boy doth not belong to us...how are you certain that the Girl is ours?'(p.305). This is not the way Mr Andrews is presented in *Pamela*, where he is a pious and venerable man. Joseph was stolen from 'Persons of much greater Circumstances than those he had hitherto mistaken for' parents (p.306). He happens to be Mr Wilson's son.

One of the functions of comedy is as a form of social critique. Fielding's comic muse may demand that certain characters are rewarded and others punished, in accordance with romance tradition, but this does not negate the serious social and legal criticism made *en route*. The fact that the magisterial author has to intervene is in itself a criticism of the law, which should dispense justice itself. Fielding's comic eye can be rather stern: the reader's conscience is directed by Fielding's satiric onslaught and, in the case of the legal system, we are given specific legal reference to ensure that we read the situation correctly.

It is perhaps difficult to do justice both to Fielding's humour and to his legal concerns, but we need not see them as incompatible: Fielding uses humour to gain the reader's sympathy for his ideas, to sustain interest, to surprise and of course to entertain. Fielding seems to see the humorous potential in most situations; but although he revelled in comic irony, he also wrestled with the most serious socio-legal problems of his day, not only as a magistrate but as a writer.

Fielding mounts a sustained attack on the judicial system and its members in *Joseph Andrews*. When Joseph is beaten and stripped by robbers, we are presented with an amusing dramatic debate on the laws of evidence and theft. One of the robbers is caught and searched by the mob. They find Joseph's precious 'Piece of Gold' but they 'find nothing...likely to prove any Evidence'. The clothes he stole from Joseph are found in a ditch and 'the Mob were very well satisfied with that Proof'(I,ch.14,p.57) but the law regards it as insufficient.

The surgeon explains to the frustrated crowd that the clothes 'could not convict him, because they were not found in his Custody'(p.57). Barnabas comments that they are '*Bona Waviata*'(p.58). *Bona Waviata* was the term used to describe stolen goods which had been thrown away by the thief in his flight, for fear of being apprehended. They were forfeited to the King or the Lord of the Manor, his representative, as a punishment to the owner, for not pursuing the felon. Both the Surgeon and Barnabas reflect popular interest in the law. Fielding comments amusedly, 'The Surgeon drew his Knowledge from those inestimable Fountains, called the *Attorney's Pocket-Companion*, and Mr *Jacob's Law-Tables*' and that '*Barnabas* trusted entirely to *Wood's Institutes*'(I,ch.15,p.61), all of which were popular legal handbooks.

Mrs Tow-ouse articulates a rather more common attitude: 'I hope the Villain...will be hanged'(p.59). Interestingly, the two characters who know most about the law want to set the robber free, believing 'there was no Evidence against him'. Ironically, it is the ignorant Betty's common sense which triumphs over the musings of the pseudo-lawyers. She reminds them 'they had over-looked a little Piece of Gold' and 'every one now concluded him guilty'(p.58). Fielding enjoys exposing ludicrous legal situations but this does not lessen his concern.

Lawyers and Justices proved popular butts for criticism throughout the century and Fielding comments on them with the same comic satiric zeal and profound misgivings that Swift and later Sterne do. In *Joseph Andrews* Scout is presented rather bitterly as 'one of those Fellows, who without any Knowledge of the Law, or being bred to it, take upon them, in defiance of an Act of Parliament, to act as Lawyers...They are the Pests of Society, and a Scandal to a Profession, to which indeed they do not belong'(IV,ch.3,pp.255-6) -

after 1730 lawyers had to serve 5 years as clerks to lawyers. Fielding was deeply concerned by the lack of professionalism among so-called lawyers; this concern finds expression in comic form in his fiction.

Fielding was acutely aware of the power of individuals within the legal system and the abuses it led to. One Justice who brings irony to his title 'Justice', regards the 'Examination' of Adams and Fanny for supposed robbery as 'good Sport'(II,ch.11,p.130) and clearly behaves contrary to law. He exceeds his authority when he accuses Adams of 'robbing in the Dress of a Clergyman' telling him, 'your Habit will not entitle you to the *Benefit of the Clergy*'(p.131). The 'witty Spark[']s' challenge to Adams 'to cap Verses'(p.131) is a satirical presentation of early trials where clergy had to prove that they knew Latin in order to gain Benefit of Clergy, which would lessen the punishment from execution to a fine or transportation depending on the crime. The absurdity of this exploitation of a law originally designed to protect the clergy but now available to fops like 'the witty Spark' is clear in this travesty of a court scene.

The Justice is reminded by his clerk 'that it would be proper to take the Deposition of the Witnesses'. Fielding is presumably lampooning Justices who, due to ignorance of the law, had to rely on their clerks, who had at least some legal training. The clerk writes down the depositions while the Justice 'crack[s] Jests on Poor Fanny'(p.130), which is indicative of his irresponsible attitude towards his legal powers. The Justice pays lip service to legal procedure and swears in the witnesses but does not listen to the evidence or read the depositions, presumably providing a comment on those Justices who were so inept that the evidence might as well have remained unread. He intends to imprison them without hearing their case, saying 'you will be asked what you have to say for your self, when you come on your Trial'(p.132). This may seem reasonable enough but Fielding assumes that we are familiar with the role of Justices and know that if a Justice decided after interviewing the accused that there were insufficient grounds for a prosecution, he could discharge the accused.

The Justice tells Adams, 'if you can prove your Innocence at *Size*', or the Assizes (county courts), 'you will be found *Ignoramus*', the term written on the back of indictments by juries finding insufficient evidence for prosecution. He concludes fatuously, 'and so no harm done'. Adams expostulates, 'Is it no punishment, Sir, for an innocent Man to lie several Months in Goal?'(p.132), a situation Godwin deplotes at the end of the century in *Caleb Williams* (1794). It is worth remembering that it was possible to die in prison before the case came to trial. Fielding's disgust is equally evident but he exposes the system satirically, encouraging us to condemn the Justice in a trial by humour, where his own absurdity and ineptitude condemn him. The Justice is a caricature based on faults Fielding must have witnessed in Justices he met: 'I have writ little more than I have seen'(III,ch.1,p.168).

Fielding's presentation here is clearly comic, for example when a man tells Fanny that 'if she [has] not provided herself a great Belly, he [is] at her service'(p.130). Women due to be executed who could prove pregnancy were allowed to live until they had given birth. The hope was that by this time, they would have been able to arrange a pardon. It was not uncommon for men in prison to offer to make women pregnant - it could save their lives. Beneath the sexual humour there is a serious threat of execution. The comment is in fact no less harsh than telling Adams he may 'be exalted above the Heads of the People'(p.131), not in his usual position of cleric but on the scaffold.

Adams and Fanny are ultimately freed due to the intervention of the Squire, whose rank impresses the Justice sufficiently for him to give them a fair hearing. The Squire frightens him by telling him that Adams is indeed a clergyman and of known good character. The Justice is clearly not sufficiently inept to be unaware of Adams's right to Benefit of Clergy at least. The Justice immediately becomes more conciliatory on hearing of Adams's rank and he gives him a hearing exactly in line with the procedure he flouted earlier, listening to Adams 'uninterrupted', only asking him to 'repeat those Parts which seemed to him most material.' This new found adherence to legal procedure is of course undercut by Fielding's explanation that he 'believed every Syllable of his Story on his bare Affirmation', despite 'Depositions on Oath to the contrary'(p.133), replacing one bias by another. He closes this preposterous trial with a flurry of judicial action, threatening to 'bind [his men]...over to their good behaviour'(p.134), that is, to keep the peace, if they do not find the perjurer and bring him to justice. The incident is clearly a comic device but aristocratic influence was a major force within the judicial system. It is reasonable to assume that the Justice represents the attitudes of others within the

legal system and that Fielding, like Adams, is questioning the equity of a system based on class rather than justice.

Joseph and Fanny are later put 'on trial' for so-called larceny or theft. We may be tempted to assume that the Justice's knowledge of law is as impressive as his spelling: he writes that he is 'on of his Majesty's Justasses of the Piece'(NB spelling! IV,ch.5,p.259). Yet it is the law which is absurd rather than the Justice. Joseph's crime is that he 'with a Nife cut one Hassel-Twig, of the value...of 3 half pence'(p.259). The Squire asks, 'would you commit two Persons to *Bridewell* for a Twig?' and the lawyer replies, 'Yes...with great Lenity too; for if we had called it a young Tree they would have been both hanged'(p.259). This outrageous comment is not simply comic but darkly satirical as a specific reflection of the outrageousness of law, which made cutting down a cherry tree for example, punishable by death. The comedy proves to be rather dark when the Justice declares 'I believe I must order them a little Correction too, a little Stripping and Whipping'(p.258). Eighteenth-century readers would have known the barbarity of such punishments.

One of the most popularly hated sets of laws were those concerning settlement, that is, laws which determined which parish was responsible for maintaining the poor. It was usually the parish in which one was born but one could also gain settlement by marriage. Lady Booby argues against Joseph's marriage ostensibly 'to prevent the Increase of Beggars'(IV,ch.3,p.255), arguing that he 'is a Vagabond, and he shall not settle here'. Lawyer Scout explains, 'any Person who serves a Year, gains a Settlement in the Parish where he serves'(ch.2,p.252). Lady Booby's amusing arrogance is presumably a satiric comment on upper class attitudes: 'if this be your Law, I shall send to another Lawyer'. Scout argues, apparently representing legal integrity, 'if she sent to a hundred Lawyers, not one nor all of them could alter the Law.' This is immediately and comically undercut by his next sentence: 'The utmost that was in the power of a Lawyer, was to prevent the Law's taking effect'(p.254).

Fielding's cutting satiric slant also embraces the ludicrous intricacies of the law itself: 'there is a material Difference between being settled in Law and settled in Fact'(p.254). Scout warns that 'When a Man is married, he is settled in Fact; and then he is not removeable'(p.255). He argues that the law is 'deficient in giving us any such Power of Prevention', to stop the poor marrying and gaining a settlement but promises that 'the Justice will stretch it as far as he is able, to oblige your Ladyship'(p.255). Scout's legal explanations are accurate but his sycophancy and inhumanity in interpreting law betray serious flaws in the working of the Settlement Laws.

### **To sum up:**

Joseph Andrews is a satire of Pamela and the ideals of chastity she represents. As such, he is part of a long running and very important debate concerning the true nature of virtue and, indirectly, the issue of marriage for economic reasons. Joseph and Fanny marry for love, resisting the pressure from Squire Booby and Pamela, who are against the marriage for purely snobbish reasons.

The novel is a satire influenced by the picaresque and, as such, provides the reader with a variety of diverting adventures, through which Fielding is able to comment on social issues: marrying for money (Leonora), gambling (Mr Wilson) inheritance (Wilson) and of course charity (Adams versus Trulliber), the social divisions of rank and the attendant privileges, ineptitude and corruption within those representing the legal system and injustice manifested within the laws themselves.

On the one hand, Fielding wants us to laugh at our follies and those of our fellow man; on the other, he expects us to be moved by the injustices he presents. We can try to pin this novel down and find its 'meaning' but if we concentrate on it too much, we will miss the playful humour. If we simply enjoy the comedy, we will miss some very serious and useful socio-legal comment. We just can't win - and I'm not sure Fielding would want us to.