

JOSEPH ANDREWS AND RADICAL SATIRE

Harold Clifford Brown Jr.
Department of English
Kuwait University

ABSTRACT

Along with burlesque, romance, satire, mock-heroic comedy of manners, pastoral and picaresque, there is also religious allegory as a technique of fiction in **Joseph Andrews**. Recent interpretations of Fielding have emphasized the influence of Latitudinarianism on the unsystematic religious ethos they find in his novels, but this essay argues that Augustinianism informs the religious ethos and allegory of the early novel **Joseph Andrews**. Here the Christian prototype Abraham Adams condemns uncharitableness and explicitly considers the state of souls belonging to other characters. Adams's survey of British society reveals so few charitable people that the reader may feel the Augustinian Fielding is condemning the depravity of the whole of human society. In fact, the early Fielding, like Swift and Tolstói, was a "radical satirist" whose sights were set so high that they amaze and abash the reader, and would revolutionize humanity beyond recognition, were they fully realized. Mixing so many fictional techniques blurs the focus of Fielding's religious satire and allegory, but not so obscurely that they cannot be identified, and their Augustinian ethos can now be recognized.

For some years discussion of the religious ethos of Fielding's novels has emphasized the influence of Latitudinarianism, that tolerant, unmysterious, rationalistic form of Christianity which blossomed in the eighteenth century to emphasize good behavior and almost

universal salvation.¹ Spokesmen for the position of Latitudinarianism included Barrow, Tillotson, Clarke and Hoadly. Fielding was understandably attracted to this form of Christianity, which demanded of believers only charity. The following pages, however, will explore the kind of residual Augustinianism one finds in the religious ethos and allegory of the early novel **Joseph Andrews**, where Fielding depicts serious uncharitableness and where his moral agent Parson Adams comments on the spiritual state of his fellow characters. This does not suggest that the reader's primary impression of the book should be serious, but it does suggest that beside the pastoral, burlesque, and comedy of manners, romance and picaresque, there is an element of religious allegory that is definitely Augustinian.

Looking directly into the book, one finds two persistent Augustinian motifs: first, the operation of grace in the charitable cast of characters (effectively, the "saved" cast), and second, the primitive Christian radicalism of the social reform of England that Parson Adams expects.

At the head of the charitable cast one finds Abraham Adams, the religious allegory of charity, as well as the buffoon, still the foremost of early eighteenth-century Christian heroes, and also a man of robust "good nature" (to use Fielding's favourite secular term for charity), a man quite unlike the moral types in Richardson's **Pamela**, which was partly parental of **Joseph Andrews**. We see him charitable in all ways, but not as a construction of Latitudinarian principles. As with most human definitions of character, the image of human good nature in Adams developed from Fielding's early social experience. Intellectual doctrines which adults read about, such as the Ruling Passion, Shaftesbury's Benevolence, or Latitudinarianism, merely recall some of Fielding's ideals formed by social interaction as a child, though such intellectual doctrines are still compatible with Adams' goodness and his principles, such as the salvation of the virtuous heathen (Fielding 1967: 82). Yet Adams normally recommends only charity. Clergymen in the novel, who propose doctrines other than charity are shown to be hypocritical or vain. When Parson Adams recommends anything more than charity, such as the Stoicism he asks of Joseph Andrews (who thinks he cannot marry his beloved Fanny), then Adams is undercut himself, in this case by the mistaken news of his lost child. A few other characters besides Adams are people of "good nature" or charity: Joseph (the allegorical lost son), Fanny, their parents, Mr. Wilson, possibly Mr. Two-woose, and men such as the peddler who gives Adams money, and who reveals identities in Book IV. The reader is moved to admire no character who is not charitable. Adams and Joseph may even be types of charity and chastity; that is, of public and

private virtue, as discussed by Barrow in his sermon, "Of Being Imitators of Christ" (Battestin, 1959:26). All of Fielding's novels give the impression that their author valued such good nature as a secular form of charity, the greatest virtue. Yet the Augustinian **Joseph Andrews** gives some difficulties to this attractive reading, in that the great majority of characters form a quite different uncharitable cast. They lack genial good nature and even the most elementary charity. Nothing in Fielding's society or in the way that men live their lives shows that men care to be good. This uncharitableness is closely related to the second Augustinian motif of radical social reform, which would upheave uncharitable society. Certainly English society in the book is uncharitable. The gentry such as the Boobies lack charity. The profession of doctors lacks it, such as the man who refused to treat Joseph. The professions of law and justice also lack charity, men such as Suckbribe, Scout and Frolick, and the man who hesitated at taking Joseph into the coach. Also, the profession of the clergy lacks it, men such as Peter Pounce. And, of course, all London life lacks charity and its secular equivalent. Fielding shows this England to be comic, but in no way attractive. All here is wordly and lost. Nor should readers of this novel smile at the simplicity of its division of good and bad casts of characters or the blanket condemnation of society, for the Augustinian tradition runs deeper in the eighteenth century than literary history usually acknowledges. The **locus classicus** of charity came long before **Joseph Andrews**, or the **City of God**, in **First Corinthians**, when Paul had indicated that one may have everything else, but if one lacks charity, one has nothing. The division of men according to charity is absolute, and the uncharitable society of England is nothing, at least in the religious allegory. From the epistle many Christians have carried away the conviction that charity is very hard to have, that reform is impossible without exploding society, that the entire world is lost. Augustan satire, we will agree, can be as radical as Paul or Augustine in damning the human race or being ready to explode the world. In this context of primitive Christianity, Swift is more widely recognized as a radical than Fielding. In Swift's "Argument to Prove, That the Abolishing of Christianity in England May... be attended with some Inconveniences," he wrote:

I hope no reader imagines me so weak as to stand up in the Defense of **real** Christianity; such as used in primitive Times (if we may believe the Authors of those Ages) to have an influence upon Mens' Belief and Actions: To offer at the restoration of that, would indeed be a wild Project; it would be to dig up Foundation; to destroy at one Blow **all** the Wit, and **half** the

Learning of the Kingdom; to break the entire Frame and Constitution of Things; to ruin Trade, extinguish Arts and Sciences with the Professors of them: in short, to turn our Courts, Exchanges and Shops into Deserts (Swift, 1957:27).

Swift's clear, yet much-debated words, indicate exactly what would happen if his own gentlemen and scoundrels and the Boobies and Pounces of Fielding were reformed into lives of charity. Yet, surely Swift and Fielding would choose "real Christianity" of primitive times.

The words of Fielding's moral agent, Parson Adams, sound almost as adamant as Swift's when, in Adams' revolutionary innocence, he makes clear what he expects of men as Christians and human beings. He emphasizes charity as the only test, and a test which men fail. For instance, Adams tells the reluctant uncharitable doctor, that "it was the duty of Men of all Professions, to apply their Skill **gratis** for the relief of the Poor and Necessitous" (Fielding, 1967:62). To the Pharisee Parson Trulliber, Adams announces that "if I [Adams] may reason from your Practice: for their Commands [the Scriptures] are so explicit, and their Rewards and Punishments so immense that it is impossible a Man should steadfastly believe without obeying. Now there is no Command more express, no Duty more frequently enjoined than Charity. Whosoever is void of Charity, I make no scruple of pronouncing that he is no Christian" (Fielding, 1967:169). Of course, if these people became Christians, they would explode society. After the words just quoted, the men are ready to explode into a fight, which suggests the latent violence of the situation. Clearly Adams stands amazed at the wanton evil of men like Trulliber or his fellow parsons. After a law suit, Adams comments, "God forbid... that men should arrive at such a Pitch of Wickedness... I can hardly believe that any Man should be such an Idiot to risque the Loss of that [immortal soul] by any trifling Gain, and the greatest Gain in this world is but Dirt in comparison to what shall be revealed hereafter" (Fielding, 1967:99-100). Here the word he uses for uncharitable man is idiot. Joseph is less idealistic than Adams when he also marvels at the world's way: "I have often wondered.... to observe so few instances of Charity among mankind; for tho' the Goodness of a Man's Heart did not incline him to relieve the Distresses of his Fellow Creatures, methinks the Desire of Honour should move him to it" (Fielding, 1967:233). Yet, the fictional characters do behave dishonorably, vacantly, idiotically. Mrs. Tow-ouse refutes her husband's impulse to charity: "Common charity, a F--t! says she, Common charity teaches us to provide for ourselves and our Families, and I and mine won't be ruined by your Charity" (Fielding, 1967:56). These characters seem to know that Christian conversion would be

their social ruin. Mrs. Tow-wouse takes herself seriously, but not in the sense that Adams and Joseph wish, whereby one considers the safety and honor of one's soul. Taking life seriously would be the second item of urgency, after showing charity itself.

By a device common in **Gulliver's Travels**, Fielding extends this lack of charity and seriousness to the vain reader when he makes him smile at the naivete of Adams, who has total charity, but of course, no wits. One surrenders to this literary device of calling up vanity when the squire offers Adams 300 pounds per annum, and Adams tries to reassure the more worldly Joseph:

"But, surely, **Joseph**, your suspicions of this Gentleman must be unjust; for, what a silly Fellow must he be, who would do the Devil's work for nothing? and can'st thou tell me any Interest he could possibly propose to himself by deceiving us in his Professions?'.... answered **Jospeh**, 'all I know is, it is a maxim among the Gentlemen of our cloth, that those Masters who promise the most perform the least' " (Fielding, 1967:176).

Then after the vain reader has smiled at the two and revealed his own smugness about reading romance, the true cruelty and vanity of the realistic situation are explained. Adam's host tells how this squire led one young man to London, into bad Company, and thence to deportation, which broke his mother's heart; how another neighbour's son had promises of preferment in the church, which led him to drink when they were unfulfilled; how the squire brought a girl to prostitution; and how he even damaged the host. This tale is not comedy of manners, but rather strict religious satire. Such a man has no charity, and he is typical of the uncharitable characters of **Joseph Andrews** in having no seriousness. His motive for making promises with levity is mere vanity. At the beginning of the novel, Fielding has announced that he would satirize vanity, the source of affectation, the source of the ridiculous. Vanity became rapidly the "odious, deformed Monster" (Fielding, 1967:69) out of which hatefulness and lack of seriousness develop. In the central parable of Mr. Wilson, the narrator defines vanity as "the worst of Passions and more apt to contaminate the Mind than any other" (Fielding, 1967:214). Wilson's sin had of course been vanity, the great sin of London. Wilson had been involved in affection, false honor (duelling), stupid modishness, sexual immorality, literary inanity, and false philosophy, which led to the death of his mistress, and the ruin of many others. Lady Booby is equally vain in her London life, which diverts wealth from the village. In Fielding's anatomy of England, there is vanity everywhere. Now that

Wilson lives an unusual Edenic life, he stresses how rare is such a calling by grace in England. Not even Fielding as he began to write could have foreseen that the satire of the ridiculous in the finished book would reach so far into the area of vanity as the depth psychology of sin, or that it would range so far among related themes, such as shallowness and cruelty, or cures, such as repentance and Horatian retirement.

Interpretation of the novel usually de-emphasizes the unthinking, idiotic lack of charity that arises from vanity, but this disagreeable psychology should make as deep an impression on readers as the giddiness of Parson Adams or the comedy of anyone else. Carelessness about the presence of evil has lessened the readiness of students to compare Fielding's art to Swift's. Possibly they could even more profitably compare **Jospehy Andrews** as religious allegory to Bunyan's **Pilgrim's Progress**. In Bunyan's allegory of faith (instead of charity), the characters one meets, such as Ignorance, are certainly human, and often meant to be comical, but they are dangerous to themselves and to others in their spiritual chaos. Fielding's allegorical evil characters may seem slightly worse than Bunyan's (whom American readers often admire) simply because uncharitableness may be more clearly observed in a narrative than lack of faith. The fact that mid-twentieth-century readers actually admire the Bunyan character Ignorance is a second instance of serious misunderstanding of religious satire and allegory, which this present essay seeks to remedy. Sir Walter Raleigh understood more surely when he wrote: "to the hypocrites of the darker sort, Fielding was as pitiless as Dante himself" (Raleigh, 1909:175)

In all the systems of pathological classification, Fielding's bad characters are lost. They suffer from alienation, bad faith, neurosis, inauthenticity, lack of charity. In Fielding's Augustinian terms, these phenomena amount to damnation, not just being condemned to bad faith with associates in this world. When writing fiction about the life on earth, like Chaucer, Fielding does not invite the reader to worry about any characters' souls in hell. If he did, Slipslop and Booby would become pathetic and uncomic. But to answer the question of the systematic moralist, the reader with the assent of Adams must agree the characters of the religious allegory are lost: Slipslop and the others, who have no anxiety for themselves in all of their empty, destructive, unexamined lives. The lives of the larger characters, such as Slipslop, Lady Booby, Beau Didapper, and the appalling squire who set his hounds on Parson Adams, lack charity and seriousness, and they really seek damnation. Despite the occasional admission of a

character such as the peddler already mentioned, or the postillion boy, who lends his coat as a Good Samaritan, all of the minor characters are equally lost. This is Fielding's City of Man. One sees Pauline grace at work chiefly in the story of Mr. Wilson at the novel's core.

On the strength of this interpretation of the novel, one is tempted to avoid the common reading of it as a spoof of Richardson's moral inanity, hitting the affectation of society, while informed by benevolent Latitudinarian Christianity. But if one avoids this view, one then must read **Joseph Andrews** as a novelistic **Canterbury Tales**. Even if one were willing to do violence to all of Fielding's sincere discussion of comedy and ridicule by reading it as bitter irony (which can be read into Chaucer), the bulk of the rest of his works, indeed, everything that we know about the man would give one the lie. He was not bitter or cynical, nor obsessed with evil and damnation. And the overall tone of **Joseph Andrews** is comic and light-hearted.

There are two possible ways of ridding oneself of the sense of conflict in Fielding, of the stern moralist who paraded as Broad Church geniality. One way is literary, and the other, theological. One can suggest that, artistically, Fielding lost control of the varying techniques he tried to use, such as satire, romance, pastoral, mock-heroic comedy of manners, and allegory. There may be something to this, and to remark it cannot be much to the discredit of Fielding, who effectively is inventing his own form. We all agree that **Tom Jones** displays considerably greater mastery and sureness of form than its earlier brother. Even though **Amelia** may be comparatively less vigorous, the third book is yet closer to a Jamesian notion of the well-made novel. This is all to suggest that in his first novel Fielding has some confusion of literary purpose which he later outgrew.

Or differently, one may try to rid himself of the sense of conflict in Fielding by turning to the appeal of the Augustinian Christianity already mentioned. One may suggest that Fielding necessarily ran into difficulty in adapting the rather enlightened theology of his time to the real human stresses of moral direction and spiritual disgust. There is certainly much truth in this. Intellectually the bourgeois, pragmatic optimism of a Latitudinarian Clarke or Hoadly may appeal and reassure, but neither offers much help in coming to grips with evil, sin, neurosis, or radically inauthentic living. Donald Greene (1976) and others have done a real service by helping to see that superficial self-assurance of the Enlightenment had little to do with producing the greatest literature of the eighteenth century.

But neither the literary nor the theological explanation tell one enough to make an understanding of the contradictions. Indeed, if we accept both arguments, as it appears we must and, if we go no further, we are led into fresh contradictions, if not in the novel itself, at least in our way of talking about it. For we must either suppose by the first suggestion, that moral dilemmas are merely functions of literary method, or by the second suggestion, that Fielding is more profound in his **Joseph Andrews** than in later novels. Both alternatives are unsatisfactory.

One can go beyond these contradictions by reading **Joseph Andrews** as a satire that is radical. We have seen that it is encyclopedic, reaching far beyond affectation into the depth of human sin. Its norms reach all the way from simple good sense to the most determined adherence to Christian charity that a radical Christian like Adams could endure. Radical satire begins when the satirist finally moves to the point where real reform is not believed in as possible, and is mentioned only to humiliate and shock the reader, who can attain nothing better than his present misery. Langland, Bunyan, Swift, Melville, and Tolstoi were radical satirists. Johnson, Pope, and Voltaire were not radical, for they did not satirize all of culture and morality, and they did not recommend only an impossible upheaval to change society and how men live their private lives. Later novels of Fielding are less radical in their satire, **Joseph Andrews** is his most radical book, offering less optimism than **Candide**, but little more sign of grace to his sinners than Swift offered to the "pernicious race of little odious vermin." The sense of being convicted does not lessen in **Joseph Andrews** because of the novel's paragons, in as much as there is no possibility of identifying oneself with them; they are pastoral and impossible, as well as charitable. Samuel Johnson, who was much subject to feelings of guilt, knew what to avoid and never read **Joseph Andrews**. He also disliked the radical satire of Swift, and would be wary of modern systems of radical reform, such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, which tells readers that their lives are trivial, vulgar, and uncharitable. Many people, nevertheless, may still enjoy being told that they are damned in this sense, because in the process they can feel self-approval for having taken life "seriously". Here is some respect for value, and it is well that such people try to take something seriously, unlike the unreflective types in **Joseph Andrews**. If the sensitive reader feels asked to worry, radical satire has only asked him to worry about himself, to take his own life more seriously. The radical religious satire of the novel may disturb the reader, but it repels no one.

Fielding's works after **Joseph Andrews** are gradually lighter in their

moral satire. **Johnathan Wild** (1743) is the biography of a rogue, but no reader feels incriminated by identification with him. The innocents of the story, the Heartfreeds and Friendly, though "silly," are, nevertheless, much easier to assimilate to the reader's mind than is Adams or Joseph. **Johnathan Wild** is also more accessible because it is more novelistic and not structured as a religious allegory. **Tom Jones** (1749), with its theme of wisdom, is even more secular, and is a masterpiece among novels (Battestin, 1968:217). Here the reader finds the tone much less strident when lack of charity is presented, and he reads fewer sermons. **Tom Jones** has a scale of excellence, and many imperfect people who mislead others have bits of charity about them. The exception is not really Square or Thwackum, or Northerton, but Mr. Blifil, the damned brother of the saved Tom. **Amelia** (1751) brought forth Fielding's only "great" and "good" character, and also brought the clearest example in Captain Booth of a good person who errs. In the non-allegorical **Amelia**, Fielding's experience in court had led him to concerns of a "practical rather than poetic justice" (Raleigh, 1909:176). All men are shown wanting in Adam's charity, but they do not seem neatly, allegorically, lost in any Augustinian sense. At the beginning of the truly modern era, Fielding becomes partly detached from difficult doctrines troublesome to many sensitive Christians. Yet he was still writing, asking the reader to take his own life more seriously, to behave with charity, without vanity.

That Fielding is capable of such effects in the reader adds to his stature as a writer, to one's feeling of depth in his comedy. When Johnson asserted that there is more understanding of human nature in a page of Richardson than in all of the novels of Fielding, we can in a sense see his meaning. Yet Fielding's seriousness of value and moral concern give us more understanding of a different, perhaps greater kind. One wishes the author of **Rasselas** had recognized this excellence, and remarked the radical satire of vanity in a moralist as authentic as himself.

Written long after Fielding or Johnson's time, these pages of comment have attempted to define the satiric, Biblical line of Fielding's radicalism, and to reply directly to the almost established Latitudinarian view of Fielding with the smile of reason. Augustinian radicalism seems the more essential religious ethos of the early Fielding of **Joseph Andrews**.

NOTES

1. The standard school text is **Joseph Andrews**, ed. Martin, C.

Battestin (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1961), in the introduction to which Pelagian thought is related to Shaftesbury and Latitudinarian thought, emerging as "sentimentalism and benevolism... in Thomson, Richardson, Sterne, MacKenzie and, of course, Fielding." See also the Battestin prefaces to the Wesleyan editions of Fielding's **Joseph Andrews** (1967) and **Tom Jones**.

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