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MORALITY AND HYPOCRISY IN 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE: A STUDY OF HENRY FIELDING'S JOSEPH ANDREWS

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ABSTRACT :

The paper explores the understanding and perspective on ethics presented in Joseph Andrews and Pamela. Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson belong to the same era; nonetheless, their interpretations of morality are markedly distinct. Fielding's work encapsulates the notion that humanity is prone to frailty. In contrast, the characters crafted by Richardson serve to delineate and embody morality as a steadfast concept. Some instances illustrate the challenges inherent in Richardson's concept of ethical philosophy. Henry Fielding crafts an environment in which the characters embody a spectrum of human traits, transcending simplistic notions of good and evil. The manuscript contemplates the concepts associated with ethics, encompassing purity, duplicity, and self-importance. Joseph Andrews engages in a discourse on morality as a matter of comparative perception, while Pamela advocates for the Christian ideal of virtuousness. In critiquing Richardson's gender bias regarding morality, Fielding appears to convey that individuals of all genders may experience unrestrained sexual desires, and it would be unjust to label men as the sole offenders. In contrast to Richardson's linear concept of morality, Fielding introduces additional dimensions of morality, addressing issues of material corruption and professional corruption.

Keywords: Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, hypocrisy, morality

Introduction

The Historical Account of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, alongside his Companion Mr. Abraham Adams; Published in 1742, this work emulates the style of Cervantes, arriving just two years subsequent to the release of Samuel Richardson's Pamela or Virtue Rewarded in 1740. Numerous characters share particular names and characteristics, with Joseph Andrews noted as a parody of Pamela or as a literary reaction to Richardson's esteemed work. It is stated that "In the most immediate way, Pamela gave rise to Fielding's career as a novelist" (Cruise 255). Pamela captured the admiration of modern readers, as it championed principles of morality, chastity, and virtue as articulated by Miss Pamela Anderson. Nevertheless, it faced substantial criticism from various quarters, asserting that it fostered immorality due to its portrayal of Mr. B's sensual inclinations; it was accused of glorifying licentiousness and sexual abuse, as well as commodifying virtue, with morality being treated merely as a spectacle for applause and success. Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews offers significant insights that allow for its interpretation as a parody and a counterpoint to Richardson's notion of morality. As noted by some: "Pamela thus had the honour to provoke the production of Joseph Andrews" (North Am. Review 59). The manuscript will provide a comparative analysis of characters, events, and the authors' distinct focus on their individual ethical perspectives as illustrated in their chosen texts.

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms defines a parody as "a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work or works, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry." Parody is connected to Burlesque through its use of serious styles applied to absurd subjects, to satire in its critique of eccentricities, and even to criticism in its examination of style" (Oxford con. dic.). The period during which these two pieces were composed and introduced to the audience was marked by a discourse on morality, encompassing both religious and social dimensions. Fielding's philosophy for modern audiences presented a fresh understanding of the term. The author found themselves in direct opposition to the prevailing ethical norms and the religious frameworks that sought to clarify a perplexed sense of morality. Upon the publication of Richardson's Pamela or Virtue Rewarded, it marked a furtherance of extensively disseminated religious teachings (Baker 130). Engaging with the notion of virtues, while Fielding maintains a connection to religious teachings, he persistently explores the philosophical discourse surrounding good and evil, as well as morality and immorality.

The familial ties linking Pamela and Joseph, as well as Lady Booby and Mr. B, serve as a prominent feature of Fielding's satire. Joseph asserts his identity as "the brother of Pamela" and expresses his dismay that the virtue she embodies should not be reflected in him. He expresses a desire for "unvirtuous people" to have the chance to read the letters of his sister Pamela. (10).

Through the character of Pamela's brother Joseph, who aspires to uphold the "excellent patterns of his sister's virtues" (6), and by challenging Richardson's gender biases regarding morality, Fielding appears to suggest that both genders are susceptible to the dangers of unrestrained sensual desires. It would be unjust to label "men" as the exclusive sexual transgressors within society. In addressing enquiries, the exemplary quality in men that Joseph

embodies for “his sex in the vicious age” (6)—also poses an ironic query regarding men's chastity through Lady Booby's words, “did ever mortal hear of humanity's moral excellence” (9).Joseph Andrews engages in a discourse regarding the nature of morality as a concept that varies with context. Morality may be linked

encompassing a range of ideas from the trivial to the profound (Cazamian 82–83).

Fielding presents further avenues for exploring these concepts. The concept of goodness within a religious framework entails a specific devotion to worship and the influence of religious institutions. For Fielding, the approach is distinct; he engages with these as relative notions within human society that vary from individual to individual. In Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams can be perceived as a deeply compassionate character, yet he exhibits certain flaws, such as an obsession with his own knowledge and a childlike demeanour, embodying an innocence reminiscent of a newborn. In this declaration, Fielding asserts, “here, once for all, I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species […]. Particular characters we mean not to lash individuals, but all the like sorts, so, in our general descriptions” (186-88).

In juxtaposition to Adams’ character, the narrative presents corrupt religious figures. Fielding challenges notions like “the parson’s ineffectiveness, which may symbolise the broader ineffectiveness of the Anglican Church, is a significant concern” (Stuchiner 875). The dismissal of labelling individuals and actions as morally good or bad illustrates Feilding’s perspective on the trivialities of human behaviour. The author does not portray malevolent figures, but rather vibrant individuals — Parson Adams is flourishing; so too is Mrs. Slipslop. Baines asserts that the comprehension of 'character' in this context lacks nuance, depth, and thorough exploration. Instead, it aligns more closely with the notion that selfhood must be immediately identifiable, remaining constant and resistant to transformation or growth (50). Richardson’s Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, explores the life and experiences of the protagonist Pamela, leading to a likely conclusion: “you will be rewarded” (81). In contrast to Pamela, Joseph Andrews presents a diverse array of characters. It allows him the opportunity to delve into a broader range of social issues than Richardson. Jeffrey suggests that there may be a connection to Fielding’s personal journey as a magistrate, followed by his roles as a social critic and writer. This background offers him ample material to portray various characters such as “physician, advocate, magistrate, innkeeper, church figures,” and “invites his readers to have a general survey” (153).

Fielding seems disinterested in extolling the notion of virtue and challenges the viewpoints established by Pamela and her community. His virtuous qualities are not affiliated with the church, nor do they receive acknowledgement for their commendable actions. Through the promotion of a broader understanding, Fielding articulates morality in more accessible terms, aligning it with its authentic essence. As noted by Downie in his work, A Political Biography of Henry Fielding: “If generally followed, would make Mankind much happier, as well as better, than they are" (8). In contrast to Pamela, Leslie Morrison articulates in Serialised Identities and the Novelistic Character in Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina and Anti-Pamela that “Pamela as a performer who manipulates the reader, as well as Mr B, into seeing her as an appropriate match for a gentleman […] Pamela as a scheming actress who withholds sex in order to entrap Mr B in marriage” (26-44). It is Pamela, the embodiment of moral integrity, contrasted with characters such as Joseph, Parson Adams, and Fanny Goodwill, who assert that virtue and goodness are inherent qualities that do not require celebration, promotion, or commercialisation. In contrast to the character Betty in Joseph Andrews, Pamela emerges as a figure embodying hypocrisy, seemingly offering greater assistance and concern for society than any other character in the narrative (Greenfield and Hunter 390).

As noted, “Fielding, with large stores of knowledge about women, saw right through little Pamela Andrews and knew her virtue was not without motive” (Elizabeth 668). Despite being labelled as lacking virtue by society, Betty assertively establishes her identity in alignment with Fielding’s concept; she serves as the voice for Fielding and says, when mistreated: “I am a woman just like you,” she exclaimed fiercely, “and no female dog…” “That is not a justification for addressing me inappropriately” (89). In a similar vein, Betty, in contrast to Pamela, does not convey an air of self-congratulation regarding her virtuousness, which she reveals to Joseph when she arrives at the inn gravely wounded. Pamela's character manifests Upon being persuaded that her master possessed a mind of malevolence and was as crafty as the devil, she deliberates for an extended period before ultimately returning the items bestowed upon her: “My master gave me more fine things” (17). In the instance of Joseph, he acquires garments due to a lack of possession.

By addressing this issue, Fielding appears to invite the reader to resonate with their intrinsic motivation. Departing under the weight of perceived danger and without persuading all present of his virtue appears to be a more compelling action than Pamela's rationale that the external world posed threats comparable to those within the household (Eagleton 45).

In Fielding’s work, these inherent human qualities are not determined by physical purity, family lineage, or religious and ideological affiliations, but rather by the intrinsic goodness within. Likewise, physical impurity does not necessarily indicate immorality, and the two concepts are not inherently linked. He contends that “a man who has no ancestors should, therefore, be rendered incapable of acquiring honour; when we see so many who have no virtue, enjoying the honour of their forefathers” (15).

Fielding offers a new interpretation of religious ethics. One might observe a particularly intriguing juxtaposition of personalities in the figures of Mrs. Tow-wouse and Betty. Mrs. Tow-wouse, a woman of considerable means in contrast to Betty, declines to assist Joseph, who finds himself in dire circumstances and in urgent need of aid. In contrast, Betty, a struggling young woman, is alleged to have engaged in inappropriate relationships with several men, yet she endeavours to alleviate the suffering that Joseph endures. In contrast to Pamela’s subsequent standing, Betty alludes to an absence of material and physical dominance while asserting a more authentic interpretation of moral conduct. Thus, the enquiry arises regarding the nature of virtue: who embodies it more, Pamela or Betty?

Pamela exhibits remarkable mental fortitude as she skilfully influences Mr. B, who elevates the value of her chastity after multiple refusals. Initially preserved, it is ultimately exchanged for the highest possible market price. “And I see you so watchful over your virtue, that though I hoped to find it otherwise, I cannot but confess my passion for you is increased by it.” (164), Mr. B's declaration illustrates the commercialisation of Pamela's virtue within the moral framework established by Richardson. The esteemed virtue, held in such high regard by the lovely young woman, ultimately yields to Mr. B, who proclaims, “you have moved me more than any lady in the world” (199).

Amidst the ongoing conflict, she remains resolute in avoiding any reliance on the charitable financial assistance extended by Mr. B. Natalie Roxburgh in Rethinking Gender and Virtue through Richardson's Domestic Accounting discusses her business inclinations: "It is important that she stays out of debt or obligation to him because by accepting any gifts she might end up owing to him what he desires: to become his mistress." In this regard, her aspiration is to achieve a state of equilibrium with Mr. B by the conclusion of the narrative; her alleged moral integrity serves as the catalyst for Mr. B's decision to wed her, as well as the rationale behind his family's eventual acceptance of their union" (412).

Lady Booby and Mrs. Slip Slop, characterised by their notable physical and mental traits reflected in their names, unequivocally embody themes of moral decay, indulgence, and sensuality. In contrast to Pamela, who perceives men as lacking in virtue and extravagantly immoral, expressing her disdain with the words, "dreadfully wicked man […] O the deceitfulness of the heart of man!" Fielding depicts a youthful male character entering into matrimony with a young woman who possesses no wealth.

Joseph is identified as Pamela's brother; however, his perspective on life seems not only distinct but also more commendable. Thus, through the portrayal of siblings with varying perspectives on existence, Fielding critiques Richardson's Pamela, who vows to uphold the virtue and goodness passed down from her parents: "your poverty is my pride, as your integrity shall be my imitation." (223).

There exists a notable distinction between Mr. B and Lady Booby; the reader perceives a compelling The transformation of Mr. B is entirely attributed to Pamela's virtue and beauty, while Lady Booby remains unchanged on all fronts. From Pamela's declarations at the beginning of the play, where she asserts her complete fearlessness, to her master providing her with luxurious gifts, and her father's admonitions echoing in her thoughts, alongside his teachings on virtue and her commitment to divine principles, the narrative unfolds to illustrate Pamela's virtuous character. This is further complicated by her master's overt attempts at seduction, including his intrusive behaviour, which starkly contrasts with her earlier claims about him. Her subsequent descriptions of him reveal a profound disillusionment, labelling him with terms that highlight his cunning and treachery. (44-138), when she acknowledges him as her elegantly attired and dashing companion.

In Joseph Andrews, there appears to be an exhibition of human emotions such as love and commitment, acknowledging that he possesses minor flaws, such as offering kisses and attempting to manage them. Fielding conveys a sense of the inherent frailties of humanity.

Nevertheless, there exist characters such as Beau Didapper, Lady Booby, and Mrs. Slip Slop, whose transformation throughout the narrative is not anticipated by the reader.

Fielding identifies a multitude of moral dilemmas within society that extend beyond the mere exhaustion of a literary piece focused solely on Pamela's monumental effort to preserve her virginity and her anxiety about the prospect of becoming "destitute again" (11). In contrast to Pamela's situation, the closeness between Joseph and Fanny does not suggest any wrongdoing; "despite the consummation of Joseph and Fanny before the marriage, they remain completely uncorrupted by what they have gone through" (Seay126). Fielding's concept of morality encompasses a myriad of social, religious, and cultural issues, addressing both individual and societal concerns. He is dedicated to the pursuit of satire as a means of reform, critiquing the absurdities and trivialities of humanity.

In Joseph Andrews, the primary function of the characters is to expose the hypocrisy and vanity that stem from affectation, potentially the traits exhibited by Richardson. As noted by Melanie, "Vanity poses a significant moral and epistemological problem for characters in Fielding's fiction" (269). Such pretensions are primarily ascribed to the upper echelons or the elite of society by Fielding. The vibrant characters in Joseph Andrews possess a humorous essence, as he asserts they are deserving of ridicule:

"The sole origin of what I perceive as the genuine absurdity is pretence [...]

Affectation arises from one of two sources: vanity or hypocrisy. Vanity compels us to adopt false personas in pursuit of admiration, while hypocrisy drives us to mask our shortcomings by presenting a facade of contrary virtues. The revelation of this pretence gives rise to the absurd." ("Moral Critique" 392)

Fielding articulates the often overlooked virtues residing within the essence of an ordinary individual: "I could name a commoner, elevated above the masses by exceptional abilities beyond what any prince could bestow, whose conduct towards those he has helped is more commendable than the very act of assistance." (188) Pamela upholds her integrity and achieves elevated social standing and esteem following Mr. B's public proclamation of affection, which also bestows upon her his own social stature and regard. Fielding's ethical perspective is expressed through its more affirmative aspects: in his commendation of inherent goodness, a kind spirit, transparency, an innate generosity, and emotional connections that are nurturing and selfless rather than solely self-serving. Lady Booby seems to embody the essence of duplicity and self-importance. Lady Booby, the widow of Sir Thomas, navigates her mourning through the diversion of card games and the boldness of making advances towards her servants.

She feels a profound allure towards Joseph, her footman, yet perceives this attraction as diminishing and experiences humiliation from his rejections. She embodies the classic shortcomings of the elite, characterised by a sense of superiority, self-importance, and an absence of moderation, along with a tendency for extreme emotional fluctuations. However, regardless of any opinion or suspicion, the scandalous tendencies of detractors may hold concerning Lady Booby's "innocent freedoms" (63).

The transformation in life perspective with Lady Booby appears to be a formidable challenge to achieve. She is presented as a model of consistent behaviour and an inherent unwillingness to acknowledge shortcomings, while Mr. B's transformation in Pamela appears both theatrical and insincere, suggesting that his change is not intrinsic but rather influenced by Pamela's undeniable influence over him. Consequently, the introduction of a character akin to Mr. B, represented by Lady Booby, raises an intriguing enquiry: can Mr. B remain faithful to his commitments?

Parson Adams is a kind-hearted, forgetful, financially struggling, and somewhat self-important curate in Lady Booby's rural parish. He observes and nurtures Joseph's intellect and moral sincerity from the outset, and he backs Joseph's resolve to wed Fanny. His journey back to the countryside aligns with Joseph's for a significant portion of the way, and the liveliness of his uncomplicated good nature positions him as a contender to Pamela's notion of reward and Fielding presents him as a character deserving of the title of protagonist. In contrast to other ecclesiastical leaders, he possesses a remarkably robust character. Indeed, by showcasing the virtues inherent in Adams' character, the narrative conveys insights into the principles of faith and the essence of morality. In contrast to the idealised portrayal of virtue in Pamela's character, Parson embodies the complexities of human experience, encompassing joy, pride, vulnerabilities, and a range of emotions ("Moral Critique" 395).

Conclusion

In a comparable manner, the authentic depiction of the character unfolds across various chapters: the Hunter of Men emerges as an eccentric and sadistic country gentleman who unleashes his hunting dogs upon Mr. Adams, permits his companions to engage in cruel pranks at his expense, and makes attempts to abduct Fanny. Fielding appears to be quite critical of such individuals, yet they consistently adhere to their nature throughout the Narrative. He characterises him as a "dog," and unlike Mr. B, they shall persist in this manner: "indeed, he had hitherto followed the sport only with dogs of his own species" (231). The themes of material corruption and professional corruption are insufficiently explored in Pamela. Fielding elevates the concept of morality from individual experiences to broader societal implications by incorporating characters from diverse backgrounds and critically examining various aspects of society. In addition to the clergymen, the physician and the magistrate, there exist several other instances as well. Tom Suckbribe serves as the Constable, yet he finds himself unable to secure an incarcerated Ruffian, potentially due to certain monetary motivations influencing his performance in this role. The Surgeon exhibits an excessive pride in his skills yet fails to conduct a thorough examination of Joseph, ultimately declaring that he would soon meet his demise. When Joseph inquired about his safety, he responded, "He feared he was; for his pulse was notably elevated and feverish, and should his fever turn out to be more than merely symptomatic, it would be impossible to save him" (66). The repression of emotions in Mrs. Slipslop is sharply condemned. Fielding refers to her as "Slip Slop" due to an incident from her early years when she engaged in an immoral act (slipped), yet she has since maintained her purity and chastity. Ironically, she is an unattractive and insatiably passionate upper-class servant in the Booby household. She might resemble Pamela in her formative years, who is determined to uphold her integrity at all costs. Despite possessing nearly every conceivable flaw, she continues to inhabit a realm steeped in self-importance. Similar to Pamela, "for she [Mrs Slip Slop] was a mighty affecter of hard words," (34), and Pamela who prioritised her "pen more than you do your needle" (39), is acknowledged as "a mighty letter writer" (30). Fielding challenges the notion that emotions and physical needs should be suppressed, as neglecting these aspects may lead to more significant issues within society. Nevertheless, in Fielding's realm, individuals seem to take pleasure in maintaining a facade of hypocrisy. The visage of hypocrisy manifests in various forms, and its manifestations are numerous.

Despite the mockery from thinkers, bards, and authors, it shall persist in its path within human society, for "all our passions are thy slaves" (77). Similar to Pamela, Joseph possesses the hidden knowledge of his mentor. Lady Booby contends that if Joseph possesses the master's secrets, she inquires, "would you not be my master?" (12). By concentrating on this, Fielding rejuvenates the recurring assertions of Mr. B concerning the "family secrets" and raises the enquiry of whether Mr. B's emotions stem from love or fear, prompted by the anxiety surrounding public knowledge of his secrets; consequently leading to Pamela's authoritative demeanour as she guides Mr. B throughout the narrative. The audience is likely to encounter a captivating fusion of satire, a "comic-epic in Prose" approach, and intricate characteriszation within the piece. In Joseph Andrews, various events and characters illustrate the juxtaposition of Richardson's fundamental concept of morality. He appears to not only challenge them broadly but also engages with the esteemed principles of Richardson by providing illustrations from everyday experiences: as he states, "it is a trite but true observation that examples work more forcibly on the minds than precepts […] and far greater use in that narrow circle than a good book" (Eagleton 45).

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