



HENRY FIELDING'S JOSEPH ANDREWS AS A PICARESQUE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Henry Fielding was born at Sharpham Park in the vicinity of Glastonbury in 1707. It was Sir Gould's countryside estate. The novelist was the eldest son of Sarah and Edmund. He passed some of his time with Lady Gould, his grandmother. There he developed a taste for law and read something of literature. Fielding died in October, 1754. Before that he was gripped by gout. In 1753 his health showed a considerable deterioration. It became exceedingly difficult for him to perform his magisterial duties. Since the climate of England did not suit him, it was suggested that he should seek a 'milder climate'. He left the country for Lisbon in Portugal and expired there. The general impression that we gather from his life shows that his career had been that of a protracted struggle. The parental affluence left him in lurch. The political fight undertaken by him was constant and vigorous. His literary understanding was of a kind which not only created a stir in that century, but blazed the trail of light followed by writers of the subsequent periods, a force which pierced through a history of novel writing which came in his wake and after.

INTRODUCTION

Fielding is regarded as one of the most well-known novelist of 18th century. *Joseph Andrews* was the first novel written by him. It was published in 1742 as a parody of Samuel

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Richardson's first novel Pamela. He is the first writer in English after Chaucer and Shakespeare who followed the whole sweep of English society. He says that his story was fictitious and his characters were invented. His characters are mostly extroverts as he was not interested in psychological realism. Characters were real to him and make them real to us also.

Fielding can be considered as a realistic writer. He was absolutely faithful in the presentation of portraits of all that came within his sphere of vision. He described the manners and customs of his life honestly. He described the land, men and women in such a way that we come to know all about his time. In the social picture, we get information about everything. He presents facts faithfully. Today, it would be impossible for us to see 18th century London as it was there were contrasts in the age. If there was good architecture and elegance, there were crudest licence and brutality at the same time. There were high way men and robbers who robbed and beat people. People died because of hunger. Crimes flourished. Fielding describes a scene where Joseph is robbed, beaten and left naked.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'Picaresque' means 'belonging or relating to rouses or knaves.' It is applied to the literary fiction style with the adventure of rogues, chiefly of Spanish origin. In 1895, Fonger de Hann gave definition of Picaresque fiction as the autobiography of a picaro, a rogue and it is in the form of satire upon the conditions and persons of the time that gives it birth. Through the experiences of the hero, the writer satirizes the evils and vices of the society in the narrative. The conventional definitions of Picaresque novel are forgotten by the modern critics. They define it as a novel in which hero takes up a journey and meets adventures on the way.

The main characteristics of a picaresque novel are (A) They are episodic (B) they are comic. The episodes describe the wandering through the countryside on the way, the hero meets a series of adventures and of course, meet representatives of society belonging to various level. Comic is derived from satire.

The original title of the novel is *Joseph Andrews* or The History of the Adventures of *Joseph Andrews* and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams. The Picaresque novel is always divided into episodes which are comic in tone. *Joseph Andrews* is divided into four books. In the novel, Book I is divided into eighteen chapters. Book II is divided into seventeen chapters. Book III is divided into thirteen chapters. Book IV is divided into sixteen chapters. In *Joseph Andrews*, the picaro is Joseph who plays the central role in the novel and in the novel comic hero is Parson Adams.



Joseph Andrews is the picaresque novel of the road written in manner of Don Quixote. The plot of the novel is loose. We witness the journey of Joseph and Adams from London to Lady Booby's estate. There are digression like the story of Leonora and the story of Mr. Wilson which are not directly connected with the story of the novel but they are as device frequently used by picaresque novelists.

Comedy often aims at correcting the excess. Fielding also follows this aim. He does not spare the lawyer scout or the greed of a parson Trulliber. But there is a sense of delight and order. There are positive qualities of love, charity and sincerity exposed by Adams. Joseph and Fanny. Fielding preaches good and noble qualities.

Journey is always an important action of a picaresque novel. It is not simply a geographical journey. Fielding's characters pass through a series of episodes. The characters get self-knowledge. Joseph marries Fanny in an ideal setting and it is here that we come to know about the generosity of Mr. Booby and Lady Booby does not change and there is no reformation in her character. She returns without any change.

Joseph Andrews can be considered a classic among picaresque stories as it has a loose plot. The plot is not able to hold the subject matter together in an organized way. It is held together by not only a story but certain themes also. The journey of Joseph and Adams from London to the Booby estate is the main thread of the story. In between the story is held up when there is the description of a long story which is not connected with the novel. This was the technique used by the picaresque writers. Both these digressions offer variations. On the main themes of the book are romance, charity and love.

The journey is significant symbolically. It starts from London which is sophisticated and goes towards the bucolic simplicity of the parish Fielding presents the high town life with its vice and virtues of the country. Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop represent the high society with its snobbery while Joseph, Fanny and Adams represent rural virtues.

As the purpose of the picaresque novel is always to satirize the society, *Joseph Andrews* satirizes the prevailing social conditions of Fielding's time. There are people who are tops and hypocrites. They cheat lawyers and squires. Fielding has presented women's contradictions and weaknesses. Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop are great pretenders. They tried to seduce Joseph and on the other hand pretended to be good. Their hypocrisy and pretentious nature are satirized by the novelist. There is satire on arrogant people who used their power in vain. Fielding describes the power of innkeeper or the greater power of squires and judges. The greatest satire is there in the passage where Joseph is beaten and left naked by the robbers. He is refused to enter the coach. Nobody is ready to offer him clothes. The



greater irony lies in the scene where a beggar like man helps Joseph by giving his coat to him. Fielding wanted to satirize all the people of his time who pretended to be charitable and good. There are Christians like squire who pretends to be a Christian and doesn't help Adams with money. On the other hand, we find a beggar who gives all the money he had. There is a great satire on such so called Christians of the time.

Through a series of episodes, Joseph passes through mishaps and meets different characters. He starts his journey alone but other major characters go on joining him. He is inspired by a single aim of marrying Fanny. Fielding then adds a series of melodramatic surprises that heightens suspense and result in a strong denouement which affects the realism of the book. The comedy is aroused from the ridicule of the people. The sources of the comedy are vanity and hypocrisy.

The picaresque side of the novel is very entertaining. Joseph passes through the experiences which are of picaresque style. Fielding has combined realism with genuine concern for morality.

Thus, the role of the picaresque in *Joseph Andrews* becomes conspicuous at the beginning of the middle or we may say at the end of the exposition of the novel. The rambling part of the narrative and the discovery of the birth of *Joseph Andrews* form the picaresque picture in it. This part is most captivating and sustained till the end of the book. The criticism of the then society and picaresque are interrelated. The hero and his elderly companion move on and meet people of different shades of their character.

That way, the role of the picaresque is strong in *Joseph Andrews*. It covers a very large space in the novels. It seems Fielding recognizes the utility of such a mode of writing. The picaresque does not care for the probability and smacks of contrivance on the part of the novelist as a technician, but it serves to lend color to the episodes in a novel. The incidents are of exciting character in a picaresque, and many things happen to the hero and the heroine which make us laugh. The hero becomes a target of several predicaments. The specialty of the novel lies in the happenings caused to bring out the character of Adams, an immortal figure of fiction for all time to come. Further, the picaresque in the novel serves to show the unchristian element in the general humanity of the time.



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