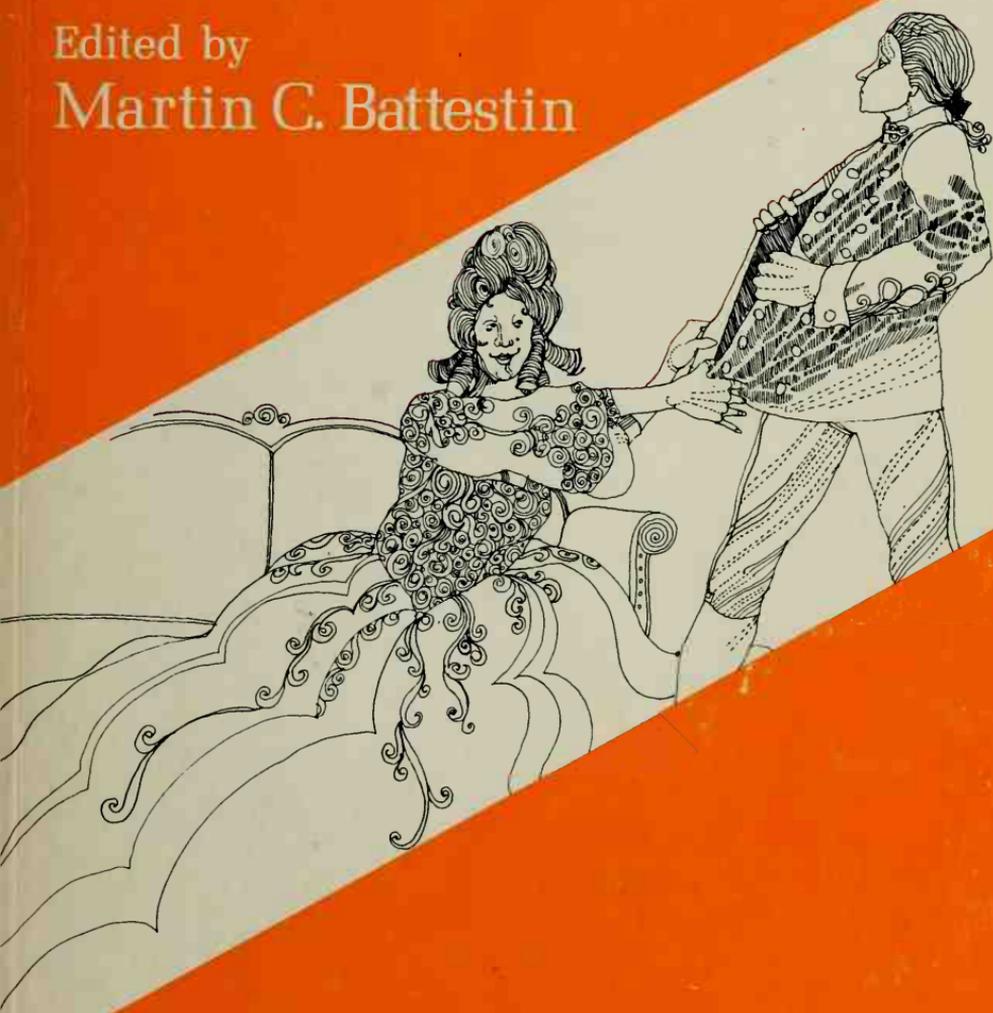


Joseph Andrews

by Henry Fielding

Edited by
Martin C. Battestin



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
RIVERSIDE EDITIONS

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JOSEPH ANDREWS



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UNDER THE GENERAL EDITORSHIP OF

Gordon N. Ray



Henry Fielding

J O S E P H A N D R E W S



EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

MARTIN C. BATTESTIN

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

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Henry Fielding: 1707-1754

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INTRODUCTION

MARTIN C. BATTESTIN

A NOVEL, like any of its characters, has its own story — its own origins, its own shape and spirit, its own meaning. The story of *Joseph Andrews* is one of the most curious and significant in the history of English letters. In the early 1740's, after years of gestation which led it through the realistic allegories of Bunyan, the satiric fantasies of Swift, and the fictional biographies of Defoe, the English novel came all at once into being as an art form, its two main directions — inward, toward the individual personality, and outward, toward the panorama of society — arising from the conflicting temperaments and literary motives of two very different men, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. It could hardly be called a marriage, but from the rude and often hilarious conjunction of Richardson's feminine sensibilities and Fielding's robust masculinity, the modern novel was born. Richardson's *Pamela* began it all. Reaching the bookstalls in November 1740, it enjoyed almost immediately a popularity so vast and vociferous that Fielding, who despised the book, could describe the commotion only as an "epidemical phrenzy" that needed to be checked and cured. In his brilliant parody, *Shamela* (April 1741), he set about the destructive task of exposing, uproariously, the absurdities of Richardson's work. In *Joseph Andrews* (February 1742) he offered his own alternative conception of the art and purpose of the novel.

In his fifties when he wrote *Pamela*, Fielding's rival was another sort of man, another sort of writer, entirely. Whereas Fielding was tall and hale, with a lusty, open-hearted zest for life and a sharpness of vision that could penetrate its masks and gaudy surfaces, Richardson was short and round in stature, shy and fastidious and a little inclined to a quiet pomposity. He preferred the salon and the society of the ladies, whose hearts he understood (or so they liked to think) better than they did themselves. He was a man who lived so much in a world of pose and posture that, in *Pamela* at least (*Clarissa* is another and a better story), he could mistake for truth the artifice and pretense of his own creation. By profession he was a master-printer, not an author,

but from his childhood he had developed his hand at the art of letter writing — and a noble art it was, esteemed by his contemporaries but nowadays unhappily lost! Always a little self-righteous, at the tender age of ten he had written an anonymous letter to an elderly widow castigating her for being a malicious gossip; and at thirteen he had taken to “ghost-writing” the love notes of the older girls of the neighborhood. As a writer of letters, he achieved such skill and local fame that in 1739 he was approached by booksellers who persuaded him to compose a practical little volume known as the *Familiar Letters*, a kind of correspondent’s guide and conduct book for all occasions, intended not only to furnish the illiterate with model letters, but also to teach them, by examples, “how to think and act justly and prudently in the common concerns of human life.”

It was while he was engaged in writing this work that Richardson hit upon the idea of expanding one of the illustrative situations it contained (in Letters 138 and 139, “A father to a daughter in service, on hearing of her master’s attempting her virtue” and the reply) into that celebrated first novel, which he called, in the expansive and explicit manner of his day, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. In a Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel, to her Parents. Now first Published in order to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes*. Briefly, his story tells of the conspicuous chastity of a pretty young servant girl who — ubiquitously, in summer-house, closet, or bed — preserves her “virtue” from the hot assaults and clumsy intrigues of her ardent master, bringing him at last to his knees in capitulation and marriage. The plot is certainly simple enough and timeless, a variation, as one critic has remarked, on the old tale of the Beauty and the Beast, transformed by an eleventh-hour metamorphosis into the charming Prince. And to Richardson’s age, an age in which a cash- and property-conscious middle class was beginning more and more to assert itself, an age that tended to equate a young woman’s virtue and her virginity and to view the latter as a kind of saleable commodity to be exchanged as dearly as possible for the social advancement of both daughter and family, the theme struck a sympathetic chord. Although it was not original with him, Richardson’s method of narration also helps to explain the book’s extraordinary appeal. To tell his story, he used the epistolary form most natural to him, having his heroine describe the events and confess her sentiments in candid letters to her parents. In

this way, Richardson achieved a curious and fascinating effect: the reader becomes a kind of *voyeur* and eavesdropper, overhearing Pamela's private thoughts, as it were, and seeing into her life with an intimacy made possible by the detail and expansiveness of Richardson's manner. At times, indeed, as in Pamela's accounts of Mr. B.'s fruitless attempts to ravish her in her bed, the narrative becomes almost too vivid for comfort: it was all doubtless done, as Richardson impatiently insisted, in the cause of morality, but he had managed to evoke his scenes so graphically that he had teased and titillated his readers as much as he had chastened them.

It is no wonder, then, that *Pamela* became, almost overnight, the sensation of London, running through five editions in less than a year. By January 1741 *The Gentleman's Magazine* could observe that it was already "in town as great a sign of want of curiosity not to have read *Pamela*, as not to have seen the French and Italian dancers." The simple, as well as the sophisticated, took Richardson's heroine to heart, trembling over her trials and exulting in her triumph. In the country the villagers of Slough gathered at the smithy to hear her story read aloud, and they communally celebrated her marriage by ringing the church bells. "Like the snow, that lay last week, upon the earth and all her products," Richardson's friend, Aaron Hill, wrote to the author not two months after the novel had appeared, "[*Pamela*] covers every other image, with her own unbounded whiteness." It was this claim — the "whiteness," the moral purity, of Richardson's shrewdly chaste young servant maid — that especially irked Henry Fielding. Even the clergy, the custodians of the public morality, were broadcasting their approval: there was, for example, the exasperating case of Dr. Benjamin Slocock, who sounded Pamela's praises from the pulpit of St. Saviour's, Southwark, as if, it must have seemed to Fielding, Richardson had written not a mere romance after all, but another book of Scripture. And Alexander Pope, England's greatest living poet and a man from whom he might have expected better sense, had also been taken in by Pamela's "virtue": the novel, he was reported about town as saying, "will do more good than many volumes of sermons." In the midst of this uproar, it would have been hard indeed for Fielding to hold his peace about a book he deplored.

Richardson had thus unintentionally set the spark that kindled Fielding's real genius as a writer, driving him in a spirit half amused, half indignant, to discover for himself the rich possibili-

Wilson's story

ties of the art of fiction. But in other ways, as well, the time was right for him to try his hand at something new. To see his situation in 1741 more sharply, let us briefly turn to certain salient and significant features in the background. Born on 22 April 1707 into the younger line of an old and distinguished family, Fielding had grown up in the green fields and fresh country air of Dorsetshire, storing memories that he later contrasted in his writings, nostalgically, with the dirty streets and noxious vapors of the town. After learning his accidence from a kindly neighborhood curate named Parson Oliver, whom he seems to have remembered in the good clergyman of *Shamela*, he received his formal education first at Eton and then, after a brief interlude in London, at the University of Leyden, across the Channel in Holland. At these schools he developed a respect for useful learning (as distinguished from empty pedantry) and a love of classical Greek and Latin literature that is evident in nearly everything he wrote: Parson Adams' impromptu critique of the *Iliad* delivered in Mr. Wilson's parlor is, for example, only one of many instances in *Joseph Andrews* where Fielding's impressive knowledge of the classical authors and their critics serves to enliven the characterization and the comedy.

Fielding's family connections and his education notwithstanding, there was little money available to him, and the young man had to make his own way. His choice of a career lay, as he liked to say, between being a hackney writer or a hackney coachman. At the age of twenty-three he returned from Leyden with a play in his pocket and the ambition to make his mark in the London theater as a dramatist vaguely in the comic tradition of William Congreve, the genius of the Restoration stage. As a playwright, however, the disciple was no match for the master: in general, Fielding's comedies lack the brilliant repartee and the sense of situation and structure that distinguish Congreve's best work; today most of them seem rather dry and lifeless. But in the lesser modes of farce and burlesque he excelled, creating, for example, in *The Tragedy of Tragedies: or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) one of the true masterpieces of dramatic burlesque, a travesty so skillful and amusing that it enjoys the distinction of having made Jonathan Swift laugh for the second time in his life! (or so the Dean himself supposedly declared, doubtless with a touch of hyperbole). One clear reason why Fielding's plays succeeded on the London stage is that they sparkled with timely and spirited satire, much of it at the expense

of contemporary "pollitricks," as he used to say, and of Sir Robert Walpole, the prime minister, in particular. For at the height of his theatrical career in 1736, Fielding, in search of a patron for his purse and of an honest government for England, had enlisted on the side of Chesterfield, Lyttelton, Pulteney, and the rest of the self-styled Patriots who led the noisy and vigorous Opposition to Walpole's administration. He became, in fact, his party's principal satirist, his pen one of its sharpest weapons against the minister. His "squibs and crackers," delivered to the delighted audiences that packed The Little Theatre in the Haymarket, were "let off in the country and sometimes at Court," exploding everywhere to Walpole's embarrassment. Unfortunately for Fielding, however, his heavy-handed ridicule of the ministry in *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register* (1737) proved too successful, since it stirred the government, irate and uneasy over the immense popularity of these farces, to put an end to such abuse and, incidentally, to the career of the man mainly responsible. The result was the passing in June 1737 of the Theatrical Licensing Act, which placed the playhouses under the Lord Chamberlain's strict control and shut the doors of Fielding's theater against him. "Like another Erostratus," sneered Colley Cibber with metaphors typically mixed, Fielding had "set fire to his stage, by writing up to an Act of Parliament to demolish it."

This was indeed a dark time for Fielding. In 1734, during his more prosperous days, he had married Charlotte Cradock, a remarkably pretty young woman whom he had loved and courted for four years; she was, he later said, the "one from whom I draw all the solid comfort of my life," and his deep affection for her is embodied in the good and charming women of his novels — Mrs. Wilson, Sophia, Amelia — for whom she was the model. By 1737, when the Licensing Act had cut him off from his livelihood, Fielding had two infant daughters as well as a wife to support. In near desperation he began to search for other means of providing comfortably for himself and his family. In November he entered the Middle Temple, but, though eleven years later he was to become one of London's most effective and prominent magistrates, the law was at first an inadequate solution. To supplement a meager income, Fielding was forced to turn hackney author in earnest and to resume his labors—now as Captain Hercules Vinegar, editor of *The Champion* — on behalf of the Opposition. The number of miscellaneous and fugitive productions—translations, poems, essays of every description—that came

from his pen during the little more than two years preceding the appearance of *Joseph Andrews* suggests that his need was urgent. In Mr. Wilson's doleful account of his brief and unprofitable career in London, we may see something of his author's own plight.

In the midst of these gloomy, arid days, the storm over *Pamela* broke. Clearly, there were ample reasons, more practical than moral and artistic indignation, that prompted Fielding's response. A "spoof" of Richardson's immensely popular book was sure to be financially rewarding, and Fielding desperately needed the money. But it would be a serious and rather cynical distortion to underestimate the importance of those other, less mercenary motives, which, after all, are the ones that chiefly matter to us as expressions of Fielding's art and his thought. To Fielding, London had gone wild over an egregiously bad and pretentious book — a book morally contemptible and technically incompetent. To sense the full force of these sentiments in the genesis of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, we must first understand how Fielding, together with the best of his contemporaries, looked upon the job of the writer, especially the writer of satire. It is a mode and an attitude somewhat strange to our own times. Fielding wrote when the English Augustan Age — the Age of Satire, as it has been called — was not long past and when the greatest of its wits, Swift and Pope, were still living. To these men the satirist's craft was a responsible one: he wrote with the Horatian design to instruct, as well as to delight, his readers; he acted, in a real sense, as the arbiter and custodian of the good manners, morals, and taste of his society. Though laughter is his mode, the satirist is, then, fundamentally a moralist; though he makes us wince as he wields the knife of ridicule, he is, Fielding declared, "to be regarded as our physician, not our enemy." Solidly in this tradition, Fielding chose, as he variously put it, to speak truth with a smiling countenance, to laugh mankind out of their favorite follies and vices, to tickle them into good manners. Richardson's fatuous performance — as the noise of applause, even from those who should have known better, convinced him — needed to be exposed and corrected. Later, in 1748, Fielding would write his rival a warm and generous letter praising *Clarissa*, but *Pamela* was another matter entirely. It was bad morality and bad art. In *The Champion* Fielding had set himself up as Captain Hercules Vinegar, "great champion and censor of Great Britain," arraigning an old antagonist, the laureate-comedian Colley Cibber,