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Romance and the "New" Novels of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett

JERRY C. BEASLEY

The decade of the 1740's witnessed the first great flowering of the English novel, with the sudden emergence of Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett. During the ten years between 1740 and 1749, these three authors produced a half-dozen novels which are still counted among the finest and most important eighteenth-century works of fiction: *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Clarissa*, *Roderick Random*, and *Tom Jones*. It is almost always useful to investigate the climate in which great bursts of artistic energy take place, for by so doing we can heighten our understanding of the works of art themselves. In this essay I should like to explore one aspect of the climate of the 1740's as it relates to the major novelists of this important decade.¹

In the 1740's in England, most forms of prose romance enjoyed only a very dubious reputation. No one was any longer writing heroic romance of the kind popularized in the seventeenth century by La Calprenède, the Scudérys, and their numerous English imitators. Thomas Simon Gueulette's several vulgar imitations of the delightful oriental fantasies of Antoine Galland (*The Arabian Nights*) and Pétis de la Crioix (*Turkish and Persian Tales*) were declining in public acceptance, although their fine originals were to remain extremely popular throughout the rest of the century.² Fénelon's didactic romance of *Télémaque* (1699-1700) still had many readers, if the number of editions (five) in the decade is any indication, but native writers displayed little interest in developing this mode in

¹I have already explored this climate in a general way in an article called "English Fiction in the 1740's: Some Glances at the Major and Minor Novels," *Studies in the Novel*, 5 (1973), 155-175. Like the present essay, this article complements some of the arguments developed by William Park in "What Was New about the 'New Species of Writing?'" *Studies in the Novel*, 2 (1970), 112-130.

²Translations of Gueulette's *Chinese Tales* (1723), *Mogul Tales* (1732), and *Peruvian Tales* (1733-1734) were very popular in the 1730's and early 1740's; the works of Galland and Pétis de la Croix, initially translated during the first two decades of the eighteenth century, enjoyed a steady following into the 1800's. For full data on the fiction published between 1700 and 1750, see William H. McBurney, *A Check List of English Prose Fiction, 1700-1739* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); and Jerry C. Beasley, *A Check List of Prose Fiction Published in England, 1740-1749* (Charlottesville, Va., 1972).

new works of their own. The English reading public had not totally renounced romantic writing, which was to enjoy an enthusiastic revival in some new forms during later decades. But for the moment the prevailing spirit of the age was decidedly anti-romantic, as is attested by the continued popularity of Cervantes, Le Sage, and Defoe, and by the excitement over "anti-romantic" writers like Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett. Interestingly enough, most of the avowed romances published in the 1740's were political fables and satires which actually contributed to the anti-romantic atmosphere. That is to say, despite their unbelievably valiant heroes, astonishing coincidences, and generally exotic dress these works seem to have concentrated less on the "marvellous" than on the topical. In some surprising ways, their claim on the public's attention coincided with and perhaps reinforced the claim laid by the works of the decade's major novelists, who were always topical and relevant but who certainly did not altogether dismiss romantic conventions from their fiction. In the interest of developing a fuller sense of these new novelists' contemporaneity, it seems worthwhile to investigate some of their relationships with the kinds of romantic fiction popular when they came on the scene.

Heroic romance, to be precise, may be described as dead in the decade inaugurated by *Pamela*, as far as new editions of the seventeenth-century French originals are concerned.³ Recent abbreviated adaptations of heroic romance enjoyed a certain currency in the 1720's and 1730's, and one of these, an anonymous native piece *Celenia, or the History of Hyempsal, King of Numidia* (1735-1736), reappeared in 1742. Like the celebrated *Cléopâtre* and *Cassandre*, these adaptations emphasize virtuous love and heroic military exploits, and they are by and large quite discursive, structureless tales set in remote, vaguely delineated ancient locales. Furthermore, they characteristically feature long conversations and interpolated *histoires* exploring a variety of polite subjects from sentimental love to ethical philosophy, religion, history, and literature. Probably the chief reason for the success gained by these adaptations is their sometimes insistent topicality. *Celenia*, for example, engages in strident Tory-Jacobite polemics against powerful ministers (meaning Sir Robert Walpole) and republican politicians (meaning the Whigs). The story of its various beleaguered heroic stereotypes is a

³A few old heroic romances may have been available in circulating libraries. See Alan Dugald McKillop, "English Circulating Libraries, 1725-1750," *The Library*, Fourth Series, 14 (1934), 477-485. Joseph Collyer's list, as recorded in the *London Daily Advertiser* for November 17, 1741, included earlier editions of *Cleopâtre* and *Cassandre*.

barely disguised political allegory which attempts to demonstrate ideologically that the Tory-Jacobite cause must, by virtue of its own rightness and the Whigs' (and Walpole's) wrongness, win out in the end. The book was still popular on the eve of Walpole's downfall in 1742; surely it is to the timeliness of its ideological appeal, and not to its generic affiliation with heroic romance or its interest as story (it has almost none), that we must attribute the success *Celenia* enjoyed, although we have no clear idea who its readers actually were.

The didactic romance closely resembles its heroic cousin in its use of chivalric conventions, except that it gives much heavier emphasis to a moral function. The moral emphasis helped to gain this mode of avowed fiction an open respect often denied by large segments of the early eighteenth-century reading audience to other kinds of imaginative prose narrative. The didactic romances follow Boileau's famous pronouncements upon the moral function of epic, and seem to take quite literally Le Bossu's argument, in Book I of his *Treatise of the Epick Poem* (1675), that the epic fable must be designed with a view to "the Instruction, and the point of Morality, which is to serve as its Foundation."⁴ These romances typically sacrifice narrative values to moral purpose. Specifically, they usually advance rationalist principles of ethics, theology, and politics as solutions to the problems encountered by a hero whose character is actually established as a suprahuman *beau idéal*. The most popular of all the didactic romances, and indeed the progenitor of the type, was Archbishop Fénelon's *Télémaque*, which enjoyed perhaps twenty-five English editions between 1700 and 1739. *Télémaque* set out to be a new kind of epic, as Fielding acknowledged in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, offering in prose narrative a series of episodes allegedly omitted from Homer's *Odyssey*. Probably the most important reason for the work's continued popularity (besides its moralism) was the directness of its address to some of the pressing political and intellectual questions that occupied virtually all contemporary Englishmen. The earliest readers were doubtless attracted by Fénelon's criticisms of the bellicosity and extravagance of Louis XIV's reign, criticisms which applied equally to the career of Louis XV. The Archbishop's attacks on the French king, together with his Quietist interpretation of Catholic theology and his implied assault

⁴I quote from a modern photofacsimile reprint of the first English edition (1695) of Abbé Le Bossu's work (Gainesville, Fla., 1970), p. 15. Le Bossu agreed generally with Boileau's argument (in *Art poétique*, 1674) concerning the importance of the moral in epic poetry, but in his own *Treatise* he heavily emphasized the moral content as a major determinant of form.

on the Jesuits who dominated Versailles, held an inherent appeal for Englishmen who perpetually feared and mistrusted both France and the Roman Church.

In a more positive vein, the humane and enlightened principles of government and individual conduct espoused by *Télémaque* conformed with much that was current in English philosophy and political thought. By means of the relatively simple device of tracing the virtuous Telemachus' difficult search for his father, Fénelon provided occasion for the display of some rather liberal-minded ideals characterized by a calm philosophic rationalism. The book's plot does not require summary here. It is enough to point out that as Telemachus and his faithful tutor Mentor (an embodiment of the goddess Athena) pass through the many lands—some of them, like the island of the lusty Calypso, as unreal or enchanted as any in Homer—lying in their pathway, the reader's attention is always focused on the lesson that the prince himself is learning. The lesson is that aggressive evil and carnal temptation wait around every corner; that in all of man's affairs prudence and reason must govern passion, and that man's public affairs are best conducted by kings whose control over their personal lives and over their foreign and domestic policies make them trustworthy servants not only of their own countries, but of all mankind. The story of *Télémaque* exalts the individual man as the author of his own rectitude and teaches the humane doctrines of benevolence and honesty, moderation and modesty in public and private conduct. Furthermore, the book boldly advocates policies of free enterprise and broad religious tolerance. These positions were anathema to the French regime the author once served, but they accorded with English moral philosophy and with the most popular policies of the Whigs. Fénelon's formal political views, as expressed in his romance, also paralleled jealously guarded post-revolutionary British ideals of a benevolent patriarchal government by consent. The government of the new city of Salente, as organized by Mentor, doubtless held attractions for all readers, of whatever class or political persuasion, who feared arbitrary power and disapproved of the methods of Sir Robert Walpole. Blessed with a wise and selfless monarch, unthreatened by ruthless ministers, and free from legislative factionism, Mentor's Salente is a utopian realization of the Lockean political philosophy upon which Whiggism was founded. It was these ideals that Walpole (and George II), in the minds of many, had overturned.

Despite an anachronistic indulgence in the *merveilleux* far exceeding even the improbabilities of the heroic romance, *Télémaque* (and similar didactic romances) had much to offer an English

audience generally hostile toward frankly romantic fiction.⁵ Another species of romantic narrative, the oriental tale, also turned to political subjects and managed to capture the notice of the public. Aside from Gueulette's extravagant imitations of *The Arabian Nights*, the most successful orientalized stories were political fables by writers like Crébillon *fils*, Eliza Haywood, and George Lyttelton. Such fables all employ the machinery of exotic settings, sultans, seraglios, wicked viziers, and wily magicians. Crébillon's elegant satires of Louis XV called (in translation) *The Skimmer* (1735) and *The Sofa* (1741) gained considerable attention among English readers in the 1730's and 1740's, while Mrs. Haywood's *Adventures of Eovaaï* (1736), a satire of Sir Robert Walpole, enjoyed at least two editions (in 1736 and 1741) prior to the downfall of its victim. George Lyttelton's small book *The Court Secret: A Melancholy Truth* was printed in 1741, 1742, and 1743; its popularity was well deserved, for it is one of the most skillful of the orientalized political fables. Lyttelton's work attacks Walpole furiously, depicting him as a self-seeking vizier named Behemoth who drives a gentle, virtuous man called Achmet to his grave. Achmet had challenged Behemoth on the grounds of political chicanery, fiscal corruption, and complicity with a hostile foreign nation; Behemoth destroys him in self-defense, tricking him into treason and finally suicide. *The Court Secret* perpetrates the most shameless kind of propagandistic satire: it capitalizes on all of Walpole's alleged failings, and viciously distorts recent events in order to support its slanderous thrusts. The historical record shows that the Earl of Scarborough, an enemy of Walpole and a frequenter of Opposition assemblies, died mysteriously just before the publication of Lyttelton's book. But there is no evidence that Walpole persecuted him, as Lyttelton charges, or that he tricked him into a treason that precipitated suicide. *The Court Secret*, then, is not a "Melancholy Truth," but an orientalized political myth about an obscure figure who is depicted as a paragon in the moral order that his persecutor schemes to destroy.⁶

⁵Besides *Télèmaque*, the most popular didactic romances in the second quarter of the eighteenth century were Andrew Ramsay's *Travels of Cyrus*, 1727 (seventh English edition, 1745); and Juan Palafox y Mendoza's *The New Odyssey*, 1659 (English editions in 1735 and 1745), which Fénelon acknowledged as one model for his own work.

⁶Maynard Mack, in Chapter IV of his study of Pope called *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto, 1969), shows how the Augustan literary establishment (of which George Lyttelton himself was a member) made considerable use of oriental machinery in its frequent satires of Walpole. It would appear that, by this example, native writers of oriental romance were led in the direction of political satire. Incidentally, satiric modes such as the secret history (Mrs. Manley's *New Atalantis*) and the "spy"-letter tale (Marana's *Turkish Spy*) would not have been regarded in the same light as Lyttelton's romance, even though

The Court Secret functions as romance in only a limited way. Like the other orientalized political fables, it lays claim to the notice of the public by addressing topical issues quite deliberately, thus directing attention to contemporary life and away from its own remote settings and fantastic occurrences. With the exception of Gueulette's exotic fantasies, the other kinds of romantic writing I have described worked to similar effects, actually contributing to the anti-romantic climate of the period. So far as this function is concerned, the appeal of such works coincided with the appeal of the "new species of writing" offered so successfully in the 1740's by Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett, whose own anti-romantic drift was surely encouraged by the general climate. All three of these novelists viewed their works as anti-romances of some sort, although in very different ways.⁷ Richardson saw *Pamela* as the kind of new work which might neutralize the "pomp and parade of romance-writing."⁸ He may have idealized his virtuous heroine, but he endowed her with a distinctive, sensitive personality that is finely delineated in the dramatic record of her experience. Later, in the Preface to *Clarissa*, Richardson very carefully reminded his readers that in offering his heroine as "an exemplar to her sex," it was imperative she be "not in all respects a perfect character"; for it was "not only natural, but it was necessary, that she should have some faults. . . . To have been impeccable, must have . . . carried our idea of her from woman to angel."⁹

Fielding, in his theoretical statements, stressed the satirical qualities of his own works, and made Cervantes his acknowledged model. His mock-epic flourishes and his focus on ordinary people and contemporary affairs constituted a strong reaction to romance.¹⁰ He was emphatic on the desirability of "mixed" characters; the prefatory chapter to Book X of *Tom Jones* argues that in fiction nothing can be more convincing or "of more moral Use" than little

they were frequently orientalized in some degree; Mrs. Manley, Marana, and their imitators posed as "historians," and were more or less accepted as such by contemporary readers.

⁷Ronald Paulson, in his book *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 1967), takes a similar view of the major novelists of the 1740's, although he does not take Richardson's anti-romantic posture very seriously. See Chapters III, IV, and V of this study. See also Dieter Shulz, "'Novel,' 'Romance,' and Popular Fiction in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *SP*, 70 (1973), 77-91.

⁸*Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford, 1964), p. 41.

⁹Everyman Library Edition (London, 1932), I, xiv. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and will be cited by volume and page numbers in my text.

¹⁰For a rather full discussion of Fielding's attitudes toward romance, see Arthur L. Cooke, "Henry Fielding and the Writers of Heroic Romance," *PMLA*, 62 (1947), 984-994.

"Imperfections" of character, since "such form a Kind of Surprise, more apt to affect and dwell upon our Minds. . . ."¹¹ Fielding is just as urgent on the question of believability in the fable as a whole. The introductory chapters to Books VII, VIII, IX, and XVII of *Tom Jones* address this question very directly. The introduction to Book VIII, for example, sneers at "that Species of Writing which is called the Marvellous," and then rules that every writer should keep "within the Bounds of Possibility" (I, 395, 397). But Fielding's narrator goes on: "Nor is Possibility alone sufficient to justify us, we must keep likewise within the Rules of Probability" (I, 400).

Smollett made the most sustained attacks on romance of all three major novelists. The Preface to *Roderick Random* indicts romance as the opiate of foolish minds. Its origins are identical with those of epic and tragedy, Smollett observes, but "when the minds of men were debauched, by the imposition of priestcraft, to the most absurd pitch of credulity, the authors of romance arose, and, losing sight of probability, filled their performances with the most monstrous hyperboles."¹² In the same Preface, Smollett voices his admiration for Fielding's revered mock-romancer Cervantes, and announces that in his own novel he has followed a variation on Cervantean fiction as practiced by "other Spanish and French authors," and most particularly Le Sage, whose *Gil Blas* had "described the knavery and foibles of life, with infinite humour and sagacity" (p. 4). Smollett's satiric portrayal of contemporary life is vivid, brusque, sometimes savage; nothing is idealized about the world through which his picaresque hero moves. Some of Roderick's adventures are quite extraordinary, but Roderick himself, as Smollett conceived him, is a young man of "modest merit struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed, from his own want of experience, as well as from the selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind" (p. 5).

Each of the major novelists of the 1740's tried in his own way to offer a convincing portrait of contemporary experience, dramatized in the lives of familiar characters. The familiarity of their characters was very likely as much a moral and epistemological as a literary matter. Different as their various heroes and heroines are, they all function as exemplary figures struggling toward Christian heroism

¹¹*The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, Conn., 1975), II, 527. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and will be cited by volume and page numbers in my text.

¹²Everyman Library Edition (London, 1927), p. 4. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and will be cited by page numbers in my text.

in a hostile environment. Given the didactic emphasis in the major novels, the currency of works like *Télémaque* suddenly seems very relevant, although Fénelon's romance unreservedly indulges in inflated characterizations and the *merveilleux*. The early latitudinarian argument for the "good man as hero" receives very emphatic, if varied, endorsement in the fiction of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett, and that argument included a strong position on the moral efficacy of ordinary, believable exemplars as aids in the quest for Christian truth and the good life.

These three novelists dismissed the "marvellous" as unworthy and inappropriate, but they did not totally renounce romance. Their conversion to an anti-romantic mode was only partial. Each of the major novelists made tacit concessions to a tradition that so recently enjoyed the favor of English readers, and was to be renewed in the romances of the 1750's. Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett specifically rejected the extravagances of orientalized fiction, with its magic and improbable mystery—in *Tom Jones* (XVII, i), Fielding made plain his own objections to tales of "*Arabians and Persians*" with their "*Genii and Fairies*" (II, 876).¹³ Romantic conventions from other modes, however, recur in their works; the appeal of these writers to the contemporary audience therefore coincided in yet another way with that of the "anti-romantic" romancers. In effect, the major novelists heightened and intensified the stories of their "ordinary" characters and "familiar" circumstances by importing some of the attitudes and strategies of romance.

Richardson's persistent treatment of the theme of sentimental love repeats a romantic convention, which was also a convention of the contemporary theater and of the amatory novels of Eliza Haywood and her imitators. Richardson's novels, however, focus narrowly on the moral dimensions of the theme and use it very precisely as a device for defining the moral worth of his characters. That is to say, in his stories requited love and happy marriage signify the rewards due to the virtuous at the end of a moral struggle, and marriage is seen as the state nearest to heavenly bliss. The wedding of Sir Charles Grandison and Harriet Byron is a triumphant event. Mr. B. calls Pamela a "romantic girl," and the novel itself is a moralized re-telling of the romantic Cinderella legend. Even Clarissa Harlowe's melancholy

¹³The only instance of orientalism in the major novels comes in Book XII (Chapters xi-xii) of *Tom Jones*, when the hero and Partridge meet a band of gypsies. The episode is really a political parable attacking the Jacobites. See Martin C. Battestin, "*Tom Jones* and 'His Egyptian Majesty': Fielding's Parable of Government," *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 68-77, for full discussion of the episode in this light.

story concludes with a version of this same strategy of a happy ending in matrimony, for the heroine goes as a "bride" to her "marriage" in heaven. In pursuit of his didactic purpose, Richardson tends to idealize his heroes and heroines in a manner that makes them parallel those of romance in some important ways. But there are essential distinctions to be made between what the romances had done with character, and what Richardson was attempting to do in his "new species of writing." In *Rambler* No. 4 (March 31, 1750), when speaking of the "works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted," Dr. Johnson carefully stated one overriding consideration distinguishing "realistic" narrative from romance. It is widely believed that Johnson was defending the author of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* in this essay. The "province" of this kind of writing, he observed, "is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder; it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles."¹⁴ From this premise, Johnson argued that the "task of our present writers" properly demands, "together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse and accurate observation of the living world." These writers are "engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance."

In other words, according to Johnson, the novelist's function is to hold the mirror up to life and human nature, and to reflect its general truths. But this is an ethical as well as an aesthetic problem. The authors of these works are "at liberty, though not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such a situation, as to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones." What Johnson's essay really discusses here is a variation upon the neo-classical ideal of *la belle nature*—the doctrine that the "mirror" of art should reveal an exemplary pattern, a generalized version of archetypal nature on which the eye might be fixed, and that this pattern must conform to the truth of empirical

¹⁴I quote from Johnson's essay as conveniently reprinted in *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, comp. Ioan Williams (New York, 1970), pp. 142-146.

observation. The extravagant characterizations of seventeenth-century French heroic romance, and those of didactic romance as well, were indebted to this ideal for their original sanction. These genres, however, and especially the heroic romance, distorted the ideal by imparting to their flat heroes and heroines suprahuman qualities which were not supported by the realities of life itself and which, with repetition, generated mere stereotypes having even less validity as representatives of general nature.

It is not clear just how aware of the ideal of *la belle nature* Richardson may have been. In his fiction he is not so close to it as Johnson implies in his comments; his allegiance to that ideal seems to have been partial and indirect. Richardson avoids the "marvellous," and his technique is that of circumstantial fidelity to empirical reality. His heroes and heroines are certainly offered as "living" exemplars, or models. They are very original portraits, vividly drawn from ordinary life, and their particular heroism rests on a personalized, uplifting spiritual code of honor and on a conception of the unremitting pursuit of simple goodness as the highest courage. In these respects, they differ markedly from the personages of romance. But they are also extremely subjective creations, endowed with amazing and highly individualized beauty, endurance, and powers of mind. In addition, they tend to be relatively unflawed. In some striking ways Richardson's idealized characters resemble those found in *Celenia*, *Télémaque*, and *The Adventures of Eovaaï*. Pamela Andrews, with all the wit, cunning, and energy that give life to her character, is nevertheless projected as an almost flawless creature, a romantic heroine re-cast as a serving maid. (Some readers would have recognized that her name comes from Sidney's *Arcadia*.¹⁵) Clarissa Harlowe, although a more mature creation and a much more convincingly representative figure, is still very grandly romanticized as the ideal of female virtue. Even as he argues for his heroine's "faults," Richardson declares that "As far as is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect, considering the people she had to deal with and those with whom she was inseparably connected," Clarissa "is perfect" (I, xiv). Sir Charles Grandison is a most glaring monster of perfection, for he is almost without a blemish. *Grandison*, says Richardson in his Preface, was written upon his friends' pleas that, having already provided the world with two matchless heroines, he should finally favor it with "the character and actions of a man of TRUE HONOUR."¹⁶

¹⁵See Ian Watt, "The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding," *Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), 325-326.

¹⁶Shakespeare Head Edition (Oxford, 1930).

In Book III, Chapter i of *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding declares "once for all": "I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species."¹⁷ His endeavor, we are told, is to "hold the Glass to thousands in their Closets" (p. 189)—to depict general truths about human nature, so that his readers might confront the reality about themselves and their acquaintance within the world of his novel. In part, perhaps, Fielding was reacting to what he seems to have regarded as *Pamela's* undue glorification of an unrepresentative heroine. Richardson is doubtless one of those modern "Novel" writers chastised earlier in this same chapter, writers who "without any Assistance from Nature or History, record Persons who never were, or will be, and Facts which never did nor possibly can happen: Whose Heroes are of their own Creation, and their Brains the Chaos whence all their Materials are collected" (p. 187). But this chapter of *Joseph Andrews* is interesting in the present connection chiefly because it suggests Fielding's own version of the neoclassical ideal of *la belle nature*, which he (as a comic writer) had extended to enable him to describe the "Actions and Characters" of all kinds and classes of men, from low life to high life (p. 185). Fielding was steeped in neo-classical doctrines; his own idealized portraits may occasionally bear resemblances to those in romantic fiction, but (unlike Richardson's) they derive directly from the older tradition. Many are quite pictorial in their effects, and they attempt to render not only the particular aspects of visible human nature—what Erwin Panofsky calls "'common' nature"¹⁸—but also the general and the ideal.

The young titular hero of *Joseph Andrews*, a footman and paragon of male virtue, having been provided with a mock-epic lineage (I, ii) is described (I, viii) at the "one and twentieth Year of his Age" as a youth whose exact proportions and handsome mien, even to "those who have not seen many Noblemen, would give an Idea of Nobility" (pp. 38-39). Joseph's beloved Fanny Goodwill, a paragon of female virtue, is similarly described (II, xii); of a perfect shape and plumpness, she is endowed by nature with a neck whose "Whiteness" the "finest *Italian* Paint would be unable to reach," and blessed with a "natural Gentility, superior to the Acquisition of Art, and which surprized all who beheld her" (pp. 152-153). Fielding is often very deliberate in "mixing" imperfections into his heroes, but the character of Parson

¹⁷*Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, Conn., 1967), p. 189. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and will be cited by page numbers in my text.

¹⁸*Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, N. Y., 1955), p. 266.

Adams is an intensely visualized comic idealization of the "Good-natur'd" man, a saintly creature whose naiveté and little vanities over his excellences as preacher and schoolmaster in no way qualify his function as a "Character of perfect Simplicity" (p. 10). *Tom Jones* (IV, ii) introduces Sophia Western with a burlesque epic flourish ("Hushed be every ruder breath.") but calms to a modulated, deliberate description of the character, an exemplar of all natural beauties and virtues. Sophia was

a middle-sized Woman; but rather inclining to tall. Her Shape was not only exact, but extremely delicate; and the nice Proportion of her Arms promised the truest Symmetry in her Limbs. . . . Her Neck was long and finely turned; and here, if I was not afraid of offending her Delicacy, I might justly say, the highest Beauties of the famous *Venus de Medicis* were outdone. . . . Such was the Outside of *Sophia*; nor was this beautiful Frame disgraced by an Inhabitant unworthy of it.
(I, 156-157)

Although Fielding's portraits are directly indebted to the traditional neo-classical ideal of *la belle nature*, they are, like Richardson's, of familiar personages. Quite obviously part of the strategy of the idealized descriptions in the work of both novelists is to exalt familiar characters as moral exemplars. Furthermore, Fielding's pose as the author of "comic-prose-epics," while it suggests his rejection of heroic modes as inappropriate for contemporary writers, likewise serves to impart heroic status to figures drawn from ordinary life.¹⁹ The pose has another purpose, of course. Like Cervantes, Fielding is a comic romancer. As he implies in *Tom Jones* (VIII, i), when kept "within the Rules of Credibility" his mockery is a license to "deal as much in the Wonderful as he pleases," in order to "surprize the Reader," "engage his Attention," and "charm him" (I, 406). Through his burlesque of romance and epic machinery Fielding actually imports elements of the "marvellous" into his own work. For one thing, he endows Fortune with a very long arm. For another, moments like the Upton Inn episode of *Tom Jones*, while at least marginally plausible in the events, stretch credibility by a mock-epic rendering that is itself a form of the "marvellous." But Fielding employs his epic machinery in the service of his comic realism, as a device to heighten the significance of the real as he presents it. Fielding also exploits the theme of sentimental love, although he

¹⁹Sean Shesgreen's book *Literary Portraits in the Novels of Henry Fielding* (De Kalb, Illinois, 1972) gives extended treatment to some of the aspects of characterization in Fielding's novels that I have been discussing.

characteristically subordinates it to his sweeping satirical commentary on the contemporary world through which his characters journey. His repetition of this romantic convention, however, functions to virtually the same end as it does in Richardson's novels. The rewards in love and marital bliss that accrue to Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Billy Booth serve as a measure of their moral stature—for Jones and Booth they come after a long progress toward Christian heroism. The sudden reversals of fortune that make the material happiness of these heroes possible are also derived from romantic convention, at least in part; all three heroes rise from a *nadir* into wealth, while Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones learn their true identities and climb several notches in the social hierarchy as well.²⁰

Of the three major novelists of the 1740's, Smollett depends least upon romance. The theme of sentimental love does enter *Roderick Random*, though it is much subdued—as it is later in *Peregrine Pickle* (1751). Smollett permits Roderick to idealize his beloved Narcissa, much in the manner of a romancer: "So much sweetness appeared in the countenance and carriage of this amiable apparition, that my heart was captivated at first sight . . ." (p. 219). The course of *Random's* mercurial career, like that of Tom Jones, is abruptly brought to an end by a stroke of good fortune: he discovers his long-lost father, now a wealthy resident of Brazil; his newly won moral integrity is subsequently rewarded in happy marriage. To a certain extent the picaresque hero himself is romanticized as a wayward but good-natured youth, driven by adversity into roguery, but destined for moral nobility. These are all very rudimentary gestures in the direction of romance. Smollett's first novel (and *Peregrine Pickle* as well) is much closer to both the posture and the texture of *Gil Blas*. A modified picaresque fiction, it notices romance mainly by inverting it. Like Le Sage's work, Roderick Random focuses on an "anti-hero," and seeks to expose through relentless satire the seamiest sides of contemporary life.

²⁰Sheridan Baker, in his article called "Henry Fielding's Comic Romances," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, 45 (1960), 411-419, argues that the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* actually defines Fielding's work as comic romance, a mode rather different from comic prose epic. Baker sees all of Fielding's fiction as falling into line with this mode; in "Fielding's *Amelia* and the Materials of Romance," *PQ*, 41 (1962), 437-449, he tries to show specifically how the author's last novel departs from the realms of "epic" and "private history," and follows instead the "unfactual and inquotidian tradition of romance" (p. 438). Baker's interesting but somewhat extreme view is corrected by Homer Goldberg in an essay entitled "Comic Prose Epic or Comic Romance: The Argument of the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*," *PQ*, 43 (1964), 193-215. Goldberg justifies Fielding's claim that a "comic romance is a comic Epic Poem in Prose"; his book, *The Art of 'Joseph Andrews'* (Chicago, 1969), further elaborates this argument, and develops some of its formal implications.

The concessions made by Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett to a romance tradition are important, and probably helped their "new species of writing" to gain the notice of the public. Furthermore, as we have seen, the devices and strategies borrowed from romantic writing and related sources contributed to the enrichment of these stories of familiar life, and helped to heighten the significance of their characters' experience. But none of this really changes the major writers' stance in opposition to romance, which they tended to dismiss for what they regarded as its faulty and therefore dangerous vision of life. Any student of their remarkably fresh and original works recognizes the insistence of their topical relevance—Richardson's social myths, for example, or Fielding's anti-Jacobitism in *Tom Jones*, or Smollett's criticisms of the Navy administration in the Carthage episodes of *Roderick Random*. The very topicality of these novels is a feature shared with romances like *Celenia*, *Télémaque*, and *The Court Secret*, which have already been described as anti-romantic because of their strategy of reference to topical issues. In the final analysis, of course, the "anti-romantic" novels of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett differ fundamentally from these shamelessly exotic lesser works. For the major novels of the 1740's are essentially circumstantial records of man's broad social and moral experience, seriously conceived and carefully wrought as authoritative artistic statements about observable life. As such, they achieved extraordinary success among their first readers. Our continued interest in them testifies to the clarity and permanence of their authors' vision.

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