

Joseph Andrews by Henry Fielding as a Satire of 18th century.

Henry Fielding is widely studied today as one of the chief begetters of the modernist movement in novel and as a master who embodied in realistic prose a panoramic survey of the contemporary society. With the novelty and vitality of the writings of Henry Fielding exerted a major influence on the succeeding writers and dominated the English fiction until the end of the 19th Century.

Fielding's brilliant tour de force *Joseph Andrews* is an amazing depiction of the 18th century English social life and manners. It mirrors with rare force and realism, the blemishes of mankind in its true face. The novel, in its entirety, is an impassioned satire on the moral and social ills that beset the 18th century English society. In this novel we are confronted with a chameleonic society that frequently changes its appearance to gratify personal lusts of various kinds. The social life portrayed by Fielding is scrutinized in every facets of this society. The novel depicts human beings camouflaged in various shades of vanity, hypocrisy and narcissism. Here, Fielding essentially becomes a spokesman of his age and seeks to come out strongly against the affected behavior of the so-called respectable society of the day. The reader becomes a witness of characters who have a life of their own, but it is the essence of humanity, distilled through Fielding's own vision. It is presented to us through the lines:

"I describe not men, but manners, not an individual, but species".

Fielding's exploration begins with his survey on the nature and temperament of women of his time. Women of all classes were proud and amorous to some extent. The sensuality of women is reflected at its best through the representatives like Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop and Betty. Lady Booby feels greatly attracted by Joseph's manliness and personality and seeks in vain to evoke his sexual response to gratify her sensual appetite. Mrs. Slipslop also follows her mistress' path and tries to win Joseph as a lover. Even Betty falls in love with Joseph and seeks in vain

to have sexual gratification from him. All these amorous intentions show a fair picture of the amoral side of the 18th century women

The society that Fielding portrays in *Joseph Andrews* is extremely inhuman, cold, indifferent, uncharitable and narcissistic. The insensitive hardness of this society is clearly exposed in the stage-coach scene in which we find inhuman stubbornness. When Postilion tells the Coachman that someone is groaning within a ditch, he bids the postilion to **"Go on, Sirrah, we are confounded late"**. Then there is a lady who reacts in a contemptible manner, when Postilion relates Joseph's nakedness : **"O Jesus, a naked Man! Dear Coachman, drive on and leave him"**. Thus both the coachman and the lady decide to leave Joseph to his own lot, the coachman because he is behind schedule, and the lady because she cannot tolerate the idea of aiding a naked man. Seeing the gentlemen, Joseph appeals to them and details the circumstances of his situation, upon which an old gentleman cries: **"Robbed! Let us make all the haste imaginable, or we shall be robbed too"**, showing again a similar willingness as the others have displayed to abandon Joseph. In addition, the other gentleman, who studies law, deems that they should not abandon Joseph at all, although for contemptible reasons. Although he agrees with the rest that **"he wished they had past by without taking any notice"**, his final conclusion is that they would be held accountable for murder if Joseph died in that situation and he therefore thought **"it advisable to save the poor creature's life, for their own sakes"**. Although Joseph does require clothing to fight against the cold in his enfeebled state, both the lawyer and the older gentlemen do not condescend to grant any assistance. The coachman also declines, in spite of his two large coats, because of fears that **"they should be made bloody"** At last, it is the postilion, **"a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost, voluntarily strips off a great coat, his only garment"** and swore that he would rather remain in a shirt than **"suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition"**. Here Fielding shows the contrast between the attitude of the rich passengers and that of the poor Postilion. What sets him apart is not his class, but the fact that he alone dismisses his own comfort and he is the only person who considers Joseph a **"fellow-**

creature" worthy of such rescue. Fielding emphatically declares: "**High People**" are "**People of Fashion**", but that they are not "**higher in their Dimensions**" nor in "**their Characters**" The incident gives ample scope to Fielding for satirizing the pretenses and affectations of an essentially inhuman society.

Fielding also provides some glimpses of the chaotic, greedy, opportunistic and insincere sides of the 18th century society. The chaotic side is exposed by the robbery incident. It is also revealed by the incident in which a villain attempts to rape Fanny. Human greed is exposed by the characters of the surgeons and the clergymen. The surgeon refused to treat Joseph because he was unable to pay fees. The clergymen of the time were the most selfish and materialistic. Parson Barnabas and Parson Trulliber are the true embodiments of corrupt clergy. Then there is a squire who is fond of hunting hares, tries to satisfy his lustful desire for Fanny taking advantages of her poor condition. The insincerity of the society is also revealed by the depiction of the justices, who were as dishonest as the clergymen and the squires. Justice Frolick, for instance, goes out of his way to send Joseph and Fanny to prison, without any trial, only to satisfy a whim of Lady Booby.

In brief, *Joseph Andrews* is a fine social document that represents an inclusive picture of the 18th century English society. The novel directs its satire not only against particular individuals but also against the follies and vices of the entire society.

●The End●

Regards;

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