

Fielding's Use of Comparisons

in *Joseph Andrews*

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The eighteenth century in England was one of conflict under a veneer of calm. The social and political order which seemingly fell apart during the English Civil War of 1642 struggled anew for stability in an unstable world. As Pat Rogers points out, the interests of the age were varied, including not only politics, religion, and societal divisions but also psychology, art, and landscape gardening ("Introduction" 72-74). The writers of that period reflected those interests in their work; the focus seemed

the continuity and the dignity of the uniquely human—man's will, conscience, and yearning for order and peace—menaced as always by brutality, vanity, sloth, and stupidity.... (Tillotson et al. 18)

In November, 1740, Samuel Richardson published his novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, which in epistolary form sought to instruct "handsome Girls, who were obliged to go out to Service, as we phrase it, how to avoid the Snares that might be laid against their Virtue..." (qtd. in Tillotson et al. 767). The "menacing" of Pamela's virtue or moral stability by Mr. B——'s importunities, or rather her refusal to submit to Mr. B—— without the blessing of matrimony, seemed ridiculous to another novelist of the period, Henry Fielding. Although Fielding did not disagree with Richardson's moral purpose, he became "heartily disgusted" at Pamela's "prudential morality" (Tillotson et al. 727) and set out to contrast that heroine with his own description of, as Maurice Johnson notes,

life as it really is—with all its foibles and mild madresses strongly delineated: the affectations of deceit, ostentation, and avariciousness, the vanity and hypocrisy.... (58)

Published anonymously in 1742, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of His Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams...* reveals Fielding's concern for truth. Martin C. Battestin states that "[t]he difficulty of distinguishing truth from appearances is Fielding's constant theme..." (*Providence* 178), and with such purpose, his characters are "neither idealizations nor monsters," but fully human (Johnson 60). In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding examines the nature of the ridiculous: its source, he says, is affectation proceeding from either vanity or hypocrisy (xxix).¹ His characters reflect that affectation, those masks behind which social beings hide their true natures, which Fielding saw operating in Richardson's heroine. Even Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Fanny Goodwill are "masked" in a way—he as a footman, she as an orphan—but their true natures, taken from them by Fate (or the gypsies), become known to them and to everyone else before the novel ends. Prior to the revelations of the poor pedlar, the masking is only alluded to by the narrator in his discussion of Joseph's and Fanny's outward appearance.

As Sean Shesgreen notes, Fielding claimed in his "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" that the inward passions indicate their presence externally in the countenance (78). Because Joseph in reality is the son of a gentleman, his outward appearance gives him "an air which, to those who have not seen many nobleman, would give an idea of nobility" (I, viii, 22). In Book III, the narrator refers again to this reflection of internal qualities in outward forms: "... as the drapery of a picture, which though fashion varies at different times, the resemblance of the countenance is not by those means diminished" (i, 174). Joseph, though he works as a footman, remains a gentleman in action and appearance; Mrs. Tow-wouse of the Dragon Inn, though she in an earlier age may have sat upon a throne (the narrator imagines), would remain hypocritical. However, other characters' features do not seem to correspond with their internal natures: Timotheus (plain Tim) of the Lion Inn looks like a lion but behaves like a lamb (I, xi, 34); the doctor who plays a trick on Parson Adams in Book III had "a gravity of countenance which would have deceived a more knowing man" (vii, 235); the Catholic priest is seen by the host of an inn first as having the face of an honest

man and then that of a "confounded rogue" (III, viii, 239-40). In *Joseph Andrews* itself, Fielding's view remains ambivalent at best as the character study reflects not only one person's "countenance" but also his viewer's own sensibilities.

The narrator, in one of his many digressions, states that his "history" of Joseph Andrews is valid because he writes "not of men, but of manners; not of an individual, but a species" (III, i, 173).² As such, the minute or particular details of occupation or social position are not important to the discernment of truth or moral character. For example, when Joseph has been beaten, robbed, and stripped by two ruffians, only a lowly postilion (later transported for stealing chickens) offers him a garment with which to cover himself. The gentlemen, ladies, and coachman spend time laughing at Joseph's predicament, reflecting on their own "discomfort" at being confronted by such a naked apparition, and generally ignoring the opportunity to help one in need (I, xii). Actions rather than position reveal the moral nature of characters. Although much of the narrator's reflections on morality takes the form of "objective" observation of action, he and other characters also depend on explicit comparisons in formulating their own conception of others and, in that way, influencing the perception gained by the reader. As Sheridan Baker observes, by using "the durable and typical ideas... [and] permanent types of character" Fielding can "represent the lasting truths of human nature" (360). Those "durable and typical ideas" are often comparisons taken from Fielding's "own version of 'nature' [i. e. his society] . . . , combining incidental satire with an implicit satiric characterization of the world assumed as a familiar point of reference between his reader and himself" (Goldberg 247).

The small number of characters (generally from the lower social classes) who show positive values are opposed by others from all classes who "expose worldly vanity and hypocrisy" (Shesgreen 73). Characters, compared among themselves, are also likened to classical and Biblical figures, animals, objects, and even persons depicted in Hogarth's works. Arthur Sherbo notes that writers would often make comparisons instead of giving detailed physical description of characters (187). In *Joseph Andrews*, indeed, Fielding (or the narrator) seldom focuses on a character's

physical attributes: Lady Booby, Mr. Wilson, Parson Barnabas, Fanny's "would-be" ravisher, and others are not given "looks," unless one wishes to refer to the thickness of a skull or the fleeting emotion of surprise so evident on a character's face that the narrator often refuses to describe it.

Sheridan Baker notes that the comparisons which are made in *Joseph Andrews* and other Fielding works are often clichéd expressions. One popular eighteenth century cliché which links courtship to a hunt is used by Fielding in Book IV, Chapter vii:

[B]y the age of ten, [girls] have contracted such a dread and abhorrence of the above-named monster [a boy], that whenever they see him they fly from him as the innocent hare doth from the greyhound. (288)

Other clichés in *Joseph Andrews* include hearts as flint (II, ii, 77; III, xi, 249); persons in a state of surprise as statues (I, viii, 24; II, iv, 92; IV, xiv, 325); Love as an armoury with arrows, cannon, and kisses in its artillery (I, xviii, 69; II, iv, 100; IV, i, 264); love as an illness (II, iv, 86; IV, xiii, 317); the passions as a horse to be bridled and controlled (I, viii, 21; II, vi, 109); a singer as a nightingale (II, xii, 140); a coward as a chicken (II, ix, 123); and loud snoring as the braying of an ass (III, vi, 220). However, such expressions do not detract from the value of the novel as some critics might suppose; as Baker states, the use of the cliché, "the favorite old hat of speech, is characteristic of the talker" (361). The use of familiar comparisons aids the narrator in forming a bond with his reader, as well. Homer Goldberg considers the narrator's use of similes and metaphors to be part of "an amalgam of facetiously adopted manners" (235); thus the clichés add another creative, though often repetitious, layer to the narrator's own mask.³

Although the narrator and other characters avoid physical description for the most part, they do rely on other forms of portrayal. Sometimes a character will compare another figure to an object, without realizing that such a comparison reflects more upon his own nature. In Book II, Chapter xvi, Parson Adams, Joseph, and Fanny meet a gentleman who proceeds to promise them food, shelter, horses, and money. However,

the gentleman then follows each offer with a politely worded denial; Joseph states that "those masters who promise the most perform the least" (164), a certain reminder of the gentleman's earlier comparison of the parson of that parish to "a puffed-up empty human bladder" (159). Although this gentleman appears generous to a fault, he is in reality empty of any real "inclination to serve" others (160). In a more developed attempt to show a comparison reflecting on oneself instead of on one's intended target, the narrator records in Book III, Chapter x, the conversation of a poet and a player concerning the current poor state of the drama. The poet blames the actors while the player denigrates the playwrights. Although the discussion ends without the men reaching a compromise, the comparisons which the poet makes throughout his speeches reflect upon his own writing ability. He compares plays to trees and mushrooms which "shoot up spontaneously, as it were, in a rich soil," the muses to vines which may be pruned, and the unreceptive town to "a peevish child" (245). Unfortunately, this poet's "rich soil" seems covered with more fertilizer than growing plants.

Generally, the more extended comparisons belong to the narrator. His most successful comparisons are memorable, incorporating legal and military terms, animal imagery, and more. The narrator states that human life is like a chess game in which often a person, by guarding one side of the board, "is apt to leave an unguarded opening on the other" (I, xvi, 55). When describing the shift from fear to love in a young girl's feelings for a boy ("the monster"), the narrator says that the human mind tends "to skip from one extreme to its opposite, as easily, and almost as suddenly, as a bird from one bough to another" (IV, vii, 288). In reference to Mr. Tow-wouse's adultery with Betty the chambermaid, he compares human passion to "water which is stopt from its usual current in one place" only to trickle in another direction (I, xviii, 69).

The narrator focuses again on the passions in his examination of Lady Booby's agitated mental state after she has dismissed Joseph from her service. Prior to his dismissal, Joseph has truthfully denied the charge of impregnating one of Lady Booby's maids and has steadfastly refused to "dally" secretly, and therefore honorably, with the lady herself. Instead

of remarking upon the similarity with the Biblical Joseph and Potiphar's wife, the narrator chooses to compare her indecisiveness at "Joseph's sentence" to a courtroom trial in which two lawyers, Serjeant Bramble and Serjeant Puzzle, merely submit arguments that result in

confusion in the tortured minds of the hearers . . . and neither judge nor jury can possibly make anything of the matter; all things are so enveloped by the careful serjeants in doubt and obscurity. (I , ix, 29)

Goldberg applauds this comparison, "[f]or all its unexpectedness," as "a vivid and accurate rendering of Lady Booby's tangled emotional conflict" (263); Henry Fielding's own career as a lawyer undoubtedly aided the vividness and accuracy of this description.

Later, in Book III, Chapter ix, the narrator draws upon military jargon to describe a fight in an inn bedchamber as Adams and Joseph struggle to protect Fanny against "an old half-pay officer" and his men. As the two sides meet on "the field, or rather chamber of battle," the tactics described follow terms of military attack: the captain marches to the door and opens it to find "the enemy drawn up three deep; Adams in the front and Fanny in the rear" (243). Such a comparison aids the narrator in his attempt to reveal the truth behind Fanny's abduction by the captain: the captain's master lusts after her. The fight in the chamber sees as weapons one "hangar" or shortsword, a full chamber pot, and a dirty mop. An earlier battle in which Adams is attacked by a pack of hounds is also seemingly commemorated by the narrator as he overloads the reader's senses with mock-Homeric praise of the *dogs'* courage, helped as he is by "the muse [who] hath with her usual dignity related this prodigious battle, a battle we apprehend never equalled by any poet, romance or life writer whatever..." (III, vi, 225). The narrator's too obvious support of the captain and of the dogs leads the reader to side with "the enemy," in these cases the actual heroes of his tale.

In the same descriptive manner, the narrator reveals Fanny's hopeful ravisher, he of the thick skull, to be similar to a fighting cock when responding to a "rival," immediately quitting his amorous play and turning on his competition (II, ix, 122). However, his rival is none other

than Parson Adams, a man whose wife later rebukes him for advocating a foolish doctrine "that husbands can love their wives too well" (IV, viii, 300). Perhaps a hen-pecked husband but "no chicken," Adams rescues Fanny; he shows himself capable of defeating both the ravisher and the narrator's own simile (Goldberg 235). Surprisingly enough, Adams receives more comparisons to animals than any other character in the novel: he is as fast in walking as a greyhound is in running (II, vii, 114); as unaware of societal mores as the cat on the table (II, xiii, 144); "as brisk as a bee" (III, ii, 176); as quick as "a large jack-hare" when chased by dogs (III, vi, 223); as dangerous as a badger at bay (III, vi, 227); and possessed both of a "fist rather less than the knuckle of an ox" (I, xv, 51) and of a snore "louder than the usual braying of the animal with long ears" (III, vi, 220). Why Adams, whom Fielding calls "a character of perfect simplicity" and innocence, should receive such varied comments possibly relates to his portrayal as a man with social flaws of his own: as Johnson states, "[d]ivine excellence and human defect are joined in Parson Adams" (81).

Other characters are joined more forcibly by the narrator to animal traits. Notably in the instances of Mrs. Slipslop, Mrs. Tow-woose, Parson Trulliber, and Beau Didapper, the narrator relies upon physical characterization to link human nature with animal nature. Although Sherbo states that Fielding shows little consistent interest in physical characterization (180), the writer of *Joseph Andrews* shows an admirable facility in "[c]hoosing animals that are symbolic of the moral or intellectual qualities he sees in a figure" (Shesgreen 44). Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby's waiting-gentlewoman, resembles a cow: she is short, fat, of a reddish hue, with small eyes and a large nose. For the narrator, the resemblance is particularly striking because of the "two brown globes which she carried before her" and which Adams later terms "two mountains" (I, vi, 15; IV, xiv, 323). Shesgreen relates the cow to sloth and animality (99), the first of which qualities seems counteracted by the second in the narrator's next description:

As when a hungry tigress, who long has traversed the woods in fruitless search, sees within the reach of her claws a lamb, she prepares to leap on her prey; or as a voracious pike of immense

size, surveys through the liquid element a roach or gudgeon, which cannot escape her jaws, opens them wide to swallow the little fish; so did Mrs. Slipslop prepare to lay her violent amorous hands on the poor Joseph.... (I , vi, 17)⁴

Mrs. Slipslop tends to equate lust and food, a further note of her "animality": in Book IV, Chapter i, she says her body is not "meat for a footman" (266) and later compares her enjoyment of a man to the eating of sweetmeats (xiii, 317).

Mrs. Tow-wouse, whose husband owns the Dragon Inn, also receives the loving descriptive care of the narrator. She, too, is short and has small eyes. In contrast to Slipslop, though, she is thin and crooked, with a sharp nose, thin lips, and a loud, coarse voice (I , xiv, 46). Goldberg remarks that the narrator's description of her face seems that of a topographer, her forehead a type of terrain which "descended in a declivity," or that of a naturalist, the "two bones" of her cheeks like those of some specimen (233-4). Her actions, however, are necessary for the reader to flesh out the narrator's comparison: she curses constantly and seems without charity for the wounded Joseph until she believes him a gentleman. Later, she reacts with such violence to her husband's dalliance with Betty the chambermaid that her association to the small and ferocious weasel becomes clearer. Because that animal is not named in the narrator's description, the reader might also believe that Mrs. Tow-wouse is a veritable dragon herself, as she seems to breathe fire every time she opens her mouth. As Betty tries to borrow one of Mr. Tow-wouse's shirts for Joseph to wear, Mrs. Tow-wouse responds,

Touch one if you dare, you slut.... [Y]our master is a pretty sort of a man, to take in naked vagabonds, and clothe them with his own clothes. I shall have no such doings. If you offer to touch anything, I'll throw the chamber-pot at your head. . . . (I , xii, 40)

Next in the parade of animals is Parson Trulliber, a man whose enormous size and greed make the link to a hog easy enough without mention of his week-day profession: he "was a parson on Sundays, but all the other six might more properly be called a farmer" whose chief duties lay in taking care of his hogs. The narrator draws this comparison

even further when he describes Trulliber's size as "being, with much ale, rendered little inferior to that of the beasts he sold"; Trulliber's "roundity" increases visually because the parson is short, "his shadow ascending very near as far in height, when he lay on his back, as when he stood on his legs" (II , xiv, 148). Although this minister speaks often of charity—"though he never gave a farthing, he had always that word in his mouth" (II , xv, 156)—he refuses to provide fourteen shillings to Parson Adams and friends on their journey and seems as shocked at Adams' innocent request as, so the narrator states, a lawyer who prepares himself to receive a fee from a stranger he thought a client, only to have a writ served against him instead (II , xiv, 152).

The last of these animal portraits appears in Book IV as Joseph, Fanny, and Adams have returned to the country seat of Lady Booby. In her plans to end Joseph and Fanny's attachment, Lady Booby enlists the aid of her friend Beau Didapper, a young man of wealth "entirely well satisfied with his own person and parts [and] ... very apt to ridicule and laugh at any imperfection in another" (IV, ix, 302). This young "perfect" gentleman is very short, thin, pale, with "very narrow shoulders and no calf" and little hair. His habitual gait, the narrator points out, seems to be "hopping," not walking. In addition to his appearance, his very name contributes to the narrator's comparison of this "little person, or rather thing" (303) to a bird: a "didapper," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a small water bird "characterized by a short body, flattened and webbed feet set far behind, and the virtual absence of tail." This "virtual absence of tail" may in fact refer to Beau Didapper's learning or intelligence; the narrator states that "[t]he qualifications of his mind were well adapted to his person" which seems not a man at all. His extent of learning includes "a little French and ... two or three Italian songs" (302).

In other matters, the narrator attributes human qualities to emotions, events, or ideas. He refers, in that time-honored way, to Fortune as a fickle woman and to the morning as a lady, who in her "walk over the eastern hills" meets "that gallant person the Sun [who] stole softly from his wife's chamber to pay his addresses to her" (III , iv, 210). This last

instance reveals the narrator's ability to place his own current societal conventions or practices, as with the earlier use of Bramble and Puzzle, within his comparisons: the Morning has "a countenance blooming with fresh youth and sprightliness, like Miss," at which point the narrator asserts in a footnote that "Miss" may be [w]hoever the reader pleases."

By far his most elaborate use of personification appears in Book I, Chapter xv, in which the narrator gives Vanity the qualities of a harlot or a *femme fatale*:

The greatest villainies are daily practiced to please thee; nor is the meanest thief below, nor the greatest hero above, thy notice. Thy embraces are often the sole aim and sole reward of the private robbery and the plundered province. (53)

Avarice becomes Vanity's handmaid, Lust her pimp. In this "metaphorical drama," as Goldberg calls it (243), the narrator addresses Vanity familiarly:

I know thou wilt think that whilst I abuse thee I court thee... but thou are deceived: I value thee not of a farthing... for know, to thy confusion, that I have introduced thee for no other purpose than to lengthen out a short chapter.... (I , xv, 54)

The slap here not only rebuffs Vanity, but any reader who may have fallen under the narrator's rhetorical spell. In the personifications as well as in the comparison of man to animal or of emotion to object, the hoped for result seems to be dividing truth from lie.

The bewildering use of such comparisons in which the reader must always be wary of a trap is further compounded by the narrator's discussion of simile as artistic technique. By reminding the reader overtly that he is an artist, the narrator reveals his comic attitude toward that art or toward other artists who have (in his eyes) abused it. His mock-Homeric style seems out-of-place and highly artificial in a work concerning the adventures of a supposed footman and a country parson. In Book I, Chapter ix, after describing Lady Booby's internal "legal" dilemma, the narrator states, "If it was our present business only to make similes, we could produce many more to this purpose; but a simile (as well as a

word) to the wise" (29). Later he adds that similes "are now generally agreed to become any book but the first" (II , i, 74); although he uses them, he denies them. However, this last denial appears in a chapter replete with similes: divisions in a book are not "so much buckram, stays, and staytape in a tailor's bill, serving only to make up the sum total" but instead should be considered by the reader "an inn or resting-place where [the reader] may stop and take a glass or any other refreshment as it pleases him" (II , i, 72). This metaphor so appropriate for the story of the travels of Joseph and Adams continues: the content notes given for every chapter are "so many inscriptions over the gates of inns." He then equates the author's dividing of his text with a butcher's jointing of meat (II , i, 74), a somewhat shocking shift.

Even when his creativity of simile-making fails him, he mentions it, seeming to glory in that failure. When Joseph rushes to Parson Adams' aid in fighting the hounds (III , vi, 224), the narrator describes him as "swift of foot" and lightning-eyed and then stops to comment rationally on the reasons he will not provide the reader with a simile: first, because a simile would interrupt the description of the furious battle (which is what his explanation is doing anyway), and second, because he could not find an adequate simile for "Joseph Andrews, who is himself above the reach of any simile."

Philip Stevick points out in his discussion of metaphor in *Tom Jones* that the "metaphorical activity" is "various and unpredictable" (29), an observation which surely carries to *Joseph Andrews*:

Like the range of allusions, the range of the metaphors is extraordinary, from the traditional and formulaic, to the deliberately oafish, to the ingenious, to the sublime. (30)

In yet another comparison from the novel itself, the narrator describes the difference between the satirist and the libeller:

... [t]he former privately corrects the fault for the benefit of the person, like a parent; the latter publicly exposes the person himself, as an example to others, like an executioner. (III , i, 174)

This distinction, perhaps, provides one key to Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and the comparisons made therein. Few of the characters portrayed

within its pages recognize themselves for what they really are, flawed and imperfect individuals. Though sometimes cruel, or clichéd, or editorialized, the similes and metaphors seek a revelation of man's affectations in order to show the reader his own image. As Williams notes,

Whatever type of literature [Fielding] was writing, his attitude was the same: 'the Covetous, the Prodigal, the Ambitious, the Voluptuous, the Bully, the Vain, the Hypocrite, the Flatterer, the Slanderer' called aloud for his vengeance. (xii)

But Fielding's vengeance was tempered by compassion; he intended not "to vilify or asperse any one" (Preface xxxi), but "to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavor to reduce it . . ." (IV, i, 174). The compassion shares place with the humor. Begun as a direct parody of Richardson's *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews* came to offer the reader a chance, as Pat Rogers states in *Augustan Vision*, to do more than feel—"to think, to recognize quotations, to swap ideas, to share jokes, to attend convivial gatherings, to make fresh acquaintances, to indulge new tastes" (277). The sheer variety of events and of characters and of comparisons invites the reader, in the end, to recognize his own foibles, to join the narrator in laughing at them, and to change them.

Notes

1) All parenthetical references to the text of *Joseph Andrews* and to the preface of same will refer to the Washington Square Press (New York) edition of 1963, with an introduction by Irwin Ehrenpreis.

2) Many critics have set forth the reading of this novel as a Christian allegory, perhaps because of the narrator's reference to "manners" and "species." The length of this paper does not permit treatment of this topic, but for further information, see Martin C. Battestin, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974); Sean Shesgreen, *Literary Portraits in the Novels of Henry Fielding* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1972); and Paul J. Korshin, *Typologies in England 1650-1820* (Princeton, NJ:

Princeton UP, 1982).

3) For more thorough discussions of the narrator as character, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983); Robert Jordan, "The Limits of Illusion: Faulkner, Fielding, and Chaucer," *Criticism 2* (1960): 278-305; and Arthur Sherbo, *Studies in the Eighteenth Century Novel* (N. P.: Michigan State UP, 1969).

4) Baker points out that the "voracious pike" simile is repeated in nearly the same manner in *Jonathan Wild* and in *Amelia*; he also traces the phrasing of the comparison to James Saunders' 1724 edition of *The Compleat Fisherman* which Fielding quoted extensively in *The Champion* (Dec. 15, 1739).

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