

ESTUDOS LITERÁRIOS

DYNAMICS OF CHARACTERIZATION IN *JOSEPH ANDREWS*

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The emergence of the new form of narrative, which we today call the novel, in Eighteenth-Century England, assigned literary scholars the task of establishing a poetics of the genre, within the canonical hierarchy of the epic, the lyric and the dramatic. However, to this day the formulation of a theory of the novel that may define its distinguishing features has presented peculiar difficulties. Bakhtin emphasizes that the novel is the only developing genre among other genres long since completed and in part already dead, and although it partakes of their characteristics in some measure, it is not exactly like any of them.¹

It is a genre with noble ancestors whose genealogy reaches back to classical times – Longus, Heliodorus and Petronius. Nevertheless, divergent critical appraisal has accompanied the discussion of the form, often associated with entertainment, amusement, and escape rather than serious art. As Malcolm Bradbury suggests, the notion that the novel fails to satisfy the requirements of form or art has much to do with the over-bulk of reality: “the unformed looseness

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1 BAKHTIN, M. Epic and Novel. In: LIAPUNOV, V. (Ed.). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. p. 3-40.

of event, the shapelessness of life and of persons, the disposition of the slack prose instrument to set its own pace”.²

The close association with reality in the creation of fictional persons gives rise to another critical issue: since to create means to bring into existence out of nothing, and characters in fiction have always been based on experience, novelists cannot be considered true creative artists. Besides, characters never come into existence – we cannot take them by the hand. As a counter-argument, Robert Liddell contends that we regard ourselves as individually created beings, although none of us was made out of nothing. And there is more than one way of existing. Hamlet or Parson Adams may not belong to the same order of being as Queen Victoria, but it is nevertheless not unreasonable to say that they exist, and that their authors have created them.³ Such controversies are common in the epistemology of fictional creatures, which has been one of the major concerns in the theory of fiction, from the very early days of the novel.

As practitioners of an incipient literary form, eighteenth-century English writers were evidently concerned with its definition. Henry Fielding presents his critical views on “this kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language”,⁴ both in the introductory chapters to the several books or divisions in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, and, mainly, in his renowned “Preface” to the former work, in the words of Bradbury, “one of the most promising attempts we have at the sketching of a poetics with which to explore that new and almost undefinable form”.⁵ Fielding’s vision of the novel as “a comic epic in prose” is a reference point in its studies:

Now, a comic romance is a comic epic in prose, differing from comedy as the serious epic from tragedy, its action being more extended and comprehensive, containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters.⁶

2 BRADBURY, M. *Possibilities*. Essays on the state of the novel. London: Oxford University Press, 1973. p. 4.

3 LIDELL, R. *A treatise on the novel*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971. p. 14.

4 FIELDING, H. Preface. In: _____. *Joseph Andrews*. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. p. v.

5 BRADBURY, op. cit., p. 31.

6 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit. p. vi.

Thus, a comic romance diverges from the epic in its “fable and action”, which are “light and ridiculous”, instead of grave and solemn; in its diction and sentiments, which are “ludicrous, not sublime”; in its characters, who are persons of inferior rank and, in consequence, of inferior manners. The base or virtuous, ridiculous people that inhabit Fielding’s fictional world and constitute a multicolored panorama of mankind are the central interest of this study. Taking as its axis Fielding’s views on the novel, this paper analyzes the dynamics of characterization in *Joseph Andrews*,⁷ aiming at an insight into the novelist’s craft, as well as into his ethical principles and moral outlook.

Of special interest for our study is the distinction that Fielding establishes between comedy and burlesque, in his ‘Preface’. He draws parallels with painting in order to make his point clear: a comic writer would be like a “comic history-painter” who is required to make “the exactest copy of nature” as opposed to “those performances which the Italians call *caricatura*” and which allows “all licence, all distortions and exaggerations”. What *caricatura* is in painting, burlesque is in writing: the representation of the monstrous and unnatural. Though he has admitted burlesque in his diction, Fielding points out, he has excluded it from his sentiments and characters. Burlesque in diction is justifiable, as it will be external to character, like clothes to man. It is not his intention, however, to create burlesque incidents or characters; his province in *Joseph Andrews*, he affirms, is the *Ridiculous*, a notion he proceeds to explain to the reader: it is impossible to ridicule the monstrous, “the blackest villainies, and what is yet worse, the most dreadful calamities”; the only true source of the ridiculous is affectation: “Now from affectation only, the misfortunes and calamities of life, or the imperfections of nature, may become the objects of ridicule”. And affectation derives from one of two causes: vanity or hypocrisy, which should not be confounded, since they proceed from very different motives.⁸ As concerns character depiction, the introductory chapter to Book Three in *Joseph Andrews*, entitled *Matter prefatory in praise of biography*, is also of seminal relevance:

I declare here once for all I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species. Perhaps it will be answered, are not the characters then taken from life? To which I answer in the

7 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit.

8 *Ibid.*, p. vii-viii.

affirmative; nay, I believe I might aver that I have writ little more than I have seen.

Joseph Andrews, Book III, i⁹

Thus, in the construction of characters and incidents, Fielding chooses the point of view of the biographer since “truth is to be found only in the works of those who celebrate the lives of great men and are commonly called biographers”.¹⁰ As a biographer he intends to copy nature in contraposition both to those authors of romances, whose heroes are of their own creation “and their brain the chaos whence all the materials are selected”, and to historians, whose work is confined to a particular period of time, and to a particular nation. Like Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, he intends to write about the world in general.¹¹

The narrative voice is a heritage in the new English novel of the elements of the *histor* and *bard* of classical history and epic, to which is added the role of *maker* of purely fictitious narrative. In other words, Fielding’s narrative persona in *Joseph Andrews* both recounts events and presents external aspects of characters (*histor*), reveals unspoken thoughts when he wants to (*bard*), and admits he is making things up, when he addresses the reader openly about his artistic problems (*maker*).¹² Character analysis in *Joseph Andrews* is, therefore, intimately linked to plot; indeed, it is the sequence of episodes in the novel that will make its main characters known to the reader or will introduce accidental figures.

The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams, Fielding’s first novel, was initially conceived as a satire on Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, its situations and values: the novel’s heroine, Pamela Andrews, is a chaste servant-girl who resists seduction by her master, Mr. B. Fielding ridicules Richardson by reversing male and female roles in the seduction game: *Joseph Andrews* opens with an account of how its title character, Joseph, Pamela’s brother, repulses the advances of Lady Booby, who happens to be the aunt of Mr. B.; her name is maliciously extended to Booby, which denotes clumsiness or foolishness. Joseph is dismissed for his refusal to give in to his employer’s advances and sets out on a journey to his home parish in

9 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 162.

10 Ibid., p. 160.

11 Ibid., p. 162.

12 SCHOLLES, R; KELLOG, R. *The nature of narrative*. London: Oxford University Press, 1979.

search of his own sweetheart, Fanny. On the road he meets his old friend Parson Adams, who becomes his fellow traveler. At this point Fielding seems to have changed the plan of his novel and the adventures of Parson Adams become the focus of the narrative. The Parson's Christian trust in the goodness of human nature gives rise to a series of entanglements with the wickedness, malice, and viciousness of rogues, squires, innkeepers, coach drivers, representatives of the humanity which crowd the roads and inns of eighteenth-century England. Thus social satire takes the place of literary parody, and the interest of the narrative centers on Parson Adams. The other characters are important insofar as they advance plot or participate in the various episodes. This brief summary evidences a clear opposition between the virtuous and the vicious in Fielding's human panorama:

Be it known then, that the human species are divided into two sorts of people, to wit. High people and Low people. As by high people I would not be understood to mean persons literally born higher in their dimensions than the rest of the species, nor metaphorically those of exalted characters or abilities; so by low people I cannot be construed to intend the reverse. High people signify no other than people of fashion, and low people those of no fashion. (...) nothing more was originally meant by a person of fashion than a person who dressed himself in the fashion of the times, and the word really and truly signifies no more at this day.

Joseph Andrews, Book II, xiii¹³

The classification of the human species into low and high, based solely on fashionable dress is evidently ironic. The narrator's *dissertation concerning high people and low people* is an example of Fielding's satirical view of mankind that will not respect his virtuous heroes, Joseph and Parson Adams, or the novel's irreproachable heroine Fanny; it is, however, his minor characters that get the brunt of his irony and sarcasm, mercilessly ridiculed in a profusion of unpleasant hilarious portraits. He ridicules the naiveté of the first group – the comic mode ridicules persons by drawing them in their proper characters –, but he denounces the viciousness of the latter. Parson Adams illustrates aptly the

13 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 135-136.

figure of the well-intentioned and mainly innocent man who becomes an object of derision, whereas, in characters like Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop, as well as in numerous minor figures, Fielding's satirical vein finds fertile ground for the exercise of his sarcasm. The analysis of a few of the most representative figures in the two groups constitutes the basic structure of this article.

High People or Low People?

Should the implied author's apparent acceptance of characters' evaluation of their own qualities and position be taken at face value? Does Mrs. Slipslop belong in the group of high people – according to her evaluation of social status – or low people, as the ironic style suggests? It is appropriate, therefore, that we should start our analysis of dynamics of characterization with a question, which we will attempt to answer, initially, by observing the portraits of some of the “vicious rogues” that abound in the novel's picaresque world.

Characters' most evident traits are established from the outset by Fielding's frequent use of allegoric or quasi-allegoric naming to denote particular qualities of his fictional creatures. Satirical intention is evident in the names of Tom *Suckbribe*, “a drunken, drowsy blockhead”; of Tom *Whipwell*, the stage-coachman; of Peter *Pounce*, – who by *pouncing* on underservants' wages has amassed the *small sum* of twenty thousand pounds; of the grotesque Mrs. *Slipslop*; and of Lady *Booby* whose hauteur is the butt of comic reversal and unmasking.

True to the point of view of the biographer, the author stands aside in order to observe how his characters lie or cheat their way out of difficult situations, allowing them enough scope to act out their foibles. Abrupt reversals of attitude are recurrent, a very effective technique to highlight a character's weak points, besides contributing to the humor of the narrative. Thus, Mrs. Tow-ouse, the innkeeper's wife, whose distorted features match her shrewish temper, is ready to send a severely wounded Joseph packing, as she had no pity for “scabby rascals”. However, on hearing he was befriended by “quality” – meaning Parson Adams –, she immediately orders her maid to take Joseph whatever he wanted: “God forbid he should want anything in my house”.¹⁴

The narrator ironically affirms her temper is sweet and her face, a work of art by nature:

14 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 60.

Her person was short, thin, and crooked. Her forehead projected in the middle, and thence descended in a declivity to the top of her nose, which was sharp and red and would have hung over her lips, had not nature turned up the end of it. Her lips were two bit of skin which, whenever she spoke, she drew together in a purse. (...) Add to this a voice most wonderfully adapted to the sentiments it was to convey, being both loud and hoarse.

Joseph Andrews, Book I, xiv¹⁵

Foreseeing possible objections to the introduction of vicious characters in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding justifies himself in his “Preface”: “It is very difficult to pursue a series of human actions and keep clear from them”. Furthermore, such figures are never “set forth as the objects of ridicule”, but of detestation”.¹⁶ In truth, readers are certainly repelled by Mrs. Tow-wound, whose viciousness is not a privilege of the lower classes:

(...) though perhaps, during the changes which so long an existence must have passed through, she may in her turn have stood behind the bar at an inn, I will not scruple to affirm she hath likewise in the revolution of ages sat on a throne. In short, where extreme turbulency of temper, avarice, and an insensibility of human misery, with a degree of hypocrisy, have united in a female composition, Mrs. Tow-woose was that woman;

Joseph Andrews, Book III, i¹⁷

The catalogue of vices is evidently meant to guide readers into specific ethical judgments. As Paula McDowell points out, critics have always stressed Fielding’s efforts to control readers’ reactions. In his novels, his prime concern is with narrative authority, through his use of narrators as a source of “intensely supervising commentary”.¹⁸ To Ian Watt, such authorial intrusion tends to diminish the authenticity of Fielding’s narrative, as it breaks the spell of the

15 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 56.

16 Ibid., p. x.

17 Ibid., p. 163.

18 MCDOWELL, P. Narrative authority, critical complicity: the case of *Jonathan Wild*. *Studies in the Novel*, v. 30, n. 2, p. 211-231, Summer 1998.

imaginary world in the novel. It is consistent, however, with his major intention: by preventing us from identifying with the characters, he keeps us alert “to the larger implications of their actions.”¹⁹

In fact, whenever the narrative voice addresses the reader – in its function as *maker* –, as a preamble to the introduction of a character, an illusion of intimacy between narrator and reader is created. Consequently, we tend to accept what is said about the character as truth and look forward to having his/her evaluation confirmed by the development of action. Information about Beau Didapper, a minor character in the plot, for example, long precedes his participation in the plot:

I shall detain my reader no longer than to give him one caution more of an opposite kind, for as in most of our particular characters we mean not to lash individuals, but all of the like sort... (...). By those high people (...) I mean a set of wretches, who, while they re a disgrace to their ancestors, whose honours and fortunes they inherit (...) have the insolence to treat those with disregard who are at least equal to the founders of their own splendour (...). And now reader, taking these hints along with you, you may, if you please, proceed to the sequel of this our true history.²⁰

The reader is asked to hold his/her curiosity in check and, simultaneously, to “take these hints along”, that is, to keep looking forward to the character’s appearance. Commenting on Fielding’s ingenuous strategy for compelling submission to his ultimate authority, Sandra Sherman emphasizes the idea of a “contract between writerly challenge and readerly work”, in order to guarantee the reader’s perseverance.²¹ Indeed, much happens in the adventurous world of *Joseph Andrews*, before the young man, who is a “disgrace to his ancestors”, enters the stage in the unpleasant role of the seducer that tries to separate Fanny and Joseph, at Lady Booby’s urging.

I have put into relief a seemingly unimportant character, in order to illustrate a technique of portrayal that is recurrent in Fielding’s human gallery: the

19 WATT, I. *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Penguin, 1963. p. 285.

20 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 163-164.

21 SHERMAN, S. Reading at arm’s length: Fielding’s contract with the reader in *Tom Jones*. *Studies in the Novel*, v. 30, n. 2, p. 232-245, Summer 1998.

Theophrastian character-sketch. True to his neo-classical tradition, Fielding makes use of Theophrastus's model in *Characters*,²² as do other writers like Addison and Steele, whose avowed purpose is “to cultivate and polish human life, by promoting knowledge.”²³ Fielding's character-sketch is based on the brief, concrete sketches of ethical types of mankind in *Characters*, which include the definition or illustration of some social quality, then a description of how a man embodying such a quality will talk and act. Beau Didapper's portrait emphasizes not one, but various *undesirable* social qualities:

He was not entirely ignorant for he could talk a little French, and sing two or three Italian songs; he had lived too much in the world to be bashful, and too much at court to be proud; he seemed not much inclined to avarice, for he was profuse in his expenses; nor had he all the features of prodigality, for he never gave a shilling; no hater of women, for he always dangled after them; yet so little subject to lust, that he had, among those who knew him best, the character of great moderation in his pleasures. No drinker of wine, nor so addicted to passion, but that a hot word or two from an adversary made him immediately cool.
Joseph Andrews, Book IV, ix²⁴

Fielding's aversion to that “disgracer of the human species, called a beau”, conveyed by the deeply ironic tone of the passage, is amply corroborated by his writings. His *Essay on Conversation* places the beau on the same footing as the monkey, “if dress is their only claim to pre-eminence”.²⁵ In the sequence, the narrator allows the character “a dash or two on the affirmative side”, a claim belied by the description of the beau's actions:

22 Theophrastus – Greek Peripatetic philosopher, follower of Aristotle, of 4th Century BC. The famous *Characters* consist of brief and vigorous delineations of moral types. GILLIE, C. *Longman Companion to English Literature*. London: Longman, 1977. p. 824.

23 ADDISON, J.; STEELE, R. *The spectator*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1967. v. 1, p. 1.

24 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 269.

25 FIELDING, H. Essay on conversation. In: RAWSON, C. J. *Henry Fielding*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969. p. 123-124.

Though he was born to an immense fortune, he chose, for the pitiful and dirty consideration of as place of little consequence, to depend entirely on the will of a fellow whom they call a great man; who treated him with the utmost disrespect, and exacted of him a plenary obedience to his commands; which he implicitly submitted to, at the expense of his conscience his honour, and of his country, in which he had himself so large a share.²⁶

After such vehement and unabashed condemnation, the narrative voice brings the character-sketch to a summing up, after the Theophrastian pattern: “And to finish his character: “As he was entirely well satisfied with his own person and parts, so he was very apt to ridicule and laugh at any imperfection in another.”²⁷

Vivid summary character portraits such as this, although constituting individual set pieces, blend into the context of the narrative. The effectiveness of this portrait, based on a well-known figure in the political and social circles of the time,²⁸ is echoed by other character profiles in which the author “means not to lash individuals, but all of the like sort.”²⁹

Thus, the damning portraits of the seducers who attack Joseph’s unshakable virtue evidence Fielding’s moralist purposes, by presenting “vices as objects of detestation”. Lady Booby plays the role of the antagonist in the love interest of the plot, occupying the “lust” end of the chastity-lust opposition. As Joseph and Fanny are irrevocably chaste, Lady Booby is almost overcome by her lustful passion for her handsome footman. In spite of her relevance for the advancement of plot, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the character of Mrs. Slipslop, the secondary seducer as it were, as it provides a more varied illustration of character construction.

Mrs. Slipslop is Lady Booby’s waiting-woman who, like her mistress, has fallen under the magnetism of Joseph’s good looks. It is through her maneuvering that Joseph is dismissed from his job and forced to set out on his journey West. She is not above listening at doors, or robbing her employer. Guilty of a “small

26 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 269.

27 Id.

28 This is a portrait based on a real person, Lord Hervey (1696-1743) whom Pope had also attacked fiercely as Sporus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735). Cf. RAWSON, C. J. *Henry Fielding*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969. p. 81.

29 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 163.

slip” in her youth, she had continued “a good maid ever since”. Her physical description clearly parallels her moral qualities:

She was not at this time remarkably handsome, being very short and rather too corpulent in body and somewhat red, with the addition of pimples in the face. Her nose was likewise too large and her eyes too little, nor did she resemble a cow so much in her breath as in two brown globes which she carried before her; one of her legs was also a little shorter than the other, which occasioned her to limp as she walked.

Joseph Andrews, Book I, vi³⁰

Later in the narrative we are informed there is a rough beard on Slipslop’s chin and that her savor is not that which a lover would “expect in the room of a sweet young creature”. To a “slip” in behavior the “sloppy” quality of her personal care is added to complete the significance of her name. The character’s grotesque appearance is the weapon of Fielding’s violent attack against vulgarity and hypocrisy, put into relief by her recurrent changes of allegiance. Although she does everything in her power to win Joseph over, when refused she claims she would “have wished to die a thousand deaths rather than to live to see that day”, that is, when she would have placed her affections on a servant. Affectation that arises from hypocrisy is confirmed by Slipslop’s pretence not to recognize Fanny at a public meeting-place – it is the condemnation of her attitude that triggers the dissertation on high people and low people, mentioned before, a concrete example of Fielding’s purpose of exposing human affectation to ridicule, particularly “when it proceeds from hypocrisy, it be(ing) nearly allied to deceit.”³¹

The opposition “chastity” versus “lust”, the central theme of the plot, is ironically scrambled when it comes to acquainting the reader with Slipslop’s erotic impulses and erratic behavior. At a certain point in the narrative someone enters the “maiden gentlewoman’s” bed in the dark; taking it to be Joseph she returns the person’s hug with “equal ardour”. Aware of her mistake – it was in fact innocent Parson Adams who had entered the wrong room –, the “prudent” Slipslop tries to reverse the situation to reaffirm her “impregnable chastity” by putting on a screaming act, “O thou villain! who hast attacked my chastity and

30 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 30.

31 Ibid., p. x.

ruined me in my sleep”. In the ensuing comedy of errors, the “chaste” Slipslop tries to push Adams out of her bed, only to begin to “move with much courtesy towards him”, the moment the awakened members of the household leave her room.³² The narrator unmaskes the character by juxtaposing instances of her contradictory behavior.

Decidedly ridiculous is Mrs. Slipslop’s habit of misusing high-sounding words in her speech: *confidous* for *confident*; *necessitous* for *necessary* – the catalog is long. No comments are necessary to emphasize the character’s crass ignorance and, paradoxically, snobbery. The narrator ridicules her pseudo-rhetorical speech further in her advances to Joseph:

‘If we like a man, the lightest hint sophisticates whereas a boy proposes upon us to break through all the regulations of modesty, before we can make any oppression upon him’. Joseph, who did not understand a word she said, answered: ‘Yes, Madam.’ ‘Yes, Madam!’ replied Mrs. Slipslop with some warmth, ‘Do you intend to result me passion? ... Barbarous monster! How have I deserved that my passion should be resulted and treated with ironing?’³³

Slipslop’s repulsive physical portrait is surpassed by her moral profile. The mock-heroic style of the passage above highlights Fielding’s satiric intention of exposing the character’s Affectation, which stems both from her groundless vanity and from hypocrisy. The development of Slipslop’s character is an apt illustration of the ironic reversals in the narrative, as she is shown to be the exact opposite of what she “affects”. Using irony, reversals, unmasking, mock-heroic style and apparent acceptance of his persona’s self-evaluation, Fielding draws a thoroughly unpleasant portrait of a despicable being.

32 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 286.

33 Ibid., p. 38.

The Heroic and the Virtuous

Naming is equally relevant to characterize the virtuous: biblical allusions are evident in the naming of *Mr. Abraham Adams*, the patriarchal figure who is asked to sacrifice his son, and in the naming of *Joseph* who resists the seduction of Potiphar's wife. Secondly, the correspondence between physical appearance and moral profile is again evidenced in the characterization of both Joseph Andrews and Fanny, the couple of lovers in the narrative, who are depicted as exponents of physical beauty and paragons of virtue. From the ugly and cruel portrait of Mrs. Slipslop Fielding's exaggeration makes a 180° reversal: there is not the slightest flaw in either Joseph's or Fanny's physical or moral portraits.

However, the description of Joseph's physic has parodic tones. In a deeply ironic manner, the narrator appeals to female readers' ability to appreciate Lady Booby's passion for Joseph, conquered as she has been by his uncommon variety of charms. The situation of Lady Booby trying to seduce her footman is inherently humorous. It places Joseph in a feminine role and makes his portrait, accordingly, rather effeminate: legs and thighs formed in "the exactest" proportion; white even teeth; full, red, soft lips; rosy cheeks; tenderness and sensibility of countenance. Especially comic are Joseph's "wanton ringlets" that fall down his back. Joseph is the innocent, chaste young man who will go to any lengths to preserve his chastity, a true counterpart to his sister Pamela in the seduction game.

Fanny is rather a function in the novel's plot, as she gives rise to most of the action involving Joseph and Parson Adams in the defense of her virtue. Fielding makes her a simple innocent country girl, unaware of her beauty, but simultaneously endows her with a luscious appearance, with swelling breasts" and hips that did not want "the assistance of a hoop to extend them..."³⁴ It is as a sexual object that she appears throughout the novel, attracting all kinds of men – travelers, squires, menservants, justices, fops –, who attempt to rape or seduce her. Through all this she sails unblemished to a virginal conclusion.

Likewise, Joseph's qualities match his physical beauty: a model of friendship, courage, youth, beauty and strength, he is above the reach of any simile. His perfection renders him rather unreal, although some development is noticed in his characterization as the journey proceeds. From a song-loving youth, so naive as to tell the enamored Mrs. Slipslop he loves her as his mother, he grows up to lecture Parson Adams on the merits of public schools and to

34 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 132.

declare himself astonished by the lack of charity among mankind. Although not as emphatically as Fanny's, his role is also that of a sexual symbol, the main cause of Lady Booby's conflict between her passion for him and her concern for her social position. In every encounter with his would-be seducers – Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipslop, the maid Betty –, his chastity is always victorious.

In spite of being the novel's title character, Joseph's role loses relevance after the narrative line turns to Parson Adam's adventures and the building of Fielding's stalwart though humorous Christian hero. The character of Parson Adams is the supreme achievement of *Joseph Andrews* – he is the moral nucleus of the novel and constitutes the parameter for gauging both secondary characters and the multitude of occasional participants in the several episodes or scenes centered on him. An agreeable and valuable companion, virtuous, generous, friendly, brave and an excellent scholar to boot, the good Parson's grotesque physical characteristics are revealed gradually: he is very tall – “his legs almost touched the ground when he bestrode the beast” – and there are several references to his powerful fist, which gets him out of his various entanglements with ruffians, robbers and kidnappers. His nimble legs can run faster than a coach – ‘Aye, aye. Catch me if you can,’ he cries to the coach driver who attempts to overcome him on the road,’ and he is so strong “he could bear a drubbing as well as any boxing champion in the universe”.³⁵

Parson Adam's physical strength is compatible with the “goodness of his heart” and with his “good nature”, the basic human virtue to Fielding: the narrator in *Tom Jones* declares his belief that “there is in some (I believe in many) human Breasts, a kind and benevolent Disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the Happiness of others.”³⁶ Probably the clearest statement of what Fielding understood by the term occurs in his *Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men*:

Good-nature is that benevolent and amiable temper of mind which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former; and that without any abstract contemplation

35 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 12, 113, 120.

36 FIELDING, H. *Tom Jones*. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973, p. 206.

on the beauty of virtue, and without the allurements or terrors of religion.³⁷

As the perfect embodiment of Fielding's concept of good-nature, Adams is always ready to aid his fellow-men, for no other reason than that it is his nature to do so. Adams's spontaneity, unflinching generosity, and, mainly, his grotesque physical appearance, bring him close to Cervantes's universal hero Don Quixote – which is consistent with a novel “written in the manner of Cervantes”, as indicated on the title page of *Joseph Andrews*. Parson Adams's tall and ragged appearance plus the incongruity of the many situations created by his obliviousness to the considerations of the outer world make him an object of ridicule, like his knightly ancestor:

Adams presents a figure (...) which would have moved laughter in many, for his cassock had just again fallen down below his great-coat – that is to say, it reached his knees, whereas the skirts of his great-coat descended no lower than halfway down his thighs.³⁸

Covered with hog's blood, blackened by a mop, his cassock torn by hunters' dogs, Adams is the nuclear motif of low life scenes in the novel. His attitudes match his ridiculous appearance: he absentmindedly leaves his horse behind and sets out on foot; walks through a pond, when he could have taken the path around it and leaves at home the books of sermons whose publication was the reason for his journey.

Notwithstanding the author's obvious sympathy for his character, Parson Adams is not immune to satire. Thus, he preaches a sermon to Joseph, who is anxious to marry Fanny without waiting for the banns, to emphasize that no Christian should overvalue human affections and that their eventual loss ought to be received resignedly.

37 BRISSENDEN, R. Introduction. In: BRISSENDEN, R. *Fielding's Joseph Andrews*. Middlesex: R. Brissenden, 1985. p. 13.

38 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 58.

All passions are criminal in their excess; and even love itself, it is not subservient to our duty, may render us blind to it. No Christian ought to set his heart on any person or thing in this world but that, whenever it shall be required or taken from him in any manner by divine Providence, he may be able, peaceably, quietly and contentedly to resign it.

Joseph Andrews, Book IV, viii³⁹

Denying the practice of his doctrine, Parson Adams sets up a deafening lamentation on hearing that his youngest son was drowned. His attitudes suffer another drastic reversal when the news proves to be false and his grief turns into passionate joy and gratitude for the person who had saved his son:

No, reader, he felt the ebullition, the overflowing of a full, honest, open heart, towards the person who had conferred a real obligation, and of which if thou canst not conceive an idea within, I will not vainly endeavour to assist thee...⁴⁰

Fielding overdraws the “Ebullition” of Parson Adams for dramatic and comic effects. As his discursive writings indicate, Fielding understood human passions very well, and uses his characters’ displays of exalted feelings to make moral statements. As indicated above, in spite of inconsistencies in his behavior, Parson Adams, functions as the measuring rod for all the other characters, particularly for his fellow clergymen, whose hypocrisy is put into relief by his simple-hearted belief in human kindness. In this respect, Fielding’s purpose not to “lash individuals, but all of the like sort” is reaffirmed:

Thou art to know, Friend, that there are certain Characteristics, in which most Individuals of every Profession and Occupation agree. To be able to preserve these Characteristics, and at the

39 FIELDING, 1979, p. 265.

40 Ibid., p. 266-267.

same Time to diversify their Operations, is one Talent of a good Writer.

Tom Jones, Book X, 1⁴¹

Parson Trulliber, another member of the profession, endowed with a grotesque physique and greedy vulgarity, offers a sharp contrast to Mr. Abraham Adams. The whole scene between Adams and Parson Trulliber, who is more concerned with his pigs than with the cure of souls, and who believes, at first, that Adams too must be a pig-dealer, is highly farcical and highlights Adams's sincerity of purpose when contrasted to false charity. Adams comes the winner in their verbal battle when, after the gross Trulliber expels our hero, deprecating the poor parson's need to beg for help, he pronounces with great dignity:

Now there is no command more express, no duty more frequently enjoined than charity. Whoever, therefore, is void of charity I make no scruple of pronouncing that he is no Christian.⁴²

Opposed to the falseness of Trulliber's celebrated charity, Adams grows in stature. The same process is repeated in the sequence of events in the plot in which characters strive to ridicule or diminish Parson Adams. He always ends up in the stronger position. Adams is an original character: in consonance with his affirmations in the "Preface", Fielding makes him simultaneously an example of benevolence and love, a true stalwart Christian who believes that Christianity is to be practiced as well as preached, and the central figure of low adventures, a creation of pure humor and the source of the novel's many unforgettable moments.

In conclusion, authorial description and the observation of a character's deeds, diversely realized – by means of the correspondence of physical traits with a character's moral qualities; the juxtaposition of incidents that provide comment on one another; ironic reversals, unmasking, burlesque in diction – are the mechanics of Fielding's characterization. It is essentially an objective, impersonal approach that weaves a brilliant colorful tapestry, but does not offer

41 FIELDING, 1973, op. cit., p. 399.

42 FIELDING, 1979, op. cit., p. 145.

the reader an insight into the characters' feelings or motives. As a corollary of the external approach to characterization, as well as of the author's stated purpose to characterize a species rather than the individual, his characters end up as representations of a single quality, flat static characters that can be summed up in a single sentence or indicated in quasi-allegoric naming: Fanny and Joseph are chaste and virtuous, in spite of the attraction they unwittingly exert on members of the opposite sex; Lady Booby's lust is the force that sets the plot in motion. So we have a whole gallery of flat characters in *Joseph Andrews* with the possible exception of Parson Adams, in spite of his mannerisms – finger snapping, pipe smoking, nervous strides signaling anger or excitement – and his predictable reactions. As a round character, he retains the power to surprise us in some circumstances such as his adherence to the idea of witchcraft as an explanation for his presence stark naked in Slipslop's bed. It is a sincere belief and not a diverting maneuver. Fielding's parson remains an unfailingly honest brave Christian hero to the end.

Besides those characters directly involved in the action, Fielding creates his own set of stock, humorous figures: the greedy landlord; the shrewish domineering female; the false prude; the snobbish woman. Since we see these same traits in numerous characters, the feeling of a static world is reinforced. That does not mean a detraction of Fielding's craftsmanship, however. As E.M. Forster⁴³ affirms, flat characters have attractive qualities: they are easily recognized by the reader's emotional eye and, as they are not subject to changes, they can easily be remembered by the reader, offering a comforting sense of familiarity.

Furthermore, Fielding's characterization obeys the rules he mentions in his critical writings: he describes not men but manners; not an individual, but a species, in keeping with his neo-classical tradition, to which he maintains his allegiance when he calls his form of narrative "a comic epic-poem in prose". Consequently, his view of man is universal rather than individualistic. According to Ian Watt, Fielding is more interested in those features, which are necessary to assign man to his moral and social species than in the analysis of motives in any individual's mind at any particular time.⁴⁴

That explains the processes of characterization in *Joseph Andrews*: it takes the accumulation of human characteristics seen in numerous characters to define man as a whole; Fielding's characters are not individualized but placed in categories, according to their main features, as discussed above. Therefore it is

43 FORSTER, E. M. *Aspects of the novel*. London: Penguin, 1970. p. 73-89.

44 WATT, op. cit., p. 252.

not for Fielding the laying bare of man's inner feelings, the subjective approach to characterization from which he is prevented by the neo-classical ideal of beauty, tranquility and stability. It follows that if human nature is essentially stable, there is no need to describe in detail the development of human characteristics in fiction. Besides, the stability of human nature is also reflected in Fielding's adherence to the neo-classical precept of conservation of character: it is impossible for a man to act in direct contradiction to the dictates of his nature.⁴⁵ Fielding's *dramatis personae* do not change; they exemplify the same traits to the end. Recalling his chosen point-of-view – that of the biographer – it is clear why he has to document his characters' qualities by actions rather than by examining their inner feelings or thoughts. That limitation is the basis of Dr Johnson's unfavorable comparison between Fielding and Richardson, as concerns the creation of character, "there was a great difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial plate".⁴⁶ The source of Fielding's fictional characters is life realistically observed and humorously presented: his intention of copying from nature is concretized.

As for the ethical objective of the novel, it is effectively fulfilled in *Joseph Andrews* through Parson Adams, who functions as a spokesman for Fielding's moral outlook. He is the author's example of healthy Christianity, capable of arguing that he prefers the virtuous heathen to the vicious Christian. Fielding embodies his age in that sensible religion which is not concerned with mysteries but with values of good conduct and charity.

Consequently, Fielding maintains a temperate strength of feeling – neither indulgent, nor excessively rigid – and a trust in the good-natured impulses of life. In this sense, Adams again dominates the book; in his unaffected good nature he expects the best of men. From man's own heart or, in other words, from his own nature – in fact, Fielding believes this is true of the majority of men – springs benevolence, the key virtue in his moral world. He emphasizes his protagonist's essential goodness by contraposition with human viciousness, which is always defeated in Adams's struggles against Evil. In the world of *Joseph Andrews* vice never wins.

Like comic drama, the genre he practiced first, Fielding's comic novel treats of foibles and affectations. However, Fielding is not primarily a satirist and his novel's major purpose is to bring its readers to a healthy frame of mind

45 FIELDING, 1973, op. cit., p. 307.

46 WATT, op. cit., p. 261.

through laughter at the recognition of the true comedy that surrounds them. And that Fielding does with a master's touch.

RESUMO

Este trabalho analisa a dinâmica da caracterização no romance *Joseph Andrews* de Henry Fielding, com base nas doutrinas críticas do autor sobre a epistemologia das criaturas ficcionais.

Palavras-chave: Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, caracterização.

ABSTRACT

This work presents a review of some aspects considered in the interpretation of progressive sentences, and proposes that the notions of *eventivity* and *dispositionality* play an important role in the distinction of the progressive and non-progressive forms.

Key-words: Progressive; Gerund; events.

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