

Satire as a Social Critique: Exploring Class and Gender Politics in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the “Class and Gender Politics” in Henry Fielding’s novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Both these aspects are prime issues of social life. As literature is viewed as a reflection of social life, it is important to analyse and examine these issues through literary perspectives. Class and gender are intertwined in this novel. There are certain characters and instances that highlights the interconnectedness of gender and class. It launches the attack on human affectation which primarily arises from vanity and hypocrisy. With the use of different techniques such as humour, wit, sarcasm Fielding mocked and satirizes the morals and manners during eighteenth century England. He presents a very realistic picture of life which is still relevant at present time. The novel depicts the wide gulf that seems to separate upper class people from lower class people. Certain class and gender stereotype are socially constructed by patriarchy. However, one should erase the ideology that patriarchy is always male dominated society. Both men and women are victim of it. The theory to be deployed is Marxism and Feminism. Basically, we can admit that class is mapped along the line of gender to certain extent. Here the term “politics” refers to the fact of power structures in any relationship.

Keywords: Class, Gender, Hypocrisy, Satire, Vanity

Introduction

Henry Fielding who is a British novelist and dramatist lived between 1707 and 1754, which places him in the neoclassical period. *The History of the Adventure of Joseph Andrew’s and of his friend Mr Abraham Adams*, simply referred to as *Joseph Andrews*, is a 1742 “comic epic poem in prose”. Fielding began to write the book as a satire on Samuel Richardson’s

Pamela (1740), which immediately became a sensation. *Pamela* is the story of a virtuous housemaid, who having successfully resisted her employer, Mr. Booby finally gets to marry him and become a proper lady (Spencer 668). Richardson's story of a virtuous servant girl protecting her chastity against her wealthy employer, which resulted in her triumph over him and their marriage was highly praised as an example of moral purity. *Joseph Andrews* was a parody of this particular novel. Fielding reversed the situation by presenting Joseph the chaste servant, whom Lady Booby tempts from the path of virtue. However, he runs away to save his chastity. Nevertheless it is not only a story of escaping. Fielding is laden with class and gender concern and used characters and places that represented real life. Fielding says that he does want readers to identify his characters with some individual known to them. When someone say that he knows the lawyer in the stage coach, that he has met him at one time or another. In order to make the distinction absolutely clear, he makes his most celebrated statement "I declare here once for all, I describe not man but manners; not an individual but the species"(Fielding 193). By manners Fielding probably means not etiquette but complex of social relationship pictured. And by species of course he means the generalized universal figure which represent many distinct individual. Thus, a close reading of this text brought in how basically females and lower class people are victim of upper class male dominated society.

The present study concerns itself with two fundamental principle, Marxism and feminism. Analyzing *Joseph Andrews* through a Marxist lens reveals Henry Fielding's critique of class conflict, social hierarchy, and the exploitation of the working class in 18th-century England. Although Fielding was not directly influenced by Marxism (as Marx's works came later), his satirical approach in *Joseph Andrews* touches on themes that resonate with Marxist ideas. As Marx says that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.

Moreover, feminist lens offers insights into gender roles, the treatment of women, and the dynamics of power and sexuality. Fielding's portrayal of female characters, as well as the ways men and women interact, highlights social attitudes towards women. Particularly around issues of virtue, agency, and respectability.

Thus, Fielding weaves a rich social critique, addressing both class and gender dynamics through the adventures of the protagonist and the characters he meets along the way. The novel often humorous and satirical, not only entertains but also challenges the class and gendered

expectations of 18th-century England. Fielding uses irony and parody to highlight these social inequalities, poking fun at the inconsistencies and hypocrisy that come with them.

Aims and Objectives

Some of the aims and objectives of the paper are as follows:

- 1) To examine class and gender dynamics and its interconnectedness.
- 2) Critically analyse snobbery and hypocrisy of 18th century England through satire and irony.
- 3) To explore the contrast between appearance and reality.

Literature Review

In an article entitled “Vices and Virtues in *Joseph Andrews* by Henry Fielding”, Manpreet Kaur and Sanjay Prasad offers a complex exploration of vices and virtues of the novel. The characters are flawed and imperfect, but they strive to lead a virtuous life despite the temptations and challenges they face. At the same time, it is a critique of the societal vices of the time, such as greed, envy, and lust. According to them, by studying vices and virtues in *Joseph Andrews*, readers can gain insight into the cultural and social values of the 18th century. As well as the complexities of human behaviour and motivation. The story offers a rich and nuanced exploration of the human condition, and can provide readers with valuable lessons and insights that are applicable to a range of contexts.

Manish Bhatt in his paper “Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* as a Picaresque Novel” writes that, the purpose of the picaresque novel is always to satirize the society. This novel satirizes the prevailing social conditions of Fielding’s time. There are people who are tops and hypocrites. They cheat lawyers and squires. Fielding has presented women’s contradictions and weaknesses. Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop are great pretenders. They tried to seduce Joseph and on the other hand pretended to be good. There is satire on arrogant people who used their power in vain, such as judges and squire. There in the passage where Joseph is beaten and left naked by the robbers. He is refused to enter the coach. Nobody is ready to offer him clothes. The greater irony lies in the scene where a beggar like man helps Joseph by giving his coat to him. Fielding wanted to satirize all the people of his time who pretended to be charitable and good.

“The Problem of Ridicule in Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*” by Dita Hoconova discusses the unconventional satirical method of the true ridiculous based on showing a mirror rather than distorting a trait that should be mocked. Intending to laugh the mankind out of its follies, instead of punishing human vices with the proverbial lash of satire, he creates characters not strictly virtuous or vicious, but rather ambiguous and hardly ever escaping the effects of comedy and satirical comments of the narrator. Which makes them less acceptable as models of proper conduct, but also more relatable and realistic. At the same time, he carefully guides readers’ judgments and asks them to reconsider their first impressions of his characters, leading them more and more into depths of revealing pretence and false moralities.

Research Methodology

This study shall follow a qualitatively, descriptive and analytical research. In this context, the qualitative research takes into accounts Henry Fielding’s novel *Joseph Andrews*. The secondary source will comprise of edited texts, eBooks, literary reviews, articles, essays, etc. The theoretical framework to be deployed in this study is Marxist and Feminist theory.

Analysis

All of us have multiple identities. For example in addition to being a woman a person maybe Hindu, middle class, upper or lower caste, married etc. (Kamala 6). The characters in the novel occupy different subject position. We have the character of Fanny who was a female, belonging to country side. She was a lower class woman. Thus, Gender interacts with the other identities. In society most of the women are subordinate to men. For instance, a rich woman because of her class affiliation is in position to dominate the men who work for her as domestic help. With regard to this, we have the character of upper class woman such as Lady Booby who tried to seduce Joseph, her footman. Fielding seems to debunk the idea of chastity. “Chastity is as great virtue in a man as in a woman” (Fielding 79). Joseph said that he hoped he would be able to maintain his virtue against all temptations. Lady Booby's lustful nature begins to assert itself and she indulges him in some scandalous liberties. Her husband is barely a week dead when she tried to seduce Joseph. She make her wicked intensions absolutely undoubtable when she exposes her bare bosom in a desperate bid to win him over. Her frustration makes her angry and she dismisses him as a villain. Again we have the figure of Fanny who was twice oppressed because of her class and gender. In this case, a low class woman may be doubly exploited by a snobbish society. Fanny was abducted and attacked many a time. It seems that at every step there is a risk to her life. She was the victim of rape attempts

several times. Beau Didapper trying to assault Fanny, squire sends his people to abduct her, falls in wrong companion etc. There are tragic potential in the text. But since, it is a comic epic in prose the tragic possibilities are undercut. We can see how Fanny was mistreated because of her class. Mr. Booby accepted Joseph after being well dressed up but denied to accept Fanny because of her class position. Pamela and her husband presented all kinds of arguments to turn Joseph away from his intension of marrying Fanny. Fanny's birth on a lower class family made a different opinion to their minds. The society described by Fielding appears to be callous and cruel. All these incidents show how Fanny was oppressed and attack because of her class and gender.

This novel is a critique of class snobbery and hypocrisy. *Joseph Andrews* take us into a vast gallery of characters and highlights some interesting incongruities of human nature through them. It cannot be denied that most of the characters are of hypocritical behaviour. They never appear to be unrealistic. Fielding is not contented with the representation of their external appearances alone. He judges their deeds, their intentions, and sometimes he goes beyond their conscious intention to highlight their inner conflict. He ruthlessly tears the mask of apparent reality and uncovers the essential reality. Whether it is Barnabas or Trulliber, Lady Booby or Mrs. Slipslop, Squire of fools or Squire of false promises, their vanities and affection, their hypocrisy and pretensions do not escape him. Nor does the nobility hidden under the tattered cassocks of Parson Adams. It appears that people in Fielding's age did not follow their profession seriously. At least most of them depicted in the novel do not. Barnabas is more interested in punch than in prayers. The surgeon carries 'Galen and Hippocrates' in his pocket but knows pretty little about medicine. Trulliber is more a hog-dealer than a priest. All these brought in the binary of tension between money and morality. The rural magistrate is an experienced fox-hunter. Lawyer Scout is more interested in preventing the law taking effect rather than being a champion of law. It is astoundingly selfish, insensible and hard-hearted people depicted by Fielding. Soldiers lack courage and bravery; patriots have no love for their country; politicians are interested only in self-advancement. In brief, the moral climate of the country is badly corrupted although people pretend to be highly moral. The stage-coach episode in which the passenger are reluctant to admit Joseph, half-killed and stripped naked by robbers, adequately brings out its callousness. Since, he cannot pay the fee Mrs Tow-wouse angrily forbids her husband to lend him a shirt. At another inn, when the innkeeper finds his wife chafing Joseph's bruised leg, he rebukes her harshly for taking care of a poor fellow. It also shows how a husband commands more authority and gets free right to rebuke his wife.

Theoretically gender hierarchy can mean the domination of either gender (Kamala 8). But in practice we can see how most of the time men dominate and woman are dominated. We can see a dichotomy between public and private space. In the novel all businesses man, doctors, lawyers are assigned to man. Whereas the innkeeper are mostly woman such as Mrs. Towhouse. It may take in account how almost all the paid jobs are assigned to men. As there is a common notion to regard woman as “home maker”. Men are considered to be the heads of household, bread-winners, owners and managers of property, and active in politics, religion, business and the professions. Women, on the other hand are expected and trained to bear a look after children, to nurse the infirm and old do all household works and so on. Thus, we can see a very rigid dichotomy of male and female function in society.

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write in *The Communist Manifesto* that “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat”(Marx, Engels 33). Bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalist, the oppressor. And the working class or the oppressed. The upper class people show utter disregard of the rights and interest of the poor people. Lady Booby is not concerned whether her servant get their wages in time. An autocratic squire, in His zeal for preserving game kills all the dogs and confiscates all the guns in the neighbourhood. When he goes hunting he recklessly breaks down the farmers hedges and rides over their gardens and cornfields. Another squire sends his people to abduct Fanny. The poor have absolutely no protection. Even law exists on behalf of the rich. Lawyers are always at the service of the upper class people to make a mockery of the law. Justice are ready to stretch the law to the outmost possible extent to gratify the whims of the upper class people. Adams was sent to jail without even knowing the truth. Joseph and Fanny were arrested for cutting just a Hazel twig. A man in a position of power is misogynistic. They even have the power to change the law which has been regarded as “law is blind”. Scout says to Lady Booby, “the laws of this land are not so vulgar as to permit a mean fellow to contend with one of your ladyship’s fortune” (Fielding 270). Law is not itself about truth but based on class status which is highly problematic. The words of the squire was believed in the court just because he was an upper class person. Whereas the voice of Adam, Joseph were questioned or not even heard. Thus, people like Justice Frolick, lawyer Scout are the pests of society and a scandal to the profession.

In the novel we can see that “female rivalry” is presented along class lines. Feminist psychology argues that female rivalry is primarily driven by social mechanism, not biological imperatives. There is a stereotypical image of female rivalry brought in. At one level Fielding

breaks stereotype with regard to woman. But at the same time he did not keep women on pedestal. A woman is targeted not only by man but also by a woman. Lady Booby called on Beau Didapper to assault Fanny. She continually shows superiority in front of others. At the very opening scenes we can see accusation between Mrs. Slipslop and Lady Booby for the pleasure of Joseph. In the later part of novel, Lady Booby advised Mr. Booby to try to dissuade Joseph from marrying Fanny, and also prevent the publishing of banns. Mrs. Slipslop and Lady Booby often indulge in gossiping about Pamela and Fanny. On one hand we have Pamela and Lady Booby who was constantly trying to attack Fanny. On the other hand we have submissive, silent Fanny who would take up everything without any voice. There was a rivalry between Lady Booby and Pamela, when Mr. Booby praise Fanny's beauty. Mr. Booby "launched forth into such raptures praises of her beauty" (Fielding 286). They "paid a cross compliment to each other's charms" (Fielding 286). Slipslop regard Fanny as a barbarous manner, Low-life creature. Mrs. Booby's comment that Pamela is an angel compared to Fanny shows how a married woman is much safe than are unmarried one like Fanny. Fanny represents innocence, sensuous modesty with sweet temper. We can bring in the image of loyal friendship between Joseph and Adams which can be contrasted with the female characters. Thus, female rivalry is also portrayed with regard to class tensions.

Appearance are deceptive, but they are constantly taken for reality and truth. "Pretensions", "clothing", "reputation" are of the factor that brought in binary between appearance and reality. Lower class people are always a source of amusement and entertainment in front of the upper class people. There are scenes when Adams was a victim of several practical jokes. Through the slapstick comedy of the squire the fools, it shows how Adams was insulted. In the dining hall, one of them pulled Adams chair. Another, a poet, over turned a plate of soup into his breeches. One of the waiting men mixed a large quantity of gin into Adams ale. When the dinner was over, the poet recited an extemporaneous verse making fun of his shabby clothes. A dancing master invited Adams to do a minuet and reached for his hand. A captain fastened a fire-cracker to his cassock. A doctor, the best-educated in the company but the worst of the lot. He too didn't leave a chance to make a mockery of Adams. This scene expose those who pretend respectability- the squire, the doctor, the captain, the dancing master are the most hypocritical one. The novel satirizes a number of people belonging to different cross section of society. It expresses the ignorance and irresponsibility of the judge who thinks of the culprits as fun for his guests. It satirises the genteel company who amuse themselves by insulting Fanny and Adams. A parson, making fun of Adams Latin and declaring

his Aeschylus to be an ancient manuscript of the church Father. Thus, people belonging to lower strata are subject to amusement.

Another important theme of *Joseph Andrews* is that of clothing and nakedness, a theme which is closely related to appearance and reality. Clothing is suggestive of both gender identity and class. Take, for instance, Beau Didapper who is very foppish in his dress. Perhaps he is more particular about his appearance because he is worthless in reality. Much attention is paid to dress in the Booby's household as well. Adams tell us that he is not invited there because Lady Booby thinks his dress is not good enough for the gentry at her table. When Mr. Wilson goes to London in order to seek for himself the characters of fine gentleman, it is the tailor whom he approach first. Another very ironic comment on clothing comes from the misery and uncharitable Peter Pounce; Since he is not inclined to give any charity. He remarks that a man naturally wants clothes more than a horse. We found Joseph gentrified through his clothes. Social rank is frequently mistaken because of improper clothes, as when Slipslop take Adams for someone going to fair and when Bellarmine boasts of having mistaken English ladies for chambermaid at the opera. Fielding especially delights in ridiculing the upper class people (from the squire up) who are people of fashion “ in reality, nothing more was originally meant by a person of fashion than a person who dress himself in the fashion of the times (Wiesenfarth 358).

Fielding has satirized the hypocrisy so typical to the aristocracy of his age. Lady Booby is worried for her reputation. For if she loses her, it would deny her the power and pleasure of “demolishing the reputation of others”. Fielding is highly contemptuous of such a superficial concept of virtue and reputation. Even Pamela's statement to Joseph after Mr Booby advises him as a friend: “no doubt, my papa and mamma will be of his opinion, and will have great reason to be angry with you for destroying what his goodness hath done, and throwing down our family again, after he hath raised it” (Fielding 295). This remark shows how Pamela was worried to lose their reputation. Through the story there are several characters which seems to be well reputed but hollow inside. The most insistent reversals are in Lady Booby's feeling, as she loved, hated, pity, scorned, admired, and despised the same person by fits, which changed in a very short interval. Slipslop advises her to disregard contentions and take Joseph for her husband, but society deems birth and title as worthier than true merit. And so the emotions of Lady Booby has been suppressed. For all his inner equalities and his external comeliness Joseph simply isn't a gentleman.

'Class Consciousness' is an important aspect of Marxist Philosophy. There is the anxiety about class transgression that ultimately leads to one's class position. Social mobility is a prime issue in climbing the social ladder. In the history of Leonara, we can see how her aunt enforced her to be with Bellarmine just because of his material wealth. This affectation, according to Fielding, proceeds either from vanity or from hypocrisy: vanity makes men affect "false characters, in order to purchase applause," while hypocrisy is the concealing of "our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues" in an endeavor to avoid censure (Cauthen 379). Marriage of convenience is upheld unlike the marriage of romance. Social mobility which means class transgression can be influenced highly by marriage. Fielding tried to satirize marriage based on economic ground. Influential character is Pamela who has acquired a new opinion of her own position after getting married to Mr. Bobby. Saying of Fanny- 'she was my equal,' answered Pamela, 'but I am no longer Pamela Andrews, I am now this gentleman's lady, and as such I am above her' (Fielding 295). We can also see a transgression of Joseph's character after he was well dressed and accepted by Mr. Booby. His status was raised to a certain extent because of Pamela. There are also other instances in the text where we can find upheld in class. For example "Lottery" which works as a luck favour to up bring one's class to some extent. We found how Mr. Wilson won a lottery leaving the whole fortune to Harriet Hearty.

The class and gender issues are highlighted through the binary between public and private space, money and morality, marriage of convenience versus romantic union, appearance versus reality. Thus, we can conclude that Fielding brings his major characters in contact with different strata of society- country squires, divine and philosopher's, lawyers and surgeon, land ladies, beggars and highwayman- and exposes the contemporary social evils as well as human follies and foibles of a more general nature. General human weakness that Fielding holds to ridicule are lack of charity, malice, vanity, selfishness and hypocrisy of the people who are held in high esteem. However, at the end the class hierarchy still remains intact through the social elevation of Joseph and Fanny.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Fielding offers a complex examination of class and gender dynamics in 18th-century England. He critiques the rigid social hierarchy and the ways in which class and gender intersect to shape individual experiences and societal expectations. The story highlights the absurdities and hypocrisies of the time. Ultimately, Fielding's satire underscores the moral shortcomings of a society bound by strict class distinctions that transcends wealth, rank, and

gender. The novel serves as a sharp social commentary. Urging readers to reflect on the injustices of their own social structures and to consider a more humane and equitable society.

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