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THE INORGANIC PLOT OF *JOSEPH ANDREWS*

Aleš Tichý

Whatever pleasure may be derived from the reading of *Joseph Andrews,* the plot of the novel, in the sense of an ordered sequence of causally related incidents, is not one of its main sources. In the most extensive and most significant part of the narrative, the central section, it is too tenuous and produces too little expectation to act as an effective organizing factor, the development of the action as a whole has a definite air of arbitrariness about it, and the story fails to acquire a balanced shape in spite of its tendency to formal symmetry. In comparison with the much-celebrated organization of *Tom Jones,* Fielding's first novel (which already contains all the substantial elements of its mature successor) is less contrived but also much more inconsistent, and the character of the plot contributes to this effect considerably.

The unsatisfactory arrangement of the story is a symptom of its inferior position in the structure of the novel. The thematic pattern of the book is brought out by the way in which the characters are presented, assisted by the inflection of the narrator's voice and his occasional comments. The characters do not develop, but our knowledge of them increases as the protagonists and some of the minor figures acquire new dimensions in the process of accretion, refinement, or change. Most of the action aims at supplying us with such knowledge, and as the characters operate primarily on a moral plane, it is so designed as to reflect credit or discredit upon them or upon their professed views. The limited imaginative appeal of such a rendering, together with a strong rhetorical element, considerably reduces the function of the chain of cause and effect and gives the story an essentially non-dramatic character.

The role of the plot is also weakened by a tendency to reveal a theme through juxtapositions of differing attitudes. In order to make these juxtapositions especially prominent and conducive to the reader's involvement in the problem, events leading to the encounter of the bearers of these attitudes as well as events resulting from their confrontation are usually rendered in a very low key or reduced to a bare minimum. As a thorough investigation of a problem requires many such encounters to

take place, the story has to supply secondary characters in profusion and let them disappear as soon as they are no longer needed.

Both the emphasis on confrontation rather than on its results and the stream of characters make the employment of a modified picaresque formula of a journey, adapted "in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote", an understandable choice. Fielding, however, was not ready to follow his Spanish model the whole way. He was concerned not so much with the exploration of the complex relationship between literature and life as with the exposure of human follies, whether in writing silly books, or in using one's position or riches to the detriment of the physical well-being of other people and the spiritual well-being of oneself, or in adhering to doctrines with a similarly harmful effect. As he ceased to be interested in the potentialities offered by the initial parody, instead of gradually widening the scope of the novel he abruptly passed to an autonomous development of his comprehensive thematic pattern and removed the literary implications into the background. While at first he used *Pamela,* in Forster's words, as a "source for his own intentions",[1] from Chapter Eleven onward he treated it as a mere formal "framework". The result was a non-symbolic love story superimposed in the bulk of the novel upon an equally non-symbolic journey, a plot intended to give some degree of unity and formal order to a "work of somewhat mixed intentions"[2] by developing its main theme within a story that soon lost its thematic importance.

Fielding's attempt to organize his themes round a love story and to call various literary models to his assistance naturally arises from the treatment of plots in his dramatic works. The author of *Joseph Andrews* had a long dramatic career behind him when he was forced to abandon the stage and took to fiction as his new means of literary expression, and the experience was not lost upon him. As Irvin Enhrenpreis pointed out,[3] the very idea of an intrusive narrator might have been suggested, besides in addition, his dramatic work included many incidents and characters which later appeared in both the Richardsonian and the Cervantine sections of *Joseph Andrews.* Fielding's work for the theatre did not make his novel dramatic in the sense of suggesting a conflict of interests resolved through concentrated action. On the contrary, his plays had been gradually moving away from such a model, and before the publication of the Licensing Act they had attained a shape which made them as pertinent a source of inspiration for *Joseph Andrews* as its avowed and assumed models of prose fiction.

The general line of development of Fielding's dramas from pure entertainment in the *Love in Several Masques* to pronounced satire on the contemporary state of England in *The Historical Register* is characterized

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[1] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 124.

[2] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 261.

[3] Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Fielding's Use of Fiction: The Autonomy of Joseph Andrews," in *Twelve Original Essays on Great English Novels,* edited by Charles Shapiro (Detroit, 1960), pp. 37–38.

by a gradual decrease in the importance of the plot, ending with its complete suppression in the last "rehearsal" plays. From the early dramas onward the poverty of matter was occasionally alleviated by instances of more acute observation, but these observations were placed outside the main line of action, and the conventional story of a love intrique, developed in many complications, was long predominant. A more radical approach appears in plays referring to literary models. In the early burlesque of *The Author's Farce* the author for the first time put the plot to other than strictly dramatic uses by employing it as a framework for a play-within-the-play, and in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* he learned how to produce an effective parody without substantially changing the character of the traditional plot and the way in which it evolved. *Don Quixote in England* presents yet another story of love and marriage, but the centre of interest moves to the protagonist, defined by his literary background, who invites comparison with other people and comments on what he sees around him without participating prominently in the main action. As the gap between the thematic pattern and the plot widened, Fielding drew the consequences, and in *Pasquin* he put his commentators outside the action for the first time and let the conventional plot completely disappear.

Another feature of the plot in *Joseph Andrews* which the author employed in a rudimentary form in some of his dramas is its unexpected resolution. The amount of preparation for the denouement varied from one play to another, but Fielding was always ready to close his story with a happy ending with the help of chance, a stolen or unsuspected inheritance, the sudden *volte-face* of some character, or other similar devices, in which the plays and fiction of his time abounded. Their artificiality did not deter the author from using them: they were void of any symbolic meaning and merely assisted in keeping the audience amused. If a *deus ex machina* was at hand to remove obstacles which the sympathetic protagonists were powerless to overcome, it had not yet assumed the shape of benevolent Providence.

Shamela combined the literary satire and the general criticism of life with definite social colouring, elements which had been gradually emerging from Fielding's plays, and took it another step forward. This time the author did not intend to produce an autonomous piece of fiction; he was about to demolish another book and managed to do it most effectually by imposing his own vision of life on Richardson's well-known story. *Joseph Andrews*, a book of wider scope from the very beginning, was at first constructed along similar lines. The satirical intent again suggested the outline of the plot, but the expression of Fielding's views was soon made independent of the criticism of *Pamela*. The world of Richardson's novel was cut to size by contrast with another world (and later incorporated within a far more comprehensive view) rather than subverted from within. However, the first ten chapters of *Joseph Andrews* still lead a semiautonomous life. In order to understand them the reader must be acquainted with *Pamela*, though he must be prepared to look far behind it for clues to their meaning.

The text of the opening chapters is too short and, in the absence of

external evidence, rather too equivocal to allow far-reaching conclusions to be derived from it. Nevertheless, as it stands, it produces some definite expectations concerning the future action of the characters. As a result, the Richardsonian chapters, due to their sensitive initial position, shape the plot of the novel as a whole out of all proportion to their importance.

After the sudden shift in the narrative the characters can be easily adapted to the new requirements (except for Joseph, who undergoes a long process of change in the eyes of the reader[4]), but the story has to be completely remodelled. From a fully integrated and substantial part of the narrative it changes into a very thin chain of incidents, for the most part without any influence on future events. The non-thematic links between the first and second sections consist of allusions to events in the opening chapters, arbitrarily superimposed on the progress of the journey. At first they maintain a tenuous link with the original literary theme, and so assist in mitigating the impact of the sudden break in Chapter Eleven; later they pave the way for the resumption of the original story, though in a profoundly modified form.[5] After the adventures on the road have almost exhausted the pattern of non-literary themes, the relation between Joseph and Lady Booby again comes into the foreground. At this stage, however, the treatment no longer aims at ridiculing *Pamela*. The central situation is reworked within the new thematic framework elaborated in the middle section: the inducements to virtue are more important than virtue itself, and vanity has become the chief laughing-stock. Though the plot again resembles that of *Pamela*, the reader's acquaintance with Richardson's story is no longer essential; it is his remembrance of the beginning of *Joseph Andrews* that is made use of.

While the influence of the Richardsonian section on the plot is obvious, it should not be transferred to the thematic pattern without substantial modifications. If chastity is raised to one of the major themes in the novel or even, as Mark Spilka suggested,[6] to the central theme, some inconsistencies will disappear but many more emerge.

The clue to the relatively frequent appearance of the theme should be looked for again in the original intention behind the book. In the rendering of the theme of chastity in the opening chapters the context of parody is more important than the man-woman relationship itself, and this sets the tone for the reiteration of the theme in the following section. The novel soon moves away from the initial burlesque, but the non-parodic refutation of *Pamela*, present in the opening scenes, does not disappear at once. The story of Betty the chambermaid (in I, xviii) is, as an appropriate coda to Book One, still Richardson-oriented: first, it reintroduces the concept of male chastity, which is of no use outside the

[4] For details see Dick Taylor, Jr., "Joseph As Hero in *Joseph Andrews*," *Tulane Studies in English*, 7 (1957), 91–109. The analysis of Joseph's change is not invalidated by the conclusions, which are not always accepted.

[5] Homer Goldberg in *The Art of Joseph Andrews* (Chicago, 1969) sees in them supporting evidence for his claim that the novel attained an unprecedented degree of formal integration.

[6] Mark Spilka, "Comic Resolution in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*," in *Fielding: A collection of critical essays*, edited by Ronald Paulson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962), pp. 59–68.

burlesque, as a farewell gesture and then subordinates female virtue to the more serious concepts of benevolence, again with strong social implications. ("... if I have been wicked, I am to answer for it myself in the other World, but I have done nothing that's unnatural," says the good-hearted Betty after she has been discovered together with Mr. Tow-wouse, while his wife comments: "If she had been a gentlewoman like my self, it had been some excuse, but a beggarly saucy dirty Servant-Maid." [In I, xvii; 85 and I, xvii; 84 respectively.][7])

Before Book Four the problem of chastity acquires new aspects in the encounter of Joseph and Fanny (in II, xii and II, xiii), where a perfect relationship between man and woman is defined. On the other hand, the numerous attempted rapes of Fanny are part of the novel's scaffolding: they preserve the sense of continuity with the original story but are devoid of any psychological interest. Their presence also assists the author in introducing other themes (providence in II, ix and II, x, the town-versus-country theme in IV, vii, etc.).

The man-woman relationship is again treated on its own ground in Book Four, but by now chastity has given way to marriage. The refutation of Richardson is complete: while his characters (his by name only) appear in the novel in person and the story again takes its nucleus from *Pamela,* the world presented has nothing to do with its prototype.

In the initial chapters the double intention makes itself felt both in the thematic pattern and in the ordering of the narrative. The two main strains — parody and the presentation of Fielding's own outlook that grows out of it — show a perceptible tendency towards complementariness, both in the intrusions of the narrator and in dramatized scenes. Even though the meaning of some passages is obscured by the lack of a longer perspective, most of the juxtapositions, congestions with a telescoping effect and other similar devices unequivocally help to link the two strains and make them comment upon one another.

The complicated approach to the reader which appears in the last encounter of Joseph and Lady Booby in Book One, in juxtaposing the ridicule of *Pamela* and its transgression, offers an elaborate example of this tendency. It illustrates the opportunities for an organic evolution of the thematic pattern by the literary plot so instructively that it deserves to be presented in greater detail.

The starting-point for the complications occurs when the second scene of temptation has reached its climax and Joseph has defended his conduct by his virtue. The word takes the scene square into the world of *Pamela* and touches upon the heart of Fielding's objections against it. The purpose of parody is obvious and Lady Booby's reaction shows at once how contrived the situation is:

"Have you the assurance to pretend, that when a Lady demeans herself to throw aside the Rules of Decency, in order to honour you with the highest Favour in her Power, your Virtue should resist her Inclination? That when she had conquer'd her own Virtue, she should find an Obstruction in yours?" (I, viii; 41).

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[7] All quotations come from the Wesleyan edition of *Joseph Andrews* (Oxford, 1967). The page numbers are separated from those of books and chapters by a semicolon.

If the parodic intention were not so prominent, the fact that Joseph represents the Richardsonian set of values and Lady Booby explodes it would be confusing in view of the previous history of the two characters. From the very beginning, however, Joseph has been moving in and out of the literary context, both in his actions and in the intrusions of the narrator. The literary atmosphere around him is never completely absent: the very description of his appearance, inserted just before the present scene of temptation, contains a sly dig at *Pamela*. To take Joseph for a prig is to miss the essential dual quality of his character arising from the dual intention behind the action. All the difficulties which the author experiences in the middle section of the novel concerning the memory of Joseph's behaviour are due to this quality. On the other hand, within the short span of the initial chapters, it makes Joseph the most effectual connecting link between the two worlds presented there.

While Lady Booby's rhetorical query underlines the broad satire demolishing the image of *Pamela* as a book which contributes to the improvement of its readers, Joseph's answer takes the matter into the wider thematic sphere at once:

> "Madam," said *Joseph*, "I can't see why her having no Virtue should be a Reason against my having any. Or why, because I am a Man, or because I am poor, my Virtue must be subservient to her Pleasures." (I, viii; 41).

All the dangers that threaten a woman who is poor, exemplified by so many near-rapes of Fanny, are hinted at in this reply. The words go beyond the problem of a sexual ethic and yet are pertinent to the central situation of *Pamela*. The incongruity of Joseph's answer makes the reader construct a hierarchy of themes involved in it, and this would show him the limits of the Richardsonian concept.

The suggestion of more serious themes behind those realized in Richardson's novel does not, however, exhaust the possibilities offered by the situation. The narrative, which has for a moment transcended its satirical intent, returns to the ridicule of *Pamela* as Joseph, the footman without a liberal education, who was "a little too forward in Riots at the Play-Houses" (I, iv; 27), says about the "Magistrates who punish Lewdness, or Parsons, who preach against it":

> "... I wish they had an Opportunity of reading over those Letters, which my Father hath sent me of my Sister *Pamela's*, nor do I doubt but such an Example would amend them." (I, viii; 41).

These words would seriously impair Joseph's reputation if they did not invite comparison with his preceding reply and in doing so remind the reader of his simultaneous existence outside the literary world.

The contrast between the functions of the plot and the action in general in the Richardsonian and Cervantine sections of the novel is so pronounced that the dividing line between them assumes the character of a rift in the structure. Passing from a broad parody to a broad comedy, Fielding looked to Cervantes for support and took over his loose organization of the material. Except for a few instances of close imitation, which

underline the replacement of one narrative type by another, the new "manner" remained limited to the general characteristics of the literary mode. The author introduced into this narrative a world peopled predominantly with lawyers, parsons and innkeepers and let these characters meet his protagonists so as to extract from their encounters as many opportunities for the confrontation of their attitudes as possible. The confrontation usually takes the form of a self-contained dialogue, and if some action follows, it provides a comment on the dialogue rather than arises as its outcome. As a result of this method, the causal chain almost disappears and what has been preserved of it is removed from the field of our vision so as not to interfere with the presentation of the themes.

Fielding altered the new formula as the novel proceeded, but its general features remain the same throughout the whole middle part of the work. The scene with the naked Joseph and the travellers in the stage-coach (in I, xii) sets the tune for the rest of the section: the robbers, the cause of everything, are the least interesting of all the people that take part in it and have been introduced for the sole purpose of creating a situation in which the others may reveal themselves. In sharp contrast to the first section, the separation of the machinery and the themes is profound.

The undramatized sequence of events which have little or no bearing on one another enables the author to concentrate on the finer shades in the attitudes of his characters but is far less suited for the presentation of concepts which have little to do with the motivation of action. When Fielding wants to introduce the theme of providence, he makes Fanny and Adams declare it (in II, ix) and, lest it should be overlooked, lets Adams repeat it soon afterwards (in II, x), and reintroduces it on various other occasions. As a rule, such repetitions are used to elaborate and refine a theme which arises from the confrontation of attitudes, but in this case they do not go beyond restating it.

As the novel approaches the end of Book Two, it becomes more serious in tone and more complex as to the narrative methods. The presence of the rhetorical element increases, while the reader turns from an amused observer to a person who, though still amused for most of the story, from time to time experiences various uncertainties similar to those which beset the characters. The cautionary element breaks into the open in the tale of Mr Wilson's life.

The shift in the narrative methods is above all apparent in the treatment of characters. In the first half of the novel the characters were defined at once by their attitudes to some person in distress: at first to the physically disabled Joseph and later to Parson Adams in his financial straits. The scene in the stage-coach again offers a good example: the characters declare themselves at once and then are exposed to our amused view as they display their vain and selfish selves. However, towards the end of Book Two, the formula is no longer valid. The promising gentleman (in II, xvi) at first deceives us as well as the protagonists, and though our deception is of much shorter duration that that of Parson Adams, it introduces a new element into the picture and subdues the sense of all-pervading comedy. Similarly, the scene with the lights in the darkness (in III, ii), which first offers a comic explanation, later a tragic one, and

finally gives commonplace reasons for what has happened, symbolizes the new approach.

The new demands on the reader's power of discernment are also apparent in other fields. From the very beginning of the novel Fielding put incongruous themes and incompatible attitudes together and let the reader sort them out and arrange them in hierarchical order. The reader had to look for inconspicuous and often distant clues and sometimes had to do without them altogether. His task was aggravated by the need to discern irony in the narrator's voice and still more by the need to separate the "correct" and "incorrect" attitudes of one character. On the other hand, the very presence of the incongruities had a challenging effect on him and sent him on a journey of exploration on which he tested the adequacy of his own attitudes. Now, in the latter half of the novel, this device has the same purpose as the other changes, namely to establish a more complex scale of values than before; and in order to achieve it, the author distributes the mixed attitudes without any unequivocal sign of their relative value. In II, xvii (the widening of themes is again heralded in the last chapter) Parson Adams, engaged in a discussion on the respective merits of learning and trade and showing a considerable lack of prudence, illustrates the new complex approach.

The virtual suppression of causality in the Cervantine section hightened the role of the narrator, but did not transfer the role of organizing the narrative to any other structural principle. In the last section the plot can again resume its original role, but it is affected by the methods developed in the central part. The emphasis on the scene rather than on its result has been retained: the timely arrival of Mr Booby reminds us of the opportune return of Peter Pounce. On the other hand, when it is the outcome that is of importance, the scene is omitted.

Book Four re-enacts most of the themes, both major and minor, from the whole novel and even contains various narrative devices appearing elsewhere in the work, such as the interpolated tale. While Book Three developed ways of presenting a complex thematic pattern, Book Four linked this pattern, in a formal manner, with the plot.

The ending of the novel is a counterpart to its beginning in the literary atmosphere which it creates. The discoveries are as contrived as the initial parody, the theme of incest as unreal as that of male chastity. The Joseph who vows perpetual celibacy if he is confirmed as Fanny's brother does not differ from the young man who refused Lady Booby's advances because of his virtue. He again passes from life to literature and back: the only difference is that criticism of literature is not part of the intention but a means of formal symmetry.

The inconsistencies of *Joseph Andrews* make it look like a novel in the making, searching for adequate forms of expression, rather than an accomplished artefact. The exploratory character is apparent in the unprepared thematic shift between combined criticism of literature and of life in the first ten chapters and the abandonment of the former in the bulk of the novel, as well as in changes of narrative technique as the author envolved and reshaped his tools in the progress of the story. By the time the book came to its conclusion most of the lessons had been

learnt and Fielding was well equipped to conceive a major work in the new genre; in the meantime, however, he had produced a novel in which — at least in so far as its plot is concerned — the developing design is more interesting than its outcome.

NEÚSTROJNÁ ZÁPLETKA *JOSEFA ANDREWSE*

Zápletka Fieldingova románu *Josef Andrews* souvisí jen okrajově s ideovým obsahem díla, kterým je potřeba lásky v tehdejším sobeckém a marnivém světě. Autor vyjadřuje tuto myšlenku tím, že konfrontuje názory postav a v první polovině knihy dokládá jejich správnost nebo nesprávnost jednáním jejich nositelů, v druhé polovině pak ponechává na čtenáři, aby si závěry z juxtapozice postojů vyvodil bez opory v ději. Častá setkávání umožňuje pikareskní formule putování hlavních postav. Základní dějový konflikt zpočátku slouží především k parodii Richardsonovy *Pamely*, v rozsáhlé střední části se jen připomíná a rozvíjí se až v posledním oddílu jako formální svorník mezi úvodem a nesourodým pokračováním. Proto má závěr románu opět literární ráz a postavy v něm střídavě přecházejí z autonomního do literárního plánu a zpět. Téma, které zápletka rozvíjí, je v celkové koncepci díla podružné. Odtrženost dějového konfliktu od myšlenkové náplně a potlačování dějovosti lze pozorovat už ve vývoji Fieldingových dramat.