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Amelia and the limits of empathy

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4 AMELIA AND THE LIMITS OF EMPATHY

Despite Fielding's playful instructional designs, his work was largely misconstrued by the readers of his time. His first novel brought him a wave of criticism for its vulgarity, and *Tom Jones* only increased Fielding's reputation as an indecent author of books not recommendable to young readers and ladies due to their provocative sensuality. Of course, Fielding saw such sensuality as an undeniable part of human nature, but this subtlety was lost on many readers. Tom's transgressions against chastity made him a character which is difficult to read, and many reviewers were outraged at the base nature of his acts. For example, Fielding's greatest critic, Samuel Johnson, strongly argued that good and evil should be strictly distinguished, and that 'Colours of Right and Wrong' should not be confounded by writers who 'instead of helping to settle their Boundaries, mix them with so much Art, that no common Mind is able to disunite them'.¹ Nevertheless, the danger of ambiguity serves the author's educational aims since he uses it to put the notions of good and evil in a social perspective and comment on the value of self-affection as a beneficial and necessary constituent of good judgment and success in life.

Fielding's last novel, *Amelia*, differs substantially from his previous comic prose in its tone, which is more serious. It shows Fielding's former playfulness giving way to more straightforward satirical and didactic tendencies. Whereas in *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742) Fielding uses comic satire and the rules of causality to guide the reader, in *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *Amelia* (1752) his view of the world is much more sober, and he lets the reader observe the characters with less help from the narrator's commentary. Offering readers a more serious perspec-

1 R. Paulson and T. Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 234.

tive on public life than in his comic works, he centres both stories on the threats that society imposes on young men and the roughness of the urban environment. In his descriptions of Mr. Heartfree's family's misfortunes caused by Wild's sharp practice, the novelist discloses the brutality of people's everyday lives – violence, attempted rapes, stealing, murder, indifference, the ineffectuality of law, and overall social insecurity. Heartfree's helplessness against Wild's schemes and his inability to protect his family against their consequences shows the inevitable conflict of innocence with the brutality of the surrounding world.

Nevertheless, Fielding's view of human nature and life perspective never turn to the cynicism or melancholy we can see in later novelists, for example Mackenzie and Goldsmith. When Wild tries to trick Heartfree into breaking out of prison, he refuses to take the risk of somebody being hurt or killed on his behalf and answers to Wild:

Give me, therefore, no more advice of this kind, for this is my great comfort in all my afflictions, that it is in the power of no enemy to rob me of my conscience, nor will I ever be so much my own enemy as to injure it.²

For Fielding, the loss of conscience is, thus, a greater disaster than death or prison. As in *Jonathan Wild*, 'the central question in *Amelia* is still whether good can preserve itself in an evil world without participating in the evil which besets the virtuous'.³ Set in a dangerous world ruled by great ruthless men and other lesser evils, Fielding's last novel explores the theme of a hero's journey through this evil world, as the hero comes to understand that social success is less about commercial achievements and more about quality relationships.

Ironically, the change of narrative strategy in *Amelia* did not bring Fielding more respectability among readers – similarly to his previous novels, *Amelia* had its admirers as well as severe critics. The abandonment of ingenious satirical comicality inspired by Hogarth, which, in the end, had won him fame as a novelist, appeared to be a bit of a disappointment to the subscribers of his new prose. After the great commercial success of the vivid and hilarious *Tom Jones*, Fielding once again had to fight for the favour of his readers as he tried to get himself out of the pigeon-hole of a humourist and an amusing storyteller. The audiences, at first so scrupulous about vulgarity and lowness in Fielding and Hogarth's work, nevertheless enjoyed their talents, and did not receive the change in their art with joy. As Voogd states, in the 1750s, both artists grew more pessimistic and had to defend themselves against hostile criticism: 'Fielding, because his novel *Amelia* lacked the high degree of irony found in his earlier fiction; Hogarth, because he

2 H. Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, New York, The New American Library, Inc., 1961a, p. 128.

3 P. J. de Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1981, p. 175.

began to paint sublime history paintings'.⁴ The shift from playfulness to more sombre expression probably reflected the development of their thinking in later stages of their lives and also the fashion of sentiment brought in especially by Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748).

However, it is important to note that in the 40s and early 50s, the word 'sentiment' was used to describe thoughts, opinions or judgments rather than feelings. As Brissenden explains, the sentiments in Richardson's work were 'indeed moral and instructive and they were intended to provide comfort as much for the reader as for the heroine during her trials' and therefore to describe a novel as sentimental would have been to imply that it was a thoughtful, moral work, and one which presented human passion in a sober and realistic rather than a fancifully romantic manner.⁵ Like Fielding's satirical approach, sentimentalist tendencies in his last novel entail readers' emotional response to the struggles of his characters. Whereas in his previous work Fielding carefully guided the reader through the complexity of the situation, consciously correcting the reader's moral judgment with his narratorial voice, in *Amelia* he presents characters which are not burdened by comicality and serve as more direct pictures of manners. Instead of humour, which provides a certain type of release from the baseness and frustrating dangers of reality, Fielding changes his narrative strategy and adopts the popular technique of painting his heroes' trials. As a result, rather than making readers laugh their way out of their follies, he asks them to appreciate the moral strengths of virtue in the disturbing realities of the surrounding world.

Like Hogarth in his two *Progress* series of paintings, Fielding also stresses the 'story' element and the chain of cause and effect. However, there is an important difference between Hogarth and Fielding's art: 'Fielding's "consequences" are never, in the long run, "dreadful or fatal"; he nearly always makes us believe they are going to be so, and contrives a happy conclusion'.⁶ His comic novels focus on ridiculing city fops, self-serving sycophants and brutish egoists, who cause some harm by their recklessness and machinations, but never cause a complete undoing of the heroine. His work therefore continues to be above all satirical rather than sentimental in comparison with Richardson's harrowing and even fatal stories. Even though there are serious portrayals of threat in the characters of powerful evil suitors in Fielding's comic works, that threat remains in the background, overshadowed by the many other adventures which the heroes experience. As opposed to Richardson's descriptions of the fearful acts of Mr. B and Lovelace, Fielding's first two novels do not use scenes of distress as the central effect. The

4 Ibid., p. 49.

5 R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, London, Macmillan, 1974, pp. 100-101.

6 Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, pp. 41-42.

helplessness of the innocent when facing evil rather suits Fielding's satirical purposes and reflects his political aversion to the old forms of power.

While *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* display characters of central villains, in *Amelia*, we are presented with a complex system of adversities, which the principal couple must tackle. The revealing dichotomies of the Roasting Squire and Parson Adams as well as Blifil and Tom Jones are no longer used in this last novel. Although there is the character of the corrupted lord, which features in all Fielding's major texts, he is far from being at the centre of the plot. As a result, by portraying the main hero Booth with no contrasting evil adversary, Fielding shifts our focus on the social circumstances of Booth's struggle so that he can fully explore the theme of a journey of a young man through various pitfalls of male social experience.

Even though Fielding's last novel is much more serious in tone, it certainly does not read like a series of moral maxims. Sheldon Sacks in his *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* defines a novel in the context of Fielding's writing as 'a work organized so that it introduces characters about whose fates we are made to care'.⁷ Robert Hume stresses Sack's reading of Fielding's work as an experience as opposed to a sermon and claims that he 'presents us with "realistic" lives and characters – realistic in his terms, not in ours – and he means us to sympathize, criticize, enjoy, and ultimately judge'.⁸ Even without the comical tone, Fielding thus invites us to assess his characters within the circumstances of the story, and understand them not only as examples of manners but as messengers of possibilities rendered by the consequences of their actions. In line with his aim to instruct the reader in the 'most useful of arts' – 'the art of life', Fielding takes up a challenge to portray 'the various accidents which befell a very worthy couple after their uniting in the state of matrimony'.⁹ John Cleland, who was a great admirer of the novel, sees it as a bold stroke, since

the author takes up his heroine at the very point at which all his predecessors have dropped their capital personages. It has been heretofore a general practice to conduct a lover and his mistress to the doors of matrimony, and there leave them, as if after the ceremony the whole interest in them was at end, and nothing could remain beyond it worthy of exciting or keeping up the curiosity of the reader. Instead of which, Mr. Fielding, in defiance of this established custom, has ventured to give a history of two persons already married...¹⁰

7 S. Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding with Glances at Swift, Johnson and Richardson*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, p. 26.

8 R. Hume, 'Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?', *Modern Philology*, vol. 108, no. 2, 2010, p. 262.

9 H. Fielding, *Amelia*, London, Smith, Elder, 1882, p. 3.

10 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, p. 304.

Along with the absence of central evil, Fielding's choice to make his hero a married man underlines his intention to present us with a serious model of masculinity – a settled citizen who is not engaged in a romantic pursuit of love but is surrounded by a complex system of social relationships.

The journey of a young man through the dangers of life is a theme which connects all of Fielding's novels. His concerns about the snares of the city life are also prominent in the interpolated stories of Mr. Wilson in *Joseph Andrews* and The Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones*. The deterrent examples of their troubled life experience, which brought them misery and ruin, resonate with the stories of survival we know from earlier narratives, for example, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). However, instead of battling the harsh environment of a deserted island or the London underworld, Fielding's heroes must navigate in the motley labyrinth of human society. The dangers of urban city life which Joseph and Tom escape thanks to their good decisions also appear in the texts of Tobias Smollett, whose novels, like Fielding's, realistically portray the adventures and hardships young men must go through when they first come to the capital.¹¹ Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) and *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) were both published approximately at the same time as Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, so they draw a parallel to his urban narratives while addressing the pressing issue of educated young men who are not funded by their families, and who as a result must find their way through the snares and adversities of life.

In contrast to Fielding's often humorous treatment of the subject, Smollett remains brutally realistic, and his descriptions of the dangers and various practices of his time leave the reader with rather distressing impressions.¹² As the change of tone in Fielding's *Amelia* demonstrates, the issue of male success in the economics of eighteenth-century society deserved to be treated with seriousness. Consequently, instead of introducing the central young couple while they are courting or at the happy occasion of their wedding, right in the first scene, Fielding takes us to court and then into prison, where we are made to witness various types of criminals as well as innocent people in the utmost distress.¹³ We are also presented with a snapshot of the hero, Billy Booth, as we will see him for the rest of the story – battling misfortunes, poverty, rogues and tricksters along with social injus-

11 For more details on Smollett's portrayal of masculinity and his approach to self-interest, feminization and affection, see J. Shields, 'Smollett's Scots and Sodomites: British Masculinity in Roderick Random', *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2005.

12 Jennifer Thorn provides a more detailed study of Smollett's portrayals of masculinity and the struggles of non-aristocratic masculine heroes in her essay 'Roderick Random, Literacy, and the Appropriation of Plebeian Culture', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2012.

13 The influence of Fielding's life experience as a magistrate on his last novel is further documented by Lance Bertelsen in his study *Henry Fielding at Work*, New York, Palgrave, 2000.

tice and ruthlessness. Although Fielding initially holds on to a slightly burlesque description of Blear-eyed Moll and other criminals,¹⁴ the overall affliction of the place is portrayed in shocking detail; we watch the hero's alarm at the cruelty he sees slowly turning into indifference to the fates of others under the weight of his own suffering.

Apart from the more serious tone, the presentation of the main character in *Amelia* also differs from those seen in Fielding's previous narratives. As Voogd has observed, 'there is no invocation, no biographical sketch, no formal portrait of him'. In the first scene, we only get a glimpse at what Billy Booth is like – 'he is poor, honest, courageous but impetuous', 'given to gambling', 'taken-in by appearances', 'sensitive and intelligent, but also too unsuspecting'¹⁵ – qualities which are at the core of his misfortunes but which we need to reconsider later when more is revealed of his life and character. Like Tom and Joseph Andrews, Booth also reflects Fielding's interest in the values of the preceding era as well as the emerging trends of his own time. By making Booth a soldier, he refers to his own father's profession and the traditional idea of a man who is a brave and strong warrior. At the same time, Booth is a caring husband and a loving father – modern social roles which became more and more important as the century proceeded. As Campbell affirms, 'Booth seems suspended in a kind of gap between prevailing past and future masculine roles'.¹⁶ The conflicting models which Booth represents often clash, since they necessarily impose different requirements on the character. Torn between the two representations of masculinity, Booth is destined to reveal the limits of both, and therefore often gets into difficult social situations.

The key issue symbolizing Booth's dissension between the conflicting models is his controversial engagement in duelling. A parallel to Tom and Squire Western's fondness for hunting, the custom of duelling among military men like Booth and Colonel Bath represents the old notion of male honour and value in society. In his study on eighteenth-century politeness, Philip Carter stresses the importance of duelling in the changing trends of masculinity when he refers to Bernard Mandeville's understanding of the practice as 'the corollary of the honour by which men gained the courage to fight',¹⁷ and compares it with the claims of the antiduelling campaign, which presented such ideas of honour as erroneous and incompatible with new ideals of polite society. As he claims, 'modern honour, by contrast, was a quality less associated with warriorship than with lawfulness,

14 C. Rawson, *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress*, New Jersey, Humanities Press International, 1972, p. 81.

15 Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, p. 172.

16 J. Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 213.

17 P. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, Harlow, Longman, 2001, p. 72.

religious respect and sociability'.¹⁸ Like the hero of Fielding's previous novel, Billy Booth remains indebted to the old tradition of virile physical power and bravery, which compromises the new, softer and more approachable, modern model of masculinity.

These two notions of male honour are also separately represented by an old veteran, Colonel Bath, and a priest and moral authority, Dr. Harrison, who clash in the novel in the same manner as the concepts they stand for. The ever-cursing Colonel Bath and the sagacious Dr. Harrison are a striking analogy of Squire Western and Squire Allworthy from *Tom Jones*. However, this time, by contrasting these two extreme characters, Fielding does not explore the theme of prudence, which dominates *Tom Jones*, but focuses on the problem of violence as a part of male identity. While Colonel Bath claims that 'a man of honour wears his law by his side'¹⁹ and brings the examples of Greeks and Romans to help when defending the tradition of duelling, Dr. Harrison calls this custom butchery, and warns the colonel that he will be damned by God for his barbarous practices. As Campbell states, 'the explicit controversy over duelling ... represents a kind of fault line along with which the larger, underlying forces of contrary social systems become visible'²⁰ and Booth seems trapped between them as he is stuck in conversation with the two opponents. Their debate draws attention to the problem of military service as an expected male duty to the state and the coincident demand for the social refinement of male aggression. Although he was a soldier and took part in battles, Booth's duelling is perceived as completely different from fighting in the military. Unlike the wars between nations described in Greek and Roman poetry, duelling is private, presented as 'a modern custom, introduced by barbarous nations,' of which Dr. Harrison does not 'remember one single instance in all the Greek and Roman story'.²¹ Booth's hesitations and reluctance to take part in a duel with Captain Bath earlier in the novel shows Fielding's critical approach towards the tradition. Nevertheless, as opposed to Richardson's exemplary Sir Charles Grandison, who refuses to resolve his problems in a duel, Booth remains faithful to the old code of masculine honour and does not dare to turn down such a challenge.

One more instance of Booth's insecure puzzlement occurs when he is seduced by his old friend Miss Matthews in prison. As opposed to the bold sensual encounter of Tom and Mrs. Waters in the previous novel, in *Amelia*, we witness the main hero being saved by the mysterious Miss Matthews, who invites him into her cell to spend an evening with him in conversation about their troubled lives.

18 Ibid.

19 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 424.

20 Campbell, *Natural Masques*, p. 205.

21 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 426.

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When listening to Booth's story, Mrs. Matthews frequently falls into fits, sheds tears, expresses deep sympathy with the misfortunes of Booth's wife and flatters the hero, concluding:

If all men were like you, all women would be blessed; nay, the whole world would be so in a great measure; for, upon my soul, I believe that from the damned inconstancy of your sex to ours proceeds half of the miseries of mankind.²²

The greater is Booth's surprise when, after they finish narrating their stories, Miss Matthews asks Booth to stay overnight in her cell, which he gratefully accepts. Fielding then makes his hero repeat the same mistake as Tom Jones made with Mrs. Waters on his way to London and then with Lady Bellaston when he thought he was her debtor.

On the one hand, Booth's act can be considered in agreement with upper-class masculine code of gallantry, since, as Donna T. Andrew states, until the mid-eighteenth century it was generally believed that 'some segments of society were more apt to commit adultery than others, that for some it has ceased to be viewed as a crime or even as a sin, but was instead treated gently, called "gallantry", and formed a part of the mores of a privileged group in society'.²³ Nevertheless, the author's apologetic commentary on the situation, asking the reader to forgive the hero and stating that 'Fortune seemed to have used her utmost endeavours to ensnare poor Booth's constancy',²⁴ reminds us of the skilful plotters which Tom Jones had to face on his way to happiness. The falsity of Miss Matthews' feelings, which are ridiculously exaggerated and affected rather than genuine, only assures us about her role as temptress in the story and leaves Billy in the position of a victim, who, as Campbell points out, is closer to the character of Charles Grandison than a gallant Cavalier, 'for he is serious enough about the ideal of marital friendship and fidelity to be tormented by his sexual betrayal of Amelia'.²⁵ Besides drawing attention to two dominant models of masculinity, Fielding opens up the question of human fallibility, which Billy Booth represents in a more serious context than the hero did in his previous novel.

Another weakness which Booth succumbs to is his passion for gaming. When his family faces a financial crisis, and his wife and children have barely enough to eat, Booth seeks the company of his old friend, Captain Trent, who served under the same regiment with him. However, Captain Trent and his companions

22 Ibid., p. 84.

23 D. T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p. 128.

24 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 84.

25 Campbell, *Natural Masques*, p. 215.

willingly become a part of a well-thought-out scheme against Booth and trick him into a game of cards where he loses all the remaining money his family has and even falls into debt.²⁶ Booth's blind reliance on the ideas of honour – that he must respond to an affront with a challenge to a duel, that he must never fail a lady, and that he must always trust an old fellow soldier – bring him and his family near complete ruin.

The striking talent of the main protagonist to get into trouble is closely linked to his outmoded understanding of society. As Campbell points out:

Booth's preservation of old notions of upper-class masculine identity seems to place him at an economic impasse: the time-honoured gentlemanly choice of a military career does not offer Booth a viable form of support, but he finds it unthinkable to look for other means to support his family in trade of manual labour.²⁷

His traditional classical education, which presents male friendship as solid and honour-based, proves to be quite misleading since

the system of male relationships within which he defines himself constantly turns out to be either illusory or corrupt; and the conflict between Booth's hopes for male relationships and his role as husband and father only gets worse as the novel goes on.²⁸

Such an expanding discord between the roles of a soldier and a husband and a father is thus clearly connected to the changing economy of the times. Although Booth's upbringing and education makes him adhere to the traditional view of the world, he is, nevertheless, a modern man thrown into modern society and must face its risks. Therefore, Fielding's aim is not only to draw attention to the old traditions' failure, but also to portray a young man's struggle to prove his qualities in life.

Tobias Smollett's main heroes also undergo the experience of making their way in the world. Like Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Billy Booth, the characters of Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle are left by their families to take care of themselves and find their own path through the perils of modern society. As it is clear from the correlation between the major themes of these two novelists, regardless of the lack of conduct books for men at that period, the topic of masculinity and its role in modern society was a pressing and popular subject. Even though both authors give very realistic portrayals of their characters' adventures, their heroes differ substantially – whereas Smollett depicts hardy male figures, Fielding's characters are more empathetic. Under the influence of the developing

26 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 502.

27 Campbell, *Natural Masques*, p. 206.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

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sentimentalist movement, Fielding's Billy Booth had to be portrayed as capable of showing his emotions as well as empathy towards other people, but also manly enough to avoid effeminacy, which was highly criticized at the time. As Philips Carter claims:

to critics of social change, sceptical of women's contribution to men's company and alarmed by increasing levels of what they saw as fashionable and luxurious consumption, polite society threatened to undermine, tried and tested male values. In their place would arise 'effeminate' manners, characterized as physical and mental debility resulting in dependence, indulgence, inconstancy and irrationality.²⁹

By making Billy Booth a soldier, who 'behaved with distinguished Bravery' at the siege of Gibraltar and 'was dangerously wounded at Two several Times in the service of his Country',³⁰ Fielding makes sure to furnish his hero with the necessary aura of masculine virility.

However, he never acquaints us with Booth's heroic acts, and 'Booth's valour and military merit are evoked by him not through descriptions of aggressive actions or conquests, but through these references to his willing suffering of injuries'.³¹ Fielding's last hero is therefore not a tough fighter, who can face adversities with resilience and determination, but a martyred soldier, softened up by his tender love for Amelia and his children. As opposed to Fielding's previous heroes, he is described as having 'a tenderness of heart which is rarely found among men'.³² Right after he is offended by Colonel Bath and puts his sword through him in a duel, he shows a great concern for him and hurries to get him a surgeon. He also worries about his wife during her pregnancy and takes affectionate care of her. Moreover, he is devastated by the guilt over his infidelity, and when he receives Amelia's pardon, he utters 'the most extravagant expressions of admiration and fondness that his heart could dictate and accompanied them with the warmest embraces'.³³ He sheds tears over his wife's goodness as well as over the goodness of his friends who lend him money. Although Fielding's fiction and therefore also his approach to the questions of gender are traditionally studied in the context of satire,³⁴ Fielding's heroes are undeniably sentimental

29 P. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, Harlow, Longman, 2001, p. 72.

30 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 535.

31 Campbell, *Natural Masques*, p. 217.

32 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 434.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 587.

34 For example, Claude Rawson's core study about the transitions and co-existence of the Augustan and modern principles in literature of that period, *Satire and Sentiment*, only uses Fielding's work as a point of reference for Richardson's project. It is also Richardson whom he presents as one of the main figures in the development of the sentimental movement, along with Addison, Steele and Boswell.

in the sense that they openly express their emotions and show interest in other people's feelings.

Nevertheless, Booth's tender-heartedness also has limitations. When he leaves *Amelia* for war and forgets her gift, he sends his companion Atkinson to get it for him but disregards Atkinson's feelings about going back to his home after saying goodbye. Another instance of his emotional shallowness is revealed when he narrates the story of his wife's injury and describes her suffering and bravery with so much concern and admiration that he must stop because 'a torrent of tears gushed from his eyes'. We are then immediately informed that 'such tears are apt to flow from a truly noble heart at the hearing of anything surprisingly great and glorious'.³⁵ Yet, soon enough, *Amelia's* excellence and virtue, which Booth described with so much tenderness, are overshadowed by Mrs. Matthews' flattery and invitations when the hero accepts her offer to spend a night in her cell. So, Booth's tears, although they are a sign of genuine appreciation for his wife's superior qualities, do not make him a man who would treat his wife accordingly.

Even though some readers saw *Amelia* as a noble character that was instructive for readers, her attitude towards her husband was received with many objections. When Fielding himself summarizes the criticism of the town to write an apology for his favourite child, *Amelia*, he states that critics find her 'too apt to *forgive the Faults of her Husband*' and 'that her not abusing him, for having lost his Money at Play, when she saw his Heart was already almost broke by it, *was contemptible Meanness*'.³⁶ As it is even clearer from the commentary of Sarah Capone in her letter to Elizabeth Carter, Booth's behaviour and inconstancy raised a great indignation among ladies:

Are not you angry with the author, for giving his favourite character such a lord and master? and is it natural that she should be so perfectly happy and pleased with such a wretch? A fellow without principles, or understanding, with no other merit in the world but a natural good temper, and whose violent love for his wife could not keep him from injuring her in the most essential points, and that in circumstances that render him completely inexcusable.³⁷

Indeed, Sarah Capone is on point when she aptly captures the problem which critics saw in Fielding's work:

Are we to look upon these crimes as the failings of human nature, as Fielding seems to do, who takes his notions of human nature from the most depraved and corrupted

35 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 56.

36 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, p. 315.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 318.

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part of it, and seems to think no characters natural, but such as are a disgrace to human species? Don't you think Booth's sudden conversion a mere botch to save the author's credit as a moral writer? And is there not a tendency in all his works, to soften the deformity of vice, by placing characters in amiable light, that are destitute of every virtue except good nature?³⁸

It becomes clear that Fielding's playful game with notions of masculinity, which is further complicated by his focus on human weaknesses, finds little understanding with the readers who compare his work to Richardsonian straightforward models of virtue. As Anna Donnellan expressed it in her letter to Richardson:

I rejoice to find you proceed in the noble design of showing the man of virtue in all the different circumstances of social life. But what can you mean by feeling uncertain whether you shall publish it? ... Is it that we do not want such a pattern, or that you imagine there are others can give it better? Will you leave us to Capt. Booth and Betty Thoughtless for our examples? As for poor Amelia, she is so great a fool we pity her, but cannot be humble enough to desire to imitate her.³⁹

As opposed to Tom's youthful transgressions through which he learns to appreciate his own virtue and gains Sophy's heart as well as readers' favour, Booth's tender appreciation of his wife but failure to be faithful to her and financially secure his family was seen as a crime against matrimony, which readers could not forgive despite the touching scenes of Booth's genuine anguish. Although Booth displays a great deal of affection, expressing his emotions and genuinely caring for people in his surroundings, Fielding's request to empathize with his misfortunes does not fall on fertile ground. Since the hero fails to express his deep feelings also in his acts, his struggles with modern masculine roles are better understood as selfishness covered up with a masque of victimization.⁴⁰

As it turned out, the public craze for exemplary characters, like Pamela Andrews and Clarissa Harlowe, did not so easily transfer to the male version. Even Richardson, the master creator of models of manners, tried to avoid designing a picture of male virtue. As Richardson confides to Lady Bradshaigh:

A good woman is my favourite character [with whom] I can do twenty agreeable things ... none of which could appear in a striking light in a man. Softness of heart, gentleness

38 Ibid., p. 318.

39 Ibid., p. 319.

40 For more details on Shaftesbury's intellectual attitude towards sensibility and the explanation of sentimentalism as a weapon of manipulation, see J. Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 39-46.

of manners, tears, beauty, will allow pathetic scenes in the story of one, which cannot have place in that of the other.⁴¹

Carter therefore rightly observes that ‘Richardson clearly remained conscious of the limitations of men acting as exemplars of sensibility’ and in his correspondence outlined ‘the need for his idealized “good man” to be less sentimental than, above all, “wonderfully polite”’.⁴² Pushed by his correspondents to create such an ideal after all, he makes sure that Sir Charles Grandison meets the requirements of the affectionate modern man, but does not appear overly sentimental to the audiences.⁴³

Booth’s goodness but also incompetence to live up to the standard of his extraordinary wife made his character as controversial as Fielding’s previous heroes. In comparison with later, truly sentimental, male characters, like Laurence Sterne’s Yorick in *Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie’s Harley in *The Man of Feeling* (1771), Billy Booth lacks the required level of accomplished virtue as well as the frailty it results in. As Brissenden claims, ‘virtue in the eighteenth century tended to be regarded more and more – especially by novelists – as something frail and delicate; something essentially passive and easily corrupted; something, above all, which needed protection’.⁴⁴ Whereas the heroes of the novels of sensibility from the 1760s and 70s represent an ideal which, in its passivity, reflects the cruelty of the world and could even be swayed by sentiment, Fielding’s heroes still embody a different, strong and active, model of masculinity. The weaknesses of Billy Booth therefore function as obstacles he needs to overcome to achieve happiness, and despite his capacity for sympathy with the suffering around, he is not portrayed as an example to be admired.

Nevertheless, not all readers saw Billy Booth as a disgrace of his sex. John Cleland says that Booth gets involved in difficulties

partly through the criminal designs of false friends upon the fair Amelia, and partly through the misconduct of Mr. Booth himself, in many points of life; in which his errors of vivacity and inadvertence, appear rather the misguidances of his head, than of his heart, and are contrasted by the constancy of good-sense.⁴⁵

41 Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 100.

42 Ibid.

43 The influence of Richardson’s audiences on his last novel is further explored by Betty A. Schellenberg in her essay ‘Using “Femalities” to make “Make Fine Men”: Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison* and the Feminization of Narrative’, *Studies in English Literature*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1994.

44 Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*, p. 128.

45 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding*, p. 308.

Despite the scorn over Booth's weaknesses, the hero was seen as possessing a good and noble heart, and therefore meets the requirement of inner goodness as a drive for his feelings. Also, his genuine emotional response to his wife's excellence and suffering as well as the hardships and beneficence of others reveal his good sense and the honesty of his designs. Booth even has a high level of education, which was not entirely typical of a military career, and makes friends easily through his kindness and amiability. Such qualities correspond with what Carter saw as the dominant ideal. As he states, 'the prevailing eighteenth-century concept was of masculinity not just as a social but a sociable category in which gender identity was conferred, or denied, by men's capacity for gentlemanly social performance'.⁴⁶ Booth's natural fondness of company as well as his fineness of manners and frankness of conduct, thus clearly recommended him to the reader as a fine gentleman.

The reason the main hero fails in society is, therefore, not a lack of virtue or sensitivity towards his surroundings, but a failure of judgment. The character's reliance on the old codes of male hierarchy makes him overestimate his manly duties and ties of male friendship, which he perceives as sacred, putting them above his relationship with Amelia. In fact, neither his relationship with Colonel James nor with his faithful friend Atkinson is based on reciprocal respect and trust in solidarity between gentlemen. As Campbell points out, the main hero blindly relies on the 'confident assumption that Atkinson's loyalty to the Booth family grows first out of his attachment to his "master" and military superior, Booth himself, than out of devotion to his foster sister and secret love object, Amelia'.⁴⁷ Likewise, Colonel James, who generally pays respect to Booth and treats him as a friend, does not care much for his well-being. Although the Colonel promises to help Booth get a better-paid position in the army so that he can support his family with less trouble, as it turns out, the Colonel's decision is motivated by the hope of getting rid of Booth and seducing his beautiful wife. It becomes apparent that Mrs. Matthews's generous help in prison, Atkinson's admirable loyalty, and Colonel James's superficial solidarity are all rooted in a common motive of lust rather than adherence to the principles of traditional male hierarchy and values.

Whereas in *Tom Jones*, this very motive, which is hidden behind most of the charitable acts in the story, is portrayed as something quite natural, in *Amelia* it is condemned as reckless and potentially exploitative. Tom Jones's spontaneous protection of, and general fondness for, the women around him, and their corresponding tenderness and generosity towards him, seem somewhat innocent and reciprocal in comparison to the harsh world of Billy Booth, in which the selfishness of ulterior motives behind acts of charity is portrayed as a serious

46 Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 209.

47 Campbell, *Natural Masques*, p. 222.

threat. A dazzling example would be the plan of the evil lord who readily sends gifts and money to the languishing Amelia in order to lure her to a masquerade, where he intends to put drugs in her drink and rape her. As a contrast to such pretended generosity stands the character of Dr. Harrison, whose intentions are always pure and who helps Booth and his family the most without expecting any rewards. He also becomes the symbol of Booth's moral awakening after reading the Latitudinarian sermons of Issac Barrow and John Tillotson. In that respect, the character of Dr. Harrison represents a more solid ground for social conduct than the natural, yet potentially selfish, network of relationships based on heterosexual attraction.

Another male character who appears to be fooled by his passions in the novel is Booth's servant Sergeant Atkinson. Whereas Booth fails Amelia on all practical levels, Atkinson secretly loves her and does every possible thing to make her life and the life of her family better. The only crime Atkinson is guilty of is stealing Amelia's portrait from Booth's bundle when they are leaving home. When he confesses the crime on what he thinks is his deathbed and returns the painting, Amelia goes and pawns it because she is in dire need of money to feed her children. Despite being only Booth's servant and not a gentleman, Atkinson provides better practical help to Booth's family; thus, he almost appears to surpass his master.

It might seem strange that the character of Atkinson is paired with a dominant and overbearing female character proud of her learning and especially her knowledge of classical languages. Mrs. Atkinson often contradicts and silences her husband and even dares to challenge the greatest moral authority in the novel, Dr. Harrison. She is also portrayed as fond of drinking, and so they create another uneven couple in the story. As John Cleland comments on the learned wife in *The Monthly Review*:

her pedantry, and insulting this her second husband with the superiority of her acquisitions in *Latin* and *Greek*, all concur to make one wish this *Atkinson*, who is little less than the hero of the whole work, had been better provided for, than in such a match.⁴⁸

Atkinson's goodness and subordinate behaviour to his wife, who overrules him and takes advantage of his lower level of education, therefore represents another danger in the paradigm of an imaginary male journey through life, since such a wife is seen as undesirable. Despite his dutiful care for her, his wife leaves Atkinson longing for the shy and modest Amelia. Nina Prytula distinguishes two categories of Amazon-like female characters in Fielding's work: 'those who assert their equality (or superiority) to men on intellectual grounds ... and those who

48 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding*, p. 308.

attempt to subjugate the men around them by means of sheer physical (and often sexual) domination'.⁴⁹ As opposed to the traps of Molly Seagrim, Lady Bellaston and Mrs. Matthews, who want to use the hero for either personal pleasure or profit, Mrs. Atkinson thus represents an intellectual threat to masculinity. Her character is comparable to Mrs. Western in Fielding's previous novel, who contradicts her old-fashioned brother, boasts about her 'knowledge of the world' and even represents opposing political views of the Hanoverian court.

On the one hand, the arguments about women's learning and emancipation expressed by these ladies when fighting with authorities epitomize the fight for rights and independence for women, but on the other hand, both Mrs. Atkinson and Mrs. Western are portrayed rather negatively, as pretentious, lacking deeper understanding, and neglecting their traditional matrimonial role – motherhood. Smallwood draws attention to the fact that Fielding's interest in the social position and general estimation of women to a great extent overlapped with the concerns of early eighteenth-century feminism represented for instance by Mary Astell. Yet, in her analysis of feminist pamphlets of the time – for example, 'Sophia, a person of quality' – Smallwood does not proclaim Fielding to openly support feminist thoughts and goes only as far as to say that

when Fielding's treatments of issues concerning women are related to his basic moral and political thinking, it becomes possible to suggest that he may have felt an essential sympathy with the kinds of argument used by 'Sophia' and other feminist writers.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the careful formulation of her argument, Smallwood therefore manages to break a deep-seated perception of Fielding as traditionally patriarchal and masculine, as opposed to the feminized and allegedly feminist Richardson.

Curiously enough, the perceptions of Mrs. Atkinson's character by Fielding's contemporaries vary as well, as is evident from the contradictory commentaries of readers. On 6 January 1752, Lady Orrery wrote to her husband about the novel that 'Mrs. Atkinson's character is neither uniform nor natural, the only good stroke in it making so learned a lady also a drunken Lady'.⁵¹ In contrast, on 11 February of the same year, Anne Donnellan raised her concern about Fielding's intentions when corresponding with Samuel Richardson:

49 N. Prytula, "'Great-Breasted and Fierce": Fielding's Amazonian Heroines', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2002, p. 176.

50 A. Smallwood, *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate 1700-1750*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 32.

51 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding*, p. 317.

But pray, Sir, you that desire that women should be learned, what do you say to Mrs. Atkinson? Must we suppose that if a woman knows a little Greek and Latin she must be a drunkard, and a virago?⁵²

The two contradicting reactions to the character of Mrs. Atkinson show the uncertainty of society about such issues as female education and the slowly changing attitude towards such a possibility.

As Battestin and Probyn brought to light, the correspondence of Fielding's own unmarried sister, Sarah, shows that her 'acquisition of an impressive competence in Greek and Latin was acquired at the cost of her brother's "Company" and "Civility"'. They also claim that

Sarah described herself, with characteristic deference and (if she were recalling her brother's satire of Mrs Atkinson in *Amelia*) some irony, as *not* one of those women who have 'pick'd up a few scraps from Horace, [and who] immediately imagine themselves fraught with all knowledge'.⁵³

In the eyes of Fielding and John Cleland, traditional male knowledge of classical languages, however, continued to be perceived as something impractical for a wife as well as undesirable and potentially threatening for her husband. The two strong female figures of Amelia and Mrs. Atkinson, therefore, seem to have a rather intimidating effect on the models of masculinity. In the end, both Billy Booth and Sergeant Atkinson are perceived as gentlemen admirable for their bravery in battle and their honesty, but also weak in the sense that they cannot catch up with the either overtly virtuous or learned modern women. Atkinson's inability to oppose his wife and Booth's failure to live up to his heroic Amelia point to the limits of the suggested ideal of new masculinity, which is based on more emotional and empathetic responses to surroundings, but which makes it almost impossible for Fielding's male characters to effectually exist in the hostile environment of the modern urban economies.

Nevertheless, Fielding's reflection on the vices of the town and the portrayals of injustice and suffering of his heroes do not seem to be directly connected. McCrea observes that

the two actions of the novel – Booth's spiritual journey to a religious faith that rescues him from his own worst impulses, and his efforts in the city to receive a military command commensurate with his merits – ultimately bear no relation to each other.

52 Ibid., p. 319.

53 M. C. Battestin and C. T. Probyn (eds.), *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. xxxii.

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Booth's spiritual rebirth and subsequent reward have no effect on the London scene: rather they permit him to imitate Jones's escape to a rural world ruled by a benevolent despot. They speak not at all to the problem of corruption in London and involve no reward for his military virtues.⁵⁴

Fielding's heroes therefore do not achieve any social success for their military qualities and gentlemen-like upbringing.

Instead, Fielding focuses on the role and position of a masculine figure in a world dominated by self-interest and speculates about its boundaries. His quandary is well-illustrated by Booth's entrepreneurial fiasco when he gets some funding from his good friend and benefactor, Dr. Harrison, and starts a farm in the countryside. Although he has very good conditions for becoming a successful country gentleman who lives off the land, Booth becomes too proud and gets into conflicts with his common-folk neighbours. Due to his arrogant behaviour and his decision to buy a coach and six so that he can move around the village like a proper gentleman, even though he cannot afford such a luxury, Booth loses the favour and trust of his neighbours and falls victim to their malevolence and spiteful acts. His overall failure to integrate into a frugal country community, which in Fielding's previous novels functions as an ideal society, reflects the author's commentary on

the loss of traditional male virtues such as moderation, sense, public duty, integrity and independence for which ... British manhood had once been famed and feared. In its place had come the tyranny of self-interest from which sprang the social evils – luxurious consumption, social competition and preoccupation with fashionable trivia.⁵⁵

The right measure of self-interest therefore remains a vital topic for Fielding, who sees it as the core of the new set of manners within modern Whiggish society.

McCrea develops his comment on Fielding's full acceptance of Whiggish ideology at the end of his life and further states that Booth's autonomous and seemingly miraculous spiritual rebirth at the end of the novel, along with Amelia's much-criticized lack of spirit, derive from Fielding's reluctance to openly question the vices of London life. As McCrea states about Amelia:

She has great moral rectitude but little moral force; her virtue is lame because Fielding will not permit it to combat the vice it encounters. Fielding's hesitancy to criticize

54 B. McCrea, *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth Century England*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1981, pp. 186-187.

55 Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 129.

London life is at the heart of both these features of *Amelia*, and again reveals how political considerations account for some of the more puzzling, unsuccessful features of his later work.⁵⁶

Despite Fielding's hesitance to directly criticize the vices and corruption in London, his portrayals of their effects underline his call for better administration – 'a theme he typically illustrates by multiplying examples of bad administrators: Justice Trasher, the bailiffs who guard Booth, the venal lord, Booth himself in his first attempt at being a country gentleman'.⁵⁷ Although his main protagonists fail in judging the situations and people in their surroundings, and consequently damage their reputation while not giving the expected social performance, Fielding makes sure to balance their failings with examples of truly corrupted characters, like the evil lord, who are indifferent to the results of their cold-blooded acts, and therefore show the egocentric idealist Billy Booth in a more amiable light.

Yet, even though the reader might find the distressed main hero more silly than guilty of any serious crimes, Booth does not escape punishments for his transgressions as easily as his predecessor Tom Jones. The bankruptcy of his business appears to be a much greater flaw in character than any dalliance or a hot-headed fight. His imprudence is contrasted with the lifestyle of his benefactor, the exemplary Dr. Harrison, who functions as the Good Samaritan and becomes the model of social behaviour for the right gentleman. As Booth describes him:

he is far from being rich. The doctor hath an income of little more than six hundred pound a-year, and I am convinced he gives away four of it. Indeed, he is one of the best economists in the world: but yet I am positive he never was at any time possessed of five hundred pound, since he hath been a man.⁵⁸

Thus, the self-centred folly of Billy Booth, who disregards his new community and gradually loses the trust and assistance of all his acquaintances, is compared here to the desirable image of manners embodied in the character of Dr. Harrison – an excellent economist giving away some of his money to people in his community in need.

On the other hand, even the figure of Dr. Harrison is shown to have limited patience. When the character is informed about Booth's bankruptcy, drinking, card gaming and failure to support his wife and children, despite *Amelia*'s impassioned pleas, he decides to have Booth arrested and punished for his irresponsibility. Although the young Captain surely does not fulfil modern society's requirements

56 McCrea, *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth Century England*, p. 186-87.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

58 Fielding, *Amelia*, p. 621.

for an exemplary man and turns out to be a lousy manager of his estate, a bad neighbour to his community, an unworthy husband to his wife, and a miserable father to his children, Dr. Harrison seems to go a bit too far when he breaks the ties between him and his friend from the same social class. When Fielding mockingly summarizes the criticism of his novel, he states that the voice of the town finds Dr. Harrison to be a 'low, dull, unnatural, Character, and that his arresting Booth, *only because he had all imaginable Reason to think he was a Villain, is unpardonable*'.⁵⁹ Such a reaction reflects the aptness of Fielding's commentary on the co-existence and clash of two paradigms for social relationships between men, which for some of his readers were still supposed to be based on social-class solidarity rather than moral principles and socio-economic alliances. Since the goodness of Dr. Harrison is not without boundaries, his character can be contrasted with the slightly naïve characters of generous Parson Adams and Squire Allworthy. When he finds out about Booth's foolish squandering of money and bad reputation as a neighbour, he feels let down by the young hero and refuses to help Booth get out of bankruptcy. As opposed to the funny absent-minded Parson Adams and the amiable and tolerant Squire Allworthy, Dr. Harrison is very serious about his principles and does not give second chances. His attitude, thus, represents the shift between the humorous, playful satire of Fielding's first two novels and the more serious approach to society in his last one.

At the same time, Fielding is making a very important statement on the limits of empathy as a social competence and a necessary base for right decision-making. Considering the three exemplary benefactors of Fielding's male heroes, one can see the clear difference between their abilities to make competent judgments about the people around them. The first controversial character, Parson Adams, is easily tricked in his learned gullibility and ends up living in absolute poverty for giving away too much. Being a not very economically and socially competent figure, he did not convince readers as a possible model example of masculine imagery. In contrast, Squire Allworthy is a much more honourable man who, nevertheless, falls prey to crafty plotters for his trusting nature. Although he can manage his own estate with excellence, and willingly shares his riches with people in need, even with a foundling, he appears to be too soft to get rid of Mr. Square and Mr. Thwackum, whose practices he despises, and to restrict Blifil's whimpering and telling tales about Tom. As a result, he gets fooled into expelling the good hero and supporting people who exploit his goodness. Finally, Dr. Harrison seems to be different from his kind predecessors, since he is very strict and sober in the way he judges his environment. Far from being fooled by anyone, he sticks to his firm moral principles based on Latitudinarian sermons and openly challenges Captain Bath's violence as well as Mrs. Atkinson's superficiality, and many

59 Paulson and Lockwood, *Henry Fielding*, p. 315.

other flaws. Thus, his character, in comparison with Billy Booth's confusion, illustrates that for survival and the right gentlemanly conduct in society the level of sensibility needs to be limited.

The overall reaction to the change in Fielding's narrative strategy from comedy to a more serious social commentary was met with general disappointment. When compared with Richardson's portrayals of virtuous heroines in distress whom the audience could adore, the imperfect Billy Booth and his blindly loving wife do not inspire much awe. For example, Mary Granville Delany, in her letter to Mrs. Dewes from 18 January 1752, claimed about the novel that

it has more a moral design than either appears in Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones, but has not so much humour; it neither makes one laugh or cry, though there are some very dismal scenes described, but there is something wanting to make them touching.⁶⁰

Since readers likely expected another humorous book from Fielding, the well-established witty author, *Amelia* was seen as a let-down.

However, as Voogd observes about the progress of Fielding as a novelist, 'the change of tone and manner is in keeping with the change of subject; Fielding's *Amelia* is not an anomalous break but a continuation and redirection of his art'.⁶¹ Refusing J. P. Hunter's understanding of the novel as a sad surrender 'to a traditional rhetoric calculated to console the already righteous',⁶² Voogd objects to this view and re-asserts Fielding's autonomy as a writer:

I completely fail to see why Fielding should have felt a failure, since *Tom Jones* was very well received (although, indeed, not by Richardson), and harder still to see why Fielding should suddenly feel the need for acceptance by 'the already righteous' he had always despised and whom he ridicules.⁶³

Instead, Voogd claims that 'when it is read in the light of Fielding's overall development as a novelist, *Amelia* is the logical culmination of his oeuvre, and more revolutionary than *Tom Jones*'.⁶⁴ By challenging the traditional view of the novel as Fielding's failure to approximate the style of his literary rival, Voogd thus also lays the groundwork for a more accurate understanding of Fielding's use of sentiment.

60 Ibid., p. 313.

61 Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, p. 176.

62 Ibid., p. 210.

63 Ibid., p. 170.

64 Ibid.

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If Fielding's last book is viewed as a satirical piece in line with his previous work, it becomes clear that he uses the character of Billy Booth to comment not only on the models of masculinity and their shortcomings, but also on sentimentalism as a rhetorical strategy and its inefficiency in producing models of morality. Whereas Richardson's vivid descriptions of the dreadful trials his heroines had to go through were supposed to compel readers to better understand and embrace the virtue of their suffering, in *Amelia*, Fielding breaks the spell of the sublime by mocking the ineffectiveness of this rhetorical strategy and warning against its negative effects. As Edmund Burke explains in his treatise *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, the sublime is a principle by which

poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself. It is a common observation that objects which in the reality would shock, are in tragical, and such like representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure.⁶⁵

It follows that the popularity of Richardson's portrayal of virtue did not necessarily reform his readers' minds, but merely entertained them with more effect and force than any other type of rhetoric at the time. As Kathleen Woodward explains in her essay 'Calculating Compassion':

The experience of being moved by these sentimental scenes of suffering, whose ostensible purpose is to awaken us to redress injustice, works instead to return us to a private world far removed from the public sphere. Hence, in a crippling contradiction, Berlant concludes, the result of such empathetic identification is not the impulse to action but rather a 'passive' posture.⁶⁶

While the general public found Fielding's last novel disappointing because it neither employed comicality as its main narrative strategy nor did it properly use the principle of the sublime, in Voogd's view, Fielding's perspective on sentimentalism could have been a satirical one, as the writer used it to continue making a commentary on the social and gender patterns of his age. I agree with Voogd's perspective and see Fielding's transition from joyful satirical games full of comedy to a more serious tone as an expression of the need to make a vital comment on the limits of sentimentalism as a literary rhetoric which should lead to better judgment-making.

A few years after the publication of *Amelia*, Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral*

65 E. Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, New York, John B. Alden, 1885, pp. 38-39.

66 K. Woodward, 'Calculating Compassion', *Indiana Law Journal*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2002, pp. 235-236.

Sentiments (1759) further complicates our view of how we relate to others under any circumstances, by stressing the subjective nature of our judgments and concluding that we need to rely on an imaginary ‘fair and impartial spectator’⁶⁷ to be able to judge ourselves as well as others. As Fleischacker explains:

Smith thinks that to sympathize with another’s feelings is to approve of those feelings, and to sympathize as we think an impartial spectator would is to approve *morally* of those feelings. Moral norms thus express the feelings of an impartial spectator.⁶⁸

As a result, Smith sees moral norms as based on our ability to empathize with each other, but at the same time argues for the necessity of general moral norms since we cannot rely on our subjective sentiment-based response alone to make good moral judgments.

Similarly, Fielding sees our ability to empathize with others as a precondition for functional social relationships. The use of sentiment in his last novel can be seen in how he portrays Booth’s attempts to communicate his shortcomings to his wife in the hope of being understood and forgiven, and her capability to ‘see his heart’ despite the failings of his judgments. Sadly overlooked by most of Fielding’s readers at the time, the theme of communication in marital relationships was also of interest to Laurence Sterne, who approached it with more humour in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759). As Fielding foresaw the dangers of sentimentalism in its appeal to our own emotions without a reflection of reality, he does not offer a picture of a virtuous hero who morally surpasses the others in the way he bears his suffering, nor does he present a man of sensibility who crumbles underneath the weight of the world. Instead, he asserts the need for moral norms as a measure of virtue and, in the spirit of Latitudinarian thought, links them to social obligations towards other members of one’s community.

Since Fielding’s books are essentially generic, rhetoric and ideological hybrids inspired by the previous satirical Tory generation but also indebted to the new ideas of Addison and Steele as well as Whiggism,⁶⁹ one can see that, in the end, Fielding used both satire and sentiment as a part of his narrative strategy. Nevertheless, he felt the need to guide the reader once again through his developing characters and plots in order to make them see how sentimentalism can easily change into sentimentality and become a failure of feeling⁷⁰ rather than

67 A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1982, p. 110.

68 S. Fleischacker, Samuel, ‘Adam Smith’s Moral and Political Philosophy’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020.

69 McCrea, *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth Century England*, pp. 205-206.

70 L. Berlant (ed.), *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, New York Routledge, 2004, p. 162.

a medium of empathy. As he portrays Billy's series of misfortunes, which show the corruption and cruelty of the surrounding world, he stresses Booth's inability to face the circumstances and take care of himself as well as his family and to fulfil his social and moral duties towards his community. In consequence, unlike the virtuous and powerless Clarissa Harlowe, Booth fails to inspire compassion from other characters as well as from readers. As young Tom Jones in his previous novel must morally grow to be a good husband to Sophia, Billy Booth, in a more detailed social and political context, struggles to gain the virtues of being not only a decent husband, but also a good friend, a reliable neighbour, and a responsible father to his children. As Voogd observes, 'in no other novel by Fielding are so many tears shed, do women so often faint, and is so much hartshorn needed to keep them conscious'. As a result, 'Fielding makes it clear in *Amelia* that such a sentimentalist attitude causes a world of pains of others'.⁷¹ All in all, the character of Billy Booth clearly extends Fielding's ideas of male virtue from mere ability to empathize with others to the ability to fulfil one's social duties. His resistance to making the main hero without flaws and portraying his marital struggles with a great dose of reality, he shows the limits of sentimentalism as a principle which can reveal moral ideals, since it can easily appeal to shallow emotions rather than inspire compassionate practice.

To conclude, despite the change in tone and narrative strategy, Fielding's last novel *Amelia* also comments on human nature and offers pictures of models of masculinity. Like its predecessors, Billy Booth appears to be an ambiguous character, which was received diversely by Fielding's contemporaries. Whereas some of them identified his honourable gentlemanlike qualities and valued him for his bravery, education, manners, and tender heart, others criticized him for his inconstancy and failure to meet the requirements of a modern man, which include good household management and social responsibility. As opposed to the previous characters of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, which were burdened by comicality and the satirizing mirror of the true ridiculous pointing out their imperfections in an amusing way, Captain Booth's character is treated with much more seriousness, as he is put in the context of a more complex system of social relationships. The contradictory reactions of readers suggest the various perceptions of the main hero's emotional response to the problems he is battling, and reflect the change of Fielding's strategy from using humour to adding more sentiment to his writing.

Like Joseph and Tom, Billy has a lot of trouble adapting to the new type of society while being brought up with traditional principles of manhood. The portrayal of his struggle for success and even his survival in a rough urban environment is at times critical of the vices of the town, but more than that, it depicts Booth's tri-

71 Voogd, *Correspondences of the Arts*, p. 167.

als and dilemmas, which illustrate the difficult journey of a modern young man who is forced to make his name and career in the town without the help of his family's fortune. The initial struggles of the hero as he makes his way from social passivity to moral awakening can be explained by Fielding's full embracing of Whiggism, which presupposes a certain amount of toughness and regard for self-interest as a part of the good functioning of society. As McCrea states about Fielding:

his loyalty to the Whig principles rarely wavered, even in his late writings. Only his estimation of the ability of frail men to live by those principles was subject to substantial, yet grudging, re-evaluation.⁷²

As with his previous novels, Fielding's last hero, therefore, needs to be read in a political context, which reveals Fielding's concern with the clashing demands of a new form of masculinity which asked men to be both tender-hearted and economically efficient.

The main hero's superficial approach to society based on his adherence to the old virtues of masculinity, and his failure to realize the importance of the new Christian values for the modern man, impair his judgment as he deals with the changing social paradigms. As a result, surrounded by lurking artfulness, Captain Booth cannot use his tender heart and gentlemanly conduct alone to defend himself and his family against the scheming city dwellers. Despite his flawed decisions, which brought him a great deal of criticism from readers, Booth's genuine emotions of awe and sorrow are highlighted by Fielding, who dramatizes his confessions to his wife and contrasts his affection with the negative image of an unfeeling fop or seducer, whose manners are pretended and self-seeking. Unlike Richardson's *Clarissa*, whose sufferings touched the hearts of many of his contemporaries, Fielding's Booth does not represent virtue in distress, but an aspiring model of masculinity who faces the challenge of becoming virtuous by not only realizing the needs of other people but also embracing numerous social responsibilities towards them.

72 McCrea, *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth Century England*, p. 196.

