

## Hypocrisy of the Rich vs Honesty of the Poor in the English Society of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Abstract

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, life was unpleasant and disturbing due to the Horrible Plague and the Great Fire that attacked England and turned the English society upside down. There was a big gap between the rich and the poor. Violence and crimes were everywhere. However, along with all the misfortunes, 18<sup>th</sup> century was also a period of elegance for England. Education flourished, and the novel genre developed impressively along with fine music and theatre performances.

During these times, the rich led a luxurious life, while the poor in extreme poverty hardly preserved their miserable existence. The whole atmosphere was that of contrasts between brightness and staleness, wellness and sickness, abundance and insufficiency, virtue and vice, along with charity and selfishness which, combined with other characteristic features of the English society, created a chaotic situation.

Henry Fielding's novel, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*, often called *Joseph Andrews* artistically mingles all these contrasts on different levels of different aspects of life, depicting the age he lived in while giving credit to the poor and the abandoned, making the good successfully triumphant and the bad miserably overwhelmed until at the end he makes his characters reach poetic justice punishing the vicious and rewarding the virtuous.

The article aims at revealing the chaotic situation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century England through H. Fielding's novel in question and the writer's critical attitude to it.

**Key words:** *18<sup>th</sup> century English society, class distinction, honesty of the poor, hypocrisy of the rich, vice, virtue, reward, love, gossip.*

## Introduction

The rise of the novel coincides with the rise of the middle class in Western Europe, including England. It is important to mention that the profound social and economic changes during the 18<sup>th</sup> as well as the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries such as the technology of printing, made the novel genre a primary form of popular entertainment. Britain and the British society were rapidly changing, and towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, England already became a strong world power (<<https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/18th-century-Britain>>). So, as a result of this change, a shift in wealth had induced and “propelled the gentry into the highest social class, alongside with nobility and even royalty.” (<<https://study.com/academy/lesson/english-class-system-in-the-18th-century.htm>>)

Meanwhile, because of these profound economic changes, the middle class representing priests, land-owning farmers, successful merchants, and other people was also being formed. Henry Fielding, an 18<sup>th</sup> century English novelist, who was of an aristocratic landowning family and had a judge as his maternal grandfather along with a clergyman as his paternal grandfather, depicts the details of the lifestyle of the English people of his time in his unique picaresque novel called *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*.

Having been affected by both his grandparents, Fielding brought a new ground to the genre of novel with its blend of comedy and seriousness as well as his realism and eccentricity. Through the creation of the eccentric character of Parson Abraham Adams, a friend and adviser of Joseph Andrews, Fielding depicts a good example of virtue and chastity, alongside the characters of Parson Trulliber and Mrs. Booby, representatives of vice and hypocrisy that dominated upon the rich class of the English Society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## Virtue Rewarded in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*

Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, published in 1742, was written as a reaction against Samuel Richardson's novel called *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* after two years of its publication in 1740. *Virtue Rewarded*, which is an epistolary novel,

provided a new way to measure reading and writing skills during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Whyman 2007). It is the story of a chaste servant, who fears but is strongly attracted towards her employer, the rich Mr. B. When he makes advances to her in the summerhouse, Pamela can no longer doubt his sexual intention, however, she preserves her virginity until he marries her. Margaret Doody considers this work a case of “sexual harassment and marriage” (Doody 2018), yet I believe that it is a story of a smart female servant, in love with her employer, but not ready to give herself just for the sake of love, and so preserves herself till marriage in a male dominant society during the age of patriarchy.

Having this epistolary work in mind, Henry Fielding writes a picaresque novel, a comic epic in prose, and calls it *Joseph Andrews*. Fielding creates both honest and hypocritical characters, he makes them pass through difficult circumstances, undergo different tests and prove to be either virtuous or vicious. At the end of Joseph’s journey, the writer rewards those characters who prevail and preserve their virtue and punishes those who give their virtue up and act in hypocrisy.

*Fielding portrays* several women “who are no longer young but who still want love and sexual relationship”, they are both landlords and servants, of rich and poor heritage, such as the rich and hot blooded widow Mrs. Booby as well as the “unpleasant” servant Mrs. Slipslop (Butler 1996).

Mrs. Booby, who is an excellent representative of the rich women of her age, is attached to the city life, she is shallow in her feelings and blind to her own motives and consequently to those of others. Throughout the novel, she uses every way possible to seduce the footman in her husband’s farm. Although she knows she belongs to a social class, different from that of poor Joseph, yet she has her reason and her passion at odds. She is clearly the agent of confusion in Fielding’s comic plan. She pretends to be a caring and chaste person, but in fact she is a hypocrite. The energy and vividness with which Lady Booby is portrayed in her troubles prevent us from seeing her as a supreme villainess. She is more than a pawn in Fielding’s game. She pretends that she is mourning her husband’s loss, but in fact she is seducing a young and handsome boy of

poor parenthood. She likes to walk with Joseph in the park, and spend a lot of time alone with him leaning on his shoulder.

*She would now walk out with him into Hyde Park in a morning, and when tired, which happened almost every minute, would lean on his arm, and converse with him in great familiarity. Whenever she stepped out of her coach she would take him by the hand and sometimes, for fear of stumbling, press it very hard... (p. 25)*

Not even a week after her husband's death she invites poor Joseph into her room and talks with him about women, meanwhile trying to seduce the poor young man and make him discover the fact that she is naked under the covers of her bed. Although Joseph resists Lady Booby, yet the hot lady still dreams of having him in her arms.

On a Sunday morning, when she goes to church and hears Parson Adams announce the coming marriage of Joseph and his beloved Fanny, she commands the parson not to allow them to have a church marriage threatening to dismiss the poor parson from the curacy in case he doesn't follow her commands. She then, sends for Lawyer Scout, an unprincipled and unscrupulous lawyer, to prevent Joseph and his sweetheart from residing in the parish; she claims that Fanny is too beautiful and too young, and she will breed many children who will need charity. Later, when the parson announces their marriage, she commands the Scout to have both Joseph and Fanny removed from the parish. Thus, Lady Booby, the rich landlord's wife, a woman of "gaiety" who considers herself superior to all, who is extremely interested in men and especially her handsome footman Joseph, grieves her husband's loss among the gossipy women of her rank, yet she is ready to have this same servant of poor parentage in her bed by any means. It is obvious, that through the character of Lady Booby, Henry Fielding reveals most of the rich women of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who pretend to be virtuous, but in fact are full of profligacy, lechery, and immorality.

Another vicious character of Fielding's creation, through whom he unveils the characteristics of the rich holding religious positions, is Parson Thrulliber, a supposedly virtuous and charitable priest, but in fact, a sinful person who is a man of God only on Sundays and a farmer for the rest of the week. When Parson Adams asks Parson Trulliber for some money when he was in need, he refuses to help him and fires him out of his house. Although one of the greatest virtues of a Christian is to be charitable and loving, yet, it is obvious that Parson Trulliber is neither one of them. On the contrary, he is a good representative of vice and hypocrisy.

However, since Fielding had a firm sense of Christian morality, he never left an obscene character flee with his/her act and gave him/her the suitable punishment thus achieving poetic justice.

Poetic justice, an outcome in which vice is **punished** and **virtue rewarded** usually in a manner ironically appropriate (Webster 1993), is the ideal form of justice, in which ultimate virtue is rewarded and viciousness is punished by an ironic twist of fate related to the character's own actions (<[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)>). This literary device is very obviously used in Fielding's novel since the hot Mrs. Booby's trials to have the handsome footman in her bed never prosper until the end, nor can Parson Trulliber realize his dream of wealth and abundancy even though he tries hard farming five days a week. Apparently, it is important to mention that Lady Booby and Parson Trulliber reveal the vicious and obsolete characteristic features of the high class of the Patriarchal English society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Another important fact to mention here is that the upper class had an obviously very different lifestyle than the low class citizens in England. As Hochmanova puts it in *The Rhetoric of Virtue and Vice in Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century England*, "After acquiring their new rights, the ruling elite were urged to create an appropriate image and distinguish themselves from the rest of the society" (Hochmanova, 2013). Most of the ruling class distinguished themselves from the rest of the society, however, what is explicitly revealed throughout *Joseph Andrews* is the fact that Henry Fielding didn't miss the chastity and sagacity of those Englishmen who were part of the ruling elite, yet, they were not poisoned

with their titles and positions. For example, through the character of Parson Abraham Adams who was a charitable priest, Fielding reveals the type of clergymen who were virtuous and were not affected by the vice that dominated in the society, even though they were desperately in need, yet they didn't replace their Christian virtues with vice and didn't accept a bribe, neither did they behave in evil ways. Unlike Parson Trulliber, who distinguished himself from the rest of the society behaving in vicious ways, Parson Adams was a man of honor, ready to fight even for strangers with only a stick in his hand. He was a true clergyman and served as a moral guide for Joseph and his sweetheart throughout the novel (Mavor 1994).

Although Parson Adams is a comic figure, he is the firm pivot and the axis of the novel's moral influence. It is his belief in charitable acts which distinguishes him as a parson/vicar from such hypocritical boors and clowns as Parson Trulliber (Mavor 1994). Like Joseph and Fanny, he acts on his feelings, and it is because of this affinity that he is such a fine guardian and guide to the young pair. His unchanging quality of innocence is part of Adams' merits as a valuable character. Throughout the novel, he never develops, never changes, but we know what he stands for; he is the ever active, ever charitable moral guide without whom Joseph and Fanny's love bond would have long been untied. Thus, for all his virtues and chastity, for all his honesty and integrity, at the end of the novel, Fielding rewards Parson Abraham Adams by giving him another parish to take care of, filling up the financial gap that he and his family had.

Joseph Andrews, Fielding's protagonist, the model of male chastity, the handsome young fellow battles for his virginity throughout the novel. His chief qualities are his self-control, his virtue, and his devotion to his one and only lover, Fanny Goodwill. Although he is handsome and physically attractive, and can fill up his time with all the women who gather around him like bees around their hive, yet he remains trustful and uncorrupted spending his leisure time on music, thinking of Fanny, and avoiding women. He has Parson Adams as his role model and behaves as he tells him to. In a letter to his sister Pamela, he says:

*Mr. Adams hath often told me that chastity is as great a virtue in a man as in a woman. He says he never knew any more than his wife, and I shall endeavor to follow his example. Indeed, it is owing to his excellent sermons and advice, together with your letters, that I have been able to resist, a temptation which, he says no man complies with....*  
(p. 41)

He is a man of virtue and genuine emotion, and it is this very quality which inspires him to do all the virtuous acts that Fielding believes to be so important. In the sixth chapter of the third book, during a long monologue on charity, Joseph maintains his moral reflections saying that the desire for honor should lead a man, not to material acquisition but to charity. He says:

*I defy the wisest man in the world to turn a true good action into ridicule. I defy him to do it. He who should endeavour it would be laughed at himself ininstead of making others laugh. Nobody scarce doth any good, yet they all agree in praising those who do.* (p. 198)

It is true that Joseph is always ready for a good action and a battle for a stranger, however, throughout the novel his main battles are for his chastity and purity. Because of his handsomeness, Joseph is seduced by all the women in his circle; be it the rich Lady Booby, or the poor housekeeper Mrs. Slipslop, and even poor Betty, yet, he remains incorrupt and immaculate. Throughout the novel, Joseph remains a symbol of male chastity and of genuine emotion. Because he always battles to preserve his purity in a society full of vice and hypocrisy, at the end of his novel, Fielding rewards him by letting him get the virtuous Fanny Goodwill, his beloved, as a wife. To double his reward after that many trials, Fielding makes Joseph also encounter the rich Mr. Wilson, who turns out to be his biological father. Mr. Wilson, who had been the son of a very rich man, in his young days had had too many affairs with women. He first

had had a cohabitation with a mistress with whom he had pasted ways but soon the woman started flirting with another man. Later, he encountered a young girl, who was to be married with a linen-draper, but as Mr. Wilson puts it:

*I represented him in so low a light to his mistress, and made so good a use of flattery, promises, and presents, that, not to dwell longer on this subject than is necessary, I prevailed with the poor girl and conveyed her away from her mother! In a word, I debauched her.”*(p. 175)

They lived together in happiness but they grew sick of each other and began fighting constantly, then the woman ran off with Mr. Wilson's money. Having had enough troubles with too many women, eventually Mr. Wilson decided to end his affairs and pursue other activities to entertain himself with. So, he turned away from all the bad things he had done, and finally got himself a good wife and lived happily together with their children. However, he encountered a misfortune, and the gypsies stole his baby boy, Joseph.

However, to be fair with Mr. Wilson, like all other virtuous characters, Fielding cannot but reward him as well for his repentance and decency. So, after different trials, Fielding makes Mr. Wilson find Joseph, his only son, and lets him inherit his son a house where he could live happily with his wife. Thus, it can be deduced that Fielding has created a vice, rich, and vain womanizer, Mr. Wilson and has made him undergo too many trials and tribulations, has made his son be stolen by the gypsies, and has punished him making him poor. However, because he ended up living in decency, after so many years, he is rewarded by having back his lost son.

To add to his insistence on rewarding the good and reaching poetic justice in his literary work, Fielding has created another character who is extremely poor, however, she is so gorgeous that she is the center of everybody's attention, whether men or women. Her outward beauty matches her inner qualities just like that of her man, Joseph Andrews. She is called Fanny Goodwill – a sensible, sweet, and gentle servant in Lady Booby's house, only



nineteen years old, tall, beautifully shaped, with a deep sense of modesty, and a little too perfect. Like Joseph, she is also exposed to trials by different people such as Beau Didapper and Lawyer Squire but she rejects them both. Moreover, once she was exposed to a sexual trial by Beau Didapper who, though promised to take her to London, in fact had other ideas in his mind. If it were not for Parson Abraham Adams, who was ready to defend people at any cost, Fanny Goodwill might have long been raped by Beau Didapper. Fanny was also sexually tried by Lawyer Squire, whom she encountered after leaving Mr. Wilson's house with both Parson Adams and Joseph. After the Squire's dog attacked the three pedestrians Lawyer Squire arrived and invited them all to dinner at his estate. But later he made an attempt to get Joseph and Parson Adams drunk, so that he and Fanny could spend some time alone. But Parson Adams, feeling unsafe, left Lawyer Squire's estate with both Joseph and Fanny, with a heavy feeling of disgust towards the lawyer. However, Lawyer Squire didn't give up his vicious plans about Fanny and sent three of his men to go and kidnap her. Luckily, Fanny got saved by Peter Pounce and was taken to her beloved.

Thus, Fanny, like Joseph, always rejected the rich and the famous who felt only sexually attracted to her and kept on seducing her. Towards the end of the novel, Fanny was rewarded for her virtue and chastity by having Joseph, her one and only love, as her husband. Moreover, she was also gifted a house by her father in law, where she could start her new life and new family. Here again Fielding achieved poetic justice by rewarding virtue and chastity. He was happy to reveal the fact that although there was vice among the rich, there was also some virtue in the low class citizens of the 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, it can be deduced that Fielding's novel *Joseph Andrews* depicts a good example of the vice that dominated upon the rich class of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Patriarchal English Society. Accordingly, throughout the novel characters such as Lady Booby and Parson Trulliber never register any progress and never reach their goals, whereas characters such as Joseph Andrews, Fanny Goodwill,

Parson Adams, and Mr. Willson get what they long for. This shows that along with the vice dominating in the English society during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were also virtuous and chaste people, who deserved a reward and got it at the end.

Throughout the entire novel Fielding tries to teach the reader a lesson in morality, which is: “Feelings should be kept under control since natural desires can’t be fulfilled through primal pleasures”. Fielding allows sexual advances to be made on both Joseph and Fanny by characters like Lady Booby, Betty, Beau Didapper, and Lawyer Squire. However, neither of the lovers respond to these trials. Fielding also teaches his readers to have some restraint and modesty. So, he makes both lovers have the moral reason of not simply losing self-control in the face of lust and desire, and for that very reason they are bestowed the gift of a happy ending, the gift of marriage they both desperately longed for. Likewise, he rewards Parson Abraham Adams by giving him a new parish, so that he can earn for his living, as the only thing he lacked was money. Fielding also rewards Mr. Wilson, who, although having been on the wrong path in his young days, chose to live in decency later. In Fielding’s novel, as it is in life, it is through trials and tribulations that a character proves to be virtuous, and be rewarded with what he loves and lacks the most.

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### Հարուստների երեսպաշտությունն ընդդեմ աղքատների ազնվության 18-րդ դարի անգլիական հասարակությունում

18-րդ դարում կյանքը դարձել էր ավելի անտանելի ու դաժան սարսափելի ժանտախտի ու Մեծ հրդեհի պատճառով, որը պատուհասել էր Անգլիային և տակնուվրա արել անգլիական հասարակությունը: Այն ժամանակ հարուստներին ու աղքատներին բաժանում էր հսկայական անդունդը: Ամենուր դաժանություն էր ու հանցագործություններ: Այնուամենայնիվ, ի հեճուկս այդ դժբախտությունների, 18-րդ դարը նաև նրբաճաշակության շրջան էր Անգլիայի համար: Ծաղկում էր կրթությունը, երաժշտական և թատերական ներկայացումների հետ մեկտեղ մեծ արագությամբ զարգանում էր վիպագրությունը:

Այս ընթացքում, հարուստները շքեղ կյանք էին վարում, մինչդեռ աղքատները շարունակում էին թշվառ կյանքով ապրել: Անգլիական հասարակության մեջ առկա տարբեր դասակարգերում տիրում էր հակասությունների մթնոլորտ՝ լույսի ու խավարի, առողջության ու հիվանդության, շոայլության ու ընչազրկության, առաքինության ու արատների, բարեգործության ու եսասիրության միջև՝ ինչը քառասյին իրավիճակ էր ստեղծում հասարակությունում:

Հենրի Ֆիլդինգի «Ջոզեֆ Էնդրյուզի և նրա ընկեր պրն. Աբրահամ Ադամսի արկածները» վեպում, որը հաճախ պարզապես անվանում են «Ջոզեֆ Էնդրյուզ», հեղինակը հմտորեն միախառնում է կյանքի տարբեր մակարդակներում առկա այս բոլոր հակասությունները՝ պատկերելով այն դարաշրջանը, որում նա ապրում էր: Միննույն ժամանակ նա ընչազուրկներին ու լքյալներին՝ դրական կերպարներին հաղթանակ է պարգևում, իսկ բացասականներին ներկայացնում մոայլ լույսի ներքո: Վեպի վերջում հաստատվում է «գեղարվեստական արդարություն»։ հեղինակը պատժում է արատավորներին ու պարգևատրում առաքինիներին: Այսպես է Հենրի Ֆիլդինգը տեսնում արատներից ազատվելու ելքը:

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