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Autor(en): **Mortimer, Anthony**

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Anthony Mortimer

**“THE MANNER OF CERVANTES”:
SOME NOTES ON *JOSEPH ANDREWS* AND *DON QUIXOTE***

That the first true English comic novel is born under the sign of Cervantes stands among those solid reassuring facts of literary history that students love to hear and that contemporary criticism delights to undermine. Even for an age which could still use the term “imitation” without negative connotations, there is something almost embarrassingly explicit about the way Fielding announces the context in which he wishes to be read and the standard against which he expects to be judged: “The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams, Written in Imitation of The Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote”¹. There is more to this title-page than Fielding’s characteristic blend of generosity and self-advertisement in acknowledging his sources: the name of Cervantes serves him as a potent weapon in the war against Richardson. If Fielding had initially reacted to the extraordinary success of *Pamela* (1740) with the small arms of a hilarious and ribald parody (*Shamela*, 1741), he now felt obliged to bring up the heavy artillery. Richardson was, after all, too serious a literary challenge to be seen off with a brilliant squib. What Fielding now sought to provide was a counter-example, an alternative form of fiction. In this context, the name of Cervantes already amounted to a mini-manifesto.

The presence of Cervantes on the title-page of Fielding’s first novel constitutes, first and foremost, an appeal to tradition which stands in deliberate contrast to Richardson’s claim to be creating a genre more or less without precedent. Throughout his career as a novelist Fielding oscillates between truculent declarations of independence and rather

1 For my primary texts I have used the following editions: Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. R.F. Brissenden, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977; Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, tr. J.M. Cohen, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970. In-text reference is to book and chapter.

febrile attempts to establish a distinguished literary ancestry. On the one hand, he sees himself as the founder of “a new province of writing”² and declares himself exempt from any judgment based upon traditional critical norms: on the other hand, he keeps reminding us that Homer and Virgil provide his epic structure, that Lucian and Swift are his masters in the art of satire, and that Scarron, Le Sage and Marivaux are his predecessors in comic romance.

As for Cervantes, *Don Quixote* had been translated at regular intervals throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and the noun “quixotism” (if not the adjective “quixotic”) had entered the language as early as 1688. Cervantes, therefore, represented an acceptable humanist compromise between ancient and modern: modern enough to serve as a feasible model for contemporary fiction, but already familiar and celebrated enough to have acquired the dignity of an ancient. It was not only what he saw as the dubious morality of “Virtue Rewarded” that made Fielding set his face against *Pamela*; it was also the parochial arrogance that could imagine an English novel owing nothing to the European tradition. The supporters of *Pamela* had been quick to celebrate Richardson’s book as the expression of specifically national virtues, written “with a truly English Spirit” and providing “an Example of Purity to the Writers of a neighbouring Nation”³. Fielding, for all his robust (and sometimes tiresome) beef-and-beer patriotism, had an aristocratic, humanist and European culture that was incompatible with Richardson’s peculiar middle-class blend of jingoism and self-righteousness.

The appeal to Cervantes involves not only respect for tradition, but also a recognition of the inevitable “literariness” of the novel. *Don Quixote* is not just a novel about a man who sees reality through the distorting perspective of literature. Through the constant and ironic awareness of its own literary status and through the digressions on its own alleged source in the “Arabic historian” Cide Hamete Benengeli, it reminds us that all histories are artifacts and that no narrative can claim to be a direct transcript of experience. The success of *Pamela* had been, to a great extent, created by the invisibility of the author and by the sense

2 Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. R.P.C. Mutter, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1966, p. 88.

3 Actually written by a Frenchman, J.B. de Ferval, but probably inspired by Richardson himself. See A.D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 1936, pp. 39-42.

of authenticity or immediacy conveyed by the heroine's first-person epistolary narrative which, as A.D. McKillop remarks, "gives the reader a continuous and cumulative impression of living through the experience"⁴. To this "formal realism" with its concentration on and immersion in a single consciousness, Fielding will oppose his "realism of assessment" where the intrusive and omniscient narrator allows himself to establish the social context and moral framework required for dispassionate and considered judgment⁵. Coleridge famously contrasted the "close, hot, day-dreamy" atmosphere of Richardson's habitually indoor settings with the outdoor world of Fielding⁶; but the sense of fresh air and expansiveness that we get from both *Joseph Andrews* and *Don Quixote* is produced by something more than the open road and the variety of characters; it is a function of their explicit "literariness", understood not merely as reflexivity but also as a hospitality to other texts and an amplitude of reference that place the concerns and adventures of the protagonists in a context as broad as the author's own capacious culture.

Finally, the appeal to Cervantes suggests the kind of relation we can expect to find between *Joseph Andrews* and *Pamela*. The name Joseph Andrews obviously recalls Pamela Andrews, whose brother he is initially supposed to be. But by announcing that he intends to treat his subject in "the manner of Cervantes", Fielding warns us that this is to be a full-scale novel and not just another *Shamela*-style parody. Just as *Don Quixote* starts out with the apparently limited intention of ridiculing the chivalric romance and then develops its own autonomous direction and dynamics, so *Joseph Andrews*, beginning with a comic inversion of Richardson's theme (the chaste male servant resisting his mistress rather than the chaste servant girl resisting her master), will gradually take on a life of its own where the importance of *Pamela* as a pre-text will fade into insignificance. It used to be assumed that Fielding discovered his vocation as a novelist almost by accident, intending another parody of *Pamela* and getting caught up by the liveliness of his own characters and the pleasure of his own narration. Recent critics (notably Martin Battestin) have, however, found in *Joseph Andrews* a coherence of

4 Cited by Ronald Paulson, "The Anti-Romanticist", in *Modern Critical Views: Henry Fielding*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House, 1987, p. 52.

5 The terms "formal realism" and "realism of assessment" are taken from Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1957.

6 From notes in a copy of *Tom Jones*, reproduced in *Henry Fielding: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Claude Rawson, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973, p. 205.

purpose and a solidity of structure that would seem incompatible with such a casual and unplanned evolution. As Battestin puts it, the allusions to Richardson “are meant primarily to recall the technical and intellectual inadequacies of *Pamela*, while the main narrative of *Joseph Andrews* offers instead a mature and antithetic alternative”⁷.

By placing Cervantes and *Don Quixote* on his title-page Fielding obviously evokes a wide range of expectations. But the way in which Cervantes actually contributes to the fulfilment of these expectations is another matter and it must be admitted that the considerable body of Fielding criticism has usually been content with little more than ritual acknowledgments. The one major exception is Homer Goldberg’s *The Art of Joseph Andrews* (1969), a characteristic product of the Chicago Aristotelean school of R.S. Crane. The following observations inevitably owe a great deal to Goldberg, but my emphasis is, I think, different and it will lead me to see Fielding’s comic stance as rather less comfortable and more ambiguous than is suggested by *The Art of Joseph Andrews*.

The problem of Cervantes’ influence on *Joseph Andrews* can be resumed in two basic questions: 1) What did Fielding learn from Cervantes about the techniques for imposing unity and sequentiality on an episodic narrative form? 2) How far is Parson Adams an English version of Don Quixote? As we shall see, the two questions, though it may initially be useful to pose them separately, turn out to be closely related. It will ultimately be the difference between Adams and Quixote, Fielding’s radical modification of Cervantes’ comic formula, that imposes new structural solutions.

In the Preface to his sister’s novel, *David Simple* (1744), Fielding distinguishes between two kinds of epic plot, both of which have their origin in Homer and both of which may be applied to the comic epic in prose: there is the *Iliad* type where the action is “entire and uniform” and the *Odyssey* type, of which *Don Quixote* is an example, “where the fable consists of a series of separate adventures, detached from and independent on each other, yet all tending to one great end”⁸. The awkward question that arises here is what exactly Fielding means by “tending to

7 Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1959, p. 9.

8 Preface to Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, London, 1744, reprinted in *The Criticism of Henry Fielding*, ed. Ioan Williams, London, Routledge, 1970, p. 265.

one great end". Goldberg argues that we should take this not "in the sense of producing some climactic event", but rather as referring to "the intended overall effect or quality of the work as a whole". What matters is less the sequence of events than the fact that they all share the same "distinctive character" and "combine to produce a unified total effect"⁹. This is a seductive but not entirely convincing theory and I suspect that Fielding, in choosing the ambiguous term "end", was hedging his bets on the whole vexed issue of the episodic plot. In his review of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) Fielding remarks that "here is a regular story, which, tho' possibly it is not pursued with that epic regularity which would give it the name of an action, comes much nearer to that perfection than the loose unconnected adventures of *Don Quixote*; of which you may transverse the order as you please, without injury to the whole"¹⁰.

It would seem, therefore, that sequentiality of some kind is, after all, desirable even in episodic narratives that cannot pretend to "epic regularity". Goldberg appears to identify sequentiality with "the causal mechanism" that connects the actions of a plot. But, as his own perceptive analysis tends to demonstrate, there are surely other ways in which one action may be said to grow out of another and "causal mechanism" need not be the only principle that underlies a sequence. It can be argued that in *Joseph Andrews* Fielding was working towards a structure that is both episodic and sequential – a plot where, even when "causal mechanism" may appear weak or non-existent, the order of events could not be altered without serious "injury to the whole". Moreover, certain structural analogies between *Joseph Andrews* and *Don Quixote* may lead us to conclude that in this process Cervantes provided him with an example of how sequentiality could be made to emerge from apparently "loose unconnected adventures". The novelist is not, after all, forced to choose between the purely episodic (theoretically endless) narrative and the plot that moves through causal mechanism to some climactic event. Cervantes offered a third way, a compromise solution – that of a narrative which gradually shifts from the episodic towards the sequential in a process that Goldberg himself calls "incremental revision", involving

9 Homer Goldberg, *The Art of Joseph Andrews*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1969, p. 11.

10 *The Covent Garden Journal*, No. 24 (1752), reprinted in *The Criticism of Henry Fielding*, p. 193.

frequent recapitulation, variation and redirection of the basic comic situation.

The first real adventure of Don Quixote, once he has had himself knighted by a prostitute at an inn (I. 3), occurs when he intervenes to save a young farmhand from a savage beating inflicted by the farmer who refuses to pay him his due wages (I. 4). Having extorted from the master a solemn promise that the wages will be paid, the knight rides off convinced that he "has righted the greatest injury and wrong that injustice could invent or cruelty perpetrate". And, of course, the beating is resumed with redoubled vigour. What makes this episode almost unique in the novel is that there is a genuine injustice to be set right and that Don Quixote's intervention might well have been effective if he had not been so naive as to trust the farmer's word. We might be led to think that the knight's dominant characteristic will be his simplicity, his readiness to believe that other men share his own code of honour. But the chapter continues with an episode which has nothing to do with real injustice and in which Don Quixote, far from redressing wrongs, launches into an insane assault on a group of merchants who refuse to pay homage to the beauty of his invisible mistress, the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso. This passage from naivety to madness and its physically painful consequences for the knight establish the basic pattern for his future adventures. Surprisingly, however, it is at this stage that Cervantes puts an abrupt end to the first expedition and brings Quixote back to his native village. We may suppose that Cervantes recognized the limitations of his comic formula and felt the need for a more solid point of departure. By showing us the domestic situation of Don Quixote and by giving the priest and the barber a chance to review his library of chivalric literature (I. 6), Cervantes amplifies the context that he had merely sketched in the first chapter and thus announces his expanded narrative ambitions.

But the crucial aspect of this new start and the element that really modifies the initial comic formula is, of course, the introduction of Sancho Panza (I. 7). One essential lesson that Fielding may have learned here is that Sancho is not simply a counter-figure (pragmatist *vs* idealist, egoist *vs* altruist, fat man *vs* thin man, etc.). We shall gradually discover that Sancho is a prey to illusions and delusions of grandeur almost as great as those of his master. It is, indeed, the blend of contrast and similarity between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza that allows for a dialogue that does not become mechanical and predictable. And the dialogue in its turn provides a new formula for comic invention since, from now on, our

attention will be equally divided between the episodes of physical action and the debates that those episodes provoke. A similar modification of the initial comic formula occurs in *Joseph Andrews* (I. 14) when Parson Adams turns up at the inn where Joseph lies after being robbed, stripped and beaten. The relation between Adams and Joseph is only sporadically and superficially like that between Don Quixote and Sancho, but it does permit the same balanced and dynamic interplay between action and debate. Moreover, just as Cervantes seems to have recognized that Quixote alone could not sustain an extended comic narrative, so Fielding, by introducing Adams, gives notice that he does not expect Joseph's defence of his chastity to provide material for a whole novel.

With the relation between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza firmly established, Cervantes now has a formula susceptible to multiple variations and we get a series of episodes (the windmills, the battle with the Basque, the Yanguesans, Mambrino's helmet, the liberation of the galley slaves) which, for all their inventiveness, do not seem to be leading anywhere in particular. It is probably of this section rather than of anything in Part II that Fielding is thinking when he speaks of an order that could be transversed "without injury to the whole". But once again Cervantes seems to be aware of the need to create, at least provisionally, a new focus of interest. This he does with the interpolated stories of Marcela and Chrysostom, Cardenio and Dorothea, Ferdinand and Lucinda, the Tale of Foolish Curiosity and the Captive's tale. Fielding objected that these tales were "extravagant and incredible" and "very near to the Romances which he (Cervantes) ridicules"¹¹, but, as we can see from his own use of interpolated stories (the Unfortunate Jilt, the history of Mr. Wilson, the Two Friends), he probably appreciated the need to interrupt the adventures on the road and to create a new suspense around the protagonist by removing him from the narrative. Fielding, however, narrows the gap between the world of the interpolated stories and that of his main narrative: the Unfortunate Jilt and the tale of the Two Friends are disenchanting little social comedies, and the history of Mr. Wilson (Fielding's version of the Man in the Green Coat), with its moral of the need to acquire prudence in a hostile world, has a direct relevance to Adams and Joseph.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

As we approach the end of the First Part of *Don Quixote*, we notice Cervantes attempting to link episodes, as it were, retroactively. A remarkably successful example is Chapter 45 where a character from an episode we have almost forgotten (Mambrino's helmet) reappears to provoke a pitched battle in which the protagonists of the interpolated stories join the action on Don Quixote's side. This technique of recuperating and recapitulating episodes that we had assumed to be concluded gives the narrative a structural complexity and a thematic richness that we could hardly have expected while reading the first twenty or thirty chapters.

The Second Part of *Don Quixote* shows more evidence of a preconceived design. Once again Quixote and Sancho leave for a series of adventures on the road, but this time there is a new sense of direction. The road is supposed to be leading somewhere – to the tournament at Saragossa. The defeat of Sampson Carrasco in his first battle with Quixote leads us to expect a decisive second round. The frequent references to Avellanada's spurious sequel to Part I should also warn the reader that Cervantes is now working towards a conclusion that will not leave the knight's adventures open to further exploitation. In short, Cervantes does create the anticipation of some climactic event. In some ways, Part II repeats, with a firmer outline, the structure that had emerged in a rather blurred fashion from Part I. We begin with a series of relatively disconnected adventures on the road. These give way, as in Part I, to an extended section in a fixed milieu, filled out this time not with interpolated stories but with the episode of Sancho as Governor and the various pranks played on Don Quixote by the Duke and the Duchess. The unprovoked cruelty of these pranks (like the "roasting" of Adams in *Joseph Andrews* III. 7) is, perhaps, designed to create in the reader a wish for release from a situation where sympathy for the victim begins to outweigh the sense of comedy. Sancho's disillusion with his governorship is another sign that the end cannot be far away. Finally, after Quixote's defeat by Sampson Carrasco on the strand at Barcelona, we have another recapitulative return journey before the knight is restored to his senses and consigned to the safety of the grave.

What we have seen in *Don Quixote* and what we find again in *Joseph Andrews* may be summed up as a threefold movement. First, a relatively simple parodic situation; second, the creation of a more complex comic formula which allows for a variety of more or less autonomous episodes; third, the ordering of episodes in an increasingly sequential fashion

leading to a climactic event. We may now see how Fielding's version of this structure is related to his adaptation of the Quixotic character in the figure of Parson Adams.

On the title-page of *Joseph Andrews* the name of Adams occupies the second place (and slightly smaller type): "the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams". There is little doubt, however, that Fielding intended the latter to dominate the novel. In the Preface, where he sketches his idea of the comic novel, there is no mention of the young lackey and his chastity whereas Adams receives some self-congratulatory acknowledgment: "As to the character of Adams, as it is the most glaring in the whole, so I conceive it is not to be found in any book now extant. It is designed a character of perfect simplicity". Fielding has already defined the province of his comedy as "the ridiculous" whose only proper source is "affectation" which, in its turn, derives from the related but not identical vices of vanity and hypocrisy. It is, therefore, in the encounter between the "perfect simplicity" of Adams and the vanity and hypocrisy of society that we can expect to find the comic centre of *Joseph Andrews*.

How closely is the simplicity of Adams related to the chivalric delusion of Don Quixote? The basic formula that Fielding finds in Cervantes is that of a protagonist who is distinguished from other characters by a persistent tendency to perceive the world in a specifically distorted manner. Despite this incapacity to see the world as it is, the protagonist possesses moral and intellectual qualities that arouse the sympathy and admiration of the reader. Fielding's first move in adapting this formula is to limit the extent of his hero's distorted vision. Don Quixote's delusion transforms every aspect of reality – windmills become giants, a barber becomes a Saracen, inns become castles, etc. The vision of Adams is distorted only when it comes to the moral character of men. We have already mentioned the episode where Quixote imagines that he has rescued a farmboy from his master's cruel treatment simply because the farmer swears a solemn oath to mend his ways. It is precisely this aspect of Don Quixote, this assumption that other men share his own moral standards, that defines the distorted vision of Parson Adams. Fielding clearly wants to provide a more credible version of Quixotism and to eliminate the kind of adventures that he later described as "extravagant and incredible". In praising the portrait of Arabella in *The Female Quixote* he remarks: "nor is there any thing in her character, which the brain a little distempered may not account for. She conceives indeed

somewhat preposterously of the ranks and conditions of men; that is to say, mistakes one man for another; but never advances towards the absurdity of imagining windmills and wine-bags to be human creatures, or flocks of sheep to be armies”¹². If we substituted “moral characters” for “ranks and conditions”, that statement would be perfectly applicable to Parson Adams whose distorted vision is given a “natural” explanation in the combination of a secluded life which renders him “entirely ignorant of the ways of this world” (I. 3) with an intrinsic honesty that makes him incapable of suspecting dishonesty in others.

That the errors of Adams should be related to his bookishness is an obviously Quixotic element, but here the modification turns out to be audaciously radical: Adams’ vision has been distorted not by the fantastic fictions of chivalric romance but by the philosophers of antiquity and the Holy Scripture. How is it that these great sources of truth become a source of error? A first reply might be that Adams, in his ignorance of the world, takes the ideal of human nature as it should be for a description of human nature as it is. But we still need to ask why he persists in his error despite the repeated examples of sheer malice that he meets with on his journey. And here the answer lies in his vanity, a characteristic he shares with Don Quixote and one which, we remember, is singled out by Fielding as a source of the affectation that gives rise to the ridiculous. Vanity, as we are told in the Preface, occurs when a man is “a little deficient in the quality he desires the reputation of” and is to be distinguished from hypocrisy where he is “the exact reverse of what he affects”. Unlike hypocrisy which involves a deliberate attempt to deceive others, vanity is not incompatible with fundamental honesty since it may be no more than unconscious self-deception.

The vanity of Adams is essentially professional. Just as Quixote holds that there is no nobler activity than that of the knight errant, so Adams “thought a schoolmaster the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest of all schoolmasters” (III. 6). Thus, if Adams’ “perfect simplicity” accounts for his initial ignorance of the world, it is his vanity that prevents him from acquiring wisdom. Adams’ peculiar combination of simplicity and vanity, ignorance of the world and ignorance of himself, gives rise to complex ironic effects which we may illustrate with two celebrated episodes. In discussion with an innkeeper (II. 17) Adams defends his profession and cites Socrates as an example

12 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

of how a disposition naturally inclined to vice can be corrected by the study of philosophy. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that at that precise moment Adams exemplifies the opposite. His philosophical reading has reinforced rather than corrected his natural vice of vanity. The professional teacher is incapable of learning and his naive confidence in others is doubled with an equally naive confidence in himself. Again, towards the end of the novel (IV. 8), when Joseph expresses his impatience with the obstacles that delay his marriage to Fanny, Adams launches into an elaborate homily on Christian resignation: "no Christian ought so to set his heart on any person or thing in this world, but that whenever it shall be required or taken from him in any manner by divine Providence, he may be able, peaceably, quietly, and contentedly to resign it". At that moment he receives the news (fortunately false) that his youngest son has been drowned and falls into a paroxysm of uncontrollable grief. Does this mean that we are to regard Adams as a hypocrite who refuses to practice what he preaches? Surely not. How would the reader have reacted if Adams had accepted the death of his son "peaceably, quietly, and *contentedly*" (my italics)? His grief is, after all, the demonstration of his positive humanity and to that extent he is better than the ideal he proclaims. Adams, as these two examples demonstrate, is simultaneously inferior and superior to the image he has of himself.

What we have said so far should indicate at least one crucial difference between Adams and Don Quixote. Adams' distorted vision is rooted not in some extraordinary obsession but in his basic nature. Quixote, as we are constantly reminded, is a wise and peaceful country gentleman who is driven to aggressive insanity by one specific delusion. Though his positive qualities excite our sympathy, never is there any suggestion that the delusion itself is amiable and Cervantes leaves us in no doubt that we are to regard his restoration to sanity as a positive conclusion. With Adams, on the other hand, the origin of his misjudgment of the world lies in his readiness to believe in the goodness of man, a characteristic which cannot easily be dissociated from Christian charity. Fielding, therefore, has to do something more than preserve our sympathy for Adams as Cervantes preserves our sympathy for Quixote. His problem is how to exploit the comedy that arises from Adams' distorted vision without ridiculing the essentially charitable impulse that is at the root of that distortion.

Fielding's solution is to darken the context in which his protagonist moves. Don Quixote may from time to time complain of a degenerate

age infected by a multitude of evils, but we hardly take him very seriously. We get some sombre reminders of the harsher side of Spanish life in the criminals on their way to the galleys (I. 22) and the exiled Moor Ricote (II. 54), but otherwise the world holds no greater terrors than surly innkeepers, avaricious peasants and contemptuous aristocrats. It is a world in which, without his obsession, Quixote could travel in relative safety. Indeed, what violence there is in *Don Quixote* is nearly always initiated by Quixote himself. In Fielding's novel the young Joseph no sooner leaves the security of Booby Hall than he is robbed, beaten and left for dead; Fanny can hardly set foot in male company without provoking an attempt at rape; magistrates are corrupt and clergymen without charity; there is little sympathy for weakness or innocence, no respect for learning or age. In such a world distressed damsels are not a figment of the chivalric imagination but a painful reality and there are as many wrongs to redress as the most valiant knight could wish for. It follows that the many physical battles of Abraham Adams have an effect that is rather unlike anything we derive from similar episodes in Cervantes. The surface details, no doubt, are much the same – improvised weapons, pratfalls in the mud, punches in the guts and bloody noses. But Adams never fights without provocation and the injustices he seeks to rectify are far from imaginary. However intellectually ill-equipped he may be for this combat with the world, his combativity is in itself admirable. So much so that some readers have been tempted to read the adventures of Mr. Abraham Adams as if they constituted a real *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*¹³. And yet the awkward fact remains that Adams, much as Fielding may trumpet his virtues, is indeed very often ridiculous, though not many critics have had the courage of Arthur Murphy (1762) who, in at least one instance, admitted to “an emotion of laughter attended with a contempt for Adams's want of knowledge of the world”¹⁴. Every time Adams falls a victim to his own simplicity or to the malice and cunning of others, the reader is provoked into an awkward blend of hilarity and moral indignation – and

13 The most explicitly Christian reading of *Joseph Andrews* is that of Battestin who argues that “It is the liberal moralism of the Low Church divines – not the principles of Cicero or Shaftesbury – that underlies the ethos, and much of the art, of *Joseph Andrews*” (*The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*, p. 13).

14 *The Gray's-Inn Journal*, No. 50 (1754), reprinted in *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 377.

it is by no means clear which of these two emotions undermines the other. Here, I suspect, lies the really disturbing and perhaps slightly shifty aspect of Fielding's comedy. It would seem that he seeks at the same time both the credit of an entertainer for making us laugh at Adams' antics and the status of a moralist for suggesting that we really ought not to laugh at all. It is an ambiguity not all that far removed from Richardson's mixture of Puritanism and prurience.

What ought to be obvious from the preceding remarks is that Fielding can hardly allow Adams to be cured of his distorted vision. On the one hand, if we see Adams as the Christian soldier, we do not want him to be cured since, as one contemporary reader put it, "his innocent ignorance of this world and its ways demonstrates him not to have been a child of it"¹⁵. On the other hand, if we see his misjudgments as resulting from a basic flaw of intellect, any final cure would appear "extravagant and incredible". And this brings us back to the structural problem. How can a novel escape from an episodic non-sequential structure, how can it move towards a *dénouement* when its protagonist is incapable of change?

Let us look once again at the title-page: "The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams". If Joseph is given first place, it is because the "history", understood as a sequence of events leading towards a conclusion, belongs to him. Adams may have "adventures", but only Joseph has a history.

It is in the shifting of attention from Joseph to Adams and back again that we find the threefold movement mentioned earlier. Once Fielding has exhausted the initial parodic situation of Joseph defending his chastity, he revises his point of departure. Joseph, we discover, has repelled the assaults of Lady Booby not because he is lacking in virility but because he is in love with the younger and more beautiful Fanny. We are thus offered a structure of anticipation where Lady Booby will provide the obstacle that has to be overcome before the novel can end with the climactic event of a happy marriage. Expelled from Booby Hall, Joseph sets out on the road and meets his old friend and mentor Abraham Adams. Here begins the second movement, that of a series of loosely connected episodes dominated by Adams. The third movement emerges gradually as Fielding modifies the relations between the young lover and

15 *The Student, or, The Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany* (1750), reprinted in *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, p. 218.

the parson. In a functional adaptation of the dialogues between Sancho and Quixote Fielding shows Joseph advising prudence, attempting to moderate the moral ardour of his teacher and giving voice to some serious doubts about the relation between booklearning and practical experience. The interpolated story of Mr. Wilson serves to strengthen the position of Joseph and weaken that of Adams by showing how it is possible for a good-natured man to learn worldly prudence without losing the sense of moral values. It is entirely appropriate that Wilson should eventually turn out to be Joseph's father since his experience of society fits him for this rôle far better than Adams' dogmatic paternalism. The Wilson episode is the real turning-point in the relation between Joseph and Adams. Having received the kind of instruction that Adams, for all his learning, cannot give and that is directly relevant to the world as he has observed it, Joseph is now ready to be reinstalled as protagonist. After this last interlude in a fixed milieu, the novel moves rapidly through a series of carefully linked episodes to the recapitulation, complication and resolution of its comic imbroglio.

The framing of the adventures of Adams within the history of Joseph is a piece of highly skilful structural cobbling, but it still leaves us with the impression of a novel whose form is inadequate or external to its theme. Joseph, as most critics have recognized, is too pale a figure to serve as a counterweight to the invasive physical and moral bulk of the Parson. He provides a history that can be concluded, but it is a history that fades into insignificance beside the potentially endless adventures of Adams which constitute the real centre of Fielding's interest. Fielding knew that there could be no satisfactory conclusion to the struggle of a brave innocent and not very intelligent Christian against the vicious intelligence of the world. In the career of Adams any climactic event must appear arbitrary and unconvincing.

The madness of Don Quixote is an extraordinary aberration in a world which it illumines but does not ultimately disturb. As Auerbach remarks, Quixote's obsession with chivalry "gave Cervantes an opportunity to present the world as play in that spirit of multiple, perspective, non-judging and even non-questioning neutrality which is a brave form of wisdom"¹⁶. The folly of Adams has a very different function. It combines the exalted vision that is "unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1.

16 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. Willard Trask, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 357.

23) and the limited vision of a rather stupid man. Adams is simultaneously both farsighted and shortsighted. His folly is a genuine challenge to the world in a way that Quixote's madness cannot be; but Fielding, by stressing the ridicule that he receives (and which, indeed, he invites), makes the combat woefully unequal. Even in his moment of triumph, when he finally marries Joseph and Fanny, Adams does not escape from ridicule and has to rebuke Mr. Booby and Pamela "for laughing in so sacred a place" (IV. 16). We may rejoice to see Adams openly rebuking his social superiors, but it is a small success and Fielding refrains from telling us whether it has any lasting effect. The fact that Mr. Booby and Pamela dare to laugh at all undermines the Parson's assertion that "Mr. Adams at church with his surplice on, and Mr. Adams without that ornament, in any other place, were two very different persons" (IV. 16). And even that assertion could be taken as an admission of what all his adventures have demonstrated – that Adams commands little or no respect outside his village church.

Adams, drenched in hogsblood, set upon by dogs, "roasted" by the gentry and flailing with his fists in the dark, embodies Fielding's gloomy outlook on the prospects of virtue in a wicked world. We are nearer to the Tory pessimism of Swift and Johnson than to Shaftesbury's reassuring view of human nature. Taken seriously and not as modish cynicism, this is a rather awkward outlook to incorporate in a comic romance and, as we have seen, it creates a structural problem which can only be solved by framing the adventures of Adams in a history that fails to touch the heart of the matter. We remain unhappily conscious that the frame is no more than a frame and that the comic romance is an inadequate vehicle for Fielding's darker purpose. That is, perhaps, why *Joseph Andrews* leaves us without the sense of comprehensive grasp and comic repletion that we gain from *Don Quixote*. It may also justify Auerbach's conclusion to his chapter on Cervantes: "So universal and multilayered, so non-critical and nonproblematic a gaiety in the portrayal of everyday reality has not been attempted again in European letters"¹⁷. In the hollow shell of his comic romance the laughter of Fielding awakes echoes more sinister than anything we are likely to hear in "the manner of Cervantes".

17 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 358.

