

The Rise of the Novel in England

The Great Augustans

Henry Fielding 1707-1754



Augustan Age

- **HISTORICAL SETTING**
- **LIFE**
- **STYLE:** The Comic Epic Novel
- **WORKS**

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1

Historical Setting

STUART

- **Anne (1702-1714)**

HANOVER

- **George I (1714-1727)**
- **George II (1727-1760)**

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2

Life

- 1) Born in Somerset, into an aristocratic family (unlike Defoe and Richardson) - **1707**
- 2) Educated first at Eaton, then at the German University of Leyden, (he studied law);
- 3) He took up playwriting pressed by need for money due to a decline in his family fortunes;
- 4) In 1734 he married Miss Cradock, a beautiful woman he deeply loved and whose money allowed him to lead a pleasant and expensive life as a country gentleman;
- 5) As a playwright he wrote a remarkable number of plays (The Thumb, Pasquin ...) but his career went to an end because of the Licensing Act of 1737 against political satire; so he started writing novels;
- 6) After his wife's death and a much criticised second marriage with his wife's maid, he was appointed Justice of Peace, which allowed him to come into contact with the poor and criminal people of the town;
- 7) He died in Portugal, where he had gone in the vain hope of recovering his health, ruined by work and personal problems. - **1754**

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3

Style: COMIC EPIC NOVEL -1

- a) He decided to describe comic situations in an epic structure, so he found his model in Cervante's Don Quixote;
- b) The plot is no longer based on a simple sequence of events (as in Defoe) or on a single story (as in Richardson), but presents a well knit combination of episodes, structured in an organic unit;
- c) More than of interiors the setting is made up of streets, highways and various itineraries;
- d) There is a larger range of characters including anticonformist middle-class people as well as people from the lower classes; his characters are "flat" ones;
- e) Unlike Richardson, Fielding is much more interested in society than in the single characters; he proposes to show "not men but manners, not an individual but a species;
- f) All his novels offer a realistic and genuine picture of the 18th century English life;

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4

Style: COMIC EPIC NOVEL - 2

- g) There is no idea of Puritan punishment. Sexual instinct is frankly presented and not suppressed as immoral; yet there is a moral message: he wants to make men realize that virtue is better than vice, and laughter can be the means to discover and defeat immorality;
- h) He doesn't make use of melodramatic episodes;
- i) Social denunciation is carried out indirectly, through the personal experiences of some of the characters who may happen to be robbed, unjustly sentenced, etc;
- j) Connected with the mock-heroic character of the novels, irony is always broad and witty.
- k) Fielding establishes a complex relationship between the narrator, who is omniscient, the character and the reader. He often addresses directly to the reader, using terms like "madam", "dear reader" (obtrusive narrator).

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5

Works - 1

- **An Apology for the life of Mrs SHAMELA ANDREWS (1741):**
 - * A parody of Richardson's Pamela;
- **The History of the Adventures of JOSEPH ANDREWS (1742)**
 - * Written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes,
 - * F. is reversing the parody started in the first book: Pamela's good and modest brother, Joseph, has to defend his virtue against the attacks of Lady Booby;
 - * But, after dropping the original idea of writing a satire, he produced a real novel with a happy ending and whose main character, in spite of the title, proved to be Parson Adam, a quixotic personage with a solid Christian conscience;

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6

Works - 2

- **The History of TOM JONES, a Foundling (1749)**
 - * The story of a foundling who, after many vicissitudes, manages to discover his real origin and marry the woman he loves.
 - * It was the first novel published by F. under his real name; he called it a "history", not a "novel", to point out it had nothing to do with "vulgar romances", but was a faithful presentation of the life of his time;
 - * each book of the novel is prefaced by a sort of essay which constitutes a direct commentary on the forthcoming episode and which contains the author's viewpoint (obtrusive narrator).