

CHAPTER V

FIELDING'S ARTISTIC METHODS

Unlike Defoe and Richardson, whose attempt is to make their fiction seem real, Fielding always reminds the reader that he is telling a story. He thinks of fiction as only a made thing, an imitation of human actions which is carefully and artfully presented by the maker. Fielding, as an artist, uses different methods of representing reality in art.

Being against verisimilitude, he uses the technique of forgetfulness to support the artifice of his narrative. In the relationship of Lady Booby, Joseph and Mrs. Slipslop, the narrator comments that,

"It is the observation of some ancient sage, whose name I have forgotten...."
 "Another philosopher, whose name also at present escapes my memory, hath somewhere said...." "We hope, therefore, a judicious reader will give himself some pains to observe, what we have so greatly laboured to describe, the different operations of this passion of love in the gentle and cultivated mind of Lady Booby from those which it effected in the less polished and coarser disposition of Mrs. Slipslop."
 (Book I, chap. VII)

Fielding, the narrator, sometimes pretends to give exactness. After his recovery, Joseph is hungry and wants to have boiled beef and cabbage,

"Adams was pleased with so perfect a confirmation that he had not the least fever, but advised him to a lighter diet for that evening. He accordingly eat either a rabbit or a fowl, I never could with tolerable certainty discover which; after this he was, by Mrs. Tow-wouse's order, conveyed into a better bed and equipped with one of her husband's shirts."
 (Book I, chap. XV)

The phrase 'I never could with any tolerable certainty discover which' seems to assure the reader that what he is telling is fact. But Fielding actually uses it to break his narrative and remind the reader that this is a story, told by a story-teller. Fielding's authorial interruptions in his narration help establish the relationship between himself and the reader which is a main purpose of his fiction writing. Northrop Frye suggests that this technique is helpful.

"All the great story-tellers, including the Augustan ones, have a strong sense of literature as a finished product. The suspense is thrown forward until it reaches the end, and is based on our confidence that the author knows what is coming next. A story-teller does not break his illusion by talking to the reader as Fielding does, because we know from the start that we are listening to Fielding telling a story - that is, Johnson's arguments about illusion in drama apply equally well to prose fiction of Fielding's kind."¹

Fielding's method of authorial self-assertion is necessary both for the ironic and moral treatment. Without his appearance in the story, he cannot use verbal irony. He also presents a community of values through a witty narrator whom the reader comes to like and trust.

The interpolated stories in both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones are examples of literary parallels which imply that they have a coherent structure and a unity of design. The interpolated tales help complete the artistic scheme of the novel and also reveal Fielding's awareness of the novel as a made thing. In Joseph Andrews, Mr. Wilson's story emphasizes the contrasting qualities

of town and country. He is corrupted by the town and finally runs away to live with his wife in the country. The story of Leonora is not only a conventional story of romantic disappointment for a girl. It also presents the dangers of seeking to marry for money. In Tom Jones, the Man of the Hill's story is used to point out a lesson for Tom and for the reader about the harm that a young man will receive if he lives without benevolence. He is parallel to Tom in that in his youth he spent his life in a careless way. Finally he is corrupted by city life and separates himself from society. The mood and tone of the interpolated stories differ from those of the main narrative. But Fielding intends to put them in contrast with the surrounding narrative in order to make it seem lively and lifelike. For example, in the middle of the romantic action and formally stylized language of Leonora's story, Fielding puts a traditional picaresque episode full of violent actions and noises.

As a craftsman, Fielding writes his fiction with antithetical patterns. The antithesis does not only give a symmetry but also ironical meanings to his fiction. In Tom Jones, we can see an antithesis between Mr. Allworthy's and Bridget's reactions towards Captain Blifil's death. Bridget begins to weep and this transition is a further antithesis:

"Here a torrent of tears had the same consequence with what the suppression had occasioned to Mr. Allworthy, and she remained silent."

(Book II, chap. IX)

When Blifil's body is brought on the scene, the reversed positions take place:

"Here the curious reader may observe another diversity in the operations of grief: for as Mr. Allworthy had been before silent, from the cause which had made his sister vociferous, so did the present sight, which drew tears from the gentleman, put an entire stop to those of the lady, who first gave a violent scream, and presently fell into a fit."

(Book II, chap. IX)



The symmetrical arrangement is noticeable here. Two doctors, Dr. Y and Dr. Z are called; one takes Blifil's right arm, the other his left. When they see that there is no hope to save his life, they come to take Bridget's hands, "as they had before done on those of the corpse." Besides, Bridget's artificial grief is ironically put in contrast with the natural feelings of the good man, Mr. Allworthy.

The antithesis is sometimes found in the chapter heading. Allworthy's serious preaching to Jenny Jones on the evils of sexual indulgence in Book I, chap. VII is immediately followed by a lively satiric dialogue between Bridget and Mrs. Wilkins on all loose wenches in chapter VIII. The heading for chapter VIII is "A Dialogue Between Mesdames Bridget and Deborah Containing More Amusement, But Less Instruction, Than the Former." The contrasting material is easily seen here. A similar technique is found in Joseph Andrews; the dialogue between two conceited villains is immediately followed by that of the two good men, Joseph and Adams, which is a contrast to the former. The latter is introduced as "a sort of counter part" to the former. In his

fiction, Fielding succeeds in using this antithetical device. Fielding comments that, "Most artists have this secret (the principle of contrast) in practice, though some, perhaps, have not much studied the theory. The jeweller knows that the finest brilliant requires a foil; and the painter, by the contrast of his figures, often acquires great applause."

Fielding's use of contrasting parallels is limited to verbal arrangement. In Joseph Andrews, there is a contrasting parallel in Lady Booby's and Mrs. Slipslop's attempt to seduce Joseph. Fielding treats these two women differently:

"We hope, a judicious reader will give himself some pains to observe, what we have so greatly labored to describe, the different operations of this passion of love in the gentle and cultivated mind of the Lady Booby, from those which it effected in the less polished and coarser disposition of Mrs. Slipslop."
(Book I, chap. VII)

The reader is aware that what he writes is just the opposite of what he thinks; both of them are controlled by the same lust. Then he comes to say about Lady Booby that she;" ...was left by Joseph in a temper of mind not greatly different from that of the inflamed Slipslop." Mrs. Slipslop is the lively representative of her mistress and a voice of her mistress's desires which are concealed:

"Do as I bid you," says my lady "and don't shock my ears with your beastly language." "Harry - come - up," cries Slipslop, "people's ears are sometimes the nicest part about them."
(Book I, chap. IX)

This presentation of Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop is both a parallel of character and of incident. It suggests Fielding's artifice in plotting his architectonic novel, which has a unity of design for the whole.

Sometimes, Fielding uses cinematic comic techniques, such as in his description of the duel between Tom and Fitzpatrick:

Jones...pressed on so boldly upon Fitzpatrick that he beat down his guard, and sheathed one half of his sword in the body of the said gentleman, who had no sooner received it than he stepped backwards, dropped the point of his sword and leaning upon it, cried, "I have satisfaction enough: I am a dead man."
(Book XVI, chap. X)

The actions are quickly presented like those in cinema and the speech is humorous, not serious as it should be.

The recurrent element also reminds the reader that everything in the novel is a part of a unified piece of art. In Tom Jones, the whole plan of the novel is complicated and artfully presented. Irvin Ehrenpreis suggests that the symmetrical structure of Tom Jones enables Fielding to create similar scenes at opposite ends of the novel as a didactic commentary upon each other. For example, Square, Lady Bellaston and Honour are each seen in other people's bedrooms.²

The repetitions of incident in Tom Jones do not only give interesting comparisons but also contribute to the plot of the novel. We can find an ironic parallel between Lady Hellaston's generosity to Tom and Tom's to poor Mr. Anderson. Lady Bellaston gives Tom money for his services as her lover. Fielding ironically describes her generosity:

"To clear, therefore, the honour of Mr. Jones, and to do justice to the liberality of the lady, he had really received this present of her, who, though she did not give much into the hackney charities of the age, such as building hospitals, etc., was not, however, entirely void of that Christian virtue; and conceived (very rightly, I think) that a young fellow of merit, without a shilling in the world, was no improper object of this virtue."

(Book VIII, chap. VIII)

This ironically false charity prepares the reader to compare Lady Bellaston's generosity with Tom's. In the same chapter Tom gives fifty pounds to Mr. Anderson. What is noticeable is that the money he gives to rescue a poor family from starvation is the money he has received from a lustful older woman as a payment for his amorous service to her. Here Fielding suggests a moral judgement; that sometimes an act of goodness depends upon a dishonorable act. Tom tells Mr. Anderson that it is his great pleasure to have saved his whole family. Tom, in his speech, indicates Fielding's moral attitude:

"If there are men who cannot feel the delight of giving happiness to others, I sincerely pity them, as they are incapable of tasting what is, in my opinion, a greater honour, a higher interest, and a sweeter pleasure than the ambitious, the avaricious, or the voluptuous man can ever obtain."

(Book XIII, chap. VIII)

It is Fielding's intention to give moral teaching and he brilliantly presents it through thematic devices. Both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones repeatedly refer to the contrast of town and the country. The town represents the complication and degeneration

of modern life whereas the country represents a modest traditional life in the small community of family and friends. In Joseph Andrews, this contrast is more emphasized because the whole action of the novel is concerned with the movement from London to the country. There are recurrent comments of the town people on the country and also of the country people on the town:

Lady Booby, "who had been blest with a town education...never spoke of any of her country neighbours by any other appellation than that of 'the Brutes'."
(Book I, chap. III)

Joseph's comment on the town as a place where people are separated from one another:

"London is a bad place, and there is so little good fellowship that the next-door neighbours don't know one another."
(Book I, chap. VII)

In Tom Jones, the themes are craftily revealed in an architectonic way. Each passage is supported by the weight of the whole novel. For example, Lady Bellaston is characterized through the relationship between her and Tom. Details of this portrait suggest a unity which provides the larger thematic patterns of the novel:

Such was the unhappy case of Jones; for though the virtuous love he bore Sophia and which left very little affection for any other woman, had been entirely out of the question, he could never have been able to have made any adequate return to the generous passion of this lady, who had indeed been once an object of desire, but was now entered at least into the autumn of life, though she wore all the gayety of youth, both in her dress and manner; nay, she contrived still to maintain the roses in her cheeks; but these, like flowers forced out of season by art, had none of that lively blooming freshness with

which Nature, at the proper time, bedecks her own productions. She had, besides, a certain imperfection which renders some flowers, though very beautiful to the eye, very improper to be placed in a wilderness of sweets, and what above all others is most disagreeable to the breath of love.

(Book XIII, chap. IX)



The key word "generous" is a pure irony. The words "wore" and "art" suggest the disparity between clothing and nakedness, mask and man, appearance and reality, art and nature. She is all art: not natural. In spite of her age, she tries to make herself look like a blooming flower.

Joseph Andrews is not only supported by the recurrence of themes and the contrasted narrative materials but also by an effectively symmetric conception. The whole story is divided into four books in a balanced and artful pattern. At the beginning of the first book, the main action is introduced by Lady Booby's attempt to seduce Joseph. Chastity, a major theme is introduced. Then a second major theme, charity is presented when Joseph is found naked on the road and nobody in a stage coach shows mercy to him except the postillion. Later the themes of chastity and charity are joined together when Joseph resists Betty's seduction after she has been kind to him, looked after him when he was sick. At the beginning of this book, Joseph is dismissed by Lady Booby and at the end of the same book, Betty, the chambermaid is also turned away from her service. All these suggest the formal asymmetry of the book. Book II begins with Parson Adams on the road. From his adventures, he finds the contrast between appearance and reality; that men are not what they seem to be. This theme is

followed by the charity theme when Adams hurries to rescue Fanny who is crying for help. A debate between Adams and the innkeeper on whether realities can be judged from appearances brings the themes of appearance - reality and charity together. Like Book II, Book III begins with Adams on his journey with Joseph and Fanny. In this book, he is involved with Peter Founce on the question of charity which is the most important theme of this book. The last book, Book IV, like Book I begins with Lady Booby who is still hypocritical and lustful. The main themes of the novel are repeated and this book also gives the central comic situations at Lady Booby's. At the end of the book, the two lovers, Joseph and Fanny, come to reunite and the story ends with happiness.

Coleridge considered the plot of Tom Jones to be one of the most perfect in literature:

"What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the Oedipus Tyrannus, the Alchemist and Tom Jones, the three most perfect plots ever planned." 3

Fielding divides Tom Jones into groups and each group consists of six books. Each group is paralleled by Tom's amorous adventures, the symmetrical recurrence of incidents, the balanced contrasts of town and the country, the parallels of characters and events. The whole novel can also be divided into two main groups. Many actions in the first nine books artfully answer to those in the last nine. Both Sophia and Molly are introduced in book IV and Sophia and Tom fall in love with each other in Book V. In book IV of the second ome, Lady Bellaston is also introduced and her relationship with Tom is found in the following book. Fielding

suggests the connection between the mechanism of plot and the symmetry of structure in Tom Jones. In book XVIII when Tom marries Sophia, Fielding leads the reader back to book IX at the Upton inn:

If the reader will please to refresh his memory, turning to the scene at Upton, in the ninth book, he will be apt to admire the many strange accidents which unfortunately prevented any interview between Partridge and Mrs. Watera, when she spent a whole day there with Mr. Jones. Instances of this kind we may frequently observe in life, where the greatest events are produced by a nice train of little circumstances; and more than one example of this may be discovered by the accurate eye, in this our history.

Robert Alter comments that "The plot of Tom Jones serves not only to generate comic suspense through the long reaches of expansive narrative, but also to remind us of the presence of an artist, ordering the materials of life in a light interconnection that actual experience only sometimes approximates, avoiding through a choice of comic art the incoherencies, the undisputed moral confusions, the irreversible calamities, which so abound in life."⁴

It seems most probable that a considerable part of Fielding's technical skill was acquired during his work as a dramatist. He wrote various kinds of plays. He wrote witty comedies of intrigue in the Restoration manner, farces, ballad operas concerned with politics, burlesques, comedies of modern manners and satirical comedies in which an absurd play is rehearsed with comments from the author, a critical acquaintance and the players. Most of his

early plays are concerned with burlesque and farce. Fielding was more interested in farce than burlesque and he admitted that five of his plays were farces. Farce is intended to make people laugh and also teach by exaggerating to absurdity. It is slightly different from burlesque which amuses people by the contrast between form and content, between what is said and the way it is said; and at the same time is an indirect satire creating a sense of absurdity. Joseph Andrews is partly burlesque, but not wholly so; Fielding intends to relate it to life, not only make fun of a type or a piece of art.

Pasquin (1736) and The Historical Register (1737) are his most successful plays. Pasquin is characteristic of his art; he calls it "A Dramatic Satire." It is a satire relating to life; well presented in a theatrical way. His early experience of burlesque in Tom Thumb (1730) and The Convent - Garden Tragedy (1731) is also important to his later career as a novelist. He parodies an old-fashioned kind of writing and introduces a new kind as a change. In Joseph Andrews, he does the same by mocking the old heroic style and invents a new kind: "comic epic in prose." Before writing Jonathan Wild, Fielding had already written about the theme of greatness in Tom Thumb or The Tragedy of Tragedies. Tom Thumb is the symbol for greatness and is skilfully developed into the character of Wild in Fielding's later novel, Jonathan Wild.

Fielding's dramatic career taught him to write dialogue which distinguishes country people from town people or a lady from a young girl. It taught him the way to arrange all incidents together

leading to the final scene of the novel where main characters are brought together and the problem is solved. Fielding also uses a drawing room set on a stage, which has a limited area, in his novel scenes. In his plays, characters are interrupted by an unexpected entry which annoys and confuses their relationship. In Act III of The Temple Beau, young Wilding is pretending to seduce Lady Lucy Pedant and has just embraced her when they are interrupted by her husband's entry and then by Wilding's father. The same technique is more artfully developed in Tom Jones. In Book XV chapter V, Lord Fellamar and Sophia, in Lady Bellaston's house, are interrupted by Squire Western's entry and then by Lady Bellaston's. Lord Fellamar attempts to attract Sophia's interest but she does not pay any attention to him. Therefore, he hopes that Western's and Lady Bellaston's entry will be helpful to that situation.

Besides, there are other examples showing Fielding's use of his theatrical experience in his novel writing. The most remarkable is in Act III of The Letter Writers, one of his early plays, where when Mrs. Wisdom and her gallant Rakel are interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Softly, Rakel suddenly hides under the table. Mrs. Softly is followed by Mr. Wisdom and a nephew who is drunken, turns the table over and discovers Rakel. In Tom Jones, Lady Bellaston also discovers Mrs. Honour hiding behind the bed in Tom's room (Book XV, chapter VII) and Tom discovers Square hiding behind a rug in Molly Seagrim's bedroom (Book V, chapter V). Although Fielding is better-known as a novelist than a dramatist, much of ingenuity and technique in fiction writing was derived from and greatly influenced by his theatrical experience.