

HENRY FIELDING

LIFE (1707 - 1754)

Henry Fielding was born in Somerset in 1707. On leaving college, an allowance from his grandmother allowed him to travel to London, where he began writing plays. Between 1729 and 1737 he wrote or adapted no less than twenty-six plays. Eventually Fielding turned to the emerging genre of the novel. His first novel was *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*. In 1749 he published his most famous work, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. Fielding's health was declining. In 1754 he resign his post and in June of that year left for Portugal, in search of a warmer climate. He died in Lisbon in October 1754.

ACHIEVEMENT

Written as a reaction to Richardson's *Pamela*, which he considered insincere, ***An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*** has the same epistolary structure. The heroine, Shamela (sham = false), is hypocrite since she is virtuous for her convenience: she wants to marry a wealthy man even if she belongs to the lower class, her mother being a prostitute and her father an idler. After Shamela, Fielding published ***Joseph Andrews*** as a further reaction to Richardson's *Pamela*. It deals with Pamela's supposed brother, Joseph, who is a servant at Lady Booby's estate and has to face her assaults and attempts to seduce him. He manages to preserve his virtue thanks to his qualities of honesty, courage and generosity.

TOM JONES

Henry Fielding began writing novels when the two most popular forms were the pseudo-autobiography (Defoe) and the novel in letters (Richardson). Both had the advantage of being indistinguishable from truth. This was a clear advantage, if we consider that the middle-class readers were often Puritans and the Puritans condemned all fiction as a form of lying.

Fielding was neither middle-class nor a Puritan and he didn't share the scruples of the other writers about admitting that their books weren't true. This explains the use of an **omniscient**, third-person **narrator**: Fielding is always there, he knows what his character are thinking and feeling, he knows where they are and what they are doing.

Tom Jones is a foundling who has been brought up by a country gentleman, Mr Allworthy. Tom is strong, generous, intelligent and loved by everybody, but he often runs into trouble because of his impetuous nature. However, he is hated by Mr Blifil, Allworthy's nephew. Tom falls in love with Sophia Western, the daughter of a wealthy country squire. Their relationship is opposed by the two families, since Tom is illegitimate. Sophia runs away from home to join Tom, who in the meantime has been thrown out of the house by Mr Allworthy because of the false accusations of Blifil. The rest of the novel is taken up by Tom's and Sophia's many adventures on the English road, in country inns, and in London, where the plot is finally resolved. Tom is cleared of all accusations and turns out to be Allworthy's legitimate nephew, and so he can marry Sophia.

Fielding declared he was influenced by Miguel Cervantes and by **picaresque novel** (the term "picaresque" comes from the Spanish word "pícaro" used to identify an individual who moves from one adventure to the next, often on the road). The relationship between Tom and Partridge, his travelling companion, is inspired by two famous travelling companions: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Although the comic element is present in the novel, Fielding's main purpose is moral. He wants to direct the reader's attention to human nature and to underline the evils of the society of his time: hypocrisy, vanity, selfishness, greed, duplicity and meanness. Also in the course of his journey, Tom himself gradually learns how full of illusions the world can be.

Notebook