FIELDING'S WORLD OF FEMININE ASSERTION

by

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The purpose of this thesis is to establish the existence of two distinct groups of women in Henry Fielding's four novels: *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. In each of these works there is clearly discernible an assortment of aggressive, domineering, and calculating females. This first group of women has three specific functions: to initiate action, to satirize values, and to provide low and middle comedy. Fielding is amused rather than shocked or angered by the predominance of such women. However, as a corrective guide for his female readers, he presents heroines who comprise the second group. They, too, tend to be assertive and domineering in their relationships with men. But in contrast to the women in the first group who exhibit superficial values, the heroines represent Fielding's moral ideal. In each novel the hero strives to achieve a tranquil union with the heroine.

Before further defining these two groups of women and illustrating their functions, it is first important to have some understanding of the woman's status in 18th century England. Only then can one properly understand Fielding's *Shamela*, his first fictional work that is concerned with types of women and women's values. G. M. Trevelyan in his *Illustrated English Social History* comments:

The want of education in the sex was discussed as an admitted fact, one side defending it as necessary in order to keep wives in due subjection, while the other side, led by the chief literary men of the day, ascribed the frivolity
and the gambling habits of ladies of fashion
to an upbringing which debarred them from
more serious interests. 1

Fielding, in particular, was concerned with providing women
a more useful position in society. To my knowledge only a
few critics of Fielding, namely John S. Coolidge, Aurelien
Digeon, and Martin C. Battestin, have given attention to
Fielding's concern for the woman's role and the extraordinary
female characters in his novels. 2 But their studies are mostly
of a general nature, and, like most works on Fielding, empha-
size his primitive Christian morality and his revolutionary
theories on the novel as a literary genre.

The Spectator, a popular 18th century collection of
periodical essays, is another valuable guide in clarifying the
woman's position. 3 Like Fielding, Addison and Steele were inter-
ested in rescuing the woman from her trivial existence. In one
of the earliest papers (No. 10) Addison declares one of his
objectives in writing the essays:

But there are none to whom this paper will be
more useful, than to the Female World. I have
often thought there has not been sufficient
Pains taken in finding out proper Employments
and Diversions for the Fair ones. Their Amuse-
ments seem contrived for them rather as they
are Women, than as they are reasonable
Creatures; and are more adapted to the Sex
than to the Species. The Toilet is their
great Scene of Business, and the right adjust-
ing of their Hair the principal Employment of
their Lives. The sorting of a Suit of Ribbons
is reckon'd a very good Morning's Work; and
if they make an Excursion to a Mercer's or a
Toy-shop, so great a Fatigue makes them unfit
for anything else all the Day after. Their more serious Occupations are Sowing, Embroidery, and their greatest Drudgery the Preparation of Jellies and Sweet-meats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary Women; tho' I know there are Multitudes of those of a more elevated Life and Conversation, that move in an exalted Sphere of Knowledge and Virtue, that join all the Beauties of the Mind to the Ornaments of Dress, and inspire a kind of Awe and Respect, as well as Love, into their Male-Beholders. I hope to increase the Number of these by Publishing this daily Paper, which I shall always endeavour to make an innocent if not an improving Entertainment, and by that Means at least divert the Minds of my Female Readers from greater Trifles.4

Steele in Paper No. 66 remarks:

To make her an agreeable Person is the main purpose of her Parents; to that is all their Cost, to that all their care directed; and from this general Folly of Parents we owe our present numerous Race of Coquets.5

Similarly, Addison says:

The same female Levity is no less fatal to them after Marriage than before; it represents to their Imaginations the faithful prudent Husband as an honest tractable and domestick Animal... As this irregular Vivacity of Temper leads astray the Hearts of ordinary Women in the Choice of their Lovers and the Treatment of their Husbands, it operates with the same pernicious Influence towards their children, who are taught to accomplish themselves in all those sublime Perfections that appear captivating in the Eye of their Mother.6

With the passage of the Theatrical Licensing Act in 1737 Fielding's career as a playwright ended. He then began the study of law, and was unheard of as a literary man until shortly after the publication of Richardson's immensely popular novel, Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded, in 1740. Richardson, despite his intentions, created in Pamela the type of misguided female
that Addison and Steele had tried to raise from triviality. Despite being a servant, her aspirations and values differed little from those of upper class women whom Addison and Steele were speaking to. However, the public, Fielding being one of the few dissenters, accepted Pamela as the epitome of feminine virtue and morality. Clergymen cited Pamela as representing an ideal ethical standard for women to emulate. But Fielding detested Richardson's novel and Pamela in particular whom he saw as calculating and immoral. To a considerable extent it was his disdain for Pamela that led Fielding to begin writing fiction. Shamela is a parody of Richardson's heroine, and in each of Fielding's later novels he presents a heroine who, in contrast to Pamela, possesses what he sees as truly virtuous qualities. Thus at the outset of Fielding's career as a writer of fiction there is the concern for women's values.

Shamela is not a novel, and because of its fragmentary nature I have chosen to discuss it separately as a preface to Fielding's four novels. In Shamela Fielding satirizes Richardson's epistolary method, but he is more concerned with exposing Pamela as vain and immoral. An introductory letter from Parson Tickletext to Parson Oliver is intended to reveal the acclaim of the new book, Pamela:

As soon as you have read this yourself five or six times over (which may possibly happen within a week) I desire you would give it to my little god-daughter as a present from me. This being the only education we intend henceforth to give
our daughters. And pray let your servant-
maids read it over, or read it to them.
Both yourself and the neighboring clergy
will supply yourselves for the pulpit from
the bookstores, as soon as the fourth edi-
tion is published. 10

Parson Oliver, disturbed by Tickletext's reaction, replies
that he sees Pamela as greedy and lascivious. He encloses
a packet of letters which mock Richardson's epistolary
technique and his heroine:

Dear Mamma,
O what news, since I writ my last! the
young squire hath been here, and as sure as
a gun he hath taken a fancy to me... and
then he kissed me... and I pretended to be
angry... and then he kissed me again, and
breathed very short, and looked very silly;
and by ill-luck Mrs. Jervis came in, and
had like to have spoiled sport. — How
troublesome is such interruption! 11

Fielding also satirizes Richardson's Mrs. Jervis, Mrs. Jewkes,
and Pamela's mother, Mrs. Andrews, who is ultimately more con-
cerned with her daughter marrying an aristocrat than with her
virtue. These women are the prototypes for the bold and in-
trusive females who appear later in Fielding's novels.

In Shamela Squire Booby, who is Fielding's adaption of
Richardson's Squire B., becomes impatient in his desire to
possess Shamela, and in a moment of frustration evicts her
from his house. Here, as elsewhere, Fielding accurately re-
counts the events in Pamela. But his interpretation of Pamela
varies considerably from Richardson's. 12 Shamela readily
complies with Squire Booby's order; she knows he will quickly summon her back:

I thought he would be no more able to master his passion for me now, than he had been hitherto; and if he sent two horses away with me, I concluded he would send four to fetch me back.13

Later in his novels Fielding depicted numerous episodes involving women like Shamela who for various reasons exploited man's sexual passion. But unlike Richardson who made Pamela his heroine, Fielding sees such women as tempters. In contrast to Pamela who after her marriage offered Squire B. nothing but sexual gratification and unrelenting acquiescence, Fielding's heroines refine the hero's passions. They provide guidance, control, and moral strength.

Shamela reveals Squire B. as boisterous but mostly ineffective against the cunning strength of Pamela, her mother, and Mrs. Jewkes. Fielding's novels contain similar female characters: Lady Booby, Laetitia Snap, Mrs. Western, and Miss Matthews. But he, unlike Richardson, is able to see them as the calculating sort they really are. Fielding does nothing to disguise the fact that they dominate the male characters. In Pamela the consummation of Pamela's and Squire B.'s "love" consists of an insignificant marriage ceremony and subsequent superficial union. In Shamela Fielding made clear the true nature of their relationship after their marriage:
'Madam,' says he... 'this is a spirit which I did not expect in you, nor did I ever see any symptoms of it before.' — 'O but times are altered now, I am your lady, sir;' — 'yes, to my sorrow,' says he, 'I am afraid...'

Their marriage was the result of lust on the one hand and a desire for social position on the other. Similar unions are evident in Fielding's novels but they are, as one would expect, turbulent affairs.

Amidst the recounted trivia in Shamela, Fielding makes several italicized insertions regarding Pamela and her kind that emphasize his aversion to their calculating tactics:

Nothing can be more prudent in a wife, than a sullen backwardness to reconciliation; it makes a husband fearful of offending by the length of his punishment.

O how foolish it is in a woman, who hath once got the reins into her own hand, ever to quit them again!

Relinquishing his ironical tone, Fielding concludes that men like Richardson's Squire B. who regard sex as the sole ingredient of love will ultimately realize the folly of their view:

The character of Shamela will make young gentlemen wary how they take the most fatal step both to themselves and families, by youthful, hasty and improper matches; indeed, they may assure themselves, that all such prospects of happiness are vain and delusive, and that they sacrifice all the social comforts of their lives, to a very transient satisfaction of a passion, which how hot so ever it be, will be soon cooled; and when cooled, will afford nothing but repentance.
Shamela is in part Fielding's attempt to initiate change in an age that, as Martin Battestin aptly states, "tended to equate a young woman's virtue and her virginity and to view the latter as a kind of saleable commodity to be exchanged as dearly as possible for the social advancement of both daughters and family..." 18 Trevelyan notes in his Social History that middle and upper class families often solicited husbands for their daughters on the principle of "frank barter." 19 Why Fielding should be so concerned with the 18th century woman's values and misguided intentions is not clear. Richardson's Pamela in its acceptance by Fielding's contemporaries as an exemplary document on feminine morality, is certainly a partial explanation. Battestin notes that even Alexander Pope admired Pamela's virtue. 20 Prior to writing Shamela, Fielding had criticized the loose marital standards in his biting comedy, The Modern Husband, in a poem entitled "To a Friend on the Choice of a Wife," Fielding catalogued the types of women (heiresses, titled ladies, coquettes) that tended to ensnare men; such women are seen frequently in his novels. In his burlesque of Juvenal's satire on women he attacked the current feminine values. But, despite his realization that women whether of good or bad character usually prevail over their men, Fielding was not contemptuous of them. In the above mentioned poem he also lists the admirable qualities that some women possess, and he concludes the poem:
If Fortune gives thee such a Wife to meet
Earth cannot make thy Blessings more complete

In the preface to *Miscellanies* Fielding referred to his first wife, Charlotte Cradock, as "one from whom I draw all the solid comforts of my life." His heroines, who were most likely in part modeled after Charlotte, represent Fielding's contention that not all of England's women had degenerated to a state of coquetry. If a woman could adhere to the basic Christian truths like Fielding's heroines she could, as he makes clear, assume a position of the highest importance.

After *Shamela* Fielding wrote four novels, and nearly all the female characters in these works can be accurately placed in either the first or second group. Among those in the first group are Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipalop, Mrs. Western, Laetitia Snap, and several innkeepers' wives. These aggressive and domineering women rampage through Fielding's works; they are comical, spiteful, and are involved in much of the action. They, also, exhibit those feminine values that prevailed in 18th century England which Addison, Steele, and Fielding exposed as ludicrous. To fully understand and appreciate these women, and, for that matter, Fielding's novels, one should keep in mind that Fielding was a dramatist before turning to writing fiction. In looking at the development of English drama there is evident a tradition of shrews and calculating wives beginning with Mrs. Noah in the medieval cycle.
plays, Gill in The Second Shepherds' Play, and Tyb in Heywood's A Merry Play. Their primary function is to provide low comedy, and this is one of Fielding's intentions in using aggressive women in his novels.

In the second group are Fielding's heroines: Fanny Goodwill, Mrs. Heartfree, Sophia Western, and Amelia Booth. To be properly understood, they too should be seen as functioning within the tradition of dramatic comedy. The basic situation in all comedy involves uniting the hero and heroine, the two productive figures in the community. Usually there are one or more characters who through assorted machinations are temporarily able to keep the lovers from coming together. This is the controlling format in Fielding's two best novels, Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, and is used to a lesser extent in Jonathan Wild and Amelia. In these works it is Fielding's aggressive women in the first group who are primarily responsible for keeping the hero and heroine apart. Fielding's heroines, like those in dramatic comedy, are productive figures who possess the most desirable values in the community. As mentioned, they represent Fielding's moral ideal, and, much like Sidney's Stella in "Astrophel and Stella," function in an instructive capacity. In the course of the novels the heroes try to bring their lives into accordance with the heroines'.

In discussing the first group of women it is worth reiterating the three important functions they have: initiate
action, satirize feminine values, and provide low and middle comedy. Lady Booby in *Joseph Andrews* and Mrs. Western in *Tom Jones* are major characters who motivate much of the action. The introductory chapters of *Joseph Andrews* are, like *Shamela*, a satire on Richardson's *Pamela*. Lady Booby is Fielding's counterpart of Richardson's Squire B. Both are brutish aristocrats who have a young servant in their employ. In *Pamela* Squire B. continually attempts to seduce Pamela, and in like manner Fielding's Lady Booby tries to seduce Joseph Andrews. When she is unsuccessful and is sufficiently angered by a servant having denied her, she evicts Joseph from her house:

> Revenge came now to her assistance; and she considered her dismissal of him, stript, and without a character, with the utmost pleasure. She riot in the several kinds of misery which her imagination suggested to her might be his fate; and, with a smile composed of anger, mirth, and scorn, viewed him in the rags in which her fancy had drest him.  

Thus she is the compelling force of Joseph's journey on the road. But unlike Squire B. who has Pamela returned, Lady Booby is unsuccessful. However, she is not easily defeated, and continues to pursue Joseph, urged on by her desire to have him and her wrath to punish him. Digeon, aptly analyzing Lady Booby, states: "she bears upon the action, now retarding and now precipitating it."
In *Tom Jones* Sophia's aunt, Mrs. Western, is a similar compelling force. Early in the novel she informs her brother, Squire Western, that Sophia is in love with Allworthy's sickly nephew, Blifil. Squire Western immediately begins to discuss marital arrangements with Allworthy. When Sophia hears of this she exclaims to her aunt that it is Tom Jones, not Blifil, whom she loves:

Mrs. Western now stood a few moments silent, while sparks of fiery rage flashed from her eyes. At length, collecting all her voice, she thundered forth in the following articulate sounds: — 'And is it possible you can think of disgracing your family by allying yourself to a bastard? Can the blood of the Westerns submit to such contamination.'

By intervening, Mrs. Western sets off a series of events which lead to Tom, like Joseph Andrews, being evicted from his home. Tom also undertakes a journey on the road which after numerous adventures ends in London. In the interim Mrs. Western devotes herself to insuring that Sophia does not see Tom. When she fails to have her niece marry the cunning Blifil, she quickly turns to Lord Fellamaras the next potential husband for Sophia. Thus Mrs. Western is successful throughout much of *Tom Jones* in keeping the hero and heroine separated. It is only near the end of the novel that she concedes in a huff: "I will withdraw all my forces from the field." Near the conclusion of *Joseph Andrews* Lady Booby with a similar determination is still plotting to win Joseph:
The Lady Booby had no sooner had an account from the gentleman of his meeting a wonderful beauty near her house, and perceived the raptures with which he spoke of her, than, immediately concluding it must be Fanny, she began to meditate a design of bringing them better acquainted; and to entertain hopes that the fine clothes, presents, and promises of this youth would prevail on her to abandon Joseph...26

Although there are other women in these two novels such as Mrs. Slipslop, Molly Seagrim, and Lady Bellaston who initiate significant action, Lady Booby and Mrs. Western are the predominating figures. They have no counterparts in Jonathan Wild and Amelia. In Jonathan Wild Laetitia Snap is a vicious young woman who provides humor and is used to satirize feminine values. But she does not motivate action because it is Fielding's intention to depict Jonathan, a mock Sir Robert Walpole character, in the process of destroying himself. It is his mistakes in judgment rather than any active solicitation on her part that leads to their fatal union. In Amelia, written a few years before Fielding's death, the characters are inferior to those in his previous works. It is his only novel that does not have one or more aggressive and humorous females who serve in more than just a minor capacity. This is in large part why it is Fielding's least impressive novel.

Despite this somber tone, Fielding's robust women make occasional intrusions. In the early part of the story, Capt. Booth, Amelia's husband, is falsely accused of attacking a man and is put in prison. One night he is summoned to the prison
chamber of Miss Matthews, an old acquaintance. In a flashback sequence he relates to her his courting of Amelia and the considerable obstacle he found in her mother, Mrs. Harris:

Mrs. Harris burst from the closet where she had hid herself, and surprised her daughter, reclining on my bosom in all that tender sorrow I have just described. I will not attempt to paint the rage of the mother, or the daughter's confusion, or my own.27

Capt. Booth explains that Mrs. Harris was determined that he would not marry her daughter because of his inferior military rank. Upon being surprised by her a second time, Booth recounts:

my spirits were so much sunk at the sight of her mother, that no man was ever a greater coward than I was at that moment.28

By means of his recollected narrative the reader learns that Capt. Booth and Amelia, like Fielding's other heroes and heroines, were for some time kept apart by a domineering woman.

Rather than being overbearing like Mrs. Harris, Miss Matthews is a more sophisticated calculator. After ending their talk, she and Capt. Booth spend the night in her cell. Fielding says:

Let the reader set before his eyes a fine young woman, in a manner, a first love, conferring obligations and using every art to soften, to allure, to win, and to enflame.29

After this extra-marital affair, Miss Matthews is seen only occasionally. Incensed by Booth's refusal to submit to future
affairs, she attempts to gain revenge by destroying his friendship with Col. James and by threatening to tell Amelia of his infidelity. Despite her failure to ruin the hero's and heroine's marriage, she is the cause of much of Booth's despair in this bleak novel.

Amelia's sister, Betty Harris, is, like Laetitia Snap, a thoroughly treacherous woman. Fielding tells the reader that she spread the news of Booth's imprisonment with "malicious joy," and blamed Amelia for their mother's death. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Betty had her mother's will changed making her the main benefactor. Amelia, instead of receiving the 90% of her mother's estate as the original will stated, received only a token amount. Clearly, if Betty had not intervened, Amelia and Capt. Booth would have suffered none of the misadventures, almost all of which are the result of financial problems, that make up the basis of the action.

Another manipulator in Amelia is Mrs. Ellison, the Booths' landlady. Her involvement is revealed by Mrs. Bennet, a friend of the Booths, who informs Amelia that several years ago Mrs. Ellison had served as an "agent" for her cousin, Col. James, in his involved scheme to seduce Mrs. Bennet. Their present intended victim, adds Mrs. Bennet, is Amelia. Fielding's heroine confronts Mrs. Ellison with this, who, after behaving in an offended manner, leaves the house:
in the bosom of Mrs. Ellison, all was storm and tempest; anger, revenge, fear, and pride, like so many raging furies, possessed her mind.

Out of context the above commentary appears to be illustrative of Fielding's typically humorous depictions of his aggressive women in wrathful moments. However, his calculating women in *Amelia*, unlike those in his previous novels, are most often treacherous in an unamusing way. Fielding's more caustic view of society resulted in such women as Mrs. Ellison, Miss Matthews, and Betty Harris being more figures of evil than of comedy.

In my prefatory notes I emphasized Fielding's concern for women's superficial values. Direct statement and satire are his techniques for exposing the triviality of those values which were the guidelines for 18th century women. He sees three areas in particular where society is badly deceived: marriage and love which is always Fielding's major concern, social prestige based on wealth and position, and women's education. Fielding frequently points to mothers and aunts as being responsible for instilling in younger women fallacious concepts of marriage and love. Under their guidance, what should be a natural process becomes, instead, one of greed and deception. Any attempt by the young woman to develop a meaningful relationship with a man is discouraged. In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding makes his most explicit statement on these distorted notions:
Now, reader, to apply this observation to my present purpose, thou must know, that as the passion generally called love exercises most of the talents of the female or fair world, so in this they now and then discover a small inclination to deceit; for which thou wilt not be angry with the beautiful creatures when thou hast considered that at the age of seven, or something earlier, miss is instructed by her mother that master is a very monstrous kind of animal, who will, if she suffers him to come too near her, infallibly eat her up, and grind her to pieces. That so far from kissing or toy ing with him of her own accord, she must not admit him to kiss or toy with her. And lastly, that she must never have any affection towards him; for if she should, all her friends in petticoats would esteem her a traitress, point at her, and hunt her out of their society. These impressions, being first received, are farther and deeper inculcated by their school-mistresses and companions; so that by the age of ten they have contracted such a dread and abhorrence of the above-named monster, that, whenever they see him, they fly from him as the innocent hare doth from the greyhound. Hence, to the age of fourteen or fifteen, they entertain a mighty antipathy to master; they resolve, and frequently profess, that they will never have any commerce with him, and entertain fond hopes of passing their lives out of his reach, of the possibility of which they have so visible an example in their good maiden aunt. But when they arrive at this period, and have now passed their second climacteric, when their wisdom, grown riper, begins to see a little farther, and from almost daily falling in master's way, to apprehend the great difficulty of keeping out of it; and when they observe him look often at them, and sometimes very eagerly and earnestly too (for the monster seldom takes any notice of them till at this age), they then begin to think of their danger; and, as they perceive they cannot easily avoid him, the wiser part bethink themselves of providing by other means for
their security. They endeavour, by all the methods they can invent, to render themselves so amiable in his eyes, that he may have no inclination to hurt them; in which they generally succeed so well, that his eyes, by frequent languishing, soon lessen their idea of his fierceness, and so far abate their fears, that they venture to parley with him; and when they perceive him so different from what he hath been described, all gentleness, softness, kindness, tenderness, fondness, their dreadful apprehensions vanish in a moment; and now (it being usual with the human mind to skip from one extreme to its opposite, as easily, and almost as suddenly, as a bird from one bough to another) love instantly succeeds to fear: but, as it happens to persons who have in their infancy been thoroughly frightened with certain no-persons called ghosts, that they retain their dread of those beings after they are convinced that there are no such things, so these young ladies, though they no longer apprehend devouring, cannot so entirely shake off all that hath been instilled into them; they still entertain the idea of that censure which was so strongly imprinted on their minds, to which the declaration of abhorrence they every day hear from their companions greatly attribute. To avoid this censure, therefore, is now their only care; for which purpose they still pretend the same aversion to the monster; and the more they love him, the more ardently they counterfeit their antipathy. By the continual and constant practice of which deceit on others, they at length impose on themselves and really believe they hate what they love. 31

Fielding continues his exposal in *Tom Jones*. He sees the accepted procedure of a woman marrying for the single purpose of advancing her social position as the cause of her later trivial existence:
Our present women have been taught by their mothers to fix their thoughts only on ambition and vanity, and to despise the pleasures of love as unworthy their regard; and being afterwards, by the care of such mothers, married without having husbands, they seem pretty well confirmed in the justness of those sentiments; whence they content themselves, for the dull remainder of life, with the pursuit of more innocent, but I am afraid more childish amusements, the bare mention of which would ill suit with the dignity of this history. In my humble opinion, the true characteristic of the present beau monde is rather folly than vice, and the only epithet which it deserves is that of frivolous.32

Again in Tom Jones, in reference to an affair that Mrs. Waters was having, Fielding defines "love" in its degenerated sense:

To speak out boldly at once, she was in love, according to the present universally received sense of that phrase, by which love is applied indiscriminately to the desirable objects of all our passions, appetites, and senses, and is understood to be that preference which we give to one kind of food rather than to another.33

In contrast with the meaningful love of the heroes and heroines, Fielding juxtaposes practical or contractual marriages. In Jonathan Wild he parallels the marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Heartfree, and Jonathan and Laetitia. Whereas the Heartfrees find the highest felicity in their union, the Wilds, due mostly to Laetitia, experience something entirely different:

Jonathan: A good wife would keep no company which made her husband uneasy.
Laetitia: You might have found one of those good wives, sir, if you had pleased; I had no objection to it.

Jonathan: I thought I had found one in you.

Laetitia: You did! I am very much obliged to you for thinking me so poor-spirited a creature, but I hope to convince you to the contrary.

A few minutes later:

Jonathan: If you did not marry for love why did you marry?

Laetitia: Because it was convenient, and my parents forced me.34

In Joseph Andrews Leonora's aunt encourages her to leave Horatio, a good man who holds no significant social position, for Bellarmine, an aristocrat. To Leonora's insistence that she is engaged to Horatio, her aunt replies:

I have lived longer in it [the world] than you; and I assure you there is not anything worth our regard beside money; nor did I ever know one person who married from other considerations, who did not afterwards heartily repent it.35

The aunt finally persuades Leonora to reject Horatio for the pompous Bellarmine, and he in turn eventually leaves her.

Fielding's female narrator concludes:

...she hath ever since led a disconsolate life, and deserves, perhaps, pity for her misfortunes, more than our censure for a behaviour to which the artifices of her aunt very probably contributed, and to which very young women are often rendered too liable by that blameable levity in the education of our sex.36
In *Tom Jones*, as in *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding reveals the absurdity of contractual marriages. Mrs. Western and her brother are determined that Sophia will marry Blifil simply because he is the nephew of an aristocrat. Mrs. Western is Fielding's most notable example of the "learned" aunt who instructs her niece on the finer points of "love:"

She had lived about the court, and had seen the world. Hence she had acquired all that knowledge which the said world usually communicates; and was a perfect mistress of manners, customs, ceremonies, and fashions. ... She was, moreover, excellently well skilled in the doctrine of Amour, and knew better than anybody who and who were together; a knowledge which she the more easily attained, as her pursuit of it was never diverted by any affair of her own; for either she had no inclinations, or they had never been solicited; which last is indeed very probable; for her masculine person, which was near six foot high, added to her manner and learning, possibly prevented the other sex from regarding her, notwithstanding her petticoats, in the light of a woman. However, as she had considered the matter scientifically, she perfectly well knew, though she had never practised them, all the acts which fine ladies use when they desire to give encouragement, or to conceal liking, with all the long appendage of smiles, ogles, glances, etc. as they are at present practised in the beau-monde (sic). 37

Squire Western, an arrogant bully, locks Sophia in her room to prevent her escaping from the proposed marriage with Blifil.

Mrs. Western entertained her with,

lectures of prudence, recommending to her the example of the polite world, where love (so the lady said) is at present
entirely laughed at, and where women consider matrimony, as men do offices of public trust, only as the means of making their fortunes and of advancing themselves in the world.38

In *Amelia*, as I have said, Mrs. Harris tries to prevent her daughter from marrying Booth because of his relatively minor rank in the military. Booth tells Miss Matthews that while he had temporarily left Amelia to attend his dying sister, a wealthy man (Mr. Winckworth) made arrangements with Mrs. Harris to marry Amelia. Booth adds: "These proposals the old lady had, without any deliberation, accepted, and had insisted, in the most violent manner, on her daughter's compliance..."39 But Mrs. Harris, like Mrs. Western, is eventually unsuccessful in keeping her charge from marrying the man she loves. Fielding contrasts the Booths' marriage with that of Miss Bath's to Col. James:

...the match was of the prudent kind, and to her advantage; for his fortune, by the death of an uncle, was become very considerable; and she had gained everything by the bargain but a husband; which her constitution suffered her to be very well satisfied without.40

But to Fielding the only result of such marriages that are more the product of social than natural inclinations is disaster. Col. James was soon pursuing other women, and eventually took Miss Matthews as his permanent mistress. The marriage of Jonathan Wild and Laetitia Snap is similarly ill-fated. Near the end of the novel, Jonathan is sentenced to be hanged. Laetitia on her last visit to Newgate prison
reproached him for his impending "shameful death" and then she "proceeded to a recapitulation of all his faults in an exacter order."

Much of what has been related indicates Fielding's good-natured contempt for wealth and position as the basis of one's social status and the measure of an individual's merit. Equally ludicrous were the efforts to reflect gentleness. The aristocratic Lady Booby in Joseph Andrews continually flouts her superiority in front of others. Fielding comments:

...she had the utmost tenderness for her reputation, as she knew on that depended many of the most valuable blessings of life; particularly cards, making curtseys in public places, and, above all, the pleasure of demolishing the reputations of others, in which innocent amusement she had an extraordinary delight.41

Similarly, Mrs. Western in Tom Jones reflects a perpetual haughty attitude because of her high social position. Upon joining her brother at a country inn, Mrs. Western exclaims:

Well, surely, no one ever had such an intolerable journey. I think the roads, since so many turnpike acts, are grown worse than ever. La, brother, how could you get into this odious place? no person of condition, I dare swear, ever set foot here before.42

In Jonathan Wild Laetitia is incensed when she learns that her unmarried sister has just become a mother:

She fell into the utmost fury at the relation, reviled her sister in the
bitterest terms, and vowed she would never see or speak to her more... She concluded with desiring her father to make an example of the slut and to turn her out of doors.43

Miss Bath, prior to her marriage to Col. James who held a prestigious army commission, is a pleasant and loyal friend to Amelia. After the marriage, she is aloof. Fielding explains her new behavior as that of a

fine lady who considered form and show as essential ingredients of human happiness, and imagined all friendship to consist in ceremony, courtesies, messages, and visits.44

The matter of rank and snobbery did not concern merely the upper echelons. Fielding saw the fierce competition among the servant class in particular. In Joseph Andrews he says that Fanny and Mrs. Slipslop had been servants in Sir John's household until "she [Fanny] had been discarded by Mrs. Slipslop, on account of her extraordinary beauty: for I never could find any other reason."45 Mrs. Slipslop discussed theology with Parson Adams "but always insisted on a deference to be paid to her understanding, as she had been frequently at London, and knew more of the world than a country parson could pretend to."46 In Tom Jones Sophia's attendant, Mrs. Honour, is surly because, like Mrs. Slipslop, she is associated with a lady from the upper class. After she and Sophia stop for the night at an inn, Mrs. Honour asks the landlady:

'Is there nothing neat or decent to be had in this horrid place?' — 'What think you of some eggs and bacon, madam?' said the
landlady. — 'Are your eggs new laid? are you certain they were laid to-day? and let me have the bacon cut very nice and thin; for I can't endure anything that's gross. Prithee try if you can do a little tolerably for once, and don't think you have a farmer's wife, or some of those creatures, in the house.'

Fielding was also amused, and annoyed, by the proscribed rules for mourning the dead. In Joseph Andrews,

...the death of Sir Thomas Booby, who, departing this life, left this disconsolate lady [Lady Booby] confined to her house, as closely as if she herself had been attacked by some violent disease. During the first six days the poor lady admitted none but Mrs. Slipalop, and three female friends, who made a party at cards.

On the seventh day, her obligation to society fulfilled, Lady Booby summons Joseph to her bedroom and makes the first of several attempts to seduce him. In Tom Jones Fielding comments directly on this hypocrisy:

Hence, too, must flow those tears which a widow sometimes so plentifully sheds over the ashes of a husband with whom she led a life of constant disquiet and turbulency, and whom now she can never hope to torment any more.

Fielding's third concern in regard to values is education. As cited, Trevelyan notes the active suppression of women's education in 18th century England. Fielding has several women in his novels who have managed to acquire learning in Classical literature and foreign languages. In reference to Jenny Jones who appears briefly in Tom Jones, Fielding emphasizes
the hostility that she encounters because of her educational training:

This advantage was attended with some small inconveniences; for as it is not to be wondered at that a young woman so well accomplished should have little relish for society of those whom fortune had made her equals, but whom education had rendered so much her inferiors, so is it a matter of no greater astonishment that this superiority in Jenny, together with that behavior which is its certain consequence, should produce among the rest some little envy and ill-will towards her; 50

Similarly, in *Amelia* Mrs. Bennet (later Mrs. Atkinson) is castigated by her aunt for her perceptive comments in a family debate:

...my aunt burst almost into a rage, treated me with downright surliness, called me conceited fool, abused by poor father for having taught me Latin, which, she said, had made me a downright coxcomb... She then fell foul on the learned languages, declared they were totally useless, and concluded that she had read all that was worth reading, though, she thanked heaven, she understood no language but her own. 51

As this excerpt suggests, Fielding's young and intelligent women are opposed primarily by his overbearing women who cling to the accepted values. Mrs. James, upon hearing Amelia refer to cards as games for children, exclaims:

Detest cards!... How can you be so stupid? I would not live a day without them — nay, indeed, I do not believe I should be able to exist. 52
Fielding's humorous attacks on superficial values are not unique; his distinctiveness is in his continual use of women to exhibit those entrenched social values that I have mentioned, and to give his readers, usually through the heroine, more humane and intelligent values. And although any consideration of human values, as Fielding knew, cannot be limited to one sex, it was in many ways to Fielding an exclusively female problem:

And hence, I think, we may very fairly draw an argument to prove how extremely natural virtue is to the fair sex; for, though there is not, perhaps, one in ten thousand who is capable of making a good actress... yet this of virtue they can all admirably well put on; and as well those individuals who have it not, as those who possess it, can all act it to the utmost degree of perfection.53

In Amelia Fielding cites Vanbrugh:

Friendship, take heed; if woman interfere, 
Be sure the hour of thy destruction's near.54

Such passages indicate Fielding's preoccupation with female motivation. Although all of his novels except Amelia are fundamentally concerned with a male protagonist, it is most often the women who are the domineering figures, and the topic of his digressional observations on values.

Fielding's last and primary interest in presenting the first group of women is for comic effect. This is evident in the way in which they initiate action, and in the way they assert the worth of those values that Fielding saw as absurd.
Fielding's genius is creating comedy, and this is most apparent in the low comedy episodes involving his brutish females. In a prefatory chapter to Book V in *Tom Jones* Fielding comments on the disappearance of low comedy in 18th century drama:

Or hath any one living attempted to explain what the modern judges of our theatres mean by that word low, by which they have happily succeeded in banishing all humour from the stage, and have made the theatre as dull as a drawing-room?55

Later, Fielding remarks on a puppet-show that Tom and Partridge attended:

The puppet-show was performed with great regularity and decency. It was called the fine and serious part of the 'Provoked Husband;' and it was indeed a very grave and solemn entertainment, without any low wit or humour, or jests; or, to do it no more than justice, without anything which could provoke a laugh. The audience were all highly pleased.56

The only dissenter was Tom who later informed the showman: "but I should have been glad to have seen my old acquaintance Master Punch, for all that; and so far from improving, I think, by leaving out him and his merry wife Joan, you have spoiled your puppet-show." It would seem, then, that Fielding by the depiction of overbearing women was attempting to reintroduce the lower brand of comedy to English literature through the novel.

Fielding achieves his comic effects through character description, dialogue, and the depiction of skirmishes; such
skirmishes invariably involve the first group of women. In Joseph Andrews Fielding’s finest and most amusing characterization, with the possible exception of Parson Adams, is that of Mrs. Slipslop:

She was a maiden gentlewoman of about forty-five years of age, who, having made a small slip in her youth, had continued a good maid ever since. She was not at this time remarkably handsome; being very short, and rather too corpulent in body, and somewhat red, with the addition of pimples in the face. Her nose was likewise rather too large, and her eyes too little; nor did she resemble a cow so much in her breath, as in two brown globes which she carried before her; one of her legs was also a little shorter than the other, which occasioned her to limp as she walked.57

Because Lady Booby is of the aristocracy, and Mrs. Slipslop is associated with it, they are not involved, as is also the case in traditional dramatic comedy, in physical brawls. Most of the humor involving them is presented through dialogue:

But, dear Slipslop... if I could prevail on myself to commit such a weakness, there is that cursed Fanny in the way, whom the idiot -- O how I hate and despise him [Joseph]! -- ’She! a little ugly minx,’ cries Slipslop; ’leave her to me.’58

No less amusing and formidable are Parson Adam’s wife and Mrs. Tow-mouse. The Parson, who accompanies Joseph on the road, is the embodiment of Christian charity, but he is verbose and absent-minded. The outspoken Mrs. Adams ("she had always the last word everywhere but at church") regiments his existence:
Adams roped out the bed, and turning the clothes down softly, a custom Mrs. Adams had long accustomed him to, crept in and deposited his carcass on the bed-post, a place which the good woman had always assigned him.59

Mrs. Tow-wouse is the first of numerous innkeepers' wives that appear in Fielding's novels. Apparently shrewish landladies were common in 18th century England; Steele remarks in one of his essays: "Say it is possible a Woman may be modest and yet keep a publick House."60 Fielding describes Mrs. Tow-wouse as,

...short, thin, and crooked. Her forehead projected in the middle, and thence descended in a declivity to the top of her nose, which was sharp and red, and would have hung over her lips, had not nature turned up the end of it. Her lips were two bits of skin, which, whenever she spoke, she drew together in a purse. Her chin was peaked; and at the upper end of that skin which composed her cheeks, stood two bones, that almost hid a pair of small red lips. Add to this a voice most wonderfully adapted to the sentiments it was to convey, being both loud and hoarse.61

She, like most of Fielding's women, dominates her husband:

'Well,' says he, 'my dear, do as you will when you are up; you know I never contradict you.' 'No,' says she, 'if the devil was to contradict me, I would make the house too hot to hold him.'62

Fielding notes in Tom Jones:

It is, indeed, the idea of fierceness, and not of bravery, which destroys the female character... at the same time,
perhaps, many a woman who shrieks at a mouse or a rat, may be capable of poisoning a husband; or, what is worse, of driving him to poison himself.63

Fielding uses the inn more extensively in Tom Jones, and they are invariably run by shrews. After Tom leaves Allworthy's household, he and Partridge move from inn to inn until arriving in London near the end of the novel. Commenting on the first landlady, Fielding says:

But as he [her husband] was a surly kind of fellow, so she contented herself with frequently upbraiding him by disadvantageous comparisons with her first husband, whose praise she had eternally in her mouth... The landlady was, as we have said, absolute governess in these regions; it was therefore necessary to comply with her rules.64

At another inn Tom is provoked into fighting the innkeeper, and with the entrance of the innkeeper's wife and chambermaid into the battle, it becomes one of the finest displays of low comedy in Fielding's novels:

My landlord whose hands were empty, fell to with his fist, and the good wife, uplifting her broom and aiming at the head of Jones, had probably put an immediate end to the fray, and to Jones likewise, had not the descent of this broom been prevented ... by the arrival of Partridge; who... prevented so sad a catastrophe, by catching hold of the landlady's arm, as it was brandished aloft in the air. The landlady soon perceived the impediment which prevented her blow; and being unable to rescue her arm from the hand of Partridge, she let fall the broom; and then leaving Jones to the discipline of her husband, she fell with the utmost
fury on that poor fellow... Victory must now have fallen to the side of the travellers... had not Susan the chambermaid come luckily to support her mistress. This Susan was as two-handed a wench... as any in the country, and would, I believe, have beat the famed Thalestris herself, or any of her subject Amazons; for her form was robust and manlike, and every way made for such encounters...

This fair creature entering the field of battle, immediately filed to that wing where her mistress maintained so unequal a fight with one of either sex. Here she presently challenged Partridge to single combat. He accepted the challenge, and a most desperate fight began between them... that Amazonian fair having overthrown and beatrid her enemy, was now cuffing him lustily with both her hands, without any regard to his request of a cessation of arms, or to those loud exclamations of murder which he roared forth.65

Mr. Partridge, like his counterpart in Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, also has a bullying wife. Fielding describes her reaction to a rumor that Partridge had sired a child by Jenny Jones:

Not with less fury did Mrs. Partridge fly on the poor pedagogue. Her tongue, teeth, and hands fell all upon him at once. His wig was in an instant torn from his head, his shirt from his back, and from his face descended five streams of blood... her teeth gnashed with rage; and fire, such as sparkles from a smith's forge, darted from her eyes. So that, altogether, this Amazonian heroine might have been an object of terror to a much bolder man than Mr. Partridge.66

Throughout much of Tom Jones Mrs. Western and her brother, Squire Western, are embroiled in arguments concerning which of them shall take charge of Sophia. Near the end of the
novel, when all the main characters have gathered in London, Mrs. Western demands that he release Sophia. Fielding remarks:

This she spoke with so commanding an air... that I question whether Thalestris, at the head of her Amazons, ever made a more tremendous figure. It is no wonder, therefore, that the poor squire [himself an irascible character] was not proof against the awe which she inspired.67

Despite Fielding’s intentions in Jonathan Wild to depict the self-destruction of a cruel and irredeemable man, it is Jonathan’s wife, Laetitia, who emerges as the more evil and abusive person. Jonathan is the leader of a gang of ruthless thieves, but he is repeatedly humiliated in his attempts to manage Laetitia. After one incident she "be-knaved, be-rascalled, be-rogued the unhappy hero, who stood silent, confounded with astonishment."68 Concerning another incident, Laetitia retorts:

Monster! I would advise you not to depend too much on my sex, and provoke me too far, for I can do you a mischief, and will, if you dare use me so, you villain!69

Amelia, as I have said, does not have a brutish, intruding female. Mrs. James is the only one who resembles Fielding’s earlier women in the first group, but she is only infrequently seen. Miss Matthews, Mrs. Ellison, and Betty Harris are essentially characters like Laetitia Snap, Lady Booby, and Mrs. Western minus their humorous aspects. This
novel indicates that Fielding's view of English society had become more pessimistic; he focuses almost exclusively on the evil nature of man. He again works out a hero and heroine relationship, but without his indomitable shrews, which are his primary mode for conveying comedy, the novel is overwhelmingly bleak. In *Amelia* we have the "Provoked Husband" without Punch and his merry wife Judy.

Fielding's fascination with overbearing women was not simply a literary interest. *A Voyage To Lisbon*, Fielding's journal of his trip to Portugal a few months before his death, is uneventful except for his stay at an inn in Ryde which was run by a Mr. and Mrs. Francis. It is clear from what Fielding writes that Mrs. Francis, in her recalcitrant and dominating manner, was the real life counterpart of the fictional Lady Booby, Mrs. Western, and Mrs. Tow-wouse:

...nature or fortune, or both of them, took care to provide a proper quantity of acid in the materials that formed the wife, and to render her a perfect helpmate for so tranquil a husband. She abounded in whatsoever he was defective; that is to say, in almost everything... A tyrant, a trickster, and a bully, generally were the marks of their several dispositions in their countenances... But, perhaps nature hath never afforded a stronger example of all this than in the case of Mrs. Francis. She was a short, squat woman; her head was closely joined to her shoulders, where it was fixed somewhat awry; every feature of her countenance was sharp and pointed; her face was furrowed with the smallpox; and her complexion, which seemed to be able to turn milk to curds, not a little resembled in colour such milk as had
already undergone that operation. She appeared, indeed, to have many symptoms of a deep jaundice in her look; but the strength and firmness of her voice over-balanced them all; the tone of this was a sharp treble at a distance, for I seldom heard it on the same floor, but was usually waked with it in the morning, and entertained with it almost continually through the whole day ... She differed, as I have said, in every particular from her husband; but very remarkably in this, that as it was impossible to displease him, so it was impossible to please her.
II

For as the being enamoured with a Woman of Sense and Virtue is an Improvement to a Man's Understanding and Morals, and the Passion is ennoble by the Object which inspires it...

Steele, No. 153, The Spectator

In distinct contrast to the women in the first group are Fielding's heroines. Like all but two or three of his female characters, they are the dominant figure in their relationships with men. But whereas the first group of women are oppressive, the heroines are sympathetic and provide the hero with moral strength. The union of the heroine and hero embodies a love which is in opposition to the concepts of "love" held by Fielding's brutish women.

In Chapter One of Book VI in Tom Jones Fielding gives his most explicit statement on love:

...this love for which I am an advocate, though it satisfies itself in a much more delicate manner [than sexual "hunger"], doth nevertheless seek its own satisfaction as much as the grossest of all our appetites. And... this love, when it operates towards one of a different sex, is very apt, towards its complete gratification, to call in the aid of that hunger which I have mentioned above: and which it is so far from abating, that it heightens all its delights to a degree scarce imaginable by those who have never been susceptible of any other emotions than
what have proceeded from appetite alone
...there is in some (I believe in many)
human breasts a kind and benevolent dis-
position, which is gratified by contribut-
ing to the happiness of others. That in
this gratification alone, as in friendship,
in parental and filial affection, as in-
deed in general philanthropy, there is a
great and exquisite delight. That if we
will not call such disposition love, we
have no name for it. That though the
pleasures arising from such pure love may
be heightened and sweetened by the assist-
ance of amorous desires, yet the former can
subsist alone, nor are they destroyed by
the intervention of the latter. Lastly,
that esteem and gratitude are the proper
motives to love, as youth and beauty are
to desire, and, therefore, though such de-
sire may naturally cease, when age or sick-
ness overtakes its object, yet these can
have no effect on love, nor ever shake or
remove, from a good mind, that sensation
or passion which hath gratitude and esteem
for its basis. 72

Love, then, as Donne and Shakespeare insisted in reaction to
the neo-platonic ideals of Sidney, involves mind and body. To
this Fielding adds the ideals of primitive Christianity, the
most important being an altruistic spirit. And although the
heroine, like Sidney's Stella, has an instructive function, she
is not aloof. She has already acquired an understanding of
love, and by actively demonstrating this love, not merely by
oral instruction, she purges the hero of his weaknesses and
elevates him to a union with her. With the exception of
Joseph Andrews, the heroes through a gradual awareness of the
heroines' fortitude and high morality become aware of their
faults and are eventually redeemed.
Unlike Richardson's Pamela who rarely leaves the confines of Squire B.'s household, Fielding's heroines are involved in the realities of English life. Fanny travels through the countryside, and at one point is abducted by a lecherous admirer. Sophia, armed with a pistol, takes a similar journey across the dangerous country roads to London. Mrs. Heartfree undertakes an extraordinary Odyssean-like journey to Africa. Amelia is seen in pawn shops and bailiffs' houses. And in contrast to the fragile Pamela, Fielding's heroines are not portrayed as idealized, physical beauties:

She [Fanny] was tall, and delicately shaped; but not one of those slender young women who seem rather intended to hang up in the hall of an anatomist than for any other purpose. On the contrary, she was so plump that she seemed bursting through her tight stays, especially in the part which confined her swelling breasts. Nor did her hips want the assistance of a hoop to extend them.73

To understand the precise function that the heroines have in Fielding's novels and to realize their increased assertiveness in each succeeding work, it is necessary to look at the novels separately beginning with Joseph Andrews. Fanny Goodwill, despite her shyness, is, like Fielding's other heroines, the aggressor in her relationship with the hero:

her violent love made her more than passive in his embraces; and she often pulled him to her breast with a soft pressure...74

[Fanny] immediately set forward in pursuit of one [Joseph] whom, notwithstanding her
shyness to the parson, she loved with inexpressible violence, though with the purest and most delicate passion.75

Another indication of Fanny's assertion is her rescue of Joseph and Parson Adams in a type of reverse historical romance situation. Fanny is abducted by an amorous squire who has Joseph and Parson Adams taken to an inn and bound to chairs in a second-floor room. Fanny, with the help of a friend, manages to escape, and returns to the inn to free them.

Shortly after this episode she and Joseph are married despite Lady Booby's and Mrs. Slipslop's attempts to intervene. Their marriage is the consummation of Joseph's journey through a world of evil, particularly seductive women. Fanny does not become an idle gossiper, a player at cards; Fielding says that she "provides with most excellent management in his [Joseph's] dairy."76 But foremost she is the natural complement to Joseph who without her is somewhat ludicrous as the result of his rigid insistence on remaining chaste. This rigidity, as some critics have suggested, may be, at least initially, a parody of Pamela's insistence on remaining a virgin. However, it is more likely that Joseph's love for Fanny provides him with the necessary moral strength to control his passions. This, to Fielding, is a commendable attribute. Tom Jones is essentially Joseph Andrews less the latter's strength to withstand the solicitations of promiscuous women. Fielding wrote Tom Jones to depict a hero in the process of acquiring prudence,
and realizing that his true interests, as Fielding implies in the introduction, are with Sophia.

Joseph Andrews contains a secondary hero and heroine, and although the relationship between Wilson and Harriet Hearty is of minor importance, it follows the pattern of those relationships involving Fielding's more prominent heroes and heroines. Wilson, after several misadventures and incurring sizeable debts, is imprisoned. Hearing of his plight, Harriet sends Wilson part of the payoff from a lottery ticket that he had pawned to her father. Wilson is thus able to pay his debts and purchase his release from prison. They marry and eventually, like all of Fielding's heroes and heroines, move to the country. Wilson tells Joseph and Parson Adams:

My happiness consisted entirely in my wife, whom I loved with an inexpressible fondness, which was perfectly returned.77

and,

to say the truth, I do not perceive that inferiority of understanding which the levity of rakes, the dulness of men of business, or the austerity of the learned, would persuade us of in women. As for my woman, I declare I have found none of my own sex capable of making juster observations on life, or of delivering them more agreeably; nor do I believe anyone possessed of a faithfuller or braver friend.78

Here, as elsewhere, Fielding expresses the idea of man achieving the highest felicity on earth through and with a noble woman, and emphasizes companionship in marriage.
In Fielding's next novel, Jonathan Wild, Mrs. Heartfree is his first heroine that is clearly the dominant figure in the hero-heroine relationship. She and Mr. Heartfree function mainly as contrasts to Jonathan and Laetitia; Fielding's purpose is to juxtapose the ennobling love of Mr. and Mrs. Heartfree with the degenerated love of Jonathan and Laetitia. Fielding states that Mr. Heartfree "married a very agreeable woman for love" and later says that Jonathan's "lust was inferior only to his ambition, but, as for what simple people call love, he knew not what it was." Mr. Heartfree is, like Capt. Booth in Amelia, compassionate but unsuspecting of the evil, particularly avarice, that exists in the world. As a result, Jonathan, acting under the pretense of helping Heartfree, is able to rob him and have him put in jail for bankruptcy. Jonathan then with inflamed passion succeeds through a series of lies in getting Mrs. Heartfree to accompany him on a ship going to Rotterdam. She manages to escape from Jonathan's lustful advances, but nevertheless is compelled to take an incredible voyage on several English vessels and a French privateer which take her to Africa and finally back to England. Her adventures include a number of assaults upon her virtue by an assortment of men, but she is able to thwart all of them. During one of these assaults, the ineffectual Mr. Heartfree, unaware of her plight, exclaims to a friend: "My wife deserted me in my misfortunes!"
When she returns to England and relates her adventures to Mr. Heartfree, he is awed by her courage and fidelity. Her heroic and triumphant journey through a world of treachery and lust makes her superior in the eyes of the reader to Mr. Heartfree who spends most of the time in the novel in prison as the result of his own gullibility. But whereas Laetitia is involved in destroying Jonathan, Mrs. Heartfree is devoted to saving Mr. Heartfree. She, like Amelia Booth, suffers indignities in her efforts to rescue her husband from prison and financial ruin. Fielding says of her efforts:

In this manner did this weak, poor-spirited woman attempt to relieve her husband's pains, which it would have rather become her to aggravate, by not only pointing out his misery in the liveliest colours imaginable, but by upbraiding him with that folly and confidence which had occasioned it, and by lamenting her own hard fate in being obliged to share his sufferings.80

This commentary is partially an ironic allusion to Laetitia's treatment of Jonathan. But more important it accentuates the love and understanding that Mrs. Heartfree has for her husband. To reiterate an important aspect of Fielding's exposition on love in Tom Jones, "esteem and gratitude are the proper motives to love."

In Jonathan Wild, as in Amelia, the heroine and hero are married at the outset of the novel, and both Mrs. Heartfree and Amelia are the sustaining force in the family. Mrs. Heartfree is solely responsible for restoring her husband and family
to prosperity. She returns Heartfree's stolen jewels and saves him from bankruptcy, and brings wealth to the family from the sale of a large gem that an African chieftain had given her. Fielding, in a concluding note on the Heartfree's resultant prosperity, accentuates what is to him the highest earthly reward:

His [Heartfree's] wife and he are now grown old in the purest love and friendship.81

In the Preface to Tom Jones Fielding addresses a letter to George Lyttleton. Fielding writes:

Besides displaying that beauty of virtue which may attract the admiration of mankind, I have attempted to engage a stronger motive to human action in her favor, by convincing men that their true interests directs them to a pursuit of virtue.

Without reducing Sophia to an allegorical abstraction, it is evident that Fielding associates Sophia with virtue. Tom Jones reduced to its simplest terms is the account of Tom's pursuit of Sophia, and their subsequent union which results in Tom being purged of his lust.

In contrast to the inert Mr. Heartfree, Tom Jones is dynamic; and, unlike the rigidly chaste Joseph Andrews, Tom possesses "naturally violent animal spirits" which lead to his involvement in several illicit affairs. Early in Tom Jones Fielding states Tom's dilemma:

His life was a constant struggle between honour and inclination, which alternately triumphed over each other in his mind.82
Tom is young, and, as Fielding frequently mentions, is lacking in prudence. He is easily enticed by Molly Seagrim and Mrs. Waters into sexual affairs. Fielding does not condemn him; such affairs, although not reflecting admirable conduct, are natural to a young man. Furthermore Fielding makes it clear that it is the women who are mostly responsible for Tom's involvement:

...for though she [Molly] behaved at last with all decent reluctance, yet I rather choose to attribute the triumph to her, since, in fact, it was her design which succeeded.83

Although Sophia is less active than Fielding's other heroines, her very presence serves as a guide to Tom's future conduct. Early in the novel Tom is turned away from Sophia by Mrs. Western's intervention, and it is not until midway in the story that he is "in quest of his lovely Sophia." Once he realizes that it is possible for him to marry Sophia he is able to govern his passions. His only lapse is with Lady Bellaston in London, but this is more the result of financial necessity than succumbing to his "animal spirits." When Blifil's lies about Tom have been disproved, due in large part to Mrs. Miller's efforts, Tom and Sophia are able to marry. Fielding notes:

Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man [Allworthy] and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia.84
...Mr. Jones appears to be the happiest of all mankind; for what happiness this world affords equal to the possession of such a woman as Sophia, I sincerely own I have never yet discovered.

Despite *Tom Jones* focusing primarily on Tom and consequently devoting considerably less time to the heroine, Sophia emerges as the moral ideal to which Tom, aside from the two brief affairs with Molly Seagriff and Mrs. Waters, aspires.

*Amelia*, Fielding's last novel, is the dismal account of a naive and perpetually erring husband on one hand, and a courageous, intelligent wife on the other. Booth's extramarital affair with Miss Matthews and her subsequent attempts to blackmail him are only partial causes of the grief that he brings his family. Twice he is detained in a bailiff's house for being in debt, but he makes no attempt to earn money. During the entire novel, Booth, his family badly in debt, sits idly waiting for an army commission that has been promised him by Col. James who is trying to seduce his wife.

Mrs. Booth, who reflects a greater importance than Fielding has given any of his previous heroines, is left to save her family. She replies to Booth who has informed her that one of his gambling debts is due:

I will endeavour by some means or other to get you the money...
Fielding adds:

this excellent woman not only used her utmost endeavours to stifle and conceal her own concern, but said and did everything in her power to ally that of her husband... She packed up not only her own little trinkets, and those of the children, but the greatest part of her own poor clothes (for she was but barely provided), and then drove in a hackney-coach to the same pawnbroker's who had before been recommended to her by Mrs. Atkinson, who advanced her the money she desired. Being now provided with the sum, she returned well pleased home, and her husband coming in soon after, she with much cheerfulness delivered him all the money. Booth was so overjoyed with the prospect of discharging his debts to Trent, that he did not perfectly reflect on the distress to which his family was now reduced.86

Booth then proceeds to lose this money on the advice of another "friend" who claims it will ensure his getting an army commission. For such reasons it is not surprising that Amelia refers to Booth as "child," and their children to him as "poor papa."

Fielding says that despite Booth's being upset by the sudden coldness of his friend James,

...he had luckily at the same time the greatest blessing in his possession, the kindness of a faithful and beloved wife. A blessing, however, which, though it compensates most of the evils of life, rather serves to aggravate the misfortune of distressed circumstances, from the consideration of the share which she is to bear in them.87
Amelia, like Mrs. Heartfree, is a patient and understanding wife, and it is she who must sustain her family. Booth and Heartfree are victims of an evil world, and it is only through the efforts of their wives that they are able to survive and eventually prosper. In the end it is the money that Amelia receives from her mother's estate that enables Booth to pay his debts and move with his family to the country. Whereas the hero in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones aspires to a union with the heroine, the Booths are already married. It is Fielding's intention in Amelia, as in Jonathan Wild, to depict the highly significant function of the heroine as a married woman. Fielding concludes: "Amelia is still the finest woman in England of her age."

Despite Fielding's generally convincing hero and heroine relationships, there are two conspicuous weaknesses: the acquisition of substantial material wealth upon achieving a tranquil union, and the subjection of the hero to the heroine. Fielding had indicated in Shamela that one of his reasons for detesting Richardson's Pamela was her tendency to consider her virtue as a saleable commodity. Each of Fielding's heroines, it would seem, was created at least partially in contrast to Pamela; there is never any doubt that his heroines are truly virtuous. Unlike Pamela who marries a wealthy aristocrat, Fanny, Mrs. Heartfree, Sophia, and Amelia marry men who have neither social position or money. Joseph is from the servant
class, Tom is thought to be a foundling when Sophia first becomes in love with him, Heartfree is a merchant, and Booth is an unemployed ex-army officer. Fielding selected heroes from the lower ranks so that material gain would not be a motivating factor in the heroines' love for them. But subsequent to the hero's and heroine's obtainment of a peaceful union, Fielding grants them sizeable fortunes: Mr. Booby gives Fanny two thousand pounds with which Joseph purchases a "little estate" including a dairy; Mrs. Heartfree is given a valuable gem; Squire Western gives the "greater part of his estate" to Tom, and Allworthy "was likewise greatly liberal to Jones on the marriage;" and by a turn of fate Amelia receives most of her mother's estate. Such gifts can in part be explained by the "happy endings" that the early English novels were inclined towards. However, Fielding, after carefully separating wealth and feminine virtue, suffered serious lapses in awarding his heroes and heroines wealth at the moment of their achieving a blissful union. Their love for each other is not questioned, but one is left with the impression that material as well as spiritual reward will come to virtuous women and to the men who aspire to an ennobling love with them.

In reference to the subjection of the hero to the heroine, John S. Coolidge observes in his essay "Fielding and 'Conservation of Character':"

Fielding's good men, from Heartfree to Booth, show a persistent tendency to fall
back gratefully but helplessly on the moral, and frequently material, support of their good women ... As Amelia is Fielding's first novel to plunge directly into the depths of the city and stay there, so this tendency of the Fielding male to sink into moral dependency on his women reaches its extreme in Booth.89

The only work in which this excessive dependency of the hero on the heroine does not exist is Joseph Andrews, Fielding's first novel. Fanny is a simple character; she has none of Sophia's and Amelia's psychological complexity. Because she does not subjugate Joseph she is Fielding's most likeable heroine. Fielding tells the reader that Joseph "doats" on Fanny, but we are left with the impression that their marriage is one of mutual understanding and responsibility.

In Jonathan Wild Mrs. Heartfree is much the superior of her husband. Although they are thinly drawn as deliberate contrasts to Jonathan and Laetitia, Mrs. Heartfree's overwhelming superiority is the first indication that the heroine, to Fielding, not only represents the moral ideal, but is also the sustaining force in the family.

In Tom Jones Fielding reverts to the general theme of the hero in pursuit of the heroine that was used in Joseph Andrews. Sophia Western in Tom Jones is the least pleasing of Fielding's heroines. Prior to his reuniting with Sophia, Tom is an exuberant and likeable young man. But upon reuniting, Sophia subjects him to brutish demands:
'You must expect, however, that if I can be prevailed on by your repentance to pardon you, I will at least insist on the strongest proof of its sincerity.' — 'Name any proof in my power,' answered Jones eagerly. — 'Time,' replied she; 'time alone, Mr. Jones, can convince me that you are a true penitent and have resolved to abandon those vicious courses, which I should detest you for, if I imagined you capable of persevering in them.' — 'Do not imagine it,' cries Jones. 'On my knees I entreat, I implore your confidence, a confidence which it shall be the business of my life to deserve.' — 'Let it, then,' said she, 'be the business of some part of your life to show me you deserve it. I think I have been explicit enough in assuring you, that, when I see you merit my confidence, you will obtain it. After what is past, sir, can you expect I should take you upon your word?'

Shortly later, Sophia remarks:

'Your situation, Mr. Jones, is now altered, and I assure you I have great satisfaction in the alteration. You will now want no opportunity of being near me, and convincing me that your mind is altered too.' — 'Oh! my angel,' cries Jones, 'how should I thank thy goodness!... I will be all obedience to your commands, I will not dare to press anything further than you permit me. Yet let me entreat you to appoint a short trial. Oh! tell me when I may expect you will be convinced of what is most solemnly true!' — 'When I have voluntarily thus far, Mr. Jones,' said she, 'I expect not to be pressed. Nay, I will not.' 'Oh don't look unkindly thus, my Sophia.' cries he, 'I do not, I dare not press you. — Yet permit me at least once more to beg you would fix the period. Oh! consider the impatience of love.' 'A twelvemonth, perhaps,' said she.

Fielding is serious; to him this is part of Tom's purgation although he has indicated throughout the novel that Tom is basically good. Sophia's unyielding demands are partially
accounted for by her having learned of Tom's affairs with Mrs. Waters and Lady Bellaston. However, Sophia's insistence that Tom do penance to her is presumptuous; no other Fielding heroine makes such demands on the hero. Sophia does not consciously reject the idea that Tom should repent before some higher authority, but her narrow position reveals a temporary lack of understanding. Mrs. Heartfree and Amelia are superior to their husbands, but they are sympathetic; Amelia, for instance, forgives Booth for his indiscretion with Miss Matthews. And despite Fielding's efforts at the end of Tom Jones to convince the reader that Tom and Sophia are living in mutual bliss, the earlier, utter subjugation of Tom is not easily forgotten; it was a cruel and not wholly warranted fate to a man as natural, energetic, and good as Tom Jones.

In no novel of Fielding's is the hero more inept than in Amelia. Although Booth is much like Heartfree, the latter is not adverse to working and has no weakness for gambling. However, neither is particularly admirable despite Fielding's intention that they should be heroes. Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, until the end of that novel, are capable of functioning satisfactorily even when they are not with the heroine. Heartfree and Booth reveal no similar ability. They are not lacking in virility; each, like Joseph and Tom, is ready to defend his honor against other men. But Heartfree and, particularly, Booth, who unlike the other two heroes are already married at
the outset of the novels, are inclined to let their wives solve their problems. In *Amelia* Fielding indicated that even the best of men, Booth being his example, were doomed to stumbling along in an evil world, and it was only the strength of a woman like Amelia that could preserve him. It is not surprising, then, to hear Booth saying to Amelia:

> Let me survey thee; art thou really human, or art thou not rather an angel in a human form?"92

and,

> O my Amelia, how much you are my superior in every perfection."93

In *Amelia* the dominant position of Fielding's good women in marriage is not limited to the heroine. In reference to Mrs. Bennet's marriage to Booth's loyal and courageous companion, Atkinson, Fielding comments:

> Mr. Atkinson upon the whole hath led a very happy life with his wife, though he hath been sometimes obliged to pay proper homage to her superior understanding and knowledge. This, however, he cheerfully submits to, and she makes him proper returns of fondness."94

It is apparent that in his first novel Fielding uses the heroine in the conventional manner of dramatic comedy. In each succeeding novel his heroines extend beyond the confines of this tradition, and, with Amelia, have assumed a position superior to that of a good 18th century man such as Booth. Amelia is Fielding's most mature heroine, and it is her fortitude that sustains the Booths; she preserves her family in the face
of adversity in an increasingly evil world. G. H. Maynadier comments in his introduction to *Amelia*:

> The saving grace in Booth, the one thing which makes us keep our regard for him, is his steady comprehension of his wife's excellence... All the personages, even Booth and Miss Matthews... are subordinate to the heroine. No other of Fielding's characters, on coming upon the stage, so dominates it as Amelia when she makes her appearance.95

In retrospect, it is rather astonishing to realize the extent to which Fielding's most significant male characters—Parson Adams, Jonathan Wild, Heartfree, Tom Jones, Partridge, Booth, Atkinson, and to a considerably less extent, Joseph Andrews— are subservient beings in their relationships with the women in the two groups that I have designated. The remaining female characters in Fielding's novels are not as easily typed, but nevertheless reveal a similar assertiveness.

The only women in *Joseph Andrews* of any significance whom I have not mentioned are Joseph's sister, Pamela, and Betty, a chambermaid. Pamela is Fielding's conception of Richardson's Pamela, and, as could be expected, she flouts her virtue and is a deft handler of men. Betty, like several of Fielding's minor female characters, is essentially a good person but inclined to be over-passionate and aggressive in the presence of a young man like Joseph. However, she is unsuccessful in her attempt to seduce him.
In Jonathan Wild Mrs. Heartfree and Laetitia are the two important women characters. The only other female participant is Miss Straddle, a London prostitute. She intercepts Jonathan on his way to see Laetitia, and easily persuades him to delay his visit to the Snap house. Fielding remarks that after arriving at Laetitia's a while later that Jonathan, one of London's most notorious thieves,

discovered the absence of a purse containing bank-notes for £900, which had been taken from Mr. Heartfree, and which, indeed, Miss Straddle had, in the warmth of his amorous caresses, unperceived drawn from him.96

Molly Seagrim, Mrs. Waters, and Lady Bellaston in Tom Jones are triumphant aggressors in their affairs with Tom. Mrs. Fitzpatrick escapes from a bullying husband, and willingly becomes another man's mistress for security. And in London Mrs. Miller is mostly responsible for Tom's being absolved of the misconduct that Allworthy believes him guilty of. It is her insistence on Tom's loyalty to Allworthy that leads to Blifil's exposure, and subsequent revelation that Tom is Allworthy's nephew. Mrs. Miller by disentangling things at the end of the novel enables the hero and heroine to come together. Mrs. Atkinson, who is the only woman in Amelia that cannot be accurately placed in either group, functions in a similar capacity by informing the Booths of Col. James' elaborate plot against them. Coolidge says: "It hardly seems too much to say that Mrs. Atkinson saves the novel."97
In conclusion to his critical study, Digeon states that Fielding's "main objective seems to have been to contribute to that deep moral reform, which he thought was becoming increasingly necessary in the England of his day." Fielding's satirical treatment of the first group of women was part of his effort to make English women see the absurdity of many of their values. He is not a strict moralist; Lady Booby, Mrs. Western, and Mrs. James are intended to be humorous. But ultimately their trivial existence was part of a misguided society that Fielding saw was in need of corrective action.

Through his heroines Fielding attempted to provide realistic and worthy models for his female readers to emulate. Digeon notes that 18th century English women were considered inferior; even such notables as Swift and Pope believed that women were morally and intellectually weaker than men. Such views created a serious imbalance, and Fielding, who placed the highest value on a love involving mutual respect, presented his heroines as a challenge to the accepted notions of females.

Fielding's efforts on behalf of England's women were not gratuitous. In A Voyage To Lisbon he writes:

My wife, who, besides discharging excellently well her own and all the tender offices becoming the female character; who, besides being a faithful friend, an amiable companion, and a tender nurse, could likewise supply the wants of a decrepit husband, and occasionally perform his part...
Here, as in his two novels with married heroines, Jonathan Wild and Amelia, Fielding indicates that the wife's perseverance enables the family to endure. Despite three of his four novels being titled after the male protagonist, and being largely concerned with them, the heroines reveal themselves as intelligent and moral individuals. In addition they are instrumental in bringing about a meaningful love based on respect and friendship, and Fielding implies that this is the one sustaining thing in an evil world.
FOOTNOTES


3. Essays to *The Spectator*, published in 1711 and 1712, were written thirty years before Fielding began writing novels.


5. Ibid., No. 66, p. 251.

6. Ibid., No. 128, p. 170.

7. Digeon, pp. 41-43.


11. Ibid., p. 308.

12. Those who are familiar with *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded* and *Shamela* will agree, I think, that Fielding's view of Pamela is more perceptive than Richardson's. Despite creating the character of Pamela, his rendering of her is at variance with the Christian concept of virtue that he espouses in his Introduction.

22. I will designate and briefly discuss at the end of this study the few female characters who don't conform to either of these groups.


28. Ibid., p. 98.

29. Ibid., p. 214.


32. Tom Jones, p. 651.

33. Ibid., p. 433.


36. Ibid., p. 108.

38. Ibid., p. 259.


40. Ibid., p. 237.

41. *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, p. 35.


46. Ibid., p. 19.

47. *Tom Jones*, p. 460.


49. *Tom Jones*, p. 66.

50. Ibid., p. 15.


55. *Tom Jones*, p. 159.

56. Ibid., p. 554.

57. *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, p. 25.

58. Ibid., p. 282.

59. Ibid., p. 288.


62. Ibid., p. 46.
63. Tom Jones, p. 480.
64. Ibid., pp. 359-60.
65. Ibid., pp. 425-27.
66. Ibid., p. 51.
67. Ibid., pp. 751-52.
69. Ibid., p. 137.
71. One of the few women who is dominated by her husband is Mrs. Trullibe, wife of a parson in Joseph Andrews. However, this is part of Fielding's satire on clergymen.
72. Tom Jones, pp. 214-16.
74. Ibid., p. 40.
75. Ibid., p. 122.
76. Ibid., p. 298.
77. Ibid., pp. 188-89.
78. Ibid., p. 191.
79. Digeon notes: "The episode of Mrs. Heartfree, carried far from her husband by a disloyal friend, and forced to make an extraordinary journey, is very much like the story told by Abbé Prévost in Cleveland. Fanny, the virtuous wife of Cleveland, is abducted by his false friend Grelin, who persuades her that her husband is deceiving her. On board the vessel which is taking them away he makes love to her and she resists, just as Mrs. Heartfree resists Wild. At the ports she breaks the hearts of many lovers, and finally rejoins her husband more frightened than hurt, exactly like Mrs. Heartfree." p. 117.
81. Ibid., p. 219.
82. Tom Jones, p. 183.
83. Ibid., p. 126.
84. Ibid., pp. 885-86.
85. Ibid., p. 883.
86. Amelia, Part III, pp. 184-86.
88. Notice that with the exception of Allworthy's gift to Tom, either the heroine or her family provides the finances.
89. Coolidge, p. 167.
90. Tom Jones, pp. 877-78.
91. It is possible that Sophia is an extreme example of the virtuous woman who lacks understanding. Fielding may have done this as a deliberate contrast to Mrs. Heart-free and Amelia who possess exceptional patience and understanding.
96. Jonathan Wild, p. 79.
97. Coolidge, p. 175.
98. Digeon, p. 34.
99. Ibid., p. 205.
100. A Voyage To Lisbon, p. 252.
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