

## A BRIEF SURVEY ON HENRY FIELDING'S WORK

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### Introduction

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was born on 22nd April 1707 at Sharphampark in Somersetshire in an aristocratic family. He received his early education from the family Chaplain, Mr. Oliver of Montcombe. He gained proficiency in classical languages: Greek and Latin. His interesting subject in his dramatic works was the political satire on Sir Robert Walpole, the prime Minister of England. He is basically a novelist and dramatist. He is known for his humor and satire. He sometimes worked through parody, irony and wit which shock his readers with the great pleasure. Fielding's literary works are full of religious, philosophical and political ideas.

In November 1737, he was admitted as a student of law at the Middle Temple and was called to the bar in 1740. In November 1739, a newspaper *The Champion published* thrice a week was mainly written by Fielding and his friend James Ralph. Fielding's notable plays are - *Love in Several Masques*(1728), *The Temple Beau*(1730), *The Tragedy of Tragedies of Life and Death of Tom Thumb, the great* (1730), *The Covent Garden Tragedy* (1732), *The Miser* (1733), *Don Quixote in England* (1734), *Pasquin* (1736), *Tumble Down Dick* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) *Coffee House Politician*, *The Universal Gallant*, *The Grub Street Opera*.

Finally Fielding became a novelist and discovered a new genre-comic epic in prose. Fielding used it directly in his novel *Joseph Andrews*. Fielding is greatly influenced by Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Pelagius, St. Augustine, Wesley and Whitefield. Fielding's health deteriorated and he died near Lisbon on 8th October 1754.

### Features of Fielding's Writing:

i) Henry Fielding as an Artist:

Fielding is regarded as one of the greatest artists in the realm of English literature. His literary art is concerned with the relation between man and his actual life.

ii) Henry Fielding as a Realist:

Fielding's novels contain the portrayal of low subject and of low life characters. It portrays all the varieties of human experiences and draws attention to dialogues and actions as used in day to day life.

iii) Henry Fielding as a Humorist:

Fielding is known as the humorist who presents humor in his literary works. Humor occupies a prominent place in Fielding's novel. His humor springs from the ridiculous which arises from either vanity or hypocrisy.

iv) Henry Fielding as a Moralist:

Fielding was a moralist and an emotionalist like Richardson. He believes the natural emotion and values sentiments as guides to live. Fielding creates both tears and laughter in his novels. He is great thinker, moralists and philosopher concerning with human nature.

v) Henry Fielding as a writer of Picaresque novels:

The term picaresque has been derived from a Spanish word *picar* which means a rascal or a cunning trickster or a villain. A picaresque novel is presented in an extravagant style. It is a tale of adventures and misadventures mostly on highways and the sea.

vi) Henry Fielding's comic epic in prose:

It is believed as a new genre in English. Fielding uses this tone and type of structure. The word epic suggests the time and society which refer to realism. Like a true comedy, a comic epic in prose has the elements of humor, satire, wit and irony.

vii) Irony as Fielding's Art:

Irony is spoken of one thing but meant the other in order to ridicule some falseness of the actual hearer. Fielding's irony does not depend upon very subtle manner to attack on people's follies. Fielding has used this technique in his *Pasquin, The Author's Farce and Tom Thumb*.

viii) Farce as the form of Satire:

Farce deals with both a metaphor and structure. Fielding depicts a wretched piece of politics or religion, a bill in the parliament, the activities of great men, a village election with heroic speeches, bribery etc.

ix) Fielding's art of Life:

Most of the Fielding's novels are in the category of reflection of life and also represents man's shadowy experience. He reflects true value of life in his fiction and attacks on the folly and hypocrisy of human beings as an artist of imaginative world.

x) Fielding's art of Parody:

Parody implies a certain degree of distortion which includes both of fun and laughter. Fun is the aspect of parody may be abusive words or phrases in the story telling and laughter is generally set up from recognition and is succeeded by the parodist's aptness, wit and daring.

**Fielding's works:**

**i) Shamela(1740):**

In Shamela, Fielding parodied the formal conventions of the Richardson's novel Pamela. Fielding strongly insists that Pamela's virtue is pretentious for self interest which exploits greatly the romantic values. Shamela's cynicism itself can be an object of fun.

**ii) Joseph Andrews (1742):**

Fielding described it as a comic epic in prose. He introduced characters of a great variety and depicts their common lives in all its authenticity, smiling at its incongruities, ridiculing its hypocrisy and of sympathizing with its weakness. It is written in the field of picaresque

tradition.

**iii) The History of Mr. Jonathan wild the great: (1743)**

It is an autobiographical biography written in a tone of assumed admiration. Here irony deals intentionally with the attacks on Walpole. Wild had become an ironic popular legend and Fielding adapted him with foolishness and weakness.

**.iv) Tom Jones(1748 49):**

It is one of the best pure comedies in English literature. It is a pure ridicule. In this novel, there is no personal satire or no personal abuse. Tom was an anti Richardson hero. It is an epic of human nature.

**v) Amelia:**

The novel contains satire which is directed against inhuman inequities in the law. This sentimental novel involves pathetic and tragic scenes. The realistic narrative provides ordinary details with parody.

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