

# Henry Fielding (1707-1754)

Fielding: *Shamela*,  
*Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*

# A different background

- Born into an **aristocratic** family
- **Classical studies** at Eton and university of Leyden
- He wrote for the theatre, his plays = parodies of fashionable repertoire.
- 1737 Licensing Act → his **plays** were censored and he stopped working for the theatre.
- He began studying law, became **a magistrate**, devoting himself to social reform.
- He also wrote satirical articles for newspapers and magazines. He edited *The Champion* for three years.

# From Parody to Novels

- He started writing novels by chance with *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* (1741), a parody of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) → Fielding found in the moralism of the book a new object of contempt and parodic skills.
- Shamela = shame or sham (fake) + Pamela (her surname was Andrews). A satire of the hypocrisy of Pamela and *Pamela*. He also criticizes the epistolary novel for its pretension to be able to be "to the moment".

# Links: from one novel to the other

- Richardson's *Pamela* (1740): surname ANDREWS
- Fielding's *Shamela* (1741): ANDREWS = surname , shame on Pamela or Pamela is a sham (faking, pretence)
- Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742): Pamela's brother, reversed situation of seduction. Parody of *Pamela*.



## *Joseph Andrews* (1742): references to Richardson's *Pamela*

- Joseph (Pamela's brother) is the footman of Lady Booby, the aunt of Mr B. (who is now called squire\* Booby).
- Lady Booby's advances to Joseph, who is pure and faithful to Fanny and rejects them → he is thrown out. Male chastity becomes a matter for comedy.

\*squire= signorotto di campagna

# Picaresque Part

- His homecoming from London to his Somerset village (where Lady Booby's country residence is) = Ulysses' homecoming after the war of Troy. Complicated, difficult, full of adventures and misadventures.
- Joseph bumps into Parson Adams, the vicar of his home village, and they travel together → a British version of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza's journey).
- When they arrive at the village they discover that Pamela has married Squire Booby. Joseph and Fanny finally marry overcoming the hostility of Lady Booby (backed up by Pamela).

# A New Type of Novel: Importance of the Form

- 1- **Stylish** and **entertaining** novel, a combination that you didn't find before. Irony and humour.
- 2- Accuracy in writing and in the plot
- 3- Accuracy in the form: division into books and into chapters; search of order, balance symmetry.

# Fielding's Narrator

- **Third-person omniscient narrator**: **intrusive** or **obtrusive** narrator, makes his presence explicit from the outset, comments on the action, makes digressions, addresses the reader, constantly reminding him/her that s/he is reading a novel
- He is present both as **narrator** (interpreter of the events) **and** as the **creator of the method** he is using. He is the creator of a new art form and explains it → first theorist of the novel.



# Fictionality

- 4- Defoe and Richardson tried to hide the fictional nature of their works under the guise of journal or memoirs and letters. → See Robinson's frontispiece: "written by himself".
- Fielding does not hide the fictionality of his stories.

# Joseph Andrews: The “Preface”

- Fielding is keen to underline the literary value of his work and looks to **classical works** as a marker against which to situate his novel.
- His work is something new, never attempted before: **a comic epic poem in prose**
- It differs from *romance* for being **light** and for introducing persons of inferior rank. He appeals to the classical genres to legitimize the presence of his lower-class characters and the genre of the novel itself.

# Irony and “Virtue”

- Detached and patrician outlook on life
- His view is ironic because life «furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous».
- The conviction that virtue leads to happiness is “a very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, that it is not true.”
- Fielding condemns hypocrisy and rebels against the Puritan code of the age that considered respectability synonymous with virtue.

# Differences with previous novels

- Fielding's notion of virtue is different from Richardson's. Joseph and Tom Jones are good-natured and good-hearted but not necessarily "virtuous" as the Puritans meant virtue. They are not scheming or calculating. Tom is impudent, exuberant, sometimes sexually promiscuous, but he is generous, honest, sincere .
- Fielding addresses a larger public that includes the upper classes → a broad picture of the 18th century society.



# Tobias Smollett (1721-71)

- Smollett uses the 3 forms of narration employed by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.
- Smollett translated the picaresque novel *Gil Blas de Santillana* (by Alain-René Lesage), the most successful example of this genre. This book influenced his writing.
- *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), a first-person picaresque novel, in which the hero narrates a long series of adventures. He also drew on his experience at the siege of the Columbian city of Cartagena (expedition against the Spaniards in the Caribbean sea, Smollett = surgeon's mate on a ship).

# Smollett

- *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751) has a **third-person omniscient narrator**. It tells of the protagonist's **Grand Tour** and gave the author an opportunity to mock continental habits and matters. It includes digressions on real people and ferocious caricatures of some personalities of the day (including Fielding).
- **Epistolary novel** *Humphry Clinker* (1771). The account of 5 correspondents on a journey through England, Scotland and Wales → multiplicity of viewpoints on the same object/s

# Humphry Clinker

## A Sentimental journey

- The journey becomes 5 journeys (also with comical effect) → a «sentimental» journey, offering what the landscapes and experiences arouse in different people.
- A journey north, to Smollett's Scotland (he was the son of a Scottish nobleman).
- Scotland = rural world as opposed to the metropolitan world of the hectic (chaotic) capital.
- Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*

# GRAND TOUR

- The Grand Tour was the traditional trip of Europe undertaken by mainly upper-class European young men of means. The custom flourished from about 1660 until the advent of large-scale rail transit in the 1840s and was associated with a standard itinerary. It served as an educational rite of passage. It was primarily associated with the British nobility and wealthy landed gentry, but the tradition was extended to include more of the middle class after rail and steamship travel made the journey easier.



# Laurence Sterne (1713-68)

- *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), published after his death.
- Based on journeys he had undertaken for his health.
- Focus on **little episodes, small objects, details** → A **SENTIMENTAL** or “feelingful” account of them.
- Parson Yorick (the narrator) teaches us to love the world and our fellow-creatures” , in the name of “Dear Sensibility”.
- This book made critics pardon the transgression of *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67). But is Sterne satirizing these traits of “a new sensibility” arising? Ambiguous.

# The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy (1760-67)

- The title declares not adventures but «opinions». Break from conventions.
- The narrator constantly addresses himself directly to the reader, in a tone similar to Fielding's: witty, amused, satirical. He establishes a civil conversation, looking for their complicity.
- The novel declares its fictional nature. The author refers to his characters not as people existing in the real world but as created by the author in the novel's universe. **Meta-fiction?**

# Mental Time vs Chronological Time

- The novel does not start with the birth of Tristram, the narrator, but with his conception (his birth is only in volume III).
- Tristram writes following the **thread of his thoughts** and associations of ideas that occur to him.
- Relativity of time, interruption of chronological order with a thousand digressions about the lives of the people around him → Sterne anticipates the **Stream of Consciousness**.

# Eagleton on Sterne

- Terry Eagleton: 'it is a monstrous parody of Richardson's "writing to the moment". Tristram's problem is to keep the time of his writing, the time written about and the time of the reader in some sort of equilibrium.'
- A mission impossible → Tristram has to talk to the reader and uncover the fictionality of the narration.



# Exploration of the Limits and Possibilities of Language

- Subversive approach to form and language.
- He explores and takes apart any sort of jargon and language, rhetorical figures, artifice of grammar and syntax, the limits of words to convey a meaning.
- He has recourse to a variety of **non-verbal devices**: asterisks, blank pages, marbled pages, dashes, even a black page when Yorick closed his eyes and never opened them any more.
- Typographical devices substitute verbal communication.

# New possibilities of the Novel as a genre

- It mocks and overturns the characteristics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel but also shows its vitality, its ability to explore new paths and forms. A sort of “anti-novel”.
- Critics and writers at the time did not appreciate it, but the ordinary people responded with enthusiasm to it . Contemporary writers from Joyce to Rushdie admired it.
- It anticipates the concern about time and relativity of Modernism and the «Stream of Consciousness»