

Fielding's art of characterization: Tom Jones.
Pg. Exp. Sem. 1 cell A. H. H. H.

Henry Fielding, as a matter of fact, is the first English novelist and holds an important position in the history of English literature. He is the genius who gave it a proper shape, bade farewell to the fantastic world of Romance and planted it in his own soil. He is the pioneer of the realistic novel and has rightly been called the father of this genre. He enjoys intimate knowledge of human life and human nature. His novels reveal his personal experiences and hold a mirror to his age. Like his other novels, Tom Jones also demonstrates his superb art of characterization. Let us see in a brief.

Fielding is a great master of the art of characterization. His profession gave him opportunities to get himself well acquainted with different aspects of life and various modes of human nature. His Catholic temperament and objective outlook furnished him with thorough understanding of men and their manners. He has created a large variety of characters representing various types. Thackeray drew his characters mainly from ladies and gentlemen. Dickens excelled in picturing the 'humour' of the lower social strata. But, Fielding does not concentrate on any particular type and represents, by multitudes of a diverse figures, the human nature as a whole, in its intrinsic essence and 'prodigious variety'.

Fielding's characters are of flesh and blood vitality. They are humorous and serious, elaborately described and lightly sketched, but all of them are unmistakably alive. They stamp themselves on the readers' mind as real persons. Fielding has created them as per the need and they are befitting to their situation. They have the force and spirit of the real people in life. In fact, Fielding endeavours to picture human nature accurately as he has seen. That is why, he is called a serious student of human nature. All the characters of Tom Jones are life-like because they are not the creations of imagination and present

all the minutiae of human nature through their individual conduct and behaviour. A critic comments that Tom Jones should be considered as a 'history of human nature'. Byron proclaims the author of this novel 'the prose Homer of Human Nature'.

Fielding has deliberately refrained from including the members of the high aristocratic class in his portrait gallery. He believes that a uniformity of good manners and artificial conversation of this class obscure the distinguishing idiosyncrasies of individuals that affords but little scope for delineation of human nature. So, he concentrates on the world of middle and lower classes. His characters are squires, doctors, parsons, lawyers, businessmen, innkeepers, clerks, servants etc. who express their thoughts and feelings with an artless frankness that shows the glimpses of their 'particular humours'. But, it cannot be denied that they belong to England of 18th Century who are rational and practical in their attitude, untroubled by ideals, eschewing heady passion or enthusiasm. That is Fielding's philosophy of human nature gives to the extraordinary potentiality of humanity for the highest of good or the deepest of evil. There is neither a great saint nor a great sinner among his characters. His people are morally mixed beings, compound of both good and evil. They are neither the paragons of excellence nor the monsters of depravity.

The characters of Tom Jones have one trait in common. They are thoroughly typically English and display English humanity. But it cannot be undermined that Fielding has taken pains to reveal, under the local and temporal form, that universal human nature which is essentially the same at all times and all places. Therefore, this novel, though smeared with English colours, is not merely a national epic, an epic of England, but also an epic of humanity, an epic of the life of all humanity.

Another remarkable feature of Fielding's characterization is his psychological insight into the deep recesses of mind and heart of his characters. Unlike Smollett, he is not content to observe and produce the external appearances and the superficial mannerism of speech and action and seeks to penetrate and explore the inner aspects of human personality. The conflict between conscience and avarice in Black George on the question of purloining Sophia's purse of sixteen guineas for Tom illustrates this feature. Fielding takes extra care to avoid caricaturing in Tom Jones. No doubt, he delights in addition, in quaint and comic traits but he never exaggerate them. The characters of Mrs. Western and Parson Trullibronn are heightened, but only humorous features are brought out and there is no distortion.

In short, the hero of the novel, Tom Jones, is created after the likeness of Fielding himself. He is smart, robust, frank, chivalrous, quick tempered and free from malice. He has naturally violent spirits but virtuous and sympathetic at heart. Sophia, the heroine of Tom Jones, is fair, both within and without. She is an obedient daughter, has her own likes and dislikes, and takes rational decision. Blifil, a rival of Tom, is cunning and malicious at heart. Mr. Allworthy and Mr. Western are the gentlemen who exhibit the feudal mind set of the age. Mr. Partridge and Black George are the common men who are much bothered for their livelihood. Molly Seagrim is a flirt young woman and Jenny Jones ^{Sally} bears the stigma of immorality. Mrs. Allworthy is morally dubious. Mrs. Western is extremely humorous in her normal conduct, while Mrs. Honour is servile by nature.

Thus, we see that Fielding's characterization is original. He is not a Copyist. He compounds observation and imagination, experience and invention. He selects

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recombines, exaggerates, tones down and modifies the qualities and idiosyncrasies of his characters according to their conditions and circumstances. We find everywhere a fusion of facts and fancies, of inventions and imitation. ^{However,} they always speak and act in strict conformity with the laws of human nature and the authentic facts of human life. This is essence of Fielding's real character.