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# THE ROLE OF THE READER IN TOM JONES AND JOSEPH ANDREWS

- ① A new province of writing – Fielding.
- ① A background is necessary to perceive novelty.
- ① To write ‘about’ innovation, one needs the cooperation of the reader.
- ① Direct addressal of the reader.

- The role of the reader is not just passive. It is transformative.
- The author shapes the reader. – W Booth.
- The reader must actively participate in the act of reading, i.e. the act of creating meaning.
- 18<sup>th</sup> century novelists were aware of the importance of the reader.

- ⦿ Richardson – ‘the story must leave something for the reader to do’.
- ⦿ Sterne – the novelist must keep the imagination of the reader busy.
- ⦿ At least certain elements of the text must remain unformulated.

- In Tom Jones, Fielding clearly appeals to the readers sagacity and urges the reader not to be lazy or complacent.
- A reader becomes somebody who should constantly engage in discernment.
- Through this process, the readers judgement is continually improved. Reading becomes a learning process.
- The meaning of a novel materializes only through the responses of the reader.

## II

- Further exploring the act of reading; its nature.
- Joseph Andrews: warns the reader that preconceived notions of reading will have to be changed in order to derive pleasure from the text. i.e. this novel is not to be read in the same way as epics or plays or any other earlier form of writing.
- Gombrich – ‘schema and correction’. Conforming to certain stereotypes, only to later diverge from them and thereby enhance the feeling of novelty.
- This is the first step towards innovation.

- ① The novelists stresses the similarities between Joseph Andrews and other earlier forms of the novel. The reader is left to figure out the differences for himself or herself.
- ① Later on, these differences become what sets the work apart as unique. Hence, Novelty.
- ① The differences heighten our awareness.
- ① A negative strategy.

- ◎ The novel maintains a tone of irony throughout. So, when a commonly accepted social norm is transplanted into the novel, it is transformed in unexpected ways.
- ◎ Abraham Adams has all the characteristics that would make him the perfect man. And yet, he is totally incapable of coping with situations, precisely because he possesses all those qualities

- ◎ Familiar social norms, weltanschauung – social reality- forms the background of the novel.
- ◎ This background is warped and negated by its representation in the novel.
- ◎ The reader has to counterbalance this negation by searching for his/her own meanings. They have to construct their own realities. This is the realization of the meaning of the novel.

- ⦿ In Joseph Andrews, Fielding declares that the novel will demonstrate how pretension and hypocrisy is practiced.
- ⦿ This is done in a manner which brings out its ridiculousness.
- ⦿ Therefore it creates a sense of superiority in the mind of the reader. However, the novel does not tell us what the proper form of societal behaviour and conduct is; that will have to be formulated by the reader.
- ⦿ In order to make this process effective, it must not be stated as part of the novel's intention.

- ① Fielding says that the novel is like a mirror in which the reader can see himself. ie, through the characters that he has been laughing at.
- ① Fielding does not want to shame the individual but wants to expose the collective shortcomings of the society.
- ① It is the readers' own imagination that supplies the appropriate conduct.

### III

- ◎ Reading is often like the experience of living through the incidents depicted in the text.
- ◎ This is because the reader is personally involved in creating part of the meaning.
- ◎ The distance b/w the story and the reader is lessened and the spectator becomes an actor.

- In one scene of *Joseph Andrews*, the reader is left to figure out a particular emotion displayed by a character (Lady Booby) based on the clues that the author has provided.
- The reader's imagination is likely to create an impression of a lived event in such a circumstance.
- The character comes to life in the reader.

- ① Fielding's text disproves the belief that emotions are felt differently depending on the social standing of the characters who feel them.
- ① The reader is invited to participate in the removal of such false distinctions.
- ① Participation of the reader also sharpens his sense of discernment.

- ⦿ The character of Parson Adams is important.
- ⦿ He possesses too many virtues that his responses to a vice filled world is always inappropriate.
- ⦿ The reader can experience Adams' naive point of view and also see how the world looks at him as a fool.
- ⦿ It is up to the reader to decide what responses might have been appropriate.
- ⦿ The novel thus becomes a test for the reader's faculty of discernment.

- ① Reading a book is like a journey – Fielding.
- ① Occasional interventions by the author are like resting places. – “vacant pages”
- ① They give the reader an opportunity to think about what has happened so far.
- ① The reader creates the motivation with which he can experience the text as reality.

- ① At the end of the novel Parson Adams finds his son who was believed to be drowned.
- ① Adams' joy is not directly described; it is only alluded to. The reader is invited to feel it for himself or herself.
- ① Fielding says, 'if thou canst not conceive an idea within, I will not vainly endeavor to assist thee'.

- ① Virtual dimension of the text : that which is not described explicitly.
- ② The configurative meaning of the text : that meaning which the reader arrives at in conjunction with his experience of the text.
- ③ The aim of the novel is to afford the reader an insight into his or her self.

- ◎ It is natural that the reader feels a sense of superiority over flawed characters.
- ◎ The novelist must show that this feeling is illusory in order to be able to reveal the readers' own weaknesses.

- ① The author can use various strategies to achieve this effect.
- ① First of all the reader is allowed to feel superior to the characters by giving the reader knowledge which the characters themselves do not have
- ① This is done to draw the reader out of himself for the duration of the reading.

- ① However superior knowledge puts the reader in a tricky position.
- ① As a result of which, the superiority becomes an embarrassment.
- ① The reader is trapped by his superiority.

- ① 'A Book is a machine to think with' | A Richards.
- ① The text allows the readers to make discoveries.
- ① For Fielding, unlike Richardson, the book is not a collection of exemplary characters or stories.
- ① If we say that literature is a collection of examples to live by, we are deluding ourselves by engaging in a fantasy.

- ◎ Adams as a character overcomes his overdependence on books by casting his copy of Aeschylus into the fire.
- ◎ The novel does not represent the world.
- ◎ It provides points of access to the world.

# Part IV: Strategies for control and explanation.

## IV

- Since the reader is the source of the meaning of the novel, there has to be some controls placed on him/her so that the meaning does not become completely arbitrary and subjective.
- This control is provided by the author-reader dialogue.

- ⦿ This dialogue does not give explicit rules by which the reader to judge a book.
- ⦿ But it provides guidelines. I.e., a framework.
- ⦿ This framework only allows the full realization of the complexity of *Tom Jones*.
- ⦿ The complexity actually arises from the complexity of the subject matter: life.

## Strategies to guide the reader & convey the complexity of the subject matter: Contrast.

- Fielding asserts that the key to understanding literature is contrast.
- ‘...what demonstrates the beauty and excellence of anything but its reverse? Thus the beauty of the day, and that of summer, is set off by the horrors of the night and winter.
- An event can take its full shape in the reader only if it is simultaneously followed by its reverse.
- The actual picture that the author wants to convey is in the middle of these opposites.

- ① The contrasting pairs in Fielding are varied enough to create a very complex picture of human life in the reader's mind.
- ① However contrast itself is only a strategy. The real complexity of life is unfolded only in the mind of the reader who negotiates the contrasting pairs provided by the text.

# Examples of Contrast in Tom Jones.

- A particularly striking example of the use of contrast : The story of the Man of the Hill.
- A more subtle and effective example of contrast is towards the end of the novel when Tom, the hero is in danger of complete ruination. At this stage, he is contrasted with a highwayman he once saved and this is a reassuring reminder of Tom's inherent goodness.

- In Fielding, the use of contrasts are overlapping and numerous, and clearly indicates the complexity of the characters.
- Additionally, contrast is also present in the social norms depicted (eg, city folk and their customs vs. the country folk).
- Often the character of the hero would be contrasted with the social norms in which he finds himself in.

- ◎ This added level of contrast helps the reader to assume different perspectives depending on which element (the hero or the social background) the author is emphasizing.

# Conclusion

- The aesthetic pleasure which the novel gives lies in the opportunity for the reader to discover things for himself.
- This also serves a didactic purpose, as training for the reader's discernment.
- Fielding often uses legal imagery. He often addresses his reader as an advocate.
- This underlines the goal of the novel: to induce the reader to make balanced judgements.

# The Role of the Reader

- The role of the reader is potential, not actual.
- His reactions are not predetermined but he is offered a frame of possible decisions.
- Fielding was aware that the reader's reaction might be at variance with his own.
- The novelist must not be afraid to show what might be unfamiliar to his reader.

- ① The novel must not be limited to what the reader has experienced. It is left open for the reader to explore.
- ① The very fact that Fielding's novels have survived so far is testimony to their value.