
HARVARD
CLASSICS

SHELF OF
FICTION



HENRY
FIELDING

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THE HARVARD CLASSICS
SHELF OF FICTION
SELECTED BY CHARLES W ELIOT LL D

THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES
A FOUNDLING

VOLUME I

BY
HENRY FIELDING



EDITED WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTIONS
BY WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON PH D

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE HARVARD CLASSICS SHELF OF FICTION

BY

CHARLES W. ELIOT, LL.D.

THE selection of twenty volumes of famous fiction as a supplement to The Harvard Classics, and also for separate sale, has proved to be a very interesting undertaking. The first question was what national literatures ought to be represented; the second, what authors in each nation. Both these questions had great interest. The actual contents of The Harvard Classics affected them both.

In the original selection of The Harvard Classics, fiction was admitted only to a small extent, and none was admitted that was later than 1835. Indeed, Manzoni's "I Promessi Sposi," a historical novel published in 1826, was the only book included that would now be called a novel. "Don Quixote" (Part I) and "Pilgrim's Progress," two other pieces of prose fiction which found place in the collection, both belonging to the seventeenth century, have a character quite distinct from that of the nineteenth-century novel, romance, or story. Selected stories from the "Thousand and One Nights" constituted one volume of The Harvard Classics, representing there ancient Oriental fiction made known to Europe two centuries ago, and since engrafted on European literature; but these stories differ widely from the fiction of the nineteenth century in style, matter, and motive. Another kind of fiction, the fable and wonder story, was illustrated in The Harvard Classics by one volume containing fables which pass under the name of Æsop, the tales collected by the brothers Grimm, and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen; but again this form of fiction is distinct from that which the new set of twenty volumes is in-

tended to illustrate. Yet, after all, there are five volumes of fiction in *The Harvard Classics*; and that fact necessarily affected the present choice.

This collection contains modern novels, romances, and short stories, the oldest of which appeared in 1749, but most belong to the nineteenth century. The twenty volumes represent seven different national literatures, namely: English, American, French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Scandinavian. More than half the set, eleven volumes, is devoted to English and American fiction, French having two volumes, German two, Russian four, and Spanish and Scandinavian sharing one volume.

The great inventors in novel-writing wrote in English; but the short story has been developed by the English, the Americans, the French, the Germans, and the Scandinavians. The Russian novel is a type by itself. It has had an extraordinary influence in Russia, and has done much to make Russia known to the rest of the reading world. The influence of the novel on social and industrial reform has been strong in all the countries in which it has been well developed; and the historical romance and the novel have been, since the opening of the nineteenth century, a new force in the world.

The selection of individual authors came next; and then the choice, if possible, of the most appropriate and desirable work of each author. Here certain limitations which took effect on *The Harvard Classics* had again to be accepted. Many admirable novels or romances were too long to be included in this set. Living authors were excluded. No books are included of which it cannot fairly be said that they were famous in their generation, and have since shown a strong power of survival. Each author is represented by a work generally counted among his best; so that any one who reads the whole set may feel that he has made the acquaintance of thirty writers of modern fiction under favorable conditions. He will have seen each of them in some characteristic and durable production.

On the choice of authors, and the choice of the best available work of each author, it soon appeared that no general consent among competent judges was likely to be attained and that the ultimate decision would necessarily be more or

less arbitrary, and liable to provoke dissent. The selection of the best authors and of the best book of each author depends on taste, literary discrimination, and moral judgments, combined with individual affections or devotions which are often warm. Discussion of these choices with numerous good judges developed a great variety of opinions on both these kinds of selection or preference. But, although there was no general consent that the selected authors were all the best of their nation, or that the selected book representing each author was his best, there was general consent that the authors were all creditable representatives of the fiction of their respective nations, and that the work selected for each was a good representative of the author's genius. The differences of opinion related to comparative values, not to the positive merit of the authors and works chosen.

The value of the set is enhanced by the biographical and critical introduction, written by Professor Neilson, and by the six essays on the several national contributions to the collection. There is no work in the series which does not illustrate good literary form, and none which may not be read over and over again with pleasure and profit. It provides the intellectually ambitious family with a body of interesting and enjoyable literature, good not only for the present generation but for their children and grandchildren. It portrays the emotions, the passion and some of the moral efforts of the nineteenth century and the last half of the eighteenth century, and pictures vividly the changing manners and social states during that tremendous period; but in so doing it portrays intense human feelings and motives which will be only slowly modified and purified in time to come. It is, therefore, a durable collection.

THE NOVEL IN ENGLAND

THE historical origins and development of the English novel, its relations to continental fiction, the vexed question of the definition of the form itself—all these are matters too complex to be handled here. The present brief discussion can only treat, and by dangerously wide generalization, three or four of the outstanding characteristics of British prose fiction of the last two hundred years, and can suggest rather than formulate those intellectual and moral traits of the national character which are thus indicated.

From this point of view, however, one matter of history is significant,—namely, that the novel first emerged as a definite literary type in the eighteenth century, which laid the foundations also for the social sciences and which was, more than any previous century, an age of criticism and reflection. The impetus of the earlier renaissance, with its soaring imagination, its dazzling poetry, its passion for the fullness of sensuous experience, had long since expended itself, leaving to the mid-seventeenth century a dangerous heritage of libertinism on the one side and sectarian zeal on the other. The disastrous conflict between these two extremes of character produced, by way of reaction, a temper of moderation and reasonableness, equally averse to sensualism and to mystic exaltation, more concerned, on the whole, with life as it has been and as it is than with life as it might be; a frame of mind distrustful of fine-spun theories, but profoundly humanistic, in that it held with Pope that "the proper study of mankind is man." Such was, at its best, the temper of the eighteenth century, and it was in this intellectual atmosphere that the English novel had its beginnings.

Further, in the eighteenth century, England was undergoing an economic and industrial transformation which

awakened new aspirations in, and opened new opportunities to, the great "upper middle" class. (The merchant Sir Andrew Freeport, in the *Spectator* club, is a figure much more representative of the prosperous man of the mid-century than Tory Sir Roger.) The early novel was written for the public augmented by this large and mixed class. Its character, then, was determined, first by the lively sense of fact and the singularly sane and clear standards of judgment characteristic of the intellectuals of the eighteenth century; and secondly, by the predominant interests of the new reading public, with their democratic sympathies, their zest for actual experiences, and their abundant practicality.

All this, however, explains Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett much more than Richardson and Sterne. In the latter writers different qualities predominated; their temperaments were emotional rather than practical; their styles had not the fine unconcern, "the perfect manner of the eighteenth century." In these respects the sentimentalism of Richardson and Sterne was symptomatic of an impending change; for the aristocratic tradition of reason and good sense was, in this same century, to be rudely challenged, and the explosive forces were already at work in the prim little stationer and the philandering parson. Observing, however, this striking difference, we may point out that even Richardson was constrained by his sense of fact—he was exploring, more minutely than any one had done before, the inmost feelings of women's hearts; and that Sterne's chief interest lay in observing, recording, and, it is fair to add, inducing, delicate fluctuations of emotion about life's trivial affairs. In such ways even the sentimentalists of the group are affected by the prevailing realism.

This tendency toward realism has remained characteristic of the English novel. There have been, of course, conspicuous exceptions; the Brontës, with their haunting strangeness; R. L. Stevenson, and lesser gentlemen of the "Gadzooks!" tribe; above all, Sir Walter Scott, perhaps the greatest figure of British fiction and certainly the prince of romancers. But Sir Walter's romanticism is very different from that of Victor Hugo or that of Goethe in his early period, being neither a passionate assertion of individualism

nor a mood of lyrical melancholy. It is spirit at once robust and social, youthful but of an ancient line, drawing its rich stores from fireside legend and from proud national tradition. Moreover, conjoined with the vigorous imaginativeness of the Waverley novels is a considerable element of realism; Scottish types of character are as faithfully depicted in David Deans, Dominie Sampson, and Bailie Nicol Jarvie as are English types in Squire Western and Parson Adams. And on the whole it is a realistic tradition which has dominated English fiction. It appears in Dickens's lovingly minute descriptions of London streets and in Thackeray's truthful pictures of the Inns of Courts. But it may perhaps be best studied in George Eliot, whose Tullivers, Dodsons, and Poysers are like masterpieces of genre painting.

The line between realism and satire is often difficult to draw. In English fiction the two are closely related; indeed, the generalization that realism is pervasive will hold only if the latter term is so defined as to include work animated by the spirit of satire or of comedy. Now the elements of the satiric spirit are disapprobation and humor, and its method of characterization is analogous to caricature. Satire produces figures which lack the rounded completeness of real men and women; it gives us, wittingly, a distorted view of society—a *Vanity Fair*, for instance. And the spirit of comedy too, may impose upon one's selection and one's treatment of material, limitations incompatible with the strictest realism. Certainly in the English novel humor, conceived broadly, has been a constituent of the very first importance, ranging from the boisterous mirth of Fielding to the amused penetration of Jane Austen and the elaborate irony of George Meredith. If other evidence were lacking, the novels alone would furnish evidence of the rich fund of humor possessed by the British race. In Dickens this humor is united with an inordinate susceptibility to pathos, in Thackeray with a gentle disillusionment, in George Eliot with an extraordinary sensitiveness of conscience; in none is it at once more wholesome and more sympathetic than in Sir Walter. Very significantly, of the greater British novelists, only Richardson seems to have been deficient in the capacity of laughter.

Yet the English Novel has been a serious form of literature, concerned very largely with standards of conduct and informed often with profoundly moral purposes. Both Fielding and Richardson had pronounced ethical convictions, and were at pains to justify their writings upon moral grounds. In the case of *Tom Jones*, the modern reader may feel that the unselective realism of the book to some extent obscures the author's avowed purpose—"to recommend goodness and innocence"—but it must be remembered that Fielding's work is a kind of protest against what seemed to him the mawkish unreality of Richardson's. And ever since their day, whether rightly or wrongly, popular discussion of fiction in England and Scotland has proved likely to take a didactic rather than an esthetic turn. Of the comic writers represented in this series, Jane Austen alone is free from didactic motive. This is not because she was indifferent to moral values, but because her chosen game was harmless absurdity rather than moral obliquity. Hers is the "slim feasting smile" of the spirit of comedy,—an expression, be it noted, seldom caught on the sturdy features of John Bull. Much more typically British is Dickens's burning indignation at cruelty, hypocrisy, and meanness, or Thackeray's little homilies on the virtues of kindness and simplicity. And the history of the novel has reflected the broader social movements of the time,—the spread of democracy, the growth of humanitarianism, the struggle of the toilers to obtain industrial freedom. Dickens was perhaps of most importance to his own generation because of the indictment which he brought against their acquiescence in such institutions as the debtors' prison and Squeers's school. This preoccupation with the moral side of life shows itself in other ways in a philosophical mind like George Eliot's. To her the inward and spiritual aspects of the problem of evil were of more interest than the mere organization of social and religious forces. In her novels as well as in her life, George Eliot reveals the change which many thoughtful minds underwent in the disturbed Victorian period. It is not fanciful to see a relation between the moral struggle of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and J. S. Mill's speculations upon the philosophy of liberalism; both turn upon the nature of the

individual's rights to happiness and the obligations which he owes to society.

On the side of form and structure, the tendency of the English novel may be indicated by a quotation from Fielding, whose example has been influential: "My reader then is not to be surprised, if in the course of this work he shall find some chapters very short and others altogether as long: some that contain only the time of a single day and others that comprise years; in a word, if my history sometimes seems to stand still, and sometimes to fly; for all which I shall not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever; for as I am in reality the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein; and these laws my readers, whom I consider as my subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey. . . ." The tendency has been, as it was in the Elizabethan drama, toward fullness of incident, amplitude of background, numerousness and variety of characters, rather than toward concentration of interest and singleness of artistic purpose. The greater men have commonly been prolific writers, working often under pressure, and little given to revision. The result is frequently a lack of proportion in the design or an appearance of negligence in the details of a plot, and a style marked rather by vigor and natural grace than by subtlety or dexterity. Scott, for instance, a rapid writer, was often careless in minor matters; Richardson, though he had much of the artist's feeling, interminably prolix; and Sterne wayward and purposely baffling. The desultory narrative of *Pickwick Papers*, (which does finally achieve some semblance of plot) is an extreme example of looseness of structure, which, however, may be best illustrated by the popular biographical type of novel such as *David Copperfield*. It is significant that several well known English novels underwent an entire change of design during the process of composition. In all these respects Miss Austen, with her deft handling of plot and her admirable compactness of phrase, is exceptional. Of course examples are not lacking, in other writers, of structural skill; George Eliot's *Romola* might be cited, or almost any of the novels of Thomas Hardy. But comparatively few

English novels have been notable for architectural perfection. It is difficult to think of British novels which show such artistic compression as Hawthorne achieved in *The Scarlet Letter*.

These four characteristics, then, may be taken as broadly typical of the English novel: realism, humor, didacticism, and elasticity of form. Among the literary types, for the last hundred years the novel has undoubtedly enjoyed the widest popularity. Its vitality, as regards both production and consumption, shows no signs of diminution.

S. P. C.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

"SINCE the author of *Tom Jones* was buried," says Thackeray, "no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a *Man*." A grave impeachment, this, of the English novel, but at the same time justification for beginning a representative selection of the masterpieces of English fiction with the chief work of Henry Fielding.

Fielding's father was Major General Edmund Fielding, who had served in Queen Anne's wars under the great Duke of Marlborough. Though descended from the first Earl of Denbigh through the Earl of Desmond, General Fielding was not wealthy, and the future novelist was thrown on his own resources shortly after the completion of his education. Henry was born at Sharpham Park, Somerset, the house of his maternal grandfather, Sir Henry Gould, on April 22, 1707. After some years under a private tutor, he went to Eton when about twelve, and five or six years later to the University of Leyden. In 1728 he obtained his degree there in the Faculty of Letters, and, returning to England, took up play-writing for a livelihood. He had apparently been experimenting in this art while still in Holland, for his first comedy, *Love in Several Masques*, was performed at Drury Lane a month before his graduation.

During the next eight years Fielding produced something over a score of plays—comedies, farces, and burlesques—all of them satirical. Though himself leading the life of a gay and somewhat rakish man-about-town, he was a lively and persistent critic of the follies and abuses of the time. The plays were hastily written, and abound in passages offensive to modern taste, but their rollicking humor and high spirits preserve them from dullness. Three of them, *Tom Thumb the Great*, *The Author's Farce*, and *Pasquin* are still worth reading both for the light thrown on the conditions satirized

and for the brilliance of the burlesque. The first two are dramatic satires, ridiculing bombast and pedantry, and particular practices and personages in the writing world of the day; the last exposes corruption in politics. So free had criticism of this sort in the theatre become that in 1737 a strict licensing act was passed, and with this Fielding's play-writing came to an end.

Meantime, in 1735, he had married Miss Charlotte Cradock of Salisbury, who is considered to have been the original of both Sophia Western and Amelia. His marriage was the turning point of his career. The wildness of his youth disappeared, to be bitterly repented of during the rest of his life; and in 1737, after a short experiment as a gentleman farmer, he devoted himself to the study of law. While he was striving to establish himself in his new profession there appeared Richardson's novel *Pamela*. This work met with an extraordinary popularity which was largely deserved, but the sentimentality and conventionality of it disgusted Fielding and induced him to begin a parody. *Pamela* was the history of a servant girl whose resistance to temptation was finally rewarded by receiving her master as a husband; and Fielding undertook to describe the parallel career of her brother Joseph. But, as he proceeded, the human interest of his characters got the better of the burlesque, and when in 1742 he published *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews . . . written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes*, he was found to have produced a satire indeed, but at the same time the greatest novel so far written in England. By a lucky accident he had stumbled on the literary form which suited his genius.

Early in the next year Fielding published by subscription three volumes of *Miscellanies*, among the contents of which was his *History of the Life of the late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*. This work was based on the career of a well-known criminal, and was ostensibly devoted to contrasting greatness and goodness. The tone is bitterly ironical, Wild's villainies being constantly held up to admiration as differing but slightly from the actions of the men the world has called "great." It has recently been argued that beneath the obvious satire there lies an allegory in which Wild sym-

bolizes the "great" prime minister of the day, Sir Robert Walpole.

Near the end of the same year, 1743, Fielding's wife died. He suffered extremely from this loss, and when four years later he married again, he chose Mary Daniel, the maid of his first wife, to whom he seems to have been drawn by her affectionate devotion to her mistress.

A new period in the career of Fielding began with his appointment as a justice of the peace for Westminster in 1748. Later his commission was extended to include the county of Middlesex, and in 1749 he was elected chairman of quarter sessions at Clerkenwell. The reputation of English magistrates at that time was none too good, but Fielding took his duties with seriousness and conscience. His experience in court brought him face to face with vice and misery, and he became more and more devoted to the devising of measures for the improvement of public morals. He took part in obtaining legislation restricting the liquor traffic, published plans for making provision for the poor, and induced the government to adopt a scheme which proved efficacious in reducing greatly the number of murders and robberies.

Meanwhile he still found some time for literature. He engaged in several journalistic enterprises, and in 1749 brought out his masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. The book was at once enormously successful, and its popularity has not only been maintained in England but has spread abroad, so that translations have appeared in all the leading languages of Europe. It was followed in 1751 by *Amelia*, a novel almost equally well received at the time, but now less highly esteemed than its predecessor.

Though Fielding obtained good prices for his works and earned much reputation both from them and from his public services, he was never long at ease financially. He was generous and extravagant, and as a result was much troubled with anxiety about the future of his family. For it was early apparent that he was not to be long-lived. He began to suffer from gout at thirty-five, and though he sought relief in many remedies, he never conquered it. It later became complicated with asthma and dropsy, and the situation

became so serious in 1754 that he decided to seek relief in a warmer climate. In June of that year he set out for Lisbon, accompanied by his wife and eldest daughter. On the voyage he kept a *Journal* which for the simplicity of its art, the vividness of its descriptions, and the charm of its self-revelation is one of the most highly prized of his productions. But the change was not to cure him. Two months after his arrival, on October 8, 1754, he died, and was buried in the English cemetery in the Portuguese capital.

Fielding's forty-seven years were close packed and bear testimony to the extraordinary force and vitality of the man. Apart from his services as a judge and a social reformer, he achieved distinction in several separate fields of literature. He was one of the most effective journalists of his time; he won a place of his own in the history of the drama and produced several comedies that still repay reading, besides many that exhibit his abundant wit and courage as a satirist; and his essays are among the wisest as well as cleverest that his century produced. But all these accomplishments are dwarfed by his novels. In them we find the most graphic pictures that have come down to us of English life in the first half of the eighteenth century. It was a time of hard living, hard drinking, hard swearing, and no faithful reflection of it could be "nice." But despite the frankness of Fielding's pictures, it must be claimed that their morality if not delicate is at heart sound; and it is difficult to find his equal in the portrayal of warm-blooded youth—a portrayal which, though in externals characteristic of his time and country, is in its insight into human nature possessed of a truth that is neither temporary nor local.

"Our immortal Fielding," wrote the historian of the Roman Empire in his splendid way, "was of the younger branch of the Earls of Denbigh, who drew their origin from the Counts of Hapsburg. The successors of Charles V may disdain their brethren of England: but the romance of *Tom Jones*, that exquisite picture of humour and manners, will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial Eagle of Austria."

W. A. N.

CRITICISMS AND INTERPRETATIONS

I

BY WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

FIELDING, too, has described, though with a greater hand, the characters and scenes which he knew and saw. He had more than ordinary opportunities for becoming acquainted with life. His family and education, first—his fortunes and misfortunes afterwards, brought him into the society of every rank and condition of man. He is himself the hero of his books; he is wild Tom Jones, he is wild Captain Booth; less wild, I am glad to think, than his predecessor: at least heartily conscious of demerit, and anxious to amend.

When Fielding first came upon the town in 1727, the recollection of the great wits was still fresh in the coffee-houses and assemblies and the judges there declared that young Harry Fielding had more spirits and wit than Congreve or any of his brilliant successors. His figure was tall and stalwart; his face handsome, manly, and noble-looking; to the very last days of his life he retained a grandeur of air, and although worn down by disease, his aspect and presence imposed respect upon the people round about him.

A dispute took place between Mr. Fielding and the captain of the ship in which he was making his last voyage, and Fielding relates how the man finally went down on his knees, and begged his passenger's pardon. He was living up to the last days of his life, and his spirit never gave in. His vital power must have been immensely strong. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu prettily characterises Fielding and this capacity for happiness which he possessed, in a little notice of his death when she compares him to Steele, who was as improvident and as happy as he was, and says