

Joseph Andrews=

Henry Fielding=

Themes=

Charity Is the Mark of a True Christian=

A major theme of Joseph Andrews is that charity is the mark of a true Christian. Time and again, Joseph Andrews is the victim of people's lack of charity and even downright maliciousness. For example, he is fired from his job by Lady Booby for refusing to sleep with her, and then he is beaten within an inch of his life by robbers on the road. He is saved by some people in a stagecoach only because they fear getting sued. The people who are kind to Joseph outside his circle of acquaintances are members of the lower classes, since the upper classes are painted fairly broadly in the novel as lacking charity and compassion. Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews are the moral center of the novel, and both make speeches about charity. Joseph says that he doesn't understand why there is so little charity among people or why people don't at least practice charity so that other people will honor or admire them. In Joseph's view, being honored for charity is far superior to being admired for being rich or accomplished. He finds it strange that "all men should consent in commending goodness" but "no man endeavor[s] to deserve that commendation." Similarly, all rail against wickedness yet seem eager to carry out wicked deeds.

Parson Adams continually preaches charity, and his life is a testament to his own charitableness. He is the father to his parishioners and is open handed with everyone, even though he himself is quite poor. He scolds the hypocritical parson Mr. Trulliber for his lack of charity, saying any man "void of charity, I make no scruple of pronouncing that he is no Christian." The parson is surprised by people's inability to lend a helping hand to him, even when it doesn't cost that much. Yet when he is helped, it is almost always by people who have very little themselves. One exception is Mr. Wilson, but when the parson learns his story, he realizes that he has been saved by the charity of a woman—first she gives him material help, and then she accepts his love and offers him her own.

Affectation Makes a Person Ridiculous=

The narrator/author announces in the preface that he is writing a comic romance or epic poem in prose in which he will focus on the ridiculous rather than the sublime. He explains that the ridiculous, which is the cause for amusement and laughter, arises from affectation, and affectation itself arises either from vanity or hypocrisy. "Vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause," says the narrator, "so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavor to avoid censure, by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues." Although it is possible for a person to be vain or hypocritical without affectation, these human failings usually lead to affectation, which leads to making oneself a laughing stock. The narrator considers hypocrisy to be a much worse vice than vanity.

The immoral characters of the novel continually make themselves ridiculous because of their hypocrisy, but they also cause a lot of damage. For example, Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop

pretend to be chaste while pursuing Joseph Andrews, and both create a lot of misery for him. On the other hand, Parson Adams is sometimes ridiculous because of his vanity about his learning. He believes his learning makes him wiser than all others, and when this view is challenged, he pretends to be infallible. Nonetheless, his vanity is fairly harmless when compared to the hypocrisy of characters like Lady Booby, Mr. Trulliber, the hypocritical parson who has terrorized the people in his parish, and Peter Pounce, who is like a loan shark preying on the poor people of Parson Adams's parish.

Corruption Increases Along Class Lines=

In the novel the upper classes—called the high people or fashionable people—are consistently portrayed as immoral, while the low people, or people with no fashion, are mostly portrayed as moral. One exception to this rule is Mr. Wilson, who was born a gentleman and has some property. Nonetheless, he has a moderate income and is not rich. He once was a rake, but he has reformed himself with the help of a woman who loves him. This approach to characterization is radical for the 18th century, since literary stories were pitched at the middle and upper classes and most people thought "bad people" came primarily from the lower classes. While rakes and ravishers were portrayed as aristocrats in other novels, for the most part the high people were portrayed in a positive light. But in *Joseph Andrews*, the villains of the upper class rob and take advantage of the poor and violate their rights, which is shown time and again in the novel. For example, Lady Booby uses her clout as an aristocrat to have Fanny Goodwill and Joseph Andrews falsely arrested, and the corrupt judge sentences them to stripping and whipping and one month in Bridewell for stealing a twig. They are saved at the 11th hour by Squire Booby, an aristocrat who is also decent now that he has taken the servant woman Pamela Andrews (now Booby) as his wife. Another corrupt magistrate (the judges were always from the upper classes) almost throws Fanny and Parson Adams in jail on false charges. An evil squire of the upper classes and Beau Didapper, a patrician dandy, attempt to rape Fanny Goodwill and assume they can do so with impunity.

Religion Is the Antithesis of the Good=

Also radical in *Joseph Andrews* is the portrayal of bad clergymen. Two such men are Mr. Barnabas, the parson who comes to see Joseph on his hypothetical deathbed, and Mr. Trulliber, the prosperous pig farmer who is a parson only on Sunday. While Mr. Barnabas is not actively evil, he is a poor specimen of a Christian. He tells Joseph Andrews it is okay for him to hate the men who robbed him and even to kill them if he had the chance, because that is allowable by law, but he says Joseph must forgive the robbers as a Christian. Joseph, who is still justifiably harboring a lot of resentment against his attackers, asks in all sincerity what forgiveness is—what it would look like in such a situation. The parson, whose spiritual understanding is about as deep as the water in a shallow pan, answers, "Forgive them as—as—it is to forgive them as—in short, it is to forgive them as a Christian."

Mr. Trulliber is the richest man in his parish, yet he refuses to loan Parson Adams 14 shillings for his debt with the innkeeper. Trulliber accuses Adams of trying to rob him and throws him out of his house after Parson Adams says he is no Christian. Trulliber has completely intimidated his wife, who calls him "her master," as well as all his parishioners, who are afraid of his wrath. The narrator says, "Mr. Trulliber had, by his professions of piety,

by his gravity, austerity, reserve, and the opinion of his great wealth, so great an authority in his parish, that they all lived in the utmost fear and apprehension of him." As a rich man he has the ability to bring them considerable misery, so he rules his parishioners using fear rather than love.