miguilim

revista eletrônica do netlli

volume 8, número 2, maio-ago. 2019

THE MASQUERADE: HUMOR, REALITY AND FICTION IN HENRY FIELDING'S WORKS

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BAILE DE MÁSCARAS:HUMOR, REALIDADE E FICÇÃO NAS OBRAS DE HENRY FIELDING

Raphael Valim da Mota SILVA
Universidade de São Paulo, Brasil

RESUMO | INDEXAÇÃO | TEXTO | REFERÊNCIAS | CITAR ESTE ARTIGO | O AUTOR
RECEBIDO EM 13/06/2019 ● APROVADO EM 21/11/2019

Abstract

The eighteenth century was a decisive period for the rise and consolidation of the English novel. Considering Henry Fielding's (1707-1754) importance in such process, this article aims to analyze the relationship between fiction and reality in some of his works — with emphasis on *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and its preface, but also considering *Shamela* (1741) and *Tom Jones* (1749). For such relationship, the construction of humor or comic is crucial, because the affectation is, in Fielding's view, the only source of the true ridiculousness present in the world. It is through affectation that fiction and reality come together in their idiosyncrasies and interpenetrations, which allows Fielding to subvert and raise to absurdity the quest for factuality that was common to novels at the time.

Resumo

O século XVIII foi um período decisivo para a ascensão e consolidação do romance inglês. Considerando a importância de Henry Fielding (1707-1754) nesse processo, o presente artigo busca analisar a relação entre ficção e realidade em algumas de suas obras — com ênfase em Joseph Andrews (1742) e seu prefácio, mas também considerando Shamela (1741) e Tom Jones (1749). Para tanto, a construção do humor ou cômico é crucial, pois a afetação é, na visão de Fielding, a única fonte da verdadeira ridicularidade presente no mundo. É por meio da afetação que ficção e realidade se aproximam em suas idiossincrasias e interpenetrações, o que permite a Fielding subverter e elevar ao absurdo a busca pela factualidade que era comum aos romances da época.

Entradas para indexação

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Henry Fielding. Joseph Andrews. Tom Jones. Humor. Literatura inglesa. Romance inglês.
KEYWORDS: Henry Fielding. Joseph Andrews. Tom Jones. Humor. English literature. English novel.

Texto integral

If by any chance some unsuspecting man asked Henry Fielding to represent reality in a painting, he would probably receive neither shapely and geographically located landscapes, nor the faithful picture of a waiting-maid, but simply the painting of a paint-brush. Made of old wood and new bristles, this brush would contain in itself reality, whose representation depends on the instrument. Such a rudimentary parable serves as a frontispiece to understand what is innovative in Fielding's "new province of writing". The self-reflexive character of his work reminds us all the time that we, as readers, are dealing with the purest fiction, with the arbitrary (although neither illogical nor improbable) construction of narrators who take the reins of their stories. Even when explicitly and passionately fictional, novels such as *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) establish deep relations with the realm of truth. This dialectic takes shape in the concept of comic presented in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. When linked to affectation, the comic can be thought of as both a reaction to human behaviors seen in social reality and a stimulus for the creation of narrative mechanisms that give the tone to a work of fiction. Recognizing the differentiation between real and fictional is the impetus that allows the deep interpenetration of these two poles, showing how both are governed by the logic of masks and pretense.

The novel, genre to which Fielding would migrate after a ten-year career as a playwright, is linked to questions of truth from its ascension. In an attempt to justify the existence of a supposedly bastard, corrupting and imaginary genre, early English novelists succumbed to the tyranny of truth. Attachment to what is real (or conceived as such) was justified as a means not only to break the idealistic tradition of romance, but especially to dribble the suspicion and the prejudice that Protestant societies like England have against imaginary narratives, usually seen as a waste of time and null in terms of edification. Thus, formal realism, as

emphasized by Ian Watt (1957, p. 28), was the proper set of narrative procedures for the novel, since it narrowed down the frontiers between fiction and reality as never before, allowing the creation of "full and authentic reports of human experience" through referential use of language and emphasis on the details of the story. The factual fever proliferated in a way that paratexts (such as prefaces and notes) served as artifices for Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, among others, to boast about the authenticity of their writings, thus creating in the reading public a predisposition to value their works as the most immaculate truth, a guarantee for instruction and entertainment.

According to Michael Mckeon (1985, p. 163-165), the victory of historicity over the imaginary is justified in many cultural movements still in vogue in eighteenth century England, among which "three of the most important are also closely intertwined: the scientific revolution, the typographical revolution, and the Protestant Reformation". All three are similar by the valorization of empiricism, objective research and observation. Protestantism specifically stands out by elevating individual experience and the power of the senses in the world's apprehension. Thus, such conditions, when combined with the rise of the bourgeoisie, contributed to the emphasis on individual and (supposedly) real experience as a means of legitimating the novel, to the point that both Defoe and Richardson "pretend to be only the editors of authentic documents whose plain and artless truth is above question".

Fielding also flirted with the ideal of capturing reality, the real chimera, through writing. However, for him, reality lies neither below nor above, but juxtaposed to fiction itself. The clamour for truth was subverted and brought to absurdity by Fielding, who traced an epic lineage back to himself and to the genre that he promoted. Relying on the principle of art as imitation, which comes from Aristotle, the author sought to capture the truth of human nature through invention. His work does not attempt to deceive the readers into believing that the matter narrated happened or that the characters correspond to empirical entities; on the contrary, it exposes not only the fictionality of its creation but also the regimes of verisimilitude responsible for transmitting this "air of truth" so desired by all. Fielding is against the notion of fiction as inauthenticity by connecting his imaginary microcosm to the essence of humanity. We are dealing with an extremely unstable terrain, since fiction here is assumed to be as such and yet it creates points of contact with reality in order to instruct and entertain its readers. In other words, Fielding's narrator is the very same who calls a book as *Tom Jones* "a history" and yet shows the mechanisms that constitute it as a story.

Joseph Andrews formalizes and puts into practice the literary impetus that underlies Henry Fielding's prose. However, prior to his first novel, his satirical work *Shamela* was already a reaction to the questions of truth that novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* represented. His satire subverts the function of paratexts, which hitherto served to mask novels as authentic accounts. Thus, before the satire itself, the author weaves literary frameworks that always relativize a text in relation to others. The first framework is the work's dedication to Miss Fanny, in which the author presents himself under the pseudonym of Conny Keyber. Noteworthy is the emphasis on the own author, since Conny presents his merits by writing such a satire and even compares himself with the writer and mathematician Euclid. To the detriment of the expected emphasis on the historicity or factuality of the work, the authorial instance is not only valued

but also displaced from orbit, since the reference is not to a real person, but to the arbitrariness of writing that is the pseudonym. In addition, criticism agreed to consider this dedication a parody of the one by the English clergyman Conyers Middleton[1] to his *Life of Cicero* (1741), published in the same year of *Shamela*'s publication and a year after *Pamela*'s publication.

The second framework is the most curious one: the "letters to the editor", a section which normally compiles letters from readers who praise a book. In *Shamela*, not only are these letters the author's invention, but also one of the letters, which draws the most attention, is from the editor to himself, as another feature that emphasizes the fictional input in the work.

> The Editor to *Himself*
>
> Dear SIR,
>
> However you came by the excellent Shamela, out with it, without Fear or Favour, Dedication and all; believe me, it will go through many Editions, be translated into all Languages, read in all Nations and Ages, and to say a bold Word, it will do more good than the C___y have done harm in the World,
> I am, Sir,
>
> Sincerely your Well-wisher,
>
> Yourself.
> (FIELDING, 2010, p. 51).

This is an example of how Fielding's prose is modern, for such a cleavage of the subject would be comparable to that which, almost two centuries later, modernist authors came to do, including Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Andrade (the latter wrote a foreword dedicated to himself in his book *Pauliceia desvairada*).

Finally, the third framework is already within the narrative, through the exchange of letters between two characters, Parson Tickletext and Parson Oliver; the former, a man enchanted by the novel *Pamela*, proposing it as an example of virtue; the latter, a man who considers Richardson's work a farce, for he knows the true story of this waiting-maid who in fact is called Shamela. Parson Oliver proposes to send the authentic letters written and received by Shamela, which contain the true story about how such an aggressive and hypocritical girl deceived her master, Mr. Booby, by marrying him in order to ascend socially. Fielding's satire takes every point of Richardson's novel and turns it into its opposite. Pamela's virtue and naivety are in fact profound hypocrisy and pretense.[2] The debate is not only moral, but epistemological. Truth is thrown into a combat zone and relativized by different fighters.

Therefore, the three narrative frameworks, coupled with the parodic procedure of the book, point to the self-reflexive and metalinguistic character that permeates Fielding's writing as a whole. The author applies the recursive principle of writing, explaining different references that he uses not as authentic accounts, but as texts that they are, as the result of linguistic constructions and conscious structuring. Writing allows the dissection of writing itself; *Shamela*'s configuration

owes nothing to the notion of *mise en abyme* proposed by André Gide many years later. Through criticism and irony, Fielding systematizes the exposition of the mechanisms of narrative construction, even in those genres that claim to be trustworthy, as the novel at the time intended to be. The dialogism between different forms of writing points, in negative, to the literary construction in the satire and also in Richardson's novel.

Joseph Andrews develops the proposals engendered in *Shamela* with more rigor and resourcefulness. Its plot is also a parody of *Pamela*: Joseph Andrews is supposed to be the brother of Richardson's famous character. Like his sister, he must resist the advances of a mistress, Lady Booby in this case, in order to preserve his virtue. After this initial configuration, the novel follows another path and achieves a degree of autonomy, developing "in the manner of Cervantes" a travel narrative in which Joseph, accompanied by his mentor Mr. Abraham Adams, tries to return home and to encounter his beloved Fanny. In view of this, it is as if Fielding had been so engrossed with the genre that he had parodied to the point of trying to write a novel himself. If in *Shamela* the emphasis rests almost entirely on the art of fiction and its unfolding, in *Joseph Andrews*, fictional self-consciousness mingles with the aforementioned attempt to imitate reality and human behavior. Doubtless, this field is more ambiguous from the very beginning. In the introductory chapter of the novel, for example, the third-person narrator reflects on the exemplary behavior of some personalities like Mr. Colley Cibber and Mrs. Pamela Andrews. The former was a playwright who actually existed and wrote an autobiography; the latter is a fictional character. Such non-fortuitous references lead to a much more complex sense of reality reflected in writing, for they consider and equate the influence of a real person who unfolds himself in an autobiography and of an imaginary character created to be conceived as real.

Another complexification lies in the very name of the protagonist, Joseph Andrews, which covers at the same time two apparently opposing tendencies: first, a tendency proper to the novel of portraying particular individuals with common names; and second, a tendency proper to ancient narratives of using names with interpretative meaning. Joseph, like Pamela, Robinson, or Moll, does not seem an eccentric or dislocated name for common experience in eighteenth-century England, although it still manages to be a name that guides us back to earlier texts and stimulates interpretation. Any reader of novels at the time would immediately recognize the parallels between *Joseph Andrews* and Richardson's novel just by the use of the surname. In addition, when we consider the plot of the novel, the name Joseph recalls the biblical figure of Joseph of Egypt, since both characters had to resist the seduction of women of a superior class, Lady Booby and Potiphar's wife respectively, were punished for doing it and soon after rewarded for their choices. Thus, what could be seen as a subtle influence of the novel's realistic rules holds in itself the dialogue with other texts and with a previous tradition.

The same principle applies to Abraham Adams, a reference to the biblical patriarch, and to Lady Booby, female version of Richardson's Mr. B. The counterpoint between "Booby" and "B." elucidates the whole question. While the former raises interpretation by pointing to the personality of the character, the latter is justified as an attempt to preserve the identity of a supposedly real man. In each case it is evident, respectively, the imaginative trait and the factual trait of the writing. However, the complexity is that all the references raised by these names are on the borderline between fiction and reality, which is obvious in the case of

Pamela, a novel sold as a real story, but somewhat complex in the case of biblical characters, which, depending on belief or referentiality, can be seen from different perspectives, as historical or invented figures.

The title of the novel already triggers the readers' imagination, but it does not fail to frustrate their expectations. Perhaps the greatest surprise to readers accustomed to this type of fiction is the formal construction of the novel: *Joseph Andrews* is not written in the first person and also has the insistent presence of an intrusive narrator who interrupts the narrative to make comments, to reflect on life and writing and to talk to the readers. Here the reader is less an empirical entity and more a character to whom are attributed various masks, knowledges and expectations, which are put to the test all the time. This already happens in the first chapter of the third book, in which the narrator reflects on the importance of chapter division and spacing in works of fiction in order to create moments conducive to pauses in reading. Something similar occurs in the first chapter of the third book of *Tom Jones*, in which the narrator emphasizes that his book will skip periods of time in which nothing really important happens, a technique by which he intends to spare the reader's effort.

Such examples underline that Fielding's narrators have complete control of their works, and are capable of exposing the backbone of their creation in several moments. The figure of the narrator thus mingles with that of the author through the point of view described by Norman Friedman (2002) as "editorial omniscience". The authorial instance is a constant in the book, and its most insistent manifestation is in the preface to the novel, which can be read as Fielding's theory of the novel. The preface gives an intense emphasis to comic and humor as a means of conceiving human nature and literature. Therefore, we want to propose that in the concept of humor lies the synthesis for the debate about fiction and reality in the works of Henry Fielding. For this understanding, we need to refer back to the preface.

Fielding presents his novel as something not yet attempted in the English language; it is a "comic epic poem in prose". The word "epic" not only refers to the Greek epics, but also carries within itself the idea of expansion. Fielding's epic intent in *Joseph Andrews* is perceived in the large number of characters from the most varied social classes, whose presence is justified by the structure of travel narrative as developed by Cervantes. The variety of places and characters gives a clear view of the reality at the time. It is the opposite of *Pamela*'s dramatic closure and the complement to Defoe's narratives, which also covered vast territories and presented a heterogeneous range of characters, without however giving them as much attention as it gave to its protagonists. As for the comic aspect, it refers not only to humor, but also, according to classical standards, to the inclusion of people of inferior rank and inferior manners in the narrative. The novel would be the propitious genre to unite such influences and thus allow a depurated imitation of human nature.

The comic for Fielding is not to be confused with the burlesque: "for the latter is the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural [...]; so in the former we should confine ourselves strictly to nature" (FIELDING, 1958, p. xxi). In regard to the word "nature", what Henry Fielding meant, according to Terry Eagleton (2005, p. 45), was "exactly this sense of the few vital, unchanging elements which all men and women shared in common". That's the narrator's explanation in the first

chapter of the third book of *Joseph Andrews*: "I declare here, once for all, I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species" (FIELDING, 1958, p. 166). Certainly, in Fielding the dimension of reality takes shape not by describing individual experience, but by depicting the behaviors of human species. In this sense, as much as he is the guiding thread of the plot, Joseph is not the protagonist of the novel in the same sense as Moll Flanders and Pamela are in their respective books, since he is left aside several times in the narrative and his characterization serves more to illustrate the behavior of the species than the psychology of an individual.

Why, if the author's interest is to deviate the least from nature, why choose a comic perspective? His reply could not be more accurate: "life everywhere furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous". The comic for Fielding (1958, p. xxi-xxiii) is related to affectation, the only source of the true ridiculous, which can be manifested through vanity (the art of pretending to be something beyond what one is for approval) or hypocrisy (the art of pretending to be something contrary to what one is to escape censorship). "From the discovery of this affectation arises the ridiculous, which always strikes the reader with surprise and pleasure". Furthermore:

> Now, from affectation only, the misfortunes and calamities of life, or the imperfections of nature, may become the objects of ridicule. Surely he hath a very ill-framed mind who can look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves: nor do I believe any man living, who meets a dirty fellow riding through the streets in a cart, is struck with an idea of the ridiculous from it; but if he should see the same figure descend from his coach and six, or bolt from his chair with his hat under his arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with justice. (FIELDING, 1958, p. xxv).

People in themselves do not provoke laughter, but when they pretend to be what they are not, we laugh. The deviation from what is expected, the breaking of expectations, the denaturalization of the natural... such expressions summarize the comic content present in affectation. The doctrine of laughter is a true masquerade in which all mankind dances. Why, if the comic as affectation allows Fielding to narrowly restrict himself to the description of nature, then we conclude that pretense is the human essence, that is natural for us to be unnatural. Men constantly pretend to be what they are not; they do not act according to what is expected of them at several moments. Thus, not only can fiction represent reality because both are marked by pretense, but also reality itself is defined by different "fictions" that men create for themselves in order to survive. *Homo sapiens* is born alongside *homo fictus*.

In *Joseph Andrews*, characters use affectation for different purposes. When her invectives are refused by Joseph, Lady Booby pretends not to be interested in the boy anymore, although her behavior eventually betrays her. In "Chapter XIV" (Book I) there's a gentleman who, imbued with the deepest vanity, pretends to have medical knowledge in order to impress other gentlemen; he is soon discovered and unmasked by a surgeon, for the amusement of others. In the story of Leonora and Horatio, Bellarmine counterfeits love for Leonora when in fact he is

not interested in her, since her father cannot pay the dowry. Finally, Mr. Adams shows himself as an illustrious and literary man, certain of his sermons and his pedagogy. However, he is very naive and is deceived throughout the narrative. Similarly, Joseph Andrews' innocence and delicacy contrast with his surprisingly aggressive manners, as in his battle against the hounds that attack Mr. Adams.

These examples show how the affectation portrayed in Fielding's fiction is not so different from what we find in reality. Mankind acts like this all the time, perhaps by impulse, perhaps by impetus. Fielding's task of imitating reality gains its maximum potential when we deduce that reality is also permeated by imitation. Humanity is broken into its multiple masks, which are fit according to necessity. That's what justifies the emphasis on the so called "mixed-character" as proposed by Fielding in *Tom Jones*. Since the human being is not one in itself and is neither completely good nor completely evil, in the same way characters should be. Accordingly, if there is no inherently authentic or virtuous character, the behavior of someone like Pamela, in Fielding's conception, can only be seen as affectation, which justifies the creation of Shamela.

In Fielding's work, there is a refined theatrical vocabulary that points to his experience as a playwright. Thus, when we relate affectation to words such as "mask", "pretense" and "theatricality" we do not evoke a universe unknown to the author. On the contrary, in *Tom Jones*, he even compares the world to a theater stage, his characters to actors and his readers to the audience. Even before that, his debut as a writer considers the notion of mask and pretense as behaviors inherent in the social way of life. In 1728, he began his literary career by publishing his first poem "The Masquerade", which presents a state of worldwide confusion marked by the wearing of masks, by pretense and by hypocrisy. Life here is a heap of incoherencies which lies in a madman's frantic skull:

> THE MASQUERADE
>
> As in a madman's frantic skull
> When pale-faced Luna is at full
> In a wild confusion lies
> A heap of incoherencies
> So here in one confusion hurled
> Seem all nations of the world
> Cardinals, quakers, judges dance
> Grim turks are coy, and nuns advance
> Grave churchman here at hazard play
> Cinque-ace ten pound - done, quater-tray
> Known prudes there, libertines we find
> Who masque the face, t'unmasque the mind.
> (FIELDING, 2013, p. 63963).

In the same year, Fielding debuts his first play, *Love in several masques*, which deals with love and marriage. The morality of the play, roughly speaking, lies in the valorization of true love, which must be tested, since hypocrisy reigns in human behavior: "But still, ye generous maids, beware, / Since hypocrites to heaven there are" (FIELDING, 2013, p. 37132). Regardless of the literary genre in which he wrote, Fielding portrayed reality as a sort of fictionalization process

manifested in the creation of different masks. His specific role as a novelist was, paradoxically, to use fiction to represent human nature through laughter "not to expose one pitiful wretch to the small and contemptible circle of his acquaintance; but to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavour to reduce it" (FIELDING, 1958, p. 167). Art creates empathy while showing ourselves mirrored in a work of fiction.

In terms of the conception both of humor and of the comedian's function, Henry Fielding and Luigi Pirandello approach each other vehemently, despite the temporal and spatial distance that separates them. For Pirandello (1996, p. 50), the function of the humorist is different from that of the sociologist: "While a sociologist describes social life as he objectively observes it, the humorist, armed with his sharp intuition, shows and reveals how appearances are vastly different from what goes on in his associates unconscious". The comedian has the ability to reveal affectation and show how we create artifices to look different than we are or think we are. In addition, Pirandello, like Fielding, sees simulation or dissimulation like a dominant behavior in the human species:

> The soul of our race - or the collectivity of which we are part - lives in each individual soul. **The pressures of others judgment, of other people's ways of feeling and acting, are felt by us in the unconscious. As in the world, social simulation and dissimulation dominate.** They are less noticed the more common they become. **In the same way we simulate and dissimulate with ourselves, splitting or even multiplying ourselves**. We resent that need to appear different from what we really are which is a form of social life. We shun any analysis which, revealing vanity, would awaken the bite of our conscience and humiliate us in front of ourselves. **But the humorist makes this analysis for us. He can even assume the job of unmasking all vanities and representing society.**

Provided with a technical vocabulary typical of a post-Freudian world, Pirandello presents reality as a constant invention. Humans pretend all the time, even if they do not perceive it. The comedian has the illustrious role of unmasking all vanities so that we can see concealment in us. Pirandello did not see the individual so detached from the universal, since the predisposition to pretense is something that unites us as human beings until the moment in which death comes with the definitive mask, the veil that covers our faces and cannot be removed. Pirandello also says that different wills coexist and compete in the same person. How can we not see Fielding's mixed-character theory as an outline of this, rudely anticipating what Freud would say much later? For an author whose emphasis falls almost entirely on social types, Fielding understood the human psyche well.

Both Fielding and Pirandello seem to agree on one more aspect: human nature seems to vehemently value appearance. Since Fielding develops his novels from an aristocratic perspective, the issue of dress and codes of conduct as social markers is of the utmost importance, because these are also masks, by which many show off their vanities. How can one not think of Mrs. Grave-airs in *Joseph Andrews*, a snobbish woman who refuses to travel with Joseph and attempts to obliterate,

through clothing and behavior, her parentage's origin (her father once was a lower servant)? The differences between high and low people are not only issues of birth, but also of dress. In "Chapter XIII" of Book II, the narrator ponders that "high people signify no other than people of fashion, and low people those of no fashion" (FIELDING, 1958, p. 136). As much as he acknowledges that the term "person of fashion" is related to birth and accomplishments, the narrator recovers the primeval meaning of the expression: "in reality, nothing more was originally meant by a person of fashion than a person who drest himself in the fashion of the times". Consideration is then tied to appearance. Well considered are those who dress better. Both affectation and clothing are linked to artificiality because they cover the natural and paint our contours from the eyes of others, as well-exemplified in "O espelho" by Machado de Assis.

Thus, birth itself is not enough. Although Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews are gentlemen by birth without knowing it, this inherent characteristic of theirs is only valued as soon as others recognize this position, serving as a pragmatic resource for the conclusion of the plot. They do not evolve by personal merit, but by the consideration of others, which arises when the truth about their origins comes to light. Hence, the route of the two novels is the discovery of identity not as subjectivity and particularity, but as the status of belonging to a class. There is no space for characters who (as a Crusoe or a Pamela, for instance) survive on merit and effort, since merit is already determined at birth. As much as life is marked by the exchange of masks, there are certain masks that, from an aristocratic perspective, are definitive. The one of heir is one such case. For heirs, just to be born means to receive consideration. Tom and Joseph are exceptions, since they have been born, but do not have the due consideration, which will come as a reward for them in the end of their journeys.

Fielding develops his plot respecting the Aristotelian principle of Catharsis, Peripeteia and Discovery. For Aristotle, Discovery is aligned with the recognition of parental relations. Moreover, the best Discovery is that which occurs along with the Peripeteia, which means the change of fortune to its opposite according to the rules of necessity and verisimilitude. These principles justifies the conclusion of such novels while demonstrating both the classical roots and the conservative aspects of Fielding's work, which seems to portray the reality in which social mobility does not exist by self improvement.

So far we have emphasized how in *Joseph Andrews* fiction and reality are intertwined through humor. The social behaviors observed in the human species are transposed to the novel, whose characters serve as a sample for the dilemmas of life. Pretense is then something inherent in the two poles, and questions of truth manifest in the book despite its explicitly fictional and metalinguistic characteristic. With all this in mind, we still need to focus more closely on an essential figure for such aesthetic result: the narrator.

Paying attention strictly to the narrative mechanisms employed in the novel, the narrator also has its moments of humor intimately connected to affectation and surprise. The comic emerges when we find ourselves, as readers, before a narrative that turns to what it should not be and, in doing so, exposes the dialectic between the classical tradition and the novel as a new genre. The narrator consciously parodies other classical and contemporary texts. It is as if his feathers were constantly changing as he writes; he uses feathers of different shapes, sizes

and colors, but does not hesitate to either alternate them or even break them. The narrator is then the true harlequin in the show of writing. Genuinely human, he alternates between different masks, creating a dialogism between texts and traditions, as already done in *Shamela*. Perhaps therein lies Cervantes's greatest influence on Fielding, for it is enough to recover the parodic and self-referential aspect of *Don Quixote* in order to understand what we are dealing with.

There are many examples in which this narrative technique is employed, Firstly, there's the imitation of the epistolary novel itself, when Joseph writes his letters to Pamela. While flirting with the rhetoric behind such genre, the narrator insists on denying it. In "Chapter XIII" of Book I, for instance, Joseph is ill after being beaten by thieves on his way home. While resting in an inn, he starts to talk to himself as if he were writing a letter to Pamela. What could be seen as an example of greater emotional eloquence assumes a strictly prosaic character soon after, when the surgeon finds out that Joseph is delirious with a high fever. The refusal of the presuppositions of such genre guarantees the narrator's total autonomy; he wants to tell the story without the intermediation of individual voices apart from his control. The refusal still lies in Fanny's inability to read and write (which prevents the exchange of letters between lovers). The moments in which female characters are deprived of paper and ink in *Tom Jones*, as when Sophia is imprisoned by her own father, are other examples.

Similarly, the narrator creates a supernatural atmosphere typical of romance and then frustrates it with the most prosaic explanation possible. This is what happens in "Chapter 2" of Book 3 when Joseph, Fanny and Mr. Abraham Adams are lost in the middle of a forest during the night. They think they are being followed by forest spirits, who are actually sheep-stealers. In *Tom Jones*, something similar occurs in "Chapter 12" of Book 12, when Partridge and Tom are faced with strangers who could be Beelzebu or Satan, but who actually are a company of gypsies.

Finally, perhaps the most paradigmatic example is the parody of classical genres, for, unlike Defoe and Richardson, Fielding incorporated his writings with deep roots in the classical tradition and in traditional plots. We can immediately think about the flirtation with an Oedipal state at the end of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, when their protagonists think they are involved in incest. It is only a lapse, since the narrator exposes such possibility, but soon after demonstrates that such a classic paradigm will not recur in his novels. Another important genre for the work is that of the Greek epic. Joseph Andrews' battle against the hounds that chase Parson Adams in "Chapter 6" of Book 3 is a great example. To report such a strictly epic and unparalleled feat, the narrator resolves, in the fashion of the ancient epic, to invoke the muse so that she narrates that part of the story: "Now thou, whoever, thou art, whether a muse, or by what other name soever thou choosest to be called, who presidest over biography, and hast inspired all the writers [...]" (FIELDING, 1958, p. 214). The comic emerges from this clash between the classical and the modern, since "classical values are infused into the modish form of the novel and brought up to date; or, perhaps, modern values are made to look comic when held in literary tension with classical forms which hold a ruefully intermittent sway" (BAINES, 2007, p. 52). Such a scene, as well as that of Molly Seagrim attacked by the crowd in front of the church in *Tom Jones*, serve as an example of mock-heroic descriptions that emphasize better than ever the Fieldian narrator's ability of dividing himself into many.

If one of the aspects that best define the novel lies, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1982, p. 322-323), in its ability to maintain constant dialogue with other genres, parodying them and exposing their conventionalism ("It squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them"), then Henry Fielding is an accomplished example of a novelist who, despite his attachment to tradition, knew how to use in his favor the formal malleability of the genre he developed. Through a humor that was often acid and always imbued with moralizing intentions, Fielding was able to grasp the value of fiction as a means of capturing human essence without hiding behind the shadow of factuality. Fiction and reality are seen in their idiosyncrasies and interpenetrations, since pretense is inherent in both. So in the masquerade of life, Fielding is the photographer. In the masquerade of fiction, Fielding is the host.

Notas

[1] The pseudonym Conny Keyber itself seems a mixture of Middleton's name with the name of another writer, Colley Cibber, also quoted in *Joseph Andrews*.

[2] It is interesting how Shamela always refers to virtue as "vartue", with the letter "a". In this linguistic corruption, Fielding evinces the emptiness of some moral discourses and relativizes the supposed authenticity of Pamela's feelings.

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Para citar este artigo

SILVA, Raphael Valim da Mota. The masquerade: humor, reality and fiction in Henry Fielding’s works. *Miguilim – Revista Eletrônica do Netlli*, Crato, v. 8, n. 2, p. 287-299, maio-ago. 2019.

O autor

Raphael Valim da Mota Silva é graduando em Letras com dupla habilitação em Português e Inglês pela Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo (FFLCH-USP). Atua na investigação dos seguintes temas: literatura brasileira, literatura portuguesa, literaturas de língua inglesa e literatura comparada. Desenvolveu pesquisa financiada pelo Programa Unificado de Bolsas da USP acerca da lírica e da prosa contista de Mário de Andrade e escreveu artigos sobre obras literárias de língua inglesa. Atualmente, pesquisa, também sob financiamento da Universidade de São Paulo, as relações entre os romances de José Saramago e Victor Hugo.