

Female Victimizers in English Fiction : A study on Henry Fielding

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Abstract

A study of Henry Fielding's novels, particularly "Tom Jones" and "Joseph Andrews", highlights those female characters who, by way of their indulgence in immoral life, not only corrupt themselves but also those young men who fall a victim to their bewitching immoral ways of life. Hence, the appellation 'female victimizers' can rightly be applied to them. In the famous novel "Tom Jones", even Tom Jones falls a victim to Molly Seagrim's advances. In "Joseph Andrews" the role of Mrs. Slipslop and that of Lady Booby is noticeable in this regard. The present paper aims at a more detailed study of these characters in Henry Fielding's fiction.

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The term 'Female Victimizers' is quite appropriate in respect of some of the women characters portrayed by Henry Fielding in his novels. It implies those lady figures in Henry Fielding's fiction who constantly indulge in immoral life; and thus corrupt a number of young men who fall a victim to their sluttish ways. In almost all of his novels we come across these women characters who attract attention by their bewitching appearances and activities. In this paper we shall study the female victimizers in the novels 'Tom Jones' and 'Joseph Andrews', the two famous novels by Henry Fielding.

The novel 'Tom Jones' represents the corrupt lady characters- Molly Seagrim, Mrs. Waters and Lady Bellaston. In the novel 'Joseph Andrews' we find Lady Booby as a female victimizer. In the novel 'Jonathan Wild the Great', Miss Laetitia Snap is a female victimizer. In the pamphlet 'Shamila' a female victimizer of that name is presented. Molly Seagrim is the second daughter of Black George. She seduced Tom. She often threw herself in his way. She did it in a way that Tom thought himself to have won her heart. But the truth was that he became a victim of her passion. When she is big with a child, which is the result of her affair with a young man called Will Barner, Tom is suspected to be the father of the child and he confesses the charge. He does not know that he has been entrapped into the affair by Molly Seagrim. Tom speaks to Allworthy to this effect, "whatever be my faith, let me succeed in my intercessions for the poor girl, I confess I have corrupted her..." Mrs. Honour's opinion of Molly Seagrim is apt- "She seemed to me to look like a slut, and to be sure, she had laid the child to young Mr Jones." That Molly is a whore is obvious to Tom Jones, when he catches Molly with Philosopher Square in her room. Having been forsaken by Tom Jones, Molly turned her affection to Square, "She then poured forth a vast profusion of tenderness towards her new lover, turned she had said to Jones and Jones himself into ridicule and vowed though he had had the possession of her person, that none but Squire had ever been master of her heart."

Jenny Jones, later known as Mrs. Waters was a maid servant. She was a lady of easy-going virtue. When she used to learn Latin from Partridge, a poor school master, Anne, his wife, one day charged her of being a whore. Once, while teaching her, the school master was leaning over her. At another time she smiled and blushed at Partridge's saying something in Latin. This makes Anne suspicious. In Book IX, Jenny reappears as Mrs. Waters. Some English ensign attempted to rape her in the wood in the hills on the way to Upton. Tom was near about this place. He turned and rescued her, but she herself became the seducer of Tom. Tom takes her to Upton Inn. When Tom was busy in satisfying his hunger with beef at the dining table, Mrs Waters employed all her amorous tools to charm Tom. She ogled all the time at Tom. She gave a passionate smile to Tom. Tom was ensnared in the amorous display. He succumbs to her charms. Thus, Mrs Waters seduces Tom. Tom is victimized and seduced by her. In short, "no sooner had the amorous parley ended and the lady had unmasked the royal battery, by carelessly letting her

handkerchief drop from her neck than the heart of Mr Jones was entirely taken and the fair conqueror enjoyed the usual fruit of her victory."

Lady Bellaston is introduced in Book VIII in the novel "Tom Jones". She is presented as a thoroughly corrupt city woman. She is a widow or a divorcee. She is wealthy. She is middle-aged. She uses her affluence to keep young men to satisfy her lust. She is in the autumn of her life, but in order to keep her sex appeal 'she wore all the gaiety of youth both in her dress and manner; nay, she continued still to maintain the roses in her cheeks...'

Lady Bellaston is a sex maniac. When Sophia Western runs away to London and lives with her, she uses her as a bait to attract Tom. She sends a masquerade ticket to Tom. At the masquerade Tom searches for Sophia. Suddenly a lady slapped him on his back and mentions the name of Sophia to him. It was Lady Bellaston. She took him aside and began to flirt with him. Tom follows her to her place where he discovers her identity. Here, she seduces Tom and makes him the promise to find out Sophia. Lady Bellaston gives Tom 50 pounds to pay for her sexual gratification. She is, thus, an example of a dissolute aristocratic city woman. Lady Bellaston's affair with Tom comes to a close in Book XV. Nightingale, a gay young man about town, convinces Tom of Lady Bellaston's affair with other men. Nightingale informed him that he was not the first one upon whom she conferred obligation of such kind. She confers such obligations on the men with whom she is infatuated.

Fielding's novel 'Joseph Andrews' shows Lady Booby as a female victimizer. She is the wife of Sir Thomas Booby. With her appearance in Book I, chapter ii, she gives us the impression of being a dissolute base lady. The handsomeness and youth of Joseph at the age of 17 draws her attention. She feels castivated. She makes Joseph her foot man who often carries her prayer book to the Church, waits for her at tea-table, goes on her errands. She takes him to London to make him look more pretty and with the intention to seek freedom with him in isolation. Mrs Slipslop speaks to Parson Adams to this effect - "she is going to London very concisely and I am confident would not leave Joey behind on any account." In London she seeks liberties with him. When she is out on a walk with him, she leans on his arms, takes his hand and presses it hard pretending the fear of tumbling. This shows her weakness for sex.

In Book I, chapter V, Lady Booby attempts to seduce Joseph. Hardly after six days of Thomas Booby's death, Lady Booby admits Joseph to her room and makes him sit down by her side. Naked in bed she lays her hand on his hand and asks him abruptly if he has ever been in love. Then she exposes her white bare bosom to win him. Her wicked attention to seduce Joseph is clear when she speaks, 'can you keep a secret my Joey? Again - 'what am I doing, I have trusted myself with a man alone naked in bed,...' Lady booby gives more explicit hints, 'what would you think Joseph, if I admitted you to kiss me?'

Again - 'Pugh! that I am to answer to myself, but would not you insist on more? Would you be contented with a kiss? Would not your inclinations be all on fire rather by such a favour?'

Conclusion: Thus, here, an effort has been made to put forth the different roles played by the female victimizers in the novel 'Tom Jones' and 'Joseph Andrews'. After this study, it must be noted that such characters are not only found in Fielding's novels, but they are also the replicas of those characters to be found in the contemporary British society.

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