

## Compare and contrast Richardson and Fielding as Novelists

“...written, though, perhaps not intended, with such explicitness [don't be alarmed, my dear!]”

-Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*

"I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species."

- Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*

Novel as a work of art flourished in the eighteenth century. Though Defoe and Swift prepared the ground, it was Samuel Richardson who founded the novel tradition in English literature with his instant-successful novel *Pamela* (1740) followed by *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. Following Richardson there emerged a host of novelists including Henry Fielding who achieved grand success in this field with *Joseph Andrews*-a parody of *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*- a comic-epic in prose and *Amelia*, a novel different in tone.

### The common grounds shared by Richardson and Fielding:

**Same Theory of the Novel:** Both Richardson and Fielding advocated the same theory of the novel. To them depicting the snares and pitfalls of life was not enough. Instead both insisted on providing a positive example which others could imitate.

**Novels as ‘Histories’:** Both imagined their works as "histories," and subscribed to the common neo-classical principle of showing general nature rather than the particular or topical. Richardson’s *Clarissa* is the "History of a Young Lady." In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding tells us that he means to describe a species, not an individual.

**Stock Figures and Situations:** In their novels, the characters, however different their treatment, are comprised of the same stock figures: the virgin, the prostitute, the good man, the rake, the town lady, the fop, the scheming servant and so on. The protagonist follows the same route, beginning in either the felicity of a country estate or domestic circle, through some form of bondage and trial, ending in all three of the cardinal virtues -benevolence, prudence, and chastity.

### Differences:

**Outlook:** Richardson's outlook was essentially feminine. *Pamela* presents the picture of a young girl in lowly life, pressed by the dishonourable attentions of her employer's son. On the other hand, Fielding was decidedly masculine in treating male chastity of Joseph Andrews, a boy servant subjected to the torture of his mistress, Lady Booby.

**Art of Characterization:** Richardson, remarkable for the psychological insight, makes microscopic analysis of his characters slowly- touch by touch and line by line. He is not only the first novelist of character, but also the first novelist of female character. When *Pamela* came out the ladies became so obsessed with Pamela that they could try to persuade Richardson to let Pamela do what they wanted –

"Oh, Mr. Richardson, please, don't let her die"

On the other hand, Fielding's comic purpose necessitates the external approach to the characters. He never attempted to lay bare the soul of his character. Tom, for example, is a type of good but hot blooded young man, Amelia, of a devoted and suffering wife.

**Moral Purpose:** Richardson is a teacher with a strong moral purpose. In his novels righteousness is rewarded and sin is punished either here (in the case of Pamela) or hereafter (in the case of Clarissa). Rejecting the morality and value systems of high society, Fielding saw England's virtue as a sham. In *Shamela* (1741) Fielding portrayed the hollowness of the kind of virtue Richardson had praised in *Pamela*. In *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Joseph, loses his job because he rejects the advances of the aristocrat, Lady Booby.

**Plot Construction:** The first English novelist to give great importance to plot construction was Fielding who provides an organic unity to multiple episodes. *Tom Jones* is a marvel of organic plot construction. Richardson's plot on the contrary is always slight, shapeless and having little complexity. It serves merely as a framework of a study of the soul of character.

**Manner of Storytelling:** While Richardson's method is epistolary, which develops action through letters written among various characters, Fielding uses some features of the "picaresque" tradition. He created a new area of novelistic experience, one which would lead on to the major comic novelists of the early Victorian age. Byron rightly calls him 'The prose Homer of human nature.'

**Thematic Treatment:** Richardson's social pictures are confined to middle class drawing room. On the other hand, Fielding draws on the picaresque tradition to involve the characters in a great variety of adventures revelling in the English landscapes and in the manners of the people.

**Temperament:** Fielding's novels are "comic-epics in prose" for he adopts a mock-heroic style in describing the numerous scuffles among the characters. Richardson on the other hand is more interested in instructing rather than making fun. His deliberate and detailed method enables him to give maximum effect to the sentimental note.

**Tone:** Humour, one of the predominant features of Fielding's novel is frank and open revealing the weakness and idiosyncrasies of his characters. In Richardson's novels we do not find Fielding's tolerant way of looking at things.

**Virtue:** *Shamela* reveals that Fielding is more absolute in his idea of virtue than Richardson who seems to regard female chastity as an almost divine quality which cannot be contaminated by fleshly lusts, attractions, and ambivalence.

**Summing up:**

From the above discussion, it is evident that Richardson and Fielding stand as two exponents in the history of English novel, while one of them is the mighty pioneer, the other a successful master. The anonymous author of *Charlotte Summer* writes:

"But the Discovery [of when to laugh and when to cry] was reserved for this Age, and there are two Authors now living in this Metropolis, who have found out the Art, and both brother Biographers, the one of *Tom Jones*, and the other of *Clarissa*."