



Henry Fielding Biography

(1707–1754)

Henry Fielding was an 18th century English writer and magistrate who established the mechanisms of the modern novel through such works as *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*.

Synopsis

Henry Fielding was born on April 22, 1707, in Sharpham Park, England. After beginning his writing career as a playwright and editor of satirical publications, he found his footing by penning *Joseph Andrews* and other parodies. Through later works such as *Tom Jones*, Fielding earned acclaim for helping establish the foundations of the modern novel. He died on October 8, 1754, in Lisbon, Portugal.

Early Years and Career

Henry Fielding was born on April 22, 1707, in Sharpham Park, Somerset, England. He attended Eton College, where he studied classical authors and emerged ready to tackle the literary world. Fielding finished his first play in 1728, one of more than two dozen he penned in the span of a decade. He then enrolled at the University of Leiden in Holland, but left to return to London in 1729.

Unable to find meaningful work, Fielding began studying law at Middle Temple and became a barrister. In the meantime, he married Charlotte Craddock and edited the *Champion; or, British Mercury*, a satirical political publication.

First Novels

In 1740, Samuel Richardson published *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*, which was an instant success. However, Fielding found the work objectionable and set out to write a parody of it, which he called *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741). Although the book was published anonymously and Fielding never claimed credit, it is generally accepted that he was the author. He followed with *Joseph Andrews* (1742), another parody published anonymously, and *The History of the Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743).

Despite his productivity, Fielding endured significant personal loss in these years. His father passed away in 1741, followed by one of his daughters in 1742 and his wife in 1744. He married his wife's maid in 1747 after the two grew close during a period of grieving.

Later Works and Death

Fielding's legal training was at last put to good use in the late 1740s, when he was appointed justice of the peace for Westminster and then magistrate of Middlesex. Although he devoted significant energy to combating crime, Fielding delivered the celebrated *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* in 1749, a work considered one of the English language's great early novels. The somber *Amelia*, his final novel, was published in 1751.

Fielding's health was in serious decline by this point. He traveled by sea to Portugal with his wife and daughter in the summer of 1754, but never returned to England, as he passed away in Lisbon on October 8 of that year.