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Notes for classroom teaching

B. A. Part - II, Paper - IV

Henry Fielding as a Satirist

Poet, playwright, journalist and novelist, Henry Fielding produced a striking variety of works in his literary career. A large portion of his literary career and his works are filled with satirical tone. The numerous farces, burlesque and comedies Fielding produced as a dramatist relied heavily for their appeal on the social, literary and political satire they contained. The irony and derision in these works was directed at specific elements in his society which Fielding felt merited exposure. His tone was that of the Augustan satirist ridiculing the folly he witnessed around him.

Fielding's first attempts at prose were also satirical, with many of the targets the same as those he had attacked in his plays. However the nature of his satire began to change, to take on moral overtones as he began to concentrate on larger, more fundamental problems concerning man and his relation to society. Jonathan Wild, Fielding's most sustained satire in the Augustan manner

It is the best of his works to fully reveal his author's preoccupation with moral issues of his day. In The Satire Fielding's concern is with the principles that govern human behaviour and the whole question of good and evil in man's nature.

This type of moral satire is carried further in Tom Jones, where Fielding sets out not only to criticise society & satirise but also portray a way of life as a norm of behaviour for the common man. He is no longer satirist concentrating on the evil in society, for as the novelist he must portray society with all its intricate blendings of good and evil. Even in his comic novels, however, Fielding never completely abandoned the role of satirist, and it is changing nature of the satire in his work as he switched from dramatist to novelist that made his work vibrant and lively.