



## FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

### **Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci Jaromíra Lelka „The Novelist as a Moral Physician: Fielding, Hume and the Moral Sense School of Thought“**

---

This BA thesis focuses on *The History of Tom Jones; A Foundling* (1749), the most important novel by the canonical eighteenth-century writer Henry Fielding, who not only paved the way for the rising genre of the novel but also, through his classical learning and vast erudition vividly represented the philosophical atmosphere of the time. In the submitted BA thesis, the novel about Tom Jones is read for its treatment of the interrelationship of ethics and sensibility. The novel is put into its literary context (novels of sentiment and novels of sensibility; perhaps a clearer distinction could be drawn: it is obvious that a novel such as *Clarissa* is vastly different in focus from e.g. Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and other texts from the 1760s-70s) and the philosophical one (moral sense, Scottish Enlightenment, and its merging of ethics and aesthetics). Close analysis of the novel and the ensuing discussion of Hume show the complexity of Fielding's thought as a philosophizing novelist.

First I need to mention the most striking aspect of the thesis. Some readers may respond negatively to the style and register in which the thesis is written. Some may deem it too stylized, ornate and affected, or indeed even too colloquial (the reader is left in stiches etc.). However, I personally find the style quite refreshing in contrast to the usual sober and dry academic style of writing, and quite appropriate to a discussion of Fielding. E.g. the 1950s bringing a "New Look" to Fielding studies etc. I suppose Fielding himself would have appreciated such wit. On the other hand, as a meticulous stylist, he would have objected to the rather sloppy editing and proof-reading. There are approximately two to three errors per page (articles, dates mixed up on page 10, the Czech abstract is a disaster etc).



## FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Overall, I find the thesis a very interesting and thought-provoking piece. Below are some questions and comments that were inspired by the reading:

- I have some doubts whether Squire Western ought to be called a hypocrite and be grouped in the same category with the Blifils and Thwackum (pp. 32-33). Mr Lelek himself concedes that he is a very complex character (see page 56-7).
- I appreciate the footnote about Barry Lyndon on page 39. It is nevertheless rather surprising that only the movie is mentioned and not Thackeray's original book (1844). Also, Barry Lyndon himself is more reminiscent of the picaresque heroes of Tobias Smollett.
- On page 52 Mr Lelek mentions Fielding's "prudential moral philosophy". How does the concept of prudence (defined as careful forethought and reflection of consequences) connect with Fielding's idea of moral sense?
- Hume's notion of social utility and his ideas about duty are inspiring. Can we apply them to the character of Tom Jones and his coming to terms with his proper place in society (as an heir of Squire Allworthy in all senses)?
- Perhaps rather than "corresponds", it may be more appropriate to use the words "leads to" (page 54). It is fitting that Adam Smith is the last great representative of the moral sense school. His *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is the last major work to admit the sentimental aim of trying systematically to link morality and emotion. Where did philosophical energy move from then on? (e.g Godwin?). Adam Smith himself in *The Wealth of Nations* sounds more like Hobbes than Shaftesbury (to misquote: we owe our dinner to the butcher and baker who are driven not by benevolence but their own self-interest).

I find the submitted BA thesis to fully comply with the required standards. It fittingly confirms its aims as laid out: Both Hume and Fielding are a "bridge between literature and philosophy". If I find fault, it is not in argumentation, but in proportion (I would have appreciated a more detailed treatment of the novel and more textual analysis) and in the



FACULTY OF ARTS  
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

formal, i.e. mostly linguistic, elements. However, despite these issues, I certainly recommend the thesis for defence with the preliminary mark of very good.

**Doporučuji práci k obhajobě s předběžným hodnocením VELMI DOBŘE.**

V Praze dne 10. 6. 2019

.....

PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.