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Introductory Critical Studies

HENRY FIELDING

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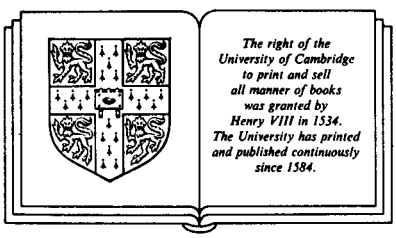

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Preface

This book is intended in the main for students and any other readers who would like some orientation as they come to Henry Fielding's novels. In the case of university students the study of Fielding will probably form part of a survey of eighteenth-century literature or its major novelists. Some of this book is in fact adapted from lectures I gave until recently at the University of Utrecht, as parts of precisely such courses. My criticism, like anyone else's, has its biases, but I have tried to subordinate them to the need to clarify and explain, to suggest ways of approaching Fielding rather than present packaged interpretations. It is not my purpose to parade modish critical approaches, so readers anxious to discover the feminist's Fielding, the deconstructionist's Fielding, or the neo-Marxist's Fielding, will catch at best only accidental glimpses of him here. This book is meant to introduce Fielding's major work.

Although a book of this kind is not the place for detailed historical scholarship, the literature it discusses is richer if it can be placed in its cultural and political contexts. Within the limited space available, these shape my account of Fielding's work, as they shaped his development as a versatile writer: playwright, journalist, pamphleteer, and legal essayist, as well as glamorous novelist.

The critical work listed in my bibliography to some extent reflects and influences my own writing. However, my account of Fielding is not a synthesis of modern criticism, even though it may look like that because, to save space, I have not used footnotes. Authors whose work I quote or refer to in the text (usually with a short title and page reference) are listed in my bibliography, as are some others who are not actually quoted.

A substantial portion of my manuscript, all my notes, and even some of my copies of Fielding's books were stolen in the spring of 1984 by a New York thief. When he found out the value of what he had taken, he probably cursed me as much as I cursed him. But, in circumstances which I do not recommend, I learned very quickly who my friends were. For the support that has enabled me to finish writing this book, it is my pleasure to thank Jerry and Rita Beasley, Bill and Marlene Park, Carol Varey, and Richard Varey, as well as

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numerous others whose offers of help I never in fact took up. My thanks too to the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, whose genial staff let me take over a computer terminal to process my words. And finally, I am very grateful to Terry Moore, of Cambridge University Press, for being such a forbearing editor.

Fielding would have approved: he used to celebrate such good nature.

Los Angeles, 1985 SIMON VAREY

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A note on texts

I have quoted from the volumes published so far in the Wesleyan edition of Fielding's *Works*. Until this series has been completed, one can easily consult most of Fielding's writings in *Complete Works of Henry Fielding*, edited by W. E. Henley, 16 volumes (1903, reprinted 1967). However, because these unannotated texts were not very well edited, I prefer not to quote from them, and instead have used either first editions, or modern editions, often designed for use in classrooms, of individual works whose texts are accurate and notes helpful.

After textual accuracy, my main concern is accessibility. I have given book and chapter references from the novels, act and scene references if possible from the plays. This means that readers can usually track down quotations without much trouble even if they are using different editions. In the case of the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, which is not so conveniently divided, I have given page references to the rare 'second' edition and added references to the Everyman reprint.

In abbreviated form, these are the other editions I have used:

The Wesleyan edition for: *Miscellanies*, vol. 1 (1972); *Joseph Andrews* (1967); *Tom Jones* (1974); *Amelia* (1983).

Everyman edition for *A Journey from this World to the Next* (1973).

Penguin edition for *Jonathan Wild* (1982).

Oxford English Novels edition of *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, for *Shamela* (1970).

Regents Restoration Drama Series for: *The Author's Farce* (1966); *The Grub-Street Opera* (1968); *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1967).

First editions of all Fielding's other works, unless otherwise specified.

The bibliography at the end of this book gives full details of all these editions.

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