

Novel

Second year

JOSEPH ANDREWS

AS A MOCK HEROIC EPIC IN PROSE

Henry Fielding claimed that his novel Joseph Andrews is a “comic epic in prose”. In general terms, a comic epic is a sort of a parody. In Joseph Andrews many of the style, plot, and character elements of the epic genre are present, but there are humorous changes that mockingly place the Epic in an ordinary light. Epic-style speeches are reduced to scandalous subplots. The journey taken by our hero covers the English countryside, not all of Earth and the Heavens. Epic battles are replaced with barroom brawls. These, among many others, are ways that Henry Fielding was able to write an epic and set it in 18th century England.

The very beginning of Joseph Andrews uses some substitutions for the way traditional epics began. Most epics started out with a statement of theme by the author. The very first paragraph of Joseph Andrews is in Fielding’s own voice stating, “It is a trite but true Observation, that Examples work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts...A good Man therefore is a standing Lesson to all his Acquaintance...” (61). What we, as readers, can take from that is we are about to embark on a novel of moral instruction with a “good man” as our example to follow.