

Part Two
The World of the
Eighteenth-Century Novel

Why Fanny Can't Read: *Joseph Andrews* and the (Ir)relevance of Literacy

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How simple are our notions about literacy. How directly and linearly we conceive its consequences. How stark and inflexible are our assumptions and expectations about it. And how deeply we hold our faith in its powers.

Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy*¹

Should everyone learn how to read and write? Many eighteenth-century authors did not think so, for it was not yet taken for granted that literacy was an inherent good for all social groups. Schooling made sense for those who were likely to obtain careers that required specific educational qualifications or who needed it to govern or rule. But it was not only unnecessary but undesirable for those “born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life,”² wasting time that should be devoted to the larger social good. As Bernard Mandeville wrote in 1723:

Reading, Writing and Arithmetick are very necessary to those, whose Business require such Qualifications, but where Peoples Livelihood has no dependence on these Arts, they are very pernicious to the Poor, who are forc'd to get their Daily Bread by their Daily Labour. Few Children make any progress at School, but at the same time they are capable of being employ'd in some Business or other, so that every Hour those of poor People spend at their Book is so much time lost to the Society. Going to School in comparison to Working is Idleness.³

In England, there was little support for state-sponsored public education, and in rural areas as much as half the population could not read.⁴ Yet older assumptions about literacy as an occupational tool were increasingly challenged by arguments anticipating the modern Western assumption that literacy is a universal good. These shifts are reflected in the gradual transformation of the most common understanding of the

term “literate,” from the older meaning of literate as “learned” (*litteratus*: a person who knew Latin, or was learned) to the most common definition today: that is, having a basic ability to read and write.⁵ In 1699, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge began promoting a system of privately supported charity schools primarily intended to socialize the poor. These schools would teach children the Bible, catechism, and basic arithmetic, and so “save souls, impart moral discipline, and relieve suffering.”⁶ Hopes for personal elevation through increased schooling were encouraged by popular narratives. In his best-selling novel *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), printer-author Samuel Richardson represented female servants’ literacy as an intangible personal property that, properly invested, could turn a bountiful profit.⁷ Another phenomenal bestseller, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1766), published by children’s bookseller John Newbery, relates “the Means by which [little Margery Goodwife] acquired her Learning and Wisdom, and in consequence thereof her Estate.”⁸

Henry Fielding’s novel, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* (1742), was written in the midst of these debates concerning literacy and schooling, and tells us much about the eighteenth century as a key transitional period with links both to modernity and to the past. This essay reads *Joseph Andrews* as a sustained engagement with contemporary debates concerning education, especially the type of education befitting the “lower Orders of Mankind.” Echoing Mandeville’s “Essay on Charity-Schools” as well as John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Fielding challenges key assumptions of arguments for broader schooling. By means of his central characters in both *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela* (1741), he systematically shows that there is no necessary causal relationship between literacy and (i) virtue (his virtuous country lass Fanny Goodwill, the future wife of his hero, can neither read nor write); (ii) moral improvement (the corrupt Shamela Andrews devours books sent to her by her bawd mother and tutor in immorality, Parson Arthur Williams); or (iii) socioeconomic elevation (Parson Abraham Adams, the most “literate” character in *Joseph Andrews*, is patriarch of the most “ragged Family in the Parish,”⁹ and subject to every kind of humiliation and contempt).

Many of the seemingly incidental episodes of *Joseph Andrews* participate in a broader sociocultural debate on education. One of the first things Fielding shows us about his footman hero is his contentment with his minimal schooling. By ten years old, Joseph’s “Education was advanced to Writing and Reading” (1.2.21), but the same year, when he entered into the service of Sir Thomas Booby, his formal education ceased. What additional learning he has gained is the product of his few “Hours of Leisure” and of minutes stolen from his work when he reads “without being perceived”:

Ever since he was in Sir *Thomas*’s Family, he had employed all his Hours of Leisure in reading good Books; that he had read the Bible, the *Whole Duty of Man*, and *Thomas à Kempis*; and that as often as he could, without being perceived, he had studied a great good Book which lay open in the Hall Window. (1.3.24)

Yet when Parson Adams asks Joseph “if he did not extremely regret the want of a liberal Education, and the not having been born of Parents, who might have indulged his Talents and Desire of Knowledge?” Fielding’s hero responds:

he hoped he had profited somewhat better from the Books he had read, than to lament his Condition in this World. That for his part, he was perfectly content with the State to which he was called, that he should endeavour to improve his Talent, which was all required of him, but not repine at his own Lot, nor envy those of his Betters.
(1.3.24–25)

Of this scene, critic Judith Frank observes: “One of the novel’s first acts is to deny Joseph ‘Instruction in *Latin*’ . . . imagining Latin as the engine of social mobility, the novel concertedly refuses him that mode of literacy that would enable a rise in station.” Frank suggests that Fielding “imagines literacy as the engine of upward mobility,”¹⁰ but my argument here is exactly the opposite. *Joseph Andrews* does *not* suggest that literacy or Latin are “engine[s] of upward mobility”; rather, it exposes these as *false* assumptions. Neither literacy or higher learning ensures socioeconomic advancement (as the example of Parson Adams shows). In fact, a surprisingly sustained argument of *Joseph Andrews* is that literacy and/or education – in itself – will get you nowhere.

Frank reads *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* “in light of the pressures exerted upon them by ambivalence over lower-class literacy.”¹¹ While I agree that the issue of lower-class literacy exerts special “pressures” on these texts, I would suggest that they do not show Fielding himself to have been “ambivalent” about this issue. Rather, they suggest that he viewed laboring-class literacy much as Mandeville did: as largely irrelevant, either to the personal happiness of the poor or to the larger social good. In *Joseph Andrews*, education can actually be *detrimental* to the “lower Orders”; one benevolent character, a retired “Sea-Faring Man” of great worldly experience, tells two pointedly similar stories of farm boys tragically educated beyond their rank. Fielding’s satire on those who naïvely link schooling and social advancement works partly through the character of Parson Adams. Fielding’s pedagogue parson is immune to careerism on his own account, but even he is caught up in new-fangled modern foibles concerning schooling. Despite his own and his eldest son’s failure to obtain a secure living through advanced education; despite the stories he hears of unfortunate youths ruined by “over”-education; and despite the many characters he encounters whose schooling seems only to have made them more corrupt, Adams persists in imagining a direct causal relationship between learning, social advancement, and moral improvement, and has grand educational ambitions not only for Joseph but also for his own sons whom he aims to make scholarly parsons like himself.

While Fielding himself was an accomplished Latinist who knew Greek and loved learning, he did not assign unvarying values either to advanced learning or to the basic ability to read and write. Ironically, in refusing our modern faith in

the “consequences” of literacy, Fielding anticipated recent revisionary arguments by major theorists of literacy – challenges to what Harvey J. Graff calls the “literacy myth”:

Until recently, scholarly and popular conceptions of the value of the skills of reading or writing have almost universally followed normative assumptions and expectations of vague but powerful concomitants and effects presumed to accompany changes in the diffusion of literacy. For the last two centuries, they have been intertwined with post-Enlightenment, “liberal” social theories and contemporary expectations of the role of literacy and schooling in socioeconomic development, social order, and individual progress. These important conjunctures constitute what I have come to call a “literacy myth.”¹²

Models of “literacy effects” in twentieth-century development literature and related scholarship attempt to isolate literacy as a variable, then measure its consequences. Growth in literacy is linked to desirable outcomes such as modernization and democratization and to cognitive consequences such as enhanced reasoning and analytic powers.¹³ Yet recently, scholars of literacy have observed a worrying “disparity between theoretical assumptions and empirical findings” in arguments about “literacy-as-a-path-to-development.” This troubling gap has led to questioning of “the grander claims for the radical shift supposedly entailed by the acquisition of literacy” and to heightened efforts to distinguish broad claims for the consequences of literacy from its real significance for particular social groups. Literacy in itself is not necessarily an “agent of change”; rather, “its impact is determined by the manner in which human agency exploits it in a different setting.”¹⁴

Recent challenges to widespread modern assumptions about literacy can help us to understand eighteenth-century debates concerning education in new ways. In turn, eighteenth-century *non*-assumptions about literacy can provide an essential historical dimension that is often lacking in these twentieth-century debates. At the very moment when modern ideas about the “consequences” of literacy first began to be articulated, Fielding challenged assumptions about a *necessary causal relationship* between schooling and any particular outcome whether moral, social, economic, or cognitive. In his fiction, Fielding does not necessarily take one ‘side’ or the other in contemporary debates; while a deeply conservative social thinker himself, he lays out the issues at stake as competing positions, then uses the antithesis he creates as a powerful means for the analysis of complex questions. This essay will read *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, along with Fielding’s social pamphlet *A Proposal For Making an Effectual Provision For the Poor, For Amending their Morals, and for Rendering them useful Members of the Society* (1753), as part of the prehistory of our modern cultural construct of “literacy.” Fielding’s texts provoke a valuable – and for us, counter-intuitive – questioning of the meanings and consequences of literacy at a time when “literacy” was not yet a stable cultural construct with universally agreed meanings.

Fielding and the Emergent Myth of Literacy

In addressing the “Distraction the Nation has labour’d under for some time, the Enthusiastick Passion for Charity-Schools,” Mandeville argued that the withholding of education from the poor was fundamental to national advancement. While twentieth-century development discourse has traditionally linked economic growth to increased literacy, this is the opposite of widely held eighteenth-century views. Most eighteenth-century elites held that the acquisition of literacy by too many would hurt the economy. National “Welfare” was dependent on a large body of cheap laborers ready to work:

The Welfare and Felicity . . . of every State and Kingdom, require that the Knowledge of the Working Poor should be confin’d within the Verge of their Occupations, and never extended (as to things visible) beyond what relates to their Calling. The more a Shepherd, a Plowman, or any other Peasant knows of the World, and the things that are Foreign to his Labour or Employment, the less fit he’ll be to go through the Fatigues and Hardships of it with Chearfulness and Content.¹⁵

Fielding’s *A Proposal For Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor* (1753), a product of his first-hand observation of the “Misdeeds” and “Sufferings”¹⁶ of the lower classes during his tenure as a justice of the peace, suggests that he shared Mandeville’s view of the poor as “a vast store of potential energy.”¹⁷ As Fielding theorizes, “among a civilized People,” all members of society “are obliged to contribute a Share to the Strength and Wealth of the Public”; therefore, because the poor have “nothing but their Labour to bestow,” this labor rightfully belongs to the social good.¹⁸ Outlining a program of “universal employment” for the able-bodied poor, Fielding calls for the erection of workhouses – not schools – for the poor of the entire country. Especially concerned to eliminate all opportunities for wasteful idleness, he details an agenda for workhouse time management, ten hours a day, six days a week. While the inculcation of religion was essential, Fielding’s program for reform says nothing about literacy instruction. Religion was to be imparted orally by means of mandatory twice-daily attendance at chapel and twice-weekly lectures on morality. The conspicuous absence of any provision for literacy instruction reflects conventional elite opinion that educating the poor was not only economically unwise but against God’s divine design.¹⁹ As poet, essayist, and Member of Parliament Soame Jenyns would write four years later:

Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of Providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper Education.²⁰

Proponents of so-called “Charity” schools had it backwards. It was not education but the *withholding* of education from those “born to . . . the drudgeries of life” that was the truly wise and benevolent act of Christian charity.

In outlining the “Necessity there is for a certain Portion of Ignorance in a Well-order’d Society,” Mandeville anticipated that the only groups *certain* to benefit from increased literacy were printers and stationers. He expected that these groups would vocally object to his critique of charity schools:

I cannot but smile when I reflect on the Variety of uncouth Sufferings that would be prepar’d for me, if the Punishment they would differently inflict upon me, was Emblematically to point at my Crime. For if I was not suddenly stuck full of useless Penknives up to the Hilt, the Company of Stationers would certainly take me in hand, and . . . have me buried alive in their Hall under a great heap of Primers and Spelling-books, they would not be able to sell.²¹

As the examples of Samuel Richardson and John Newbery show, printers and stationers were indeed foremost among those who promoted the spread of literacy. Richardson’s awareness of potential new markets is evident in his *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741),²² a collection of sample letters designed to serve as a model for “Country Readers . . . unable to indite for themselves.”²³ In his most successful textual commodity, *Pamela*, Richardson provocatively represents female servants’ literacy as cultural capital. Pamela has been described as “a pioneer capitalist, a middle-class entrepreneur of virtue, who looked on her chastity not as a condition of spirit but as a commodity to be vended for the purposes of getting on,”²⁴ but her real “commodity” is arguably her literacy. Pamela represents her ability to read and write as a perquisite of her employment in an aristocratic household. Her deceased mistress, she explains, “overpaid me . . . in Learning.”²⁵ Her literacy sets her apart from other servants, catches her employer’s eye, and, by means of her letters revealing her true chastity and worth, ultimately wins his heart.

Richardson’s novel resonates with a key word of contemporary debates concerning the education of the poor, “improvement.” In the opening letter, Pamela records how Mr. B. noticed she can “write a very pretty Hand, and spell tolerably too” and gave her permission to “look into any of [his mother’s] Books to improve yourself,” and she later thanks him for “the Opportunities I have had of Improvement and Learning; through my good Lady’s Means, and yours” (12–13, 36). Yet Richardson’s novel also echoes Mandevillian discourses of lower-class reading as a waste of time that rightfully belongs to employers. Pamela notes how Mr. B. unjustly accuses her of “mind[ing] [her] Pen more than [her] Needle” and declares that he does not want “such idle Sluts” in his house (48). Yet like Mr. B., she assumes that her reading and writing are activities that must never interfere with her “work.” They are luxuries for which she will have little time when she returns to her parents’ cottage: “If I can but get Work, with a little Time for reading, I hope we shall be very happy” (77). Indeed, Pamela once concedes to Mandevillian arguments about the irrelevance of laboring-class

literacy. On the brink of being fired from her job, she acknowledges of her deceased mistress, "all her Learning and Education of me, as Matters have turn'd, will be of little Service to me now; for it had been better for me to have been brought up to hard Labour" (80). Richardson's text sometimes undermines its platform of social mobility through education. While Pamela's own "investment" in literacy is ultimately a success, her father's similar investment has failed. Mr. Andrews has laboriously managed to acquire exceptional reading and writing skills for a man of his rank, yet his hard-won skills have not improved his position. As Pamela writes to her father, it is a shame that "you . . . who are so well able to teach, and write so good a hand, succeeded no better in the school you attempted to set up; but was forced to go to such hard labour."²⁶ Nor does clergyman Arthur Williams gain the rewards he expects through advanced learning. Williams's college education means nothing in terms of social advancement without the patronage of the great. Williams admits that his "whole Dependence is upon the 'Squire" (128). Nonetheless, anticipating Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*, Williams persists in seeing a causal relationship between education and social mobility. Like Pamela's father used to do, he runs a school – in his case, "a little *Latin* School in the neighbouring Village, . . . and this brings him in a little Matter, additional to my Master's Favour, till something better falls" (111–12).

Fielding detects and widens these fault lines already present in *Pamela*. In the opening pages of both *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, he immediately demonstrates the false logic of arguments that reading necessarily teaches virtue. Both texts open with an explicit discussion of the *bad* things to be learned through reading. (Indeed, the full title of *Shamela* itself makes this point: *An Apology For The Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews. In which, the many notorious Falshoods and Misrepresentations of a Book called Pamela, Are exposed and refuted* {my emphasis}.) Reading is not inherently good or bad; the outcome depends on who is reading, what they're reading, and how. Shamela is a determined reader of books ranging from *Venus in the Cloyster* to *The Whole Duty of Man*, while her brothel-keeping mother sends her books and encourages her to read. Bad human beings can appropriate even good books for immoral ends: Shamela reads *The Whole Duty of Man* to compensate for her adultery, noting, "I read in good Books, as often as I have Leisure; and Parson Williams says, that will make amends."²⁷ Conversely, bad books can lead even good men astray – and waste their time. As the temporarily misguided clergyman Thomas Tickletext observes of *Pamela*, "I have done nothing but read it to others, and hear others again read it to me, ever since it came into my Hands; and I find I am like to do nothing else, for I know not how long yet to come" (2).

Similarly, the opening chapter of *Joseph Andrews* debunks assumptions that literacy and reading promote morality. Fielding opens his novel with the declaration, "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, and of far greater use in that narrow Circle than a good Book" (1.1.17). While this truism needs to be taken with a grain of salt, Fielding suggests the negative lessons to be learned from books such as "the Lives of Mr. Colley Cibber, and of Mrs. Pamela Andrews" (1.1.18–19). He then raises another thematically central issue, the question

of readers' "Capacity." He parodically praises those biographies "of excellent Use and Instruction, finely calculated to sow the Seeds of Virtue in Youth, and very easy to be comprehended by Persons of moderate Capacity": that is, popular chapbooks such as *The History of Jack and the Giants* (1.1.18). Is it worth learning to read, Fielding asks in the opening pages of *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela*, if one does not have the "capacity" to read beyond chapbooks; if one cannot discriminate between *The Whole Duty of Man* and *Venus in the Cloyster*; if one does not have *evaluative* and *interpretive* skills as well as the technical ability to read?²⁸

One of the first acts of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, Frank suggests, is to "defuse the scandal of Pamela's literacy. . . . The first thing we know about Shamela, when she asks her mother to 'commodate [her] with a ludgin,' is that she cannot spell." In *Shamela*, "lower-class literacy is aggravatedly eroticized and utopian"; accordingly, one of the "main projects" of *Joseph Andrews* is to "detach literacy from the eroticism it produces in *Shamela*, or to decathect literacy."²⁹ This "decathecting" is apparent in the character of Fanny Goodwill. In response to the amazingly literate Pamela, Fielding supplies a virtuous servant-girl who can neither read nor write. Like Pamela, Fanny is "a poor Girl, who had formerly been bred up in" an aristocratic household, but unlike Pamela, she has not been unwisely educated by her employers. In introducing Joseph's future wife, Fielding goes out of his way to explain why his hero has not communicated with his beloved for a year:

The Reader may perhaps wonder, that so fond a Pair should during a Twelve-month's Absence never converse with one another; indeed there was but one Reason which did, or could have prevented them; and this was, that poor *Fanny* could neither write nor read, nor could she be prevailed upon to transmit the Delicacies of her tender and chaste Passion, by the Hands of an Amanuensis. (1.11.48–49)

Frank argues that Fielding explains Fanny's "radical disqualification from literacy as an effect of her feminine modesty," but there is in fact nothing "radical" about Fanny's inability to read or write. What Frank calls Fanny's "illiteracy"³⁰ was the norm, not the exception, for a female servant. (Indeed, that is arguably Fielding's point.) Fielding never suggests that there is anything problematic about Fanny and Joseph's inability to correspond; the devoted couple share "a mutual Confidence in each other's Fidelity, and the Prospect of their future Happiness" and "content . . . themselves . . . with frequent Enquiries after each other's Health" (1.11.49). Fanny, Fielding's comic fiction suggests, will live a good and happy life even though she will never be able to teach her children to read. The example of this happy pair suggests that Fielding would also share Mandeville's view, "we shall find Innocence and Honesty no where more general than among the most illiterate, the poor silly Country People."³¹

In contrast to Fanny, Frank continues, we have Mrs. Slipslop:

Shamela's other double, in whom an avid semiliteracy is linked with a hideous corporeality and tainted sexuality. . . . In Fanny . . . the absence of writing is linked with

chastity, while the figure of Slipslop combines the letter with its concomitant social rebelliousness and sexual promiscuity. . . . Slipslop's "slip" is literacy itself.³²

But there is also a problem with Frank's argument that Fielding contrasts the "illiterate" Fanny with the "literate" Slipslop. For in fact, Fielding never tells us whether or not Slipslop can read or write:

Mrs. *Slipslop* the Waiting-Gentlewoman, being herself the Daughter of a Curate, preserved some Respect for *Adams*; she professed great Regard for his Learning, and would frequently dispute with him on Points of Theology; but always insisted on a Deference to be paid to her Understanding, as she had been frequently at *London*, and knew more of the World than a Country Parson could pretend to.

She had in these Disputes a particular advantage over *Adams*: for she was a mighty Affecter of hard Words, which she used in such a manner, that the Parson . . . was frequently at some loss to guess her meaning. (1.3.25–26)

Fielding notes that Slipslop takes great pride in her "Understanding" but also explains that the source of this "Understanding" is that "she had been frequently at *London*." He tells us she "professe[s] great Regard for . . . Learning" and uses "hard Words," but he never once depicts her reading or writing or even quoting from a book.³³ Any assumption of Slipslop's literacy is our own, not the text's. The point is, Fielding simply doesn't bother to tell us one way or the other.³⁴

In sharp contrast to these minimally educated characters, Fielding introduces Adams as:

an excellent Scholar. He was a perfect Master of the *Greek* and *Latin* Languages; to which he added a great Share of Knowledge in the Oriental Tongues, and could read and translate *French*, *Italian*, and *Spanish*. He had applied many Years to the most severe Study, and had treasured up a Fund of Learning rarely to be met with in a University. (1.3.22–23)

Adams has "treasured up a Fund of Learning," yet this is not a stock that can be exchanged for social advancement. At 50 years old, he struggles to support a large family by preaching regularly at four churches. His tattered cassock – and good nature despite of it – makes him appear "foolish," "ridiculous," "pitiful," and "shabby" to many observers (4.9.311; 3.13.276). Describing Adams to her genteel companions, Lady Booby states:

if they pleased she would divert them with one of the most ridiculous Sight's they had ever seen, which was an old foolish Parson, who, she said laughing, kept a Wife and six Brats on a Salary of about twenty Pounds a Year; adding, that there was not such another ragged Family in the Parish. (4.9.311–12)

Early in the novel, Adams quizzes young Joseph on his memorization of seemingly extraneous details concerning the Bible. He asks, "how many Books there were in the

New Testament?” and “how many Chapters they contained?” Surprised by the boy’s abilities, he is “wonderfully solicitous [*sic*] to know at what Time, and by what Opportunity, the Youth became acquainted with these Matters.” Joseph explains that he did not gain this knowledge by attending a charity school. Instead:

he had very early learnt to read and write by the Goodness of his Father, who, though he had not Interest enough to get him into a Charity School, because a Cousin of his Father’s Landlord did not vote on the right side for a Church-warden in a Borough Town, yet he had been himself at the Expence of Sixpence a Week for his Learning. (1.3.23–24)

Joseph’s relation to literacy, books and learning is that of an exemplary *servant*, not a gentleman. His reading is functional rather than comprehensive, he reads books in snippets without fully understanding their subjects, and he absorbs part of his “reading” aurally rather than visually, by eavesdropping on his “betters” while serving them at the table (3.6.235). Supporters of charity schools aimed to reconcile the laboring ranks to their estate rather than to stimulate social discontent, and while Joseph’s father “had not Interest enough to get him into a Charity School,” Joseph appears to have been an exemplary student. He is not without *any* desire to improve his situation, but his desires befit his station. When he hears a rumor that his sister Pamela is about to be married to Williams, he suggests that his reading and writing



Plate 7. An attempt to encourage subscriptions for a foundling hospital to be built on Guilford Street, St. Pancras; this 1739 print features children who would benefit from the mission of education for “exposed and deserted young Children.”

abilities might qualify him to be his clerk, "for which you know I am qualified, being able to read, and to set a Psalm" (1.6.31).

It is the learned Adams who has grander ambitions for Joseph. Adams applauds Joseph's contentment with his position in the social order, but he then immediately conceives a plan to teach this footman Latin, "by which means he might be qualified for a higher Station" (1.3.26). Adams urges Mrs. Slipslop to recommend Joseph to Lady Booby as "a Youth very susceptible of Learning, and one, whose Instruction in *Latin* he would himself undertake" (1.3.26). Parson Adams in this instance views Latin as an engine of social mobility, but in the terms of Fielding's fiction, his desire to teach a footman Latin is as "Ridiculous" as his later expression of regret that Mrs. Adams does not know Greek (3.4.227). The debate that follows between Adams and Slipslop is part of this novel's larger engagement with debates concerning not only literacy but also the question of who should undertake the study of classical languages. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke observed, "what a-do is made about a little *Latin* and *Greek*, how many Years are spent in it, and what a noise and bustle it makes to no purpose." Latin and Greek were an essential part of the education of a gentleman, but in most instances a "waste [of] Money, and . . . time" for everyone else:

Custom . . . has made it so much a Part of Education, that even those Children are whipp'd to it, and made spend many Hours of their precious time uneasily in *Latin*, who, after they are once gone from School, are never to have more to do with it, as long as they live. Can there be any thing more ridiculous, than that a Father should waste his own Money, and his Son's time, in setting him to learn the *Roman Language*, when at the same time he designs him for a Trade.³⁵

Similarly, Mandeville suggested that for the majority of the population, the time-intensive study of classical languages was a "Loss of . . . Time and Money":

It is a Vulgar Error that no body can spell or write *English* well without a little smatch of *Latin*. This is upheld by Pedants [masters of petty schools] for their own Interest, and by none more strenuously maintain'd than such of 'em as are poor Scholars in more than one Sense. . . . to Youths who afterwards are to get a Livelihood in Trades and Callings, in which *Latin* is not daily wanted, it is of no Use, and the learning of it is an evident Loss of just so much Time and Money as are bestowed upon it.³⁶

Latin was essential for the governing classes and "Learned Professions," but for everyone else it was a foolish investment. Echoing these arguments, Slipslop rejects Adams's proposal. She asks, "why is *Latin* more *necessitous* for a Footman than a Gentleman? It is very proper that you Clargymen [*sic*] must learn it, because you can't preach without it: but I have heard Gentlemen say in *London*, that it is fit for no body else" (1.3.26). Latin and Greek, Fielding would suggest, are a deep repository of human wisdom and sympathy available to persons genuinely seeking virtue, but they are no easy "ticket" to social elevation or moral improvement. Furthermore, even

when this kind of learning is attained, in modern society its true value is often misunderstood. As Shamela exclaims of Parson Williams's classical learning as cultural capital, "O! *What a brave Thing it is to be a Scholar, and to be able to talk Latin*" (21).

Parson Adams's own deep knowledge of the classics, it is frequently noted, is of little assistance in daily life. His immersion in his Aeschylus sometimes seriously inconveniences his friends. His erudition bears no relation to critical self-examination; he is unable to apply to himself the lessons he learns from his reading and is no smarter at the end of his "Adventures" than when he started out. Conversely, the minimally schooled Joseph quickly learns through his experiences. When he and Adams are tricked by pretended offers of hospitality from a duplicitous gentleman, Adams is "greatly confounded," but Joseph, drawing on prior experience, immediately understands that they have been deceived. Adams asks why the gentleman would gratuitously trick them, to which Joseph responds, "It is not for me . . . to give Reasons for what Men do, to a Gentleman of your Learning." Adams responds, "You say right . . . Knowledge of Men is only to be learnt from Books, *Plato* and *Seneca* for that; and those are Authors, I am afraid Child, you never read" (2.16.176). Yet Joseph has, in fact, already done plenty of hard learning from traveling with Adams, and he politely suggests that a disquisition on learned authors is not what is needed at this time, "for the generous Gentleman . . . hath left us the whole Reckoning to pay" (2.16.176–77).

Adams observes, "he had never *read* of such a Monster" (2.16.177, my emphasis), and especially notes that the duplicitous gentleman had an honest face. Overhearing Adams, the retired "Sea-faring Man" of great worldly experience interjects, "Ah! Master . . . if you had travelled as far as I have . . . you would not give any Credit to a Man's Countenance." Adams, whose vanity is nettled, responds, "Master of mine, perhaps I have travelled a great deal farther than you without the Assistance of a Ship. . . . the travelling I mean is in Books, the only way of travelling by which any Knowledge is to be acquired" (2.17.180–82). The two men debate whether more learning is acquired through experience or reading and whether men of business or learning provide the most valuable service. The host asks, "Of what use would Learning be in a Country without Trade? What would all you Parsons do to clothe your Backs and feed your Bellies? Who fetches . . . all the . . . Necessaries of Life?" to which Adams responds, "there is something more necessary than Life it self, which is provided by Learning; I mean the Learning of the Clergy." While there is truth in Adams's position, his claims are hyperbolic and dismissive. Books are not "the *only* way of travelling by which *any* Knowledge is to be acquired" (2.17.183, 182, my emphasis).

The noble and worthy Adams, it is also often acknowledged, is not without his faults. He can be irascible, pompous, and vain, and he is most often so when it comes to his abilities as a scholar and a teacher. When Joseph tells him, "you must be allowed by all the World to be the best Teacher of a School in all our County," he responds, "Yes, that, . . . I believe, is granted me . . . nay I believe I may go to the next County too – but *gloriarì non est meum*" (3.5.230). In *Some Thoughts Concerning*

Education, Locke anticipated his reader's surprise that he thought "Learning" the "least part" of a gentleman's education. He explains, "Reading, and Writing, and *Learning*, I allow to be necessary, but yet not the chief Business. I imagine you would think him a very foolish Fellow, that should not value a Vertuous, or a Wise Man, infinitely before a great Scholar." He advises, "when you . . . are looking out for a School-Master, or a Tutor," do "not have . . . *Latin* and *Logick* only in your Thoughts."³⁷ Fielding's erudite country parson fails to recognize that what makes him an exemplary educator is not his great learning but his *goodness*. And the truly "Vertuous" things about Adams, Fielding suggests, he never needed to learn from books.

As Martin C. Battestin has shown, Fielding's depiction of Parson Adams was part of his "campaign . . . to reform the popular contempt of the clergy."³⁸ Adams suffers both the material deprivations of poverty and also the social snubs. His noble resignation to his poverty is a Christ-like virtue. Yet as Fielding's anxious remarks concerning Adams in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* acknowledge, there are aspects of his handling of this character that elude any neat moral agenda. Fielding assures us that Adams is a portrait of Christian idealism and charity, "notwithstanding the low Adventures in which he is engaged" (*Preface*, 11). Yet he makes his country parson undergo relentless, physical humiliations of the most slapstick kind. Among other "low Adventures," Adams is scalded with soup, covered with hogs' blood, set on fire with a candle, tumbled in the mud, and chased and pulled about by hounds. Fielding tells us how we are *supposed* to read Adams's character, but as Simon Dickie has reminded us, Fielding's contemporaries seldom followed his instructions:

Many readers seemed incapable of seeing [Adams] as anything but the object of ridicule. It was almost impossible, Sarah Fielding complained in defense of her brother, to convince readers that an eccentric idealist like Adams was not a figure of contempt: most readers fixed their thoughts on his oddities of dress and behaviour, or "the hounds trailing bacon in his pocket," and entirely overlooked "the noble simplicity of his mind, with the other innumerable beauties in his character."³⁹

As if to anticipate and debunk modern cognitive theories of literacy which associate advanced literacy with advanced reasoning powers, Fielding gleefully shows his most erudite character as worryingly devoid of common sense. When Adams and Fanny are brought before a drunken magistrate on false charges, a spectator observes Adams's cassock and challenges him to a schoolboy's game of "*cap{ping}* Verses." This "witty Fellow" offers as the first verse a line from his Latin schoolbooks, then waits for Adams to take his turn. At this moment when Adams is on the brink of being committed to a prison, we expect him to chastise the wit for not understanding the gravity of the situation, but instead he gives him "a Look full of ineffable Contempt," telling him "he deserved scourging for his Pronuntiation" (2.11.146). The "witty Fellow" admits that he has forgotten most of what he learned at college. Yet Adams's own much deeper learning also fails him, for he is wholly unable to put matters of Latin pronunciation into perspective. Having now completely forgotten his imminent

imprisonment, he responds, "I have a Boy not above eight Years old, who would instruct thee, that the last Verse runs thus: *Ut sunt Divorum, Mars, Bacchus, Apollo, virorum*" (2.11.147). Fielding could not be more pointed as to what this chapter is about. He ironically titles it "A Chapter very full of Learning" (2.11.145). Significantly, the only person who is *not* satirized in this chapter can neither read nor write. When Adams begins to argue with the drunken justice concerning matters of learning, it is the uneducated Fanny who saves him from his foibles. The dispute between the Justice and the parson

had most probably produced a Quarrel, (for both were very violent and positive in their Opinions) had not *Fanny* accidentally heard, that a young Fellow was going from the Justice's House, to the very Inn where the Stage-Coach in which *Joseph* was, put up. Upon this News, she immediately sent for the Parson out of the Parlour. *Adams* . . . found her resolute to go. (2.11.151)

Critics routinely note that Fielding parodies Adams's *pedantry* and *vanity* concerning his learning, but does Fielding ever satirize the *extent* of Adams's learning as incongruous or irrelevant for a country parson of his rank? As Claude Rawson suggests, "there is a hint of patronage in Fielding's own treatment of [Adams]."⁴⁰ Adams has high hopes for his sons' advancement through higher learning, and aims to make them parsons like himself. His love for his sons is benevolent paternalism, but his unitary faith in the outcome of their education becomes problematic when read in light of the novel's larger arguments concerning schooling. Adams's benevolent plan misfires from the beginning, for his eldest son's education does not bring the expected material returns. Although several gentlemen have promised Adams "to procure an Ordination for a Son of mine, who is now near Thirty, [and] hath an infinite Stock of Learning," unfortunately, as this son "was never at an University, the Bishop refuses to ordain him" (2.8.135). In terms of social advancement, Adams's son's "Stock of Learning," like his own "treasured up . . . Fund of Learning," gets him nowhere, for as we have seen in *Pamela* with Parson Williams, this kind of "Stock" cannot be exchanged for advancement without the sustained patronage of the great.

Recall too the seemingly gratuitous scene of reading instruction at the end of *Joseph Andrews*, where Adams drills his nearly drowned, still dripping wet 8-year-old son in Latin grammar. Adams has been lecturing Joseph on the sin of excessive attachment to earthly things (4.8.308). Unfortunately, mid-sermon Adams is informed that "his youngest Son was drowned." Instead of heeding his own advice concerning the conquest of the passions, "He stood silent a moment, and soon began to stamp about the Room and deplore his Loss with the bitterest Agony" (309). Adams particularly laments the loss of a future "Scholar":

Had it been any other of my Children I could have born it with patience; but my little Prattler, the Darling and Comfort of my old Age. . . . It was but this Morning I gave him his first Lesson in *Quae Genus*. This was the very Book he learnt, poor Child! it is of no

further use to thee now. He would have made the best Scholar, and have been an Ornament to the Church – such Parts and such Goodness never met in one so young. (4.8.309)

Fortunately, Dick suddenly comes running towards his father, “in a wet Condition indeed, but alive” (4.3.309). Dick sits by the fire to try to dry his clothes, when Lady Booby unexpectedly makes a visit. “She then seeing a Book in his Hand, asked ‘if he could read?’” (4.9.314). Adams answers, “a little *Latin*, Madam, he is just got into *Quae Genus*.” But Lady Booby appears to share Locke and Mandeville’s conviction that Latin is a waste of time for poor country “Brats.” “A Fig for *quere genius*,” she exclaims, “let me hear him read a little *English*.” Accordingly, Adams encourages his son:

“*Lege, Dick, Lege*,” said Adams: But the Boy made no Answer, till he saw the Parson knit his Brows; and then cried, “I don’t understand you, Father.” “How, Boy,” says Adams. “What doth *Lego* make in the imperative Mood? *Legito*, doth it not?” “Yes,” answered Dick.—“And what besides?” says the Father. “*Lege*,” quoth the Son, after some hesitation. “A good Boy,” says the Father: “And now, Child, What is the *English* of *Lego*?”—To which the Boy, after long puzzling, answered, he could not tell. “How,” cries Adams in a Passion,—“What hath the Water washed away your Learning? Why, what is *Latin* for the *English* Verb *read*? Consider before you speak.”—The Child considered some time, and then the Parson cried twice or thrice, “*Le—, Le—*.”—Dick answered, “*Lego*.”—“Very well;—and then, what is the *English*,” says the Parson, “of the Verb *Lego*?”—“*To read*,” cried Dick.—“Very well,” said the Parson, “a good Boy, you can do well, if you will take pains. —I assure your Ladyship he is not much above eight Years old, and is out of his *Propria quae Maribus* already.” (4.9.314–15)

Parson Adams puts his nearly drowned, still dripping wet son through a semi-public display of Latin learning without questioning his own motives. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke advises that whenever young boys “are at a stand . . . help them presently over the Difficulty, without any Rebuke or Chiding, remembering, that where harsher Ways are taken, they are the effect only of Pride or Peevishness in the Teacher.” He adds of the experience of learning Latin grammar, “I believe there is no body, that reads this, but may recollect what disorder, hasty or imperious words from his Parents or Teachers have caus’d in his Thoughts.”⁴¹

Of this scene, Frank observes: “Dicky may be unpromising, or recalcitrant, but Fielding’s text stutters and repeats the words – *lego, I read* – that will, perhaps, guarantee the eight-year-old a better life than service.”⁴² But as the situation of Dick’s father and older brother has already shown, the acquisition of Latin will not “guarantee” this son of a poor country parson anything – nor should it, many contemporary readers would assume. The universal education of children in morality was one thing, but the time-consuming education of all children in Latin or Greek was quite another. And even with regard to morality, critics seldom note, even Adams is not always a successful tutor. While he does an exemplary job with the moral education of his sons, he fails miserably with his wife and daughter. When Lady Booby chastises Adams for

concerning himself with Joseph and Fanny, Mrs. Adams concurs: "Indeed, Madam, your Ladyship says very true . . . he talks a pack of Nonsense, that the whole Parish are his Children." His daughter then scolds him for bringing home "Strangers . . . to eat your Children's Bread," noting of Fanny, "I would not give such a Vagabond Slut a Halfpenny, tho' I had a Million of Money; no, tho' she was starving." Adams bids his wife prepare the travelers a meal, and "quoted many Texts of Scripture to prove, *that the Husband is the Head of the Wife*," but he ends up having to take his guests to an alehouse to get them fed (4.11.321–23).

Joseph Andrews contains numerous pointed stories of misfired education. The same innkeeper who argues with Adams concerning the value of experience also tells two stories of farm boys tragically educated beyond their rank. As Mandeville observed, "Those who spent a great part of their Youth in Learning to Read, Write, and Cypher, expect and not unjustly to be employ'd where those Qualifications may be of use to them . . . the longer Boys continue in this easy sort of Life, the more unfit they'll be when grown up for downright Labour."⁴³ The innkeeper tells how the local squire promised one boy's parents that he would make their son an exciseman:

The poor People, who could ill afford it, bred their Son to Writing and Accounts, and other Learning, to qualify him for the Place; and the Boy held up his Head above his Condition with these Hopes; nor would he go to plough, nor do any other kind of Work; and went constantly drest as fine as could be, with two clean *Holland Shirts* a Week. (2.17.178)

But the squire failed to follow through on his promise, and the "young Fellow," despite his knowledge of "Writing and Accounts," could not find employment, "So that being out of Money and Business, he fell into evil Company, and wicked Courses; and in the end came to a Sentence of Transportation, the News of which broke the Mother's Heart" (178). The host then tells Adams of another parent who "over"-educates his son. This farmer allows the squire to convince him that his boy should become a parson – a sentiment with which the listening Adams would surely concur:

There was a Neighbour of mine, a Farmer, who had two Sons whom he bred up to the Business. Pretty Lads they were; nothing would serve the Squire, but that the youngest must be made a Parson. Upon which, he persuaded the Father to send him to School, promising, that he would afterwards maintain him at the University; and when he was of a proper Age, give him a Living.

But this boy's over-education also turns out to be his undoing:

'But after the Lad had been seven Years at School, and his Father brought him to the Squire with a Letter from his Master, that he was fit for the University; the Squire, instead of minding his Promise, or sending him thither at his Expencc, only told his Father. . . it was pity he could not afford to keep him at *Oxford* for four or five Years more, by which Time, if he could get him a Curacy, he might have him ordained.' The

Farmer said, "he was not a Man sufficient to do any such thing." "Why then," answered the Squire; "*I am very sorry you have given him so much Learning*; for if he cannot get his living by that, it will rather spoil him for any thing else; and your other Son who can hardly write his Name, will do more at plowing and sowing, and is in a better Condition than he." (2.17.178–79, my emphasis)

Like the other farm boy with his "clean Holland shirts," this youth comes to a desperate end: "the poor Lad not finding Friends to maintain him in his Learning, as he had expected; and being unwilling to work, fell to drinking . . . fell into a Consumption and died." Schooling not only gets these boys nowhere in terms of the desired social advancement, but also "spoil[s]" them "for anything else." The boy who spent "seven Years at School" (the time it would have taken him to complete a useful apprenticeship) "fell to drinking, though he was a very sober Lad before" (2.17.179). Fielding is not anti-education in these pointed passages and he is certainly not anti-clergy. Rather, he is addressing some of the potential human risks at stake in contemporary proposals for educating the poor. Later we learn of a more privileged young man whose schooling failed him in a different way. Now older and wiser through experience, Mr. Wilson notes that he obtained what by conventional standards was an excellent education: "My Education was liberal, and at a public School, in which I proceeded so far as to become Master of the *Latin*, and to be tolerably versed in the *Greek* Language" (3.3.201–202). Yet Wilson's mastery of Latin failed miserably to prepare him for the realities of the world. Despite his genteel birth, he soon ended up no better than the farm boys, "out of Money and Business," and most ironically, living "the Life of an Animal, hardly above Vegetation" (3.3.204–205).

But Fielding's most sobering suggestion concerning the necessity of caution in assuming any particular "outcome" to education comes in the chapter, "*A Disputation on Schools, held on the Road between Mr. Abraham Adams and Joseph*" (3.5.229). This "curious Discourse," while ostensibly a debate on private vs. public education, is in reality a profound reflection on the issue of whether or not any kind of schooling can teach virtue or correct vice. Having just listened to Mr. Wilson's story of his useless schooling, Adams suddenly exclaims:

I have found it; I have discovered the Cause of all the Misfortunes which befel him. A public School, *Joseph*, was the Cause of all the Calamities which he afterwards suffered. Public Schools are the Nurseries of all Vice and Immorality. All the wicked Fellows whom I remember at University were bred at them. . . . you may thank the Lord you were not bred at a public School, you would never have preserved your Virtue as you have. (3.5.230)

Joseph once again politely notes that it does not become him to argue with a man of Adams's learning, then goes on to express an alternative view:

My late Master, Sir *Thomas Booby*, was bred at a public School, and he was the finest Gentleman in all the Neighbourhood. . . . It was his Opinion . . . that a Boy taken from a

public School, and carried into the World, will learn more in one Year there, than one of a private Education will in five. (3.5.230)

Echoing Locke on the secondary significance of “Learning” in relation to morality, Adams objects, “Who would not rather preserve the Purity of his Child?” But Joseph persists in arguing that public schools are equally effective – *or ineffective* – as private ones:

[A boy] may get as much Vice [in a private school], witness several Country Gentlemen, who were educated within five Miles of their own Houses, and are as wicked as if they had known the World from their Infancy. I remember when I was in the Stable, if a young Horse was vicious in his Nature, no Correction would make him otherwise; I take it to be equally the same among Men: if a Boy be of a mischievous wicked Inclination, no School, tho’ ever so private, will ever make him good. (3.5.231)

Joseph’s suggestion of the possibility of innate virtue and vice recalls Locke’s assessment of “*Learning*” as “a great help” to virtue “in well dispos’d Minds; but yet it must be confess’d also, that in others not so dispos’d, it helps them only to be the more foolish, or worse Men.”⁴⁴ It also anticipates Fielding’s sentiments in “An Essay on the Knowledge of Characters of Men” (1743), where he describes certain “original,” apparently innate inclinations in children:

This original Difference will, I think, alone account for that very early and strong Inclination to Good or Evil, which distinguishes different Dispositions in Children, in their first Infancy. . . and . . . in Persons who from the same Education, &c might be thought to have directed Nature the same Way; yet, among all these, there subsists, as I have before hinted, so manifest and extreme a Difference of Inclination or Character, that almost obliges us, I think, to acknowledge some unacquired, original Distinction, in the Nature or Soul of one Man, from that of another.⁴⁵

If vice is innate in certain individuals, then education can at best only “cover” the inclination to evil. Mr. Wilson too echoes contemporary “ruling passion” theory when he suggests that education cannot “weed out” man’s natural “Malignity” but only cover it up: “there is a Malignity in the Nature of Man, which when not weeded out, or at least covered by a good Education and Politeness, delights in making another uneasy or dissatisfied with himself” (3.3.217).

Fielding’s social pamphlets of the 1750s suggest that he eventually came to believe that strict government was the only preservative of civilization. As Martin C. Battestin observes, Fielding’s detailed plans for the regulation of the poor most clearly reveal his “final, disturbing vision of human nature and the tenuous grounds of order in society. . . Like Mandeville . . . he became convinced that reason and the will, the agents of morality in classical moral philosophy, were powerless to regulate man’s emotional nature.”⁴⁶ In his fiction, Fielding is less interested in offering detailed

solutions to social problems than in laying out competing positions to clarify the issues under debate. Still, Fielding's position in *Joseph Andrews* on both public and private education is less than optimistic: there is no guarantee that either a public or private education will produce the desired result.

On a more positive note, however, in certain individuals virtue rather than vice may be innate. As Joseph suggests hopefully, if a boy "be of a righteous Temper, you may trust him to *London* . . . he will be in no danger of being corrupted" (3.5.231). The possibility of innate virtue is suggested most eloquently in the character of Adams, whose goodness is spontaneous or "natural" rather than learned. Not coincidentally, Fielding illustrates Adams's innate goodness most powerfully in the farcical episode where his book is burned – a scene seemingly straight out of stage comedy, but one that nevertheless resonates deeply when considered in light of the novel's arguments concerning education. Adams and Fanny are resting at an inn, when all of a sudden, Fanny faints. "Adams jumped up, flung his *Æschylus* into the Fire, and fell a roaring to the People of the House for Help." The voice turns out to be Joseph's, and the happy couple are reunited, whereupon Adams "danc[es] about the Room in a Rapture of Joy . . . the happiest of the three" (2.12.154–55). Unfortunately, however, he soon "cast his Eyes towards the Fire, where *Æschylus* lay expiring; and immediately rescued the poor Remains, to-wit, the Sheep-skin Covering of his dear Friend, which was the Work of his own Hands, and had been his inseparable Companion for upwards of thirty Years" (2.12.155). While Fielding's subversive comic impulses burn Adams's precious manuscript book with pleasure, Fielding the moralist also delivers a serious message: to a good man, no book, however irreplaceable, is as important as the happiness of the people he loves.

Conclusion

This essay has used Fielding's sometimes surprisingly fierce critique in *Joseph Andrews* of contemporary arguments for educating the poor to explore changing understandings of "literacy" and rationalizations for wider schooling in eighteenth-century England. Confronting Fielding's skepticism concerning the expected "outcomes" of education illuminates the eighteenth century as a transitional period that looked backwards to the past as well as forward to our modern assumptions and hopes. By the turn of the nineteenth century, what Graff calls an "epochal shift" would take place in elite attitudes toward mass education. But the new *expectation* of universal literacy should not be confused with actual reality, for throughout the eighteenth century, "despite Enlightenment rhetoric . . . relatively little was accomplished, especially in elementary (or literacy) education." Furthermore, new arguments for universal literacy were not necessarily more "enlightened" than older arguments *against* teaching the poor to read and write. Arguments both *for* and *against* popular education were commonly motivated by fear. Whereas authors like Mandeville suggested that mass literacy would weaken society by creating discontent,

by the 1780s, “fear was spreading that *without* the security of mass education, social order, morality, and productivity were increasingly threatened.” Political and religious leaders “concluded that [mass] literacy, if provided in carefully controlled, formal institutions, could be a useful force.”⁴⁷ When it comes to the history of literacy and education, we need to recognize the inseparability of new humanitarian initiatives and older fears concerning the “lower Orders of Mankind.” What appears to us an “epochal shift” in attitudes toward literacy also had certain crucial continuities with older ways of thinking.

Today, our trust in literacy places “a great burden . . . on a single attribute.” In development discourse, “The assumption is that literacy, development, growth and progress are inseparably linked.”⁴⁸ Yet as I have tried to show, “faith in the power and qualities of literacy is itself socially learnt.”⁴⁹ Fielding challenged modern assumptions concerning the presumed “consequences of literacy” at the very moment when these modern ideologies of literacy and models of “literacy effects” were first being formulated. In *Joseph Andrews*, there is no causal relationship between literacy and “progress”; the most “literate” character in the novel, Parson Adams, is associated not with the future but with the classical and humanist past. Just as Fielding questioned the assumption that increased literacy would itself lead to progress, so today we cannot assume that schooling in itself leads to socially progressive outcomes. As Parson Adams’s rote drilling of his 8-year-old in Latin grammar suggests, literacy instruction can be restrictive and hegemonic, concerned with imparting social values, instilling discipline, and maintaining social hierarchies rather than stimulating a desire to challenge the status quo.

The meanings and consequences of literacy are vitally dependent on sociohistorical context. The main task for historians and literary scholars seeking to understand the consequences of literacy is reconstructing the uses to which literacy has been put “and the real and symbolic differences that emanated from the social condition of literacy among the population.”⁵⁰ Eighteenth-century novels can serve as a powerful analytic lens on historic transitions. Equally important, they can help us to recognize our *own* assumptions concerning literacy – a seemingly urgent task given how much recent scholarship on eighteenth-century “print culture” and the “public sphere” fundamentally depends on assumptions about dramatically increased literacy at a time when as much as half the population could not read. But ultimately, perhaps the most important lesson taught us by Fielding’s Fanny Goodwill is that in seeking to generalize about what the “lower Orders of Mankind” have historically thought about access to literacy or education, we literary historians will always be at something of a loss, for the written texts we rely on can only tell us so much.

See also: chapter 8, MEMORY AND MOBILITY; chapter 12, MOMENTARY FAME; chapter 14, JOY AND HAPPINESS.

NOTES

1. Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), vii.
2. [Soame Jenyns], *A Free Inquiry Into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, (1757; Rpt. New York: Garland, 1976), 34.
3. Bernard Mandeville, "An Essay on Charity, and Charity-Schools," *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, ed. Philip Harth (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1970), 294–95. *The Fable of the Bees* was first published in 1714. An expanded edition containing the "Essay on Charity, and Charity-Schools" was published in 1723.
4. What figures we have on early modern literacy remain far from definitive. In his synthesis of existing historical studies of literacy, J. Paul Hunter estimates that at mid-century as many as four out of ten adult men and six out of ten adult women could not read. Urban men and women were more likely to be literate than their rural counterparts, and men were more likely to be literate than women. See *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 61–88, and also "The novel and social/cultural history," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9–40.
5. Such a definition, while convenient, necessarily sets aside the question of what level of skill an individual needs to be categorized as literate. Today theorists such as Brian V. Street suggest "we would probably more appropriately refer to 'literatecies' than to any single 'literacy'" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8).
6. See M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938). This quotation is from Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "'Unwilling to be Short, or Plain, in Any Thing Concerning Gain': Bernard Mandeville and the Dialectic of Charity," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 33 (1992): 148–75, at 150.
7. Catherine Ingrassia, in *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), notes Richardson's "personal investment in the idea of . . . personal improvement" (147) and traces the ways Pamela "invests in herself for herself by creating her own negotiable paper or 'paper credit', letters and a journal which act as an indicator of her worth" (139). Building on Ingrassia's argument, I suggest that Richardson's text also represents *literacy itself* as an intangible commodity.
8. In thinking about this text I have benefited from Patricia Crain's talk in the Rutgers University History of the Book Lecture Series, "Spectral Literacy: The Case of *Goody Two Shoes*," 26 March 2003.
9. Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 4.9.312. All further references to *Joseph Andrews* are to this edition and will be cited in parentheses by book, chapter, and page number.
10. Judith Frank, *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 51, 166. See also "Literacy, Desire, and the Novel: From *Shamela* to *Joseph Andrews*," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 6 (1993): 157–74.
11. Frank, *Common Ground*, 31.
12. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 3.
13. Street points to anthropologist Jack Goody as an influential proponent of this line of thinking, but these assumptions are very widely held, and Goody himself often seems careful to disclaim such attitudes. See in particular Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

14. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 4; Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 10.
15. Mandeville, "Essay on . . . Charity-Schools," 275–76, 294.
16. Henry Fielding, *A Proposal For Making an Effectual Provision For the Poor*, (1753, Repr. in *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings*, ed. and intro. Malvin R. Zirker, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 230.
17. Zirker, intro., *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings*, lxiii.
18. Henry Fielding, *Proposal for the Poor*, 226, 228.
19. Martin C. Batestin suggests that Fielding's views of the poor as expressed in his *Proposal* are "entirely representative of his age" (Martin C. Batestin with Ruthe R. Batestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* [London: Routledge, 1989], 514).
20. [Jenyns], *Free Inquiry*, 34. In his review of Jenyns's work, Samuel Johnson exposes Jenyns's platitudes yet acknowledges the complexity of the question of educating the poor in a society where the majority were expected to labor for the few: "Concerning the portion of ignorance necessary to make the condition of the lower classes of mankind safe to the public and tolerable to themselves, both morals and policy exacts a nicer enquiry than will be very soon or very easily made" (*The Literary Magazine*, nos. xiii–xv, April–July 1757, repr. in *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson*, ed. Donald Greene [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 522–43, 528).
Views like Jenyns's continued to be held throughout the century, including by Enlightenment *philosophes*. Voltaire held that "the children of laborers" need "know only how to cultivate, because you only need one pen for every two or three hundred arms" (*Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, "Fertilisation," *Oeuvres complètes*, 19: 111, quoted in Harry C. Payne, *The Philosophes and the People* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976], 97).
21. Mandeville, "Essay on . . . Charity-Schools," 324, 297.
22. The full title of this work, now usually referred to as *Familiar Letters*, is *Letters Written To and For Particular Friends, On the most Important Occasions, Directing not only the Requisite Style and Forms To be Observed in Writing Familiar Letters; But How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently*. In *The Common Concerns of Human Life* (1741).
23. Richardson, Letter to Johannes Stinstra, 2 June 1753, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 228–35, at 232.
24. Maynard Mack, "Joseph Andrews and Pamela," intro. to Mack, ed., *Joseph Andrews* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948), repr. in *Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ronald Paulson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 52–58, at 52–53.
25. *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*, 1st ed. 1741, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely; intro. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46. Except where otherwise indicated, further references to *Pamela* are to this edition and will be cited in parentheses by page number.
26. This quotation, which does not appear in the 1741 edition, is taken from the 1801 edition edited by Peter Sabor with an introduction by Margaret A. Doody (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1980), 48. As is well known, Richardson made extensive revisions to the first edition of *Pamela*, especially toning down Pamela's "lowness" by making her language more refined. More subtly, he also heightened her concern with "improvement" through reading and gave her father, a laborer, an earlier (failed) career as a schoolmaster. Even in her darkest hours, while confined at Mr. B.'s Lincolnshire estate, Pamela records that she "picked out some books from the library. . . and from these I hope to receive improvement" (1801 ed., ed. Sabor, 150). I have chosen to quote chiefly from the 1741 edition because it is the version of the text that Fielding would have read. But as Thomas Keymer acknowledges in his introduction to the 1741 edition, the 1801 edition is also valuable in that "by superimposing defensive revision on the original version" it "incorporates within itself, if properly decoded, a history of its own reception" (Keymer, intro., xxxi).

27. Henry Fielding, *An Apology For The Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (London, 1741; facsimile ed. New York: Garland, 1974), 12. All further references to *Shamela* will be cited in parentheses by page number.
28. Fielding repeatedly suggests the dubious usefulness of literacy skills in readers of "moderate Capacity." Parson Adams's own wife can read but not correctly interpret Scripture. When Lady Booby chastises Adams for concerning himself about Fanny and Joseph, Mrs. Adams concurs, stating, "I can read Scripture as well as he; and I never found that the Parson was obliged to provide for other Folks Children" (4.1.322). Is it worth learning to read, Fielding seems to ask, if this is the message one gleans from the central text of Christianity?
29. Frank, *Common Ground*, 48, 47, 50.
30. *Ibid.*, 52, 55, 58, *et passim*. I use Frank's word here with caution, as our modern term "illiteracy," in the sense of a condition of being unable to read or write, was not commonly used before the nineteenth century – most likely because what we identify as a special condition was still the norm. Well into the eighteenth century, a common definition of "illiterate" (from the Latin *illiteratus*) was someone who did not know Latin.
31. Mandeville "Essay on . . . Charity-Schools," 277.
32. Frank, *Common Ground*, 53–54.
33. Fielding's women of the "Lower Orders" are typically associated with tongues and mouths, not paper and pens. Slipslop's sexuality is linked not to literacy but to orality – her unbridled mouth. Even Fanny, who speaks only rarely, is still associated with the mouth. Early in the work, under threat of rape, she defends herself with shrieks. Later, again under threat of rape, she cries aloud for assistance, but her ravisher informs her, "if she persisted in her Vociferation, he would find a means of stopping her Mouth" (3.12.268). In the same chapter we meet another woman of the "lower Orders" who rambles on before lawyer Peter Pounce as if she is deposing before a magistrate. She complains about her husband, "a very *nonsense* Man," and "would have proceeded in this manner much longer, had not *Peter* stopt her Tongue" (3.12.271–72).
34. Even at the end of the century, female servants' literacy could not be assumed. If it existed in any significant degree in fiction, it had to be "explained" by authors. In *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft goes out of her way to explain how Jemima, a servant, learned to read and even acquired a "taste for literature." Significantly, with respect to Jemima, Wollstonecraft makes the same point that I am arguing Fielding makes in *Joseph Andrews*: without other opportunities, even the most hard-won literacy will not necessarily lead to socioeconomic elevation. Despite her exceptional learning for a woman of her station, Jemima ends up in wretched circumstances doing hard labor. Wollstonecraft suggests that Jemima's education actually makes it *worse* for her when she has to return to her laboring origins: "I had acquired a taste for literature . . . and now to descend to the lowest vulgarity, was a degree of wretchedness not to be imagined" (*Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Moira Ferguson [New York: W. W. Norton, 1975], 63).
35. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 207, 217.
36. Mandeville, "Essay on . . . Charity-Schools," 301–302.
37. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 207–208.
38. Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), x.
39. On the competing impulses of satire and sentiment in mid-eighteenth-century fiction and the problems of celebrating the eighteenth century as a polite and enlightened age of humanitarian initiatives, see Simon Dickie, "In the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Hilarity, Pitilessness, Narrative Fiction," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2000. This quotation is from 255.
40. Claude Rawson, "Henry Fielding," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120–52, at 136.

41. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 220, 222.
42. Frank, *Common Ground*, 62.
43. Mandeville, "Essay on . . . Charity-Schools," 295.
44. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 208.
45. "An Essay on the Knowledge of Characters of Men," in *Miscellanies by Henry Fielding*, *Esq.*, Vol. 1, ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 153–78, at 154.
46. Batesttin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 517.
47. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 177, 184, 177, 14.
48. *Ibid.*, vii, 8.
49. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 1.
50. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy*, 4.

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