

A Joseph Andrews Paper

Parson Adams is most certainly not the true protagonist of Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*. Parson Adams is a nice addition to the novel, a good way to gauge other characters, but he is not the true protagonist. He is however, much like Athena is to Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, a character who pushes the main protagonist along to further places and new heights of virtue.

The novel begins with the character Joseph Andrews and end with the character Joseph Andrews. Parson Adams is a nice centerpiece in the middle of the novel, but to say that he is the main protagonist would be an error. Fielding jumps right into the novel in the beginning, giving us a good background and description of Andrews, even bringing in his dear sister Pamela for a few cameos. Andrews is immediately compared and contrasted to his sister in more than one place. Fielding has written a novel which is centered on a character spun off from *Pamela*. Logically, wouldn't that make Andrews the main character?

For the journey to begin, Parson Adams is a necessary character. Without Adams forgetting his sermons, on his way to getting them published in London, there would be no journey. Adams is required for Fielding to get things going.

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After a careful close reading of the novel, I see no reason to think Parson Adams is the main protagonist. Parson is a means to an end; he is a way for Fielding to explore other characters. Joseph Andrews is often inspired by the sermons of Parson Adams through which the reader can see what a firm and convicted Christian, like his sister, Andrews is. Andrews' adventures in the novel continue to provide evidence that he is a strong Christian. Andrews and

Parson Adams both also travel the country only to run into robbers, rapists, and other heathens. Compared to these people, Andrews and Adams both seem white and holy.

Much as Richardson does in *Pamela*, Joseph Andrews' adventures radiate him in a better light making him, like his sister, look great. Parson Adams is only a part of the equation, coming along for the ride to assist. Parson Adams puts Joseph in a better light. His sermons are the ideal for Joseph; Joseph can strive to live up to them in his own life.

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Fielding also uses Parson Adams to parody Christian values. Adams is shocked to learn that a fellow priest would not lend him any money, which was completely against the tenets of Christianity. His eagerness to get into fights also parodies the peaceful and loving teachings of Jesus. Adams is also the man who gets Mr. Wilson to talk about the affair more. He continually breaks into the man's story to ask more questions and urges him on despite his Christian convictions.

My own amusement at Fielding's parody of Christian values aside, Joseph Andrews does learn a lot from Parson Adams. Andrews is guided by the lessons in morality he receives from Adams, as the reader will see in Andrews' letters to his dear innocent (and pretty darn snotty) sister Pamela.

I am very interested in Fielding's references to classical literature in this novel. Throughout there are mentions of everything from *Ovid* to *Don Quixote*. The reference that catches my eye the most however is the references to *The Odyssey*. I could see Parson Adams fitting in quite well in Homer's work. The novel is even broken up into episodic plots much as Homer breaks up his greatest work.

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I do not, however, see Parson Adams as being like Odysseus. In *Joseph Andrews*, Adams is more like a background character. A means to an end. He is there in each episodic story, not really even comparable metaphorically to Circe, The Cyclops, or Penelope but at the same time, much as those characters enable Odysseus to continue his journey, Parson Adams does the same for Joseph Andrews. He helps him move along on his quest for virtue, much as Athena assists Odysseus on his journey back to Ithaca and his beloved Penelope. My only problem with this: does that make Pamela be Penelope? I shudder at the thought.

Joseph Andrews is the main character in this novel, but Parson Adams certainly has a big part to play in it. I can see where scholars and readers can be lead to believe Adams is the main protagonist. Some days, at the end of the day, I might even be keen to agree with them, but not today. Parson Adams is a classic comedic character, but he is not the main protagonist in *Joseph Andrews*.