

Topic - "Joseph Andrews" a Comic epic in prose.

⇒ A Comic Epic in prose :- A comic epic in prose is similar to the epic. It is large, comprehensive, and contains many incidents and characters like a classical epic. But unlike the serious epic, which treat great persons and historical figures (kings and nobles) great theme and sublime diction, the comic epic treats persons of inferior rank and manners, a general subject matter and its diction is not sublime as well, rather ridiculous.

⇒ It is true that we can term "Joseph Andrews" as a 'comic epic poem in prose' because it has almost all the prerequisites that are important for labelling it as a 'comic epic in prose.'

⇒ Fielding himself termed it as a 'comic epic in prose' in the preface to Joseph Andrews. The impetus for the novel, as Fielding claims in the preface, is the establishment of a genre of writing "which I do not remember to have been hitherto attempted in our language."

⇒ The comic tone of the novel is enhanced by the mock heroic style, for Fielding admitted burlesque in the diction. It is instrumental in heightening the ridiculous nature of situation and affections.

⇒ In "Joseph Andrews" there is an ordinary hero, a journey from one place to another place, mock-wars, digressions, discovery, humour, a high moral and bombastic diction in it.

⇒ Unlike a heroic epic, the hero of "Joseph Andrews" is an ordinary boy. He is a foot-man of Lady Booby who has fallen in love with him. But Joseph is very virtuous and chaste and therefore is dismissed from his job.

⇒ Through the Journey of Joseph Andrews, Fielding satirizes the society of the day and ridicules them. The corrupt and hypocritical clergy, parson Trulliber, parson Barnabas, individual like Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop, the squire of fools and the squire of false promises have been satirized.

⇒ The element of wars and conflicts is very important in an epic and it is no exception in "Joseph Andrews". First of all, there is a conflict between lusty advances of Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop and Chastity of Joseph.

⇒ Also there is a conflict between generosity of parson Adams and miserly parson Trulliber and Mrs. Tow-ouse. Then we see some real action in the form of a war in an inn where Joseph was insulted by the host. ♠

⇒ Parson Adams was annoyed and insulted by the host. There started the first war between both the parties. The funny situation of the bloody fight in which parson Adams gets doused in hog's blood is described in Homeric terms.

⇒ Joseph's encounter with dogs let loose on parson Adams is described in epic-style. Similarly there are many other epical elements in the novel to call it a comic epic.

⇒ The formula of discovery, as described by Aristotle, an essential element of an epic, has also been used by Fielding. In the end of the novel, we see that Joseph is recognized to be Mr. Wilson's child and Fanny as the sister of virtuous Pamela.

⇒ High seriousness is an important element in epic. But in "Joseph Andrews" there is a great deal of comedy and humour, because it is a comic epic novel. Indeed in Joseph Andrews, the comic point of view is sustained throughout the novel.

⇒ But behind this comedy, there lies a serious purpose of reformation. We have a gamut of vain and hypocritical characters in the novel. Each of these characters provides a great deal of humour and amusement under a serious purpose.

⇒ Every epic has a moral lesson in it and this is no exception with a comic epic. Fielding's views on morality are practical, full of common sense and tolerance, liberal and more realistic. These are devoid of Puritanish and rigid codes.

⇒ The use of grand, bombastic and elevated language is an important element in an epic. It has heroic diction. But in "Joseph Andrews" we see that Fielding has used prose for poetry because it brings us close to the real and actual life and it is much more suitable for Fielding's purpose of dealing with comic epic. However, his use of prose is very good, up to the mark and apt for his novel.

⇒ So, we can conclude that the theory of the 'Comic epic poem in prose' as described by Fielding in the preface of 'Joseph Andrews' manifests itself in the novel.

⇒ Fielding has assimilated the rules and adapted them to his way of writing so well that we are not consciously aware of the formal principles which give unity to his materials. According to Thornbury, "Joseph Andrews" by Fielding is;

"An art which conceals art, but is the art of a conscious artist".