



Edward Gibbon and the Shape of History

Charlotte Roberts

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Edward Gibbon's presentation of character in both the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and in his posthumously published *Memoirs* demonstrates a prevailing interest in the values of transcendent heroism and individual liberty, but also an insistent awareness of the dangers these values pose to coherence and narrative order. In this study, Charlotte Roberts demonstrates how these dynamics also inform the 'character' of the *Decline and Fall*: in which ironic difference confronts enervating uniformity; oddity counters specious lucidity; and revision combats repetition.

Edward Gibbon and the Shape of History explores the *Decline and Fall* as a work of scholarship and of literature, tracing both its expansive outline and its expressive details. A close examination of each of the three instalments of Gibbon's history reveals an intimate relationship between the style of Gibbon's narrative and the overall shape of his historiographical composition. The constant interplay between style and substance, or between the particular details of composition and the larger patterns of argument and narrative, informs every aspect of Gibbon's work: from his reception of established and innovative historiographical conventions to the expression of his narrative voice. Through a combination of close reading and larger literary and scholarly analysis, Charlotte Roberts conveys a sense of the *Decline and Fall* as a work more complex and conflicted, in its tone and structure, than has been appreciated by previous scholars, without losing sight of the grand contours of Gibbon's superlative achievement.

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