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EDITED BY
R. P. C. MUTTER

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THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES

Henry Fielding was born in 1707, at Sharpham Park, near Glastonbury. He was educated privately at first and then at Eton. In 1725 he attempted to abduct an heiress and was bound over to keep the peace. He then went to London, where, in 1728, he published a satirical poem, *The Masquerade*, and a comedy, *Love in Several Masques*. From 1728 to 1729 he was a student of literature at Leyden University, returning to London in the autumn of the latter year. Between then and 1737 he wrote some twenty-five dramatic pieces including comedies, adaptations of Molière, farces, ballad operas, burlesques, and a series of topical satires, such as *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*, which lampooned Sir Robert Walpole and his government. It was partly because of this last play that Walpole introduced the Stage Licensing Act in 1737, which effectively ended Fielding's career as a dramatist. After this he embarked on a career in the law and was called to the Bar in 1740, but he had little success as a barrister. In 1734 he married Charlotte Cradock, the model for Sophie Western and also for the heroine of his last novel, *Amelia* (1751).

His novel-writing career began with *Shamela* in 1741, a burlesque written in reaction to, what he saw as, the smug morality propounded by Richardson's *Pamela*. In the following year he published his own alternative conception of the art and purpose of the novel, *Joseph Andrews*, which achieved immediate popularity. His masterpiece *Tom Jones*, one of the great comic novels in English literature, was published in 1749. The *Miscellanies* (including *Jonathan Wild*) were published in 1743. After Walpole's fall he wrote pro-government journalism, and he produced two, weekly anti-Jacobite papers, *The True Patriot* (1745–6) and *The Jacobite's Journal* (1747–8). Later he ran *The Covent Garden Journal* which contains some of his best satire.

In 1748 Fielding was commissioned as a Justice of the Peace for Westminster and in the following year became Chairman of the Quarter Sessions of Westminster. He and his brother, John Fielding, were prominent in developing the police force, and between 1749 and 1752 Fielding wrote a good deal on urgent legal and social problems. For many years he had suffered from gout and in April 1754 ill-health forced him to resign his post and he left for Lisbon. He died on 8 October 1754.

R. P. C. Mutter, the editor of this volume, was Professor of English Literature at the University of Sussex until his retirement in 1981. His previous publications include editions of *Spenser's Minor Poems* and *Pope's Poems and Letters*.

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HENRY FIELDING

HENRY FIELDING was born on 22 April 1707, at his grandfather's house, Sharpham Park, near Glastonbury in Somerset. His father, Edmund, was then a dashing but impecunious lieutenant (who eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant-general); his mother, Sarah Gould, was the daughter of a judge. Before long, the family moved to East Stour, Dorset.

After being educated, first with private tutors and then at Eton, Henry was briefly involved in a love affair with a young heiress at Lyme Regis; he attempted to abduct her, and was bound over to keep the peace. He then made his way to London where, in 1728, he published a satirical poem, *The Masquerade*, and a comedy, *Love in Several Masques* – both titles indicating how early he was occupied with the idea of concealment beneath a disguise. After this he went to the University of Leyden to study classical literature, but returned after about eighteen months, perhaps because his extravagant father ceased to send his allowance. Henry's mother had died in 1718, having borne another son and five daughters; and about a year later, Edmund Fielding remarried. His second wife was an Italian Roman Catholic widow, greatly disliked by Henry; she already had two daughters of her own, and she bore Edmund six sons, including the famous John Fielding who was to be Henry's associate in his campaign against London crime. Edmund's remarriage was followed by a Chancery suit, instituted and won by Lady Gould, for Sarah's children.

By the autumn of 1729 Henry was back in London, and between then and 1737 he wrote some twenty-five dramatic pieces of various kinds – light comedies, adaptations of Molière (whom he regarded as his master in drama, as Cervantes was to be his master in the novel), farces, ballad operas, burlesques (of which the best known is the hilarious *Tom Thumb*), and a series of witty, entertaining, and all-too-successful topical satires, such as *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*, which lampooned Sir Robert Walpole and attacked his government. It was partly because of this last play that Walpole introduced the stage Licensing Act of 1737, which ended Fielding's career not only as playwright but also as theatre manager – for he had by now formed his own company, and was running the Little Theatre,

Haymarket. The Act was passed on 21 June; and on 1 November Fielding was admitted as a law student at the Middle Temple, and had embarked on a new career. He was called to the bar in June 1740, after only two and a half years' study as compared with the normal six or seven. He travelled the western circuit, but apparently had no great success as a barrister – partly, perhaps, because of the gout which already afflicted him.

By now he had a wife and family to support. In Salisbury in 1734 he met, wooed, and eloped with the beautiful Charlotte Cradock, the model not only for Sophia Western but also for the heroine of his last novel, *Amelia* (1751). Her mother, who died in 1735, left them some £1,500, but the money could not last for ever; while still studying in the Temple, Henry turned to journalism, and edited (with James Ralph) a thrice-weekly periodical, *The Champion*, which ran from November 1739 until June 1741.

The publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740 gave a new direction to Fielding's literary activities. He despised the prudential and selfish morality apparently advocated by Richardson, and determined to destroy it by ridicule. *Shamela*, in 1741, was followed by *Joseph Andrews*, in February 1742, both published anonymously; the latter had a fair success – Fielding got £183 from his publisher, Millar, and the novel sold about 6,500 copies, in three editions, in thirteen months. Next, the *Miscellanies* (including *Jonathan Wild*) were published by subscription in 1743, after which Fielding was largely occupied with legal duties and with pro-government journalism – Walpole having by now fallen from power. The Jacobite rising of 1745 stimulated him to the production of two weekly papers directed against the rebels – *The True Patriot* (1745–6) and *The Jacobite's Journal* (1747–8).

Meanwhile, Fielding had suffered a terrible blow. Charlotte, who had borne him two daughters (only one of whom survived), died in his arms, of a fever, in the winter of 1744. Nevertheless he continued to work, and began *Tom Jones* probably in the summer of 1746, finishing it late in 1748. On 27 November 1747, true to his principles and in defiance of convention, he married Mary Daniel, who had been his first wife's maid, and who bore him, in their seven years together, five children (three of whom died young). Fielding's enemies made plenty of capital out of this marriage, the more so as Mary was six months pregnant at the time; but there was undoubtedly affection, as well as the wish to act honourably, behind his decision, and she made him a

good and faithful wife, however much she must have felt herself to be second best to the dearly loved Charlotte.

Partly in recognition of his work as a political journalist, and with George Lyttelton's aid, Fielding was commissioned as a justice of the peace for Westminster in October 1748, and the following year, shortly after the very successful *Tom Jones* appeared, his jurisdiction was extended to the whole of Middlesex. His court, and his house, were in Bow Street. Unscrupulous magistrates – 'trading justices' – could make a very large income by abusing their power to exact fees, but Fielding's integrity was such that he reduced his stipend to about £300, much of which went to his clerk. However, he was no longer in financial straits: Millar gave him a total of £700 for *Tom Jones*, and a thousand guineas for *Amelia*. In May 1749 he became Chairman of the Quarter Sessions of Westminster, and his writings in 1749–52 include a number of pamphlets on burning legal questions; and from January to November 1752 he conducted the last and best of his periodicals, *The Covent-Garden Journal*, which contains some of his most effective satire.

By this time Fielding was a very sick man; for years he had suffered severely from gout, and in 1749 he was dangerously ill. At the age of 45 he dragged himself around on crutches. Nevertheless, he devoted the last five years of his life to fighting London's widespread crime and corruption. With his blind half-brother John (who succeeded him as principal Westminster magistrate) he drew up a plan for the suppression of crime, which involved the organization of London's first effective police force. He postponed a visit to Bath, ordered by his doctor in late 1753, so as to stay at his post in London. But at last, in April 1754, he had to resign, and left for Lisbon in June in search of health. The journey, movingly yet gaily related in the *Voyage to Lisbon* (published posthumously in 1755), was unavailing, and he died on 8 October 1754. 'It is a pity he was not immortal', wrote his cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 'he was so formed for happiness.'

INTRODUCTION

'I AM shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book. I am sorry to hear you have read it; a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work.' Samuel Johnson's outburst to Hannah More typifies innumerable eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attacks on *Tom Jones* and its author. Late in 1749, the year of the novel's publication, a writer calling himself 'Orbilius' published a hundred pages of diatribe against this 'filthy author' and his 'fetid *Foundling*'; and when, the following spring, London experienced two earthquake shocks, there were those who asserted, with varying degrees of sincerity, that *Tom Jones* was in some way responsible. The Bishop of London, in a Pastoral Letter, saw the earthquakes as being a sign of God's wrath against a dissolute people, among whose sins was the reading of lewd books; he named no names, but the scurrilous newspaper *Old England*, always ready to attack Fielding, was quite clear as to which lewd book was principally meant. A translation of *Tom Jones* had, it was said, been banned in France; Paris had not been visited by God's earthquakes; therefore *Tom Jones* was the cause of the earthquakes.

For many readers today this controversy over the book's moral qualities is liable to seem an extinct absurdity, a dodo of literary history. *Tom Jones* is, first and foremost, a great comic novel, a good story well told, with something of a fairy-tale element in its theme: the youth of mysterious and presumably humble birth, in love with a beautiful but seemingly unattainable girl of higher social rank, who finally triumphs over his enemies to discover his parentage, win the girl, and assume his proper place in society. The plot has been highly and justly praised, notably by Coleridge, who rated it, with the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Jonson's *Alchemist*, as one of 'the three most perfect plots ever planned'; and in view of its complexity it may be helpful to give a brief summary at this point.

The wealthy, benevolent Squire Allworthy, living in Somerset with his unmarried sister Bridget, returns one night from a three months' absence to find a baby lying in his bed. The child is adopted by Allworthy, given his own Christian name of Thomas and the surname of the presumed mother, one Jenny Jones. Her

former employer, the schoolmaster Partridge, denies the accusation of paternity, but his hysterically jealous wife gives evidence against him, and he is dismissed from his post.

Soon after the discovery of Tom, Bridget marries the unpleasant and grasping Captain Blifil; the captain dies two years later, leaving behind him a son, who is to become Tom's antagonist. Tom and Master Blifil grow up together under the tuition of the clergyman Thwackum and the philosopher Square. Nearby lives the fox-hunting Squire Western, his worldly and politic sister, and his beautiful daughter Sophia, with whom Tom falls in love. Western, however, is ambitious to secure the marriage of Sophia with Blifil, so that the estates can be joined. Tom's high-spirited escapades (which include an affair with Molly Seagrim, the far-from-innocent daughter of Black George the gamekeeper) are eventually used by Blifil to achieve the deception of Allworthy and Tom's expulsion from the household.

At the same time Sophia, to escape a forced marriage with a man she loathes, runs away; and the middle part of the novel is taken up with various adventures on the road – first as Sophia follows Tom's trail, and then, after the climactic events in the inn at Upton-on-Severn, as Tom pursues Sophia.

Meanwhile Tom has, quite by chance, met Partridge, now set up as a barber-surgeon, and they go along together. He rescues a Mrs Waters from attempted murder, and accompanies her to Upton, where he succumbs to her charms. It is only towards the end of the novel that Partridge identifies Mrs Waters as Jenny Jones, and the horror of presumed incest is added to Tom's many other misfortunes.

Finally all the main characters end up in London. Tom gets involved with the middle-aged nymphomaniac Lady Bellaston, whose crony Lord Fellamar attempts to gain Sophia by force. Fellamar also employs a press-gang to remove Tom, but their aid is made unnecessary by Tom's encounter with Fitzpatrick, a hot-headed Irishman whom he had met at Upton and who now attacks him in mistaken jealousy. Tom wounds him – fatally, it is thought – and is arrested. With the press-gang prepared (at Blifil's instance) to give false witness against him, things look black for Tom; but at last the wheel of Fortune turns and brings him to the top.

The plot is far more complicated than such a summary suggests, and, as the modern reader follows the workings of its

wonderful and intricate mechanism, such things as Allworthy's homily on the true foundations of married happiness, or his lecture on chastity to poor Jenny Jones, may seem tedious intrusions. Allworthy, Fielding's principal spokesman on ethical matters, is widely regarded as a bore – and, which is worse, an artistic failure. 'Fielding was hampered and misled', wrote George Saintsbury, 'by his intention to glorify a particular person, his benefactor Allen.' As for Fielding's introductory chapters, which, he said, had cost him more pains than any other part of the writing, and in which he discourses on many of the moral questions which his characters act out, a modern attitude to them was implied by a critic who hailed the film of *Tom Jones* as 'Fielding without the waffle'. Posters for the film showed a bed with two pillows on it, and the seismograph at Kew recorded no earthquakes.

But *Tom Jones* demands, and deserves, to be taken seriously. Fielding's dedication to George Lyttelton is very far from being humbug. When he talks of 'the beauty of virtue' and says 'to recommend goodness and innocence hath been my sincere endeavour' we ought to pay him the compliment of taking him at his word. The topics which Fielding discusses, 'with all the wit and humour of which I am master', may be unfashionable, but they are still relevant. His basic concern is the nature of happiness as well as of goodness – indeed, as the closing paragraph of the book suggests, they turn out to be inseparable; and in connexion with it he examines, in a way which takes us beyond the localized situations of the novel, such things as tyranny, the distinction between justice and mercy, charity, the ethics of sexual relationships, and, above all, hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy might in fact be called the main theme of nearly all Fielding's major work. In the preface to his *Miscellanies* (1743) he calls it 'this monster', 'this detestable vice', 'the bane of all virtue, morality, and goodness'. His initial impulse as a novelist came from the urge to expose and ridicule what he regarded as the hypocrisy of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded*, which appeared in 1740. Richardson and his characters, in Fielding's view, were a set of sanctimonious self-seekers, and he launched his attack, first in the hilarious burlesque *Shamela* (which was published anonymously, in 1741, but is now pretty generally agreed to be by Fielding), and then in the much greater *Joseph Andrews* of 1742. That Fielding was less than just to Richardson, tending often to misread technical

crudity as moral crudity, need not concern us here: there is no point in prolonging a war between these two great, but totally different, writers; but it is worth drawing attention to the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, in which Fielding enlarges on the twin vices of vanity and hypocrisy, with the latter seen as much the more pernicious. As for the notorious thief and informer on whose career Fielding based his *Jonathan Wild* (1743), an ironic satire on 'great men', no finer real-life example of the hypocrite could have been found. Wild, ostensibly in 'honourable' employment as a 'thief-taker', was secretly the boss of a gang of thieves.

This kind of contrast between appearance and reality, between public profession and private motive, is central to *Tom Jones*. In the introductory 'bill of fare', Fielding tells us that the feast is to be of human nature, and he is concerned both with presenting an ideal and also with showing how the ideal is so often corrupted and distorted by vanity and hypocrisy. The ideal is embodied in Allworthy, and, in her different way, in Sophia Western; and Tom, starting out with the great gift of a naturally good heart, is seen as moving towards the ideal, the proper balance of heart and head, until

> whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man, and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia.

The vice towards which Tom had practically no tendency is hypocrisy. The hypocrite is a man in a mask: when the mask is ripped off, we can see the contrast between the face presented to the world and the real features. But the important thing about Tom is that, like Sophia, he wears no mask. The handsome face (which is partly responsible for getting him into so many scrapes) is the index of a handsome soul, and the comment of that strange misanthropic recluse, the Man of the Hill, is justified: 'I have read that a good countenance is a letter of recommendation; if so, none ever can be more strongly recommended than yourself'. Similarly, after Sophia has been introduced in a glowing prose, through which one can feel the pulsation of Fielding's undying love and esteem for his dead first wife Charlotte, we are told: 'Such was the outside of Sophia; nor was this beautiful frame disgraced by an inhabitant unworthy of it'.

Tom, admittedly, has a moment of something like hypocrisy,

though romantic self-deception might be a better phrase for it. This is when, overjoyed at Allworthy's recovery, he gets drunk, wanders into the fields to cool off, and rhapsodizes over both Sophia's beauty and his own constancy and chastity. Springing up to carve Sophia's name on every tree, he meets again his old flame Molly Seagrim; the tinder catches, and they retire into the thickest part of the grove. The reversal and exposure are comic, but also serious – for it is this episode, observed, stored up, distorted, and then brought out at the suitable moment by Blifil, which leads to Tom's dismissal from Allworthy's favour. Much later, there is an echo on Tom's lips of the same romantic – and unnatural – language: surprised by Sophia at the house of Lady Bellaston, he again proclaims his constancy at the very moment when, 'trembling and pale', he is in an agony of apprehension lest Sophia should have discovered his wretched amour.

These moments aside, Tom is all openness, in sharp contrast to the majority of the figures in Fielding's world. The whole Blifil clan, Bridget Allworthy, Thwackum and Square, the landlords and landladies almost without exception, the Seagrim family, the servants of various ranks – all are hypocrites to some degree, whether their offence is venial and proceeds from self-interest and regard for position (as with the servants and landladies), or mortal and derives from a corrupt heart, as in the case of Blifil. Either way, the hypocrisy is to be shown up, either by the urbane and poker-faced comments of Fielding himself, or by incident (as in the episode where the 'wicked rug' in Molly Seagrim's bedroom falls down, and 'among other female utensils' is discovered the philosopher Square, 'in a posture . . . as ridiculous as can possibly be conceived'), or by self-exposure. People betray themselves by their style, particularly when they fall into an exaggerated rhetoric, as when Mrs Partridge protests her fictitious wrongs (II, 6), or Bridget laments her lost husband (II, 9), or Molly, the moment before Square is revealed, asserts her constancy to Tom. Dorothy Van Ghent has shown in detail how the exposure of hypocrisy is also achieved by the language itself – how around such 'good' words as *decent, respect, vow, pure* and so on is built up a set of connotations which associate them with hypocrisy, and put the reader on his guard against those to whom they are applied.*

Some of these techniques are beautifully illustrated in a pas-

* *The English Novel: Form and Function.* Rinehart & Co., 1953; Harper Torchbooks, 1961.

sage which Mrs Van Ghent analyses – the finding of Tom in Allworthy's bed. The child which, for Allworthy, reveals 'the beauty of innocence, appearing in those lively colours with which infancy and sleep always display it', is in the 'pure' eyes of his 'decent' housekeeper Deborah Wilkins a 'sin', a 'misbegotten wretch', the work of a 'wicked strumpet'. 'Faugh, how it stinks!' she cries, 'it doth not smell like a Christian'. Yet it is the same baby, busy squeezing Allworthy's finger in a gentle grasp which the good man remembers years later (XVIII, 3); and indeed for Mrs Wilkins herself it soon enough becomes 'a sweet little infant', the moment she discerns her master's attitude.

It may be objected that the irony here is simple and unsubtle. Fielding's 'apology' at III, 4 seems to indicate that, perhaps remembering the misunderstanding met with by such earlier ironists as Defoe and Swift, he does not feel entirely able to trust the reader's perceptiveness and must keep his effects fairly broad. But here, at the beginning of the book, Fielding is concerned with establishing, in an emphatic way, the dominant attitudes towards people and their habitual methods of expressing themselves that will inform the novel. He is giving a shorthand account, as it were, of Mrs Wilkins' psychological workings, deliberately simplifying her quite complex behaviour. A similar technique applied to Thwackum and Square, with the brisk antitheses it establishes between profession and performance, suggests, in Professor Humphreys' words, 'the inhumanity of the logic-chopping mind unilluminated by charity'.* Mainly, though, (and this is increasingly the case as the book develops) the irony is comparatively unobtrusive, being conveyed just by the mention of one or other of the words for which adverse connotations have been established, or through words such as *seemed, professed, appeared*. Thus, we have phrases like 'Miss Bridget had always expressed so great a regard for virtue', 'her conversation was so pure, her looks so sage, and her whole deportment so grave and solemn, that she seemed to deserve the name of saint'; Captain Blifil's brother has 'a great appearance of religion'; and so on.

This irony, it must be emphasized, is available to the reader; it is not available to the characters themselves, for one of the qualities of hypocrisy is that it does succeed in imposing upon

* A. R. Humphreys, 'Fielding's Irony: its Method and Effects'. *Review of English Studies*, 1942.