

HENRY FIELDING'S PERSONA IN TOM JONES

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## PREFACE

In writing about Fielding's persona, I pursued a study that originated over a year ago. At that time, through examining Wayne C. Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction, I recognized many layers of meanings in Tom Jones that added depth and new interest to Fielding's novel. Booth's argument convinced me that a great artist can create an implied author to suit his own purpose. Also, other interesting areas of my study include Fielding's comic view of life and his use of irony, subjects that are treated with illuminating candor in many books and articles. Necessarily, this study covers only partially the role Fielding's persona plays as tolerant guide. Perhaps the examples discussed will contribute somewhat to the reader's concept of Fielding's persona in Tom Jones and thus to new interpretations of a famous classic.

I am humbly indebted to Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley, Chairman of the Department of English, for her tolerant guidance in the writing of this thesis. Through her encouragement and her invaluable suggestions, I gained immeasurable impetus. Also initially responsible for helpful suggestions and encouragement is Dr. Joyce Palmer, whose delightful presentation of Tom Jones was responsible for my choice of that

novel. Also, without the selfless assistance of Dr. Dean Bishop, Mrs. Lavon Fulwiler, and Miss Julia Crisp, who gave of their time to read my thesis and add helpful suggestions, my endeavor would have been postponed until a later date.

*Joyce Cude LeRoux*  
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CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF HENRY FIELDING'S  
TOLERANT NARRATOR

Through careful planning of an elaborate second-self, or persona, in Tom Jones, Henry Fielding wrote fiction that remains not only rhetorically sound but also comically refreshing after the lapse of more than two centuries. His knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics, his intellectual awareness of historical as well as contemporary English literary achievements, and his experience as a playwright apparently contributed immeasurably to his deft creation in Tom Jones of a persona around whom and through whom all the characters of the story gain life. Without the everguiding influence of the author's wise and tolerant persona to lead his readers into a shared community of moral and aesthetic values, Tom Jones would lose its impact for the modern reader. Because Fielding speaks through a "witty, humane persona,"<sup>1</sup> he seems to create a common perspective between author and reader and to unite the artist's views with those of the audience. For admirers of Fielding's novel the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 45.

author's created persona succeeds as interpreter and guide.

As Wayne C. Booth says,

The narrator becomes a rich and provocative chorus. It is his wisdom and learning and benevolence that permeate the world of the book, set its comic tone between the extremes of sentimental indulgence and scornful indignation, and in a sense redeem Tom's world of hypocrites and fools.<sup>1</sup>

In creating a dramatized narrator, however, Fielding made no innovation. He and his contemporaries, who donned masks or personae for satirical purposes, had an archetypal model in the dramatists and poets of Ancient Greece. In the first remnants of known literary history one of the poet's methods of addressing the audience was through parabasis, the songs of a masked chorus during intermission. Thus the chorus's function was that of an interested commentator remarking upon the action, voicing the poet's underlying themes. Also, one of its members often became another character in the dramatis personae.<sup>2</sup> Written shortly after the peak of Greek drama, Aristotle's Poetics suggests that "the poet may imitate by narration--in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged--or he may present all his characters as

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<sup>1</sup>The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, eds., Seven Famous Greek Plays, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, Inc., 1938), p. xiv.

living and moving before us."<sup>1</sup> The poet's use of the persona, "another personality," becomes one of Aristotle's three rhetorical methods of persuasion and focuses on the created speaker's character in a "constantly shifting interplay of relationships" as he communicates with his audience.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the writer of an art form who takes another personality, as Homer does, to convey an imitation or mimesis of life seems to combine the parabasis of Greek comedy with the persona or mask donned by Ancient Greek and Roman actors to convey the underlying action of the story to the reader.

Thus using Homer as a model, many of the enduring writers of literature have distinguished their real selves from the official scribes of their art forms. The contemporary writer Jessamyn West explains her own experience of writing as a means of self-discovery. She says it is sometimes "only by writing the story that the novelist can discover--not his story--but its writer, the official scribe, so to speak, for that narrative."<sup>3</sup>

The importance of the speaker's rôle in a literary work is stressed by another writer and critic of this century. John Crowe Ransom, leading spokesman of the New Criticism,

<sup>1</sup>Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, ed. Mark Schorer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>Walker Gibson, Persona: A Style Study for Readers and Writers (New York: Random House, Inc., 1969), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>Booth, p. 71.

warns critics against judging the speaker of an art form by evaluating the author's biography or his historical setting. Instead, he advocates that the distinction be made between the artist's assumed role of a speaker, who becomes the poet's ideal or fictitious personality, and his actualized self.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, many critics and readers continue to conclude that the narrator in Tom Jones is Henry Fielding speaking directly and unmediated.

Wayne Booth offers an interesting analogy concerning the author's role as narrator:

Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works. . . . No single version of Fielding emerges from reading the satirical Jonathan Wild, the two great "comic epics in prose," Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, and that troublesome hybrid, Amelia.<sup>2</sup>

Yet all too often Fielding's role as speaker is accepted as the author himself speaking directly to the reader and not as his created persona, an extension of himself. One esteemed biographer chooses to believe that Fielding refused to "practice the artistic self-suppression which Aristotle recommended."<sup>3</sup> He fails to credit Fielding, "an author of

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<sup>1</sup>"A Poem Nearly Anonymous," Criticism, ed. Mark Schorer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>Pp. 71-72.

<sup>3</sup>F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), II, 1105.

vast original genius,"<sup>1</sup> with enough "original genius" to carefully create an implied author, a special persona, who radiates identifiable characteristics. Another biographer, Wilbur L. Cross, believes that Fielding "thrusts himself in with remarks, anecdotes, and disquisitions, becoming a sort of ubiquitous character" and, consequently, suspends the action in order that he may speak "in propria persona, and pass sentence, as a Bow Street justice ought, on the conduct of his characters."<sup>2</sup> Cross compares this procedure to the parabasis of ancient comedy and sees Fielding, like the chorus, turning to the audience and addressing it directly. That Fielding, well-versed in the Greek and Latin classics, would ignore Homer's objective technique even while he praised him as a model throughout Tom Jones seems illogical. Yet, the reader's problem is understandable, as Booth points out:

We too easily fall into the habit of talking as if the narrator who says, "O my good readers!" were Fielding, forgetting that for all we know he may have worked as deliberately and with as much detachment in creating the wise, urbane narrator of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones as he did in creating the cynical narrator of Jonathan Wild.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the past two centuries readers have voiced differing opinions concerning Fielding's novels. Their

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>The History of Henry Fielding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), III, 220.

<sup>3</sup>Pp. 82-83.

varying opinions relate sometimes to the enthusiasm and warmth of his admirers, few of whom offer dispassionate praise of him.<sup>1</sup> During his lifetime Fielding was not only praised but also attacked. One of his contemporaries, Samuel Johnson, called him "a blockhead,"<sup>2</sup> a term Johnson assigned to all who displeased him.<sup>3</sup> Of his opinion, Johnson's biographer, James Boswell, said, as he evaluated Fielding the artist:

I cannot refrain from repeating here my wonder at Johnson's excessive and unaccountable depreciation of one of the best writers that England has produced. Tom Jones has stood the test of public opinion with such success, as to have established its great merit, both for the story, the sentiments, and the manners, and also the varieties of diction, so as to leave no doubt of its having an animated truth of execution throughout.<sup>4</sup>

One of the English literary critics of the late nineteenth century, Henry James, senses the intimacy created between reader and narrator by the radiating qualities of Fielding as "official scribe" in Tom Jones and writes in his "Preface" to The Princess Casamassima:

His author--he handsomely possessed of a mind--has such an amplitude of reflexion for him [Tom] and round him that we

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<sup>1</sup>Hamilton Macallister, Fielding: Literature in Perspective (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (New York: Bigelow, Brown & Co., n.d.), II, 199.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., n. 2.

<sup>4</sup>P. 201.

see him through the mellow air of Fielding's fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style, which somehow enlarge, make every one and every thing important.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer of the same period perceives the importance of Fielding's simple and straightforward character revealed in his major works. James Russell Lowell's inscription beneath a bust of Fielding, unveiled September 4, 1883, in the Shire-Hall at Taunton, reads:

He looked on naked nature unashamed,  
And saw the Sphinx, now bestial, now divine,  
In Change and rechange; he nor praised nor blamed,  
But drew her as he saw with fearless line.<sup>2</sup>

In the early years of this century George Saintsbury writes, "If he has sometimes been equalled, Fielding has never been surpassed; and it is not easy to see how he can be surpassed."<sup>3</sup> Saintsbury enthusiastically classes Fielding with Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift. A less-admiring appraisal of Fielding in The Times Literary Supplement, in 1954, marks the bicentenary of the author's death and concludes, "A smug . . . presumption of virtuous superiority . . . infects the tone" of Fielding's work.<sup>4</sup> More recently, J. Middleton Murry defends Fielding and his novels and

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<sup>1</sup>The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Cross, III, 252.

<sup>3</sup>Macallister, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.



writes that Fielding had a special quality of brotherly love, agape, as well as a special nobility of mind.<sup>1</sup> Thus critics of English literature continue to reappraise Fielding and his art form; some reassess his works to glimpse the man who created them and thus reject prejudiced accounts of Fielding's life that have plagued his public image.

One of the most subtle and lasting influences that prevented an unbiased approach to Fielding was a slyly suggestive biography by Arthur Murphy that Andrew Miller, the publisher, used as an introduction to a deluxe edition of Henry Fielding's works published in 1762. Murphy's references to unsavory aspects of Fielding's life, sprinkled liberally throughout the essay, might have been a result of his misguided overture to gain the favor of Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, who shared feelings of animosity concerning Fielding's parodies.<sup>2</sup> Many modern scholars, realizing the unfairness of Murphy's allusions, ignore the biased judgments and gossipy anecdotes and find some enlightenment relating to Fielding's recognized genius among his contemporaries, though it was lamely acknowledged by his biographer. Even Murphy admitted that Fielding "disdained all littleness of spirit, was of a penetrating discernment, and could read to the bottom of all disguised selfishness,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Murphy, The Lives of Henry Fielding and Samuel Johnson (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), p. xiii.

pride, avarice, interested friendship, and the ungenerous."<sup>1</sup> Murphy's rhetoric combines damning criticism with faint praise. Hidden among the parrot-like reassertions of Fielding's vices is Murphy's interesting conclusion that "upon the whole he must be pronounced an admirable COMIC GENIUS."<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly many factors contributed to the development of Fielding's "admirable comic genius." Significantly, his ancestors included a long line of English landowners who gained wealth and social status through advantageous marriages. His paternal grandfather was a scholar who became an aristocratic clergyman, and his maternal grandfather was the well-known Judge Henry Gould of Sharpham Park in Somersetshire.<sup>3</sup> His father, Edmund Fielding, a military officer who served under the Duke of Marlborough, apparently mismanaged his inheritance, as his first-born Henry seems to have done. Henry was born to Edmund and Sarah Gould Fielding on April 22, 1707. He lived the first years of his life at the Gould's estate at Sharpham Park before his family settled in a house at East Stour in Dorsetshire.<sup>4</sup> During his early years, tutors instructed him at home. Biographers seem to know very little concerning his life before his mother died.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 246-247.

<sup>3</sup>Dudden, I, 3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Fielding had not reached his twelfth birthday when with the loss of his mother the pattern of his life began to change.<sup>1</sup> His father's marriage to an Italian Roman Catholic widow the following year so displeased his maternal grandmother, Lady Gould, that she took charge of her young grandson and sent him to Eton. She guided his life during his years at Eton, and he apparently spent most of his holidays at her house in Salisbury.<sup>2</sup> Bitter lawsuits between Edmund Fielding and Lady Gould concerned the guardianship and inheritance of the Fielding children. In the same year that Colonel Fielding tried unsuccessfully to kidnap two of Henry's siblings from their school in Salisbury, fourteen-year-old Henry ran away from Eton to his grandmother's house, either from fear of being kidnapped by his father or for excitement and change.<sup>3</sup> While at Eton he developed a broad understanding of the great classics of literature, an accomplishment and love that later contributed to his abilities as a dramatist and novelist. Biographers believe that he left Eton the summer of his seventeenth birthday, but the years between 1724, when he left school, and February 16, 1728, when his first dramatic effort was presented at Drury

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<sup>1</sup>Cross, III, 146.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: Intellectual Realism from Richardson to Sterne (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1930), IV, 78.

<sup>3</sup>Macallister, p. 27.

Lane in London, seem to lack authentic verification.<sup>1</sup>

According to the available information, however, he apparently spent most of his time as the man of leisure at Lady Gould's house with occasional visits to London.<sup>2</sup>

One of the admirers of the youthful Fielding was his influential second cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who probably used her prestige in the London dramatic milieu to have Fielding's first comedy, Love in Several Masques, presented on the London stage.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this first endeavor as a somewhat insignificant youth in a great crowd of adventurers in an unconventional society bluntly focused Fielding's awareness of his inadequacy although his comedy was hailed as a success. Whatever his reasons for temporarily leaving the world of literary Bohemia, he traveled to Leyden, Holland, and registered as a student in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Leyden.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps Fielding needed a more direct experience of life to shape and discipline his creative talents.<sup>5</sup> His first biographer mentions that, while at Leyden, Fielding further developed his genius for representing life with faithful copies of living models:

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<sup>1</sup>Dudden, I, 15, 20, 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

He became, very early in life, an observer of men and manners. Shrewd and piercing in his discernment, he saw the latent sources of human actions, and he could trace the various incongruities of conduct arising from them.<sup>1</sup>

After almost two years of study at the university, he returned to London in August of 1729 with a renewed determination to become a successful playwright.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt, Fielding recognized the genius of his older contemporaries and wished to imitate them. Some of his works show marked similarities to Jonathan Swift's satire Gulliver's Travels<sup>3</sup> and to Alexander Pope's mock-epic The Dunciad, which Fielding literally translated into his plays The Author's Farce (1729) and Pasquin (1736).<sup>4</sup> One critic suggests that the beginning playwright consciously grasped the coattails of the Augustan satirists:

Fielding drew on Pope, Swift, and Gay as freely as he did on Homer and Virgil. . . . The target he aimed at in satire after satire for the next ten years was the same as theirs-- the shoddy literary and artistic world of England from which could be intimated the larger political and moral malaise.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Murphy, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup>Dudden, I, 27-28.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Fielding, The Voyages of Mr. Job Vinegar, from The Champion, 1740, ed. S. J. Sackett, The Augustan Reprint Society (Los Angeles: University of California, 1958), pp. i-ii.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald Paulson, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Fielding as dramatist applied his own kind of genius for unmasking basic human nature, however; and, unlike the Augustans, he portrayed all levels of society, the slums as well as the fashionable salons.<sup>1</sup> His sharpened powers of perception ripped through the mask of appearance to the man behind it.

His dramatic subjects of vice and squalor became increasingly political while he focused more daringly on the foibles of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. In 1737 Fielding ignored warnings by the press that he was harming the government. That same year the Prime Minister ended Fielding's career as a playwright by introducing a Licensing Act that revived the old Elizabethan office of "Master of the Revels" whereby the Lord Chamberlain had to license all plays. The prime target for the Act, Fielding's Little Theatre in the Haymarket, was silenced.<sup>2</sup>

Two and one-half years earlier, on November 28, 1734, Fielding had married Charlotte Cradock, a beauty from Salisbury. They apparently eloped after a long courtship and were wed in a small secluded village church near Bath.<sup>3</sup> His legal residence and place of refuge from the London scene was his inherited property at East Stour. With his career as a dramatist ended, he enrolled as a law student

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<sup>1</sup>Dudden, I, 28.

<sup>2</sup>Macallister, pp. 36-37.

<sup>3</sup>Cross, III, 146.

at the Middle Temple in London, November 1, 1737, and disposed of his farm.<sup>1</sup> He then had the responsibility of a family.

Around the time Fielding completed his intensive three-year study of law, an endeavor that usually required six or seven years, he became editor of a newspaper, The Champion.<sup>2</sup> In his first journalistic essays he created the tolerant social commentator, "the celebrated Captain Hercules Vinegar," and other members of the Vinegar family, who became the shadowy embryos of the narrator in Tom Jones.<sup>3</sup> During his editorship of this periodical, he guided his readers through many of the complexities of life as the detached, fair-minded Captain Vinegar. The dramatist-turned-journalist and essayist formulated certain moral philosophies at this time. He stressed the importance of "good nature," a quality that he later attributed to his hero in Tom Jones as being of primary importance in life. He also included philosophy concerning the detrimental effects of "hypocrisy," a human characteristic that he believed to be among the worst faults of mankind.<sup>4</sup>

In creating his tolerant commentators in his essays Fielding was influenced not only by Swift's satirical persona in Gulliver's Travels, for example, in his extended

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>Dudden, I, 238, 250.

<sup>3</sup>Paulson, pp. 96-97.

<sup>4</sup>Dudden, I, 272, 278.

nondramatic satire about the travels of Job Vinegar, but also by Joseph Addison's created persona in The Tatler and later in The Spectator, Sir Roger de Coverley.<sup>1</sup> In Addison's persona Fielding saw an innovation; the experiences of an ordinary man were enlarged upon, not for the purpose of moral judgment but simply for their own interest. Fielding was undoubtedly impressed by the nondidactic approach to an interpretation of man's actions. Thus his moral philosophy emerged in a manner that made the use of satire untenable. The giants of satire were unconcerned with a culprit's past or with motives and extenuating circumstances. Their pre-occupation focused primarily on judging a man's action.<sup>2</sup>

More than six years later, when Fielding again became editor for a short-lived periodical, the Jacobite's Journal, he used the persona of John Trottplaid, Esquire, to convey his ideas to his readers.<sup>3</sup> At this time his persona acquired a more pronounced comic view of life. Through the use of mock gravity, he applied his art of laughing mankind "out of their favourite follies and vices,"<sup>4</sup> an art that was fully developed through the narrator of Tom Jones.

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<sup>1</sup>Macallister, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Paulson, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Dudden, I, 553.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, Signet Classic (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. viii.



While Fielding was editor of The Champion, Samuel Richardson published Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded.<sup>1</sup> The following year Fielding's parody of Pamela appeared under the title An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews. Until recently scholars were cautious in accepting Shamela as an authentic work by Fielding. Macallister believes that caution is no longer necessary, however, and says, "Literary detective work done by Americans has shown recently without doubt that Shamela--as was always suspected--was written by Fielding."<sup>2</sup> The writing of this parody was the initial stage in the writing of Fielding's first novel, The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams. His novel was published anonymously on February 22, 1742, in two volumes.<sup>3</sup>

Martin Battestin refutes the assumption too often accepted by scholars that Fielding began Joseph Andrews as a second parody of Pamela. Rather than imitative, as in the parody Shamela, the resemblances that exist seem to be allusive.<sup>4</sup> Battestin cogently argues that Fielding wrote each of the works with different motives:

<sup>1</sup>Macallister, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Dudden, I, 327.

<sup>4</sup>Martin C. Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), pp. 6-8.

In the first instance Fielding wished to expose the inherent foolishness of Richardson's book. . . . In Joseph Andrews the allusive ridicule of Richardson is intended as a kind of foil, setting off to advantage Fielding's own ambitious attempt at reconstruction, at presenting . . . a fresh conception of the art of the novel.<sup>1</sup>

In the "Preface" of his first novel Fielding distinguished his species of writing in Joseph Andrews as a kind "hitherto unattempted in our language."<sup>2</sup> The tolerant social commentator of The Champion emerged in the novel as a friend and guide for the reader.

On April 12, 1743, Fielding's Miscellanies were published. One of the most important works in this publication was a grim satire on the Walpole regime, The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great.<sup>3</sup> Fielding based his story, sometimes referred to as a novel, on the life of a master criminal who had been hanged in 1725.<sup>4</sup> His persona in Jonathan Wild maintains subtle and sustained irony as he relates the deeds of the notorious Wild.<sup>5</sup>

Fielding failed to finish Miscellanies on the date originally planned because he was delayed by the illness of

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams, Signet Classic (New York: The New American Library, 1960), p. x.

<sup>3</sup>Baker, IV, 103, 113.

<sup>4</sup>Macallister, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>Baker, IV, 111.

Charlotte.<sup>1</sup> In the "Preface" to Miscellanies he wrote that his wife was "one from whom I draw all the solid comfort of my life."<sup>2</sup> The daughter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote concerning their relationship: "He loved her passionately and she returned his affection, yet had no happy life. For they were seldom in a state of quiet and safety."<sup>3</sup> Their first daughter died in 1742, and Mrs. Fielding never recovered from the illness that caused their child's death. She died of a fever and was buried on November 14, 1744.<sup>4</sup> As a tribute to her memory, Fielding later modeled two of his ideal heroines, Sophia Western of Tom Jones and the heroine of his last novel, Amelia.<sup>5</sup> Three years later he married his wife's maid, Mary Daniel, in a small London church.<sup>6</sup>

By 1748 Fielding suffered from gout, asthma, and dropsy.<sup>7</sup> At this time his friends helped to get him appointed Justice of the Peace for Westminster. The following year his jurisdiction was extended, and he took office as Bow Street Magistrate and in the office made important contributions to English law.<sup>8</sup>

Most scholars concur that Fielding worked intermittently on Tom Jones for three years, from 1746 until it was

<sup>1</sup>Dudden, I, 413.

<sup>5</sup>Baker, IV, 83.

<sup>2</sup>Baker, IV, 83.

<sup>6</sup>Cross, II, 60.

<sup>3</sup>Macallister, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup>Macallister, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Cross, II, 10-11.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

published on February 28, 1749.<sup>1</sup> Fielding brought all of his accumulated skills and experiences to the creation of an important landmark in the history of English fiction.<sup>2</sup> In Tom Jones he perfected his rhetorical poses of the narrator, poses that he continued to develop and improve from his earlier poses as Captain Hercules Vinegar and members of his family. As a middle-aged man he knew firsthand physical suffering, grief, and the frustrations of universal man, and, therefore, he sensed the importance of taking the comic view of life. The influences and experiences of his life entered into his ability to create a novel of such wide scope that it endures after more than two centuries. His ancestry, his education, his loss of loved ones, and his prolific efforts as a playwright, journalist, and novelist helped him to formulate his moral philosophy that adds vitality and impact to his novel. Furthermore, no measurement can determine the influence of his contemporaries in a changing society.

In Tom Jones Fielding summarizes an age through the illumination of his extraordinary intelligence and his penetrating insight into the universal and eternal truths of human nature. One of his enthusiastic biographers gives a theory concerning the enduring qualities of Tom Jones: "He employed for his purpose a style and a manner so sound

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<sup>1</sup>Cross, II, 100.

<sup>2</sup>Baker, IV, 189.

and so impressive that age seems unable to abate the glory of the achievement."<sup>1</sup>

Fielding's desire to instruct as well as to entertain becomes a reality for many readers who appreciate the epic comprehensiveness that resulted from Fielding's "giving full scope" to his "personality as moralist, scholar, humorist, reformer, satirist, and man of the world"<sup>2</sup> through the observations and comments of his created narrator.

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<sup>1</sup>Cross, III, 284-285.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Irwin, Henry Fielding: The Tentative Realist (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 143.

## CHAPTER II

### FIELDING'S APPROACH TO LIFE

After his first wife's death in 1744, Fielding planned to abandon his career as a writer of fiction and devote himself to the practice of law.<sup>1</sup> The encouragement and patronage of three friends, George Lyttleton, Ralph Allen, and the Duke of Bedford, who recognized his genius, enabled him, however, to continue his literary career and to focus his creative powers on his work in an atmosphere free of the monetary pressures that had often plagued him.<sup>2</sup> In his dedication for Tom Jones he gave special tribute to Lyttleton:

To you, Sir, it is owing that this history was ever begun. It was by your desire that I first thought of such a composition. . . . Without your assistance this history had never been completed. . . . I partly owe to you my existence during great part of the time which I have employed in composing it.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, Lyttleton's persuasiveness convinced Fielding that he should write another comic epic and dramatize

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<sup>1</sup>Fielding's Preface to Sarah Fielding's The Adventures of David Simple, ed. Malcolm Kelsall (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. v.

<sup>2</sup>Dudden, II, 583-584.

<sup>3</sup>The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, The Works of Henry Fielding in Twelve Volumes (London: Gay and Bird, 1903), III, xix. All quotations are from this edition.

"HUMAN NATURE" as he envisioned it, a subject of inexhaustible "prodigious variety" (III, 2-3).

As the founder of "a new province of writing" (III, 67), Fielding combines "all the wit and humour" that he had acquired as playwright, essayist, journalist, and novelist with his serious moral purpose "to make good men wise" by dramatizing the inner peace that results from virtuous living (III, xxiii). Because of his double purpose of presenting serious moral concepts in a nondidactic manner and of using his comic spirit "to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices," however, Fielding's moral purpose in Tom Jones may be overlooked. According to Middleton Murry, Fielding's moral intensity is often misunderstood as "the genial tolerance of the man-about-town" or as "a simple attitude."<sup>1</sup> Henry Miller clarifies the problem of appreciating Fielding's moral purpose thus:

The achievement of that laudable moral end is complicated in Fielding's work by a number of factors. . . . First, there is Fielding's continuing comic appreciation of the ludicrous in things, for example, of the disparity between profession and conduct, even in the case of good men and laudable ideals. This sense of the ridiculous took him well out of the paths of the conventional moralist. Second, there is the omnipresent duality in Fielding's thought (which, incidentally, makes every attempt to categorize him in any set of unilateral terms, to make him the uncritical follower of any given school or way of life, necessarily a falsification), a duality that made the moral simplicity he honestly sought very difficult to achieve.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Unprofessional Essay (Cape, 1956), quoted by Battestin, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup>Essays on Fielding's Miscellanies (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 264.

Therefore, the fact that his moral purpose in Tom Jones is often unrecognized results from Fielding's complicated blending of the ridiculous and absurd in human behavior with his own broad and personal moral convictions.

In uniting his moral concepts with his comic view of life in the created narrator of Tom Jones, Fielding transcends moral didacticism and sees the confusions and contradictions of mankind as fascinating sources of vexation and amusement. He assumes the pose of comic irony to view mortal frailty in all its complexities. According to Ethel Thornbury, his comic spirit becomes his weapon for helping men see their follies.<sup>1</sup> In like manner, says David Worcester, Aristotle's concept of the comic approach resembles later descriptions of the comic spirit: through the comic approach mankind can view "an ugliness without pain."<sup>2</sup> A similar concept stresses the importance of protective laughter in observing human nature. In his fourth canto of Don Juan, Lord Byron declares, "And if I laugh at any mortal thing, / 'Tis that I may not weep" (ll. 25-26).<sup>3</sup> Thus Fielding cushions the impact of his dramatization of basic human nature through his comic approach of corrective laughter

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic, rev. ed. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>The Art of Satire (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. M. H. Abrams and others (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962), II, 334.



that focuses on the incongruity between men's pretensions and their real feelings. His portrayal of the strange inconsistency of human action, indelibly etched in his mind after years of observing and weighing impressions of human conduct, demands all the ingenuity at his command. Thus his narrator in Tom Jones asks for help in judging the frailties of mankind:

First, Genius; thou gift of Heaven; without whose aid in vain we struggle against the stream of nature. . . . Take me by the hand, and lead me through all the mazes, the winding labyrinths of nature. . . . Teach me, which to thee is no difficult task, to know mankind better than they know themselves. . . . Come, thou that hast inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Lucian, thy Cervantes, thy Rabelais, thy Molière, thy Shakespeare, thy Swift, thy Marivaux, fill my pages with humour; till mankind learn the good-nature to laugh only at the follies of others, and the humility to grieve at their own. (V, 262-263)

Perhaps Fielding's comedy endures because of his underlying optimism that denies the hopelessness of the human condition.<sup>1</sup> His intoxicating optimism in analyzing central truths of human behavior makes his novel relevant for every generation. Although comedy is usually a perishable commodity, Tom Jones survives. Even Fielding's first biographer, who adds faint praise for Fielding's genius along with damning criticism of his personal vices, recognizes the enduring quality of Tom Jones:

To the number of those, who by the vigour of their talents, and the vivacity of their wit, seem to have enlarged the

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, p. 423.

bounds prescribed, in the common course of things, to the memory of man, and gained a pas-port [sic] to future ages, may be added the late Henry Fielding, whose Works will be admired, while a taste for true humour remains in this country.<sup>1</sup>

In his refusal to condemn individual absurdities, Fielding escapes the danger of bigotry, a fatal disease for a writer, by displaying his essential fair-mindedness with self-critical native irony.<sup>2</sup> He knows that an author of comedy must have a good heart and know the ridiculous. In Tom Jones he writes, "I am convinced I never make my reader laugh heartily but where I have laughed before him" (IV, 318). His versatile persona lights up the story with human warmth and implements his weapon of comic irony to portray the ridiculous and the sublime within man. True humor springs from the heart, as Stuart Tave suggests, and its essence is not contempt but sensibility, a feeling of brotherly love for all mankind.<sup>3</sup> Through comic irony, Fielding's narrator adds new dimensions to such old clichés as "behind every saint lurks a hypocrite" and "everyone has the defects of his virtues."<sup>4</sup> The importance of his objective pose of

<sup>1</sup>Murphy, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Miller, pp. 425-426.

<sup>3</sup>The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 240.

<sup>4</sup>Worcester, p. 140.

comic irony portrayed in his created narrator is delineated thus by Ernest Baker:

The author will stand calmly aloof, never taking sides, smiling at the vagaries and affectations of all alike. By the delicate balancing of opposites he will bring about that equilibrium which is the end of disinterested comedy.<sup>1</sup>

Other critics concur with Baker in emphasizing the narrator's role in keeping the story on the comic level.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Wright perceives that Fielding's narrator stands between his novel and a didactic interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Fielding's comedy in Tom Jones has a purpose. It is not disinterested but rather sympathetic, the comedy that alleviates the sorrow of the human condition by emphasizing that each man's absurdities are shared universally.<sup>4</sup> Through his objective persona he censors the manners and morals of mankind, especially those of his society.

Although Miller cautions against categorizing Fielding's beliefs within any given school or way of life, he later does some clarifying himself by adding that Fielding's

<sup>1</sup>IV, 124.

<sup>2</sup>Alan D. McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1956), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Fielding: Mask and Feast (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard N. Schilling, The Comic Spirit: Boccaccio to Thomas Mann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 17.

belief embodies the Christian idea of agape.<sup>1</sup> In tracing Fielding's ethics, Martin Battestin finds that much of his ethics resembles that of the Christian latitudinarianism of mid-eighteenth-century England.<sup>2</sup> By the time Fielding arrived on the scene, the religion of England was primarily of two schools, summarized by George Trevelyan as latitudinarian Christianity and Methodism.<sup>3</sup> Fielding's rejection of most of the basic principles of Methodism stems in large measure from his objections to the preaching of George Whitefield, partner of John Wesley, founder of this sect.<sup>4</sup> George Whitefield's de-emphasis of good works as a means of attaining salvation, a concept persuasively expatiated by St. Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9, conflicts with Fielding's emphasis on the importance of active good works, an equally persuasive idea found in James 2:14. In Tom Jones Fielding's persona alludes disparagingly to "the great preacher Whitefield" and to all who are tainted "with the pernicious principles of Methodism or of any other heretical sect" (IV, 230). Tom is allowed to stay at an inn at Gloucester because George Whitefield's brother, who runs the inn, rejects the principles of Methodism and, therefore, is "not

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<sup>1</sup>P. 87.

<sup>2</sup>P. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Illustrated English Social History: The Eighteenth Century, Penguin Books (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1944), III, 112.

<sup>4</sup>Battestin, p. 23.

likely to create any disturbance either in Church or State" (IV, 230).

Like the broad-minded, tolerant latitudinarians, Fielding conceived of religion as focused on active charity. Charity does not mean mere alms-giving, although philanthropic actions are a spontaneous manifestation of that quality, but, rather, an active, universal brotherly love, the agape practiced by early Christians.<sup>1</sup> Friend and enemy must be equally embraced if a man wishes to attain peace of mind. In Tom Jones, Fielding dramatizes the importance of natural and spontaneous acts of charity through his good-natured characters. Tom, the epitome of good nature, instinctively helps anyone in need. His impulsiveness, Master Blifil does not understand. Also, Tom's loyalty to the only friend he has "among the servants of the family, . . . the gamekeeper, a fellow of a loose kind of disposition," causes him to suffer much adverse criticism (III, 124). For good-natured Tom, social status does not exist. One example of his active charity occurs when a beggar in rags asks Tom and Partridge, his traveling companion, for alms. Instinctively, generous Tom gives the lame man a shilling. Good fortune comes to Tom almost instantaneously. Recognizing Tom as a man of honor because of his active charity, the beggar sells him Sophia's lost pocket-book, which Tom uses in London as an excuse to find her (V, 184-185). Later, Tom learns more about Sophia from a "poor merry-andrew" whom he rescues

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<sup>1</sup>Battestin, p. 18.

from a cruel master, thus performing another of his acts of instinctive brotherly love (V, 210-211). His most important acts of charity, however, are his spontaneous and generous acts of brotherly love for Mrs. Miller's relatives. Because of his generosity to the very poor Anderson family, relations of Mrs. Miller, and his successful efforts to reunite Nancy Miller and her lover, Nightingale, in marriage, Mrs. Miller becomes Tom's staunch ally who helps him become reunited with Mr. Allworthy, his surrogate parent (V, 257, 312-313; VI, 22-26). In all of Tom's instinctive acts of charity, Fielding stresses the young man's moral responsibility.

Another resemblance to the latitudinarian's beliefs is Fielding's spirit of tolerance in observing human nature, as expressed in these words:

There is in some (I believe in many) human breasts a kind and benevolent disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the happiness of others. That in this gratification alone, as in friendship, in parental and filial affection, as indeed in general philanthropy, there is a great and exquisite delight. (IV, 3-4)

Fielding differs from the latitudinarians, however, concerning the essential perfectibility of man.<sup>1</sup> In The Champion he writes that malice exists within our natures and is motivated by "a delight in mischief."<sup>2</sup> He further clarifies his position between that of Calvinism and the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

latitudinarians, or perhaps between Hobbes and the latitudinarians: "Though I am unwilling to look on human nature as a mere sink of iniquity, I am far from insinuating that it is a state of perfection."<sup>1</sup> The passions of good and evil, for him, are mixed in varying proportions within each individual.

In Book VI of Tom Jones Fielding's persona delineates his basic philosophy of love and instructs the reader who does not share his beliefs to waste no more time "in reading what you can neither taste nor comprehend" (IV, 5). He scathingly rejects the philosophy of Hobbes, that "modern doctrine" that declares there are "no such things as virtue or goodness really existing in human nature" (IV, 1-2). These "truth-finders" are accused of "searching, rummaging, and examining into a nasty place, indeed, . . . A BAD MIND":

The truth-finder, having raked out that jakes, his own mind, and being there capable of tracing no ray of divinity, nor anything virtuous, or good, or lovely, or loving, very fairly, honestly, and logically concludes that no such things exist in the whole creation. (IV, 2)

Fielding's concept of brotherly love, or humanity, another synonym for his concept of true charity, becomes his primary philosophy, and the golden rule of the Bible his central rule of social behavior.<sup>2</sup> In seeking assistance from the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Morris Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), p. 33.

muses to present human nature adequately, Fielding's narrator calls on Humanity:

And thou, almost the constant attendant on true genius, Humanity, bring all thy tender sensations. . . . From these alone proceed the noble, disinterested friendship, the melting love, the generous sentiment, the ardent gratitude, the soft compassion, the candid opinion; and all those strong energies of a good mind, which . . . swell the heart with tides of grief, joy, and benevolence. (V, 263)

In his approach to the mixture of good and evil in human nature, Fielding's works resemble Alexander Pope's. Like Pope, Fielding knows that man, not God, is the object of study. Also, the two share ideas concerning judging other persons. Because of man's mixed nature, moral judgments are a delicate affair. Man, a variant blending of all degrees and kinds of passions, is the eternal puzzle of nature. Pope summarizes man's mixed nature: "Virtuous and vicious every Man must be,/ Few in th' extreme, but all in the degree."<sup>1</sup> Fielding pursues the theme of the puzzling contradiction within the individual's nature in his poem "To John Hayes, Esq." His primary stress seems to concern the confusion inherent in any attempts to judge an individual:

Yet farther with the Muse pursue the Theme,  
And see how various Men at once will seem;  
How Passions blended on each other fix,  
How Vice and Virtues, Faults with Graces mix;

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<sup>1</sup>"Essay on Man," ll. 231-232, Alexander Pope, Selected Poetry and Prose, Rinehart Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 144.



How Passions opposite, as sour to sweet,  
 Shall in one Bosom at one Moment meet.  
 With various Luck for Victory contend,  
 And now shall carry, and now lose their End.  
 The rotten Beau, while smelt along the Room,  
 Divides your Nose 'twixt Stenches and Perfume:  
 So Vice and Virtue lay such equal Claim,  
 Your Judgment knows not when to praise or blame.<sup>1</sup>  
 (I, 36-37)

Man's struggle to appear to be something he is not, Fielding observes, compounds man's inherent state of confusion. Thus moral judgment becomes a complicated procedure. For him, the complex mixture of warring passions in the human mind makes man the unpredictable yet humorous being that becomes so very adaptable for the comic writer's pen.<sup>2</sup> Fielding's vision of mankind recognizes that no man is completely infallible. Even his almost ideal character, Mr. Allworthy, has many shortcomings. In his satire Jonathan Wild, Fielding's persona exhorts the reader not to bestow praise or censure too hastily:

We shall often find such a mixture of good and evil in the same character that it may require a very accurate judgment and a very elaborate inquiry to determine on which side the balance turns; for though we sometimes meet with an Aristides or a Brutus, . . . yet far the greater number are of the mixed kind--neither totally good nor bad.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, pp. 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild, the Great, Signet Classic (New York: The New American Library, 1962), pp. 21-22.

Consequently, a man's character must be evaluated by viewing the whole man rather than an individual action. As the result of "a very elaborate inquiry," a pattern of actions for an individual will usually emerge. Fielding seems to believe that from this emerging pattern one can arrive at certain deductions or judgments. Of course, as mentioned above, Fielding is aware that man's struggle to appear to be something he is not poses an almost insurmountable obstacle for accurate judgments. Man's struggle to mask his true feelings and identity compounds his inherent state of confusion. Lacking the more recent findings of psychology, Fielding hesitates to distinguish between the mask and the man. His persona in Tom Jones says, "I am not possessed of any touchstone which can distinguish the true from the false" (III, 45). Yet, in his dramatization of this problem of distinguishing between the false and the true, Fielding exhibits his adeptness in portraying different characters in action, action that reveals the unadorned self minus the mask of appearance. Although the narrator denies having "any touchstone which can distinguish the true from the false," Alan D. McKillop recognizes Tom as Fielding's touchstone whereby other characters are judged "as they meet this test."<sup>1</sup> Ronald Paulson not only sees Tom as a touchstone to test other characters but also as a corrective to

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<sup>1</sup>McKillop, p. 212.

expose their lack of natural instinct.<sup>1</sup> One critic notes the vivacity and humor of Fielding's dramatic presentation in his revelation of true identities:

In Tom Jones, life is conceived specifically as a conflict between natural, instinctive feeling, and those appearances with which people disguise, deny, or inhibit natural feeling--intellectual theories, rigid moral dogmas, economic conveniences, doctrines of chic or of social "respectability." . . . Outward appearance . . . and the inner reality engage in constant eruptive combat, and the battlefield is strewn with a debris of ripped masks, while exposed human nature--shocked to find itself uncovered and naked--runs on shivering shanks and with bloody pate, like the villagers fleeing from Molly Seagrim in the famous churchyard battle.<sup>2</sup>

One of Fielding's dramatizations of the problem of judging from appearances is in Bridget Allworthy Blifil, whose brother is a paragon of unquestionable virtue. Fielding's persona introduces her as she appears to be: "Miss Bridget Allworthy . . . so discreet was she in her conduct that her prudence was as much on the guard as if she had had all the snares to apprehend" (III, 7). Her high regard for "virtue" causes her to maintain "a severity of character" to the world (III, 16-17). Fielding's persona continues to reveal the masked self that Bridget wears for the world: "Her conversation was so pure, her looks so sage, and her whole deportment so grave and solemn, that

<sup>1</sup>Paulson, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, Perennial Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), pp. 87-89.

she seemed to deserve the name of saint equally with her namesake, or with any other female in the Roman kalendar" (III, 45).

Soon after she meets Captain Blifil, Bridget "loves" him. Fielding's persona distinguishes her kind of love and subtly hints at the feelings of lust she harbors for the far-from-handsome captain. She is adept, however, in the art of appearances and manages to disguise her feelings in public:

During this whole time, which filled the space of near a month, the captain preserved great distance of behaviour to his lady in the presence of the brother; and the more he succeeded with her in private, the more reserved was he in public. And as for the lady, she had no sooner secured her lover than she behaved to him before company with the highest degree of indifference. (III, 54-55)

Thus the pattern of action for both Bridget and Captain Blifil seems to border on, if not indeed be, the art of deception, an art they continue to practice after their marriage.

Fielding's narrator foreshadows Bridget's lack of virtue when he confides, "Eight months after the celebration of the nuptials . . . was Miss Bridget by reason of a fright delivered of a fine boy" (III, 69). Thus the narrator prepares the reader for the information in Book XVIII that Bridget's appearance of purity and virtue is a false mask. Through a clandestine love affair with the son of a clergyman whom Mr. Allworthy helped to educate, Bridget is the

mother of Tom Jones, who is less than two years older than young Blifil.

After the death of Captain Blifil, Fielding's persona hints at another illicit love affair with Square, who is one of the tutors for the young boys:

Whether Mrs. Blifil had been surfeited with the sweets of marriage, or disgusted by its bitters, or from other cause it proceeded, I will not determine; but she could never be brought to listen to any second proposals. However, she at last conversed with Square with such a degree of intimacy that malicious tongues began to whisper things of her. (III, 150)

No judgment is made of Bridget by Fielding's persona, but Mr. Allworthy, upon hearing that Bridget and not Jenny Jones is the mother of Tom, judges Bridget for her failure to admit the truth rather than for her lack of virtue: "Good heavens! Well! The Lord disposeth all things. Yet sure it was a most unjustifiable conduct in my sister to carry this secret with her out of the world" (VI, 288).

After Sophia and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, her cousin, arrive in London, Fielding's persona comments on the latter's refusal to accept a bed in the Irish peer's mansion, a comment that includes all women and, therefore, can be considered as a comment on Bridget's former conduct:

The most formal appearance of virtue, when it is only an appearance, may, perhaps, in very abstracted considerations, seem to be rather less commendable than virtue itself without this formality; but it will, however, be always more commended; and this, I believe, will be granted by all, that it is necessary, unless in some very particular cases, for every woman to support either the one or the other. (V, 159-160)

The whole man must be viewed not only to distinguish appearance from reality but also to distinguish action and motive. Through his dramatization of certain characters Fielding seems to say that one must not assign motives to an individual on the basis of one action. His persona says, "We never chuse to assign motives to the actions of men, when there is any possibility of our being mistaken" (III, 323). Yet, his narrator, "to deal plainly with the reader," assigns the motive of greed to Captain Blifil concerning his decision to marry "Mr. Allworthy's house and gardens" for which he would have "contracted marriage with . . . the witch of Endor" (III, 52). Having presented Captain Blifil in a series of unflattering actions, Fielding's persona informs the reader that the captain dies during one of his deep meditations "on Mr. Allworthy's fortune," which he has figured, ironically, will be his soon (III, 111). Thus the captain's pattern of actions is presented to verify the narrator's assignment of motives, one of his worst actions being his attempt to oust Tom from Mr. Allworthy's house.

Although an individual's motivations can never be positively identified, Fielding shows rather graphically that a man's pattern of actions becomes a type of window into his mind. Another enlightening example of Fielding's belief concerning judging a man's motives is the character of Black George, the gamekeeper whom young Tom befriended, "a fellow of a loose kind of disposition" (III, 124).

Through young Blifil's villainy, Black George loses his job with Mr. Allworthy, but through his ever-loyal young friend, Tom, George is given a more satisfactory position in the service of Mr. Western. After the reader learns that Black George has found and appropriated for himself the large sum of money which Mr. Allworthy gave Tom as a parting gift, the gamekeeper's gratitude to Tom for past loyalties and generosities are summed up by Fielding's persona:

Indeed I believe there are few favours which he would not have gladly conferred on Mr. Jones; for he bore as much gratitude towards him as he could, and was as honest as men who love money better than any other thing in the universe, generally are. (IV, 70)

Shortly after this scene the complexity of Black George's reactions is minutely examined to clarify Fielding's optimistic belief that even "bad" men are not completely villainous. At this time Black George foregoes his opportunity, as messenger for Miss Sophia Western, to steal an additional sixteen guineas she is generously sending to Tom, who has been "turned out of doors" by Mr. Allworthy. Using the judicial metaphor that is prevalent in Tom Jones, the narrator analyzes Black George's dilemma in terms of a courtroom scene with his conscience as "a good lawyer," avarice opposing conscience, and fear deciding the case:

Black George, having received the purse, set forward towards the ale-house; but in the way a thought occurred to him, whether he should not detain this money likewise. His conscience, however, immediately started at this

suggestion, and began to upbraid him with ingratitude to his benefactor. To this his avarice answered, That his conscience should have considered the matter before, when he deprived poor Jones of his 500 pounds. That having quietly acquiesced in what was of so much greater importance, it was absurd, if not downright hypocrisy, to affect any qualms at this trifle. In return to which, Conscience, like a good lawyer, attempted to distinguish between an absolute breach of trust, as here, where the goods were delivered, and a bare concealment of what was found, as in the former case. . . . In short, poor Conscience had certainly been defeated in the argument, had not Fear stepped in to her assistance, and very strenuously urged that the real distinction between the two actions, did not lie in the different degrees of honour but of safety; for that the secreting the 500 pounds was a matter of very little hazard; whereas the detaining the sixteen guineas was liable to the utmost danger of discovery. (IV, 76-77)

Fielding's persona comments further on his showcase analysis of Black George. Using the metaphor of the theater that is also prevalent in his novel, his persona discusses the variety of reactions of the upper gallery, boxes, and pit to the scene about Black George. He adds that

we, who are admitted behind the scenes of this great theatre of Nature . . . can censure the action, without conceiving any absolute detestation of the person, whom perhaps Nature may not have designed to act an ill part in all her dramas; for in this instance life most exactly resembles the stage, since it is often the same person who represents the villain and the heroe. (IV, 84-85)

Fielding's persona stresses that an action cannot be isolated and accurately interpreted. He continues to make his point: "A single bad act no more constitutes a villain in life, than a single bad part on the stage. The passions, like the managers of a playhouse, often force men upon parts without consulting their judgement, and sometimes without any regard



to their talents" (IV, 85-86). The "man of candour and of true understanding," therefore, will avoid hasty judgments and rage against the "guilty party." As Paulson says, "Fielding has pushed his search behind motive itself, suggesting that the action, even if understood, is not basis for a definitive judgment of a man. One must look to the general span of his life."<sup>1</sup>

Later, trying to invest Tom's five hundred pounds in London, Black George Seagrim again acts as a messenger between Sophia and Tom, who is in prison. The gamekeeper's compassion for Tom in his imprisonment sounds genuine and causes Tom to exclaim later, when acquainted with the facts of George's theft: "Call it weakness rather than ingratitude" (VI, 328). But, for Mr. Allworthy, ingratitude is one of the "blacker crimes" (VI, 329), like murder and cruelty, and Black George has shown ingratitude. Although, as Fielding's persona suggests, "a single bad act no more constitutes a villain in life than a single bad part on the stage" (IV, 85-86), a series of bad actions gives revealing clues to a man's true character. Black George's compassion for others lacks depth. His motivation seems to be that of self-interest, an abhorrent motive that negates Fielding's primary virtue of active brotherly love.

One of the complexities of Fielding's approach to life is his unwritten but implied attitude of determinism.

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<sup>1</sup>Paulson, p. 148.

Miller, who has examined Fielding's Miscellanies as well as his other works, suggests that an element of determinism in Fielding's concept of character as something innate concerns "those psychopathic, antisocial beings" who are "insensible to moral or humane urging."<sup>1</sup> Fielding recognizes, therefore, that a small segment of mankind is not a part of the mainstream of life where individuals reflect both good and evil but retain at least a minimum degree of compassion for others. Although Black George Seagrim is an immature, self-seeking personality, his weak compassion for Tom saves him from being a psychopathic personality. His caricatures lie between the black and white, in those "subtle gradations of grey" that Margaret Willy perceives as creations that delighted Fielding.<sup>2</sup>

In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," a handbook of hypocrisy,<sup>3</sup> Fielding notes that some individuals fail to acquire any degree of innate goodness. He proposes that only through the acknowledgment of "some unacquired, original distinction, in the nature or soul of one man, from that of another," may we account for the extremely different inclinations to good or evil. In support of this view, Fielding continues: "This original

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<sup>1</sup>P. 424.

<sup>2</sup>Life Was Their Cry (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1950), p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, p. 191.

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" (Miscellanies, I, 182-183). Fielding dramatizes his concept of an original distinction within the nature of different individuals through the characters of Tom and Blifil, who, the reader learns, are, indeed, half-brothers reared in the same environment. Fielding deliberately contrasts Blifil's deceitful character with Tom's good-natured, open character. His concept of determinism focuses on Tom's innate propensity to goodness juxtaposed by Blifil's innate selfishness and villainy. Blifil masks selfishness, greed, envy, and hypocrisy and appears to be the model of social respectability. In Fielding's ethics, the man who masks these vices causes almost irreparable harm to charitable, good-natured men. He distinguishes the two causes of affectation in human nature, vanity and hypocrisy, and stresses the repugnant effects of false appearances caused by the latter:

Now, affectation proceeds from one of these two causes: vanity or hypocrisy; for as vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause, so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavour to avoid censure, by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues. And though these two causes are often confounded (for there is some difficulty in distinguishing them), yet, as they proceed from very different motives, so they are as clearly distinct in their operations; for, indeed, the affectation which arises from vanity is nearer to truth than the other, as it hath not that violent repugnancy of nature to struggle with which that of the hypocrite hath. . . . For though the vain man is not what he would appear, or hath not the virtue he affects, . . . yet it

sits less awkwardly on him than on the avaricious man, who is the very reverse of what he would seem to be.<sup>1</sup>

Even in his earlier works Fielding abhors hypocrisy and writes about the problem of good men falling into the schemes of deceitful hypocrites.<sup>2</sup> One of his primary aims is to help innocent people be on guard against deceit and hypocrisy.<sup>3</sup> In Tom Jones he exposes the motives behind Blifil's actions of social injustice. In exposing Blifil's motives, he portrays how a hypocrite of this type might be recognized, and he thus achieves his corrective purpose of setting the good-natured man on guard to be a match for the cunning hypocrite. He believes that if honest men can be schooled in seeing behind the disguises worn by the hypocrites and can learn to recognize their passion of ambition, honest men can learn to defend themselves.<sup>4</sup> In his dedication to Tom Jones he writes that one of his endeavors throughout the "history" has been to encourage virtue and innocence. He stresses the fact that the only way these fine qualities can be injured is "by indiscretion, . . . which often betrays" man into the "snares that deceit and villainy spread for them" (III, xxiii).

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Andrews, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>2</sup>Miller, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

Fielding's attempts to warn good-hearted men of the cunning and devious plans of their hypocritical friends resemble many earlier literary indictments of the hypocrite. In fact, Miller shows that the indictment of the hypocrite is found in the earliest recorded literature.<sup>1</sup> For Fielding's moral purpose, his exposure of the art of deceit is important and probably relates to his basic Christian ethics. One of the more prolific writers of prophecy in the Old Testament discusses the villainy of the hypocrite:

The vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

(Isaiah 32.6)

Another Christian writer deals with the problem of man's hypocrisy. In Paradise Lost John Milton writes, "For neither man nor angel can discern/ Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks/ Invisible, except to God alone" (III, 282-284).<sup>2</sup>

Having a completely guileless nature, open and free of hypocrisy, Fielding resents deceitfulness in others.<sup>3</sup> In his attempts to instruct good-natured men in the art of deceit to help them recognize and thus avoid the traps set

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. Harris Francis Fletcher (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941), pp. 212-213.

<sup>3</sup>Murphy, p. 234.

for them, he distinguishes the two types of hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup> He labels one the kind that practices deceit in order to gain another's material possessions and the second, the type that proceeds from envy and ill-nature. Also, Fielding's worst hypocrites, like Blifil, seem to gain malicious pleasure in acting as censor of others under the pose of superior virtue.<sup>2</sup>

He dramatizes twelve-year-old Blifil's full-blown pious hypocrisy through the narrator's pose of irony, a pose that exaggerates the goodness and piety of young Blifil. Captain Blifil's earlier attempts to cause Mr. Allworthy to disinherit Tom finally succeed through his teen-age offspring's purer form of deceit. Dorothy Van Ghent suggests that young Blifil, who has no first name, is "coagenitally and helplessly bad" as a result of his "brutally hypocritical father."<sup>3</sup> Another resemblance of young Blifil to his father concerns the attitudes of the two toward women. Captain Blifil "looked on a woman as on an animal of domestic use" (III, 105), and the more highly aesthetic son desires Sophia "with the same desires which an ortolan inspires into the soul of an epicure" (IV, 111). Sophia's aversion for young Blifil served simply to increase his epicurean desires, with feelings that the narrator implies are quite unnatural. Of

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>3</sup>p. 89.

course, one of his more apparent desires is for "the estate of Mr. Western" (IV, 112).

Fielding's moral emphasis concerning the unnaturalness of Blifil's actions seems to focus on the evils of feeling superior through pride and the feelings of envy for the pleasures others enjoy. His persona clarifies his feelings about the shortcomings of human nature:

To say the truth, want of compassion is not to be numbered among our general faults. The black ingredient which fouls our disposition is envy. Hence our eye is seldom, I am afraid, turned upward to those who are manifestly greater, better, wiser, or happier than ourselves, without some degree of malignity; . . . In fact, I have remarked, that most of the defects . . . in the friendships within my observation have arisen from envy only: a hellish vice; and yet one from which I have known very few absolutely exempt. (VI, 212-213)

Of course, Blifil is not in the general mainstream of life and is one of the few who lack compassion. Lacking all compassion, how dark his personality must be with the "black ingredient" of envy! His malicious envy is portrayed through his desire to ruin Tom with Mr. Allworthy, Tom, who is always happier but never "better." Envy also spurs his unnatural passion for Tom's beloved Sophia. Fielding's persona adds another reason for Blifil's desire for Sophia: "Revenge itself was not without its share in the gratifications which he promised himself. The rivalling poor Jones, and supplanting him in her affections, added another spur to his pursuit, and promised another additional rapture to his enjoyment" (IV, 111). Blifil becomes the model of the

individual who never manages to escape his prison of the self and thus fails to develop into a social being.

Fielding's moral psychology lacks access to the findings of modern psychology, but, as a pre-Freudian, he delineates many of the moral problems of human nature and perceives the psychopathic qualities of the individual who fails to develop ethically or socially.

Henry Fielding's approach to life is a complicated blending of many concepts and experiences that defies a simple categorizing. His observations of human nature are acutely accurate, yet because of his comic spirit his portrayal of human nature is painless. His laughter comes from a good heart filled with sympathetic compassion for the human condition. His humor is best described in George Meredith's description of the comic view:

The laughter directed by the comic spirit is a harmless wine, conducing to sobriety in the degree that it enlivens. It enters you like fresh air into a study; as when one of the sudden contrasts of the comic idea floods the brain like reassuring daylight.<sup>1</sup>

Fielding's purpose was to use protective laughter for a corrective moral purpose, "to laugh mankind out of their . . . follies" (III, xxiii). His created persona reflects his confidence in his ability to portray experience in action for moral intensity. He brings all of his genius

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<sup>1</sup>An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1906), p. 93.



and experience to his writing of Tom Jones with his optimistic, self-assured belief in the basic goodness of mankind.

### CHAPTER III

#### FIELDING'S PERSONA AS A TOLERANT GUIDE FOR PROPER JUDGMENTS

Often resembling a busy stage manager for a complicated comedy and at other times a judicial magistrate who hands out multiple judgments, Fielding's persona in Tom Jones tolerantly observes and understands the actions and judgments of complex human nature. Guiding interested readers in an evaluation of his precise ordering of values for proper judgments, he uses reinforcing rhetoric to stress the importance of caution, wisdom, and alertness as prerequisites for passing judgment on certain characters and actions. If unbiased evaluations are to be reached, moreover, readers must yield their judgments to the guidance of the narrator and to his laws. Describing the purpose of his creation, Fielding's persona also mentions his expectations of readers' attitudes toward him:

I am, indeed, set over them for their own good only, and was created for their use, and not they for mine. Nor do I doubt, while I make their interest the great rule of my writings, they will unanimously concur in supporting my dignity, and in rendering me all the honour I shall deserve or desire. (III, 68)

Fielding establishes a special world of varied characters to which his persona holds the key for proper judgments. His wisdom sets the comic tone of tolerance that helps to redeem Tom's world of hypocrites.<sup>1</sup> John Preston suggests that, without the guidance of Fielding's persona, the reader's judgment could not surpass that of credulous Mr. Allworth.<sup>2</sup> The guidance of the narrator's reinforcing rhetoric helps the perceptive readers avoid erroneous judgment of his characters, who are composites of good and evil, although the reader's responsibility in applying "sagacity" and alertness is a prerequisite. His persona admonishes the reader frequently:

Bestir thyself therefore . . . for though we will always lend thee proper assistance in difficult places, as we do not, like some others, expect thee to use the arts of divination to discover our meaning, yet we shall not indulge thy laziness where nothing but thy own attention is required; for thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine that we intended, when we began this great work, to leave thy sagacity nothing to do; or that, without sometimes exercising this talent, thou wilt be able to travel through our pages with any pleasure or profit to thyself. (V, 158)

Perhaps Fielding realizes that, unless alert, his readers will misunderstand his persona's pose of ironical detachment that, admittedly, presents a dilemma for even the alert reader. As one critic says, "The reader is offered excellent guidance which he must follow with caution because

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<sup>1</sup>Booth, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>"Tom Jones and the 'Pursuit of True Judgment,'" ELH (September, 1966), XXXIII, 323.

of a lurking suspicion that the deft hand of the narrator, in the midst of explanatory gestures, is somehow pulling his leg."<sup>1</sup> In qualifying Fielding's use of integrating irony, especially his ironic treatment of virtue, Robert Alter also says of Fielding, "He knows very much where he stands and wants to make it quite plain to his readers where they should stand."<sup>2</sup> His persona, or "public mask," guides the reader "in a decent mode of conduct" much like his embryonic mask, Hercules Vinegar, of The Champion.<sup>3</sup>

The reader's reliance on authorial judgment becomes increasingly necessary when the characters are complex blendings of virtue and vice.<sup>4</sup> Fielding's "honest purpose," to recommend goodness and innocence, is attained through the presentation of human nature in action, "for an example is a kind of picture, in which virtue becomes, as it were, an object of sight, and strikes us with an idea of . . . loveliness" (III, xxii-xxiii). A visual image must have reinforcing commentary when the actions of the hero, a model of Fielding's favorite kind of man, often conflict with the accepted norms and values of the reader. When readers judge Tom by normal standards of chastity and fidelity, they fail

<sup>1</sup>Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>Paulson, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>Booth, p. 187.

to comprehend Fielding's moral purpose in creating his spontaneously good-natured hero. For an illuminating view of his eighteenth-century world of appearances, the reader must suspend personal ethical evaluations and willingly agree with Fielding's system of values. Booth suggests that the reader's growing intimacy with Fielding's persona is "a kind of comic analogue" of the true believer's reliance on a kindhearted Deity because "the author is always there on his platform to remind us, through his wisdom and benevolence, of what human life ought to be and might be."<sup>1</sup>

His foundation of morality is good-nature.<sup>2</sup> In The Champion, he delineates his concept of good-nature, the warm and active sympathy synonymous with "virtue" or "humanity." He partially embraces the beliefs of the latitudinarians, who equate man's benevolent qualities and brought the term "good-nature" into general use.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, his acquaintance with the ancient classical philosophers, who looked upon the quality of good nature as almost inseparable from nature itself, undoubtedly influences his moral concepts.<sup>4</sup> In his poem that defines good-nature, addressed to the Duke of Richmond, included in Miscellanies, Fielding writes of the importance of sympathetic identification with other people:

<sup>1</sup>P. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Irwin, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Miller, p. 67.

What is Good-Nature?  
 Is it a foolish Weakness in the Breast,  
 As some who know, or have it not, contest?  
 Or is it rather not the mighty whole  
 Full Composition of a virtuous Soul?  
 Is it not Virtue's Self? A Flow'r so fine,  
 It only grows in Soils almost divine.  
 What by this Name, then, shall be understood?  
 What? but the glorious Lust of doing Good?  
 The Heart that finds it Happiness to please,  
 Can feel another's Pain, and taste his Ease.  
 The Cheek that with another's Joy can glow,  
 Turn pale, and sicken with another's Woe;  
 Free from Contempt and Envy, he who deems  
 Justly of Life's two opposite Extremes.  
 Who to make all and each Man truly blest,  
 Doth all he can, and wishes all the rest?  
(I, 15-16)<sup>1</sup>

In choosing the hero of Tom Jones, Fielding not only dramatizes the importance of good nature but also presents "a kind of picture" in action for his moral purposes. He demonstrates how an indiscreet but good-natured young man, who has much to learn about life, can fall "into the snares that deceit and villainy spread" for him (III, xxiii). By observing Tom's actions from age fourteen, Fielding's persona adheres to his requirement that the whole man be assessed over a span of years. Although good nature is Tom's most important quality, many of his indiscretions derive from his unguarded good-natured responses to the wishes or villainy of others.<sup>2</sup> He must learn, often painfully, the appropriate balance of natural instinct and intellect and the self-discipline required to attain that balance.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-57.

<sup>2</sup>Golden, p. 20.

Using the language of the theater, the narrator presents fourteen-year-old Tom, who, the reader learns in the first two books, is being reared, along with young Blifil, in Mr. Allworthy's household:

We are obliged to bring our hero on the stage in a much more disadvantageous manner than we could wish; and to declare honestly, even at his first appearance, that it was the universal opinion of all Mr. Allworthy's family that he was certainly born to be hanged. (III, 123)

The narrator exaggerates Tom's vices with mock horror and then confides to the reader that, in fact, the three robberies of which Tom is accused are nothing more than a young boy's spirited prankishness. Comparing the boys' appearances, the narrator points up the contrast between young Blifil's seeming piety and Tom's boyish Puckishness:

The vices of this young man were, moreover, heightened by the disadvantageous light in which they appeared when opposed to the virtues of Master Blifil, his companion; a youth of so different a cast from little Jones, that not only the family but all the neighbourhood resounded his praises. (III, 124)

Guiding the reader in an assessment of Tom's open naturalness as juxtaposed to Blifil's deceptive role playing, the narrator, in his ironic pose, shows Tom's damaging handicap, his inexperience in distinguishing the motives of other characters. His need for learning discretion, or prudence, becomes one of the primary moral lessons of the novel. Even the best of men must "maintain a guard to Virtue, . . . prudence and circumspection" (III, 153). Prudence, then, as

only "a guard to Virtue," is a necessary quality for a spontaneously sympathetic boy like Tom; otherwise, he will fail to distinguish worthy motives from snares of deceit and villainy. Fielding warns of dangers existing for good-natured men like Tom in The Champion: "Honest and undesigning men of very good understanding would be always liable to the attacks of cunning and artful knaves, into whose snares we are as often seduced by the openness and goodness of the heart, as by the weakness of the head."<sup>1</sup> Although, as Eleanor N. Hutchens finds in her study of Fielding's use of prudence in Tom Jones, he uses the words prudence, prudent, and prudential unfavorably three times as often as favorably,<sup>2</sup> his stress upon Tom's need for caution in identifying charitably with the needs of other persons is quite valid. Tom must learn prudence not only for physical safety but also for "that solid inward comfort of mind" (III, xxiii). Underscoring the need for impulsively affectionate men to learn restraint, Fielding's persona says:

It is not enough that your designs, nay, that your actions, are intrinsically good; you must take care they shall appear so. If your inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair outside also. This must be constantly looked to, or malice and envy will take care to blacken it so, that the sagacity and goodness of an Allworthy will not be able to see through it, and to discern the beauties within. Let this, my young readers, be your constant maxim, that no man can be good enough to enable him to neglect the

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<sup>1</sup>Irwin, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>"'Prudence' in Tom Jones: A Study of Connotative Irony," Philological Quarterly, XXXIX (October, 1960), 496.



rules of prudence; nor will Virtue herself look beautiful, unless she be bedecked with the outward ornaments of decency and decorum. (III, 154-155)

Tom's world is a world of appearances. Without the guidance of Fielding's tolerant persona, Everyman makes the same incorrect judgments made by Mr. Allworthy because "prudence is indeed the duty which we owe to ourselves; and if we will be so much our own enemies as to neglect it, we are not to wonder if the world is deficient in discharging their duty to us" (VI, 314).

Whereas the naturally good hero, Tom, is free of affectation and restraint and, therefore, fails to recognize deceit in others, the anti-hero, Blifil, "a youth of so different a cast" from Tom, is a master of deceit. The narrator comments upon Blifil's success in "blackening" Tom's character with Mr. Allworthy through carefully timing his "malicious" lies in order that his sudden revelations "would be the most likely to crush" Tom (IV, 61). Through malice and envy for Tom, who he knows at this time is indeed his half-brother, Blifil convinces his credulous uncle to oust Tom from Paradise Hall. In his naïveté Tom fails to recognize Blifil's villainy until he learns, after many painful experiences, that Blifil is, indeed, a hypocrite and "hath the cunning of the devil himself" (V, 222).

One scene that illuminates the contrast between the two young men occurs when inefficient physicians diagnose Mr. Allworthy's illness as imminently terminal. The

narrator's elaboration of Tom's sincere grief contrasts with Blifil's cold, uncaring detachment. Having no compassion for his sick uncle, Blifil tells Mr. Allworthy the news of Bridget Allworthy Blifil's sudden death. Fielding's persona reinforces the reader's judgment of Tom by stressing the young man's sincere reactions of righteous wrath upon learning of Blifil's insensitiveness for the sick man (III, 313). Of course, the narrator withholds Blifil's arch-villainy at this time, saving it for the denouement: his deliberate withholding of his mother's deathbed confession to Mr. Allworthy about Tom's parentage. In this scene, the narrator's focus is on Tom's good qualities to guide the readers in their judgments of him.

"All the neighbourhood" judges on appearances and thus Fielding's persona differentiates between an individual's reputation and a man's true worth. The narrator seeks a reappraisal of reputation, which should be man's key to the understanding of the real moral condition of others but is, instead, another "medium of confusion."<sup>1</sup> He presents different scenes, which he follows with commentary, about the "malicious tongues" of the neighborhood that misinterpret actions and repeat hearsay as truth. He cautions the readers that one of the complications of accepting a man's reputation at face value is the neighborhood gossip, "which seldom reaches to a brother or a husband,

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<sup>1</sup>Golden, p. 18.

though it rings in the ears of all the neighbourhood" (III, 153).

"The whole country" who had gossiped about Bridget Blifil and Square, one of Tom's tutors, "began to talk as loudly of her inclination to Tom, as they had before done of that which she had shown to Square: on which account the philosopher conceived the most implacable hatred for our poor hero" (III, 152). Consequently, the narrator emphasizes the destructive element of "malicious tongues," because Square then plants the first seed of real doubt for Tom's integrity within Mr. Allworthy's mind, a mind that is receptive to distorted impressions of the foundling after he observes Bridget's obvious preference for Tom instead of her son Blifil.

Marshalling all the contributing factors available, Fielding's persona reinforces the readers' feelings of tolerance for the hero before divulging Tom's alliance with buxom Molly, daughter of Black George Seagrim. Using his judicial rhetoric like a Bow Street magistrate, the narrator builds up Tom's defense. He effectively elaborates Tom's innocence in wishing harm to no one and relates the extenuating circumstances of Tom's "fall." For one thing, when Tom first realizes his physical attraction for Molly, he avoids her for three months, chivalrously protecting her "virtue." Then, because of his naïveté, he fails to recognize Molly's insincerity. The narrator

describes the circumstances that initiate Tom's liaison with Molly:

So little had she of modesty, that Jones had more regard for her virtue than she herself. . . . When she perceived his backwardness she herself grew proportionately forward; . . . In a word, she soon triumphed over all the virtuous resolutions of Jones; for though she behaved at last with all decent reluctance, yet I rather chuse to attribute the triumph to her, since, in fact, it was her design which succeeded. (III, 201)

The narrator balances Tom's fault of incontinence with his virtues of "honour and honesty." On his balance scale, sins of the flesh are considerably less damaging than sins of the spirit. In case the reader may fail to sympathize adequately with Tom's lack of prudence, the narrator stresses the virtue of his self-accusation in regard to Molly's "present unhappy condition" (III, 230). The narrator, admittedly, is guiding the reader to have the same kind of reaction to Jones's lack of chastity as benevolent Mr.

Allworthy:

Allworthy was sufficiently offended by this transgression of Jones. . . . But whatever detestation Mr. Allworthy had to this or to any other vice, he was not so blinded by it but that he could discern any virtue in the guilty person. . . . While he was angry therefore with the incontinence of Jones, he was no less pleased with the honour and honesty of his self-accusation. He began now to form in his mind the same opinion of this young fellow, which, we hope, our reader may have conceived. And in balancing his faults with his perfections, the latter seemed rather to be preponderate." (III, 229-230)

For Fielding's moral purpose, one of his main principles is, in fact, that Tom, who has a strong moral conscience,

never acts wrongly without "feeling and suffering" for his wrongdoings (III, 199). Of course, Tom must suffer for his indiscretions, and Allworthy's "severe lecture" causes Tom, who is "no hardened sinner," to suffer "melancholy contemplation" alone in his room (III, 229).

Although Fielding's persona carefully interjects statements describing Tom's feelings of responsibility for fallen Molly, this rhetoric of apology is no longer necessary after Tom discovers Square in Molly's bedroom. All sympathy for her dependence upon Tom disappears during this scene except for Tom's feelings of responsibility for the unborn child. The narrator not only relates that, indeed, one Will Barnes is the father but also explains that Molly's affection is for Will "while Jones and Square were almost equally sacrifices to her interest and to her pride" (III, 288).

Insofar as Tom's liaison with Molly is concerned, he escapes almost unscathed until his unfortunate chance meeting with her in the grove. This meeting follows soon after Tom learns of Bridget's death and of Mr. Allworthy's reprieve from death. Somewhat repetitiously, the narrator speaks of Tom's drunken condition, a result of his lack of restraint in celebrating Mr. Allworthy's recovery. Bridget's death is ignored not only by Tom but also by the narrator, whose apologies are directed toward Jones' cause of drunkenness. Leading up to Tom's betrayal of Sophia with Molly

in the grove, the narrator stresses that Tom's power of reason is now under control of his "naturally violent animal spirits" (III, 314). Tom's drunken condition also makes him susceptible to the setting, "so sweetly accommodated to love . . . with gentle breezes fanning the leaves . . . and the melodious notes of nightingales" (III, 319). All of the erotically stimulating scenery and his half-dazed thoughts of Sophia cause him to rhapsodize in highly elevated rhetoric: "O Sophia, would Heaven give thee to my arms, how blest would be my condition! . . . The chastest constancy will I ever preserve to thy image" (III, 320). The marked contrast between Tom's elevated language and the narrator's description of Molly seems to allude to the contrast between spontaneously good-natured Tom's intentions, or motives, and his indiscreet actions, for Molly Seagrim approaches "in a shift that was somewhat of the coarsest, and none of the cleanest, bedewed likewise with some odoriferous effluvia, the produce of the day's labour, with a pitchfork in her hand" (III, 320-321). Completely lacking a "guard to virtue," Tom retires with Molly "into the thickest part of the grove." The narrator apologizes for Tom's actions by again reminding the reader that "wine now had totally subdued" Jones's power of reason that "enables grave and wise men to subdue their unruly passions" (III, 321). Although drunkenness must not be an excuse in a court of justice, the narrator, as Tom's lawyer,

explains that "in a court of conscience it is." Furthermore, he continues, "If there are any transgressions pardonable from drunkenness, they are certainly such as Mr. Jones was at present guilty of" (III, 322).

This time, the long-range consequence of Tom's indiscretions, besides the pangs of his suffering conscience, is his expulsion from Mr. Allworthy's home. Of course, as Paulson says, the connection between the action and the later retribution is extremely subtle and depends on the villainy of others.<sup>1</sup>

Before Tom's affair with Jenny Waters, nee Jones, Fielding's persona again enumerates extenuating circumstances. His rhetoric is that of persuasive apology for Tom's lack of constancy. The narrator capitalizes on Mrs. Waters' semi-nakedness when Tom rescues her from an attempted murder. During their long walk to Upton, she not only refuses Tom's generous, and possibly defensive, offer of his coat to hide her exposed chest but also makes a point of attracting his attention. In order to guide the reader toward proper judgments of Tom during his second sexual indiscretion, the narrator carefully delineates the woman's forwardness as the couple walk toward Upton. He explains, "As she frequently wanted his assistance to help her over stiles, and had besides many trips and other accidents, he was often obliged to turn about" (IV, 324-325). Finally,

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<sup>1</sup>p. 147.

after a barrage of seductive innuendoes directed at Tom as he eats at Upton Inn, she wins her battle. Hence, as Alter suggests, Fielding's persona uses the elevated rhetoric of heroic warfare to emphasize the unheroic nature of the present action,<sup>1</sup> and thus apologizes for good-natured Tom's weakness in again acceding to an impassioned lady:

To confess the truth, I am afraid Mr. Jones maintained a kind of Dutch defence, and treacherously delivered up the garrison, without duly weighing his allegiance to the fair Sophia. In short, no sooner had the amorous parley ended and the lady had unmasked the royal battery, . . . than the heart of Mr. Jones was entirely taken, and the fair conqueror enjoyed the usual fruits of her victory. (V, 7)

Although incontinence ranks as one of the lesser vices for Fielding, his persona insists that the transgressor risks the danger of reaping evil consequences. Almost immediately after Tom's lost battle with Mrs. Waters, Tom suffers. Sophia, who is also traveling to London, arrives with her maid at Upton Inn and learns of Tom's liaison with the other woman. Thus, finding her muff, as she intends for him to find it, he learns of her brief stay at the inn, which she leaves upon hearing of his alliance. Tom suffers extreme anguish not only at this time, knowing of Sophia's enraged rejection of him, but also later in a London prison when Partridge, his companion of the road, tells him that Mrs. Waters is no other than Jenny Jones, who is believed to be Tom's mother. Even though his mental anguish is

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<sup>1</sup>Rogue's Progress, p. 89.



brief, thanks to Jenny Jones's revelation about Bridget's past, his guilt feelings concerning possible incest are extremely punitive.

Before revealing the next unfortunate alliance of his good-natured but imprudent hero, Fielding's persona stresses Tom's penniless condition. Although without funds, Tom, being a man of honor, never thinks of borrowing Sophia's money but, instead, resolutely continues his search for her in London to return her lost pocket book. His search projects him into the snares of her deceitful cousin, with whom she is staying in London. Lady Bellaston, an aging, lustful debaucher of young men, is attracted to Tom's masculinity and falsely promises to help him find Sophia. Not yet experienced enough to recognize deceit, Tom foolishly acquiesces to Lady Bellaston's desires. Fielding's persona diminishes the unsavoriness of Tom's present situation by reminding the reader of Tom's spontaneously sympathetic identification with people in need, this time Mrs. Miller's relatives. His good-natured act of charity in offering Mrs. Miller his first fifty-pound payment from Lady Bellaston proves his true virtue. Tom is Fielding's example of a man of noble impulses who must not be damned eternally for indulgences of the flesh.

The comic spirit of tolerance and good humor permeates the narrator's version of Tom's dilemma in being kept as an aging woman's paramour. Not only has the "blooming freshness"

disappeared from her cheeks but also an imperfection has been added to her person. Hence, the narrator describes "the unhappy case of Jones," who loves the unattainable Sophia but who feels trapped with Lady Bellaston. In his ironic pose the narrator alludes to the lady's shortcomings:

He could never have been able to have made any adequate return to the generous passion of this lady, who had indeed been once an object of desire, but was now entered at least into the autumn of life, though she wore all the gaiety of youth, both in her dress and manner; nay, she contrived still to maintain the roses in her cheeks. . . . She had, besides, a certain imperfection, which renders some flowers, though very beautiful to the eye, very improper to be placed in a wilderness of sweets, and what above all others is most disagreeable to the breath of love. (V, 317)

According to Robert Alter, "Lady Bellaston is all art and contrivance, herself a hothouse flower impiously cultivated out of season, . . . the subtle hothouse growth that gives off the gamy odor of imminent decay."<sup>1</sup>

Fielding's persona stresses Tom's feelings of gratitude for the lady's generosity, however, for "he was now become one of the best-dressed men about town" (V, 316). Yet, the narrator subtly alludes to another of Tom's feelings in a dubious whitewash of his actions:

Though Jones saw all these discouragements on the one side, he felt his obligations full as strongly on the other; nor did he less plainly discern the ardent passion whence those obligations proceeded, the extreme violence of which if he failed to equal, he well knew the lady would think him ungrateful; and, what is worse, he would have thought himself so. He knew the tacit consideration upon which

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<sup>1</sup>Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, p. 132.

all her favours were conferred; and as his necessity obliged him to accept them, so his honour, he concluded, forced him to pay the price. This therefore he resolved to do, whatever misery it cost him, and to devote himself to her, from that great principle of justice, by which the laws of some countries oblige a debtor, who is no otherwise capable of discharging his debt, to become the slave of this creditor. (V, 317-318)

One way Fielding avoids irreparable damage to Tom's image is his refusal to relate the love scene. During Tom's amorous adventures with Molly and, later, Mrs. Waters, descriptions of love scenes are not a part of the author's "bill of fare." At the time of his affair with Lady Bellaston, consequently, the author's objectivity becomes even more imperative. Tom's liaison with Lady Bellaston places him in the role of kept man, a precarious position by most standards of morality and a cause for critical derision against Fielding's novel for nearly two centuries. Although Lady Bellaston represents only a small class of eighteenth-century London society, she is an example of what Wilbur L. Cross calls "a common occurrence in the fashionable life of London."<sup>1</sup> Although she is "a common occurrence," Fielding understands human nature and knows that Tom's image must be preserved in order to attain the moral purpose of his novel. Thus, when Tom first meets Lady Bellaston alone, the narrator relates in an objective manner, "It would be tedious to give the particular conversation, which consisted of very common and ordinary

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<sup>1</sup>II, 216.

occurrences, and which lasted from two till six o'clock in the morning" (V, 307). In all of Tom's meetings with her, the narrator draws a curtain over the "ordinary occurrences" between them and thus de-emphasizes the situation (V, 315, 352).

Retaining his pose of objectivity, Fielding's persona avoids the role of "the author of scandal" (VI, 99) and gives Nightingale, who has an inclination "to tittle-tattle," the role of informant. Through Nightingale Tom soon learns that Lady Bellaston habitually lures young men into her snare and contributes her wealth, not to charity but to her lustful endeavors. Although Tom no longer feels obligated to her, he fears her wrath, and his fears prove to be well-grounded. Even though he acts diplomatically by sending her a written marriage proposal, being assured by Nightingale that she will refuse and thus will end their affair, she knows Tom's motives. Immediately she initiates actions of revenge. Guiding the reader "to look carefully into human nature," the narrator suggests "that a woman who hath once been pleased with the possession of a man, will go about half-way to the devil, to prevent any other woman from enjoying the same" (VI, 172-173). Tom suffers the consequences of his follies, again through the subtle villainy of others, including deceitful and vindictive Lady Bellaston and Blifil, who has arrived in London. Through their intrigue, Tom is falsely accused of murder and languishes

in prison. Nevertheless, he benefits from the experience because during his imprisonment, he continues to acquire self-knowledge. When loyal Mrs. Waters visits him, the regenerate Tom declares: "I do assure you, . . . I am not an abandoned profligate. Though I have been hurried into vices, I do not approve a vicious character, nor will I ever, from this moment, deserve it" (VI, 215). Unsuspicious by nature, Tom, formerly too young, heedless, and inexperienced to recognize deceit, now arrives at an ideal balance of instinct and intellect, Fielding's goal for Tom from the beginning.

Almost as if anticipating the reader's skepticism concerning Tom's sudden transformation, Fielding's persona attempts to present evidence to vindicate Tom and prove the sincerity of his renewed vows of fidelity to Sophia. One disclosure that upholds the seriousness and honesty of Tom's vows reveals Tom's refusal to accept a marriage proposal from a wealthy widow, Mrs. Hunt. At the time she sends her proposal to him by letter, he is not only in need of money but also without any hope of ever attaining Sophia. In his written refusal to the young widow's proposal, Tom says that he cannot marry without love and, indeed, would rather "starve than be guilty of that" (VI, 114). His refusal demonstrates his loyalty to Sophia, and, as Alter notes, his worthiness of her "just when he has rid himself of that woman in whose keeping he was."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, pp. 119-120.

Another incident that the narrator uses to reinforce the reader's belief in Tom's atonement occurs immediately before his imprisonment. Tom receives overt hints from Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Sophia's cousin, that her intentions are amorous. Again Fielding's persona vindicates Tom by revealing his feelings about impassioned ladies:

In reality it confirmed his resolution of returning to her no more; for, faulty as he hath hitherto appeared in this history, his whole thoughts were now so confined to his Sophia, that I believe no woman upon earth could have now drawn him into an act of inconstancy. (VI, 180)

In further establishing the truth of Tom's renewed vows of celibacy, the narrator relates Tom's reaction to Mrs. Waters when she visits him in prison: "He lastly concluded with assuring her of his resolution to sin no more, lest a worse thing should happen to him" (VI, 244). The narrator, aware "that the answers made by Jones would be treated with ridicule" by some of his readers, decides to "suppress the rest of this conversation, and only observe that it ended at last with perfect innocence, and much more to the satisfaction of Jones than of the lady" (VI, 244).

The hero of Fielding's new kind of fiction grows and changes during the novel. Through his growing process, often painful yet never tragic, Tom attains self-knowledge as well as an ability to recognize deceit. In his study of satire, Paulson delineates the difference between Fielding's Tom and the heroes of his near-contemporaries: "The villain of

Augustan satire became the hero of the new age" because satire "judges the man not for what he is but for what he did and, indeed, makes the ultimate error . . . of equating the two."<sup>1</sup> Tom's vices are defensible and pardonable.

Through Mr. Allworthy's speech to Tom in the denouement of the story, Fielding gives his required distinction between Tom's kind of error, lack of discretion, and the kind of evil action caused by villainy:

There is this great difference between those faults which candor may construe into imprudence, and those which can be deduced from villainy only. The former, perhaps, are even more apt to subject a man to ruin; but if he reform, his character will, at length, be totally retrieved; the world, though not immediately, will in time be reconciled to him; . . . but villany, . . . when once discovered is irretrievable. (VI, 314)

Through his persona's reinforcing rhetoric, Fielding expects the reader to recognize that Tom's exoneration is now complete. He has earned his final good fortune. Fielding has required that Tom repent his indiscretions and prove his vows of constancy to Sophia. His serious flaw, a weakness for acquiescing to impassioned women, is now placed under control by his love for Sophia. The narrator comments on Tom's recognition of Sophia's essentially spiritual nature, an important step in his approach to full development of character: "His mind . . . turned towards Sophia; her virtue, her purity, her love to him, her sufferings on his

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<sup>1</sup>Pp. 4-5.

account, filled all his thoughts" (VI, 101). Tom has finally recognized Sophia's true worth. Attainment of her is necessary for his happiness because through her virtue and love Tom will experience "that solid inward comfort of mind" (III, xxiii). Referring to Tom's Christian acts of brotherly love, John Butt says, "He has cast his bread upon the waters in acts of abundant good nature, and by the assistance of Mrs. Miller's representations to Mr. Allworthy, he finds it after many days. His Virtue is Rewarded by restoration into the good graces of Sophia."<sup>1</sup> Sophia, whose name means wisdom in Greek, intuitively distinguishes the good-natured man from the hypocrite and thus pardons Tom for his inconstancy. Her virtue, as "an object of sight," radiates that special quality of loveliness that Fielding admittedly displays to "attract the admiration of mankind" for his moral purpose. G. H. Maynadier upholds Fielding's portrayal of his hero and chastises any reader who fails to agree with his norms for judging Tom: "All people who sincerely believe Jones's character depraved must be under a misapprehension as to what evils in life are greatest. Tom's sins, always the result of temptation, are never of the soul but all of the flesh."<sup>2</sup> The persona stresses that Tom's sins are directly attributable to his good-natured

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<sup>1</sup>Fielding, rev. ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>The Works of Henry Fielding (London: Gay and Bird, 1903), III, xxxix.



propensity to please other persons, who, in Tom's case, are aggressive women.

Many critics agree that Fielding's persona fulfills an important function, but few concur in their evaluations of his persona's moral purpose. Recognizing the narrator's function as a guide, Sheldon Sacks says that Fielding uses Allworthy in the same way as another ethical agent to effect judgments of characters.<sup>1</sup> Although he admits that readers must be able to recognize Fielding's use of irony to avoid confusion in accepting or rejecting the validity of Allworthy's judgments, Sacks maintains that as Fielding's paragon Allworthy conveys important judgments.<sup>2</sup> When one recognizes Fielding's use of irony, however, one also recognizes that none of Allworthy's judgments are valid. Instead of being Fielding's ethical agent, as Sacks maintains, Allworthy is an example of a man who does the opposite of what the tolerant persona says that a man must do in judging other persons. For Fielding, his persona acts as his sole ethical agent to guide readers in proper evaluations of all characters, including Allworthy. Using a "perfect" man's imperfections, Fielding conveys the varied qualities of mankind that make everyman fallible and, therefore, incapable of accurate judgments based on rational thinking.

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<sup>1</sup>Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Consequently, Fielding needs Allworthy, an irreproachable paragon of virtue, to portray another contrast promised in his "bill of fare."

Fielding's persona guides the reader to feel "compassion rather than abhorrence" for the good character who has "some of those little blemishes" inherent in human nature:

Indeed, nothing can be of more moral use than the imperfections which are seen in examples of this kind; since such form a kind of surprize, more apt to affect and dwell upon our minds than the faults of very vicious and wicked persons. The foibles and vices of men, in whom there is great mixture of good, become more glaring objects from the virtues which contrast them and shew their deformity; and when we find such vices attended with their evil consequence to our favourite characters, we are not only taught to shun them for our own sake, but to hate them for the mischiefs they have already brought on those we love. (V, 26)

The narrator compares a good man's blemishes with flaws in the finest china, in either case "incurable, though . . . the pattern may remain of the highest value" (III, 108). As if anticipating critics' failure to accept his characterization of blindly fallible Allworthy, who critics believe is patterned after Fielding's friend Ralph Allen, his persona says: "I hope my friends will pardon me when I declare, I know none of them without a fault; and I should be sorry if I could imagine I had any friend who could not see mine. Forgiveness of this kind we give and demand in turn" (III, 108). Although Allworthy errs consistently in his judgments, Fielding's persona pointedly warns the reader against judging his fallibility too harshly: "We do not pretend to introduce

any infallible characters into this history; where we hope nothing will be found which hath never yet been seen in human nature" (III, 146).

True to human nature, Allworthy plays his role as just magistrate rendering judgments erroneously. Before his fallibility as a judge is revealed, readers are forced to recognize his basic goodness. Using reinforcing rhetoric, the narrator guarantees Allworthy's good-nature. Then, the dramatization of his goodness upon discovering infant Tom in his bed illuminates his basic reaction of sympathetic identification with helpless humanity. In a comically moving scene with his maid, Deborah Wilkins, his tender feelings of compassion for Tom negate his irritation with his maid's lack of compassion and understanding. She "would have offended Mr. Allworthy, had he strictly attended to it; but he had now got one of his fingers into the infant's hand, which, by its gentle pressure, seeming to implore his assistance, had certainly outpleaded the eloquence of Mrs. Deborah" (III, 12). Before long, malicious tongues start false rumors concerning Allworthy's warm-hearted acceptance of Tom; ironically, they are the same gossipmongers who later convince Allworthy that Partridge is the father of Tom. Immediately, the narrator anticipates the doubts of suspicious readers and makes clear his paragon's position on fathering illegitimate children: "Mr. Allworthy was, and

will hereafter appear to be, absolutely innocent of any criminal intention whatever" (III, 41).

Always having the best intentions, Mr. Allworthy, in his self-styled role of severely just magistrate, constantly administers injustice through his self-assured trust in his understanding of the motives of men.<sup>1</sup> Because he exists aloof from the mainstream of life, he misunderstands the underlying motives of other characters and credulously accepts blatant lies as truth. Discussing Allworthy's fallibility, A. E. Dyson maintains that the good man's failure of judgment is clearly one of the main strands in Fielding's moral texture of the novel. In referring to Allworthy as morally good but not morally right, Dyson says, "He pursues his moral arithmetic with unflinching zeal for the truth, but his data are wrong, so his answers are wrong as well."<sup>2</sup> Dyson proposes that Allworthy's failure to understand the motives of men is because of his reliance on reason as a guide. Fielding's "profound mistrust of Reason in ethics" contrasts with Allworthy's trust in rational thinking, and, therefore, fallible Allworthy seems to mirror Fielding's conviction that a severely rationalistic ethic cannot sift appearance from reality.<sup>3</sup> Relying on reason for making

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald S. Crane, "The Plot of Tom Jones," in Essays on the Eighteenth-Century Novel, ed. Robert Donald Spector (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony (London: Macmillan and Co., 1965), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

judgments Allworthy has excellent intentions and a pure heart; however, his severely rational morality does not really work.<sup>1</sup>

Always having the best intentions, Mr. Allworthy, in his far from inimitable way, carries out his Christian duties as just magistrate. Forced from his private world of near-fantasy, he must carry out his judgment of Jenny Jones, who is accused of being the unwed mother of infant Tom. At this time he delivers one of his longest sermons, conveying the kind of didacticism that provokes Irma Sherwood to complain about Allworthy's function as deus ex machina with too many judicious involvements to be other than a "stiff and mechanical personality."<sup>2</sup> Thus becomes obvious one of his shortcomings as judge: his credulous reliance on persuasive rhetoric in judging the accused. Jenny's persuasively eloquent speech convinces him that her "repentance" is truthful and sincere (III, 31). After Jenny declares that she will be sacrificing her honor and her religion if she divulges the name of Tom's father, the narrator says that "Mr. Allworthy, whom the least mention of

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<sup>1</sup>A. E. Dyson, "Satiric and Comic Theory in Relation to Fielding," Modern Language Quarterly, XVIII (September, 1957), 235.

<sup>2</sup>Irma Z. Sherwood, "The Novelists as Commentators," in The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker, ed. F. W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 119.

those sacred words was sufficient to stagger," concludes his interrogation (III, 33).

One of the most damning examples of Allworthy's misjudgments resulting from his credulous acceptance of false accusations is his unyielding pronouncement of Partridge's guilt in fathering Tom. Fielding's persona reminds readers that English law "refuses to admit the evidence of a wife against her husband" (III, 98). Nevertheless, Allworthy blindly accepts Mrs. Partridge's accusations against her husband as proof of his guilt. Years later, in the denouement of the novel, Partridge reminds the good man of his incorrect judgment that caused temporary yet devastating ruin. Guiding readers to view Allworthy as an example of other "just" judges, the narrator says: "Whatever was the truth of the case, there was evidence more than sufficient to convict him before Allworthy; indeed, much less would have satisfied a bench of justices" (III, 100).

Another example of Allworthy's credulous acceptance of persuasive rhetoric involves Square, whose name implies "rule" or "principle."<sup>1</sup> In his most persuasively philosophic terms, Square argues his case against Tom and thus "the first bad impression concerning Jones" is stamped in the mind of Allworthy (III, 232). The most damaging to Tom, however, is Blifil's use of persuasive rhetoric with his uncle. Blindly accepting Blifil's subtle falsehoods,

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<sup>1</sup>Van Ghent, p. 101.

delivered with self-effacing piety, Mr. Allworthy disinherits Tom and sends him from Paradise Hall. His action against Tom is based on Square's insinuations and Blifil's villainous lies rather than on Tom's sins of incontinence. Macallister recognizes that all of Allworthy's crucial actions are dictated by malicious gossip or falsehoods defaming the innocent, "who are in fact condemned before they can defend themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Illuminating the contrast between the standards of his persona and those of Allworthy, Fielding dramatizes Allworthy's reliance on a man's appearance and reputation. His failure to see beyond appearances and recognize the man behind the mask causes him to arrive at faulty judgments. Allworthy's lack of insight into the character of others as well as into his own seems to be his most pervasive character flaw that, one way or another, exaggerates all of his weaknesses. Like the Augustan satirists, Allworthy fails to see beneath the surface of actions to the man; thus, his judgments are usually incorrect. Pinpointing the basic problem, Dyson says: "The one thing Mr. Allworthy lacks is the instinct to smell people's souls. Because he lacks this, all his virtuous striving does not show him where true virtue is to be found."<sup>2</sup> Fielding's persona describes Allworthy's optimistic and, consequently, erroneous view of Blifil:

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<sup>1</sup>p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>The Crazy Fabric, p. 29.

"He saw every appearance of virtue in the youth through the magnifying end, and viewed all his faults with the glass inverted, so that they became scarce perceptible" (III, 153-154). Another critic comments on Allworthy's failure to understand the difference between appearance and reality and suggests that Fielding's paragon "sticks to his self-deception with all the obstinacy of a man determined not to let himself see the truth."<sup>1</sup>

In contrasting his persona's norms for judging human nature with Allworthy's norms, Fielding juxtaposes Allworthy's self-deceptive obstinacy, which causes him to have an unforgiving spirit, to Tom's good-natured acceptance of the golden rule and Christ's admonition to "forgive men their trespasses." Ironically, one of Tom's faults grieving Mr. Allworthy is his lack of religion. The good man, almost complacent in his own virtue, magnifies the mote in Tom's eye but, true to human nature, fails to see the beam in his own. Many critics comment that Tom attains prudence but, through the author's oversight, fails to accept religion. Fielding's purpose throughout the novel, however, seems to be his portrayal of Tom's inherent and spontaneous Christian love for mankind, the most important quality for Fielding's latitudinarian beliefs. The kind of brotherly love that Tom overtly shows in his life surpasses the cold philanthropy of Christian duty. One of the dramatized contrasts between

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<sup>1</sup>Macallister, p. 103.



Tom's agape and Mr. Allworthy's cold spirit focuses on their concepts of forgiveness. Mr. Allworthy's unforgiving spirit causes him to wish nothing but harm for Blifil, whose deceit has been revealed. In contrast, Tom now minimizes Blifil's villainy in the true spirit of forgiveness. Through Tom's rhetorically persuasive implication that Allworthy might impede Blifil's ultimate repentance, his uncle becomes less severe in his damning instructions for delivering Blifil his verdict but adds: "Do not flatter him with any hopes of my forgiveness; for I shall never forgive villainy farther than my religion obliges me" (VI, 326). His word never seems to emphasize his regrettably cold spirit. Through his condemnation of Tom earlier in the novel and of Blifil later, Allworthy acts in opposition to Fielding's concept of forgiveness. Repeatedly Fielding's persona admonishes the reader not to condemn another person. A man's mistakes may be recognized, but the man himself must not be condemned because of his behavior, which is only an outer indication of his character. Fielding's therapeutic forgiveness helps a man attain happiness, as Tom finally does. Through therapeutic forgiveness, all feelings of revenge or hatred cease to exist; all injuries are treated as if they have never existed. Fielding's hero does not err by hating a man for his actions but rather gains a victory over Blifil through his kindness.

Furthermore, since Tom Jones is a comedy and all must end happily, Tom's forgiving spirit acts as a healing agent for his uncle's blindness. Mr. Allworthy mellows and seems to learn about the importance of spontaneous brotherly love in the same way that Tom learns about the necessity for prudence. Perhaps, after overcoming his self-deception, Allworthy also learns to laugh at his "favourite follies" with the comic spirit. Fielding's persona tells of their happiness that has resulted from their deepened understandings: "Allworthy was likewise greatly liberal to Jones on the marriage, and hath omitted no instance of shewing his affection to him and his lady, who love him as a father. 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" (VI, 348). Thus the narrator assures the readers that his guidance has been essential in order to arrive at happy resolutions for his characters. As Preston says, "The moral discovery cannot be made through the plot as such," but is carried by the commentary of Fielding's persona.<sup>1</sup>

As a writer of a new kind of fiction that has survived for more than two centuries, Fielding possessed the power to see behind men's masks and the genius to write about his penetrating observations of human nature in action. "Very

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<sup>1</sup>P. 315.

far in advance of his time,"<sup>1</sup> Fielding indeed seems to understand the deeper motives of human nature, but his approach in Tom Jones is that of comedy and his purpose is "to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices." Through his therapeutic laughter and the tolerant guidance of his wise persona, Fielding wishes "to remove the mist" of man's self-deception, to "strip off the thin disguise of wisdom from self-conceit," so that men might learn "the good nature to laugh only at the follies of others, and the humility to grieve at their own" (V, 263). Margaret Willy speculates that Fielding's paternity of the English novel remains as undisputed as Chaucer's of English poetry. In her opinion Fielding demands our gratitude "for his candid and infectious delight in the living moment, his large acceptance of human weakness; for that generous open-heartedness that defied every grudging smallness of spirit, and lived in defence of all that was honest and humane."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baker, IV, 190.

<sup>2</sup>P. 152.

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