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A Triple-Faced Janus: Tom Jones as Bastard, Pretender, and Cowan

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SOMMARIO

Attraverso la mia ricerca ho l'obiettivo di fornire un'interpretazione di *Tom Jones* fondata su tre livelli. Dal punto di vista narrativo, l'intreccio è in larga parte basato sul tema della legittimità, così come sulla prudenza necessaria per acquisire l'eredità e uno status sociale tramite il matrimonio.

Questi aspetti funzionano come corrispettivo di un secondo livello riferito all'attualità storica, ovvero, la rivolta del 1745: la figura di Tom è costruita sul modello di Charles Edward Stuart, la sua futura moglie Sophia Western viene scambiata per Jenny Cameron, amante del pretendente Stuart, e il viaggio stesso del protagonista riecheggia le avventure eroiche di quest'ultimo.

Si innesta infine un livello simbolico, che conferisce un taglio specifico al mio lavoro: le voci del tempo vogliono che Charles Edward fosse una sorta di "hidden Grand-Master," capo universale della Massoneria (organizzazione spesso legata alla cultura giacobita in senso più ampio). Il viaggio di Tom dopo la cacciata da *Paradise Hall*, il suo cammino sotto una pioggia ricorrente, la sua incarcerazione a Londra per poi rinascere e sposare Sophia Western (sapienza occidentale), riflettono una tradizione tipicamente massonica, ossia la punizione del *cowan*. Così era definito un massone non iniziato regolarmente, un intruso che origliava i segreti della loggia, il quale veniva posto sotto una grondaia in un giorno di pioggia fino ad avere le scarpe piene di acqua.

Alla luce di questo, metto in risalto il legame diretto fra l'idea di bastardo come individuo impropriamente introdotto in casa, l'idea di pretendente come colui che finge di vantare un diritto, e l'idea di *cowan* come intruso e spia. Dunque, si evidenzia come il percorso di Tom divenga un riscatto e un conseguente ritorno all'ordine, rispetto a una condizione di triplice illegittimità.

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research is to carry out a three-level analysis of *The History of Tom Jones; a Foundling* (1749) by Henry Fielding, following and explaining its peculiar layering of various narrative lines.

Firstly, the plot is largely centred on both the theme of Tom's legitimacy as heir to Allworthy's estate and his much needed prudence to enter into possession of it, by means of his final marriage. Secondly, these issues widely reflect the historical background in which the novel took shape, that is, the rebellion of 1745. Indeed, Tom's image is based on Charles Edward Stuart, the so-called Young Pretender; his wife-to-be Sophia is mistaken for Jenny Cameron, the Pretender's Scottish lover; Tom's travels have much in common with the wanderings of the notorious claimant to the British throne. Thirdly, a symbolic level encompasses the preceding ones: contemporary rumours had it that Charles Edward Stuart was the universal leader of Freemasonry, probably the "hidden Grand-Master" (Marsha Keith Schuchard).

From this perspective, Tom's wanderings after being turned out from Paradise Hall, his adventures in the "country section" under the falling rain, his imprisonment in London and gradual inner rebirth leading to his marriage with Sophia Western, describe a sort of ritual initiation following a typically masonic punishment for *cowans*, this latter being the name for a mason who has not been regularly bred, an intruder overhearing the secrets of a lodge, and therefore "placed under the eaves of the house in rainy weather, till the water runs in at his shoulders and out at his heels" (Albert Mackey).

Therefore, my aim is to underscore the aspects which link the "bastard," the individual improperly introduced into a household, to the figure of the pretender, the improper claimant to the throne, and to the *cowan*, the irregularly trained mason. Only following this line of thought, Tom's progress can eventually be interpreted as a successful attempt to restore order amid various forms of illegitimacy. Moreover, such state of things portrays a rather different mid-eighteenth-century Britain, where the Stuarts regain their power and the Hanoverian monarchy is called into question.

**“A TRIPLE-FACED JANUS:
TOM JONES AS BASTARD, PRETENDER, AND COWAN”**

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Susan Mitchell Sommers has published a groundbreaking study containing an updated biography of Thomas Dunckerley, one of the major figures in eighteenth-century English freemasonry. As she points out, he shared with his contemporaries an outspoken need to draw materials from his own life, in order to put them together into a tailor-made narrative. As a key to reading this phenomenon, Sommers turns to cynical social climbing, a habit apparently spread like wildfire among middle-class upstarts at that time:

Dunckerley felt very keenly the class boundaries and his lack of social contacts that persistently came between him and his professional ambitions. A concomitant worry was how to provide for his family. Given these twin realities, we need to understand that the primary object of his fictional biography was to secure a government position that would boost him socially. In 1763 this must have truly seemed like an insurmountable obstacle, not just for Dunckerley, but for all other social aspirants across the middling ranks. Consider how frequently actual and fictional reinventions appear in eighteenth-century literature. Two famously popular novels, *The History of Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, come to mind. There are particularly interesting similarities between the 'hidden' history Dunckerley invents for himself, and the plot of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, published in 1749. Not only is Tom revealed as being of higher social standing than he previously suspected, but the virtuous characters he encounters in the novel tend to be strongly Anglican and pro-Hanoverian, like Dunckerley himself. The picaresque nature of Tom's journey on the way to his true position also resembles the story Dunckerley relates of his Masonic journey through the Mediterranean and France. Intended or accidental, personal reinvention was as genuine a form of social rebellion as one person could manage unaided, and the theme had broad appeal.¹

Clearly, to a certain extent, this literary 'self-marketing' engendered confusion between biographical accounts and fictional narratives. In the case mentioned in

¹ Susan Mitchell Sommers, *Thomas Dunckerley and English Freemasonry*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012, pp. 53-54.

the passage, such worlds are totally blurred as Dunckerley's journey strikes our attention by showing unexpected similarity to successful works of the previous decades. And it is even more surprising, when we come to realise that it can be aligned with Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* in terms of a masonic walk of life. At least tentatively, we can assume that Fielding's novel exerted great influence over Dunckerley's account, but then a question naturally arises: is *Tom Jones* to be read as a masonic novel? This is actually the main point in the analysis of Fielding's masterpiece that will be carried out in this thesis.

But, prior to outlining its various chapters, let us have a quick overview of the outstanding approaches that have filled the critical landscape over the past few years. Though from rather different perspectives, most readings of *Tom Jones* have largely dwelt on social issues and formal problems arising from its contribution to the history of the novel. As John Richetti puts it:

Tom Jones' elaborate structuring is a defensive bulwark against the vulgar simplicities of popular narrative and also a replacement for the alternative complexities of the social and historical world which Fielding, as the good classicist that he was, promises to represent in general and meaningful terms that will preserve that complexity but bring order and stability to it. Fielding finds himself in the awkward position of offering an ambitious revision of popular narrative tradition without discarding the central pleasures of such fiction – to re-present contemporary actuality for the reader's pleasure and curiosity and to submit to the tyranny of the literary marketplace.²

This remark typically has Fielding straddle the line between two literary forms, namely, the romance and the novel. Mid-century fiction sees a steadfast tendency to accommodate both the needs of small elites who promote long-standing classics, and the pressing demands of a fast-growing but poorly educated readership. That is why recurrent ancient *topoi* eventually fall into the domain of popular characters bearing English-sounding names, speaking everyday language, or mirroring virtues and vices alike. Due to the resemblance between fictional figures and common people, eighteenth-century readers cast a critical eye on the

² John Richetti, *The English Novel in History, 1700-1780*, London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 131-132.

development of the former, in search of good examples to imitate. Nevertheless, the accent on the possibility of turning oneself into something better, must be interpreted correctly because “novels of development (...) deal with personal change (...) only in a sense. Growth more than change is the point: not radical alteration but something more like self-discovery. Tom Jones learns prudence (...) and becomes worthy of his beloved.”³ It is almost pointless, indeed, to look for utter transformation in a young man who simply makes his own way through the English countryside towards London and, symbolically, finds the strength to see his true self. ‘Self-discovery’ is the keyword to unlock the meaning of Tom’s wanderings; he only needs time and experience, the two elements which Fielding wittily handles throughout his very long narrative.

The young protagonist suffers, we might say, from a form of ‘social amnesia.’ Even though he remains totally unaware of his origins until the closing chapters, all through the story he mostly acts in the name of an inner nobility, a vague sense of belonging to the upper class that, by contrast, his name and social standing seem to deny. Of course, however, it is not Fielding who particularly prides himself on seeing Tom sink in quicksand but, as widely acknowledged, the motive of unknown parenthood represents a great legacy, that he receives from the romance tradition. This novel stages a rather common situation, meaning that:

the world of the eighteenth-century novel as exemplified by Fielding and Richardson is a world of sons and daughters who may or may not know their own fathers. Its characters are typically born with a dynastic identity, which is sometimes correct and sometimes mistaken; even Tom Jones gains such an identity by virtue of being found in Squire Allworthy’s bed.⁴

As far as the virtue inherent in the surname is concerned, Tom becomes ‘all worthy’ at the moment he is mysteriously abandoned, bundled up in a sort of linen sheet in the Squire’s house. But, in spite of such tender scene, the warm welcome

³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel beginnings: experiments in eighteenth-century English fiction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 59-60.

⁴ Patrick Parrinder, *Nation & Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day*, Oxford: OUP, 2006, pp. 89-90.

of the wealthy man is not enough to entitle the baby to come into possession of Paradise Hall. As a consequence, Tom has to fight his way back home in more than a sense, after being turned out of doors. On a social level, one constant threat is hidden behind his half-brother Mr Blifil's two-faced behaviour: Allworthy's legitimate heir, indeed, schemes against the poor foundling, thus somehow playing the part of a brand new Cain. The relationship between Tom and Blifil is the backbone of the novel in a way and, what is more, it provides an archetypal struggle that can work powerfully in many other variations on the family theme. This potential, for example, applies to Fielding's sister, Sarah. She exploited it to the full in her best-known novel in 1744 because, as Ruth Perry remarks:

Sibling relations in *The Adventures of David Simple* are extreme: siblings are either entirely devoted to one another or cruelly competitive. David's evil brother, Daniel Simple, forges their father's will so as to disinherit David, though the hero later recovers some of his fortune with the help of an uncle, the brother of another generation. (*Tom Jones* [1749] and *Amelia* [1751] also turn on the plot device of the theft of inheritance by a sibling.)⁵

Family bonds are sometimes unbreakable and even paradoxical, as in the case of Mr Allworthy's parental love for Tom. Indeed, only in the light of the final revelation about his mother, we can fully justify the Squire's attachment to him, that would otherwise sound more something like authorial manipulation. At other times, instead, supposedly strong relationships turn out to be rooted in barren soil, including Mr Blifil's outward respect for his uncle Allworthy. Though seemingly standing up against Tom's naive debauchery, the disguise that Blifil puts on as a child is exposed at the end, when he undergoes the bitter punishment initially intended for his enemy.

If this is the picture that Fielding draws to provide his plot with a socio-economic background, the idea of a final return after a 'domestic fight' can fit into the symbolic level as well. As a matter of fact, Tom gets caught in an inescapable trap, which forces him out of Allworthy's estate and sets his adventures in motion.

⁵ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004, p. 147.

Unable to detect Blifil's bad intentions, the young protagonist finds himself momentarily homeless, so that he need roll up his sleeves and win back his uncle's trust. His distressful condition derives, on the whole, from a total lack of prudence marking his behaviour through the first and second sections of the novel. If, on the one hand, all the hardships keeping Tom apart from his friends seem to throw him into despair, on the other hand they allow him to gain wisdom in pursuit of his beloved Sophia Western. After all it could not be otherwise, given that the etymology of the girl's name produces a juxtaposition of the concrete travelling experience, and the inner drive to discover spiritual enlightenment.

These steps can be safely understood as parts of an esoteric path towards self-knowledge, that supplies the lenses through which this thesis, as already hinted before, aims to fill a critical gap. To be even more precise, the object of this reading does not merely amount to the symbolic world of *Tom Jones* in a wide sense, but further extends to its pervasive masonic imagery and meaning. Therefore, in order to form a clearer idea of this analysis, let us see the structure of each section in detail.

The aim of the first chapter is mainly to discuss the reception of Fielding's work up to the present time, starting from his own contemporaries' response. In the attempt to trace the most enduring lines of thought, the argument will be divided into three parts roughly corresponding to the different centuries. Such rationale mostly comes as the result of a question, that has constantly influenced the entire writing process: has Fielding's public image been left unchanged since his death in 1754? The answer is, of course, that he has been both praised and harshly dismissed, even though nowadays he still appears to stand the test of time. Hence, the choice of representative critical essays, and the necessity to outline peculiar traits of Fielding's literary legacy in distinct historical periods. The eighteenth century reads his novels (and drama) in terms of morality, often downplaying his honest claims to virtue, almost invariably mistaken for 'red herrings' to turn the readers' attention away from his bawdy private life. The following century partly breaks this spell, and Fielding's role in the development of the modern novel is more and more acknowledged and analysed. Indeed, novelists such as Sir Walter Scott and William Makepeace Thackeray tend to

reverse this negative trend, in order to number him among the pillars of the British canon. At last, for what concerns the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the rise of many challenging critical currents allows us to better frame Fielding within the history of the novel, so that his works become part of a much wider social and cultural context. Starting at least from the 1910s onwards, scholarship on Fielding has come up with rather conflicting ideas about his literary achievements. Indeed, suffice it to recall such diverging points of view as those expressed by Wilbur Cross in his renowned biography *The History of Henry Fielding* (1918) and Frank Leavis in his *The Great Tradition* (1948); the methodological improvements of Michael McKeon's *The History of the English Novel* (1987) with respect to Ian Watt's seminal work *The Rise of the Novel* (1957); the interesting variety of approaches ranging from Angela Smallwood's feminist study *Fielding and the Woman Question* (1989) to the influence of his classical learning in James Lynch's *Henry Fielding and the Heliodorian Novel* (1986), or Nancy Mace's *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition* (1996).

The second chapter will deal with the intertextuality and personal relationship between Henry Fielding and William Hogarth. In several cases, including Ronald Paulson's three-volume monograph on this celebrated artist and satirist, some stages in his career have been considered to be parallel to Fielding's fast-growing popularity on the mid-century literary scene. Unfortunately, the scarcity of information about Fielding's biography, when compared to the abundance of evidence about Hogarth's life, makes it rather difficult to give a reliable picture of their friendship. The argument is centred on their mutual influence in the creation of what we can define an 'autochthonous tradition,' which entails new "characters and caricaturas" and "a new province of writing," to use their own words. They tend to create a national artistic landscape by picking characters or situations out of the British reality, and then striving to turn them into classics: in other terms, the grandeur of Roman and Greek ruins increasingly has to make room for a typical northern beauty.⁶ Moreover, this

⁶ For an extensive discussion about the rise of a typically northern kind of beauty, reference can be made to: Yvonne Bezrucka, *The Invention of the Northern Aesthetics in 18th-Century Literature*, 2017 (forthcoming).

cultural claim finds support in a peculiar concept of freedom coming in the shape of a mixed constitution under the Hanoverian dynasty, as opposed to the disguised absolutism imposed by the last Stuart king James II. The chapter extensively discusses both Fielding and Hogarth as eminent figures of a cultural elite, moving along the ideological lines of the Glorious Revolution that, towards the close of the seventeenth century, manages to preserve the Protestant religion and the parliamentary monarchy.

On the whole, the second half of the thesis will provide an interpretation of *Tom Jones*, in the light of the masonic symbolism and its close relationship to the Jacobite motif running through the novel. In particular, the third chapter contains the analysis of the so-called ‘country section’ and ‘road section,’ which roughly cover Tom’s life from his birth to the arrival in London, during the last part of his journey. From a methodological point of view, a couple of aspects must be clarified. First of all, in order to give the characters a proper place within the complex world of *Tom Jones*, much weight has been given to the etymology of their names: it is no mystery, indeed, that adopting a well-oiled literary strategy, Fielding often employs them as a means to attribute moral values or vices. Secondly, some historical portraits that Fielding draws for the purposes of his political journalism (particularly when he deals with the Jacobite party), have been taken for granted, though proven false in our days. This choice is, of course, strongly consistent with the necessity to look at the mid-eighteenth-century reality through Fielding’s eyes and not ours.

History is a major concern in *Tom Jones*, both when it strictly refers to the story that the plot unfolds, and when it comes down to the troubled waters into which the British people found themselves during the 1740s. Fielding shows great uneasiness with Jacobitism, the heterogeneous movement supporting the return of the Old Pretender James Edward Stuart, and thus threatening to shake the foundations of the Hanoverian legitimacy. The Stuart heir is inevitably a controversial figure, whose life can be best summarised thus:

On 1 January 1766, in Rome, died James Francis Edward Stuart: to his supporters, still King James III and VIII of England, Scotland, Ireland and France; to his opponents, still the Old Pretender. In Catholic eyes, he had suffered for his faith,

surrendering worldly advantage rather than pay the price of conversion to Protestantism that his restoration would have required. Pope Clement XIII decided on a royal funeral, against James's wishes, and his exequies were of great magnificence.⁷

Religion, as Fielding repeatedly makes clear, might probably not be the only watershed between Jacobites and pro-Hanoverians, but it can surely become a 'bloody' battlefield. And it is no far-fetched position if we remember that religion, since long before the days of the Glorious Revolution, had been often used as a mark of political membership. Indeed, provided that many exceptions were to be found among rival wings, we can state that during the late seventeenth century, on the one hand there was the progressive Whig party strongly connected with non-conformist doctrines, while on the other hand there was the royalist Tory party, in line with the Church of England and often acting in support of the Jacobite cause.

The historical records of 1688 mostly pass down the story of an illegitimate child, born of James II and his second wife Mary of Modena. The decline of the Stuart dynasty is, therefore, often attributed to the last king's lack of a suitable heir to the throne, but it is quite evident that the actual struggle was one fought between Protestantism and Catholicism, the latter representing a serious threat for the future of the crown in the eyes of the Parliament. Overt Catholic beliefs on James' part were a thorn in the side of political opponents and, in their own view, the reason for his ambiguous attitude towards religious matters:

James's first statement as king was that he would support the Church of England because it supported the monarchy. This reassured the Tories but it became apparent that the king's support was conditional on the Churchmen's behaving in what he saw as a loyal manner. Since the 'exclusion crisis' the clergy had repeatedly stressed that active resistance to the monarchy could never be justified; James interpreted this as a commitment to unconditional obedience. However, his Tory parliament would not agree to any formal relaxation of the laws against Catholics and especially the Test

⁷ Paul Monod, Murray Pittock, Daniel Szechi eds., *Loyalty and Identity: Jacobites at Home and Abroad*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 9.

Acts of 1673 and 1678, designed to keep Catholics out of public offices and parliament.⁸

Not only was the illegitimate baby at the core of a hot debate in those years, thus overshadowing actual political divergences, but still nowadays little importance seems to be given to other pivotal points in James' reign, such as the two Declarations of Indulgence which he promulgated shortly before being sent into exile. As Richard Boyer comments, religious tolerance becomes a double-edged sword in James' hands, and an astonishing paradox in Stuart history:

The story of James's short reign and the subsequent Revolution has been told by several authors; yet not one has focussed attention upon one of the most important immediate causes of the Revolution, namely, James's Declarations of Indulgence of 1687 and 1688. To most Englishmen the idea of liberty of conscience was unfamiliar. Anglicans, nonconformists, and Roman Catholics alike denied the rights of conscience and the first two enforced conformity by political disabilities and legal penalties. The persecution of the Anglican clergy prior to 1660 must be taken into account before any judgment can be made concerning the Church's future policies. On both sides during the century men raised voices in favor of toleration, but that policy was discredited by its association with militarism, and by constant recourse to military force to establish and maintain it. It is rather paradoxical that the Stuarts, who lost a throne in 1649 partly because of religious intolerance, lost it later on through an attempt to introduce toleration.⁹

⁸ Barry Coward ed., *A Companion to Stuart Britain*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 412.

⁹ Richard E. Boyer, "English Declarations of Indulgence of 1687 and 1688." *The Catholic Historical Review* 50.3 (1964): 332. With respect to James II's Declarations of Indulgence, it must be pointed out that they seem to convey no real threat to the preservation of the Church of England. On the contrary, the king tends to include all religious denominations, as he states: "[T]here is nothing now that we so earnestly desire as to establish our government on such a foundation as may make our subjects happy, and unite them to us by inclination as well as duty; which we think can be done by no means so effectually as by granting to them the free exercise of their religion for the time to come, and add that to the perfect enjoyment of their property (...). We cannot but heartily wish, as it will easily be believed, that all the people of our dominions were members of the Catholic Church. Yet we humbly thank Almighty God, it is and has of long time been our constant sense and opinion (...) that conscience ought not to be constrained nor people

Among other things, Fielding's rendering of the 1745 background is deeply rooted in this discourse on freedom of conscience in religious matters. In his frame of mind, the divide between those people remaining faithful to the Pope and the Protestant community, reproduces the same old Stuart claim over the throne against the Hanoverian line of descent. In other words, on one side the Young Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie, marching from Scotland towards London, and on the other side the troops commanded by the Duke of Cumberland on behalf of George II. All along the rebellion, these two figures tried to make the best of their military forces, thus actually taking part to a process of historical myth-making:

Both Prince Charles and the Duke of Cumberland knew that sovereignty itself was at stake, and each held to his principle with shocking consistency. In his later years the Prince could be overcome with distracted grief whenever he was reminded of what men had suffered on his behalf, but in the rising he regarded his supporters primarily as instruments whereby he could reclaim the crown of Great Britain for his house. To have carried on the fight after Culloden made little sense to him, for it could contribute nothing to that end, and so he abandoned his followers to their fate just as he had the garrison he left behind in Carlisle. The Duke on his side denied his enemies all belligerent rights, as they were understood in regular warfare, and was not content until he had consolidated his military victory by eradicating the social roots of resistance.¹⁰

forced in matters of mere religion; it has ever been directly contrary to our inclination (...). In the first place we do declare, that we will protect and maintain the archbishops, bishops, and clergy, and all other our subjects of the Church of England, in the free exercise of their religion, as by law established, and in the quiet and full enjoyment of all their possessions, without any molestation or disturbance whatsoever. We do likewise declare, that it is our royal will and pleasure, that from henceforth the execution of all and all manner of penal laws in matters ecclesiastical, for not coming to church, or not receiving the Sacrament, or for any other nonconformity to the religion established, or for or by reason of the exercise of religion in any manner whatsoever, be immediately suspended; and the further execution of the said penal laws and every of them is hereby suspended." Andrew Browning ed., *English Historical Documents, 1660-1714*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 386-387.

¹⁰ Christopher Duffy, *The '45*, London: Cassell, 2003, pp. 546-547.

The Young Pretender is not only to be considered in terms of enmity to the Hanoverian establishment: in Fielding's novel, he represents a real-life model for the character of Tom Jones. The similarity between them and the widespread contemporary rumours that had Charles Edward a hidden Grand Master of Jacobite freemasonry, are the bases for the analysis both in the third and the fourth chapter. Interestingly enough, masonic symbolism comes to interact with all other levels of meaning; it serves as a texture underlying them all. Methodologically, first we need remark that in the course of the analysis, there will deliberately be no reference to the use of freemasonry in other works by Fielding, because this specific form of fraternalism is intended to be the 'means' and not the 'end.' In the second place, masonic imagery will be discussed as a wealth of materials that Fielding mainly draws from paintings and prints by Hogarth, who makes a rather complicated use of it in a large number of works.

The fourth chapter will deal with Tom's presence in London, namely, the third section of the novel. His travel of initiation, starting from South-West England and following a triangle-shaped path, leads him to London where he finally meets Sophia Western (knowledge/prudence) again, and then back to Paradise Hall. The chapter will particularly focus on the 'illumination' that Tom achieves while in prison and on some related episodes. His epiphany marks the final turning point in the masonic progress: symbolic death allows him to resurrect as a master. This moment paves the way for a successful self-discovery, followed by a reassuring 'marriage to knowledge' but, in so doing, Fielding also raises an unexpected question: can Tom, who is so similar to the Young Pretender, really be restored to his proper place? In this way, the novel shakes some certainties about Fielding's support to the Whig faction and, even more to the point, helps us grasp the complexity of his views. Such ambiguous political leanings result in the choice of a 'Jacobite-oriented' ending. For this reason, we will see how Tom finds his way back home and enters into possession of Squire Allworthy's estate, just like the Pretender might have come to the British throne in 1745, so to regain what his ancestors had temporarily lost.

This said, the present critical reading of *Tom Jones* should safely draw to a conclusion, but to confine such a work of art within strict boundaries is a paradox

in itself for various reasons. In the first place, it stands at the crossroads between two competing sensibilities, that is, a long classical tradition that dominates the British literary scene at least until the middle of the eighteenth century, and a rising form of beauty depending more and more on individual taste. This means, as we will see, that Fielding's work can hardly be said to fall into well-defined categories, as it constantly draws from, reshapes, and calls into question all of them. In the second place, such an amazingly contrived structure raises expectations in the readers that it often fails to meet. *Tom Jones* need be seen as an 'open-ended' novel, since it invariably reminds us of an architectural order, even though we are eventually confronted with its irredeemable chaos.

The sense of harmony and symmetry it conveys has, in several cases, led critics to read it as an example of Palladian style, sometimes recalling Prior Park, which is the mansion built by John Wood for Fielding's patron, Ralph Allen. This entrepreneur from Bath represents the real-life inspiration, or at least one of the models, for the literary character of Squire Allworthy. As a consequence, therefore, two interesting points can be stressed: on the one hand, a comparison between Allen and Tom's benefactor; on the other hand, a close similarity between Prior Park and Fielding's plot structure. In Wood's words, the design of Allen's house "was proposed to answer that of three Sides of a Duodecagon, inscribed within a Circle of a Quarter of a Mile Diameter."¹¹ We can conjecture that Allworthy's house itself is designed to serve as a fictional counterpart of Allen's residence. In the fourth chapter of the first book, the narrator describes Paradise Hall thus:

The Gothick stile of building could produce nothing nobler than Mr Allworthy's house. There was an air of grandeur in it, that struck you with awe, and rival'd the beauties of the best Grecian architecture; and it was as commodious within, as venerable without. (...) In the midst of the grove was a fine lawn, sloping down towards the house, near the summit of which rose a plentiful spring, gushing out of a

¹¹ John Wood, *A Description of Bath*, London: J. Murray, 1769, p. 96. On this aspect, see also Frederick W. Hilles, "Art and Artifice in *Tom Jones*," in Maynard Mack, Ian Gregor eds., *Imagined Worlds: Essays on some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt*, London: Methuen, 1968, pp. 91-110.

rock covered with firs, and forming a constant cascade of about thirty foot, not carried down a regular flight of steps, but tumbling in a natural fall over the broken and mossy stones, till it came to the bottom of the rock; then running off in a pebly channel, that with many lesser falls winded along, till it fell into a lake at the foot of the hill (...). [T]he prospect was closed. (*TJ*, p. 30)¹²

In 1857, reverend Robert Francis Kilvert publishes a speech previously delivered in Bath, titled *Ralph Allen and Prior Park*, where he gives a detailed picture of the large estate:

(...) [A]bout the year 1735 or 1736, Mr. Allen began to build Prior Park. Mr. Wood, in his “Essay towards a Description of Bath,” states that this grand design originated in Mr. Allen’s desire to meet certain reflections that had been cast by interested parties upon the qualities of the Combe Down stone (...). The building was intended to have displayed all the different orders of architecture (...). This magnificent building stands on a terrace (...). It is built in the Corinthian style (...). The pleasure ground of Prior Park, though not extensive, is beautifully romantic, and good use is made of the various rills of water, which (...), trickling down the precipice, are collected below into a serpentine river, which is ornamented by a fictitious bridge, designed by Mr. Pope, to conceal its termination. (...) There is a gothic building at the top, or rather on one side of the pleasure ground (...).¹³

The similarity between the two mansions is an aspect that will not be discussed extensively in this thesis because, even though it is quoted fairly often in scholarly works on *Tom Jones*, its symbolic meaning is still hard to grasp for lack of information. Indeed, this would surely deserve further research, and what we can here say is only that John Wood was known as a man with deep knowledge in esotericism, using widespread masonic symbolism in his works. Fielding, on his part, as a member of Allen’s cultural milieu in Bath, was quite familiar with the building and may well have transposed its features into Paradise Hall.

¹² All quotations from *Tom Jones* will be abbreviated as *TJ* and page number in brackets. References to the text are from: Reginald P. C. Mutter ed., *The History of Tom Jones*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.

¹³ Robert Francis Kilvert, *Ralph Allen and Prior Park*, Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1857, pp. 10-11.

When it comes to introducing Allworthy, the narrator describes him in a way that anticipates the masonic texture of the novel:

It was now the middle of May, and the morning was remarkably serene, when Mr Allworthy walked forth on the terrace, where the dawn opened every minute that lovely prospect we have before described to his eye. And now having sent forth streams of light, which ascended the blue firmament before him, as harbingers preceding his pomp, in the full blaze of his majesty, rose the sun; than which one object alone in this lower creation could be more glorious, and that Mr Allworthy himself presented; a human being replete with benevolence, meditating in what manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most good to his creatures. (*TJ*, p. 31)

First of all, the definition “human being replete with benevolence” once again signals Allworthy’s indebtedness to Allen, who is generally labelled as benevolent man (suffice it to think that Benjamin Boyce's outstanding biography is titled *The Benevolent Man: A Life of Ralph Allen of Bath*). Secondly, in this scene he is connected with the sun rising “in the full blaze of his majesty,” so that he himself becomes a sort of blazing star (an expression that occurs again later on in the novel). In masonic terms, the blazing star is a multifaceted symbol, but mostly refers to light, divine direction in the journey through life; it is the emblem of a true freemason who perfects himself in the way of truth (knowledge/prudence). In English lodges, it symbolizes the sun which enlightens the earth, dispensing its blessings to all mankind and giving light and life to all things.¹⁴

The problem with drawing a parallel between Ralph Allen and Allworthy in masonic terms, however, lies in the uncertainty about the former’s membership in freemasonry. Indeed, as Benjamin Boyce explains in a footnote:

Ralph Allen, so far as I can discover, was not a Freemason. Yet as owner of quarries and employer of numerous working masons, he would seem (to an outsider) a likely

¹⁴ Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences, Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution*, Vol. 2, New York: The Masonic History Company, 1919.

candidate. (...) I have been told by the Librarian of Quatuor Coronati in London that he finds no record of Allen's membership; P. R. James, Past Master of the Royal Cumberland Lodge in Bath, finds no evidence of membership there.¹⁵

Such gap does not allow us to find an answer, but it is not the only case. The same applies to a number of unsolved matters connected with the figure of the Young Pretender, the true nature of the acquaintance between Fielding and Hogarth, the complex pattern of Fielding's political allegiances, his actual knowledge of secret forms of fraternalism (possibly even personal membership), and many others. Of course, much evidence is still needed to answer them and, to supply it temporarily, here we will constantly attempt to make convincing hypotheses, which must prompt us to ask ourselves more questions.

¹⁵ Benjamin Boyce, *The Benevolent Man: A Life of Ralph Allen of Bath*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 207.

CHAPTER ONE

HENRY FIELDING OVER TIME: AN ASSESSMENT OF HIS CRITICAL RECEPTION

1.1 Questions of Morality: Eighteenth-Century Critical Reactions

In our times, the blending of Fielding's personal beliefs and the actual moral system of his novels makes it rather challenging for readers to grasp the meanings he was meant to convey. A situation which should come as no surprise, if we only think about the huge and irreconcilable amount of critical reactions among his contemporaries who, while often showing strong approval for his work, in many other cases took a stand against his supposedly bawdy characters by charging him with immorality. What is more, in order to reinforce or correct these first impressions, a constant attention has been devoted over the past two centuries to Fielding's unquestioned role of moralist, co-founder of the modern English novel and, as we could say through his own words, 'puppet-master' pulling the strings of certain future developments in that genre. If such interest has provided invaluable help in accounting for his narrative technique and the weight of recurring themes, we must still bear in mind that a large number of authoritative critics from different cultural backgrounds have come up with wrong-headed readings, thus frequently overshadowing the genuine authorial intentions. To say that we need to pierce the veil, in order to read between the lines and get access to Fielding's frame of mind is, perhaps, a little high-sounding but, all the same, it is necessary to shake off a set of long-standing prejudices from the assessment of his various writings. In any case, far from downplaying the lasting influence of these several interpretive layers, we must use them to account for Fielding's shifting fortunes as writer and influential man of his own time.

Through its evocative power, even more than scholarly comments and analyses, a passage from *I Like it Here* (1958) by Kingsley Amis can help lay the groundwork for our discussion. While staying in Lisbon, the author's alter ego Garnet Bowen visits Fielding's tomb and the narrator says:

Bowen thought about Fielding. Perhaps it was worth dying in your forties if two hundred years later you were the only non-contemporary novelist who could be read with unaffected and wholehearted interest, the only one who never had to be apologised for or excused on the grounds of changing taste. And how enviable to live in the world of his novels, where duty was plain, evil arose out of malevolence and a starving wayfarer could be invited indoors without hesitation and without fear. Did that make it a simplified world? Perhaps, but that hardly mattered beside the existence of a moral seriousness that could be made apparent without the aid of evangelical puffing and blowing.¹

To start with, the quite unusual way to set the mood of this scene between an admirer and Fielding's mythical image should not go unnoticed. Curiously, Bowen is not said to be staring at the tombstone, there is no remark about the visual impact of the encounter, but he is deep in thought as if he were recalling some distant memories of a close friend of his. The succeeding series of reflections points to Fielding's acknowledged role in the English literary canon and, most of all, casting a rather nostalgic eye on the eighteenth-century way of life, raises questions about key themes of his works, such as "duty," "malevolence," and "moral seriousness." As the narrator hints, average readers of novels like, say, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, can feel comfortable with a world where nearly all questions find proper answers and secrets finally unfold, nevertheless we realise that it is in many respects at odds with our own reality. As a result, everyone who attempts to decode Fielding's mindset, usually faces the almost unbridgeable gap between his teleological sense of human existence, literally inspected through the optimistic lenses of the faith in a providential order, and the present which is largely the product of radical scepticism and cultural relativism.

Seen under this light, Fielding could be easily dismissed as the outdated voice of a long-gone social system, and therefore bound to become a mere witness of his contemporary tensions. But it is probably more useful to wonder what Fielding can still teach us, how readers can relate today to his understanding of human nature, and what lasting influence this is likely to exert on us, if any, at all.

¹ Kingsley Amis, *I Like it Here*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958, p. 185.

Such assessment of Fielding's ability to find a place in the twenty-first century literary landscape, particularly through his masterpiece *Tom Jones* (1749), is the aim of this chapter: hence, it goes without saying that his legacy must be considered by following the winding path of its reception.

In order to get a clear picture of the public's reactions to Fielding as a novelist, it is necessary to premise that his career did not start in the field of prose writing, but he initially made a name as anti-ministerial satiric playwright since the late 1720s. In spite of the sharp turning point in 1737, by means of the Licensing Act that drove him out of the fashionable London stage, he devoted himself to novel writing only some five years later in 1742 when *Joseph Andrews*, his first full-length work in this rising genre, came out. And, moreover, it is just in the course of these years that he completed his legal studies and tenaciously strove to obtain a position in this profession. All these things considered, we should form an idea of Fielding in the Forties as a completely different man from the youth who had made a living out of low comedies and farces: we would expect to come across the literary effort of a wise magistrate, passing judgment on bad characters and praising heroes, condemning rakes and taking sides with the shared conventions about marriage. But, then again, Fielding is nowhere like this and, to a certain extent, he seems to fight against these very principles, just to show that life is better understood through good-hearted responses to changing contexts than black-and-white thinking.

Prior to reviewing the wide range of contradictory reflections about the success of *Tom Jones*, though, it is here convenient to go through Fielding's first attempts to make his living out of writing, and his entrance into the chaotic world of the London theatre. From the biographical fragments about his youth, we learn that:

[F]amily 'interest' would have helped him – a very important consideration in a society which largely operated through patronage. In the face of this Fielding's decision to make his income from the highly precarious profession of writing looks like an act of rebellion against both sides of the family.

He began where he clearly meant to continue, at the centre of things in London, in the momentous year of 1727, as George II acceded to the throne on the death of his

father, and the first minister Sir Robert Walpole confounded his rivals by hanging on to office despite the change of regime. Fielding's first known attempt at authorship was a pamphlet containing two poems, *The Coronation, A Poem*, and an *Ode on the Birthday* – which is ironic on two counts, since Fielding would later become notorious for his writings against the government (though not against the king).²

Being prompted by a somehow childish rejection of his family, this period appears to stand quite apart from his future walk of life. In the same way, the short poetic interlude can be mostly seen as a false step, and the more so as it turns out to be a kind of writing which Fielding himself would soon leave aside to follow other pursuits.

This is how he first came into contact with the stage: however, it must be said, nowadays Fielding's plays often receive some attention in critical works mostly on account of their documentary value. From both the points of view of themes and dramatic forms, they do not seem to have outlived the several revolutions that the European theatre has witnessed over the last two centuries. But then again, if these productions:

strike modern readers of his fiction as archaeological items, to theatre-goers in the years before the Licensing Act they were inescapably alive. Fielding was the most conspicuous and influential force in the London theatre in one of its most vigorous and innovative decades, and something of his prominence can be seen in the bald statistics. In 1727 he placed his first comedy (performed 1728) at Drury Lane, the most prestigious theatre of the day, while still aged twenty.³

Not only is Fielding notable for his constantly growing fame among the public, but also for his renowned prolific hand: particularly during the early thirties, for instance, he received praises for his ability to capitalise on the shortage of facilities he had to face. In spite of this, there was no wasting of energies on his part, the largest portion of which he employed to absorb all up-to-date theatrical

² Claude Rawson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*. New York: OUP, 2007, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

techniques and stimulating ideas, in order to align himself to the mainstream policy of the Drury Lane and please the taste of a heterogeneous public.

At the outset of his dramatic career, Fielding soon raised curiosity for his innovative approach, even though, on the other hand, he attracted antipathies and snobbish remarks of disapproval. Curiously enough, an early comment on his *The Author's Farce and the Pleasures of the Town* (1730) goes as far as to remind the public his controversial family background and, most of all, his urgent need of money:

I went to the Haymarket playhouse, and saw a play called 'The Author's Farce and the Pleasures of the Town,' with an additional piece called 'The Tragedy of Tom Thumb.' Both these plays are a ridicule on poets, and several of their works, as also of operas, etc., and the last of our modern tragedians, and are exceedingly full of humour, with some wit. The author is one of the sixteen children of Mr. Fielding, and in a very low condition of purse.⁴

The closing part seems to betray a commonplace of the ideological frame of the time: indeed, if we recall some contemporary works like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, there should immediately emerge the conventional strategy that the protagonists adopt to introduce themselves to their readers. In such narratives, the line of descent becomes a real business card, the reference to the fathers, just as much as the present condition of their ambitious sons, are used as ways to set out the story and, therefore, to find a key to reading the various episodes. In this case the plays are much recommended but, on a general level, high society is not ready at all to welcome the cutting satire of an inexperienced social climber in search of popularity, because to make fun of poetical decorum and elite entertainments, including Italian operas, means to laugh at polite people's expenses.

After writing a number of plays, among which *Rape upon Rape* (later known as *The Coffee-House Politician*) in 1730; *The Tragedy of Tragedies: Or,*

⁴ John Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: Diary of Viscount Percival afterwards first Earl of Egmont*, R. A. Roberts, ed., London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1923, p. 97.

the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great, The Letter-Writers, The Welsh Opera, and The Grub-Street Opera in 1731; Fielding stages *The Lottery* in January 1732, and only a month later *The Modern Husband* which caused uncertain responses. In a letter dated 30th March and signed ‘Dramaticus,’ we read:

Sir,

The favourable reception *The Modern Husband* has met with from the Town, having given me some occasion to doubt of the justness of the judgment I had framed of that Piece, from seeing it the last night of its representation, I resolved to give it a careful and unprejudiced reading. You know, Mr. BAVIUS, tho’ it be possible to form a pretty tolerable idea of the goodness or badness of a Play from seeing it acted once; it is certainly the surer way to judge rightly of it, to examine it carefully in one’s closet.⁵

If Dramaticus is here supposed to act like a humble and sensible critic, thus relying on the wise judgment of the public, we should all the same point out how his method is flawed at least in one respect: he makes an equation between what Keir Elam defines ‘performance text’ and ‘dramatic text.’⁶ In other terms, it is fruitless to express opinions about a piece of writing and a representation actually taking place according to the same standards.

Moreover, as he goes on, his perplexities do not seem to dissolve. His initial embarrassment about how to come up with balanced criticism, is followed by similar doubts about the actual effectiveness of Fielding’s depiction of characters. Indeed, some paragraphs later he writes:

⁵ Thomas Lockwood, Ronald Paulson, eds., *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 31.

⁶ As Elam clearly puts it: “‘Theatre’ is taken to refer here to the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it. By ‘drama’, on the other hand, is meant that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular (‘dramatic’) conventions. See Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 2.

The Author of *The Modern Husband* does not appear to have had a true notion of Comedy. He seems to have thought, that the assembling of a certain number of characters together, under the titles of Husbands and Wives, Sons and Daughters, is sufficient to preserve the relation that ought to be kept up between the persons of the Drama; and that the making of them talk together, is enough to form the dialogue part of it. Now if half the persons of the Drama, and the conversation that passes between them, might all be entirely left out, without hurting the main action of the Play, all good judges will condemn the performance; unless there is something exceeding beautiful and entertaining. (...) If it be an original (the character of Lady Charlotte) of his own invention, which he has compiled out of the intemperance of female vivacity, he has been led away by that false notion so prevalent among modern Poets, of shewing something new (...). If he had any particular person in his eye, whose folly he intended to expose, (...) he has indeed succeeded in expressing that character, but wit will hardly cure either that person, or save any others of the like turn. (...) I know not why he has made Lord RICHLY a great man, (...) nor why this great man should be the greatest rogue that ever lived (...). The making of a great man absolutely and totally bad, both in the public and private station, in his morals and behaviour, is so poor, so scandalous, so vulgar, and so mean a piece of satire (...). But what instruction or pleasure can be gathered from this heap of absurdity? those parts (...) from which we are to expect pleasure, being a most monstrous kind of wit, consisting in an affected invention of ridiculous names, such as the *Duchess of SIMPLETON*, Lady Betty SHUTTLECOCK, Mrs. SQUABBLE, Mrs. WITLESS, Lady BARBARA PAWNJEWELS, &c, and a more affected choice of very extraordinary similes and surprising chit-chat.⁷

The plot of the play seems to upset Dramaticus' fixed idea of theatre, on the basis of inconsistent relationships between characters and silly conversations. But, going no further back than the Restoration and the late seventeenth-century dramatic practice, one could make a long list of playwrights drawing on a wealth of stereotyped figures. Besides, some of the most celebrated works brought on stage during the previous decades, such as Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), feature characters bearing really strange names: Mirabell, Millamant, Lady Wishfort, or Sir Wilfull apparently have very little in common with

⁷ Lockwood, Paulson, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-36.

everyday reality, and in the same manner their cynical actions could be said to be little more than the illusion of a magnifying glass.

As to the charge of “shewing something new,” Dramaticus fails to support his statements: in the first place, he takes for granted that all those people he has never met in his own life, simply do not exist, therefore Lady Charlotte is easily dismissed as the figment of Fielding’s imagination; on the contrary, in case she proved to be drawn from a real person, she would still be condemned to play a useless role. Dramaticus misses the original intention in creating such a figure, that is, the display of a blundered nature that is meant to be a mirror for the public to look into. To sum up, Fielding made a laughing stock of Lady Charlotte in order to correct excesses, and not with a view to downplaying bad consequences.

On 8th June 1732, writing under the equally extravagant pseudonym of Prosaicus, a reporter of *The Grub-street Journal* makes some curious remarks about *The Covent-Garden Tragedy*. Echoing other critics, he complains about the general letdown in moral standards:

I had seen too much in the Play-house to follow them (a friend of his and a lady after the performance), and went to a Coffee-house to examine, whether there was any thing in this *Covent Garden Tragedy*, that could lay the least claim to wit, or deserve any encouragement from the Town. I must submit it to all men of sense, whether that can pass for humour, which is only the dull representation of the most obscene characters in life; and humour is the only thing the Poet can pretend to boast. Were it so, I doubt not but every Drury-lane Bully might make a humourous Poet: for surely he could very naturally describe a scene of life in which he was always conversant; nor is there the most stupid wretch but might pass for a Wit, would he gain that name at the expence of all decency, as well as innocence.⁸

While these statements merely voice the widespread concern for an unstoppable decadence of taste and wit, it is the conclusion of the article that provides us with some interesting piece of information. Prosaicus writes:

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Where is the humour of the Bawdy-house scene to any but a Rake? Or that of HACKABOUTA and STORMANDRA to any women, but those of the Town? These indeed, may smile to see how naturally the Poet enters into their characters; but the joke is entirely lost to all others. – As to the mock Heroic, the lines are bad, nor any thing to recommend the numerous similies. The success of this Piece will determine whether the age is fallen to the lowest ebb; for I should entertain but a bad opinion of the intellects of that Man, or chastity of that Woman, who would give the least encouragement to the most dull obscene Piece, that, I may venture to say, ever appeared on any public stage.⁹

As a matter of fact, no character in the printed version of the play is named Hackabouta. This discrepancy either implies that the representation included ‘random’ substantial variations or, more convincingly, that Prosaicus is trying to define Fielding’s loose women as a dramatic life-size rendering of Hogarth’s famous Molly Hackabout. Moreover, such comparison is made even clearer in the light of the recent success of the *Harlot’s Progress*, released just two months before.

Indeed, the plot of *The Covent-Garden Tragedy*, presenting Mother Punchbowl, the two prostitutes Kissinda and Stormandra in a love triangle with Lovegirlo, is strongly reminiscent of Hogarth’s story where we are shown the procuress and brothel-keeper Mother Needham, Moll’s affair with Colonel Francis Charteris that becomes a triangle in the second plate, and the path to her final ruin.

Obviously, the relationship between Hogarth and Fielding is not fully relevant to our present purpose so that, in order to give a detailed account of their mutual influences, it will be discussed at length in the next chapter: all the same, here it must not pass unnoticed that as early as 1732 we can find some evidence, real reference or critical insight whatever, for the enduring parallel between them. But now, going back to the contemporaries’ reception of his plays, one more aspect deserves to be deepened, that is closely related to his use of foreign and ancient sources. As already hinted, it is a hardly deniable fact that Fielding draws on a variety of traditions, some of them being familiar to the English public like

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

the *Comedy of Manners*, others passed down from generations of strolling actors of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, or from the great example of Molière in seventeenth-century France. This latter creative vein is particularly sustained in works such as *The Old Debauchees*, *The Miser* adapted from *L'Avare ou l'École du mensonge* (1668), and *The Mock Doctor* based on *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666). Not very surprisingly, Fielding's rewritings are charged with making only a badly arranged series of absurdities in contrast with the original models. Hence, much criticism condemns his attempt to debase Molière's achievements by staging them as low entertainments, and therefore decries the lasciviousness of his efforts. On 20th July 1732, in an article published in *The Grub-street Journal* and signed Publicus, we read:

The Old Debauchees is the Author's favourite, it seems; for, in the preface to a piece of MOLIÈRE'S, which he has most *execrably murdered*, he modestly compares it with the *Misanthrope* of that Author. This writer then makes no distinction between the most chaste, moral, witty performance, and the most coarse, vicious, insipid trumpery that ever was hatched. Just so much difference is there between the *Misanthrope* of MOLIÈRE, and the *Old Debauchees*. However, it must be said for the writer, that in this piece he has made most violent attempts to be witty; and how he has succeeded may be best seen by setting a few of his flowers to view.¹⁰

With respect to the moral background against which the play is analysed, we should regard its complete dismissal as a truism; what is, instead, less clear is the blind acceptance of Molière as an upright man and playwright. No doubt, his activity is always tightly linked to the Sun King's court, its expensive maintenance along with its grand theatricals, and that is why he is turned into an authoritative voice. Nevertheless, it would be rather ingenuous to talk of Molière in these terms, in fact overlooking the notorious hellish rake to whom he gives life in *Dom Juan*, the range of shallow and selfish characters who inhabit his plays, and the semantic ambiguity behind his most daring jokes.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The perseverance in this line of thought thus seems to highlight a certain ignorance of Molière's dramatic strategies. In a different manner, on 24th August 1732 Prosaicus writes on *The Grub-street Journal* that:

I should now give you some account of the *Mock Doctor* (...). 'Tis done from MOLIÈRE by Mr. F-g. The Town has receiv'd it well; but some Critics say, he has not done justice to the French Poet, nay, that he has translated the very title itself wrong. As I am ignorant of the original, I shall not pretend to pass my judgment upon the Translation: but here, to show my freedom from all prejudice against Mr. F-g, I must confess, that I think it an entertaining Farcical Piece; but whether the pleasure is owing to him, or MOLIÈRE, I know not.¹¹

Even though each step of Fielding's career can be considered through different lenses, it should not escape our notice that his plays throw a very useful light on his novels. Therefore, to conclude this overview of his experience on the London stage, it is interesting to see how certain themes and characters that will be recurrent in his later writings, are first presented during the late Thirties.

Rather appealing are some elements in *Pasquin; A Dramatic Satire on the Times* (1736). Written with a view to mocking the election of members of Parliament, it features two representatives of the Court Party, Lord Place and Colonel Promise, and two of the Country Party, Sir Henry Fox-Chase and Squire Tankard. If the former couple of names ridicules the typical faults that ordinary people can find with greedy politicians, the latter projects Fielding's art into the Forties and predicts the later appearance of irresistible figures such as Squire Western. Indeed, the rude and uneducated father of Tom Jones' beloved Sophia mostly makes a name for his obsession with hunting and his heavy drinking, which exactly amounts to overlapping the country candidates' surnames.

From a thematic point of view, this play provides really early evidence for what will turn out to be an undiminished concern until the last years of Fielding's life, that is, the struggle between the House of Hanover and the House of Stuart for the British crown. In *Pasquin*, Fielding adds two allegorical figures, namely,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

the *Queen of Ignorance* and the *Queen of Common Sense*, each of them embodying a specific attitude in British cultural and political life. Their presence on stage stands for the tension between a long-lost capacity to read reality rationally and the unpredictable effects of rising dullness. During the first decades of the century, these opposite qualities often become ready-made labels for, respectively, the pro-Hanoverian supporters and the Jacobites. In a review published on 22nd April 1736 in *The Grub-street Journal* under the name of Marforio, we are given a quite clear picture:

[O]ne would rather imagine, that *Q. Ignorance* had reigned here from time immemorial; and that *Q. Common-Sense* was but newly arrived. – But it is to be supposed, that the former had been dethroned, and forced to abdicate, by the latter; and was now returned with a foreign power, in order to recover her dominations.¹²

As before mentioned, after the fatal blow of the Licensing Act in 1737, the close of the decade sees Fielding turning his hand to political journalism in search of a new source of income to fall back on. Thus, after contributing to *The Champion*, in 1741 he publishes his short novel *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* which literally causes that epoch-making polemic between pamelists and anti-pamelists to break out. Fielding's reaction to *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) is one of disillusionment towards a heroine who just looks too heavenly and righteous to be real: in other words, no one could ever really expect to meet her through the streets of London because she resembles more an abstract ideal than everyday reality, hence by nature beyond any human accomplishment.

Shamela is pointedly given the role of a cunning social climber who makes no scruple to take advantage of the gullible Mr Booby. As a literary character, she is designed to lift the mask off Pamela's face, so to expose the 'shame' of her 'sham' marriage to Mr B. Seemingly, a considerable part of the audience did not share his reading of that praiseworthy novel, and attacked his debunking parody. In June 1741, there appears in *The London Magazine* an anonymous response in verse titled *To the Author of Shamela*, that satirically dismisses it:

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Admir'd *Pamela*, till *Shamela* shown,
Appear'd in every colour – but her own:
Uncensur'd she remain'd in borrow'd light,
No nun more chaste, few angels shone so bright.
But now, the idol we no more adore,
Jervice a bawd, and our chaste nymph a w –
Each buxom lass may read poor *Booby*'s case,
And charm a *Williams* to supply his place;
Our thoughtless sons for round-ear'd caps may burn,
And curse *Pamela*, when they've serv'd a turn.¹³

Fielding's satirical treatment of *Pamela* is so well-timed that he eventually exploits it a second time in *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742). As is well known, here (and then again in *Tom Jones*) Fielding prides himself on introducing a new literary genre, thus setting an example for future generations of writers but, when it comes to the critical reactions of his first readers, the novel seems to undergo a process intended to expose its lewdness just like in his dramatic production. In their eyes, his talent mainly emerges through the ability to handle life-like characters, but on the other hand he is considered guilty of deliberately filling up his narratives with low scenes and superfluous obscenities. For instance, on 8th April 1742, Thomas Gray writes to Richard West:

I have myself, upon your recommendation, been reading Joseph Andrews. The incidents are ill laid and without invention; but the characters have a great deal of nature, which always pleases even in her lowest shapes. Parson Adams is perfectly well; so is Mrs. Slipslop, and the story of Wilson; and throughout he shews himself well read in Stage-Coaches, Country Squires, Inns, and Inns of Court. His reflections upon high people and low people, and misses and masters, are very good. However the exaltedness of some minds (or rather as I shrewdly suspect their insipidity and want of feeling or observation) may make them insensible to these light things, (I mean such as characterize and paint nature) yet surely they are as weighty and much

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

more useful than your grave discourses upon the mind, the passions, and what not. Now as the paradisiacal pleasures of the Mahometans consist in playing upon the flute and lying with Houris, be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon.¹⁴

In general, Gray seems to show, if not sheer enthusiasm, at least some interest in Fielding's insightful judgment of both characters and situations, though perhaps his novel looks so closely at reality that narrow-minded readers can find it difficult to grasp its rationale. And one would be nearly led to see Gray as one of them, since he drops the discourse by ironically taking refuge in the comfort zone of romance.

A tone of aristocratic rejection, further underscored by a peevish complaint for the widespread decadence of good taste, is what we find in a letter dated 1st September 1742 from Chevalier Ramsay to Monsieur de Ramsay. Apart from his various writings, this Scottish-born writer and political thinker is also well-known for having joined the Old Pretender's court and for having been temporarily appointed tutor to the Young Pretender, the latter being notoriously Fielding's political nightmare come true. These circumstances alone would be enough to seal his fate as Fielding's detractor, as he writes:

I have read the first book of 'The History of Joseph Andrews,' but don't believe I shall be able to finish the first volume. Dull burlesque is still more insupportable than dull morality. Perhaps my not understanding the language of low life in an English style is the reason of my disgust; but I am afraid your Britannic wit is at as low an ebb as the French. I hope to find some more amusement in my Lady Duchess of Marlborough's adventures.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray, Containing his Poems and Correspondence, with Memoirs of his Life and Writings, Vol. 2*, London: Harding, Triphook, and Lepard, 1825, pp. 113-114.

¹⁵ John Hill Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume, Vol. 1*, Edinburgh: William Tait, 1846, p. 12.

In relation to Fielding's public endorsement of the Whig and Hanoverian faction, as we will have the opportunity to see in the last chapter, not only did Chevalier Ramsay take side with the Jacobite cause, but through his highly acclaimed *The Travels of Cyrus* he might have had paradoxically a great influence over the historical plan controlling the plot of *Tom Jones*. And it is Fielding's masterpiece, marking the climax of his popularity and controversial career, that can help us better reconstruct a lively image of his ambiguous reception.

Early comments following the publication of *Tom Jones* reveal a decided moralistic cut and, as a consequence, a somewhat double-faced attitude towards its merits and faults. On 1st October 1749, a few months after Fielding's great literary exploit, his cousin the bluestocking Lady Mary Wortley Montagu enthusiastically writes to Lady Bute:

My Dear Child.

I have at length receiv'd the Box with the Books enclos'd, for which I give you many thanks, as they amus'd me very much. I gave a very ridiculous prooffe of it, fitter indeed for my Grand daughter than my selfe. I return'd from a party on Horseback and after have [*sic*] rode 20 mile, part of it by moon shine, it was ten at night when I found the Box arriv'd. I could not deny my selfe the pleasure of opening it, and falling upon Fielding's Works was fool enough to sit up all night reading. I think *Joseph Andrews* better than his *Foundling*.¹⁶

What is here compared to the nearly childish yearning for a valuable present, must not be mistaken for an unshakable opinion about this novel, first, on account of the explicit preference that Lady Mary gives to *Joseph Andrews*, second, because in a later letter to Lady Bute dated 23rd July 1754 she remarks:

H. Fielding has given a true picture of himself and his first Wife in the Characters of Mr and Mrs Booth (some Complement to his own figure excepted) and I am persuaded several of the Incidents he mentions are real matters of Fact. I wonder he does not perceive Tom Jones and Mr Booth are Sorry Scoundrels. All these sort of

¹⁶ Isobel Grundy, ed. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Selected Letters*. London: Penguin, 1997, p. 338.

Books have the same fault, which I cannot easily pardon, being very mischievous. They place a merit in extravagant Passions, and encourage young people to hope for impossible events to draw them out of the misery they chuse to plunge themselves into, expecting legacys from unknown Relations, and generous Benefactors to distress'd Virtue, as much out of Nature as Fairy Treasures. Fielding has really a fund of true Humour, and was to be pity'd at his first entrance into the World, having no choice (as he said himselfe) but to be a Hackney Writer or a Hackney Coachman. His Genius deserv'd a better Fate, but I cannot help blaming that continu'd Indiscretion (to give it the softest name) that has run through his Life, and I am afraid still remains. I guess'd *R. Random* to be his, thô without his Name. I cannot think *Fadom* wrote by the same hand; it is every way so much below it.¹⁷

Apparently, this document is of great interest for the peculiar mixture of moral reflections and personal thoughts about the author. Quite unaware of all the critical controversies that Fielding and his works would raise from those years on, *Lady Mary* seems to pave the way to many of them. For instance, the hint that his main characters, often the protagonists themselves, are at different degrees his own alter ego, has been thrown at various times. As a matter of fact, Fielding proudly confessed to have drawn the figure of Miss Sophia Western from his beloved first wife Charlotte Cradock, but this sort of claim usually runs the risk of being overstated, thus causing critics to make too much of it. Even in the case of *Amelia*, this 'politics of close similarities,' as it might be termed, between the author's life and his characters provides us with first-rate interpretative tools, yet it frequently turns into a red herring completely leading us astray.

One more lasting commonplace is then carved in stone by labelling Tom Jones, Mr Booth and, tacitly, a long row of poor wretches in Fielding's works as "sorry scoundrels" having no prospect of salvation. Coherently with this approach, no specific mention is made of their role in the unfolding plot, as if their crucial importance were not meant to lie in the difficult progress from carefree libertinism to moral thoughtfulness: the primary concern is for their power to set a bad example for the readership on many accounts. Leaving aside, at this point, the larger questions of virtue and truth related to the all-encompassing

¹⁷ Lockwood, Paulson, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 379.

world of the novel, we must all the same stress Lady Mary's fear that this unpredictable literary horizon may lead "young people to hope for impossible events." Retaining a static idea of what the novel is or is supposed to be, it is rather clear that this statement is at odds with what we normally expect as to the image of reality it reflects, and the truth-like modes of discourse it employs. Fielding, the renowned novelist, in Lady Mary's eyes thus seems to produce the effects that were typical of the romance, swept through as it was during the Middle Ages and up to the late seventeenth-century, by the pervading sense of a supernatural hand, strange cause-effect relationships, or unlikely narrative conclusions. Hence, the question of adding Fielding to the list of the early contributors to the modern novel beyond doubt or, on the contrary, of conferring to him a kind of special hybrid status, mid-way between the compelling demands of realism and the backward look to traditional forms.

The closing lines of the letter, then, point to Fielding's alleged libertinism that, being rooted in his youth, is thought to become a constant guide for his future conduct as a husband and outstanding public man. As readers of our days, we can safely conclude that this is, by far, one of the most persistent prejudices against him, and one which deeply affected his reception at least up through the nineteenth century.

In spite of such disheartening judgments on Lady Montagu's part, we can find several tokens of appreciation and praises of Fielding's groundbreaking writings during his lifetime, or in the years immediately following his death. First and foremost among them is surely the famous *Essay on the Life and Genius of Henry Fielding*, opening the great collection that Arthur Murphy publishes in 1762. Initially he sets out on a rather formal panegyric stating that:

To stand distinguished from the common race of mankind, and, by the efforts of extraordinary virtues breaking out into acts of magnanimity and public spirit, or by a vigorous exertion of the faculties of the mind, enriching human life with the invention of arts, or the graces of elegant composition; to attain that point of

eminence, to which succeeding times shall look back with gratitude and admiration, is a lot assigned but to very few.¹⁸

Then, while attempting to carefully trace back the steps of Fielding's career, Murphy comes to deal with what he sees as a pivotal turning point and says:

AMIDST these severe exercises of his understanding, and all the laborious duties of his office (here Murphy particularly refers to the pamphlets *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*, *A Proposal for the Maintenance of the Poor*, and two volumes of Crown Law), his invention could not lie still, but he found leisure to amuse himself, and afterwards the world, with the History of *Tom Jones*. And now we are arrived at the second grand epoch of Mr Fielding's genius, when all his faculties were in perfect unison, and conspired to produce a complete work. If we consider *Tom Jones* in the same light in which the ablest critics have examined the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, and the *Paradise Lost*, namely with a view to the fable, the manners, the sentiments, and the style, we should find it standing the test of the severest criticism (...). In the first place, the action has that unity which is the boast of the great models of composition; it turns upon a single event, attended with many circumstances, and many subordinate incidents, which seem, in the progress of the work, to perplex, to entangle, and to involve the whole in difficulties, and lead on the reader's imagination, with an eagerness of curiosity, through scenes of prodigious variety, till at length the different intricacies and complications of the fable are explained, after the same gradual manner in which they had been worked up to a crisis: incident arises out of incident (...). [U]pon the whole, the business, with great propriety and probability, works itself up into various embarrassments, and then afterwards, by a regular series of events, clears itself from all impediments, and brings itself inevitably to a conclusion; like a river which, in its progress, foams amongst fragments of rocks, and for a while seems pent up by unsurmountable oppositions; then angrily dashes for a while, then plunges under ground into caverns, and runs a subterraneous course, till at length it breaks out again, meanders round the country, and with a clear, placid stream, flows gently into the ocean. By this artful management, our Author has given us the perfection of fable; which, as the writers

¹⁸ Arthur Murphy. "Essay on the Life and Genius of Henry Fielding", *The Works of Henry Fielding, Esq. With an Essay on His Life and Genius. By Arthur Murphy, Esq. A New Edition, vol. 1*, James P. Browne, ed., London: Bickers and Son, H. Sotheran and Co., 1871, p. 1.

upon the subject have justly observed, consists in such obstacles to retard the final issue of the whole, as shall at least, in their consequences, accelerate the catastrophe, and bring it evidently and necessarily to that period only, which in the nature of things, could arise from it; so that the action could not remain in suspense any longer, but must naturally close and determine itself. It may be proper to add, that no fable whatever affords, in its solution, such artful states of suspense, such beautiful turns of surprise, such unexpected incidents, and such sudden discoveries, sometimes apparently embarrassing, but always promising the catastrophe, and eventually promoting the completion of the whole.¹⁹

Though showing a somehow naive response to Fielding's stylistic achievements in *Tom Jones*, Murphy seems to fully grasp some essential points of this complex literary machine: that is why, in many respects, it really anticipates questions and scholarly research mostly carried out over the second half of the last century.

The use of such a phrase as "second grand epoch" actually highlights an unexpected awareness of the radical change that Fielding's masterpiece brings about. It marks a decisive break with the past and, quite paradoxically, it is this rather innovative look at reality that earns him an enduring place alongside the greatest authors of the past like Homer, Virgil, and Milton. What must be underlined, indeed, is that such leading role in the literary canon is, in Murphy's analysis, the result of Fielding's unquestioned adherence to old models, thus relegating his parodies of the classics and his particular posture to an underrated walk-on part.

This very early commentator comes to terms with the construction of the plot, the use of feelings, and the description of manners, but instead of keeping *Tom Jones* within the boundaries of more or less defined novelistic features, he seems to feel more comfortable with the language borrowed from stage conventions, that is, the unity of action. Passed down from Aristotle's theoretical arguments on drama, this rule had been for centuries the undisputed standard to follow along with the unity of time and space: by the time Fielding put out his major prose fiction, however, these formal limits were gradually coming to be downplayed, so to make room for a new sensibility and genuinely modern needs.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

What is more, the novel often dealing with a whole range of social figures from very poor people up to wealthy individuals and disparate situations, it has presented an additional problem since its early days: settings and unfolding relationships between characters involve a large variety of places and, quite often, a more carefully contrived, yet less stable use of time. Generally speaking, it is not uncommon to meet rakes sleeping in daytime and spending their nights out enjoying city entertainments, countrymen going back home at sunset to wind up their day, low classes living in dirty outskirts, bourgeois upstarts walking through fashionable parks, and a long series of other conflicting scenes. As a visible sign of this social maze and the several episodes making up the plot, Murphy effectively uses the image of a natural landscape, in order to convey the sense of narrative stream that meanders through an irregular surface, and finally forces its way out into the story end. We are invited to see that just like water flows because of its own composition, so does Fielding's novel thanks to its chain of events that keep the characters afloat, until they are allowed to find their own well-deserved happy or sad ending.

From this point of view, Fielding can be considered a master of nuances, trying to capture universal features from real life and, most of all, from any social status. The compliance with these new models inevitably raises questions of great interest, though never losing sight of the past and its legacy, as Lord Monbodo makes clear in his *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*. Echoing Fielding's own claims to a brand new genre, he introduces it thus:

There is lately sprung up among us a species of narrative poem, representing likewise the characters of common life. It has the same relation to comedy that the epic has to tragedy, and differs from the epic in the same respect that comedy differs from tragedy; that is, in the actions and characters, both which are much nobler in the epic than in it.²⁰

²⁰ James Burnet Monbodo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, Vol. 3, Edinburgh: J. Balfour, 1776, p. 134.

Looking back to the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Monboddo simply elaborates a basic definition of the novel, drawing established parallels and contrasts with tragedy and comedy but, more to the point at this stage of our discussion, soon after we encounter an explicit reference to the classics. By means of Homer's contribution to Western culture, he tries to deepen his understanding of the novel:

It is therefore, I think, a legitimate kind of poem; and, accordingly, we are told, Homer wrote one of that kind, called *Margites*, of which some lines are preserved. The reason why I mention it is, that we have, in English, a *poem* of that kind, (for so I will call it) which has more of character in it than any work, antient or modern, that I know. The work I mean is, the *History of Tom Jones*, by Henry Fielding, which, as it has more personages brought into the story than any thing of the poetic kind I have ever seen; so all those personages have characters peculiar to them, in so much, that there is not even an host or an hostess upon the road, hardly a servant, who is not distinguished in that way; in short I never saw any thing that was so much animated, and, as I may say, *all alive* with characters and manners, as the *History of Tom Jones*. (...) Mr Fielding, in his comic narrative poem, the *History of Tom Jones*, has mixed with his narrative a good deal of the mock-heroic; and, particularly, there is a description of a squabble in a country churchyard wholly in that style. It is, indeed, an excellent parody of Homer's battles, and is highly ridiculous; but, in my opinion, it is not proper for such a work: *First*, because it is too great a change of style, greater than any work of a legitimate kind, which I think Fielding's is, will admit, from the simple and familiar to the heroic or mock-heroic. It is no better than a patch; and, though it be a shining one, no regular work ought to have any at all. For Horace has very properly given it as a mark of a work irregular, and of ill texture, the having such purple clouts, as he calls them (...). Secondly, because it destroys the probability of the narrative, which ought to be carefully studied in all works, that, like Mr Fielding's, are imitations of real life and manners, and which, accordingly, has been very much laboured by that author.²¹

As Monboddo looks to find a suitable precedent for Fielding's experiments, we seem to be once again confronted with one eighteenth-century lasting tension, that is, the clash between ancient and modern writers. Perhaps, in this case one cannot

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-297.

go as far as calling up the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, but still the commentator tends to remind his readers that novels are, in Bernard of Chartres' words, "like dwarfs sitting upon the shoulders of giants."

Referred to towards the close of this passage, the famous battle in the churchyard is apparently bound to become a favourite scene with critics accounting for Fielding's debt to the epic genre. Nevertheless, it constantly hangs like a sword of Damocles over the plot of *Tom Jones*, as Monboddo himself states: the debunking scene that sees Molly Seagrim clench her fists to fight against her envious neighbours, is at once considered a great example of mock-heroic writing and a shameful episode pointing to the chaos in this narrative world.

Strangely enough, Monboddo casts a bad light on the overall degree of probability in Fielding's work, and contrasts it with Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, though he draws to a conclusion by giving approval of the characters' depiction:

It is for the probability of the narrative chiefly that I have so much commended *Gulliver's Travels*. Now, I appeal to every reader, whether such a description in those *Travels*, as that of the battle in the churchyard, would not have intirely destroyed the credibility of them, and prevented their imposing upon any body, as it is said they did at first. This, therefore, I cannot help thinking a blemish, in a work which has otherwise a great deal of merit, and which I should have thought perfect of the kind, if it had not been for this, and another fault that I find to it, namely, the author's appearing too much in it himself, who had nothing to do in it at all. By this the reader will understand that I mean his reflections, with which he begins his books, and sometimes his chapters (...). I do not know any work in English, nor indeed any work, in which there is more humour, as well as wit, than in Fielding's *History of Tom Jones*. All the characters in it are characters of humour, that is, of the ridiculous kind, except that of Mr Allworthy, Jones himself, Sophia, and Blifil, who is a complete villain, and, perhaps, two or three more; but he has taken care never to mix his wit with his humour; for all the wit in the piece is from himself, or, at least he does not put it into the mouth of his characters of humour.²²

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 297-348.

While sounding like quite a baffling assertion, the claim for *Gulliver's Travels* narrative reliability can make more sense on second thoughts: the medieval and early modern formula 'strange but true' towards the close of the seventeenth century slowly turns into 'strange therefore true,' thus producing a radical change of pace.²³ Indeed, accounts of travels or discoveries of marvellous places and creatures become widespread sources for the new taste and, to a certain extent, even irrational elements are often taken for granted.

Taking a step further, we should move on to what we can safely consider the milestones of eighteenth-century criticism to Fielding: Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson. As to their respective milieus and careers, they are rather far apart from each other, Richardson embodying the English dream of a self-made man come true, and Johnson making a name as leader of the literary establishment, through his grand cultural projects like the *Dictionary of English Language*.

Even more than the before-mentioned reactions, these eminent figures deliberately linger on Fielding's writings and take it on themselves to charge him with immoral intentions and a dangerous lack of creativity. Let us first examine Richardson's thoughts on *Tom Jones* through some examples from his own private correspondence.

In a way, this aversion to Fielding often prompts him to take revenge for his own characters, particularly for such champions of serious plots as Clarissa Harlowe. In a letter dated 12 July 1749, he writes to Aaron Hill sadly remarking that:

While the Taste of the Age can be gratified by a Tom Jones (Dear Sir, have you read Tom Jones?) I am not to expect that the world will bestow Two Readings, or One indeed, attentive one, on such a grave Story as Clarissa, which is designed to make those think of Death, who endeavour all they can to banish it from their Thoughts. I have neither Leisure nor Inclination yet to read that Piece; and the less Inclination, as several good Judges of my Acquaintance condemn it, and the general Taste together.

I could wish to know the Sentiments of your Ladies upon it. If favourable, they

²³ For a detailed discussion on this crucial point, see Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*.

would induce me to open the Six Volumes; the rather, as they will be so soon read. (...) Their Opinions of Tom Jones I will accept as Payment for the Honour they had intended for Clarissa.²⁴

To read through these words and to overlook Richardson's conflicting feelings about *Tom Jones* would be to miss much of them. The opening statement is exemplary and creates a tight link between this novel and its readers, but as he makes his main point, we notice a double-faced attitude. Of course, the question in brackets has a touch of sarcasm, looking down on that supposedly bad "taste of the age," while on the other hand he seems to take up the disguise of a victim. Clarissa is almost seen as no valuable counterpart to Fielding's popular success, but what is really striking in his letter is that he has not taken time to read *Tom Jones* at all. The reliance on third parties' opinions is telling of the radical prejudice against his rival, his contempt for a work which he considers below all standards of morality and common sense. The exchange of letters with Astraea and Minerva Hill during the summer 1749 shows his enduring interest in the critical responses that *Tom Jones* raises in his circle of friends and, more importantly, that he remains reticent. Indeed, in their joint reply dated 27 July, they seem to confirm his suspicions:

[T]he Commission you, at present, charge us with tends no farther than *Tom Jones*: and Tom Jones is not a *Clarissa* (...) my sister and myself, laying our two wise heads together, have agreed to hazard this Discovery of their Emptiness; and send you our impertinence, by way of our opinion. Having with much ado got over some Reluctance, that was bred by a familiar coarseness in the *Title*, we went through the whole six volumes; and found much (masqu'd) merit, in 'em All: a double merit, both of Head, and *Heart*. Had there been only That of the last sort, you love it I am sure, too much, to leave a Doubt of your resolving to examine it – However, if you do, it should be when you can best spare it your attention – Else, the Author introduces all his Sections, (and too often interweaves the *serious* body of his meanings) with long Runs of bantering Levity, which his good sense may suffer the

²⁴ John Carroll, ed., *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 126.

Effect of. (...) Girls, perhaps, of an untittering Disposition, are improper Judges of what merit there may be in Lightness, when (as seems here intended) It endeavors rather at ironic satire, than Encouragement of Folly. – But, tell us Dear Sir, are we in the right, or no, when we presume to own it as our Notion, that however well-meant such a Motive may have been, the Execution of it must be found distasteful? For we can't help thinking that a mind fram'd right for Virtue courts and serves her with too much Respect, to join in throwing a Fool's Coat upon her (...). One is naturally apt to treat as Banter the best meant advices of a Friend, who gives 'em with a laughing Countenance. And if, in Truth, we are condemn'd to live in such a trifling Age that, to make wisdom look'd upon as worth regarding, we must shew her with a Monkey's Grin, methinks the Expectation that she shou'd have any Influence, above an apish one, is but a bottomless Presumption. Meanwhile, it is an honest pleasure, which we take in adding, that (exclusive of one wild, detach'd and independent Story of a *Man of the Hill*, that neither brings on Anything, nor rose from Anything that went before it) All the changeful windings of the Author's Fancy carry on a course of regular Design; and end in an extremely moving Close, where Lines that seem'd to wander and run different ways, meet, All, in an instructive Center. The whole Piece (...) has just and pointed Satire; but it is a partial Satire, and confin'd too narrowly: It sacrifices to Authority, and Interest. – Its *Events* reward Sincerity, and punish and expose Hypocrisy (...). In every Part it has Humanity for its Intention; in too many, it *seems* wantoner than It was meant to be: It has bold shocking Pictures; and (I fear) not unressembling ones, in high Life and in low.²⁵

Apart from Richardson's genuine intentions, it is rather astonishing to see such harsh criticism of Fielding being founded on his total lack of knowledge of *Tom Jones*. Moreover, in this instance, the Hill sisters do very little to promote the strong points of the novel, while contributing much to established prejudices against it. However, we should turn our attention to one of the paragraphs in the middle of the letter, namely, the section where they introduce the theme of virtue. Surprisingly enough, we may say, Astraea and Minerva make a very interesting point when dealing with the depiction of virtue and its disguise. It is literally considered in terms of cross-dressing, wearing a "Fool's Coat:" this is where Fielding's long theatrical experience comes in as a pervasive feature of his novels,

²⁵ Lockwood, Paulson, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-74.

and as raw material for his numerous comic reversals. But this is not all: just a few lines later, the two girls write that Fielding downplays the dignity of wisdom itself, only to let it emerge again as a faint reflection of what it really is, thus doomed to play the part of a monkey which disturbingly ‘apes’ reality.

As in several other critical responses, drawing to a conclusion they attempt to find some positive aspect to this novel, particularly with respect to its closing scenes: in the end, indeed, the timely poetic justice passes judgments to reward good-natured characters and to inflict severe punishment on bad ones. Apparently, such picture must have left no lasting trace on Richardson, as on August 4th he once more declares:

I must confess, that I have been prejudiced by the Opinion of Several judicious Friends against the truly coarse-titled Tom Jones; and so have been discouraged from reading it. – I was told, that it was a rambling Collection of Waking Dreams, in which probability was not observed: And that it had a very bad Tendency. And I had Reason to think that the Author intended for his Second View (His *first*, to fill his Pocket, by accommodating it to the reigning Taste) in writing it, to whiten a vicious Character, and to make Morality bend to his Practices. What Reason has he to make his Tom illegitimate, in an Age where Keeping is become a Fashion? Why did he make him a common – What shall I call it? – And a Kept Fellow, the Lowest of all Fellows, yet in Love with a Young Creature who was tramping after him, a Fugitive from her Father’s House? – Why did he draw his Heroine so fond, so foolish, and so insipid? – Indeed he has one excuse – He knows not how to draw a delicate Woman – He has not been accustomed to such Company – And is too prescribing, too impetuous, too immoral, I will venture to say, to take any other Byass than that a perverse and crooked Nature has given him; or Evil Habits, at least, have confirm’d in him. Do Men expect Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles? But, perhaps, I think the worse of the Piece because I know the Writer, and dislike his Principles, both Public and Private, tho’ I wish well to the *Man* (...). [I]ndeed (I) should admire him, did he make the Use of his Talents which I wish him to make (...). But no more of this Gentleman’s Work, after I have said, That the favourable Things, you say of the Piece, will tempt me, if I can find Leisure, to give it a Perusal. [I]n an Age so dissolute as the present what can be said for the Morality (for the Morality shall I say?) propagated in Tom Jones? But his Judges, by whom I have been govern’d, are

perhaps too severe. I am sure I am disinterested enough, if I do read it, to give it (to the best of my Judgment) its due Praises, as well as Censure.²⁶

Once again Richardson paints it black and, on a purely moral level, he seems to come off victorious, because his status of moralising author allows him to voice his doubts in a tone of nearly biblical wisdom. As a consequence, Fielding becomes an easy target of contempt, both on account of his personal behaviour and his allegedly loose characters: anyway, on the other hand, we should underline how he acknowledges Fielding's great potential and, in some measure, the regret for his rival not being able to put his genius to better use.

Shifting our focus to Samuel Johnson, it is evident that his arguments against *Tom Jones* rest on much the same ground as Richardson's. In line with his role during the central decades of the century, however, Johnson acts as a sort of self-appointed censor, whose aim is to restore virtue to its rightful place by launching attacks on Fielding's dangerous doctrines.

But this 'critical campaign' of his must not lead us to believe that Johnson is meant to dismiss all his works as low writings, featuring a bunch of corrupt characters. Suffice it to remember that, in James Boswell's recollections, Johnson is reported to have once said that:

[F]or general improvement, a man should read whatever his immediate inclination prompts him to (...). He added, 'what we read with inclination makes a much stronger impression. If we read without inclination, half the mind is employed in fixing the attention; so there is but one half to be employed on what we read.' He told us, he read Fielding's *Amelia* through without stopping.²⁷

If this does not shed much light on Fielding, still it reminds us how Johnson's outspoken uneasiness with him is mostly confined to *Tom Jones*. In addition, his words point to the fact that prejudice or instinctive preferences often take over and exert great influence on the readers' minds: thus, in a way, he comes up with a proper answer to Richardson's reluctance. In these terms, things look quite

²⁶ Carroll, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-28.

²⁷ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, R. W. Chapman, ed., New York: OUP, 1998, p. 747.

different, since he would only seem to shun reading this novel on the basis of personal dislike.

Johnson does not simply touch on the subject of Fielding's artistry, but dwells on it and goes much more into detail than any of Richardson's statements. Giving a picture of this latter as superior to his literary rival, he famously marks the divide between them. Again, by means of the renowned biography, Boswell records his friend's thoughts on that topic in a strand of conversation which is here worth reporting:

'Sir, (continued he,) there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and *there* is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood, by a more superficial observer, than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart.'

It always appeared to me that he estimated the compositions of Richardson too highly, and that he had an unreasonable prejudice against Fielding. In comparing those two writers, he used this expression; 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.' This was a short and figurative state of his distinction between drawing characters of nature and characters only of manners. But I cannot help being of opinion, that the neat watches of Fielding are as well constructed as the large clocks of Richardson, and that his dial-plates are brighter. Fielding's characters, though they do not expand themselves so widely in dissertation, are as just pictures of human nature, and I will venture to say, have more striking features, and nicer touches of the pencil; and though Johnson used to quote with approbation a saying of Richardson's, 'that the virtues of Fielding's heroes were the vices of a truly good man,' I will venture to add, that the moral tendency of Fielding's writings, though it does not encourage a strained and rarely possible virtue, is ever favourable to honour and honesty, and cherishes the benevolent and generous affections. He who is as good as Fielding would make him, is an amiable member of society, and may be led on by more regulated instructors, to a higher state of ethical perfection.²⁸

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

Here Johnson harks back to typical categories of those times, and is at pains to describe the differences between them. In this case, Fielding is charged not so much with immorality as with choosing the easiest way to give life to his characters. Indeed, from Johnson's point of view, they never really come alive as the story progresses, but reveal to be created only for the sake of representing universal types.

It is true that not a single reader of Fielding's novels could possibly fail to notice the conventional nature of such low figures as innkeepers, servants, maids or whatever sort of country people crowding into his world. However, in spite of this, their stereotyped image and morally meaningful names do not do justice to their lively conversations: it is a mass of noisy, uneducated men and women, striving and often cheating travellers to improve their conditions, always entertaining guests with their clumsy dialects, passing down their popular legacy. Quite the opposite of, we could say, or at least something more than useless cardboard cutouts to fill the English landscape.

As a critic, Johnson apparently misses the several parts in *Tom Jones* where Fielding refers to the great 'Book of Nature' as the only source of inspiration for his fictional creations. To copy nature as accurately as possible is clearly his calling and the goal he is concretely engaged to achieve, even though, as we have seen, extending this discussion so to include his long activity as playwright, there comes to light his debt to the fixed characters drawn from the classical and early modern theatre. That is the reason why he still paid a high price for his juvenile low entertainments, even at a time when he almost completely turned his hand to novel writing, thus forming a new idea of nature as the only 'authoritative' spring of all truth about reality.

In fact, the problem of characters of manners and characters of nature that Johnson raises, will prove a lasting one, likely to cause further division between Fieldingites and Richardsonians. Far from coming up with a real solution to this dispute, nonetheless Ian Watt in 1957 makes his interesting point of two different kinds of realism, namely, the realism of assessment in Fielding and the realism of presentation in Richardson, that will be discussed later in this chapter, while dealing with the major criticism of Fielding during the twentieth century.

To conclude this brief review of Johnson's reactions to *Tom Jones*, it should be made clear that he continuously appears to scorn him as a man, not just as a writer. Accordingly, in Boswell's precious memories we read that:

Fielding being mentioned, Johnson exclaimed, 'he was a blockhead;' and upon my expressing my astonishment at so strange an assertion, he said, 'What I mean by his being a blockhead is that he was a barren rascal.' BOSWELL. 'Will you not allow, Sir, that he draws very natural pictures of human life?' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, it is of very low life. Richardson used to say, that had he not known who Fielding was, he should have believed he was an ostler. Sir, there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's, than in all *Tom Jones*. (...) I have already given my opinion of Fielding; but 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.'²⁹

Even more telling than these abusive remarks is his famous outburst, that we come across in the memoirs of Hannah More, who curiously recalls his almost unreasonable contempt for that novel:

I never saw Johnson really angry with me but once; and his displeasure did him so much honour that I loved him the better for it. I alluded rather flippantly, I fear, to some witty passage in 'Tom Jones:' he replied, 'I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book. I am sorry to find you have read it: a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work.' I thanked him for his correction; assured him I thought full as ill of it now as he did, and had only read it at an age when I was more subject to be caught by the wit, than able to discern the mischief. Of Joseph Andrews I declared my decided abhorrence. He went so far as to refuse to Fielding the great talents which are ascribed to him, and broke out into a noble panegyric on his competitor, Richardson; who, he said, was as superior to him in talents as in virtue; and whom he pronounced to be the greatest genius that had shed its lustre on this path of literature.³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 480.

³⁰ William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More, vol. 1*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845, p. 101.

1.2 Fielding's Art in the Nineteenth Century

Fielding's legacy in what we could call the 'age of the novel,' all along the nineteenth century, remains problematic. It is, first of all, a matter of new cultural backgrounds and moral values guiding everyday life in the largest part of middle-class households, often amounting to no less than suffocating priggishness during the Victorian period.

Looking backwards and surveying the main Augustan literary trends, one is confronted with recurring formal choices reflecting harmony, balance, politeness, besides a whole set of fixed rules inspired by Latin and Greek classicism. However, a similar statement holds true only as long as certain genres and works of those years are left out on purpose: hence, what of certain strands of satire? What of the dangerous positions of, say, Defoe and Hogarth when they tell the stories of prostitutes going through the suffering of their own broken lives? And what of the language used to attack religious or political dissidents?

Certainly, these diverging veins of thought coexist and set up a complex tension, but they do not have to necessarily annihilate each other. To put it simply, we can see how during the first half of the eighteenth century, literature and visual arts increasingly become aware of the bleak London suburbs, the hardships that the lower classes have to endure, the deep-rooted disease of political corruption, and the unsolved contradictions that inevitably weigh on the whole social body. As a result, we can notice the dualism of the audience that indulges in works based on the reassuring model of a hierarchical natural order, while also enjoying the disrupting force of a new vision of the world, one of blurred boundaries between classes and crumbling certainties.

On the other hand, in the nineteenth century, the social unrest threateningly looming over the stability of the British institutions, becomes an overwhelming reality. And, evidently, it is for many reasons the price to pay for an all-encompassing Industrial Revolution: it gradually drives large masses of people away from the countryside to provide the town factories with working force, causes the rise of a new proletarian class living in poor housing conditions and unhealthy environments, thus rousing widespread discontent. In a way,

especially the mid-century novel voices these problems and highlights the profound injustice behind the economic development of the British Empire. Suffice it to mention the sub-genre defined as industrial novel, mostly leaving a lasting mark in the course of the Forties, dramatising the clash between those two opposing claims of factory owners and workers. In the light of these ongoing tensions, we should point out a typical reaction of the middle class tending to smooth over all contradictions, so to project a polished image of daily miseries. Though on a very general level, we could conclude that, in the name of a sort of social *bienséance*, the nineteenth-century readership bestows a special status on realism as a literary device, but on the other hand seems to overlook the importance of self-criticism, too often replacing it with a false pretence to harmony.

In our discussion, the very use and function of realism are essential to understand the appeal that Fielding's works may have had on this century. Retrospectively, it is clear how his approach to narrative was almost completely abandoned in favour of the Richardsonian technique. Indeed, there is a growing attention to psychological truth and depth in relation to the inner and the external world: the progress of the narration is mainly entrusted to an omniscient narrator, the temporal development follows the linear passing of days, weeks and seasons, while the spatial dimension takes the shape of careful observation and, at any rate, it is generally far from being a purely mental landscape.

From this perspective, whatever critical position one espouses, Fielding can hardly be considered a master of the specific interest in concrete details that represents Richardson's literary trademark; he never dwells on long descriptions of objects, places, or characters only for the sake of truthfulness, but he rather insists on the universal value of actions and the unchanged features in human nature.

Among those who never make mystery of appreciating Fielding as novelist, we can mention Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He cited him in several pieces of writing and in 1834 famously went as far as to say:

What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the *Ædipus Tyrannus*, the *Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones* the three most perfect plots ever planned. And how charming, how wholesome, Fielding always is! To take him up after Richardson is like emerging from a sick-room heated by stoves into an open lawn on a breezy day in May.³¹

However dictated by personal taste it may be, this comment is of some critical importance. Particularly, it harks back to the commonplace that Fielding was the spokesman of a healthy, masculine point of view on life, while Richardson's output could be explained away as the printed thoughts of an emotionally repressed middle-class upstart. Even more interestingly, Coleridge underlines how Fielding's highly symbolic figures like Tom Jones himself, cannot stand comparison with his low characters depicted as they are in real life. Therefore, he states:

I honour, I love, the works of Fielding as much, or perhaps more, than those of any other writer of fiction of that kind: take Fielding in his characters of postillions, landlords, and landladies, waiters, or indeed, of anybody who had come before his eye, and nothing can be more true, more happy, or more humorous; but in all his chief personages, Tom Jones for instance, where Fielding was not directed by observation, where he could not assist himself by the close copying of what he saw, where it is necessary that something should take place, some words be spoken, or some object described, which he could not have witnessed (his soliloquies for example, or the interview between the hero and Sophia Western before the reconciliation) and I will venture to say, loving and honouring the man and his productions as I do, that nothing can be more forced and unnatural: the language is without vivacity or spirit, the whole matter is incongruous, and totally destitute of psychological truth.³²

³¹ Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. I, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835, p. 171.

³² John R. Nabholz, ed., *Prose of the British Romantic Movement*, New York: Macmillan, 1973, p. 130.

Coleridge is here simply pointing out that the quality of Fielding's handling of his novel is not homogeneous, or aesthetically effective throughout, as readers might expect of such a well-conceived plan. When it comes to giving life to characters, in Coleridge's opinion, Fielding is not always able to keep his promise and draw inspiration from the inexhaustible well of nature. Indeed, Tom and Sophia (even figures like Allworthy are not exempt from this charge) too often serve the purpose, respectively, of a would-be prudent man and an already accomplished young girl, in fact only bringing vices and virtues to the surface of the story. To this end, unfortunately, he comes up with an exaggerate amount of abstract reasoning, thus spoiling their credibility as imitations of human beings. To complete the picture, we must add, in Coleridge's words, that "[a] young man of the present day who should act as Tom Jones is supposed to act at Upton, with Lady Bellaston, &c. would not be a Tom Jones; and a Tom Jones of the present day (...) would have perished rather than submit to be kept by a harridan of fortune."³³ Tom's poor depiction is therefore further thwarted by his own background that seems to have very little in common with the generation of young men that Coleridge himself had before his eyes. Tom and the difficult situations he has to cope with throughout the novel, seem to belong to an old-fashioned world and, perhaps, this is also why in the nineteenth century they lose part of the immediate impact they used to have on the first audiences.

In spite of this, the solid 'mistake-punishment-providential hand' system that Fielding sets up, makes for a powerful example to all young people who are literally trying to figure out their path in life. And if Tom's personality may appear more and more distant from everyday experience, nevertheless Fielding still manages to teach his readers how deep their judgment of other people should go: it always depends on the role, although fictional, that a person plays in relation to those who pass it. Thus, as Coleridge makes clear:

If I want a servant or mechanic, I wish to know what he does: – but of a friend, I must know what he is. And in no writer is this momentous distinction so finely

³³ Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed., *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 2, London: William Pickering, 1836, p. 373.

brought forward as by Fielding. We do not care what Blifil does; – the deed, as separate from the agent, may be good or ill; – but Blifil is a villain; – and we feel him to be so from the very moment he, the boy Blifil, restores Sophia’s poor captive bird to its native and rightful liberty.³⁴

From roughly the same period as Coleridge, we need to mention Sir Walter Scott’s criticism of Fielding in his *The Lives of the Novelists* (1821). Before proceeding any further into his argument, there are two aspects worth touching on: first, Scott deals with Fielding from an insider’s point of view as a novelist; second, the title of his work is a telltale sign of the full awareness of the novel form, because it implies that there is a specific and long tradition related to it.³⁵

Scott somehow overstates the personal approval of Fielding’s art by paying high-flown homage to him, as he says that his praiseworthy novels are “not only altogether beyond the reach of translation, (...) but we even question whether they can be fully understood (...) by such natives of Scotland and Ireland, as are not habitually acquainted with the character and manners of Old England.”³⁶ Referring to the writing process of *Tom Jones*, he also underlines the “disadvantages incident to an author alternately pressed by the disagreeable task of his magisterial duties, and by the necessity of hurrying out some ephemeral essay or pamphlet to meet the demands of the passing day.”³⁷ The straits in which Fielding found himself at the moment when he started planning *Tom Jones*, raise a controversial question, and one that is likely to remain a thorn in his side: did the economic support coming from Lord Lyttelton, the Duke of Bedford, and Ralph Allen have any influence on the political and ideological aspect of the novel? Today, to find a reasonably certain answer can still reveal to be a dead end situation. What we know is that Fielding, during the early Forties and then after Robert Walpole’s death in 1745, went through a radical change of political views

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 374-375.

³⁵ It must be pointed out that Scott’s review of novelists is not strictly confined to the British context, since he devotes the second chapter of the first volume to the French author Alain-René Lesage.

³⁶ Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists*, vols. 1-2, Philadelphia: William Brown, 1825, p. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

and gave up his satirical attitude only to get involved in a hammering pro-government campaign, but still it is quite difficult to understand the actual weight of Lyttelton's intrusion into the work.

If in biographical terms the composition of *Tom Jones* is largely the result of complex relationships, with reference instead to the effectiveness of the plot, we could notice in Scott's critical essay a striking resemblance between his account of Fielding's mastery of narrative texture and Arthur Murphy's landscape metaphor. He writes that:

The attention of the reader is never diverted or puzzled by unnecessary digressions, or recalled to the main story by abrupt and startling recurrences; he glides down the narrative like a boat on the surface of some broad navigable stream, which only winds enough to gratify the voyager with the varied beauty of its banks. One exception to this praise, otherwise so well merited, occurs in the story of the Old Man of the Hill; an episode, which, in compliance with a custom introduced by Cervantes, and followed by Le Sage, Fielding has thrust into the midst of his narrative, as he had formerly introduced the History of Leonora, equally unnecessarily and inartificially, in to that of *Joseph Andrews*.³⁸

Curiously, the metaphorical streams of water that the two commentaries describe are diametrically at odds: Murphy concentrates on windings, rocks, and the mouth of the river finally flowing into the sea, while Scott appears to conceive a peaceful landscape where readers can take their time to enjoy the grandeur of the separate parts. In the first case, the observer gets a close-up look at the episodes and focuses on the seemingly disordered cosmos of *Tom Jones*, made up of noise and confusion; on the contrary, Scott is able to consider the novel in the light of an overall design, thus discovering its overarching architectural structure.

As a leading critic of the Romantic period, William Hazlitt is another authoritative voice acquitting *Tom Jones* of the deep-seated prejudice passed down from the previous generations. He distances himself from the pointless remarks that turn the young protagonist into a kind of hardened sinner:

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

I think Jones acquits himself very well both in his actions and speeches, as a lover and as a *trencherman* whenever he is called upon. Some persons, from their antipathy to that headlong impulse, of which Jones was the slave, and to that morality of good-nature which in him is made a foil to principle, have gone so far as to prefer Blifil as the *prettier fellow* of the two.³⁹

In the same vein of thought, he briefly reviews some outstanding characters drawn from Fielding's novels, and passes his judgment thus:

Joseph Andrews is a hero of the shoulder-knot: it would be hard to canvass his pretensions too severely, especially considering what a patron he has in Parson Adams. (...) Booth is another of the good-natured tribe, a fine man, a very fine man! But there is a want of spirit to animate the well-meaning mass. (...) The author has redeemed himself in Amelia; but a heroine with a *broken nose* and who was a married woman besides, must be rendered truly interesting and amiable to make up for superficial objections.⁴⁰

Here Hazlitt follows the commonplace statement that *Amelia* signals a decline of Fielding's lively figures, in fact deprived of their typical humour and reduced to dull creatures. The reference to Amelia's broken nose makes her literally 'flat,' in a way that nearly foreshadows Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), in which he marks the difference between flat and round characters, the former being perfectly described in no more than a sentence. Hence, she could be seen at the same time as physically and artistically maimed, yet retaining the good-natured disposition inherited from ancestors such as Fanny Goodwill and Sophia Western.

Hazlitt also ventures to expose the hypocritical posture that conditions a part of the audience, often leading to ridiculous overreactions to Fielding's version of the English society:

³⁹ William Carew Hazlitt, ed., *Sketches and Essays; and Winterslow (Essays Written There)*, London: Bell & Daldy, 1872, pp. 184-185.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

It has been made a subject of regret that in forty or fifty years' time (...) no one will read Fielding. What a falling-off! Already, if you thoughtlessly lend *Joseph Andrews* to a respectable family, you find it returned upon your hands as an improper book. To be sure, people read *Don Juan*; but *that* is in verse. The worst is, that this senseless fastidiousness is more owing to an affectation of gentility than to a disgust at vice. It is not the scenes that are described at an alehouse, but the *alehouse* at which they take place that gives the mortal stab to taste and refinement. One comfort is, that the manners and characters which are objected to as *low* in Fielding have in a great measure disappeared or taken another shape; and this at least is one good effect of all excellent satire – that it destroys ‘the very food whereon it lives’. (...) People of sense and imagination, who look beyond the surface or the passing folly of the day, will always read *Tom Jones*.⁴¹

Once again, the reception of Fielding clearly shows to have little or nothing to do with his supposed lack of talent or technical incompetence, but it is rooted in the need to keep up a strict moral façade: in other words, alehouses are no meeting-places for serious and upright middle-class men.

Moving further into the nineteenth century, we can regard William Makepeace Thackeray as one of Fielding's greatest admirers among mid-Victorian novelists. Besides openly making reference to Fielding in his novel *The Newcomes* (1854), he devotes the chapter “Hogarth, Smollett and Fielding” in his *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century: A Series of Lectures*, first published in 1853. His argument on Fielding's art has a tone of sincere appreciation, even when he seems to question his authorial sense of justice and feels uneasy with it:

Amelia perhaps is not a better story than *Tom Jones*, but it has the better ethics; the prodigal repents, at least, before forgiveness, – whereas that odious broad-backed Mr Jones carries off his beauty with scarce an interval of remorse for his manifold errors and shortcomings; and is not half punished enough before the great prize of fortune and love falls to his share. I am angry with Jones. (...) Sophia actually surrenders without a proper sense of decorum (...). I suppose Sophia is drawn from life as well

⁴¹ William Carew Hazlitt, ed., *The Round Table. The Northcote's Conversations. Characteristics*, London: Bell & Daldy, 1871, pp. 564-565.

as Amelia; and many a young fellow, no better than Mr Thomas Jones, has carried by a *coup de main* the heart of many a kind girl who was a great deal too good for him.⁴²

Before proceeding to the last section of this chapter, we should mention Gilbert Keith Chesterton. In 1908, this major critic publishes the collection *All Things Considered*, also containing an essay titled “Tom Jones and Morality.” On the basis of the long critical tradition at his own disposal, Chesterton seems to get a much clearer picture of what Fielding really meant by the creation of Tom Jones, since he underlines how the main goal of the novel “is the description of a definite and very real type of young man; the young man whose passions and whose selfish necessities sometimes seemed to be stronger than anything else in him.”⁴³

And, moreover, he attempts to make sense of the moral system underlying Fielding’s plan: actually, in his view, it is no harm to twentieth-century young readers, since they lead their lives according to totally different standards. The lapse of time between the publication of *Tom Jones* and the early Edwardian period turns the tables on morality and attaches it to individual judgment; the mainstream contemporary mindset prompts the public to be sceptical about all sorts of fixed models, and tends to erase all traces of a teleological horizon. Making his case, he underscores the way the representation and function of vicious characters have deeply changed since early modern times. This is why they may look like perfect strangers to us:

The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad, though not so bad, *spiritually* speaking, as the practical morality of Arthur Pendennis or the practical morality of Pip, and certainly nothing like so bad as the profound practical immorality of Daniel Deronda. The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad; but I cannot see any proof that his theoretical morality was particularly bad. There is no need to tell the majority of modern young men even to live up to the theoretical ethics of Henry Fielding. (...) Tom Jones is still alive, with all his good and all his evil; he is walking about the streets; we meet him every day. (...) The only difference is that we have no longer the

⁴² William Makepeace Thackeray, *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century: A Series of Lectures*, New York: Leyboldt & Holt, 1867, p. 255.

⁴³ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *All Things Considered*, New York: John Lane, 1909, p. 262.

intellectual courage to write about him. (...) We have grown to associate morality in a book with a kind of optimism and prettiness; according to us, a moral book is a book about moral people. But the old idea was almost exactly the opposite; a moral book was a book about immoral people. (...) This older and firmer conception of right as existing outside human weakness and without reference to human error, can be felt in the very lightest and loosest of the works of old English literature. It is commonly unmeaning enough to call Shakspeare a great moralist; but in this particular way Shakspeare is a very typical moralist. Whenever he alludes to right and wrong it is always with this old implication. Right is right, even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.⁴⁴

1.3 Fielding and the History of the Novel: Criticism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

What are the contemporary views of Fielding's works and contribution to the development of the novel? Leaving the question quite unanswered, one could dismiss the problem and conclude that, in the same fashion as earlier criticism, we can see his works going through ups and downs, according to the contempt or praise that critics show towards the lifestyle of his rambling heroes. As a matter of fact, instead, we can notice a significant swerve from the ordinary course of things: the critique of Fielding widens its scope and aims at putting him in the context of the history of the novel, that is, it increasingly comes to understand the importance of intertextuality in the making of the genre. As the phrase goes, the novel and its most recurrent devices do not come out of the blue, therefore critical writings now have to raise new questions, explore the relationship between old romances and modern realism, account for the middle class taking over the traditionally aristocratic role in the cultural market.

But let us consider, first of all, how Fielding's production steps into the twentieth century. In 1903, William Ernest Henley publishes *The Complete Works of HENRY FIELDING, ESQ. With an Essay on the Life, Genius and Achievement of the Author*, an edition which is bound to become a lasting reference for scholars and readers. In fact, however, it turns out to be textually inaccurate and not really comprehensive as, for instance, it leaves *Shamela* out. Perhaps, on a more general

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

level, Henley's effort does not stand out for its editorial plan as much as for the fact that it meets the demand for Fielding's works: as a consequence, we might say, at least it demonstrates to what extent the public still assigns them a leading role in the English canon at the turn of the century.

Less than a decade later, the critical scene sees the appearance of Gertrude Godden's *Henry Fielding. A Memoir, Including Newly Discovered Letters and Records, with Illustrations from Contemporary Prints* (1910). This volume is what can be considered as one of those much needed contributions that allowed a sensible change of pace in the understanding of Fielding. As the title suggests, the study mainly stands out for the precious addition to the limited corpus of letters available, which becomes Godden's greatest achievement as she herself makes clear in the Preface:

New material alone could justify any attempt to supplement the *Fielding* of Mr Austin Dobson. Such material has now come to light, and together with reliable facts collected by previous biographers, forms the subject matter of the present volume. As these pages are concerned with Fielding the man, and not only with Fielding the most original if not the greatest of English novelists, literary criticism has been avoided; but all incidents, disclosed by hitherto unpublished documents, or found hidden in the columns of contemporary newspapers, which add to our knowledge of Fielding's personality, have been given.⁴⁵

Following Godden's own statements, what we can expect of the work is not yet another assessment of Fielding's moral orientation, but a thoughtful attempt to provide the most true-to-life image possible at that point. A tentative reconstruction that literally comes down to his physical features:

Among the contemporary prints now first reproduced that entitled the *Conjurors* is of special interest, as being the only sketch of Fielding, drawn during his lifetime, known to exist. Rough as it is, the characteristic figure of the man, as described by

⁴⁵ Gertrude M. Godden, *Henry Fielding. A Memoir, Including Newly Discovered Letters and Records, with Illustrations from Contemporary Prints*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1910, p. v.

his contemporaries and drawn from memory in Hogarth's familiar plate, is perfectly apparent. The same characteristics may be distinguished in a small figure of the novelist introduced into the still earlier political cartoon, entitled the *Funeral of Faction*.⁴⁶

However great Godden's influence over later scholarly output may be, it is in Wilbur Cross' huge *The History of Henry Fielding* (1918) that we can truly find a keystone for much twentieth-century critical advancement. There emerges an evident allusion in the title to Fielding deliberately labelling his own novels as histories, an aspect that then Cross makes explicit in the Preface. Indeed, the work bears a resemblance to its subject, both as to genre and length, and he wants the slight irony not to be lost on his readers:

The title of this book will recall Fielding's favourite use of the word history; by which the great novelist meant a biography, either fictitious or real, that places in the proper social background all the incidents in the life of a man essential to knowing him, in conjunction with a sufficient account of the persons who bore upon that life for good or for evil. This was the aim of "The History of Tom Jones"; and this has been the aim of "The History of Henry Fielding." By accident, perhaps, the two histories contain about the same number of words.⁴⁷

Such premise is strongly supported by Cross' reiterated intention to give life to a man of flesh and blood, as we could call him. Just like Godden's, this work strives to expand the context of Fielding's acquaintances and public engagement, in a way to let him out of that mythical world in which he was confined for more than a century. Well aware of the relatively few sources of information, Cross admits the risk of falling back into the old habit of making false conjectures, relying too much on slander, and thus ending up writing a romance instead of a proper history. His task as historian is to collect facts, so that "a sort of natural plot, lacking the precision of perfect art, emerges, and at last the man's character and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁴⁷ Wilbur Lucius Cross, *The History of Henry Fielding*, vol. 1, New Haven: YUP, 1918, p. vii.

achievements become reasonably clear.”⁴⁸ Then he goes on to show the critical gaps that prompted him to set out on such an engaging project, and the method he adopted to carry out his research:

This history of Henry Fielding I began several years ago with only one prepossession – a surmise which soon grew into the conviction that the author of “Tom Jones” could not have been the kind of man described in innumerable books and essays. In these volumes I have presented, so far as I could ascertain them, the details of Fielding’s career (...) and I have tried, extending the history, to thread the maze of controversy since his death over his personal character (...). It is indeed difficult for a biographer of Fielding to keep a just and even course. He has no large body of personal correspondence to guide him and set him right in doubtful places. (...) And if more of Fielding’s intimate letters had withstood the wreck of fortune, (...) they would enable us to disprove more easily the slanders of Richardson and other enemies. This would be much, but it would be all. This book, showing no trace of a desire to conceal either the author’s weaknesses or his virtues – whichever they may be called – is as frank and as candid a piece of autobiography as ever came from any pen. (...) Fielding lived, contrary to the usual opinion, as single and consistent a life as most men. We miss in him the vagaries supposed to be necessary to genius. God, nature, and circumstance made Henry Fielding what he was. His was a full-blooded youth and a full-blooded manhood. Of this man I have written.⁴⁹

Moving along the lines of Cross and several Victorian critics like Dobson and Gosse, in 1926 Frederic Blanchard puts out his voluminous *Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism*. Picking up the biographical work where those eminent figures left off, Blanchard “now provides the whole history of Fielding’s reputation.”⁵⁰ He devotes the first part to the unsolved issues of the popular success and the scornful attitude mainly on the part of literary connoisseurs. In the second section, he deals with the preference that the average readership showed to Richardson at least up to the last decades of the eighteenth century. And,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. viii-xv.

⁵⁰ Oliver Elton. “*Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism* by Frederic T. Blanchard.” *The Modern Language Review* 22.2, (1927): pp. 225-228.

accordingly, he tries to answer the pressing question by partly depicting Fielding as a kind of misunderstood genius. Indeed, Blanchard holds that “by the pompous clergy, he was often regarded as a buffoon; and in the minds of many otherwise worthy persons he was merely the ‘facetious’ author of the dissolute *Tom Jones*.”⁵¹

If, on the whole, Blanchard still joins in the unanimous praise of Fielding that paved the way to his comprehensive work, the mid-century critical interest in his literary career takes a sharp turn towards complete dismissal, as Frank Raymond Leavis attempts to ‘overthrow’ the novelistic canon. As is evident, indeed, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948) sets out on a radical revisionism in the history of the novel. His mentioning only three writers in the title attests to the revolution he intends to bring about: in his own view, many eighteenth and nineteenth-century authors were mistakenly overrated, then included in the tradition of modern narrative, and as a result they drew undeserved attention at the expense of the few real novelists. In his opening remarks sets the mood for the provocative position he will adopt in order to undermine the established accounts of the genre:

The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad – to stop for the moment at that comparatively safe point in history. Since Jane Austen, for special reasons, needs to be studied at considerable length, I confine myself in this book to the last three. Critics have found me narrow, and I have no doubt that my opening proposition, whatever I may say to explain and justify it, will be adduced in reinforcement of their strictures. (...) [E]xcept Jane Austen, George Eliot, James, and Conrad, there are no novelists in English worth reading.⁵²

Leavis downplays the literary value that is commonly attributed to Fielding’s works, as he aims at rethinking his place in the first stages of the modern novel. Therefore, as he abundantly makes clear, the acclaimed author is to be considered

⁵¹ Frederic Thomas Blanchard, *Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism*, New Haven: YUP, 1926, p. 139.

⁵² Frank Raymond Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, London: Faber and Faber, 2011, p. 1.

of some critical importance only as long as he discovered an unbeaten path useful to future generations, his novels thus acquiring an instrumental function for such later developments as Jane Austen's novelistic exploit. In other words, Fielding is a face in the crowd, and one which is not worth keeping too long in mind:

To insist on the pre-eminent few in this way is not to be indifferent to tradition; on the contrary, it is the way towards understanding what tradition is. (...) There is a habit nowadays of suggesting that (...) all that can be said of the tradition (that being its peculiarity) is that 'the English Novel' can be anything you like. (...) To be important historically is not, of course, to be necessarily one of the significant few. Fielding deserves the place of importance given him in the literary histories, but he hasn't the kind of classical distinction we are also invited to credit him with. He is important not because he leads to Mr J. B. Priestley but because he leads to Jane Austen, to appreciate whose distinction is to feel that life isn't long enough to permit of one's giving much time to Fielding or any to Mr Priestley. (...) He is credited with range and variety (...) [b]ut we haven't to read a very large proportion of *Tom Jones* in order to discover the limits of the essential interests he has to offer us. Fielding's attitudes, and his concern with human nature, are simple, and not such as to produce and effect of anything but monotony (...) when exhibited at the length of an 'epic in prose'.⁵³

In a more balanced tone and for quite different reasons, Ian Watt comes to a similar conclusion when he looks back to Fielding as a forerunner of contemporary realism, and as a necessary basis for Jane Austen's writing technique. But, as far as authorial outlooks are concerned, his method does not wholly fit the frame of later achievements, since the novel gradually abandons that persistent concern for moral commentary which runs through Fielding's novels as a part integral to the plot, in favour of the characters' depth as thinking individuals.

To face the question of how to represent the world in its complexity, means to account for different approaches to everyday reality and its reflection in the novel. Indeed, this is a considerable part of Watt's discussion in his seminal

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

work *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957) where, alongside the sociological conditions that fostered the great success of the genre in the eighteenth century, he tries to outline the distinction between Richardson and Fielding as to their use of realism. Famously, he comes up with two definitions: the ‘realism of presentation’ becomes a way to describe the typically Richardsonian capacity to enter the mind of his characters, to make them show their own feelings, besides the constant interest for details related to people and places; on the other hand, the ‘realism of assessment’ connects Fielding’s narrative strategy to the authorial intrusions, the taste for sudden reversals, and the manipulation of scenes in the name of comic effects.

However, the apparent watershed between these literary models must not induce us to think of their novels as two worlds apart, as Watt puts it, because:

the two major differences of narrative method between the novels of Richardson and Fielding are by no means manifestations of two opposite and irreconcilable kinds of novel, but merely rather clearly contrasted solutions of problems which pervade the whole tradition of the novel and whose apparent divergencies can in fact be harmoniously reconciled. Indeed, the full maturity of the genre itself, it can be argued, could only come when this reconciliation had been achieved, and it is probable that it is largely to her successful resolution of these problems that Jane Austen owes her eminence in the tradition of the English novel.⁵⁴

In this light, one of Jane Austen’s outstanding features is the successful overlapping of competing traditions. She ably makes the two lines meet, thus exploiting the potential of them both. In her novels, there is a remarkable amount of commentary on moral and social conventions in line with Fielding, but her practice is nowhere like his in that she avoids full-length essays, assuming that her pervasive irony can best take over their role. From Richardson, instead, she retains the sharp eye for private tensions and sentimental issues, but we do not find the overwhelming atmosphere or the psychological pressure looming over many a scene in *Pamela* or *Clarissa*.

⁵⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1957, p. 296.

Watt thus explains how she combines several elements into a more coherent and comprehensive approach:

the full maturity of the genre itself, it can be argued, could only come when this reconciliation had been achieved (...). She dispensed with the participating narrator, whether as the author of a memoir as in Defoe, or as letterwriter as in Richardson, probably because both of these roles make freedom to comment and evaluate more difficult to arrange; instead she told her stories after Fielding's manner, as a confessed author. Jane Austen's variant of the commenting narrator, however, was so much more discreet that it did not substantially affect the authenticity of her narrative. Her analyses of her characters and their states of mind, and her ironical juxtapositions of motive and situation are as pointed as anything in Fielding, but they do not seem to come from an intrusive author (...) At the same time, Jane Austen varied her narrative point of view sufficiently to give us, not only editorial comment, but much of Defoe's and Richardson's psychological closeness to the subjective world of the characters. In her novels there is usually one character whose consciousness is tacitly accorded a privileged status, and whose mental life is rendered more completely than that of the other characters.⁵⁵

After more than half a century, as a milestone in the understanding of the history of the novel, Watt's study is still considered an essential read. Nevertheless, he evidently misses the autonomous role that Fielding played in that long process and defines his works as by-products in the wider context of those decades. Such position leads him to open the section devoted to Fielding, stating that “[since] it was *Pamela* that supplied the initial impetus for the writing of *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding cannot be considered as having made quite so direct a contribution as Richardson to the rise of the novel.”⁵⁶

This somehow naive view on Fielding is not the only weak point in *The Rise of the Novel*. Also the treatment of realism, seen in relation to the Middle Ages and in its modern form introduced by Descartes and Locke, risks to confine the novel in a world of fixed formal devices. Reflecting on Watt, therefore, we

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

should no doubt acknowledge that he raises fundamental questions and provides a starting point for further discussion, while in several instances he fails to answer convincingly. Exposing the dialectical method applied to his *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987), Michael McKeon praises Watt's effort and throws light on its limits:

Any effort to extend this work – to engage the difficult problems that *The Rise of the Novel* either failed to resolve or, through its very brilliance, has thrown into high relief – would do well to recall first the grounds of Watt's achievement. These are entailed in the central argument that the distinguishing feature of the novel is its "formal realism," (...). Yet in isolating its formal features as strictly definitive of the new genre, Watt simultaneously argues their intimate, analogous relation to other developments of the early modern period that extend beyond the realm of literary form. (...) Watt is concerned to argue a connection between the rise of the novel and the transformation of the social context of early eighteenth-century England. (...) [E]ven though Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding explicitly subvert the idea and ethos of romance, they nonetheless draw upon many of its stock situations and conventions. (...) [T]hose ancient and medieval forms that define our notion of what "romance" amounts to can be shown to reflect, critics have claimed, some major features of "formal realism." (...) Watt is well aware of the way that Fielding in particular evades the specifications of formal realism (...). If we want Fielding, we must dissipate and weaken the explanatory framework by requiring it to accommodate "romance" elements and the anti-individualist tendencies they imply. If we want the explanatory framework, we must be prepared to exclude much of Fielding from the rise of the novel.⁵⁷

As McKeon puts it, we can allow that Watt's account of Fielding comes close to his actual contribution to literary history, but by doing so we are consequently asked to deny his very role in the shaping of the modern novel. Far from reviving such apparent contradiction in terms, McKeon provides a more comprehensive argument about the ideological tension raised by different social views. In many ways, his thought-provoking understanding of the origins of the novel is centred

⁵⁷ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 1-3.

on the interaction among what he defines aristocratic ideology, progressive ideology, and conservative ideology. Each of them mirroring a specific grasp of the world, they are respectively associated with the so-called “romance idealism,” “naive empiricism,” and “extreme skepticism.” Rigid and somehow far-fetched as they could seem, still such categories give a clearer picture of the several forces at play in those decades. The point he makes about ideology in relation to the writing process, and which of course involves Fielding as a remarkable example, is at the basis of his own tentative definition of the novel. He thus sums it up:

[Q]uestions of truth and virtue begin to seem not so much distinct problems as versions or transformations of each other, distinct ways of formulating and propounding a fundamental problem of what might be called epistemological, social, and ethical signification. And the essential unity of this problem is clear from the fact that progressive and conservative positions on questions of virtue have their obvious corollary positions with respect to questions of truth (...). [W]e may conceive of these correlations of truth and virtue also in terms of narrative “form” and “content,” so that the way the story is told and what it is that is told are implicitly understood to bear an integral relation to each other as separable parts of a greater, dialectical whole. In this respect my argument concurs with the thesis (...) that the distinctive feature of novelistic narrative is its internalization or thematization of formal problems on the level of content.⁵⁸

Applying this theoretical framework to Fielding, McKeon sees him as an authoritative voice of that “extreme skepticism” that, to a certain extent, goes beyond the other two ideologies. Indeed, while the aristocratic outlook stands for an evidently outdated remnant of the Middle Ages, and the bourgeois way of life runs parallel to the chaotic world of trade, scepticism should be interpreted as a firm denial of them both.

Fielding’s biography tells the story of a man who could boast an aristocratic descent on his father’s side and a solid upper-class tradition of legal scholarship on his mother’s, thus pointing to his ‘double nature.’ But there is no real need to speculate much on his feelings towards his social standing: indeed,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

the cutting irony and bitter remarks about his precarious economic conditions run through most of his works, as a snobbish device to recall his distinguished family, and reminder of the compelling necessity to write in order to make a living. However, besides the proverbial economic frustration, Fielding also showed great disappointment with the ongoing cultural reality, as a conscious opposition to several narrative solutions resulting as much from the typically middle-class puritan frame of mind as the backward-looking stance of the decaying aristocracy. The reasons for his disapproval can be traced further back than the literary landscape of the 1740s, as McKeon has it:

Given the energy with which he pushed against the conventions of dramatic representation, it is scarcely surprising that, once obliged to turn to narrative, Fielding adopted the skeptical stance of the “historian.” His earliest work of this sort, *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), was substantially complete before *Pamela* appeared at the end of 1740. Its satiric response to the problem of how to tell the truth in narrative therefore owes less to the instigations of Richardson than to Fielding’s wide reading in ancient and modern historiography.⁵⁹

McKeon’s insistence on the dialectical relationship between form and content as the defining feature of the novel, has great relevance to Fielding’s novels. In his case, nevertheless, the discussion could be more properly shifted to the role of the author and the narrator, this being a pivotal point that has attracted much critical attention. The numerous charges of manipulating the course of events through a ‘providential hand,’ point to Fielding’s excessive intrusion into the reward-punishment system looming large in his writings. On the other hand, it should be noted that such ephemeral claims as that to the complete absence of the author-narrator cannot stand the test of accurate critical readings: in short, all literary works are not totally exempt from ideology, since they can only tend to high degrees of impersonality for the author, and not to the sudden disappearance of this latter. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), facing the issue of authorial

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

presence, Wayne Booth deals with it in terms of an utopian goal, and wonders: “[i]f we agree to eliminate all personal intrusions of the kind used by Fielding, do we then agree to expunge less obtrusive comment? (...) Even if we eliminate all such explicit judgments, the author's presence will be obvious (...).⁶⁰ In other words, any attempt to obscure Fielding and confine him into a dark corner would corrupt the nature of his novels but, more importantly, all this could turn out to be useless, since we could still find visible traces of his writing process.

What is more, the author must not be mistaken for a fixed identity, but it is to be understood as an ever-changing image. Applying this principle to Fielding's works, Booth argues that:

regardless of how sincere an author may try to be, his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms. 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. (...) When Fielding comments, he gives us explicit evidence of a modifying process from work to work; 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*. [A]ll of the implied authors value benevolence and generosity; all of them deplore self-seeking brutality. (...) [W]hen we descend from this level of generality to look at the particular ordering of values in each novel, we find great variety. The author of *Jonathan Wild* is by implication very much concerned with public affairs and with the effects of unchecked ambition on the “great men” who attain to power in the world. If we had only this novel by Fielding, we would infer from it that in his real life he was much more single-mindedly engrossed in his role as magistrate and reformer of public manners than is suggested by the implied author of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*—to say nothing of *Shamela* (...). On the other hand, the author who greets us on page one of *Amelia* has none of that air of facetiousness combined with grand insouciance that we meet from the beginning in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

Here we can discover a sort of equation between different novels and ‘different Fieldings.’ Even though this remains a rather enticing point, nevertheless one is tempted to simply suggest that Fielding, as a man, may show several interests and concerns at a time, without hinting at necessarily separate parts of his personality. Taking a step further within the frame of the reception theory, another aspect seems to come to the foreground, that is, the effectiveness of the narrator addressing the readers.

When it comes to the role of the audience, we come across a wide range of hypotheses. In the first place, there is the typical communicative approach that is usually attributed to Fielding, that is, the narrator holding all the cards and the readers somehow left behind to guess the meaning of his discourse. Recalling the figure of a tyrant, the eighteenth-century narrator thus turns critical reading into soft despotism, as Wolfgang Iser makes clear:

From the start the novel as a ‘genre’ was virtually free from traditional constraints and so the novelists of the eighteenth century considered themselves not merely as the creators of their works but also as the law-makers. The events they devise also set out the standards regarded as necessary for judging the events; this is shown (...) especially by Fielding in the innumerable essays with which he permeates his narrative. Such interventions are meant to indicate how the author wants his text to be understood, and also to make the reader more deeply aware of those events for the judgment of which his own imagination has to be mobilized. With the author manipulating the reader’s attitude, the narrator becomes his own commentator and is not afraid to break into the world he is describing in order to provide his own explanations. (...) And so the novel as a form in the eighteenth century is shaped by the dialogue that the author wishes to conduct with his reader. This simulated relationship gives the reader the impression that he and the author are partners in discovering the reality of human experience. In this reader-oriented presentation of the world, one can see an historical reflection of the period when the possibility of a priori knowledge was refuted, leaving fiction as the only means of supplying the insight into human nature denied by empirical philosophy.⁶²

⁶² Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 101.

In Iser's view, there seems to be not much room left for readers to provide an original interpretation of fictional works: therefore, Fielding and, by extension, the largest part of eighteenth-century narrators is supposed to impose a line of thought upon the public. Proceeding further from Iser's position, we find some middle ground where the interpretive task is entrusted to the reader-narrator relationship, and it eventually becomes a matter of negotiation. At the other end of the scale, instead, the public is credited with such critical insights as to silence any possible authorial interference.

Taking up a similar discussion about the actual status and function of authorship in his study *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (1994), Ian Arthur Bell comes up with a remarkably comprehensive account of Fielding's narrative mask being shaped again and again as he goes through changes of genre or tone. Moreover, he challenges the very search for a coherent and historically valid self, both because of the little information available about Fielding's life, and the vain hope of unearthing reliable details about him in his works.

In spite of the disparate outcomes of the reception theory, it should still be seen as a trademark of literary criticism over the last decades of the twentieth century, and an outstanding one for what Fielding is concerned. However, having raised hot debates on the grounds that both narrator and reader also stand for flesh and blood human beings, the theory could be called into question thus causing its very foundation to crack. In this respect, it is illuminating to read Jeffrey Williams' conclusion as to the concrete link between narrators and their 'interlocutors' involved in the act of reading, particularly in the context of *Joseph Andrews*:

Here, I would assert the full implication of the thesis that Booth tentatively suggests, apropos *Tom Jones*, for *Joseph Andrews*: the novel details the plot of a narrator developing a relationship with a putative "reader," telling how he gets his story, taking his "reader" on a "journey" of narrative, as well as recounting other events of narratorial activity. This plot is the first-order predicate of the narrative, positing an increasing familiarity and intimacy between the figures of author and reader. In contrast to Booth, I would stress the modal reflexivity of this relation – its textual operation and linguistic relation – rather than the anthropomorphic scene of

instruction to which Booth subscribes, of the author directing the actual reader. These are not real people, but operative figures within the economy and relation of the narrative. This is not to deny that there are real readers, but that function stands in metonymical relation to the textual representation of narrators and narratees.⁶³

Williams distances himself from the main critical view that the narrator in *Joseph Andrews*, and Fielding's speaking voices in general, address real people. This would seem to imply that there cannot be any relationship outside the fictional world of the novel, that is to say, the narrators are figures designed to look like human beings, and the constant dialogue they keep up with the audience is only orchestrated to mimic a 'conversation.' However, if we allow such theoretical frame, the reception theory comes to be in a certain measure little more than an ill-founded claim.

Over the past thirty years, Fielding has been often considered through the lenses of his different activities, hence the interest for his legal commitment, his pamphlet writing as social reformer, and his interaction with the complex cultural environment of the time. The amount of articles and books investigating the various aspects of his career makes it rather difficult to give an all-encompassing overview⁶⁴ in this discussion, but some of them playing a leading role in the contemporary debate, they need be mentioned. For instance, making reference to those scholarly works that nowadays can provide good starting points with respect to Fielding's life and literary achievements, we should at least recall Simon Varey's *Henry Fielding* (1986),⁶⁵ Martin and Ruthe Battestin's *Henry Fielding: A*

⁶³ Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004, pp. 62-63.

⁶⁴ There are some attempts at comprehensive bibliographies on Fielding, but most of them are not really up-to-date. See: Theodore Carl Humphrey, *Henry Fielding: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies and Editions: 1895-1970*, PhD. University of Arkansas, 1972; George H. Hahn, *Henry Fielding: An Annotated Bibliography*, Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1979; John A. Stoler, Richard D. Fulton, *Henry Fielding: An. Annotated Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Criticism, 1900-1977*, New York: Garland, 1980; John A. Stoler, "Henry Fielding: A Partly Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, 1978-1992." *Bulletin of Bibliography*, 50 (1993): 83-101.

⁶⁵ Simon Varey, *Henry Fielding*, Cambridge: CUP, 1986.

Life (1989),⁶⁶ Jenny Uglow's *Henry Fielding* (1995),⁶⁷ Harold Pagliaro's *Henry Fielding: A Literary Life* (1998),⁶⁸ and the more recent collection of essays gathered in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, edited by Claude Rawson (2007).⁶⁹

For what the legal profession or political engagement are concerned in Fielding's moral outlook and public life, there are some studies which should not go unnoticed, such as Thomas Cleary's *Henry Fielding: Political Writer* (1984),⁷⁰ Lance Bertelsen's *Henry Fielding at work: magistrate, businessman, writer* (2000),⁷¹ James A. Downie's *A Political Biography of Henry Fielding* (2009),⁷² and Claudine and Leslie Boros' *Justice Henry Fielding's Influence On Law And Literature* (2010).⁷³

On account of his treatment of the relationship between the sexes, his rakes and loose women, his candid female heroines and virtuous male protagonists like Joseph Andrews, Fielding's output has also been discussed through the lenses of gender. In this specific line of research, two particularly outstanding works deserve to be mentioned, namely, Angela Smallwood's *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate, 1700-1750* (1989),⁷⁴ and Jill Campbell's *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (1995).⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Martin C. Battestin, Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, London: Routledge, 1989.

⁶⁷ Jenny Uglow, *Henry Fielding*, Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995.

⁶⁸ Harold E. Pagliaro, *Henry Fielding: A Literary Life*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

⁶⁹ See Claude Rawson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, already quoted in this chapter.

⁷⁰ Thomas R. Cleary, *Henry Fielding: Political Writer*, Waterloo: Laurier University Press, 1984.

⁷¹ Lance Bertelsen, *Henry Fielding at work: magistrate, businessman, writer*, New York: Palgrave, 2000.

⁷² James A. Downie, *A Political Biography of Henry Fielding*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009.

⁷³ Claudine L. Boros, Leslie L. Boros, *Justice Henry Fielding's Influence on Law and Literature*, Xlibris, 2010.

⁷⁴ Angela Smallwood, *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate, 1700-1750*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

⁷⁵ Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Also, there is no doubt that the great legacy of the Western tradition at large in Fielding's writings has proved to be a continuous critical concern. Indeed, traces of the medieval romance, the Latin masters of rhetoric, along with other ancient literary genres such as the Greek novel and satire, have often been discovered through the several readings of his works. In particular from the mid-eighties onwards, this kind of argument is at the basis of interesting studies, including James Lynch's *Henry Fielding and the Heliodorian Novel: Romance, Epic, and Fielding's New Province of Writing* (1986),⁷⁶ Nancy Mace's *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition* (1996),⁷⁷ and Henry Power's *Epic into Novel: Henry Fielding, Scriblerian Satire, and the Consumption of Classical Literature* (2015).⁷⁸

Drawing to a conclusion, it is useful to stress the critical insights we can find in two full-length studies of *Tom Jones*, respectively by Patrick Reilly and John Allen Stevenson. The former, in his *Tom Jones: Adventure and Providence* (1991),⁷⁹ reads Fielding's masterpiece as a sort of rewriting, a modern reshaping of the biblical parable of the prodigal son. Moreover, for instance, he comes to a deep understanding of Master Blifil, seen as a hypocritical Pharisee making the best of his favourable position at Paradise Hall, and embodying the typically Methodist doctrine of faith over works. If, on the one hand, Reilly's analysis of the tension among characters and situations in *Tom Jones* is a very inspiring source of intertextual references, on the other hand, Stevenson's *The Real History of Tom Jones* (2005)⁸⁰ points to the historical background, mainly connected with the Stuart family's claims over the throne. Besides, in the same vein of thought, he convincingly accounts for the actual models on whom Tom is based, among whom the Young Pretender stands out. And it is in the light of this specific

⁷⁶ James J. Lynch's *Henry Fielding and the Heliodorian Novel: Romance, Epic, and Fielding's New Province of Writing*, London: Associated University Presses, 1986.

⁷⁷ Nancy Mace's *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996.

⁷⁸ Henry Power's *Epic into Novel: Henry Fielding, Scriblerian Satire, and the Consumption of Classical Literature*, New York: OUP, 2015.

⁷⁹ Patrick Reilly, *Tom Jones: Adventure and Providence*, Boston: Twayne, 1991.

⁸⁰ John Allen Stevenson, *The Real History of Tom Jones*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

approach, and of the invaluable contribution he gives to decode Fielding's world, that Stevenson's work is one of the most relevant to the argument that will be developed in the course of the last two chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

HENRY FIELDING AND WILLIAM HOGARTH: REFLECTIONS ON THEIR ARTS

2.1 The Bases of a Mutual Exchange

When dealing with the reciprocal influence, both in personal and artistic terms, between such widely studied figures as Henry Fielding and William Hogarth, any new argument risks to become commonplace. However, surprising as it may seem, there have not been many scholarly works focusing on this specific field of research, possibly due to the lack of evidence to reconstruct the stages of their friendship.¹ The reasons for such a gap are often to be found in the hard task that any biographer potentially takes on, when trying to put together the pieces of Fielding's life. Not that critics have ever been discouraged, suffice it to call to mind the renowned book by Martin and Ruthe Battestin, but still we must agree with Frederick Ribble when he says that:

Throughout his adult life, Henry Fielding was very much in the public eye, first as a playwright and later as a political journalist, novelist, and magistrate. He lived boisterously and extravagantly, had a wide circle of friends, and enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant conversationalist. His biographers, however, have been disheartened by

¹ Two scholars dealing with the relationship between Fielding and Hogarth particularly stand out, that is, Robert Etheridge Moore and Peter Jan De Voogd. Quite interestingly, this latter shows scepticism when Moore states that Fielding would have written completely different novels without Hogarth's influence, and thus objects to this view: "Moore seems to me to overrate Hogarth's possible influence on Fielding, and to underrate the importance of Fielding's vast knowledge of the classical authors, his predilection for historical studies, his experience in the theatre and as a journalist; Moore scarcely mentions Marivaux, Lillo, or even Cervantes as possible influences on Fielding. Nor can he always resist the temptation to detect parallels in the contents of the work of Hogarth and Fielding." Peter Jan De Voogd, *Henry Fielding and William Hogarth: The Correspondences of the Arts*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981, pp. 24-25.

See also Robert Etheridge Moore, *Hogarth's Literary Relationships*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948.

the surprising paucity of significant contemporary references to him, by the meagerness of the documentary record.²

Few scattered words at the beginning of this description draw the clear-cut sketch of a sociable man dragged into the vortex of high life and therefore, in a most comfortable manner, one would be ingenuously tempted to see him as an eccentric eighteenth-century forerunner of Oscar Wilde, making a name for himself through wit and good company. Reliable as this picture may turn out to be, it reflects only a controversial part of Fielding's real character, and makes it evident that building hypotheses about his works or mindset on this basis is at least misleading. Following this line of thought, we might quite easily miss the complexity and ambiguity of his writings, reducing the winding path of his moral, religious or literary positions to an unconvincing series of contrasts.

On the other hand, as far as Hogarth is concerned, there is a far greater amount of information at our disposal to help us getting to know his private and public sphere. In a similar way to Fielding's early affection for his sister Sarah, he is seen to have established his long-lasting relationships during his youth, when he began to acknowledge his father's cultural legacy and came into contact with his future father-in-law Sir James Thornhill, while on the contrary there is no certainty about the real nature of his later acquaintances, particularly of Fielding. Reflecting on this point, Ronald Paulson writes:

Hogarth's early life had been one of powerful relationships, with his family and with Thornhill, indicating an obvious personal need for security and for models. Once he was married, however, with his father, mother, and Thornhill dead, and the success and security he desired a reality, the remaining relationships are more difficult to assess as to importance and purpose. The majority were either convivial or professional, that is public, associations. For example, it is very difficult to document the personal relationship between Hogarth and Fielding, though much can be said about the public one. It is discernible in terms of their works, not of themselves: Fielding refers to "my friend Hogarth" in *Tom Jones*. (...) There are signs of

² Frederick Ribble, "New Light on Henry Fielding from the Malmesbury Papers." *Modern Philology* 103.1 (2005): 51.

affection but no very clear indication of what kind of friendship it was or what Hogarth put into it or got out of it.³

In these words one can only catch a fleeting glimpse of Hogarth's opinion about his friend's writings and personality, though they are quite telling of the role that this cross-fertilisation clearly played in the public eye. Even more than feelings of empathy in the making of their careers, a sort of mutual enthusiasm seemed to push them to be on the same wavelength. Indeed, later in his seminal work, Paulson points out that:

Though he knew Richardson personally, Hogarth never publicly acknowledged him as he did Fielding. He rejected his own alter ego, the industrious self-employed, self-made, well-to-do printer, almost naively self-important and proud of his accomplishment, and not afraid to show it. He chose instead as his official friend and colleague the aristocratic man of the world, the wit, playwright, political journalist, friend of Lords Chesterfield and Lyttleton, but also the spendthrift, debt-ridden, heavy eating and drinking rake, who wrote his first reply to Richardson, *Shamela*, in a sponging house.⁴

Curiously enough, the divergences and similarities here have nothing to do with theoretical developments, deliberate quotations, borrowings or parodies, but involve the innermost part of the writer's nature: in fact, he turned out to be the very picture of what Hogarth considered to be an artist and a man of consequence in the polite London microcosm to which they both belonged.

Given the apparent discrepancy between the fruitful influence of their arts on each other, and the shaky certainties about Fielding's biographical data, facing the question of their friendship comes to depend largely on the analysis of works or, more importantly, on the weight that some hammering, haunting themes had on the entire creative process. It goes without saying that they shared an interest in unsettled social and cultural issues, religious sectarian quibbles, and political

³ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: High Art and Low, 1732-1750 Vol. 2*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992, p. 272.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

quarrels pervading their country in the first decades of the century, in order to exploit them as constant targets of satire. Often representing a crippling burden for the English people, though, these problems were, to different degrees, connected with the all-encompassing theme of freedom. That is why, to better grasp the meaning of the comparison between the two artists, this argument will be developed to a certain extent through the lenses of the disparate claims for liberty, and the questions thereby arising in response to them.

2.2 Humean Background for Fielding's Views on Liberty: Language, Politics, Religion

As hinted above, a vast part of the discussion about Fielding and Hogarth can be built on the concept of liberty. Apart from all historical contexts or different local realities, when it comes to defining it, one inevitably enters a tangled maze of contradictions and inconsistent positions. The more so in eighteenth-century Britain, a land undergoing radical changes and that, as already noted, was overrun with the weeds of factional divisions at all levels.

For the main concerns of the present argument, it is not liberty meant as a monolithic idea or fully accepted dogma that we will try to describe, but rather its unstable status of work in progress. It is my contention here that both Fielding and Hogarth, most times praised as upholders of the pro-Hanoverian propaganda, need neither necessarily be labelled as coherent spokesmen of the Whig establishment, nor in the least as voices of the religious beliefs and philosophical principles that it would imply.

No surprise, then, that looking for a wholehearted political support in Fielding's life and writings is no easy task, and perhaps a useless one too. Let us start from a pretty ambiguous instance: readers who call up such distracting collections of political journalism as *The True Patriot* or *The Jacobite's Journal*, will readily acknowledge, if not a downright opportunism, at least the self-interested nature of his attacks on the opposition party. This fact alone would generally be enough to put an end to the question, though some further reflection will show that things are not quite what they seem. At a first glance, the two titles stand out for their plainness, which is an effective key to reading them: who is to

be really recognised as a ‘true patriot’ in the noisy battle theatre of the 1740s? Are we going to read a clumsy campaign to defend the Pelham ministry or a ‘Jacobite’ hidden satire to it? While there is obviously nothing wrong, that is, politically dangerous with these headings, we have to consider several possible meanings, and follow their steps backwards and forwards as if they were palindromes. The point of Fielding’s insistence on the semantic field of words is not confined to this case, on the contrary it can be safely understood as a large portion of his literary method. In relation to this aspect, Glenn Hatfield helps to shed some light:

Fielding’s “alert attention to the meaning of words” (in Sheridan Baker’s phrase)⁵ has interested critics (...). But (...) the importance of Fielding’s preoccupation with language to his purpose and method as a writer has never been fully developed. Not only does his style everywhere abound in turns of phrase like “that is to say,” “what is called,” “to wit,” “viz.,” “or rather,” “as it is generally expressed,” “in other words,” “in common phrase,” “in short,” “in plainer words,” “in a word,” and (most ubiquitously of all, perhaps) “to say the truth” and “in plain English”; and not only does his irony characteristically take the form of “translations” into specific terms of heroic metaphors, polite euphemisms, and honorific abstractions (...); but it is also remarkable how many of his works – from the youthful poems through the great novels – can be read in whole or in part as essays in definition. The most interesting of the early poems printed in the *Miscellanies* of 1743 (“Of True Greatness,” “Of Good Nature,” “Liberty”) are verse essays in definition of some of the words and concepts which were to be important to Fielding throughout his career (...). In his periodical essays too, Fielding is frequently occupied with the meanings of words. (...) A satiric paper in *The Covent-Garden Journal* (...) is actually an ironic attack on the “abuse” of such words by “Custom” (or popular usage), contains a “Modern Glossary” of corrupted terms (“Author,” “Critic,” “Gallantry,” “Great,” “Honour,” “Love,” “Marriage,” “Patriot,” “Promise,” “Religion,” “Riches,” “Vice,” “Virtue,” “Wisdom,” “Wit,” etc.) that is a virtual compendium, complete with “plain English” definitions (...). The whole of the *True Patriot*, in fact, can be looked upon as an extended definition of its title, a purpose Fielding makes explicit in the second number. His aim, he announces, (...) is to restore the word to its proper meaning and dignity. (...) [H]ere as always, he sees the problem of definition as a process of

⁵ Sheridan Baker, “Henry Fielding and the Cliché.” *Criticism* 1 (1959): 357.

decontamination and revitalization of a “corrupt” word. (...) Nearly all of Fielding’s definitions assume a similar difficulty and serve a similar purpose. Always he is concerned with sets of contrary ideas or values expressed by a single word, and always he is involved in an attempt to distinguish the “true” (or “original”) sense of the word from the “false” (or “corrupt”) meaning. Definition thus becomes a negative as well as a positive process (...).⁶

Under this light, Fielding’s authorial intentions should clear the way to a totally different awareness of his cultural role. What is more, all attempts at finding out comprehensive definitions, if any, of liberty and the various concepts connected with it, are destined to be frustrated. Of course, as is to be expected of a committed writer and magistrate, words become far more decisive than a daily means of communication or bricks to build his palace of fame, hence his relationship with them comes to be a kind of lifetime mission.

We can pick up some points from Hatfield’s argument and try to see how they work in Fielding’s system. It is true that the surprisingly high number of incidental phrases make for a powerful ironic link between long sentences and the final debunking through everyday speech, but an even more interesting aspect here deserves to be developed further. When considered from a linguistic point of view, this well-oiled machine is engineered as a translation, of the sort that Jakobson defined as rewording,⁷ though it constantly reverses its process. If, on the one hand, rewording tends to broaden up the number of words so to make the meaning clearer, on the other hand this method narrows it down and inevitably sweeps away any fictitious reading. On a general level, one can therefore suppose that a first step Fielding takes to bring back the ‘original’ sense is to shift from the

⁶ Glenn W. Hatfield, “The Serpent and the Dove: Fielding’s Irony and the Prudence Theme of ‘Tom Jones.’” *Modern Philology* 65.1 (1967): 17-18.

⁷ In *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Roman Jakobson writes: “For us, both as linguists and as ordinary word-users, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign (...). The term “bachelor” may be converted into a more explicit designation, “unmarried man”, whenever higher explicitness is required. We distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it may be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, nonverbal system of symbols.” Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings: Word and Language*, The Hague: Mouton, 1971, p. 261.

trappings of polite English to the reassuring immediacy of common language. Many stages of his works are, in this way, turned into a backward journey through semantic corruption and the really demanding effort to take words out from their historical context. Once we apply this rationale to roughly all of Fielding's output, we can see the actual state of things and adjust the emphasis accordingly: in so doing, the pivotal problem is not how to define a supposedly fixed concept of liberty, but rather to detect how and why he never gives up straddling the line between different ideals. In the course of this discussion, we will see the consequences that it entails on the religious and political grounds but, for now, let us stick to an emblematic case related to the earlier phase of his career.

In 1743, Fielding included in the verse section of his *Miscellanies* a poem titled *Liberty*. Dedicated to George Lyttelton, it "must have been written after 1735-6, the date of Thomson's *Liberty*, which it echoes."⁸ In keeping with the classical tradition, the opening lines draw their power from a sort of invocation to the muse, that is at the same time meant to bestow honour on his dedicatee and set the pace for the rest of the composition. Lyttelton, famously acting as a benevolent patron of Fielding's art, is himself a living symbol of freedom just because "Who sings of Liberty, must sing his praise."⁹ The almost tragic irony in this verse must not be lost on all readers who compare it to the first pages of *Tom Jones*, where the author expresses his huge gratitude to Lyttelton for receiving from him economic support and encouragement throughout the writing process: being rescued from the threat of poverty, Fielding was literally granted freedom to continue singing his praise.

Moving towards the middle section of the poem, he delineates its tone and introduces the main themes:

Where Nature dictates, see how Freedom reigns;
The Herd, promiscuous, o'er the Mountain strays;
Nor begs this Beast the other's Leave to graze.
Each freely dares his Appetite to treat,

⁸ Henry Knight Miller ed., *Miscellanies Vol. 1*, Oxford: OUP, 1972, p. 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Nor fears the Steed to neigh, the Flock to bleat.
Did God, who Freedom to these creatures gave,
Form his own Image, Man, to be a Slave?
But Men, it seems, to Laws of Compact yield;
While Nature only governs in the Field.
Curse on all Laws which Liberty subdue,
And make the Many wretched for the Few.¹⁰

Thematically, Fielding brings together three indispensable pillars of all speculations about liberty and oppression: nature, religion, and law. In a sort of original, pre-human world, freedom is in the hands of nature and such dialectic seems to work pretty well in the animal kingdom; within it, actions and relationships are under control of an implicit order that, due to Fielding's distorting emphasis on a pastoral reality, prevents all individuals from taking over power. In his view, no twentieth-century *animal farm* seems possible, as equality among them does not serve to conceal an anguishing dystopia, but to show a self-evident truth. Through some sort of reversal, Fielding's image of the animal estate ends up being at odds with the accepted theory of mankind enjoying its highest degree of freedom in the natural state, and it is particularly in contrast with Locke's, where animals are only led by brutal force allowing the strongest beast to take on the leadership. Right after commenting on the positive animal model, there follows the foundation of all freedom which goes back to God: here, indeed, Fielding directly echoes Genesis' words "God created man in his own image," thus also alluding to the structure of worldly societies as mirrors of a heavenly order. Hence, not only do human beings have a right to be free, they must comply with their duty of establishing a natural hierarchy among fellow-creatures. Such pressing appeal to secure freedom attests to the danger for the British system of being trapped in quicksand; in fact, neither the highly praised 'mixed constitution' nor the defence of Protestant prerogatives seemed to provide a safe harbour for liberal claims. And Fielding's use of the weighty term "slavery," in line with many of his contemporaries' views, is obviously not a random choice: far from being an anachronistic medieval remnant, the feudal distinction between free men

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and serfs was, for many reasons, a vivid part of eighteenth-century cultural memory. Though not in terms of self-determination, still in Fielding's poem slavery is the primitive lack of those possibilities that people are given to lead their own lives without being coerced to act by the arbitrary will of others. In this context, 'arbitrary' becomes a key word, since the status of a free person is not so much to be interpreted as synonym of 'maverick' as a responsible individual who may be under many restraints from government, custom, and morals which, nevertheless, are fully reasonable. The direct and most important consequence of such premise is that constraints can be considered a fundamental part of freedom, if they are publicly known and equally applicable to all. In Fielding's intentions, it was this modern British achievement of the equal rule of law that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had strenuously brought about, and which needed constant preservation and supporters.

Despite all signs of optimism and trust in the rising liberal system, the last four lines quoted above make way for the paradoxical struggle between law and liberty, where the former is not always a cause of the latter. This vein is exploited even more when he says "Presumptuous Pow'r assumes the publick Voice, / And what it makes our Fate, pretends our Choice;"¹¹ in a society where the administration of power is troubled by corruption and deception, the leading figures do not really stand the test of popular approval, so that political schemes must be disguised as the outcome of free decisions. It is not hard to see how this course of action often becomes an effective weapon in the hands of very small elites and, specifically back in Fielding's time, it was a typical strategy enacted through propaganda. In the first section of the poem, no mystery is made that the present order is deeply flawed, the implicit reference being to his long-time enemy Robert Walpole, though the following part is yet another panegyric to the supremacy of the Hanoverian dynasty, the Church of England, and the liberal government over the oppressive triad including the Stuarts, Catholicism, and divine right monarchy. In fact, we are only able to find out the usual claim for a balance of conflicting interests in political and religious matters but, as a result, there are neither winners nor losers: Fielding hails the newly established line of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

kings as a lifeline for Protestantism, even though he never fails to criticise the shameful legacy of Walpolean policy.

As Fielding puts it, prior to setting off a reflection on freedom, one should form at least an opinion about its rise in relation to the origins of power and the cultural background that first legitimised it. Hence, in order to deepen our knowledge of the middle decades of the eighteenth century in this respect, we have to turn our attention to those figures who both traced the roots of British freedom back to the previous century, and sought to come up with unprejudiced accounts of the present state of things. Among such writers, we need particularly mention David Hume who helped turn the tables on several assumptions about the nature of liberty and the mixed constitution, taken for granted as undoubted truths of that age. Part of his frame of mind can be fruitfully employed to explain Fielding's attitude towards his time, and his reticence to convincingly take sides with a faction, beyond his activity as a hackney writer for the Whig propaganda.

To begin with, when going through Hume's works, we soon realise that there is nothing in him comparable to Mill's treatment in *Of Liberty* of a theoretical principle, which can distinguish individual freedom from that of the state. When he explicitly touches on the theme of liberty, "it is not to define and fix its limits but to make historical, causal observations about the conditions that produce, sustain, and threaten the existence of liberty and the values it makes possible."¹² In other words, it means that he is never too apt to write down formulas, provide his readers with easy equations of how social forces work or fail to do so; on the contrary, what he constantly tends to achieve is a conspicuous and reliable collection of data. No doubt, his method attests to his firm belief in everyday experience, that follows in the footsteps of the empiricist tradition: such starting point can account for Hume's view on liberty as something about which his readers are familiar, thus requiring no real definition.

¹² Nicholas Capaldi, Donald W. Livingston eds., *Liberty in Hume's History of England*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990, p. 105. I must here acknowledge that this work has throughout provided me with a number of valuable insights into Hume's remarks on freedom and the nature of political power.

The first problem that Hume has to face is that theories of liberty are the result of ahistorical systems of thought and, what is even worse, they pretend to be breaking loose from all restraints and universally valid. As Livingston comments on this point:

The traditional model of critical reflection for philosophy and political science is a spectator model. This is as true of empirical as of rationalistic theories. On this model, the thinker must, at some methodological point, step out of all existing political order for the purpose of critically surveying it. In this moment, the existing regimes of the world are viewed as alien objects having no normative authority for the spectator. The critical spectator conceptually ceases to be a *participant* in any regime whatsoever.

By contrast, Hume proposed a participation model of critical reflection. The thinker originally finds himself to be a participant in some practice of which he may have no concept.¹³

Hume's model is radically different from common processes of abstraction, even when observed from the empiricist point of view. The difference between the Greek speculative method and the Latin rhetorical tradition is roughly parallel to that between the spectator model and the participation model of philosophy. This latter can be said to take inspiration from the truism that things will be better understood when they belong to one's daily routine: though quite simple, it is such principle that leads Hume's search for a completely new road to walk.

The critical turning point from the spectator model to the participant one is the first of several links between his frame of mind and Fielding's approach to reality. To this end, we just need focus on the pretty illuminating title of the introducing chapter to Book XIV that reads: "An essay to prove that an author will write the better for having some knowledge of the subject on which he writes." It is clearly building a case for practical knowledge, similar to Hume's stress on the first-rate role of common experience. The subject is fraught with questions and examples particularly relevant to Fielding's concerns, and he writes them down as follows:

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

*As several gentlemen in these times, by the wonderful force of genius only, without the least assistance of learning, perhaps without being well able to read, have made a considerable figure in the republic of letters; the modern critics, I am told, have lately begun to assert, that all kind of learning is entirely useless to a writer; and, indeed, no other than a kind of fetters on the natural sprightliness and activity of the imagination, which is thus weighed down, and prevented from soaring to those high flights which otherwise it would be able to reach. This doctrine, I am afraid, is at present carried much too far: for why should writing differ so much from all other arts? (...) I would not here be understood to insist on the same fund of learning in any of my brethren, as Cicero persuades us is necessary to the composition of an orator (...). To say the truth, I require no more than that a man should have some little knowledge of the subject on which he treats (...). To avoid a multiplicity of examples in so plain a case, and to come at once to my point, I am apt to conceive, that one reason why many English writers have totally failed in describing the manners of upper life, may possibly be, that in reality they know nothing of it. This is a knowledge unhappily not in the power of many authors to arrive at. Books will give us a very imperfect idea of it; nor will the stage a much better: the fine gentleman formed upon reading the former will almost always turn out a pedant, and he who forms himself upon the latter, a coxcomb. Nor are the characters drawn from these models better supported. Vanbrugh and Congreve copied nature; but they who copy them draw as unlike the present age as Hogarth would do if he was to paint a rout, or a drum, in the dresses of Titian and of Vandyke. In short, imitation here will not do the business. *The picture must be after Nature herself. A true knowledge of the world is gained only by conversation, and the manners of every rank must be seen in order to be known.* Now it happens that this higher order of mortals is not to be seen, like all the rest of the human species, for nothing, in the streets, shops, and coffee-house; nor are they shown, like the upper rank of animals, for so much a-piece. In short, this is a sight to which no persons are admitted without one or other of these qualifications, viz., either birth or fortune, or, what is equivalent to both, the honourable profession of a gamester. And, very unluckily for the world, persons so qualified very seldom care to take upon themselves the bad trade of writing; which is generally entered upon by the lower and poorer sort, as it is a trade which many think requires no kind of stock to set up with (...). But to let my reader into a secret, this knowledge of upper life, though very necessary for preventing mistakes, is no very*

great resource to a writer whose province is comedy, or that kind of novels, which, like this I am writing, is of the comic class. (*TJ*, pp. 609-611) (Emphases mine)

While Fielding starts to unfold his “secret” for a successful authorship, we could be easily led astray by his accent on learning but, as he goes on, his statements become evidence of a method based on practical knowledge and conversations with members of all social classes. This, of course, is not yet another attempt to downplay the importance of personal studies, but a way to mediate between some “fund of learning” and the direct contact with mankind, whose inner workings we are able to grasp “only by conversation.” As a man of great importance in the fashionable Georgian society, Fielding knew where and how to keep good company, and still he was well aware of the fact that, in order to overcome a partial view of human relationships, he had to put aside from time to time linguistic and behavioural stereotypes, to dive himself into the unpredictable realm of low people: the realm of comedy. In the same manner as elsewhere in his works, Fielding here mentions Hogarth, the true source of inspiration for all those writers who strive to gather truthful information from reality, so to imitate nature.

Up to this point, we have seen how Hume and Fielding, though seemingly apt to achieve different goals, shared a similar preference for common life and the way it provides philosophers and writers with useful materials. One consequence of such a way of thinking is that “The Humean critical thinker begins in the established practices of common life, and, although practices may be modified by reflection, he ends there too.”¹⁴ To put it simply, we might note that there is not much room left for revolutionary outbursts or sudden overthrows of whatever sort, which is, however, a conclusion that risks to misrepresent Hume’s and, by extension, Fielding’s real motives. Indeed, the latter has at various times been accused to raise the standard of social conservative views by means of his works. In a rather similar way, the Scottish philosopher’s intentions are often distorted, that is why he is often thought of as a Tory and, due to his harsh reaction to the possibility of adopting republican institutions in Britain, even as a reactionary. To

¹⁴ Capaldi, Livingston, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

avoid any gross errors, it is important to go back to his own process of concept formation, and see in what respect it differs from others:

The process of conceptualizing the principles immanent in the practice (that is, of bringing them to consciousness) requires a critical act of thought which can test the purported conceptualization against the primordial, preconceptual practice. This critical act is in fact a rhetorical speech in which we are called upon to recognize who we are as participants in the practice and so are able to recognize ourselves in the conceptualization. The arts of rhetoric and history are essential to the participation model of critical inquiry; they are irrelevant to the spectator model. (...) What Hume calls the “first principle” of his philosophy is the principle that simple ideas follow simple impressions which they exactly resemble and that complex ideas follow complex impressions which they may or may not resemble. (...) The governing principle of the theory is that the experiences (impressions) rendered intelligible by ideas are not constituted by those ideas.¹⁵

The central point consists of just placing experience at the heart of the procedure but, far from framing it into a sterile environment detached from time and space, any critical act has to put it to the test in the changing historical context. Every time such process takes place, we make a progress in the understanding of the past and deliberately discover something new about ourselves: this explains why history and rhetoric, through their respective callings to collect reliable facts from the past and to put them together in a clear, unprejudiced way, are always ranked by Hume as outstanding arts. Next comes, as a plain matter of fact, Fielding’s insistence on his novel-writing as the ‘pseudo-scientific’ effort of a historian; his two major novels are presented as Joseph Andrews’ and Tom Jones’ histories, and not vaguely the tales of their lives. Playing the part of the ‘founder of a new province of writing,’ in *Joseph Andrews* he claims that:

A good man therefore is a standing lesson to all his acquaintance, and of far greater use in that narrow circle than a good book.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

But as it often happens that the best men are but little known, and consequently cannot extend the usefulness of their examples a great way; the writer may be called in aid to spread their history farther, and to present the amiable pictures to those who have not the happiness of knowing the originals; and so, by communicating such valuable patterns to the world, he may perhaps do a more extensive service to mankind than the person whose life originally afforded the pattern. (Emphases mine)¹⁶

As it is always the case in Fielding, the picture must be faithfully drawn keeping in mind the original model, which is human nature. Thus, the absolute priority for him is to create a mimetic effect, at the same time preserving a universal tone and continually drawing attention to the single person whose adventures are highlighted. The same principle will do for Hume, who is not at all concerned to illuminate experience floating through the timeless dimension of classical empiricism where sense perceptions are the paradigms, but to stress the historical experience slowly gaining awareness in a world constituted by the passions. It is not, therefore, so much experience itself that matters as the impact on self-knowledge that it may have.

From Hume's perspective, we basically live in ignorance. The arts of history and rhetoric become not only indispensable memory aids, but they actually contribute to change the present for the better, if used correctly. This feeling of optimism is evidently prey to an ebb and tide movement; it is made clear when Hume's method comes to terms with the drastic failures in seventeenth-century Britain:

In some cases, where the practice is evolving and variable, the belief that formal analysis uncovers the constitution or reality of a practice can obscure it. Thus Hume complains that Royalist historians treated the British constitution at the time of Charles I as an unchanging substance (...). They failed to understand the historical and necessarily ambiguous reality of British constitutional experience. The error of

¹⁶ Judith Hawley ed., *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999, p. 61.

intellectualism made the constitution appear more clear than it was. Some practices can perhaps never be made clear such as the nature of the Whig and Tory parties.¹⁷

Hume's complaints about the inability to read reality properly, when put into a historical context, show all the dangers to which it exposes both historians and common people. The stress is particularly on the British constitution and its elusive nature: it is no small subject, as a large part of his discussion on liberty can be said to turn around this hinge.

To talk about a fixed concept of freedom, in Hume's view, is to make a huge mistake, that is to say, it is not possible at all. The most we can do is to assess our experience and, accordingly, adjust our critical rules. Liberty is slippery and fleeting as any historical convention is meant to be; as such it resists all definitions and boundaries of a conscious agreement, just because over time it is found to be the unintended outcome of human relationships. Hume's most remarkable example of convention is language. It typically develops out of the primitive need to name reality and, therefore, share some knowledge of the world surrounding us, but then again we have to point out that it originates spontaneously. Hence, grammar is not an *a priori* code, but a temporary set of norms that takes the provisional picture of a certain language. The dialectic between tradition and the present time helps to crystallise the general repertoire that all members of the community can use, the *langue* in Saussurean terms, and the *parole* which is the individual, unique linguistic performance. In this respect, language becomes a Janus-faced entity, as it establishes the limits for speakers and, at the same time, it lends itself to potentially infinite creativity. It is this simple point that accounts for the improper use of words or their dramatic change of meaning, and provides the basis for Fielding's polemical publication of a "Modern Glossary" in the fourth number of *The Covent Garden Journal* (1752). He is worried about the imprudent writers of all sorts, whom he charges with the devastating semantic surgery that many words have, by that time, already undergone; moreover he deals with the risk of conveying different senses to different people, which stands for a further cultural crisis. Fielding describes this

¹⁷ Capaldi, Livingston, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

degenerate state of things as a pindaric flight from the authoritative role of custom, the Humean concept that takes Fielding's cultural struggle back to the start of our discussion and which completes the circle. To sum up, we should say that the overall freedom from custom reflects the human ability to reshape language, but the other side of the coin is that all accidental misuses of words correspond to a total ignorance of custom: in other words, liberty cannot be completely separated from the knowledge of the established custom, otherwise it is doomed to turn into the denial of itself.

So far, the reasoning about freedom may seem confined to a theoretical level, though we have tried to show its repercussions on the real world. Perhaps, we fully realise its urgency only by setting Hume's concerns against the background of eighteenth-century life in Britain:

Nearly everything Hume wrote on liberty can be viewed as a speech addressed to the dominant whig literary and political establishment of his time. It was this powerful group that claimed to be the spokesmen for and guardians of British liberty. Although the whig establishment participated in the experience of liberty, it seemed to Hume that its thought about that experience was confused. Distorted thinking about an experience, if extreme, can so alienate one from it that one loses one's grip on the experience itself and ceases to participate in it. As Hume's career developed, he became increasingly alarmed that the distorted thinking about liberty of the dominant whig literary and political establishment threatened to destroy the newly emerged experience of liberty. (...) Hume complained bitterly about the whig panegyric literature that had dominated British letters from the late 17th century throughout his lifetime. (...) The charge of whig barbarism occurs often in letters written during the last decade of Hume's life. (...) Hume's attack on the whig *interpretation* of the British experience of liberty is not an attack on the experience itself.¹⁸

The most compelling argument here encompasses the love and contempt for liberty, that the Whig party seems to show in Hume's eyes. Those contradictions that first cause people to undertake and then to distance themselves from the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

pursuit of freedom, are the by-product of an unremitting campaign of self-promotion. What he sees as panegyric literature is, in fact, a considerable part of the Whig “barbarism” and the mudslinging against the opposition, therefore Fielding’s literary career, at least until the late 1740s, perfectly fits into the inner workings of the political system.

Not only does Hume’s critique of Whig ideological strongholds try to root out irrational commonplaces, but he tends to ‘correct’ (which he considers to be a crucial mission entrusted to history and philosophy) the views on the recent Stuart fall after the Glorious Revolution, and to reassess the Tudor legacy as well. In those days, three main points appeared to blur the line between reality and political illusion: first, the supposed ancient origins of the mixed constitution; second, the exaggerated contrast between a heroic past and a decadent present; third, the constant and overwhelming anguish of losing this centuries-old right. There naturally followed a widespread Whig view that the present ‘unwritten law’ was the sacred reenactment of a much older constitution, that had been fortunately preserved over the centuries, in spite of the continuous attempts to overthrow it. Instead of considering the constitution causally, made up of unexpected historical accidents, and thus to be explained and patiently cultivated, it is presented as a sacred legacy of the past. Needless to say that such greatness and perfection of nearly mythical ages of the world is too unattainable a model, and any present attempt to imitate it is always bound to be a failure.

This improper historical perspective does not raise feelings of pride, but only a sort of paranoia and resentment about the helplessness of the present. But, to complicate the picture, “these historical hallucinations are not peculiar to 18th century whigs. They are a feature of liberal progressive ideology generally.”¹⁹ The general situation in Britain is seen as oppressive and threatening, even though the accused political order is the same that first made the new values possible. In this way, as we have already shown, an order striving for liberty can be transformed by a misplaced reflection into an illiberal one.

No doubt, Hume agreed with the Whig supporters when it came to the invaluable worth and benefits of the British constitution of liberty. He

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

acknowledged the immense variety of customs, manners, and characters that such liberty carried with it, and he could not but admit the fast development of a multifaceted national identity, that set Britain off from all the other countries on the continent. Generally speaking, Hume advocated a specific way of thinking about liberty as a natural demand of mankind, which, on an ideal level, should be extended as much as possible: more in detail, it was rather intended to encourage a social model based on responsible individuals, who are given the chance to express their personalities, and not to passively submit to the dogmas of a political faction. In this light, we can refer to a modern kind of ideological slavery, in opposition to the freedom of forming an autonomous opinion; if we ponder on the checks to arbitrary power, beyond the traditional notion of ‘the rule of law’ (laws must be publicly known, regular, predictable, and the power of justice equally applied to all), the most effective instrument in the hands of a truly civilised population is to show favour or perplexities to the government, and make decisions accordingly.

Religious liberty makes for an important branch of the broader argument on freedom, though for many reasons in Fielding’s time it was not a priority, if not forbidden, and thus often seen as an ornament that might only be indulged in some circumstances. Surely, it was on top of his concerns alongside politics: starting from the early theatrical career through to the novels and the political writings, we are able to form a quite clear picture of his evolving views on religion. Dealing with this aspect, Martin Battestin goes as far as marking a watershed between different phases of Fielding’s religious shifting positions:

Fielding’s attitude towards deism changed markedly from the early period of his career as dramatist (1730-37), when he consorted with freethinking friends who actively promoted the cause of the new natural religion, to the period that begins with the publication of his periodical, the *Champion*, in November 1739 and continues to the end of his life. His early flirtation with deism is evident in his popular satire *Pasquin* (1736), where “the Sun” is the deity worshipped by Queen Common Sense, who is murdered by the hypocritical priest Firebrand. When, however, he emerged from a two-year period of anonymity imposed on him by the passage of the

Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737, he reappears in the *Champion* as proponent of the latitudinarian movement within the Church of England.²⁰

The change we witness in the late thirties is largely echoed in Fielding's works published in the following decade. In a certain way, it can be seen as the religious equivalent of his growing closeness to the political establishment, the new identity that allows him to balance his adherence to the Church of England and his 'dissenting' voice. In particular, latitudinarianism was the prevailing current within the Anglican community, a loosely defined rationalist doctrine promoting the belief of the natural benevolence of mankind, the outstanding importance of good works with respect to faith, and a critique of the typical hierarchy based on low and high clergymen. It is not hard to see that such principles seriously risked to undermine the very foundations of the church, but that is not all. Indeed, there is much more to it: for instance, such set of beliefs not only displeased Anglican churchmen who gave themselves airs trying to impose an official religion, it also upset many dissenting congregations. Both superstition and 'enthusiasm' were left out of the latitudinarian picture, so that it might at once become a thorn in the side of the supposedly oppressive Catholic priesthood, and the worst enemy of the 'faith alone' motto proclaimed by George Whitefield, founder of Methodism. Leaving aside the great controversy to which it gave rise, here the crucial point is that he starts to criticise deists and freethinking philosophers such as Hobbes and Mandeville, and replaces their teachings with Hoadly, Barrow, Clarke and Tillotson.

Fielding's works are famously dotted with references to the early years of his life in London and, in several cases, his vocabulary to describe religious enthusiasts and quack divines is directly drawn from his own experience. One of the contexts in which he chooses to narrate his misadventures is that of *Joseph Andrews*, in particular Wilson's episode where he calls his youthful memories to mind:

²⁰ Martin C. Battestin, "The Critique of Freethinking from Swift to Sterne." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15.3-4 (2003): 369.

I fell into the acquaintance of a set of jolly companions, who slept all day and drank all night; fellows who might rather be said to consume time than to live. Their best conversation was nothing but noise: singing, hollowing, wrangling, drinking, toasting, sp—wing, smoaking were the chief ingredients of our entertainment. And yet, bad as these were, they were more tolerable than our graver scenes, which were either excessive tedious narratives of dull common matters of fact, or hot disputes about trifling matters, which commonly ended in a wager. This way of life the first serious reflection put a period to; and I became member of a club frequented by young men of great abilities. The bottle was now only called in to the assistance of our conversation, which rolled on the deepest points of philosophy. *These gentlemen were engaged in a search after truth, in the pursuit of which they threw aside all the prejudices of education, and governed themselves only by the infallible guide of human reason. This great guide, after having shown them the falsehood of that very ancient but simple tenet, that there is such a being as a Deity in the universe, helped them to establish in his stead a certain rule of right, by adhering to which they all arrived at the utmost purity of morals.* Reflection made me as much delighted with this society as it had taught me to despise and detest the former. I began now to esteem myself a being of a higher order than I had ever before conceived; and was the more charmed with this rule of right, as I really found in my own nature nothing repugnant to it. I held in utter contempt all persons who wanted any other inducement to virtue besides her intrinsic beauty and excellence; and had so high an opinion of my present companions, with regard to their morality, that I would have trusted them with whatever was nearest and dearest to me. (Emphases mine)²¹

In a wider sense, the passage above provides just one example of the flourishing clubbing scene of the early decades of the century. Wilson (and, of course, Fielding's own voice) underlines how this lifestyle is largely to be justified as an escape from the dull polemical crossfire of the time, an ambiguous but lively alternative to the dead end situation of religious pamphleteering. However charming this group may be, the problem is that he soon comes to understand the true nature of his fellows: they turn out to be a bunch of good-for-nothing men, whose appeal to the infallible "rule of right" is eventually exposed as a cover-up for laziness, hard drinking and vice. Once more, Fielding echoes Hume's

²¹ Judith Hawley, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222.

principles when Wilson says that, in the pursuit of truth, these gentlemen “threw aside all the prejudices of education” and were only guided by human reason. There emerges the flawed nature of a similar process, since common experience is completely overlooked and a certain number of rational abstractions is all the material they can dispose of. The consequences, from Fielding’s point of view, set up an alarming scenario, where individuals are allowed to break all limits to moral conduct and are only bound to their reasons.

Just in order to change this course of action, Fielding chooses the way to established religion, which often runs parallel to political favour. Hence, his staunch defence of the Protestant religion, his irony on Catholic priests and beliefs in many passages, including the famous exchanges between Tom Jones and Benjamin Partridge, and his mocking attitude towards such dissenting sects as the Methodists. It is roughly the average degree of religious tolerance that one is to expect of a man living in the context of mid-eighteenth-century England, though it raises the compelling question about freedom of conscience. One remark must be at the basis of any further discussion: political and religious life had probably never been so strongly interwoven as in the period from the Puritan civil war to the 1750s, a century of unabated factionalism between different doctrines, indissolubly merged with the gradual rise and the varying fortunes of the Whig and Tory parties. The political instability leading to the outbreak of the Glorious Revolution is traditionally ascribed to the James II’s violation of basic constitutional rights, and his incessant support of the Catholic faith. As to religious matters, in particular, he is commonly accused of having disguised the attempt to restore the Church of Rome as a liberal declaration of tolerance. Whatever his motives, one must acknowledge the great modernity of such a decision, as his extension of freedom involved not only Catholics, but also Protestant sects like the Presbyterians and the Unitarians, or even Jews, Muslims and atheists. In detail, the three main points of the statement are: the suspension of all penal laws in ecclesiastical matters for not attending the established services, or not receiving communion according to its rites; the freedom for people to worship in private houses or chapels; the end of the requirement that people take religious oaths before advancement to civil or military office.

It was seen as an unwelcomed violation of the Test Act, that imposed upon individuals appointed to hold a public office to take an oath of subscription to the “Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith,” moreover it paved the way to the threatening possibility of a Catholic and Dissenter leading class. On these grounds, James was deprived of the kingdom and, therefore, what could be in many ways considered a promising step to a complete religious freedom, came to sanction the end of the Stuart dynasty. In addition to this, under the reign of Queen Anne, the Act of Settlement eventually excluded any Catholic claim to the throne, imposing the requirement of the Protestant faith on the British crown. At her death, she was succeeded by George I Hanover who fully endorsed the Church of England, though his kingship raised two difficult problems: he was German and, even worse, in terms of descendancy he was totally illegitimate. It is this kind of irreconcilable contradiction that informs Fielding’s positions on liberty and legitimate rights, pervading his masterpiece *Tom Jones*.

2.3 A “New Province” of Arts

Interpreting the meaning of class and status as key concepts for eighteenth-century cultural currents and elites can be a good starting point. And in our discussion, perhaps, the interesting part of accounting for Fielding’s frustrated poses as aristocrat and Hogarth’s middle-class life, does not lie so much in their works as in their refusal to match the individual creative effort with easily marketable products. Nevertheless, as one can assume from both their artistic projects, this kind of disdain cannot be taken too literally and, to this end, a closer look to their relationship with the public may help better set them in context.

To begin with, one need note the different methods they chose to launch their works. Hogarth nearly always relied on the increasingly successful subscription-based system, that allowed him to set conditions and establish the number of copies to be sold; this habit, predictably arousing great interest in the newspaper readership, made paintings and prints available to a large audience. In addition to this, the so-called subscription tickets paved the way to the publication of the main work, and played no smaller part in the authorial overall intention. For several reasons, such as its connection to *Joseph Andrews* and its value as a kind

of manifesto, the case of the well-known subscription ticket for *Marriage A-la-mode* perfectly fits into the present discussion.

In order to explain its origins, Paulson reports an excerpt from a letter and reads it as a probable source of inspiration for Hogarth:

A letter to Caleb D'Anvers in the *Craftsman*, 12 January 1742/43, misrepresented Fielding's contrast between caricature and character as one between caricature and the beautiful: "The *outré*, or Extravagant, requires but a very little Portion of Genius to hit. Any Dauber, almost may make a shift to portray a *Saracen's* Head; but a Master, only, can express the delicate, dimpled Softness of Infancy, the opening Bloom of Beauty, or the happy Negligence of Graceful Gentility." This reference may have been the specific goad that led Hogarth to produce in the next month or so the etching *Characters and Caricaturas* (...) as subscription ticket for his new series, *Marriage A-la-mode*. He replies to Fielding's complimentary reference to him in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, follows Fielding's terminology, and makes the connection explicit at the bottom of the print: "See y^e Preface to Jo^h. Andrews." At the bottom center of the cloud of faces representing "character" are, grinning at each other, likenesses of Hogarth the "comic history-painter" and Fielding the "comic epic in prose" writer.²²

This passage, while showing instances of the influence they exercised on one another, draws attention to emblematic definitions such as "comic history-painter" and "comic epic in prose" writer, which refer respectively to the visual and literary procedures that set them off from received traditions. But before proceeding any further with this topic, let us now go back to Fielding and examine, by contrast, his own methods to advertise his writings.

On the contrary to his fellow artist, his name cannot be associated with a single attitude towards the changing editorial market, as his engagement covered a wider range of genres spanning from comedy and farce to pamphleteering, political journalism, poetry and novels. Indeed, if his juvenile career as a playwright was dominated by a more direct contact with people attracted by his often popular and low forms of entertainment, as his literary fame grew, he

²² Paulson, *Vol. 2, op. cit.*, pp. 206-207.

continually had to find new convenient ways to support his undertakings, and adapt himself to different demands. After a series of successful plays, as a matter of fact, all his high expectations of a glowing future in the theatre were put an end to in 1737: “for many of Fielding’s contemporaries, and in later accounts of his career, the Licensing Act was an *ad hominem* measure targeted by a wound ministry against a single theatrical bugbear” as Thomas Keymer puts it, but this only proves to be a watered-down version of how things really went, and thus he goes on saying:

The truth is rather more complex, but Fielding was certainly a prime contributor to ministerial anxieties about the theatre, and the retaliatory clampdown his plays provoked conferred on them a lasting reputation as works defined and dominated by a specific political campaign. (...) Even some of Fielding’s most innocuous early comedies and farces have been ingenuously decoded as partisan interventions, their texts combed for lurking signs of antiministerial innuendo.²³

Once out of the picture, having to turn his hand to journalism, he displayed deep uncertainties about the possibility of achieving goals in a new field but, in spite of this, he mainly devoted to the rising world of periodicals about three and a half years of his life, between the late Thirties and the early Forties. Of course, Fielding’s urgent and constant need for money did not allow him to stick to only one source of income, thus being led once again to produce entertainments or several occasional pieces: following *Joseph Andrews*’ extraordinary reception in 1742, he did not publish another novel but the largely forgotten oppositional pamphlet *A Full Vindication of her Grace the Dutchess Dowager of Marlborough*. After some other squibs, he tried to capture an audience with the stage farce *The Wedding Day*, a relatively unsuccessful piece which barely lasted six nights, bringing the author no more than £50.²⁴ From the point of view of self-marketing, one might say, 1743 marked a watershed as his three-volume project of the *Miscellanies* was finally published. Both as to the arrangement of the whole work

²³ Claude Rawson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, New York: CUP, 2007, pp. 17-18.

²⁴ Ian A. Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority*, London: Longman, 1994, p. 124.

and the advertising campaign related to it, this literary effort can be recognised as yet another attempt to “create something of permanent value that would take him down the avenue of fame and perhaps also the path of wealth.”²⁵ Nevertheless, Fielding’s judgement of at least part of his collection remains ambivalent and pervaded by an opportunist claim for exculpation:

The Poetical Pieces which compose the First Part of the First Volume were most of them written when I was very young, and are indeed Productions of the Heart rather than of the Head. If the Good-natured Reader thinks them tolerable, it will answer my warmest Hopes. This Branch of Writing is what I very little pretend to (...).²⁶

And some pages later he turns to his personal difficulties in search of ‘forgiveness:’

Indeed when I look a Year or two backwards, and survey the Accidents which have befallen me, and the Distresses I have waded through whilst I have been engaged in these Works, I could almost challenge some Philosophy to myself, for having been able to finish them as I have; and however imperfectly that may be, I am convinced the Reader, was he acquainted with the whole, would want very little Good nature to extinguish his Disdain at any Faults he meets with.²⁷

Besides all visible exaggerations, the muddy waters he had ‘waded through’ all along the writing of the *Miscellanies*, may well be the vivid memory of his eldest daughter’s death in 1742, and the early signs of the illness affecting his wife who eventually passed away in 1744. In any case, the private circumstances occurring in those years must not be accounted as the only reason for the general unmindful posture that Fielding assumed, but we rather need consider his strong awareness of addressing a properly educated upper-class readership. The subscription seemed to change completely the relationship between author and editor, the latter being outstanding on the title page of *Joseph Andrews* that announced “Printed for

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁶ Knight Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

A. MILLAR,” and then gradually losing importance on the title page of the *Miscellanies* that read “Printed for the AUTHOR; And sold by A. MILLAR.” No doubt, this method gave Fielding the greatest degree of control on his work and conferred on him an unprecedented authoritative status as writer: suffice it to say that such an honour had previously been bestowed upon John Dryden, John Gay, and Alexander Pope’s edition of Shakespeare and his translations of Homer. As hinted before, the subscription publication also played a major role in the dialectic between author and readers, since it literally provided a list of well-known names; what is more, even subscribers commonly yearned to obtain, so to say, their fifteen minutes of fame. On the whole, back in those days “the subscribed book could provide its consumers with both an avenue for public statement and a desirable fashion accessory, an opportunity to display an affiliation or make a gestural stand.”²⁸

As far as the present argument about Fielding’s launch strategies is concerned, some reflections on his 1749 masterpiece *The History of Tom Jones; a Foundling* may give an idea of the winding path he had to walk through the years at the apex of his career. His constant engagement with the political Hanoverian propaganda, by means of the periodicals *The True Patriot* (1746-47) and *The Jacobite’s Journal* (1747-48), did not seem to improve his financial conditions and, most of all, brought him to take a step backwards, that is, to fall in line again with the great but, by then, old-fashioned tradition of aristocratic patronage. *Tom Jones* opens with the famous dedication “TO THE HONOURABLE GEORGE LYTTLETON, ESQ., One of the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury” and continues with Fielding’s irritatingly condescending tone:

SIR,

Notwithstanding your constant refusal, when *I have asked leave to prefix your name* to this dedication, I must still insist on my right to *desire* your protection of this work. To you, sir, it is owing that this history was ever begun. It was by your *desire*

²⁸ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 126. Though constituting a form of social allegiance, Bell argues that, in the case of Fielding’s *Miscellanies*, no homogeneous group emerged from the list of subscribers, specifically including wealthy classes, members of the political anti-Walpolean opposition and representatives of the legal professions.

that I first thought of such a composition. So many years have since past, that you may have, perhaps, forgotten this circumstance: but your *desires* are to me in the nature of commands and *the impression of them is never to be erased from my memory*. Again, sir, *without your assistance this history had never been completed*. Be not startled at the assertion. I do not intend to draw on you *the suspicion of being a romance writer*. I mean no more than that *I partly owe to you my existence during great part of the time which I have employed in composing it*. (TJ, p. 3) (Emphases mine)

This brief passage contains several elements that can turn out to be useful to shed light both on Fielding's individual conditions and the wider social context surrounding him. First of all, in direct contrast with the above-mentioned subscribers' eagerness to gain a place on a list of names, almost in an ironic manner the author here must insist on making his indebtedness to Lord Lyttleton public. In the second place, we can notice a sensible shift from the bashful "desire" for a sought-after protection, to the ambiguous use of the same word he makes through the following sentences. The burden of literary authorship comes to be momentarily displaced, so that the patron seems to bear a large share of responsibility in the making of the novel, perhaps even more than might be expected. And instead of claiming his role beyond any shadow of a doubt, the author appears to want to indulge in his play: he feels he has to keep Lyttelton's reputation clear from "the suspicion of being a romance writer." Thirdly, the use of *romance*, with reference to a narration precisely defined as *history*, opens up the way to a more complex lexical confusion hovering over the novel from beginning to end.

The events connected with Fielding's unstable editorial policies, with respect to Hogarth's more entrepreneurial vocation, highlight but a small area of the common ground they found while developing their personal responses to the rapidly changing contemporary reality. In order to understand how they interacted with each other and faced the passionate disputes, the polemical discussions, the political and social questions of their time, attention must be drawn to the major points of contact between numerous pivotal moments, when their arts literally engaged in dialogue.

Following the short prose *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* in 1741, Fielding further developed his narrative technique and eventually published his first full-length narration *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams. Written in Imitation of The Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*. Awkward as it may sound today, still the extended version of this title can provide readers with a conspicuous amount of information about the cultural and literary background of the novel. Devoid of any illustrious example from the past and, even worse, from the Greek and Latin classics, the modern novelistic genre was in search of legitimate models or, in a broad sense, of some kind of recognisable ancestor. Consequently, moving away from the early eighteenth-century English horizon, Fielding appropriated the legacy of Cervantes' popular fiction, because it effectively set a precedent and therefore best suited his need to create a totally new form of prose. It is not a mere coincidence that the rising novel first trod a path starting from far away beyond the national boundaries, and that this dialectic between literary genre and place remained prominent in the beginning of his preface:

As it is possible *the mere English Reader* may have a different Idea of Romance with the Author of these little Volumes; and may consequently expect a kind of Entertainment, not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following Pages; *it may not be improper to premise a few Words concerning this kind of Writing, which I do not remember to have been hitherto attempted in our Language.*²⁹
(Emphases mine)

Referring to the “mere English Reader,” Fielding points to the large portion of his down-market public that cannot enjoy texts written in languages other than their native one. This definition, apart from being a slightly disparaging mark of the bad disposition towards the uneducated part of his audience, still underlines the complete absence of such trend in English, thus overlooking of a large number of

²⁹ Judith Hawley, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

writers, including masters as Defoe, Richardson and many others, along with their accomplishments in this field.

A rather self-indulging claim to be the first term of comparison encouraged Fielding to stress the cutting-edge nature of his effort, a point he made with renewed confidence seven years later to explain his narrative method in *Tom Jones*, and which is worth quoting in full:

When any extraordinary scene presents itself , (as we trust will often be the case) we shall spare no pains nor paper to open it at large to our reader; but if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history; but shall hasten on to matters of consequence, and leave such periods of time totally unobserved. (...) My reader then is not to be surprised, if, in the course of this work, he shall find some chapters very short, and others altogether as long; some that contain only the time of a single day, and others that comprise years; in a word, if my history sometimes seems to stand still, and sometimes to fly. For all which I shall not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever: for *as I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein. And these laws, my readers, whom I consider as my subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey*; with which that they may readily and cheerfully comply, I do hereby assure them, that I shall principally regard their ease and advantage in all such institutions: for *I do not, like a jure divino tyrant, imagine that they are my slaves, or my commodity*. I am, indeed, set over them for their 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. (*TJ*, pp. 60-61) (Emphases mine)

As is always the case with metanarrative considerations or speculative topics in *Tom Jones*, the above-cited passage is located in the first chapter of a new book (this instance being Chapter I, Book II). Not only does the authoritative narrator describe how he intends to carry out his plans properly, but he draws on his own material and turns the new “kind of writing” into a “new province of writing.” This change entails what could be defined as a geographic metaphor: if in *Joseph Andrews* the linguistic concept of Englishness was somehow associated with the

limits to the audience's openness to literary innovations, here the word province becomes a real trademark of Fielding's work and, once put in perspective, in the long run it can hopefully describe typical features of the land he inhabits. From this point of view, such statements gave voice to the eighteenth-century pressing demand for an autochthonous culture, a representative canon of texts and a coherent national ideology, that several artists and thinkers increasingly came to long for around the middle of the century.

Just as Fielding tried incessantly to enter this unexplored world, Hogarth on the other hand put a great effort to distance himself from the overwhelming European models, in order to establish new practices. Particularly, he attacked the distortions and mystifications produced by the influential class of the critics, and the dangerous effects of the leading connoisseurs disseminating their opinions in the matter of good taste. He peculiarly advocated the necessity to look for a national identity, that could both prevent the public from keeping a low profile with respect to the high-flown artistic rhetoric from all over the continent, and root out people's deep-seated bad taste. In response to the contemporary state of things, he published in February 1724 a print referred to in the papers as *The Bad Taste of the Town*, which did not involve politics or notorious scandals of those years such as the South Sea Bubble (1720), that he had already satirised in his print titled *The South Sea Scheme* in 1721. It rather revolved around taste, "catching by analogy not only masquerades, operas, and pantomimes, the spectrum of middle to low entertainments, but Burlington House, the citadel of the Palladian style in architecture and the Italianate in painting: not only citizens but connoisseurs,"³⁰ as Paulson puts it. The tension here is still between the potential for a whole range of English theatrical performances, and the nonsensical forms derived from the Italian tradition, typically standing for an oversimplification of human feelings and situations, or for a most ridiculous use of music sung in an unknown language, which were both perceived as symptoms of a general waste of local expressive power.

³⁰ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: The Modern Moral Subject, 1697-1732 Vol. 1*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992, pp. 74-75.

In assuming this particular posture, Hogarth was deeply biased by *The Spectator* and, in fact, his general position on art mirrors Addison's as phrased in No. 5: "An Opera may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its Decorations, as its only Design is to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience. Common Sense however requires, that there should be nothing in the Scenes and Machines which may appear *Childish* and *Absurd*."³¹ (Emphases mine) Operas and, in general, the parade of Italian theatricals come to represent the other side of the coin in the cultural struggle between native claims and foreign models, a visible equivalent of the public's passiveness towards the latter ones. Common sense, turning more and more into a stronghold of the mainstream British ideology throughout the century, opposes to an annoying sense of immaturity: in keeping with Addison's words, one may say, the childish attitude of the inherited entertainments need be replaced by a safer fatherly status, labelled as purely English.

In view of this nationalist aspect in Hogarth's aesthetics, a detailed analysis should take into account his writings as well, though their crucial importance often tends to be obscured by the great success of his visual art and his outspoken uncertainty about literary devices as channels to convey his theories. He focused on this nationalist theme in June 1737, when he published an essay signed 'Britophil' to augment the advertisements and subscription ticket of *The Four Times of the Day* in the same issue of the *St. James's Evening Post*, that carried an early announcement of his forthcoming work. This essay, reprinted in the July *London Magazine*, was attributed to "the finest Painter in England, perhaps in the world, in his Way," and is thought to be Hogarth's first authenticated piece of writing, one that left an indelible impression on many subsequent works.

In the same way as *Characters and Caricaturas*, the goad for Hogarth's response was an attack published on a newspaper. Following is a full picture of the events:

³¹ John Hay Lobban ed., *Selections from the Spectator*, Cambridge: CUP, 1952, p. 5.

The immediate provocation for the “Britophil” essay was an account from Paris in the *Daily Post* of 2 June of François Lemoyne’s suicide: “his Head was out of Order ever since the four Faults that were found by some rigid Criticks in that vast Work, which he had been four years about.” The reporter adds: “The Painter of the great Hall of Greenwich Hospital had much more Resolution; notwithstanding there are as many Faults as Figures in that Work he died a natural death, tho’ an Englishman [i.e., a sufferer of melancholia].” The reference, of course, was to Thornhill.³²

Hogarth’s indignant reaction was on behalf of his beloved father-in-law Sir James Thornhill and, by extension, English art as a whole. What the author of the report on the *Daily Post* does, is not only downplay his target’s technical skills but, even worse, make fun of his origins through the reference to the so-called ‘English malady.’³³ Hogarth feels the urge to defend national art and, at the same time, accuses critics who build their good reputations by underestimating English art, thus allowing picture dealers to make fortunes out of foreign works. He seems to show the greatest contempt for the latter and explicitly says:

³² Paulson, *Vol. 2, op. cit.*, p. 137.

³³ This last point made in the article may have reminded Hogarth of the recent publication, only three years before, of George Cheyne’s *The English Malady or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds; as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Distempers, Etc*, whose preface read: “The Title I have chosen for this Treatise, is a Reproach universally thrown on this Island by Foreigners, and all our Neighbours on the Continent, by whom Nervous Distempers, Spleen, Vapours, and Lowness of Spirits, are, in Derision, call’d the ENGLISH MALADY. And I wish there were not so good grounds for this Reflection. The Moisture of our Air, the Variableness of our Weather, (from our Situation amidst the Ocean) the Rankness and Fertility of our Soil, the Richness and Heaviness of our Food, the Wealth and Abundance of the Inhabitants (from their universal Trade), the Inactivity and sedentary Occupations of the better Sort (among whom this Evil mostly rages) and the Humour of living in great, populous, and consequently unhealthy Towns, have brought forth a Class and Set of Distempers, with atrocious and frightful Symptoms, scarce known to our Ancestors, and never rising to such fatal Heights, nor afflicting such Numbers in any other known Nation. These nervous Disorders being computed to make almost one third of the Complaints of the People of Condition in England.” George Cheyne, *The English Malady or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds; as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Distempers, Etc*, London: G. Strahan, 1733.

those are your *Picture-Jobbers from abroad*, who are always ready to raise a great Cry in the Prints, whenever they think their Craft is in Danger; and indeed it is their Interest to depreciate every *English Work*, as hurtful to their Trade, of continually importing Ship Loads of dead *Christs, Holy Families, Madona's*, and other dismal Dark Subjects, neither Entertaining nor Ornamental; on which they scrawl the terrible cramp names of some *Italian Masters*, and fix on us poor Englishmen, the Character of *Universal Dupes*.³⁴

While expressing the typical Protestant disregard for the abundance of religious images to decorate churches and private houses, Hogarth also looks down on the origins of unknown pictures on which cunning dealers “scrawl” the names of “Italian Masters.” This remark seems to have some connection with Fielding who, in the introduction to his *A Journey from this World to the Next* (1743), wrote: “I have a surprizing Curiosity to read every thing which is almost illegible; partly, perhaps, from the sweet Remembrance of the dear *Scrawls, Skrawls, or Skrales*, (...) and partly from that Temper of Mind which makes Men set an immense Value on (...) Pictures so black that no one can tell what to make of them.”³⁵ Tracing a subtle parallel between these passages, the identity of the paintings to which Fielding refers remains a mystery, just as the oscillating orthography of “scrawl” calls to mind the arbitrary and fake signatures on canvases from abroad. But this is by no means the end of the story, since the wordplays and distortions of names were pervading features in Fielding’s literary method: in line with this polemical tone, he does not fail to direct his irony towards the Italian painters through Joseph Andrews, who says:

all those other things; which when we so admire, we rather praise the builder, the workman, the painter, the lace-maker, the taylor, and the rest, by whose ingenuity they are produced, than the person who by his money makes them his own. For my own part, when I have waited behind my lady in a room hung with fine pictures, while I have been looking at them I have never once thought of their owner, nor hath

³⁴ See *Britophil Essay*.

³⁵ Bertrand A. Goldgar, Hugh Amory eds., *Miscellanies Vol. 2*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 3.

anyone else, as I ever observed; for when it hath been asked whose picture that was, it was never once answered the master's of the house; but *Ammyconni, Paul Varnish, Hannibal Scratchi, or Hogarthy*, which I suppose were the names of the painters.³⁶
(Emphases mine)

Besides the irony about the surnames Amigoni and Carracci, two elements clearly emerge from this excerpt, that is, the peculiar distortion of Veronese and the inclusion of his friend Hogarth in the joke. On the one hand, "Varnish" points to Joseph's wrong pronunciation, in keeping with his potential role of uneducated "average Joe;" on the other hand, "Hogarthy" resembles more a Latin-sounding word, so that in a certain way it elevates the artist to the dignity of a 'classic,' harking back to the old European tradition from which this latter was instead deliberately emancipating himself.

The Britophil essay can still provide theoretical implications and intertextual links with Fielding's output. The name of the author standing for 'lover of Britain' (and in a wider sense, of Britishness, one might add), it suggests that he speaks as a "Well-wisher to arts in England" and, when put in these terms, Hogarth can almost be said to anticipate emblematic words used a decade later in a scene of *Tom Jones*:

The Serjeant had informed Mr Jones that *they were marching against the rebels*, and expected to be *commanded by the glorious Duke of Cumberland*. By which the reader may perceive (a circumstance which we have not thought necessary to communicate before) that this was the very time when the late rebellion was at the highest; and indeed the banditti were now marched into England, intending, as it was thought, to fight the king's forces, and to attempt pushing forward to the metropolis.

Jones had some heroic ingredients in his composition, and was a hearty well-wisher to glorious cause of liberty, and of the Protestant religion. It is no wonder, therefore, that in circumstances in which would have warranted a much more romantic and wild undertaking, it should occur to him to serve as a volunteer in this expedition. (*TJ*, p. 300) (Emphases mine)

³⁶ Hawley, *op.cit.*, pp. 239-240.

This kind of nationalist rhetoric, if compared to Hogarth's pseudonym in the essay, can foster a better understanding of how such themes as political freedom and artistic expression interwove with each other back in those days. Nationalism apparently swept through a wide range of contemporary unsettled matters: in plain words, a claim to a local aesthetic canon³⁷ could be considered as the logical consequence of a native English dynasty supporting all forms of domestic talents or, at least, a line of descent that managed to win people's favour. In this perspective, Fielding's way to deal with the question is rather problematic because, in spite of Tom's unconditioned decision to join the army, the use he makes of some key words can turn out to be ambiguous. In more detail, the hot-off-the-press accounts and the rumours circulating about the Jacobite rebellion, led by Charles Edward Stuart against the royal army under the Duke of Cumberland, usually described the attempt of the former as a "romantic" and "wild" campaign; this means that in common people's perception, including Fielding's readership, such scathing adjectives were mostly attributed to the young exile from Italy.

What is more, as we can easily grasp from the context of the novel, Tom's decision is not at all an act of patriotism or heartfelt loyalty to the Hanoverian cause, but rather one of many possible ways to bring his life to an end, after his mishaps at Paradise Hall. He is no real hero who will challenge death in the name

³⁷ In the course of the eighteenth century, we assist to the constant growth of a "peculiar dimension intended for the ennobling and progressive emancipation of the Northern countries, in terms of aesthetic and political traits. This was to the detriment of the sunny Southern countries and their classical aesthetics (authoritarian politics), that had been outstanding throughout the Western world up to that point." When we deal with this cultural revolution, many social phenomena come into play, indeed "[p]rogress and urbanisation – widespread throughout the English counties during the eighteenth century and even more so in the following century – debunk any attempt to give a sentimental turn to idealised rural scenes, and the reassuring myth of Old England, that is, strongholds of wistful conservatism. Such exaltation of a peaceful and pastoral countryside, as opposed to corrupt city life, (...) only confirm the primary role that literature plays in cultural identity processes. These can create places, nations, and then states – culturally derived from nations – by means of simple features which determined groups of people will consider as their own peculiar identity." (Translation mine) Yvonne Bezrucka, "L'invenzione del paesaggio nordico tra Settecento e Ottocento." *Nuovi Quaderni del CRIER* 8 (2011): 54-62.

of freedom and Protestantism but, on the contrary, these values all become, paradoxically, ready-to-use excuses to hide his lack of heroism. As a matter of fact, Fielding does not sound so convincing when labelling his protagonist as a modern champion of faith and political legitimacy, only because there was no source to draw ultimate meaning for such ideals.

In Hogarth's essay, the concept of freedom is associated with the rising of a native cultural identity as the product of an independent and egalitarian state, while Fielding takes the issue a step further and wonders what is really at stake in this process: can a foreign family be definitely allowed to take over power? Does legitimacy pass down from father to son? Or does it have to be conferred by the parliament? And, more to the point, can a German line of descent be really expected to promote English arts? Throughout his macrotext, Fielding never seems to come up with clear answers to these burning questions, and he usually makes way to his characteristic double irony, that allows him to shed light on the strong and weak points of both claims.

In the last analysis, Fielding and Hogarth displayed in their works an original curiosity for everyday life and shared a growing interest in the ideological clashes around them, alongside the cultural politics they inevitably brought about. These similar concerns were channelled through different artistic media, each one of them exploiting the peculiarities of his own field. Such closeness and correspondence of different arts can be best described by the Latin formula 'ut pictura poësis,' that is, 'as is painting so is poetry,' introduced by Horace in his famous *Ars Poetica* where he called for greater attention on poetry (by which he meant every literary work involving imaginative powers), with respect to painting that enjoyed a better position at that time as to critical interpretation. He wrote: "A poem is like a picture. One will captivate you if you stand closer, one if you stand further away. This one favours shadow; that one will want to be seen in daylight if it is not to dread the edge of a critic's tongue. This one pleased just once, this one will after ten visits."³⁸ The argument Horace develops here, functions as a striking forerunner of the concern Hogarth expressed in his *Britophil* essay, his discontent

³⁸ Ross S. Kilpatrick ed., *The Poetry of Criticism. Horace, Epistles II and Ars Poetica*, Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1990, pp. 80-81.

with critics focusing on small details, and almost completely forgetting the observation of a picture as a whole. Indeed, at first, written texts may be more likely to offer allusions, cross-references, parodies and other literary devices through a close reading, whereas visual art may be better appreciated and understood when considered in its entirety. On a general level, this distinction somehow suggests that paintings are regulated by a spatial unfolding of images and, on the other hand, texts are controlled by a temporal principle of linear or non-linear narrative; nevertheless a more attentive reading of art works shows how such dichotomy does not apply to early modern pictures in the same manner as to ancient or medieval paintings:

The art treatises, stressing the parallels of the “Sister Arts,” ask that a painting, which deals in space rather than time, rival a poem in its temporal dimension. They show artists ways to represent a complete action in a single picture. In Le Brun’s *Conférences*, while he places primary importance on *l’expression des passions*, he also argues that Poussin’s *Fall of the Manna* demonstrates the movement through time in a single spatial image by showing the manna falling on the left side, while it begins to be noticed by the Israelites in the middle, and on the right they are picking it up off the ground and eating it. Thus three stages of time are delineated in a single canvas – in a modernised, rationalised, or naturalised version of the medieval and early Renaissance device of simply showing three Christs in the same picture, one at the Last Supper, one at Gethsemane, and one on the cross.³⁹

The alternative to old representational standards, simply based on separate episodes, is provided by a kind of work in progress recording different stages of the same situation. Observers are not the ones who profit from this technical innovation: to borrow a bachtinian concept, we can say that a brand new chronotope comes into being, that is, the time span is much the same but its relation with the physical space on the canvas is totally altered. The latter becomes the vehicle for actions to ‘take place’ smoothly, and no longer to allow different moments to be artificially sewn together.

³⁹ Paulson, *Vol. 1, op. cit.*, p. 265.

It goes without saying that such procedures perfectly suited Hogarth's posture, as they openly sanctioned a left-to-right reading or backwards, and therefore a historical approach to art. As far as history is concerned, we should note that Hogarth had been defined as the "Shakespeare of painting" by contemporary critics such as Joseph Mitchell. They mostly followed in the steps of Jonathan Richardson, who had stated that:

The great Business of Painting I have often said, and would fain inculcate, is to relate a History, or a Fable, as the best Historians, or Poets have done; to make a Portrait so as to do Justice at least, and Sometimes not without a little Complaisance; and that to the Mind, as well as to the Face, and Person; To represent Nature, or rather the Best of Nature; and where it can be done, to Raise and Improve it; to give all the Grace and Dignity the Subject has, all that a well instructed Eye can discover in it, or which such a Judgment can find 'tis Capable of in its most Advantagious Moments. Neatness, and high Finishing; a Light, Bold Pencil; Gay, and Vivid Colours, Warm, and Sombrous; Force, and Tenderness, All these are Excellencies (...); But they are Beauties of an Inferiour Kind (...); These properties are in Painting, as Language, Rhime, and Numbers are in Poetry; and as he that stops at These as at what Constitutes the Goodness of a Poem is a Bad Critick, He is an Ill Connoisseur who has the same Consideration for these Inferiour Excellencies in a Picture.⁴⁰
(Emphases mine)

Furthermore, in the context of the Raphael Cartoons, Richardson goes as far as requiring of the audience to find words that can apply to the Disciples' facial expressions. Through his reiterated comparison between the painter and the historian/poet, Richardson claims for the prominent function of storytelling: visual arts have to overcome their purely representational nature, in order to serve an urgent narrative purpose. In so doing, he simply reinforced Shaftesbury's point "that in a real history-painter, the same knowledge, the same study, and views, are

⁴⁰ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (second edition), London: A. Bettersworth, 1725, pp. 5-6.

required, as in a real poet.”⁴¹ Just like the motto *ut pictura poësis*, this alignment of painters and historians is deeply rooted in the Western tradition, and can be traced back to the Italian architect Leon Battista Alberti who, in quite a similar way, argued that the cultural background of a painter need include mathematics, history, and poetry, besides assuming that history painting is at the top of the hierarchical ladder of artistic achievements. This outstanding role is not only due to its intrinsic complexity, but to its constant inclination to capture the most heroic moments of human existence: “And I may well stand looking at a picture (...) with no less delight to my mind than if I was reading a good history; for both are painters, one painting with words and the other with the brush.”⁴² Discussing Alberti’s position on architecture, basically intended as a means to satisfy human needs and desires, Anthony Blunt adds that:

His attitude towards painting is the same. For him history painting, i.e. subject painting of any kind, as opposed to that of single figures, is the noblest kind of painting, partly because it is the most difficult genre and one which demands proficiency in all the others, but also because it gives a picture of the activities of man, like a written history. (...) A history painting affects the spectator deeply because the emotions which he sees represented in it will be stirred in him; he will laugh, cry, or shiver according as those in the painting show joy, sorrow or fear. For this reason Alberti attributes great importance to the ability of the painter to explain an action and to render the emotions by means of gesture and by the expression of the face.⁴³

⁴¹ Benjamin Rand ed., *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, New York: CUP, 2014, p. 59. Further explaining his assertion, Shaftesbury adds that “Never can the poet (whilst he justly holds that name) become a relator, or historian at large. He is allowed only to describe a single action; not the actions of a single man, or people. The painter is a historian at the same rate, but still more narrowly confined, as in fact appears; since it would certainly prove a more ridiculous attempt to comprehend two or three distinct actions or parts of history in one picture, than to comprehend ten times the number in one and the same poem.”

⁴² See *On the Art of Building*, bk. vii, ch. 10.

⁴³ Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*, Oxford: OUP, 1962, pp. 11-12.

Putting this reflection into context, we can see how the inscription Hogarth uses for Plate 1 in his first best-known series reads “A Harlot’s Progress,” which means that the very title acquires an emblematic value. The specific choice excludes any other and “this tells us that it is the Progress of a Harlot, not of a Pilgrim or of Wit or Poesie (...); indeed, not of a whore or a prostitute but a harlot. There is a slight mock-heroic quality here at the outset in the use of this biblical word.”⁴⁴ Through his well-contrived and cinematographic use of space, Hogarth carefully picks up the details to leave in and take out of the framing, thus turning the position of objects and characters into a significant feature itself. Starting from the left, we come across the first piece of information “York” and, right under, the cut off word “gon,” both of them on the side of a stagecoach covering the distance from Scotland to London, that has just brought the girl down from the town in the North of England. Not only do her clothes introduce viewers to her low origins, but her hometown and travel route concur to confirm the impression made by her shabby appearance. This is not all: if York adds a useful detail to ‘read’ her story, “gon” reveals to be a quite ambiguous element. First of all, it suggests a slang form for ‘going to,’ so that London might not be strictly considered as her real destination, but only the first stage of a much longer ‘progress’ (even after her death) through the indelible deceit to which she is about to fall prey. Second, it can be connected with the spectrum of meaning that the word ‘gone’ carries with it: therefore, she is to be seen at once as absent, missing, dead, and even pregnant (in its slang usage), the latter being perhaps an anticipation Hogarth may have placed in the Plate 1 to announce the sad consequences of her profession.

The shadow cast over her by the words on the side of the conveyance, is darkened by the initials “MH” on her trunk. It is not until the third plate that the girl’s identity as “Hackabout” is revealed, a surname that is particularly vivid in the public’s memory for its notorious precedents Kate and Francis Hackabout, two underworld figures of those days. In order to explain the punning function of this second name, we can rely on the *Dictionary of Cant* (1699) that reads: “*Hacks* or

⁴⁴ Paulson, *Vol. 1, op. cit.*, p. 261. For the brief analysis of *The Harlot’s Progress* in my discussion, I must acknowledge a huge indebtedness to Paulson’s insightful and invaluable argument.

Hackneys, hirelings. *Hackney-whores*, Common Prostitutes. *Hackney-Horses*, to be let to any body.”⁴⁵ Besides stressing the negative connotations in the girl’s surname, this definition can be extended by analogy to many other fields; it strongly recalls, for instance, the degraded condition of such professions as writing, increasingly practiced by hack writers who just needed to get a living. If we stretch the parallel further, such claims and words of disdain, scattered invariably throughout Fielding’s macrotext, have a more long-lasting impact: in this light, it seems like he has to choose between preserving the integrity of his literary endeavours and selling his ‘body of works’ to the best editor, only with the aim to please the largest audience possible.

Every character in the composition is animated through gestures and facial expressions, each of them exposing hidden intentions and satirising the confusion of roles, as is the case of the bishop who is depicted as a mere place-hunter. Hogarth had at his own disposal a long and well-established repertoire of faces and poses; moreover, he could reshape stereotypes related to some supposed resemblances between human beings and animals:

The peculiar feature of the young woman’s face is that it is in profile in this plate and in no other; our eye connects it with the shape that resembles it, the pointed profile of the goose hanging out of a basket. The same parallel appears in the second plate where the monkey’s face, designating surprise or terror, resembles the face of the harlot’s keeper, who is responding to the tipping of the tea table (to divert his attention from the departure of her interloping young lover). The animal serves as an indication of the stereotypical human response. But the parallel profiles of the girl and the goose also lead the spectator to verbalise “silly goose” (simpleton) or “green goose” or “Winchester Goose,” contemporary slang for whore. The first is a middle-class term of sad affection (“foolish girl”), the second underworld argot, gross and precise. More generally, the relationship is verbalised as something like “her goose is cooked,” referring to the consequences of her folly. In its location at the lower right corner, this small detail becomes an emblem informing the whole scene. It

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

establishes the doubleness of our reaction to the Harlot – as both whore and poor silly goose – on which the series depends.⁴⁶

Along with Hogarth's obsessive use of monkeys as emblems of imitation or stereotyped reactions, other interesting nuances emerge that are related to the vast semantic field of the word goose. In the idiom 'green goose,' it both draws upon the commonplace association of the animal with foolishness and, perhaps in a more subtle way, it appears to point to the characteristic jealousy that a shallow and good-looking girl may risk to arouse. As a matter of fact, when the *Harlot's Progress* was published, at least part of the audience was surely pretty familiar with the Shakespearean 'chromatic description' of this violent feeling, through Iago's creepy words:

Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger,
But, oh, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts— suspects, yet soundly loves!⁴⁷

When we turn to the implications of 'silly goose,' the list of famous precedents in the Western tradition is perhaps even longer. Though from a quite different point of view with respect to Hogarth's plot, Molière's *The School for Wives* (1662), for instance, had deliberately played on the same imagery of the goose, in the context of matrimonial relationships and cuckoldry. Representative of the overall tone in the play is one of the opening exchanges between Arnolphe, the male protagonist, and his friend Chrysalde:

CHRYSALDE
Yes; but remember, do,
That those you mock may someday mock at you.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴⁷ Norman Sanders ed., *Othello*, Cambridge: CUP, 2003, p. 131.

(...) Since with your jeering tongue you plague the lives
Of men who are unlucky in their wives,
And persecute them like a fiend from Hell,
Take care lest someday you be jeered as well.
If the least whisper about your wife were heard,
They'd mock you from the housetops, mark my word.
What's more –

ARNOLPHE

Don't worry, friend; *I'm not a fool.*
I shan't expose myself to ridicule.
I know the tricks and ruses, shrewd and sly,
Which wives employ, and cheat their husbands by;
I know that women can be deep and clever;
But I've arranged to be secure forever:
So simple is the girl I'm going to wed
That I've no fear of horns upon my head.

CHRYSALDE

Simple! You mean to bind yourself for life –

ARNOLPHE

A man's not simple to take a simple wife.
(...) And I know men who've undergone much pain
Because they married girls with too much brain.
(...) In short, I want an unaccomplished wife,
And there are four things only she must know:
*To say her prayers, love me, spin, and sew.*⁴⁸ (Emphases mine)

Arnolphe is chronically haunted by even the remotest chance of being cuckolded, and the only way out of his concern is to marry a silly girl, Agnès, who is literally pure and chaste, as the etymology of her name demonstrates. Over the centuries,

⁴⁸ Richard Wilbur ed., *The School for Wives and The Learned Ladies*, Orlando: Harcourt, 1991, pp. 15-17.

this name has been frequently associated with the image of the lamb and, as a consequence, with a sort of female version of the Saviour. In the comedy, Molière voices but a distorted meaning of the name, that is, uneducated (derived from “agnoscere”, that stands for “to lack knowledge”), in order to make a fool of her. Most strikingly, the translation of Arnolphe’s cynical words into English shows the full juxtaposition of ‘simple’ and ‘goose:’ indeed, the verse “A man’s not simple to take a simple wife” reproduces Molière’s original line that reads “Épouser une sottise est pour n’être point sot”, where “sottise” is the French exact equivalent of goose.

Drawing to an end of his absurd point on marriage, Arnolphe makes a significant list of his ideal wife’s good qualities; deprived of all freedom to express her own personality, Agnès is forced into a settled way of life made up of such reassuring activities as praying, devoting to love, and other ‘wifely’ occupations. Such course of actions eventually comes down to the young girl literally spinning a horned nightcap, that is both dramatic evidence of her adultery and the outspoken claim for emancipation, which she has been denied throughout the play. Her life, temporarily turned into “four things,” is supposed to wipe out all traces of uncontrolled physical desire and hide any sign of passion, just like the Harlot who obviously gets her living by the exploitation of her own body, though she is never “associated with lust and being in heat, but rather with being exploited, the result of her aping the great. There is no indication that she lusts after the young man leaving her room (...), only that having a young lover is another part of being a fine lady in London for this carefree young woman.”⁴⁹

In the above-cited comment, we can detect one of the basic features of poor Molly Hackabout: she constantly apes the great. And to stress this aspect, in the second plate Hogarth returns to use the monkey as the most effective and immediate emblem of imitation, aping the pimp’s countenance and the Harlot’s dress. In an almost Hogarthian version of Arnolphe’s anxiety about cuckoldry, this scene literalises the girl’s betrayal. As Paulson puts it:

⁴⁹ Paulson, *Vol. I, op. cit.*, p. 262.

we also verbalise the visual pun of the sword and cane carried by the young lover who sneaks out behind the keeper, by an optical illusion seeming to be “stabbing (him) in the back” – a reading that is reinforced on the one hand by the parallel stabbing in the back that takes place in the Old Master painting of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant above the group on the wall, and on the other by the further optical pun of the wallpaper pattern behind the keeper’s head, whose shifting figure and ground reveal antlers and verbalise as: he is making a cuckold of him.⁵⁰

At this point of his narration, Hogarth seems to administer his authorial justice in that the metaphorical fall of the girl is paralleled by the keeper falling victim to her ‘adultery.’ As we have seen so far, the punning function of the images throughout the series is prominent, and incessantly playing on the ambiguities of the girl’s innocence and forwardness all at once. Her loss of virginity is not explicitly referred to and, mirroring the common imagery of the time, Hogarth finds a well-known correlative:

The verbal dimension is not, of course, absent, for the broken china recalls the “frail china jar” that stands for Belinda’s loss of innocence in *The Rape of the Lock*, carrying memories of cracked crystal, the notorious china scene in *The Country Wife* where it is equated with the sexual act, and John Crowne’s lines “Women like Cheney (china) shou’d be kept with care, / One flaw debases her to common ware.” Fielding’s contemporary song in *The Grub Street Opera* (Air XIX) opined:

A woman’s ware like china,
Once flawed is good for nought;
When whole, though worth a guinea,
When broke’s not worth a groat.⁵¹

Wycherley, Pope, Crowne, and Fielding set a curious precedent for such comparison between virginity and china. Interestingly enough, though, a complete change in meaning takes place as we move from Fielding’s song in *The Grub Street Opera* to Hogarth’s plot. If in the former case, the breaking of the china is

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

the false step that brings the woman to be a “broke” young wretch, in the Harlot’s world it prevents her from being poor and, what is more, allows her to pass an illusory upward mobility off as successful social climbing.

This example shows how both in literature and in painting, just like in real life after all, a single action can lead to a certain consequence of decisive importance to the rest of the story. At other times, instead, a whole series of actions takes place in a single scene and, far from contributing to the plot, becomes an independent digression. It is sometimes the case of the *Harlot’s Progress*, or of such episodes as the famous fight in *Tom Jones* involving Molly Seagrim, where “As a vast herd of cows in a rich farmer’s yard (...) roar and bellow; so roared forth the Somersetshire mob an hallaloo, made up of almost as many squalls, screams, and other different sounds as there were persons, or indeed passions among them (...).” (*TJ*, p. 141) Here the high number of characters, the almost unperceivable order of movements, objects, and even sounds crowding the narration, account for its ekphrastic nature.⁵² Through this device, writing skills merge with pictorial representations, giving occasion to a diachronic movement and, most importantly, a synchronic one, “based not on action-consequence but on comparison-contrast.”⁵³

As far as their lives are concerned, Molly Hackabout and Molly Seagrim bear a powerful resemblance: two low-born girls come across benefactors, but while Hogarth’s harlot is destined to ‘fall’ in the hands of the unscrupulous Mother Needham, Fielding’s country girl is lucky enough to meet Sophia Western, the good-natured co-protagonist of the novel. Their fates can be partially overlapped in that Hackabout literally moves along a vertical line as she travels from York to London, from a peaceful country life to a wretched existence, and Molly Seagrim is initially seen falling prey to the envious “herd” right outside the church, then to Mr Square’s hypocritical lust and to an unwanted pregnancy.

⁵² The chapter containing this episode is entitled “A battle sung by the muse in the Homeric style, and which none but the classical reader can taste.” Fielding here explicitly states that his ekphrastic narration harks back to the Greek culture that gave rise to this writing form, and thus he comes to overlap the literal sense of painting and the concept of painting a scene with words.

⁵³ Paulson, *Vol. 1, op. cit.*, p. 266.

They, by no means, share the final, because Hogarth makes Hackabout more or less aware of the ‘final fall,’ by depicting a gloomy horizon at odds with Seagrim’s future, that never really looks helpless. She implicitly knows that somehow there is going to be a happy ending, in spite of her carefree behaviour, and her condition of ‘fallen woman’ is comically verbalised nowhere but in the fighting scene. These apparently diverging choices signal the fundamental difference between Hogarth and Fielding, who respectively filled up their plots with pessimistic and optimistic scenarios.

Once again, we need notice how aping becomes the actual common denominator. The two Mollies try to improve their own social standing and, for this reason, they have to undergo public and humiliating punishments. The dresses are invariably highlighted as symbols of ridiculous emulation and self-importance. In particular, Hogarth seems to have been concerned with the fleeting nature of such new phenomena as art collecting and connoisseurship, bringing about a reversal of priorities represented in conversation pictures, where the prominence of the sitters makes way to their extravagant status symbols. “Hogarth reveals their implications (...) models for emulation. He is satirising Jonathan Richardson’s influential advice (...) to keep portraits of the great, so that they ‘are excited to imitate the good actions, and persuaded to shun the vices of those whose examples are thus set before them,’”⁵⁴ as Paulson remarks. We might therefore add that heroism, as it used to be considered according to classical standards, is at best reduced to a vague ideal towards which all social classes tend. In this light, pictures and ‘pictorial words’ have the similar function to show the degree of pretension in the main characters, while all the bustle around them, by means of numerous walk-on parts and an exaggerated noise of human experiences, stages the predictable consequences of such miserable lives.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

CHAPTER THREE

BORN TO BE HANGED:

THE FACES OF ILLEGITIMACY IN *TOM JONES*

3.1 Behind the Scenes of Tom's Identity

Making our way through the several episodes narrated in *Tom Jones*, we are most likely to end up wondering what the protagonist's identity amounts to and what his role is in the microcosm of the novel. As already discussed in the first chapter, attempting to give a proper answer, a very large number of critics have come up with disparate hypotheses and often conflicting points of view, yet in some respects the question still lingers. This is not to say that Fielding aims at keeping the secret about Tom's origins, mainly because it would be quite a truism to state that the whole work points to the final discovery of his parents, but then again we never seem to have a clear sense of his family background in spite of the traditional happy ending.

In order to see such vagueness, there is no need to go deep into the analysis of the text, the title being a rather fruitful starting point. We know that the first drafts of the novel were simply referred to as *The Foundling*, and the full heading is a later revision. In fact, the final version titled *The History of Tom Jones; a Foundling*, provides us with much more information and at least three aspects can be underlined for a better understanding of the narrative. Firstly, the word 'history' is here deliberately used as a harbinger of Fielding's main concern about the definition of his new province of writing. It is evident that he feels the necessity to set the bases for the specific method he will adopt throughout the story and, even more importantly, to mark the difference between his effort and a long literary tradition that he openly refuses to espouse. An earlier and effective explanation of his views on this subject is to be found in *Joseph Andrews*, where he argues that:

Notwithstanding the preference which may be vulgarly given to the authority of those romance writers who entitle their books "the History of England, the History of

France, of Spain, &c.," it is most certain that truth is to be found only in the works of those who celebrate the lives of great men, and are commonly called biographers, as the others should indeed be termed topographers, or chorographers; (...)Now with us biographers the case is different; the facts we deliver may be relied on, though we often mistake the age and country wherein they happened: for, though it may be worth the examination of critics, whether the shepherd Chrysostom, who, as Cervantes informs us, died for love of the fair Marcella, who hated him, was ever in Spain, will any one doubt but that such a silly fellow hath really existed?¹

In the opening of the third book, Fielding ventures on these thoughts that somehow follow in the steps of his own celebrated preface. Once more, he puts the matter in terms of a groundbreaking narrative approach that finds a forerunner in Cervantes. If this growing sense of estrangement from the romance is pretty obvious in Fielding's discourse, still there is no clear-cut divide between the two forms as he would have his readers believe. Therefore, for instance, Arthur L. Cooke reflects on the theory of the comic epic poem in prose and argues that we can find many traces of this older genre, most notably the seventeenth-century French romance. That is to say, he is deeply indebted to great authors like Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) or Gautier de Coste de La Calprenède (1609-1663), and is found guilty of not acknowledging their influence "not only because the principles of the heroic romance constituted the most detailed theory of prose fiction prior to his own day, but also because those principles were in many instances strikingly similar to the theories which Fielding himself advanced."²

Beyond this focus on diverging literary attitudes, what can further baffle us is the way in which he employs terms such as 'biographer.' Indeed, in our times, this latter is meant to gather documents and relate a life based on the unquestionable evidence these can provide, while Fielding allows for mistakes and inaccurate information. One problem with such opinion is that it does not appear to meet our scientific requirements, but the even greater difference between his eighteenth-century perspective and our standards lies in the very

¹ Judith Hawley, ed., *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999, pp. 201-202.

² Arthur L. Cooke, "Henry Fielding and the Writers of Heroic Romance." *PMLA*, 62.4 (1947): 984.

object of biographical writing. When he refers to “the lives of great men,” he may be thinking about real-life characters such as Jonathan Wild, the notorious criminal who will play the leading role in his second full-length narrative a year later, or fictional figures, as he does a few lines later when he mentions Chrysostom and Marcella, both of them being merely born of Cervantes’ imagination. As a consequence, biography can invariably be the account of a historical figure and the narration of a fictitious existence, which is quite at odds with our understanding of it.

Fielding then applies the principles he has just exposed to his own novel-writing, in order to define almost visually what he aims to achieve in terms of representation of human nature:

But, to return to the former Class, who are contented to copy Nature, instead of forming Originals from the confused heap of Matter in their own Brains; Is not such a Book as that which records the Achievements of the renowned Don *Quixote*, more worthy the Name of a History than even *Mariana*’s: for whereas the latter is confined to a particular Period of Time, and to a particular Nation; the former is the History of the World in general, at least that Part which is polished by Laws, Arts, and Sciences; and of that from the time it was first polished to this day; nay and forwards, as long as it shall so remain. I shall now proceed to apply these Observations to the Work before us; for indeed I have set them down principally to obviate some Constructions, which the Good-nature of Mankind, who are always forward to see their Friend’s Virtues recorded, may put to particular parts. I question not but several of my Readers will know the Lawyer in the Stage-Coach, the Moment they hear his Voice. It is likewise odds, but the Wit and the Prude meet with some of their Acquaintance, as well as all the rest of my Characters. To prevent therefore any such malicious Applications, I declare here once for all, I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species. Perhaps it will be answered, Are not the Characters then taken from Life? To which I answer in the Affirmative; nay, I believe I might aver, that I have writ little more than I have seen. The Lawyer is not only alive, but hath been so these 4000 Years, and I hope G – will indulge his Life as many yet to come.³

³ Judith Hawley, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

Step by step, in this passage Fielding clearly comes to establish the overarching purpose of his engagement as novelist. The actual gist of the matter is that the trademark of the rising novel, in his views, does not have much to do with precise places and lapses of time, but it is rather committed to depicting “the history of the world in general.” It is a thoughtful claim in more than one respect: on the one hand it prevents the author from scoffing at some particular people who would easily become the objects of widespread mockery, while on the other hand it constantly reminds the readers that every effort is directed towards the correction of human vices and faults on a much larger scale, that is, not at a scapegoat’s expenses.

These points lead us to the second aspect of the title which deserves to be discussed, that is connected with the main ambiguity wrapped up in the protagonist’s name. On the whole, the first name along with the surname Jones point to the highest level of generality in an individual’s identity as far as the British context is concerned, so that he literally turns into ‘every Tom’ and ‘any Tom,’ in line with what Fielding plainly says in the above-mentioned extract. Further evidence of the wide-ranging use of Tom can be found in the common phrase ‘Tom, Dick and Harry,’ preceded by both ‘every’ and ‘any,’ alluding to common people, but also referring to those who are utterly unimportant in society. This is just as much as one needs to form a general idea of Tom Jones, however it is only one of the several ways in which the name is used. It is interesting to note how Fielding incorporates all its possible semantic overtones in his fictional creature. In the first place it often stands for a male animal, especially in the case of ‘tomcat,’ which is known for roaming in search of female cats in heat, thus anticipating and mirroring the various sexual misadventures he repeatedly goes through. Moreover, we must underline that ‘Tommy’ is a common epithet for a soldier in the British Army, and of course this should call our attention to the fact that the imprudent young man tries to join a company of redcoats, almost as an attempt to throw his life away after being turned out of doors by Squire Allworthy. One more phrase is ‘peeping Tom,’ which stands for voyeur and could be here interpreted as a slightly ironic remark for the episode where he discovers the stern philosopher Mr Square in Molly Seagrim’s bedroom. However, this

latter label can also supply a useful reading of the protagonist in esoteric terms, since it points to ‘forbidden sight,’ that is, an elitarian vision. In this sense, his symbolic voyeurism runs parallel to Hogarth’s *Boys Peeping at Nature* (1731), the subscription ticket for *A Harlot’s Progress*. Ronald Paulson thus comments on its hidden meaning:

Enclosed within a society that managed to believe in itself, its mores, and its divinities, Hogarth remained socially a subversive apprentice (...) and in religion a freethinker. (...) Hogarth’s paintings and prints show the strand of critical Deism by the beliefs and iconography of Freemasonry (...). [S]uggestive is the coincidence that both Freemasons and Deists placed great emphasis on the division of what the Masons called Lesser and Greater Mysteries, the Deists called exoteric and esoteric doctrines. They offered a much stronger version of the traditional poetic stance (...) of the “veil of allegory” (...). The idea of a double address, to the great popular audience of the prints and at the same time to a small elite, (...) was plainly overdetermined for Hogarth (...). He had announced this intention with the unveiling of Nature (*Diana multimammia*), itself both a Masonic and Deist image, in *Boys Peeping at Nature* (...).⁴

The last and probably least evident meaning of Tom is to be drawn from its very etymology: it comes from the Greek form of the original Aramaic name *Ta’oma*, that means twin and, therefore, one is encouraged to link this intrinsic idea of brotherhood to the troubled relationship in the novel between Tom and his half-brother Master Blifil.

The third element in the title that raises questions about Fielding’s overall intentions, emerges from the word ‘foundling.’ As a matter of fact, the average reader is led to take for granted this piece of information and to react accordingly to the plot, until the final discovery when one realises to have fallen prey to a deliberate and lasting deception. Making his point on the problem of titles in Fielding’s works, Homer Obed Brown rightly notes that:

⁴ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: High art and low, 1732-1750, Vol. 2*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992, pp. xvii-xviii.

NO ONE SEEMS EVER TO HAVE BEEN literal-minded enough to quibble with the most obviously fictional element of the titles of Henry Fielding's two novels *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* [etc.] and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. Before addressing larger problems of the relationship of fiction to truth (however it is defined), one might note the curious fact that, even within their own respective systems of reference, the titles are superficially fictional or fictitious that is to say, they are erroneous. What the reader learns along with the protagonists at the unraveling of the narrative riddle is, among other things, the answer to a riddle not even suspected. Joseph Andrews's name is not properly Andrews, and Tom's name should not be Jones.⁵

Of course, such a strategy paves the way for Fielding's subtle challenge to his audience and becomes the first device in a long series of wrong clues that, so to say, playfully make one lose sight of evident facts that could help to solve the mystery about Tom's parentage.

All these things considered, another central question arises that is at the basis of the specific reading of *Tom Jones* in this discussion: what are we to make with this young man's identity? From a general perspective, it is needless to underline that much has been said about his progress towards the acquisition of prudence and his final return to Paradise Hall, as master of the whole estate. Nevertheless, a large part of the criticism on this novel has often overlooked or totally dismissed the symbolic meaning attached to his relationship with many characters, and his fate in several situations, that thus remain partly unclear. By so doing, such themes as Tom's illegitimacy and his conflict with the double-dealing Master Blifil are explained away in terms of social conventions of those days or corrupt human nature and, at best, we are offered little more than detailed analyses of Fielding's complex moral system to justify his narrative choices. Taking a step further, we can add that these threads are generally understood to sketch the characters' adventures against the threatening historical background of the 'forty-five,' thus providing a larger and more familiar context, particularly to early readers. Unfortunately, even putting all these pieces together, we do not learn

⁵ Homer Obed Brown, *Institutions of the Novel: From Defoe to Scott*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 82-83.

much more than the novel plainly shows or at least suggests, so we are left to wonder if, for example, the link between Tom and the Young Pretender can shed new and completely different light on the good-hearted foundling, or if the episode in which Sophia Western is mistaken for the Stuart claimant's lover Jenny Cameron, should be taken more seriously than the clumsy words of an inn landlord. And then again, critics have never given a fully convincing answer to the reasons that Fielding may have had to leave Tom in his condition of illegitimacy, even at the close of the novel when every scandal unfolds, all clouds are slowly swept away, thus allowing for a restored order to be established. In an attempt to find the rationale of Fielding's curious handling of his protagonist's social status at the end of the story, Brown comes up with a rather valuable insight:

Since Bridget Allworthy, not Jenny Jones, proves to be Tom's mother, presumably he could take that name when he is restored to Allworthy. (...) [T]he question of the suitability of the hero's name is overshadowed by a number of other thematic recoveries at the end and by what appears to be an even larger sleight of hand on Fielding's part. Everyone – and that presumably includes the reader – is so relieved to discover that Tom will not be hanged, so shocked and then relieved that he has committed and then not committed incest, so gratified that as Allworthy's nephew he can substitute for the repugnant Blifil as Allworthy's heir and Sophia's husband, that not only is the question of the name made trivial, but a more significant problem is forgotten. Everyone is so excited by the discovery of Tom's good birth that they forget it is still a bad birth – that is, illegitimate. He remains a bastard, and there is a question whether as such, by English law, he can inherit anything. (...) That Tom can be thought of as *filius nullius* – son of no one – or *filius populi* – son of the people – would seem to support the now common notion of Tom as a novelized version of the allegorical Everyman. That he is at once son of no one and son of everyone also makes him an appropriate “generic” emblem for Fielding's text.⁶

Surely, Brown's argument voices a reasonable point of view, even though an image of the readers finally heaving a sigh of relief and leaving aside all other

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

matters related to Tom's legal status, does not seem so convincing. Indeed, one can agree with the potential definition of the protagonist as 'son of anyone,' in line with what has already been shown, but we could shift our focus and try to see things in a different way. Traditionally, the problem with the final disclosure of the mystery about his identity is thought to lie in his real father being a certain Mr Summer, and his surname remaining Jones for no apparent reason. In light of this fact, we should underscore that his happy ending as master of Paradise Hall is due to Bridget Allworthy (in spite of Tom's surname recalling Jenny Jones, who is accused of being his mother), and not to the paternal identity. Fielding, as a magistrate daily facing legal questions, cannot be ingenuous enough to pass over such an evident inconsistency, especially in a society in which the male line of inheritance is still an ideological stronghold. As a consequence, we need understand why the legitimacy of Tom's return can be explained in terms of motherhood, and a very specific kind of it too, because Bridget is a widow.

This is the basis for the main argument of this chapter, that aims to demonstrate that Tom is allowed to come into possession of Allworthy's properties since he is essentially a 'widow's son,' which also stands for a freemason. Such seemingly unimportant detail helps to reconcile three different types of illegitimacy that pervade the novel, that is, legal, historical, and esoteric. On the level of kinship, it is quite simple to account for his troubled life in relation to the out-of-wedlock birth, reaching a crisis point when Allworthy sends him away from home. On the level of the historical background, the novel traces an underlying parallel between Tom's adventures and the Stuart Young Pretender's wanderings during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, in order to discuss the same topic with respect to which proper line of descent to choose between the House of Stuart and the House of Hanover for the British crown. These two variations on the theme of illegitimacy are interwoven and held together by a third element, namely, freemasonry. Indeed, in the course of the invasion, and still through the 1750s and 1760s, Charles Edward Stuart is rumoured to be a 'hidden Grand Master,' as Marsha Keith Schuchard points out retracing his relationship with the secret society:

From the time when Andrew Michael Ramsay, a universalist Mason, acted as tutor to the three-year old Charles Edward Stuart in 1724, Jacobite Masons attempted to mold the young prince into an ideal Masonic king – a “crowned democrat,” who would maintain the Scriptural and Renaissance view of the king as vicar of God and embodiment of his people. (...) Charles Edward Stuart was heavily influenced by Masonic mentors, and he hoped to be initiated when he came of age. However, the papal bull against Freemasonry, issued in April 1738, suddenly complicated the developing Jacobite-Masonic strategy. (...) The Pretender was probably taken by surprise by the bull, since he had long tolerated the Roman lodge that included his most important supporters. (...) Disappointed by his father’s passivity, the frustrated Charles Edward listened with increasing sympathy to the calls of the more aggressive Masons, who urged him to take an independent course of action in Jacobite strategy. Despite the papal ban, many Jacobite Masons continued to meet clandestinely, and rumors circulated that the prince defied his father and secretly became Master of the Roman lodge; moreover, he allowed his partisans to use his name to recruit initiates to the special Jacobite high degrees. In 1743 one of these recruits was the Baron Von Hund, a Prussian military officer who was probably working as a liaison between the Jacobites in Paris and Frederick the Great (...). Hund later described his initiation in Paris, in which he was blindfolded and kept in a darkened room most of the time. The ceremony was led by the masked “Knight of the Red Feather,” whom Hund believed to be the Stuart prince. (...) Swedish Freemasons, who believed that Charles Edward became Grand Master of the Templar Masons, may have received the information from contemporary participants in the ’45 (...). After the crushing of the rebellion, Jacobite exiles in France issued a plethora of lodge certificates in the name of the Stuart prince. Moreover, when the prince went into hiding, after his expulsion from France in 1749, he was assisted by a network of sympathetic Masons (...). The prince always believed that he would find a refuge in Sweden, and many contemporary observers believed that he actually travelled to Sweden in 1749-50. (...) [T]he draft passport refers to his title as Knight of the Golden Sun (“*Soleil d’Or, Milete [?] de Bretagne*”), which was the title that Hund claimed was his ritual name in the Templar Order.⁷

⁷ Marsha Keith Schuchard, “The Young Pretender and Jacobite Freemasonry: New Light from Sweden on his Role as ‘Hidden Grand Master.’” *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe, 1750-1850: Selected Papers 1994*, Ronald Caldwell ed., Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1994, pp. 364-369.

On account of the Pretender's masonic membership, Tom can be said to follow a troubled path of initiation as well, if we consider his early years and later travels as a gradual progress from the role of intruder to that of master.

Preliminarily, for what the masonic lore is concerned, we must clarify certain procedures and the usage of some peculiar words pertaining to that context only. Outstanding in our discussion is the concept of *cowan*, which David Stevenson describes in detail in his seminal work on the rise of early modern freemasonry. He writes:

The statutes forbade masons to work with cowans. Who were these cowans? The evidence of scattered references in building accounts and in lodge minutes indicates that they were semi-skilled men who were qualified to undertake some work involving the use of stone. The terms *cowan* and *roughlayer* were used interchangeably in the accounts of Schaw's successors as masters of works, and scattered references elsewhere indicate that they were allowed to work with stone provided they did not use lime mortar, and they may also have been forbidden to cut or carve stone. Incorporations sometimes ignored cowans, but in some cases they licensed cowans to work or even (in Perth) admitted them to membership. Building accounts show cowans and masons working side by side. But the Schaw Statutes and the masonic lodges are positively hostile to cowans. It is not just that they are seen as semi-skilled men who have to be kept in their place, excluded from some types of work to enforce traditional ideas of trade demarcation. Masons are banned from working with cowans at all, and though in practice some lodges made exceptions this was always done reluctantly. (...) [T]o some extent what made a man a *cowan* was not lack of skill, but lack of initiation into the esoteric lore of the Mason Word.⁸

The meaning of the term *cowan*, as we can grasp from Stevenson's words, encompasses both its reference to unskilled workers and uninitiated masons, who have in common the status of unwanted would-be members. Such contempt

⁸ David Stevenson, *The origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century, 1590-1710*, New York: CUP, 1988, pp. 42-43.

towards them is also signalled by the etymology of the term supposedly derived from the Greek *kuón*, meaning dog.⁹ This description itself points, in some measure, to Tom's unlawful and often even detestable presence in Allworthy's house. But the comparison can be pushed further, if we rely on the definition given in Jamieson's renowned dictionary of the Scottish language, that reads thus: "One who does the work of a mason, but has not been regularly bred (...). One who builds dry walls (...). [*K*]ujon, homo imbellis; Fr. *coion*, a base fellow; from Su. G. *kufw-a*, supprimere, insultare."¹⁰ This said, it is clear that the concept of bastard becomes perfectly akin to that of *cowan*, once we literalise the part "not regularly bred." To complete the picture of this category of outsiders, we need to point out what breaking the rules of secrecy in a lodge would entail in Fielding's times. In this case, we can avail ourselves of Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, published in 1730, that became known as one of the first works making lodge rituals available to a larger audience. In the section where he lays down the question-answer exchange of the entered apprentice degree, we read:

Q. Where stands the Junior Enter'd 'Prentice?

A. In the North.

Q. What is his Business?

A. To keep out all Cowans and Eves-droppers.

Q. If a Cowan (or Listner) is caught, how is he to be punished?

⁹ The parallel between dogs and cowans may have been established during the early ages of the Christianity. Back in those days, indeed, the mysteries of the new religion were revealed only to initiates in a context of secrecy, therefore all infidels were labelled as dogs. To confirm this, we can quote some significant passages from the Bible reading: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew VII, 6); "Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh" (Philippians III, 2); "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." (Revelation XXII, 15) All quotations refer to the New International Version of the Bible, and they are taken from: <https://www.biblegateway.com/> (Last access: 24/10/2016).

¹⁰ John Johnston, John Longmuir eds., *Jamieson's Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1867, p. 130.

A. To be placed under the Eves of the House (in rainy Weather) till the Water runs in at his Shoulders, and out at his Shoes.¹¹

This passage from the ritual shows the fixed punishment that cowans had to undergo but, at the same time, it reveals the tight link between a common overhanging roof edge and a person who listens at the door to discover someone else's secrets. The act of overhearing in the world of *Tom Jones*, both in a literal way and from a symbolic point of view, turns into a powerful device to light a spark of historical change. And, if it is true that Tom almost never benefits from the unexpected chain of events happening on his way, on the other hand, the hardships he has to face eventually help him learn the golden rule of prudence. While letting him play the part of an outsider, his adventures enact a series of possibilities: in fact, the physical space of the countryside and city sections should be seen as a blank page to be filled with experience, thus transcending their simple real dimension. Fielding carefully contrives it as a ready-made setting with a latent cultural potential to host episodes, digressions, incidents or misunderstandings of whatever sort. Putting the matter in these terms, as George Drake states, “[a] path is not a path because it has been cleared, or because it possesses certain dimensions, but because it can be used to go from one place to another. Structures create spaces, but they create space through their use and cultural meaning (...).”¹²

In keeping with what has been said up to this point, the following analysis of *Tom Jones* will try to account for the triple identity of the young man as bastard, pretender, and *cowan*, in the attempt to explain the meaning of his unstable kinship, his close resemblance to and repulsion for Charles Edward Stuart, and his path mirroring the exclusion of a *cowan* striving to finally become a master, which pieces the previous identitarian aspects together.

3.2 On the Edge of the Threshold: Tom's Intruder Status

¹¹ Samuel Prichard, *Masonry Dissected: Being an Universal and Genuine Description of All its Branches from the Original to the Present Time*, London: Charles Corbett, 1730, pp. 11-12.

¹² George A. Drake, “Historical Space in the ‘History of’: Between Public and Private in *Tom Jones*”, *ELH* 66.3, (1999): 715-716.

In this analysis of *Tom Jones*, we will often have to stick to the chronological development of the novel. Therefore, both this chapter and the fourth one will roughly reproduce its three-part structure made up of so-called ‘country section,’ ‘road section,’ and ‘city section.’ As a premise, it must be pointed out that this choice does not come as a blind acceptance of Fielding’s design for his work, but the reason rather lies in the necessity to discuss Tom’s change through the lenses of his identity, all of which mostly occurs in a straight timeline.

The novel opens in quite a traditional manner, by drawing a picture of Allworthy along with that of his sister Bridget, and then providing the geographical setting where the story initially takes place. He writes:

In that part of the western division of this kingdom, which is commonly called Somersetshire, there lately lived (and perhaps lives still) a gentleman whose name was Allworthy, and who might well be called the favourite of both Nature and Fortune; for both of these seem to have contended which should bless and enrich him most. In this contention, Nature may seem to some to have come off victorious, as she bestowed on him many gifts; while Fortune had only one gift in her power; but in pouring forth this, she was so very profuse, that others perhaps may think this single endowment to have been more than equivalent to all the various blessings which he enjoyed from Nature. From the former of these, he derived an agreeable person, a sound constitution, a solid understanding, and a benevolent heart; by the latter, he was decreed to the inheritance of one of the largest estates in the county. (*TJ*, p. 25)

Some aspects of this passage deserve particular attention. As he starts the narrative proper, Fielding creates a sort of opposition between the actual distance from “that part” and the deictic function of “this kingdom,” that seems to address merely English readers, as he did in the opening of *Joseph Andrews*. Then he puts a remark in brackets, as if we were supposed to believe in Allworthy’s existence, but in the last analysis it is not Fielding’s only aim. Indeed, here he is not struggling to set a realistic mood to sustain throughout the novel: what is at stake is the consistency with his theory that all types of characters show universal personality traits, that remain unaltered over the centuries. On the whole, it entails that it is not Allworthy himself who “perhaps lives still,” but an individual who

belongs to the same human category as he used to. The rest of the description draws from a wealth of standard puffed-up rhetoric, that mimics the challenge between nature and fortune in the creation of such an upright, good man. Moreover, it is clearly out of his own personal interest that, at a certain point, Fielding begins to praise the squire's "benevolent heart," thus winking at Ralph Allen, who is one of the real-life models for Allworthy.

When it comes to the portrait of Miss Bridget, the narrator appears to use the weapon of irony more freely. As a matter of fact, we notice that the squire is presented in a dull and pompous way, strongly reminiscent of the overinflated tone that Fielding condemns later in the novel. On the other hand, he obliquely makes a sort of laughing stock of the woman from the beginning. Her role seems to fit into a male-oriented vision of the household, because her social status of spinster brings her to live with her brother, after the death of his beloved wife. Indeed, within this frame, we are told that:

He now lived, for the most part, retired in the country, with one sister, for whom he had a very tender affection. This lady was now somewhat past the age of 30, an æra, at which, in the opinion of the malicious, the title of old maid may, with no impropriety, be assumed. She was of that species of women, whom you rather commend for good qualities than beauty, and who are generally called by their own sex, very good sort of women – as good a sort of woman, madam, as you would wish to know. Indeed she was so far from regretting want of beauty, that she never mention'd that perfection (if it can be called one) without contempt; and would often thank God she was not as handsome as Miss such a one, whom perhaps beauty had led into errors, which she might have otherwise avoided. Miss Bridget Allworthy (for that was the name of this lady) very rightly conceived the charms of person in a woman to be no better than snares for herself, as well as for others, and yet 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 which were ever laid for her whole sex. (*TJ*, p. 26)

Bridget's figure is not really defined by commendable personal qualities: she is neither charming nor even a young woman anymore. No doubt, being past the so-called 'age of discretion,' she can boast a certain degree of prudence, but in fact

such virtue acquires a negative overtone in her case, since she turns it into hypocrisy. Beauty is cast in a bad light only as a response to her own plain features. In this passage, as far as we can sum up his strategy, Fielding stages a kind of conversation between an average “madam” who is thought to be fond of gossiping and talking behind other women’s backs, and Bridget who prides herself on downplaying the advantage of outward appearance, “if it can be called one” at all. To prevent the lady from becoming a fleeting image in the readers’ minds, some chapters later Fielding reveals her ‘true’ identity, to be found in a plate from Hogarth’s famous series of paintings (1736) and engravings (1738) titled *The Four Times of Day*. Indeed, he goes back to her physical aspect as she is said to be quickly falling in love with Captain Blifil:

The lady, no more than her lover, was remarkable for beauty. I would attempt to draw her picture but that is done already by a more able master, Mr Hogarth himself, to whom she sat many years ago, and hath been lately exhibited by that gentleman in his print of a Winter’s Morning, of which she was no improper emblem, and may be seen walking (for walk she doth in the print) to Covent-Garden church, with a starved foot-boy behind carrying her prayer-book. (*TJ*, p. 51)

This extract is of great importance to the symbolic meaning of the novel as a whole. In passing, we should note that Fielding here enacts that typical tension between word and image that runs through his artistic relationship with Hogarth, even recalling the ekphrastic tradition, as he writes down a short description of the moment captured in the engraving. What is more, not only is the narrator dropping a hint that Bridget is literally ‘cold’ by deeming her perfect for the depiction of a winter morning, but by so doing he slightly exposes her motherhood, which we are allowed to fully understand only after the veil of her mystery is lifted in the end. With regard to this issue, Peter B. Murray states that:

The name of Tom’s father is Summer, and we find at the level of metaphors and other imagery that Tom’s mother is associated with winter (...). Mrs. Bridget, Mr. Allworthy’s sister and the mother of Tom, is described as having a voice as “sweet as the evening breeze of Boreas in the pleasant month of November,” (*TJ*, p. 42, *my*

addition) (...). Illegitimate Tom (...) is thus a miracle in nature (...) [,] he is the natural son of the unnatural mating of Summer and winter. Basic to the theme of the novel and to the interpretation of these nature symbols is the fact that Tom is also, like Mr. Allworthy, what *Fielding* regards as a miracle in nature, a man of natural goodness of heart.¹³

Therefore, from this point of view, Tom can be defined as a bloom that inappropriately ‘springs’ out of summer and winter, which partly helps to explain his inner illegitimacy at all levels. One more interesting element can be mentioned, namely, the striking opposition between the “evening breeze of Boreas” that represents the lady’s tone of voice, and the narrator later asking “the heathen ruler of the winds” (*TJ*, p. 121) to metaphorically chain it down in order to let Sophia Western enter the novel. In addition, these are the only occurrences of the word and, to a certain extent, such choice becomes a way to signal that the two women are worlds apart, because “Fielding contrasts Sophia as Zephyrus or ‘western,’ with Boreas and ‘bitter-biting Eurus,’”¹⁴ the East and the West.

On the whole, we must underline how the above-mentioned remark about Bridget’s appearance is only one instance of the resemblances that Fielding makes explicit between some characters in *Tom Jones* and certain figures crowding Hogarth’s series. To fully appreciate the meaning of these intertextual references, we will have to analyse the denotative level and the symbolic role that such characters play and, as a consequence, see how Fielding handles them for his own narrative purposes.

Following the somehow sketchy portrait of Bridget, the story comes to the first turning point, that is, the discovery of the little baby on Allworthy’s bed. The narrator tells us that:

Mr Allworthy had been absent a full quarter of a year in London, on some very particular business, tho’ I know not what it was; but judge of its importance, by its having detained him so long from home, whence he had not been absent a month at a

¹³ Peter B. Murray, “Summer, Winter, Spring and Autumn in *Tom Jones*”, *Modern Language Notes* 76.4 (1961): 324-325.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

time during the space of many years. He came to his house very late in the evening, and after a short supper with his sister, retired much fatigued to his chamber. Here, having spent some minutes on his knees, a custom which he never broke through on any account, he was preparing to step into bed, when, upon opening the cloaths, to his great surprise, he beheld an infant, wrapt up in some coarse linnen, in a sweet and profound sleep, between his sheets. (*TJ*, p. 27)

Apart from the dramatic impact of the scene, especially due to Allworthy's astonishment, it is through its historical connotation that we can find an effective key to reading the whole episode, thus laying the groundwork for the analysis of later developments.

First of all, we must keep in mind the background against which Fielding started writing *Tom Jones*: the political order of a whole country haunted by the threat of Charles Edward Stuart's recent landing on the north-western shore of Scotland, and the war-like army of Highlanders supporting his claim for legitimacy over the British throne. In terms of propaganda, Fielding never makes mystery of his staunch Whig leanings, or at least what he passes off as such, that bring him to take sides openly, both before and after the publication of his masterpiece in 1749. The roots of the mid-century context are to be traced back to the 1680s when James II is deprived of his crown because of the overt manner in which he professes and fosters the image of the Roman Catholic Church, and insists on absolute power. The Protestant William of Orange and Mary Stuart taking over his role after the Glorious Revolution, his court is forced to go into exile, first in France, and then in Italy by 1719 under his son James Edward. The last straw, so to say, that causes the king to be overthrown is the slanderous rumour that the Whigs spread in 1688, which has his newborn son James Edward an illegitimate child, smuggled into his second wife Mary of Modena's chamber in a warming pan, thus replacing their stillborn heir.¹⁵

¹⁵ The rumour was revived decades later in Bishop Gilbert Burnet's *History of His own Time* (published in 1724 and reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in January 1746). He wrote: "I must now look back to England, where the Queen's delivery was the subject of all men's discourse. (...) [I]t went current, that the Queen believed herself to be with child (...). It was soon observed, that all things about her person were managed with a mysterious secrecy, into which none were

Therefore, in the light of these historical tensions, it is interesting to see how Fielding says that Allworthy “had three children, all of whom died in their infancy” (*TJ*, p. 25), and then to come across the striking description of the discovery. The scene paves the way for the extended parallel that Fielding will establish throughout the plot, between Tom’s life and the Stuart family. With reference to this very specific historical influence over Fielding’s novel, John Allen Stevenson justly writes:

admitted but a few Papists. (...) The thing upon this began to be suspected: And some libels were writ, treating the whole as an imposture. (...) The curtains of the bed were drawn close, and none came within them, but the mid wife, and an under dresser. The Queen lay all the while a bed: And, in order to the warming one side of it, a warming pan was brought. But it was not opened, that it might be seen that there was fire and nothing else in it: So here was matter for suspicion, with which all people were filled. (...) No cries were heard from the child: Nor was it shewed to those in the room. It was pretended, more air was necessary. The under dresser went out with the child, or somewhat else, in her arms to a dressing room, to which there was a door near the Queen's bed: But there was another entry to it from other apartments. (...) [I]t was not known whether the child was alive or dead (...) [,] no body was called to lay their hands on the Queen's belly, in order to a full satisfaction. (...) That night one Hemings, a very worthy man, an Apothecary by his trade, who lived in St. Martin's Lane, the very next door to a family of an eminent Papist: (Brown, brother to the Viscount Montacute, lived there:) The wall between his parlour and theirs being so thin, that he could easily hear any thing that was said with a louder voice, he (Hemings) was reading in his parlour late at night, when he heard one coming into the neighbouring parlour, and say with 1688 a doleful voice, the Prince of Wales is dead (...). [T]he Queen had ordered, that no person whatsoever should be suffered to come in to him. This gave credit to Heming's story, and looked as if all was ordered to be kept shut up close, till another child was found. One, that saw the child two days after, said to me, that he looked strong, and not like a child so newly born. (...) So healthy a child being so little like any of those the Queen had born, it was given out, that he had fits, and could not live. But those who saw him every day observed no such thing. (...) If an imposture had been intended, it could not have been otherwise managed. The pretended excuse that the Queen made, that she owed no satisfaction to those who could suspect her capable of such base forgery, was the only excuse that she could have made, if it had been really what it was commonly said to be. She seemed to be soon recovered, and was so little altered by her labour, either in her looks or voice, that this helped not a little to encrease jealousies. The rejoycings over England upon this birth were very cold and forced. Bonefires were made in some places, and a set of congratulatory addresses went round the Nation. None durst oppose them. But all was formal, and only to make a shew.” Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, London: Thomas Ward, 1724, pp. 748-754.

What we sometimes call the Jacobite century – from the Revolution of 1688 to the death of Charles Edward Stuart in 1788 – would never have occurred had there been no argument about the monarchy and legitimacy. (...) The argument thus came down to one about the nature of legitimacy, and the principles that define or establish it: is it birth? is it religion? is it political belief? Quite obviously questions of legitimacy and inheritance dominate the plot of *Tom Jones*, and those questions, in turn, connect with political issues in the British state. Fielding slyly invites such a comparison at the very outset of the action. (...) The foundling motif, of course, is as much a staple of romance as a wandering knight, but again, Fielding's use of a romance convention has a specific *historical* resonance and a connection to matters that really were extraordinary. Early readers of the novel must have been struck by the parallels between Tom's mysterious appearance and the controversies surrounding the birth of James Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie's father) on June 10, 1688.¹⁶

On the whole, here we find strong evidence for Fielding's twofold debt towards history and literary tradition in *Tom Jones*. As a matter of fact, on the one hand he overtly borrows romance stock material, for instance, in the depiction of a foundling whose features and inner feelings somehow foretell his true parentage. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that it is the most powerful and, in a certain measure, mock-heroic device that Fielding could employ to connect the theme of legitimacy with the very familiar historical events related to the Stuarts. Indeed, the old genre was a well-oiled machine both for private and public narrations; moreover, as Michael McKeon states: "The romance model did not fall into immediate disuse during the seventeenth century; in fact the Stuart monarchy found it quite serviceable in the representation of the royal succession."¹⁷ Perhaps, the various steps in the Stuart line of monarchs particularly lend themselves to this kind of narrative handling, just because they are deeply characterised by many episodes beyond common belief, even at a time when superstition is still

¹⁶ John Allen Stevenson, *The Real History of Tom Jones*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 25.

¹⁷ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 213.

widespread among several social classes. Therefore, romance is used as a means to convey a precise system of thought and, when at a very low ebb because of political interludes such as the Commonwealth or the Glorious Revolution, the Stuarts turn it into a weapon to lay claim to their rightful restoration:

The ideological function of romance narrative became even clearer once the Stuart house entered its mid-century crisis. (...) Imitation of the romance model appears to direct the activity not only of the several historical narratives (...) but even of the historical actors themselves. (...) The romance shape of the story even alludes to events beyond its reach. When nobility of birth is cut loose from its worldly moorings – as in the case of the suppositious foundling or the errant knight – we know that its inborn worth will be recognized in time and finally restored to its rightful seat of authority. (...) [The] descent [of the king] into oblivion foretells the eventual revelation of name, the discovery of parentage that will restore him to the throne of England.¹⁸

At the bare mention of conventional types such as a “foundling” and an “errant knight,” we should be here reminded of Tom’s life, particularly of his unknown parents and his wanderings through the country. Besides, it should not go unnoticed that the closure of the passage can easily be interchangeable with a very brief summarise of Fielding’s novel, thus further showing its plot and the Stuart fate completely overlapping.

On account of this background, we can be here quite confident about the ironic association between Mrs Wilkins, Squire Allworthy’s housekeeper, showing up at the ringing of the bell, and the 1688 Whigs making rather silly conjectures about the royal child’s mysterious birth. By contrast, her master represents impartiality and benevolence towards the foundling: this is, indeed, one of the few moments when he is concretely able to put to good use the great wisdom supposedly derived from his function of justice of the peace. Such immediate affection for the baby on his part, however, does not prevent him from asking Mrs Wilkins to investigate on the guilty mother’s identity, the middle-aged woman’s pent-up taste for revenge being thus enticed, because “it is the nature of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

such persons as Mrs Wilkins, to insult and tyrannize over little people (...) to recompense to themselves their extreme servility and condescension of their superiors.” (*TJ*, p. 34) As a result, in the name of some priggish sense of justice, Fielding comically transforms the know-it-all prude into a ridiculous private eye:

Mrs Deborah (...) prepared to visit those habitations which were supposed to conceal its mother. (...)

So when the approach of Mrs Deborah was proclaimed through the street, all the inhabitants ran trembling into their houses, each matron dreading lest the visit should fall to her lot. She with stately steps proudly advances over the field, aloft she bears her tow’ring head, filled with conceit of her own pre-eminence, and schemes to effect her intended discovery. (*TJ*, p. 34)

To begin with, a clumsy spinster who makes her way through the streets while she “advances” as a moral authority, is clearly one of Fielding’s attempts to scoff at her and, even more importantly, to mock the irrational outcome of her investigation. This is further underlined as, after consulting another woman among her acquaintances, she finally chooses a scapegoat who happens to be “one Jenny Jones, who they both agreed was the likeliest person to have committed this fact.” (*TJ*, p. 35) According to the evidence that contemporary reports and prints provide, a very similar craze seals the little James Edward Stuart’s fate during the first days of his life:

The accounts were various and often comically contradictory, but one assertion dominated: the child presented as Prince of Wales was no legitimate offspring of the king and queen. Rather, he was someone else’s child: the son of a miller, many thought, or of a wet nurse in St. James’s Palace, or of an Irishwoman secretly brought over (...). The most popular argument was the insistence that this interloper had been surreptitiously introduced into the birthroom in a warming pan, and the warming pan (itself an image of a surrogate womb) became the material object that gave the controversy its name: James Edward Stuart was “the warming-pan baby.”¹⁹

¹⁹ John Allen Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 26

Building on these details, it is perhaps not so far-fetched to suppose that Fielding may have had in mind some of the hypotheses on James' birth in his ironic reworking of such 'modern myth.' With respect to this, anticipating some later developments, we can wonder: does Mrs Miller, the landlady hosting Tom in London, and somehow acting like a mother at several times, show that Fielding is looking back to the rumour about James being the "son of a miller?" Does the "Irishwoman secretly brought over" hint at Mrs Fitzpatrick, the Irish lady mistaken for Mrs Waters during this latter's sexual affair with Tom? In particular, the second question leads us to reflect on the protagonist's incest with his supposed mother, a circumstance of which Mrs Fitzpatrick is not at all aware, just like the woman charged with James' motherhood is very likely to be innocent.

Such theories advanced by James II's opposition, mirror the Whig parliamentary wing's great concern for the risk of a Catholic male heir to the throne. That is why, of course, they see the potential of slander: as a consequence, some outstanding figures such as the would-be king William of Orange "exploited it to the full, and Anne (who had rather conveniently been in Bath that day) remained publicly forever dubious that the child was her half brother."²⁰ Once again, we can notice how Fielding draws on historical material and shapes it for his own narrative ends when, introducing the scene of the discovery, he writes that:

Mr Allworthy had been absent a full quarter of a year in London, on some very particular business, tho' I know not what it was; but judge of its importance, by its having detained him so long from home, whence he had not been absent a month at a time during the space of many years. (*TJ*, p. 27)

The narrator pretends to guess the reason for Allworthy's absence, but it is clear that there is actually no information to give and, most of all, nothing useful to the rest of the plot. As far as we can make sense of his words, he merely tries to stress repeatedly that the squire has just come back from a particularly long business, meaning that he must have been literally driven away from the space of the novel

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

where the mystery begins. Once at home, what Allworthy is called to settle is the problem of Tom's permanence in his house as a bastard. And it is not so important if this now seems to reflect only a part of the recent British history, because James Edward is labelled as a pretender in the same way as his son Charles Edward will be some decades later. Therefore, even from this point of view they can be 'smuggled,' since they both come to be considered "as interlopers, illegitimate heirs who have somehow been insinuated (or who would insinuate themselves) into a place where they did not belong, to which they had no legitimate right."²¹ Another question which we have already raised in relation to *Tom Jones*, here comes to the foreground as well, namely, the dilemma of motherly identity belittling the principle of patrilineal succession. This puzzling situation at the turning point of 1688 is confirmed, because "the controversy here is not about paternity, but about maternity. The decisive question in this affair asked whether Mary of Modena gave birth to the child presented to the nation as the Prince of Wales."²² In the case of *Tom Jones* we have an identical concern for the mother's name and, as hinted before, the protagonist finally becomes neither a new Mr Allworthy nor a Mr Summer. The reason for such anomaly must be traced back to Fielding's intentions when constructing the boy's status in the novel: to this end, we need to make some further reflection on the surname he bears and its probable origins.

3.3 Two Hogarthian Models for Tom and Sophia

Obviously, Fielding's aim in naming his characters is often to assign them a moral peculiarity, which is meant to support or contrast with their real behaviour through the story. Nonetheless, there is also a strong probability that, while creating many of his major narrative figures, he:

may have been indebted to the list of subscribers to the 1724 folio edition of Gilbert Burnet's *History of his Own Time*, which he is known to have owned. The list

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

includes: Thomas Jones, H. Partridge, several Westerns, William James, Atkinson, Bennett, Booth, Edwards, Harrison, Millar, Matthews, and Trent.²³

No doubt, such theory will hold true to a certain extent but, in spite of this, we can make a rather different point when it comes down to the genesis of Tom's surname. To preserve his 'kinship' with Jenny means to hold her responsible for the illegitimacy just as much as Bridget is. As she is not Tom's natural mother, the reasons for her involvement in this controversial matter are to be found more convincingly outside the novel, that is, in Hogarth's group portrait *The Jones Family*.

"Ordered in March 1730 but still undelivered on 1 January 1730/31,"²⁴ this painting dates back to the period when Fielding is thought to have made Hogarth's acquaintance, his attention being most probably aroused by the type of work to which the latter was by then devoting himself. This fact itself could be seen as evidence of Fielding's knowledge of the painting, a hypothesis further strengthened by the large amount of cross-references running through their respective works in later years, and thus testifying to the constant interest in each other's projects. For our purpose, it is of primary importance to grasp the several meanings in the apparent contrast among characters from different social classes in this conversation piece. To start with, let us see how they are arranged and how they interact with the background scene going on. In Paulson's accurate description, we read that the painting:

shows in a garden setting a decorous family group consisting of Robert Jones and his elder sister Mary standing to right of center. To the Joneses' left is their widowed mother (...) and her dog standing on its hind legs trying to hold her attention. She is sitting next to a fountain, which may have emblematic import (...) concerning the source of the Jones family or its fortune. On the left side of the scene, separated by the V-shaped prospect Hogarth sometimes employed in his conversations, are

²³ Ian Watt, "The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding." *The Review of English Studies* 25.100 (1949): 335.

²⁴ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: The "modern moral subject", 1697-1732, Vol.1*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992, p. 225.

Jones's two younger siblings, Oliver and Elizabeth. His sister Mary turns toward him and his mother, gesturing as if to include them – ignoring or excluding what intervenes between the two groups.

The striking aspect of the picture lies within the V-shaped prospect: a peasant boy scuffling with a monkey – the monkey's cap apparently at issue (or his dish, since a pentimento suggests something pouring out of it). Further back are plebeian haymakers, and in the far distance a prone couple are making love on a haystack. There is only one way to interpret the prospect of fields being harvested: this is the property that replaces the paintings and furniture of the interior scenes; these are the people, receding into darkness, who by their labor set off – contrast – but also, implicitly, make possible the ordered life of the sitters on the picture plane. It is the boy in this case who introduces another dimension, not the dog (...) which is consoling its mistress. And the boy is clearly *not* a member of the family. Needless to say, this is not a detail found in the work of any other artist of the time, whether in England or on the Continent.²⁵

Two elements in the composition of this work particularly look ahead to *Tom Jones*, that is, the “widowed mother” and what Paulson calls the “striking aspect” in the role of the little boy right in the middle. And, though it is an undeniable fact that the upper-class characters' position marks a social divide between them and the young outcast, there is another reading that allows us to set a more interesting and less obvious precedent for Fielding's novel. In Hogarth's works, the visual impact of monkeys is constantly connected with mockery and imitation of human behaviours: they dress up like silly upstarts or ridiculous shams, mimic their movements and, on the whole, can be said to mirror the vanity or the irrationality of their aspirations. In this case, the monkey is involved in a sort of comic brawl with the child, and seems to undergo punishment while receiving some liquid being spilled from its pointed fool's cap. For such reason, it does become a proper fool: it is ‘aping’ the boy, its human counterpart, thus literally embodying the meaning of its own action. But this is not all, because on account of Hogarth's engagement in freemasonry (well documented at least up to 1735), we can state that the boy's reaction perfectly stages on a smaller scale the ritual punishment for

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

cowans, which has already been discussed. As further evidence of this connotative level, we have to underline that over the course of Hogarth's career, it is not the only reference to this kind of symbolism, since it is clearly alluded to in the engraving *Night* (fourth and last plate of his *The Four Times of Day*), where he scoffs at the corrupt Bow-Street magistrate Thomas De Veil (an ex-master mason of Hogarth's lodge). As a means to debunk him, the drunken mason is here comically seen staggering back home and "standing beneath the eaves of a house, receiving the contents of a chamber pot."²⁶ In order to highlight Fielding's and Hogarth's like-minded attitudes towards this controversial public figure, we can point out that the sudden 'shower' in the scene is probably based on act IV, scene IX of the former's comedy *The Coffee-House Politician (Rape upon Rape): or the Justice Caught in his own Trap* (1730), where De Veil becomes the object of ridicule under the name of Justice Squeezum. Indeed, through the colloquial use of 'small beer' for urine, the character of Sotmore says: "I must give the justice one wish. May Heaven rain small-beer upon thee, and may it corrupt thy body till it is as putrefied as thy mind."²⁷

In light of this underlying meaning, the scene in the conversation piece suggests something more than meets the eye. The boy inflicts punishment on the monkey but, in such context, he himself comes to be a reflection of the animal as he metaphorically and visually tries to 'fit into the picture:' it is both an attempt on his part to become a member of the Jones family and, as a consequence, to turn into a 'widow's son.' Therefore, from this point of view, he correctly comments upon the two identitarian elements that are blended and seemingly at odds in Tom's legal status, because in a strikingly similar way the foundling plays the part of the widow Bridget Allworthy's son only by keeping his former surname Jones. We see how Mary Jones tries to include her brother and mother in the scene, "ignoring or excluding" what is happening in the background, as Paulson points out. This is meant to show how the boy is an intruder at all levels, since he spoils

²⁶ Marie Mulvey-Roberts, "Hogarth on the Square: Framing the Freemasons." *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26 (2003): 259.

²⁷ Thomas F. Lockwood ed., *Henry Fielding: Plays, Volume I: 1728-1731*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, p. 485.

the harmonious family picture in the foreground and finds his own place along with the monkey in the V-shaped prospect, a section that actually sets him off from them. If we literalise his position just as the animal's aping gestures, it comes down to voice the fact that he is 'in the prospect' of becoming a Jones, thus raising the bar on his initiatic expectations. Another point must be made about the perspective lines, both the V-shaped ones we have referred to up to this point, and those in the lower part of the picture in the shape of an upturned V. What is particularly consistent to our argument is the kind of angles they form: in the lower section there is a right angle and in the upper half an acute one. Drawing on the masonic metaphor discussed so far, it is therefore not at all far-fetched to consider them respectively as an inverted square and an inverted compass,²⁸ thus reinforcing the overall symbolic connotation of the work. Though it is true that the square should be pointing upwards and the compass in the opposite direction, this subversion is fully in keeping with the hidden text of the scene. Indeed, the parody of the child's prospective initiation goes even further as he is literally 'on the square,' which means he is a freemason, whose spiritual part is supposed to overcome the flesh, but then again he happens to stand above an upturned one, engaged in a clumsy fight, so it all ends up sounding like a joke. All the same, Hogarth completes this discourse by placing the little boy concretely 'within the compass' of freemasonry, thus hinting at the possibility of a future proper initiation.

There is one more element in the painting upon which we need to dwell, that is, the dog stretching out its front legs to draw Mrs Jones' attention. Dogs, specifically pugs, play an important role in Hogarth's works, most notably in his self-portrait. They often stand for a visible authorial 'signature' and represent a strong symbolic presence:

In the art treatises, Old Masters were characterized by animals – Michelangelo by a dragon, Leonardo by a lion, Titian by an ox – and Hogarth draws on that tradition.

²⁸ In *The Sleeping Congregation* (1736), Hogarth drops a similar hint of irony about the imagery of the upturned masonic triangle, in order to mock the brethren's ideal capacity of increasing their spiritual awareness, too often exposed as a false claim.

The pug, who appeared as a kind of trademark in several of his works prior to the self-portrait is also a satiric mask representing the artist's watchdog function and his moral toughness, reminiscent of Fielding's Captain Hercules Vinegar of *The Champion*. (...) [In his self-portrait of 1745] By juxtaposing his own face and his pug's he suggests the resemblance, punning on his pugnaciousness or doggedness. There are other puns: the "fidelity" of the dog would be identified with Hogarth's own "fidelity of presentation" (...). Dogs also had Masonic associations traced back to the Egyptian dog-headed Anubis who taught Isis the way to find the dismembered body of Osiris; and so the dog was associated with the higher secrets and the higher degrees of Masonry, sometimes appearing among the symbols on Masonic diplomas. Hogarth may have had these associations in mind when he juxtaposed the dog with the hieroglyphic Line of Beauty. A pug had itself been employed as an emblem of secrecy among the Jacobite faction of Freemasons, but if this emblem still carried any currency a self-portrait with a Jacobite pug would have been a rash gesture in the year of the Forty-Five.²⁹

This passage provides the missing link in the parallel analysis of *The Jones Family* and *Tom Jones* we have carried out. If the pug standing on its hind legs calls attention to its close relationship with the widow, and at the same time it can be interpreted as a symbol of Jacobite freemasonry, we can infer a very striking piece of information. Indeed, it implies that as soon as the boy is allowed to be a widow's son, he will be one by espousing the Jacobite cause. In Hogarth's pro-Hanoverian view, it may sound strange, nevertheless it could be explained as another "rash gesture," but in Fielding's case it means to turn tables on his outspoken political engagement. Though seemingly improbable, such a hypothesis in *Tom Jones* still helps us reconcile his improper masonic status at the beginning with the more or less overt associations, that Fielding makes all through the novel between him and the Stuart House, particularly the Young Pretender.

Therefore, as the Jacobite claim goes hand in hand with a certain, more old-fashioned branch of freemasonry, we need here underline how Fielding had already contemptuously satirised the ancient craft, along with what he saw as the

²⁹ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: High art and low, 1732-1750, Vol. 2*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992, pp. 261-262.

esoteric (secret) and exoteric (widespread) doctrines circulating among the supporters of the Stuarts, while he was fully engaged in the writing process of *Tom Jones*. Indeed, in his *The Jacobite's Journal*, starting from the very first issue for 5 December 1747 to that for 9 January 1748, he thus exposes their customary secrecy and overtly laughs at them:

[A]s it seems to require no Apology to appear as a Writer, so neither can I persuade myself it requires any, at this Season, to appear as a Jacobite. (...) In Reality, the Party hath so long chose to lay dormant, and have hitherto disavowed their Principles, from one or more of the following Reasons: First, many have been afraid to reveal their Opinions, not from the Apprehension of Danger to their Persons, or of any Persecution on that Account; (...) but they have suspected that it might be some Objection to them in their Pursuit of Court-Favours (...). 2dly, There are others, and those perhaps not a few, who, tho' they have been very staunch Jacobites in their Hearts, have yet been ashamed of owning themselves so in all Companies (...). 3dly, Much the largest Part of our Body have declined the public Profession of our Principles, because they have really not known what they were. (...) [A]s Jacobitism itself is a Mystery highly above the reach of human Reason, so are the Causes which, at particular Seasons, produce it. (...) I do not pretend, therefore, to assert any thing with Confidence or Certainty on this Point (...). And this Course I shall frequently be obliged to follow in the Progress of the Work I have undertaken; I mean with regard to the Esoteric Doctrines of our Sect, which are perhaps as mysterious as those of Free Masonry itself. As to the Exoteric, (...) they principally consist in one Article, viz. *in Drinking*. [W]e invoke our Deity by the Name of *Ascanius*, *The Wanderer*, *The Adventurer*, *The Chevalier* [Fielding here refers to the Young Pretender] (...). Many of the Appellations of the Ancient Deity, as well as of the modern, contain inexplicable Mystery. Most of those which are capable of Explanation may be equally applied to either. Such are the *Satus iterum*, *Solusque Bimater*; i. e. that had two Mothers; which as clearly allude to the famous Story of the Warming-Pan, as to the no more unaccountable Birth of *Bacchus*.³⁰

³⁰ William B. Coley ed., *The Jacobite's Journal and Related Writings*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, pp. 90-125.

Of course, Fielding here indulges in the satire of both the private and public sphere of the Jacobite movement, further ridiculed by a proper list of ‘mysteries,’ that is meant to remind us of their obscure and sectarian nature. Then, in the last part of the excerpt, he supplies a god-like image once again recalling the controversial birth of the Old Pretender, but even more striking is the extent to which this sort of mythological descendancy applies to the origins and adult life of Tom Jones. Indeed, the fact of being “born of two mothers” and “twice-born” reflects on the one hand the double motherhood oscillating between Bridget and Jenny, while on the other a symbolic rebirth following Tom’s imprisonment in London. Tom’s fate is tightly linked to Dionysus’ (the Latin name for Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry), the latter being given the epithet *dimētōr* that means ‘of two mothers.’ The legend has it that this god was the son of Semele and then, as an adult, he was recreated and released a second time from Zeus’ thigh. Such myth becomes increasingly consistent with Tom’s origins as we look at the etymology of Zeus “from root *dyeu- ‘to gleam, to shine;’ (...) ‘shining,’ (...) as originally sun-god or as lightener,”³¹ because it foreshadows the youth’s real identity, that is finally unearthed in terms of a new ‘shining’ parentage as the son of Mr Summer.

In keeping with the complex narrative texture of *Tom Jones*, the slight reference to Semele has interesting repercussions, besides the denotative event of birth. It is quite important to note that in 1744 this Greek myth had already been the subject of George Frideric Handel’s eponymous oratorio *Semele*, based on a pre-existing opera libretto by William Congreve. Looking back at Handel career, we notice that:

It was twenty five years after composing his first English oratorio and only nine years before his last, in 1743, that he began offering new English works in the British capital every year. In the two years following his final rejection of Italian opera he produced *Semele* and *Hercules*, the nearest he ever came to English opera.³²

³¹ Etymology of Zeus from: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Zeus> (Last access: 31/10/16).

³² Ruth Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995, p. 18.

The former of these two late musical theatricals is a very probable source for Fielding's allusion, much the more so because in his novel he overtly praises the German-born musician's works, with which he is well acquainted, in the same manner as he highly values Congreve along with Vanbrugh, who both "copied nature" (*TJ*, p. 610). Taking a step further, not only can Handel be easily ranked among Fielding's musical preferences, but his character and works take on strongly political meanings, that is, Hanoverian.³³ In *Tom Jones*, so to say, he particularly comes in, to play his part, when the pervading Stuart-Hanover tension is dramatised within the relationship between Sophia and her father Squire Western. The famous description of the young heroine at the beginning of the fourth book, which Fielding deliberately sets apart from his usual narrative style by showing off a self-conscious romance rhetoric, stresses the almost supernatural elegance of her gait as he exclaims: "So charming may she now appear; and you the feather'd choristers of nature, whose sweetest notes not even Handel can excel, tune your melodious throats, to celebrate her appearance." (*TJ*, p. 122)

³³ In spite of Handel's eighteenth-century public image, in more recent years his political leanings have been somehow reassessed and, as a consequence, his staunch support for and engagement in the Hanoverian court called into question. As David Hunter makes clear: "we have seen or been told countless times of George Frideric Handel's attachment to the Hanoverians. To challenge the supposition and claim that the reverse was possible may seem quixotic, if not perverse. Nonetheless, (...) it is possible to show that Handel might have worked for the Stuarts in the event of a restoration. (...) [W]e should not assume that Jacobites were uniformly anti-Handel, even if it is true that Handel was seen from, say, about 1724 as indelibly Hanoverian. (...) [H]is behaviour indicates that he would take advantage of the opportunities that were offered him; he had no qualms about dealing with patrons who were Stuarts, Catholics or of any other political or religious stripe; he was less firmly attached to the Hanoverians than most people have thought. If he considered his allegiance, it was probably in terms of actions that would benefit his pursuit of music. Why, then, should we assume that he would not have offered his services to a restored Stuart regime? Whether Handel's attachment to the Hanoverians and/or his financial situation in, say, 1746 would have dissuaded a restored Stuart regime from issuing an invitation or were strong enough for him to refuse one are speculations more difficult to assess (...). As for the opera, there seems little doubt that, had the Stuarts been restored in the 1710s, Handel's involvement would have continued." David Hunter, "Handel among the Jacobites." *Music & Letters* 82.4 (2001): 543-553.

Translating this statement into political terms, we see how the understanding of Sophia, both as a literary character and as pure virtue, may be implicitly utopian for the Jacobites, but then again she is just as much beyond the Hanoverians' expectations. In this first case, Fielding only hints at an increasingly apparent and even comic ideological clash, that reaches a climactic point when the narrator says:

It was Mr Western's custom every afternoon, as soon as he was drunk, to hear his daughter play on the harpsichord, for he was a great lover of music, and perhaps, had he lived in town, might have passed for a connoisseur; for he always excepted against the finest compositions of Mr Handel. He never relished any music but what was light and airy; and indeed his most favourite tunes, were *Old Sir Simon the King*, *St George he was for England*, *Bobbing Joan*, and some others. His daughter, tho' she was a perfect mistress of music, and would never willingly have played any but Handel's, was so devoted to her father's pleasure, that she learnt all those tunes to oblige him. However, she would now and then endeavour to lead him into her own taste, and when he required the repetition of his ballads, would answer with a 'Nay, dear sir;' and would often beg him to suffer her to play something else. (*TJ*, pp. 133-134)

Fielding is concerned with a humorous depiction of Mr Western that effectively casts bad light on him, and nevertheless it does not entail abstract inner wickedness, but rather a lack of refinement, education or good taste. In other words, echoing the before-mentioned debasing portrait of the average Jacobite, he is only seen as fond of heavy drinking, besides being used to swearing and hunting, as we learn through various episodes in the novel. He could be mistaken for a 'connoisseur,' because he does not enjoy Handel's music, but this is hardly a label for vulgar country squires. Indeed, it is a typical social pose that Fielding and Hogarth scorn or totally dismiss, because of its insistence on dull critical remarks and irrational love for foreign art. In Mr Western's case, instead, the problem lies in that he will not 'lend his ears' to a man called George, born and raised in Germany, and 'changing Old England's tune.' Under this light, the contempt for Handel becomes a striking metaphor of the discontent with the

Hanoverian line of descent, in the first place embodied by the outsider George I, who causes Western to utter these patriotic words. After all, the pride for old landed property or traditional songs is almost the only ideological weapon that he can perfectly handle, one which seemingly marks the divide between what England could still be and what it has actually come down to be.

Of course, Fielding does not choose Mr Western's favourite songs at random to mock his longing for the past, but he pointedly exposes his attempt to bring back some sort of true Englishness rooted in Jacobitism. As a matter of fact, the first title presents several variations including *The Golden Age* and *I'll ne'er be drunk again*, which give quite a clear picture of Mr Western's hopes and vices. The same principle applies to *Bobbing Joan* (or *John*), since it is also known as *Bobbing Joan or Love and Whiskey*: one more mocking reference to drunkenness and, more importantly, to the notorious Earl of Mar's nickname derived from his tendency to shift allegiance as, for instance, when he slyly decides to back the Old Pretender's cause during the first Jacobite rebellion of 1715. Through the implied meanings of political transformism, Fielding depicts a strongly nuanced image of Western from this point of view, as he becomes the official spokesman of the grumbling Tory country party, a faction fighting against the Whigs without pause, but never taking sides with the Jacobites in public.

Furthermore, the squire's blurred views on domestic politics are mirrored by Sophia's constant capacity to find some middle ground. Indeed, as the reverse of her father's tastes, she is said to be a "mistress of music" since she prefers Handel over outdated music, though trying to meet his requests. If, on a narrative level, this behaviour serves to show intellectual autonomy along with innocent filial obedience, on a larger scale it stands for the tension between her duty to accept Blifil's formal courtship and her wish to marry Tom, that is, to respectively do justice to the Hanoverian legal rights or the Stuart claims.

The same kind of clash is even more comically staged through the first conversations between Mr Western and his snobbish sister, who has been entrusted for some time with Sophia's education and, as the narrator tells us, "was a lady of great discretion, and was thoroughly acquainted with the world, having lived in her youth about the court, whence she had retired some years since into

the country.” (*TJ*, p. 124) In the characterisation of these two siblings, Fielding is at pains to stress the shortcomings of both Tories and Whigs, so to render a politically unstable climate. Here the mockery does not come as a result of a proper reversal of socially accepted stereotypes, but it is due to the retention of their literal sense, allowing for connotative irony that “has a subtle, reverberating quality, depending as it does on the reader’s awareness of many ramified impressions arising from the word. For this reason it is a more durable source of laughter.”³⁴ The central theme is love, but emotionally short-sighted as he is, Mr Western cannot notice Sophia’s feelings:

though he was somewhat of a politician, and had been twice a candidate in the country interest at an election, he was a man of no great observation. His sister was a lady of a different turn. She had lived about the Court, and had seen the world. Hence she had acquired all that knowledge which the said world usually communicates; and was a perfect mistress of manners, customs, ceremonies, and fashions; nor did her erudition stop here. She had considerably improved her mind by study; she had not only read all the modern plays, operas, oratorios, poems, and romances; in all which she was a critic; but had gone thro’ Rapin’s *History of England*, Eachard’s *Roman History*, and many French *Memoires pour servir à l’Histoire*; to these she had added most of the political pamphlets and journals, published within the last twenty years. From which she had attained a very competent skill in politics, and could discourse very learnedly on the affairs of Europe. (*TJ*, p. 220)

The meaning of their relationship with Sophia is described by means of their own sight. On the one hand, there is a stern father who is “of no great observation,” while on the other, Mrs Western is an experienced woman who boasts of having “seen the world.” But what they both fail to see is the girl’s present state of mind, an aspect that helps to disclose the deep truth about her double status in the novel. Indeed, she is a heroine whose inner part misleads two very close relatives who are supposed to read her thoughts; at the same time, Fielding reminds us, she is the embodiment of wisdom as her name repeatedly suggests. As a ‘walking

³⁴ Eleanor N. Hutchens, “Prudence in Tom Jones: A Study of Connotative Irony.” *Philological Quarterly* 39 (1960): 498.

virtue,' her appearance is not meant to deceive people at all and, moreover, in spite of the misunderstandings about her identity throughout the novel, Tom is expected to recognise her. He must 'espouse' her desperate cause when she is forced into an engagement with Blifil, because he is the only one who finally comes to see through her.

The passionate tone of the conversation between Mr and Mrs Western increasingly displays education as a mark of Whig leanings, rudeness thus turning into a Jacobite trait. Therefore, we see how the middle-aged lady once again puzzles her brother, as she tells him:

You who are so great a politician can be at no great loss. The judgment which can penetrate into the cabinets of princes, and discover the secret springs which move the great state wheels in all the political machines of Europe, must surely, with very little difficulty find out what passes in the rude uninformed mind of a girl.' 'Sister,' cries the squire, 'I have often warned you not to talk the court gibberish to me. I tell you, I don't understand the lingo; but I can read a journal, or the *London Evening-Post*. Perhaps indeed, there may be now and tan a verse which I can't make much of, because half the letters are left out; yet I know very well what is meant by that, and that our affairs don't go so well as they should do, because of bribery and corruption.' 'I pity your country ignorance from my heart,' cries the lady. 'Do you?' answered Western, 'and I pity your town learning; I had rather be anything than a courtier, and a Presbyterian, and a Hanoverian too, as some people, I believe, are.'
(*TJ*, p. 222)

The potentially serious remark of Mrs Western becomes yet another instance of a contemptible high register in the squire's eyes. Indeed, he cannot understand her words, associated with some kind of secret jargon among Whigs or a foreign language, only because it is the Hanoverians' mother tongue. That is why he pays them with the same coin and speaks with a strong Somersetshire accent throughout the novel, thus putting it down to an opposition between native linguistic legitimacy and ill-digested foreign idioms. His uneasiness with the *status quo* is further underlined in the last reply, where certain trends in the court, the church, and the crown are pieced together as signs of the defeat following

what he considers a cultural invasion from the East. As the squire's surname overtly indicates, this battle is also fought in geographical terms: as Bonnie Prince Charlie raises the Stuart standard on his landing at Glenfinnan (north-western Scotland) in 1745, so does he dream of a restoration of this young man coming from the western shores, so to feel proud again of being literally Western, owner of a great estate in the western county of Somersetshire. As a consequence, this implies the rejection of illegitimate kings travelling westbound from Germany and living in London, eastern England, where "bribery and corruption" mainly occur.

This is only a part of the tension between East and West in *Tom Jones*, which can be actually pushed even further. In so doing, once again it is useful to see Hogarth's oeuvre as a proper means to explain Fielding's intentions, particularly through the early print *The Mystery of Masonry Brought to Light by the Gormogons* (1724). Hogarth takes a chance to satirise the Gormogons, a faction formed by the Duke of Wharton, as a result of the 1723 schism within the established Grand Lodge of London. First of all, for what this 'divorce' is concerned, we should note that it was not only due to diverging views on strictly masonic matters, but it must also be considered as:

a skirmish in the wider struggle for political influence, with the government and its supporters on one side and opposition Whigs, Tories and independents on the other. (...) Wharton's June 1723 exodus from Grand Lodge can be categorised as a key event that cemented the pro-Hanoverian and pro-Whig nature of the Craft under Desaguliers and his colleagues' influence. It is notable that it occurred within a week of Wharton's defence of Francis Atterbury, the Jacobite Bishop of Rochester, against the charge of treason. (...) Wharton had waived his right to name a successor, (...) possibly in the conviction that his friends might move his re-election. But Grand Lodge instead chose narrowly in favour of the young Earl of Dalkeith (...). Wharton honed his anti-Walpole and anti-Hanoverian rhetoric and reputation, continued to defend Atterbury and established later the same year an anti-Walpole journal, *The True Briton*. Uncomfortable with his enforced departure from Grand Lodge, Wharton founded an alternative society in 1724 (...). The first reference to Wharton's Gormogons appeared in the *Daily Post* on 3 September 1724. It was followed by an anti-Masonic article in the *Plain Dealer* on 14 September and a subsequent note on

12 December in the *British Journal* (...). [A]part from Hogarth's print, little more was heard of the Gormogons.³⁵

Apparently, the contemporary course of events shows the extent to which public matters and freemasonry are then intertwined, in spite of politics and religion being explicitly banned from discussion in the lodge. More importantly, it stresses the Whig-oriented membership of the Grand Lodge, thus justly depicting it as a pro-ministerial modern branch of the much older craft, supposedly passed down from the medieval guilds. By way of political allegiances, freemasonry is turned into and exploited as yet another symbol of the ideological clash between the rising house of Hanover and the exiled Stuart court. In this maze of factions, Hogarth responds to Wharton's mockery, and consequently tries to "save the honour of the Grand Lodge by taking revenge on those who were attempting to undermine it by means of caricature (...). [Indeed] the society of the Gormogons would parody masonic processions through London." (Translation mine)³⁶

Hogarth's print represents a masonic procession including a variety of characters, who ironically hint at different versions and stages of the craft. In order to mark the difference between the legitimate nature of the Grand Lodge and the false pretence of the newly risen group within the scene, the Gormogons are "depicted as literally 'aping' the Freemasons. The cavorting monkey in the apron and white gloves represents his playful literalisation of metaphor."³⁷ Here, the presence of the monkey serves the purposes of mocking and pretending that Hogarth usually assigns to it in his works, as we have already seen in *The Jones Family*. The animal turns its back on the protagonists of the parade, while gesturing towards the viewer to make a laughing stock of them all. Therefore, in a certain sense, not only does the print criticise the split caused by Wharton's faction, but it also allows Hogarth to scoff at his own friends, and that is why the

³⁵ Ric Berman, *The Foundations of Modern Freemasonry: The Grand Architects. Political Change and the Scientific Enlightenment, 1714-1740*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012, pp. 140-142.

³⁶ Cécile Révauger, "William Hogarth et la franc-maçonnerie: jeux de lumière." *XVII-XVIII. Bulletin de la société d'études angloaméricaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (1999): 284-286.

³⁷ Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

“*Mystery of Masonry* may be read as an attack on speculative Freemasonry and its manifesto, Anderson’s *Constitutions*, the Georgian equivalent of the operative craft’s Mediaeval Old Charges.”³⁸ Far from making his leanings clear, Hogarth’s double attitude helps to blur the distinction between true and false claims. But what does definitely come to light from the print is the kind of geographical opposition that we have already attached to the two conflicting dynasties, to the irreconcilable personalities of Mr and Mrs Western, and that perfectly applies to the masonic diaspora as well. Indeed, through Verus Commodus’³⁹ words in his letter to *The Plain Dealer* on 14 September 1724, we learn that:

Two unhappy busy Persons, who were *Masons*, [Anderson and Desaguliers], having obtruded their idle Notions [*Book of Constitutions*] among the *Vulgar Chineze*, [sic] of Adam, and Solomon, and Hiram, and I can’t tell who besides, being Crafts-men of their Order, and offering to assert, that Adam was the first Man, which in China, is, it seems, received as a Heterodox Notion, and that the great Chin-Quaw-Ky-Po, the Institutor of the Order of Gormogons, was of later Date, many Centuries, than that Patriarch; and having, besides, deflower’d a venerable OLD Gentlewoman [violated the Operative Charges and Regulations], under the Notion of making her an European HIRAMITE (as they call’d it) they were taken up [...] hang’d Back to Back, on a Gibbet [...] And ever since, it has been an Article among the Gormogons, to exclude the Members of that Society, without they first undergo a solemn Degradation [rite of initiation] [...] Tho’ methinks, the Business of the OLD Gentlewoman [operative Masonry] afford, as our Weekly Politicians say, *Matter of Speculation* [speculative Masonry]; and, at the worst, I hope the intruded Matron went too far in her Evidence, and was rather saluted than violated.⁴⁰

The leader of the Gormogons, Chin-Quaw-Ky-Po, displaces freemasonry from its traditionally accepted cradle in the Western world, only to write a new history of the society beginning in China. The scene functions as a vivid metaphor for the general theme of legally held power overthrown by incoming conquerors and,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁹ A fictitious name used by Aaron Hill to address this letter to his own journal.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.

what is more, it is dramatised in terms of people “From Eastern Climes, transplanted to our coasts,” as the first line of the verses at the bottom of the print reads. These words can be interpreted as the foil to the previous geographical analysis of the Westerns, so as to inevitably foreshadow shaky political views, that call into question Hogarth’s support for the Hanoverians. On the whole, the scene could be merely deemed an amusing attack launched to ridicule an enemy, nevertheless it properly overturns established views about the validity of rival claims at several levels. In her valuable reading of the print, Marie Mulvey-Roberts makes quite a clear point about how the fight for the crown runs parallel to the early decades of modern freemasonry. Thus, she states that:

An analogy can be made with Hogarth’s engraving, the recently invented society of Freemasons and the newly crafted Georgian dynasty. Both speculative Freemasons and the Georgians had disrupted and rewritten tradition for their own ends and fabricated, according to Verus Commodus, ‘a far-fetch’d Antiquity’. In line with this view, it was the new Hanoverian dynasty, who were the pretenders to the throne and not James Stuart, the so-called Old Pretender (...). In his letter, the head of the order, Hang Chi, defends the Gormogons by saying ‘nor dare I render it cheap and contemptible, by admitting every Pretender’. He maintains the oxymoron that he is the ‘true’ pretender. (...) The Gormogons, who represent the Jacobites, are described in the caption as ‘a venerable race’ who, with the old woman, symbolise antiquity and continuity. Here, as in Jacobite writings, the importance of tradition, constitution and law is underscored. The Masonic equivalent of the Old Pretender is Wharton (...).⁴¹

The perspective adopted so far allows us to better fit Western, his sister, and his daughter into the frame of *Tom Jones*, but more elements are needed to complete the picture. Pursuing the same line of thought as that for the origin of Tom’s surname, here we need dwell on the possible model for Sophia’s. The long subscription list for Burnet’s *History of His Own Time* quoted by Ian Watt sets a precedent for the choice of Western, but then again we have to travel off the beaten path and, for instance, investigate Hogarth’s *The Western Family* as a

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

suitable source for Fielding's fictional household, since it may have literally been under his eyes at the end of the 1730s. Indeed, in 1738 Thomas Western of Rivenhall commissions a portrait of his family, featuring his wife, mother, and daughter, besides two servants and a clergyman. At the outset of this brief analysis, we can highlight the irony here inherent in the surname Western, because Rivenhall is actually a small place in Essex, pretty close by the south-eastern coast of England. If this amounts to nothing more than a pure coincidence in the case of Hogarth's client, it is instead a great starting point for Fielding, who can fully exploit the connotations arising from the cardinal points. In so doing, he manages to characterise his rude 'Western squire' through an 'Eastern model,' thus creating a tension between the lifestyle that the man scorns and the traditional routine he strenuously defends.

Hogarth's canvas gives further evidence for the resemblance to Fielding's characters: after the hunt, Thomas Western is back home and is seen entering the room where the rest of his family is about to drink tea. Simultaneously, he stretches his right hand to touch his wife's and his left hand to give his mother a dead bird. This latter turns to a clergyman trying to draw his attention, but in the meantime he is receiving a letter from a servant. Somehow excluded from these actions, the little child grasps the edge of a small table, and another servant is left in the background simply doing his chores. Needless to say that the focus on hunting, the presence of a young daughter, and an elegant harpsichord on the family's right hand side, remarkably connect this portrait with Squire Western's daily life. And the more so because it is intended to convey the dramatic effect of a 'scene in progress,' which reminds us of the true-to-life and comic rendering of Fielding's wealthy man, whose image is often captured in the middle of lively conversations or drunken cheerfulness.

In this type of work, Hogarth does not strive to give much emphasis to the individuals, but what he is at pains to achieve is a sense of movement and ongoing interaction among his sitters because, as Jenny Uglow writes:

When he painted groups, he had to think further, to see how the lines of his composition mirrored the collective psychology and relationships, just as the individual faces showed the nature of each sitter. He was still painting conversation

pieces and had gained in dramatic skill after the *Progresses* and *The Four Times of the Day*. He now grouped his figures more intimately, making the sense of imminent motion, hovering gesture or unheard word more immediate. In these private pictures for the walls of family homes, each touch contained references decipherable only by those involved. In the *Western Family*, what is the clergyman saying to the servant at the door with a letter? Why does the lady of the house reach out to grasp his black robes, while with the other she reaches towards her husband, holding a shot bird? And what is the servant in the background up to?⁴²

As Uglow correctly remarks, we are not part of the scene, therefore the subject of their discourse and the meaning of their gestures remain a family secret. But what can turn out to be of great interest to our analysis is the reference to the shot bird, which immediately flashes us forward to the episode of the partridge that Tom, with the aid of Allworthy's gamekeeper Black George, steals from squire Western's estate, after shooting it dead. The imprudent action is one of the early examples of Tom's good-heartedness, causing him to undergo punishment on behalf of a dear friend in need. Still, even though at first sight it may simply look like a childish mischief, the risky adventure is in fact fraught with several political meanings, in line with the rationale of the novel.

3.4 Keeping Bad Company: Black George, Thwackum, and Square

Within the intricate world of *Tom Jones*, Black George's function is definitely very difficult to explain, not because he properly plays a crucial role in the novel,

⁴² Jenny Uglow, *William Hogarth: A Life and a World*, London: Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 608. Though eventually unimportant to our purpose, it must all the same be noted that there are some discrepancies between Uglow's distribution of characters in *The Western Family*, and the description given by the National Gallery of Ireland, where it is currently located. Indeed, this latter reads: "On his return from a hunting trip, Thomas Western (1714–1766), Squire of Rivenhall in Essex, is shown joining his family for tea while a servant in the background puts away his gun. While his daughter is entranced, Western touches the hand of his wife, Anne Callis (d. 1776), and offers the dead game to his mother, Mary. She is seeking the attention of a visiting clergyman, probably Archdeacon C. Plumtre, to whom a liveried servant is giving a letter." Taken from: [http://onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/Objects\\$00402632/4/](http://onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/Objects$00402632/4/) (Last access: 9/11/16).

but most of all in terms of identity and relationships with the other characters. Indeed, apart from some scenes in the first six books, including the incident of the partridge and the later theft of Tom's five hundred pounds, he only makes a second appearance towards the end of the story, at squire Western's service. As is often the case in Fielding's works, names convey ironic and even covert meanings: but here which one of his names really has some weight? Depending on the person addressing him, we come across different versions, that is, George, Black George, and George Seagrim, besides those times when he is just defined by his own occupation. Seemingly incoherent, all these concur to take an allusive but also clear picture of the man. To start with, we can stress the fact that George is not a common name at all in England in those years, since there is evidence that the "name was rare until the advent of the House of Hanover in 1714."⁴³ Therefore, the question must shift to what peculiar reasons Fielding may have to call him this way, and why he chooses to emphasise the first name, while the rest of lower-class people are identified by their last name. And the more so because in the novel he only uses it to refer to King George II and George Gresham, the Man of the Hill's wicked classmate in Oxford, two figures completely at odds with the gamekeeper's social standing and refinement. In spite of his ambiguous nature, Fielding finally throws light on the origin of the gamekeeper's nickname that "appears to have arisen (...) from the community of which he is part."⁴⁴ At this point, the narrator informs us that:

Partridge came capering into the room, as was his custom when he brought, or fancied he brought, any good tidings. (...) 'I have seen, sir,' says he, 'Black George, the gamekeeper, who is one of the servants whom the squire hath brought with him to town. I knew him presently, though I have not seen him these several years; but you know, sir, he is a very remarkable man, or to use a purer phrase, he hath a most remarkable beard, the largest and blackest I ever saw. (*TJ*, p. 687)

⁴³ Elizabeth Gidley Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Names*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950, p. 122.

⁴⁴ John Allen Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

As a barber, Partridge is predictably struck by George's look, and defines him 'remarkable' twice. His old acquaintance seems to be literally 're-marked' through his unmistakable beard, as he chances upon him again and learns that he is now one of Western's servants. Indeed, shocked by this unexpected meeting, Partridge cannot but repeat "“why sir, he is one of the servants of the family, and very well drest I promise you he is; if it was not for his black beard you would hardly know him.”" (*TJ*, p. 689) The latter statement is not to be easily dismissed as a secondary aspect and raises another question, since it is well known that during the eighteenth century, long beards were absolutely out of fashion and, as a matter of fact, "“as near as historians can recover it, (...) almost without exception (sailors and Jews were often bearded) every man in the kingdom shaved.”"⁴⁵ In order to come up with a convincing hypothesis about George's beard, we just need to consider the exceptions, meaning precisely a reference to the world of sailors. Hardly mentioned at all, the gamekeeper's surname, we are told, is Seagrim and it is supposed to have biographical resonances for the author. Indeed, making a rather comprehensive list of people who came into contact with Fielding, Martin Battestin includes:

TAYLOR, Giles (d. 1752), attorney of Lyons Inn, London. During 1740–42 Taylor – “an eminent Attorney, of great Business, and fair Character,” according to the notice of his death in *The General Advertiser* (27 November 1752) – represented HF on a number of occasions, either defending him against creditors such as John Kempson, a druggist, and Elizabeth Blunt, a fashionable stabler, or in another instance acting in HF's behalf to recover a debt of £199 owed him by one **Randolph Seagrim** (emphasis mine). In Hilary Term 1741 it was Taylor who successfully brought an action on behalf of Edmund Fielding against the eminent surgeon James Wilkie, whom a jury of gentlemen judged guilty of negligence and incompetence in the blinding of HF's half-brother John Fielding. Taylor was a subscriber to HF's *Miscellanies* (1743).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ Martin C. Battestin, *A Henry Fielding Companion*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000, pp. 141-142.

In the light of a possible allusion to Randolph Seagrim in *Tom Jones*, the debt he owes Fielding brings to mind the episode of George's theft. And this is not all, because the association between the fictional Seagrim and the theme of stolen money in Fielding's life seems to extend even further: it particularly emerges through a comic hint dropped during the famous battle in the churchyard that involves the poor Molly, George's daughter. Once again Battestin provides useful information as he mentions:

BENNET, Thomas. In February 1734/35 at Shaftesbury, Dorset, HF, it was alleged, assaulted a person of this name who brought an action against him in the King's Bench and proceeded to injure him with his creditors. In January 1735/36 HF in turn employed the **Salisbury** attorney **Robert Stillingfleet** to bring an action for slander against Bennet, who was ordered to pay £500 in damages. This, however, would be the precise sum Bennet then demanded of HF in Easter Term of 1736/37, charging him with a second assault, again at Shaftesbury. No record of a judgment in the case has come to light. It may not be accidental, however, that a "Tom Bennet" is among the country clowns felled by Molly Seagrim in the battle in the churchyard in *Tom Jones* (1749, IV. viii).⁴⁷

Enticing as they may be, Battestin's conjectures are nevertheless part of a larger pattern of references. That is why 'Seagrim' should be more profitably seen as one of the many behavioural labels in Fielding's work. By focusing on the literal meaning of the surname, we appear to misrepresent George's calling in life: after all, he is a country labourer and not a seaman. But to avoid this confusion, prior to searching for a proper sense of Seagrim, he need be framed within the context of the first crime he commits, that is, poaching on squire Western's property. In our eyes, George's action could be deemed a minor offence but, particularly from the second decade of the eighteenth century onwards, it is ranked among the major concerns of the law:

[P]roperty was not, in 1700, trenched around on every side by capital statutes. It was still not a matter of course that the legislature should, in every session, attach the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

penalty of death to new descriptions of offence. Premonitions of this development can be noted in the late seventeenth century. But perhaps no event did more to habituate men's minds to this recipe of state than the passage into law of 9 George I c. 22, which came to known as 'The Waltham Black Act' or simply as 'The Black Act'. This was enacted in the four weeks of May 1723. (...) At no stage in its passage does there appear to have been debate or serious division; a House (...) could find unanimity in creating at a blow some fifty new capital offences. The first category of offenders within the Act is of persons 'armed with swords, fire-arms, or other offensive weapons, and having his or their faces blacked', who shall appear in any forest, chase, park or enclosed ground 'wherein any deer have been or shall be usually kept' (...). But the Act had scarcely been passed before it was enlarged by successive judgements, so that arming and/or Blacking might constitute in themselves capital offences. The main group of offences was that of hunting, wounding or stealing red or fallow deer, and the poaching of hares, conies or fish. These were made capital if the persons offending were armed and disguised, and, in the case of deer, if the offences were committed in any of the King's forests, whether the offenders were armed and disguised or not.⁴⁸

From the legal point of view, the problem of George's identity can thus be solved, since he is allegedly a sneaky member of the English underworld. However, even as a black, he is shown as a sort of deviation from what his fellow criminals are commonly thought to be: indeed, they are mainly depicted as violent men, carefully disguised, doing raids on private estates, and scaring landowners and gamekeepers. Instead, George's action implies that, among other things, he is guilty of an offence against his own peers. Seen through political lenses, the attack on Western's estate stands for a theft of Jacobite riches: Fielding deliberately hints that the man bearing the most overtly Hanoverian name is accused of stealing from 'Western properties,' in other words, King George II is portrayed as nothing more than a poacher on foreign lands. Within the outspoken Whig propaganda of *Tom Jones*, Fielding builds this episode as yet another oddity, as he assigns the Hanoverians the role of thieves, and the Jacobites

⁴⁸ Edward Palmer Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, pp. 21-22.

indignantly denounce the crime, thus completely distorting his political views and, most of all, going against historical evidence that tightly links the Waltham Blacks to the Jacobites. Confirming this parallel:

New evidence has now come to light showing that the Waltham Blacks were originally smugglers and confirming their involvement with the Atterbury Plot. Where Jacobitism was concerned, the Dutch were kept well informed by the British government since the Dutch troops were called over to crush risings such as the '15. (...) L'Hermitage, the Dutch envoy, an experienced diplomat who had been in London since the days of William III, reported in May 1723 that the Waltham Blacks were a gang operating contraband trade on the southern coast and that Sir Harry Goring, who was burdened with debts, had helped them to organize diversionary tactics against customs officers, thus enabling them to carry off their booty. In return, Goring had been in the habit of receiving agreed sums of money from these Blacks. This smuggling consisted of running wool from the English coasts, destined for Lille and the other French textile towns, and bringing back some wine and tea but, at this time, mostly brandy. (...) The smugglers used small boats, mostly "wherries," and chose the shortest crossings, usually from Dungeness, Deal, and Margate. They dealt with many British merchants in France, several of them known Jacobites and many of them innkeepers, who put them up overnight. (...) After 1720, however, the volume of contraband declined sharply. The explanation for this, according to L'Hermitage, is that at that time the government began to employ fast sloops against the smugglers, with a devastating effect on their trade. It was this, he added, that drove the Waltham Blacks to turn to deer stealing.⁴⁹

This passage makes clear that the blacks, on account of their secret operations, were often very close to the Jacobite environment, likewise scheming in absolute secrecy. As further evidence of their involvement with the Stuart cause, we can refer to Marsha Keith Schuchard who, dealing with the Sweden mystic and scientist Emanuel Swedenborg's secret missions throughout Europe, writes that in 1749: "Swedenborg travelled to Amsterdam (...). Swedenborg left Holland for Aix-la-Chapelle (...) Aix was also on the route between Lunéville and the German

⁴⁹ Eveline Cruickshanks, Howard Erskine-Hill, "The Waltham Black Act and Jacobitism." *Journal of British Studies* 24.3 (1985): 361-362.

towns that Charles Edward and his companion Henry Goring shuttled to and from in 1750.”⁵⁰ And then again, discussing the famous ‘Swedish passport’ of the Young Pretender that allowed him to travel through Sweden after his expulsion from France in 1749, she adds that it “raises new questions about the curious publication, *A Letter from H---- G-----* (...). The anonymous British editor claimed that (...) its author was Sir Henry Goring, the lone companion of Charles Edward during his secret travels.”⁵¹

In a certain way, Sir Henry Goring fills the space between Jacobitism and the blacks, but he does so when they are not yet known as dangerous criminals killing deer and destroying fences. At that point, they are guilty of illegally trading goods on the southern coast of England, which brings us back to the central question about George’s last name: he is called Seagrim because, having joined these smugglers, he initially contributed to create ‘grim sea’ conditions, and that is why the neighbourhood still retains the memory of his troubled past, by giving him the additional strange nickname ‘Black George.’ Moreover, in the before-mentioned scene, when Partridge underscores that George works at squire Western’s service, Fielding merely moves along the same lines of the poaching episode: the Jacobite Mr Western does not inflict heavy punishment on the Hanoverian George, and finally decides to take him as his ‘servant.’

With respect to the gamekeeper, one more question still lingers: why does he shoot a partridge and not simply deer as we would expect him to? The answer has to be found in the symbolic meaning of the bird, that perfectly fits into the rationale of the novel, and even anticipates the utterly ambiguous role, that its homonymous character Benjamin Partridge is called to play all along Tom’s wanderings as his fellow traveller. Juan Eduardo Cirlot thus summarises the bird’s symbolism:

The partridge is very common in Romanesque ornamentation (...). Aristotle, Theophrastus, Pliny and other ancient and mediaeval writers all have something to

⁵⁰ Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Emanuel Swedenborg, Secret Agent on Earth and in Heaven: Jacobites, Jews and Freemasons in Early Modern Sweden*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 465-466.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

say about the characteristic habit of the partridge, succinctly expressed by St. Jerome as follows: ‘Just as the partridge lays eggs and hatches young birds who will never follow it, so the impious man possesses wealth to which he is not entitled, and which he must leave behind when he is least inclined.’ It is this idea that underlies the symbol of the partridge. Another symbolic function comes from the bird’s capacity for deception. In the words of St. Ambrose: ‘The partridge, taking its name from the word *perdendo* and in Hebrew called *kore* (to call and shout), is Satan tempting the multitudes with his voice.’⁵²

As a general remark, we can say that Fielding is decidedly familiar with the classical writers referred to, therefore it is no surprise that he possibly draws symbols and reflections from them. The comments by the two Church Fathers become quite striking when put into the context of Fielding’s politics: St. Jerome explicitly talks of a man “not entitled,” who is forced to give up his wealth “when he is least inclined,” and St. Ambrose insists on the etymology of partridge which derives from ‘losing.’ All these hints considered, the meaning of the bird clearly comes down to mirror the long-standing myth of the Stuart Pretenders, originating from James II who was sent into exile and turned into an emblem of political loss. The double status of the partridge, at the same time victim and evil doer as it is traced back to the devil, spurs Fielding to use its name in several ironic ways. Indeed, the Christian tradition also has it that the bird represents Jesus himself and, more specifically, it can be associated with Catholic imagery, a constant target of Fielding’s satire in *Tom Jones*, whenever religious views come into play. It is the case, for instance, of the typical Christmas carol titled “A Partridge in a Pear Tree,” also known as “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” which “is found on broadsides printed at Newcastle at various periods during the last hundred and fifty years,”⁵³ as William Henry Husk writes in 1864. This entails that, by the time Fielding publishes *Tom Jones*, it is already a popular song in England. Moreover, this tune may have been very familiar throughout Fielding’s native county, there

⁵² Juan Eduardo Cirlo, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002, p. 250.

⁵³ William Henry Husk, *Songs of the Nativity; Being Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern. Several of which Appear for the First Time in a Collection*, London: John Camden Hotten, 1864, p. 181.

being evidence that in those days it was “common in the northern counties of England” and “also in Somerset, Dorsetshire, and elsewhere in England.”⁵⁴ The lyrics to the song are widely considered to be a coded message for eighteenth-century English Catholics, who had quite a hard time trying to express their own faith. The text can be interpreted as a hidden catechism. Indeed, precisely referring to this song and other widespread tunes, Hugh D. McKellar affirms that:

Especially after 1700, instruction of tenants’ and labourers’ children became a sore point. Some owners thought they should learn at least the catechism. (...) But if more children grew up on an estate than it could employ, some would have to move away, probably into a non-Catholic environment (...). Why not, then, encode the basic tenets of the Catholic faith, devise a tune, and produce a song which would jog the memories of those in on the secret but rouse no suspicion in outsiders?⁵⁵

The underlying significance of the partridge shifts the bird itself to a more universal level, a great ‘point of contention’ between good and evil. The comic character of Mr Partridge, who follows in these steps, becomes a telltale sign of confusion throughout the novel: he never finds the courage to overtly support his own ideals, so that his ever-changing positions, along with his fear and clumsy superstition, become the object of Fielding’s ridicule. When the narrator presents him, we learn that he is the man entrusted with the education of the young Jenny Jones who, at the moment of her first appearance in the story, “had passed above four years at Mr Partridge’s (for that was the schoolmaster's name).” (*TJ*, p. 64) If, on the one hand, he is depicted as a mild man, on the other, his wife cannot keep her feelings under control, and goes into sudden fits of jealous rage. For instance, in the course of a domestic scene, she believes Jenny’s laughter to be the sign of a secret affair with her husband:

Mrs Partridge (...) immediately fell into a fury, and discharged the trencher, on which she was eating, at the head of poor Jenny, crying out, ‘You impudent whore, do you

⁵⁴ Leah Rachel Clara Yoffie, “Songs of the ‘Twelve Numbers’ and the Hebrew Chant of ‘Echod mi Yodea.’” *The Journal of American Folklore* 62.246 (1949): 400.

⁵⁵ Hugh D. McKellar, “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” *The Hymn* 45.4 (1994): 2.

play tricks with my husband before my face?’ and, at the same instant, rose from her chair, with a knife in her hand, with which, most probably, she would have executed very tragical vengeance, had not the girl taken the advantage of being nearer the door than her mistress, and avoided her fury by running away; for, as to the poor husband, whether surprize had rendered him motionless, or fear (which is full as probable) had restrained him from venturing at any opposition, he sat staring and trembling in his chair; nor did he once offer to move or speak, till his wife, returning from the pursuit of Jenny, made some defensive measures necessary for his own preservation; and he likewise was obliged to retreat, after the example of the maid. (*TJ*, p. 65)

Even though Mrs Partridge can be said to play only little more than a walk-on part in *Tom Jones*, Fielding allows us to form an exact idea of her aspect, by remarking that she is impressively reminiscent of a hardly dignified model. Thus, he states: “This woman was not very amiable in her person. Whether she sat to my friend Hogarth, or no, I will not determine; but she exactly resembled the young woman who is pouring out her mistress’s tea in the third picture of the Harlot’s Progress.” (*TJ*, p. 63) There is an explicitly comic treatment of the woman’s features, also due to the broken nose of her obese alter ego in the print, which alludes to the unpleasant consequences of venereal diseases. And this sort of association must have been really immediate in Fielding’s mind, if we find a very similar joke in the description of his much more serious heroine Amelia. While in prison, indeed, her husband Mr Booth tells Mrs Matthews: “The injury done to her beauty (...), by which (...) her lovely nose was beat all to pieces, gave me an assurance that the woman who had been so much adored for the charms of her person deserved a much higher adoration to be paid to her mind.”⁵⁶

Hogarth’s series has been cleverly analysed over the last few decades but, of course, it lends itself to numerous and even antithetical readings, one of them being Elisabeth Soulier-Détis’ scholarly work, which proves to be more relevant to our discussion, as it unearths the hidden masonic code embedded in the story. In detail, the third print captures the moment when the magistrate Sir John Gonson and a troop enter Molly’s room to carry out their judicial punishment, thus anticipating her miserable situation in prison and her final death. Gonson’s

⁵⁶ Martin C. Battestin ed., *Amelia*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983, p. 66.

gesture as he is seen coming through the door, “sometimes interpreted as a psychological indication (...) can also be described as a hush sign connected with masonic silence.”⁵⁷ Obviously, here the main theme is the enforcement of the law but, in a certain way, Hogarth seems to be at pains to render the visual impact of impending violence through the presence of several truncheons, wands, and staves. A violent attitude that is later reaffirmed, though in a different context, in the fourth print.

Such seemingly negative objects can take on a completely different meaning, when put into a masonic context. As evidence of this overturning, Soulier-Détis comments on Gonson and the group behind him:

The rods and staffs they carry may echo those used in masons’ rites and feats. (...) The Grand Master wore a sword, while deacons carried wands and black rods (...). In the “exposé” of freemasonry entitled *Mock-Masonry: Or the Grand Procession* (March 19th, 1741), a great many clubs, staffs (long and short), wands or rods are to be seen. Of course the group led by Gonson is equipped with emblems of their function as magistrate’s enforcers, such as truncheons and wands, plus, for those acting as reinforcements, simple staffs, but it should be remembered, even truncheons could characterise masons, one being borne by Marshall Pyne during the same 1730s procession.⁵⁸

The masonic symbolism behind the rods is not limited to public processions, as we have seen, but these objects also form an interesting image by means of their triangular arrangement, typical of initiation ceremonies. Dealing with this aspect in his seminal study on freemasonry, Bernard E. Jones writes that:

Whether the custom of crossing the Deacons’ wands at a certain point in the Initiation ceremony is ancient practice or not is not known, but it is believed to have been in use in the eighteenth century (...). It may have arisen from nothing more than a wish (...) to obviate the ragged appearance of two wands in close proximity held at

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Soulier-Détis, “*Guess at the Rest*”: *Cracking the Hogarth Code*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

awkward angles, but certainly (...) many Brethren see in the crossed wands a suggestion of a triangle, the geometric form that has always been thought to be imbued with sacred qualities.⁵⁹

Besides the weapons in the intruders' hands, within the scene of the third print we should notice the presence of a witch-hat and a birchrod hanging over Molly's bed. Consistently with the triangular piece of a broken mirror lying on the small table at the right-hand side of the room, these two elements work as symbols of an ongoing improvement of rituals in the Grand Lodge. They become powerful and popular images to represent the craft, so that the first of them "can be paralleled with the hats caricatured by early-eighteenth-century masonic 'exposés.' (...) [F]or instance *A Geometrical View of the Grand Procession of the Scald Miserable Masons* (April 7th, 1742)."⁶⁰

The sequence of Hogarth's scenes creates a strong link between the third and the fourth print, as we have already hinted, thanks to the theme of coercive measures. In a similar way, applying this sort of common thread to *Tom Jones*, we can easily piece together the character of Mrs Partridge and the stern theologian Thwackum. On the one hand, we get acquainted with the schoolmaster's irrational wife, who appears as an irritable woman, always ready to upset her household by starting 'bloody' fights; on the other hand, as soon as the clergyman is introduced after the episode of the partridge, he reveals his almost sadistic behaviours:

In the morning, when Tom attended the reverend Mr Thwackum, the person to whom Mr Allworthy had committed the instruction of the two boys, he had the same questions put to him by that gentleman, which he had been asked the evening before, to which he returned the same answers. The consequence of this was, so severe a whipping, that it possibly fell little short of the torture with which confessions are in some countries extorted from criminals. (*TJ*, p. 96)

⁵⁹ Bernard E. Jones, *The Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*, Orpington: Eric Dobby, 1994, pp. 383-384. Quoted in Elisabeth Soulier-Détis, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

The very first time that the narrator mentions his name, he is seen through the lenses of blind violence. And, of course, it could not be otherwise since this feeling is carved in his surname, which derives from ‘to thwack,’ to hit hard. Not only does he spread the Gospel of corporal punishment as a means to correct evil deviations, but he specifically refers, both in implicit and explicit ways, to the use of rods. Therefore, no surprise that, expressing his disappointment for Allworthy’s decision about the case of the shooting:

Thwackum, whose meditations were full of birch, exclaimed against this weak, and, as he said he would venture to call it, wicked lenity. To remit the punishment of such crimes was, he said, to encourage them. He enlarged much on the correction of children, and quoted many texts from Solomon, and others. (*TJ*, p. 103)

It is here clear that those “meditations full of birch” help to convey almost visually a sense of his haunting thoughts about flogging. The nearly pictorial value of this description is not an unexpected effect, Fielding actually paving the way for the disclosure of Thwackum’s model. When we start reading Bridget’s mind and discover her in search of a substitute for the late Captain Blifil, the narrator tells us: “She was, indeed, rather inclined to favour the parson’s principles; but Square’s person was more agreeable to her eye (...); whereas the pedagogue did in countenance very nearly resemble that gentleman, who, in the *Harlot’s Progress*, is seen correcting the ladies in Bridewel.” (*TJ*, p. 109) This is how Fielding bridges the gap between the third and the fourth print, the latter being moreover of great importance to grasp the meaning of certain ‘bad omens’ on Tom at this stage of the narration. In order to do so, first of all we have to look at the scene and analyse three outstanding elements, that is, the jailer’s apron, some hemp on a wooden log, and a halter.

The jailer-Thwackum’s apron is one of the several overt references to freemasonry, and here it becomes part of all characters’ clothing:

as various aprons, whose second meaning is hidden by their obvious utility (to protect clothes from hard work), are worn by prisoners and warden alike. (...) The jailer’s is strangely similar to that of the monkey in *The Mystery of Masonry Brought*

to *Light by the Gormogons* (1724) and also to that of the drunk master in Hogarth's *Night*. Short and with the thong tied in front, it is very close to the operative-style apron generally worn in early lodges (...).⁶¹

The fact that the short apron looks back to the older tradition of the craft, is a telltale sign that the 'jailer' Thwackum is not apt to teach Tom the newest kind of notions, in order to initiate him properly as an eighteenth-century mason. The theologian becomes a spokesman of the so-called 'Ancients,' one of the two factions that eventually come together in 1813. Underlying this masonic diaspora, there are strong political reasons as Marsha Keith Schuchard makes clear, when she justly claims that: "After the suppression of the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, (...) a rival system of 'modern' Hanoverian Freemasonry was established in 1717, and it struggled in bitter competition with the 'ancient' Stuart."⁶² The tutor is perched upon a mountain of traditional and unshakeable views, as he proudly says: "When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England." (*TJ*, p. 99) Of course, Thwackum is mainly a caricature of the basic tenets of the Ancients, because they actually included non-Anglican people and were pervaded by a reformist spirit, that he completely lacks. But what Fielding underlines is his constant defence of the Christian faith as a basis for all understanding of life, which is in line with the Ancients' support for a form of freemasonry to be strongly founded on Christian beliefs. In this light, Thwackum symbolically acts like a father and accordingly transmits the 'ancient' genetic information, thus creating that tension inherent in Tom between a Stuart and a Hanoverian identity.

Going back to the fourth print, now we need concentrate on the convicted people beating hemp. Though it can be considered a quite common activity for prisoners in those days, when "[v]iewed from a masonic perspective, the object of the action, hemp, takes on another meaning, connected with that of its final

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁶² Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 793.

aim.”⁶³ It is principally known to have served the purpose of making ropes, a hint that is grotesquely signalled by the image of a halter and a hanging man in the background of the room. However, far from bearing a negative meaning, “the halter, the final product of this activity, belonged to eighteenth-century masonic rituals. The cable tow as noose was probably worn by the candidate,”⁶⁴ in order to represent his obedience to the Master, and visually render the need for self-improvement as an entered apprentice, or to give a token of his own bond of love with the other brethren.

Strikingly enough, such imagery and its related symbolism are to be detected for the first time in *Tom Jones* at exactly the same point where the narrator starts to introduce Thwackum, mirroring the jailer’s first appearance in Hogarth’s series, when we see Molly beating hemp. Indeed, the second chapter of the third book begins thus:

As we determined when we first sat down to write this history, to flatter no man, but to guide our pen throughout by the directions of truth, 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. (*TJ*, p. 93)

Commenting on this passage implies two pretty opposite points of view. Almost needless to say that, on a literal level, the narrator’s statement comes as a result of Tom’s questionable conduct up to that point and, most of all, foretells the bad consequences hovering over his future, in case he does not change his naive approach to life. But, as far as the masonic symbolism is involved, the allusion to the final hanging is a definitely positive one, because it refers to the first stage of his initiatic path that will then lead him through various phases up to the end, when he can metaphorically die and resurrect as a Master. Therefore, it is not by chance that, throughout the novel, the image of the halter is called up a few times to reinforce its totally overturned meaning. For example, roughly a day before

⁶³ Elisabeth Soulier-Détis, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

meeting the Man of the Hill, Tom arrives at the Bell in Gloucester, where the people he meets start talking behind his back, as soon as he goes to bed. The narrator records the scene thus:

Besides Mr Jones and the good governess of the mansion, there sat down at table an attorney of Salisbury, indeed the very same who had brought the news of Mrs Blifil's death to Mr Allworthy, and whose name, which, I think, we did not before mention, was Dowling: there was likewise present another person, who stiled himself a lawyer (...). During the time of dinner, the Somersetshire lawyer recollected the face of Jones (...). Jones answered all his questions with much civility, though he never remembered to have seen the petty-fogger before (...). As the conversation of fellows of this kind, is of all others the most detestable to men of any sense, the cloth was no sooner removed than Mr Jones withdrew (...). Jones had no sooner quitted the room, than the petty-fogger, in a whispering tone, asked Mrs Whitefield, 'if she knew who that fine spark was?' She answered, 'she had never seen the gentleman before.' 'The gentleman, indeed!' replied the petty-fogger; 'a pretty gentleman, truly! Why, he's the bastard of a fellow who was hanged for horse-stealing. He was dropt at Squire Allworthy's door, where one of the servants found him in a box so full of rain-water, that he would certainly have been drowned, had he not been reserved for another fate.' 'Ay, ay, you need not mention it, I protest; we understand what that fate is very well,' cries Dowling, with a most facetious grin. (*TJ*, pp. 349-350)

In the course of the dialogue, we assist to a complete misrepresentation of Tom's early years. Some of the episodes narrated in the preceding books, indeed, are turned into nonsense and slander. In spite of this, we should focus on the fact that Tom is believed to have been hanged for stealing a horse, a crime that strongly connects with the halter, this latter being a rope used for both carrying out capital punishment and restraining animals. The second part of the conversation describes the supposed discovery of Tom, an account which actually looks back to the humiliating ritual for *cowans* and, thus, giving further evidence for this specific reading of his illegitimacy. It must also be noticed how, at last, the lawyer Dowling reminds us that he is the only one, apart from Blifil himself, to know Bridget's secret about Tom's origins.

Through Thwackum's tutorship, we can analyse a pretty old-fashioned model, while Mr Square is the other side of the moon, that is, a typically eighteenth-century philosopher and deist. In contrast with his colleague's ridiculous obsession with the articles of faith, indeed, he embodies Fielding's "belief in the insufficiency of the contemplation and love of virtue as a basis for benevolent action. The initial description (...) prepares the reader for his appearance as a representative or allegorical figure; he is introduced, not by a proper name,"⁶⁵ but by his occupation as philosopher. Moreover, seen under the light of a dichotomy between 'ancients' and 'moderns,' he clearly takes sides with the latter group, because his system of thought is more consistent with a rational vision of the world. With respect to their differences, it is appropriate to say that "[t]hese two opposing factions, are like the two halves of the human brain – one half: esoteric, philosophical, spiritual, perceptive; and the other half: exoteric, logical, rational and practical."⁶⁶ The reference to the very foundations of freemasonry is inherent in the character of Mr Square, a point which particularly holds true if we remember that "Fielding hit on a name which evoked not only the Euclidean tropes of recent ethical controversies but also the traditional iconography of Virtue, for in the moralized geometries of the Renaissance, squares and cubes are emblematic of virtue."⁶⁷ On the whole, therefore, we can see how Square is presented as a typically stereotyped figure, whose potential Fielding exploits, in order to show the weaknesses in yet another misconception of benevolence. All along his career as a writer, indeed, Fielding is aware of the hard task to depict the ways in which this universal feeling falls prey to all sorts of twisted logic. His characters' failures entail that it can neither be supposed to spring out of religious doctrines, nor out of some abstract and ineffective reasoning: in other words, it is nowhere like Thwackum and Square, as one realises that sympathy is the only source on which to rely.

⁶⁵ Sean Shesgreen, "The Moral Function of Thwackum, Square, and Allworthy." *Studies in the Novel* 2.2 (1970): 161.

⁶⁶ Pierre G. Pete Normand Jr., *Ancients & Moderns: The Two Pillars of Conflict in Masonic Observance*. Paper presented to *Templum Fidelis* Lodge No. 746 - Bath, Ontario, 17/09/2011.

⁶⁷ K. K. Ruthven, "Fielding, Square, and the Fitness of Things." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 5.2 (1971-1972): 248.

When it comes down to the description of Square's peculiarities, Fielding seems to wink at him and pass a less harsh judgment than he does with Thwackum. Perhaps, he is able to retain some traces of empathy for the little Tom, an option that his colleague totally rejects, and this is enough to cast him under a different light. Besides, Fielding overtly delights in exposing him as a simple 'man of the world,' a silent and clumsy schemer, if we consider that:

In addition to being a lover of wisdom by profession Square is a womanizer in his spare time. (...) he apparently has an affair with Bridget Allworthy before his liaison with Molly Seagrim, although Fielding is extremely reticent about the relationship with Bridget. (...) All this Square achieves without experiencing any crisis of conscience because his notion of virtue so delightfully confuses the good with the beautiful that Bridget's fortune or Molly's breasts are indistinguishable from the *summum bonum* of less acquisitively randy philosophers. He (...) must therefore be familiar with the idea that a visual representation of wisdom (...) would arouse intense love in anybody who saw it (...). He strikes us as being rather a lover of women than a lover of wisdom (...). Square's pursuit of Molly is a kind of parody of Tom's pursuit of Sophia and an exemplum of unfitness (...). Significantly, Tom is never allowed to see Sophia's "naked charms," (...). Virtue incarnate (...) is always modestly dressed, even when thrown from a horse (...), for the naked charms of *σοφία* are not for mortal eyes. Square knows all this, and condemns himself by choosing to ignore it. He is an aficionado of the wrong sort of virtue (...).⁶⁸

The discovery of Square's affair with Molly is the narrative incident that best allows us to grasp his symbolic meaning, both because it is "a kind of parody of Tom's pursuit of Sophia" and on account of the visual impact of the scene in the girl's room. Formally, the episode is made up of a few traditional stratagems, including the comic relief in a seemingly sad situation, the debunking of a serious figure, and the involvement of a lascivious woman. Within the boundaries of such a simple structure, Square's duplicity is fully dramatised: the philosopher devotes a lot of time, perhaps too much, to questionable pursuits. His action here becomes a way to take revenge on the boy, who is supposedly guilty of having won

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-251.

Bridget's heart, thus making his dreams about a marriage of convenience fall apart. Unaware of what is going to happen, Tom eventually thwarts Square's plans, as he enters the room and urges Molly to look for another man to stand by her side. In reply to his plea, she claims that:

If the greatest squire in all the country would come a suiting to me to-morrow, I would not give my company to him. No, I shall always hate and despise the whole sex for your sake' – She was proceeding thus, when an accident put a stop to her tongue, before it had run out half its career. The room, or rather garret, in which Molly lay, being up one pair of stairs, that is to say, at the top of the house, was of a sloping figure, resembling the great Delta of the Greeks. The English reader may, perhaps, form a better idea of it, by being told, that it was impossible to stand upright anywhere but in the middle. (*TJ*, pp. 182-183)

The fact that only the central part of the room could make Square "stand upright," becomes a vehicle for Fielding to convey the irony of the moment, a joke on his ridiculous position and an attack to his moral crookedness. The use of 'Delta' instead of the more common triangle, prevents the scene from taking on evident sexual overtones: therefore, Fielding comes up with a "Euclidean conceit in which Square is a square and Molly is a triangle and their union an example of unfitness. (...) [A] relationship which logically demands precisely the opposite interpretation to the one he tries to impose on it."⁶⁹ From this perspective, Square as a geometric shape and the Delta need be read as powerful symbols. Both of them are outstanding in the masonic tradition and, when pieced together, they give life to further meanings. Albert Mackey affirms that:

As the Delta was the initial letter of Deity with the ancients, so its synonym is among modern nations. It is a type of the Eternal, the All-Powerful, the Self-Existent. The material world is typified by the "square" as passive matter, in opposition to force symbolized by the triangle. The Square is also an emblem of humanity, as the Delta or Triangle typifies Deity. The Delta, Triangle, and Compasses are essentially the same. The raising one point, and then another, signifies that the Divine or higher

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

portion of our nature should increase in power, and control the baser tendencies. This is the real, the practical “journey toward the East.”⁷⁰

Putting the two protagonists of the episode in these terms means to reassess their respective functions. In this light, we need not conceive Molly as a poor country girl falling victim to an intriguing seducer, but rather as a downright liar who gives deceiving answers to Tom and miserably pretends to love Square. On the other hand, the philosopher can be justly considered as “passive matter,” hidden behind a curtain and then exposed by what we could call authorial justice. The room has a divine potential thanks to its own shape, nevertheless Square is forced to point downwards as he crouches in silence, so that his “higher portion” is completely dismissed because he cannot “control the baser tendencies.” As a tutor, therefore, Square’s example turns out to be a failure, just as much as Thwackum’s does. Here, the Delta pointing upwards anticipates Tom’s real and masonic “journey toward the East,” even though he will have to distance himself from such bad examples to succeed in the pursuit of Sophia. It is true that “virtue becomes, as it were, an object of sight, and strikes us with an idea of that loveliness, which Plato asserts there is in her naked charms” (*TJ*, p. 5), but Fielding has in mind Tom’s inner sight and he implies, as a consequence, that the idea of nakedness must not be taken literally, as Square does in his ‘sham pursuit’ of Molly’s physical beauty.

Thwackum and Square proving to be little more than laughing stocks in Tom’s eyes, he has to face the journey only relying on his own capacity of acquiring knowledge and prudence on the way. What is more, the novel is not meant to deal with his progress exclusively, his final happiness as master of Paradise Hall being repeatedly put in jeopardy by the hypocrite Mr Blifil. At least through two thirds of the story, this latter is seen as the legitimate heir and his father accordingly dreams of a future country mansion, suitable for the social status of a wealthy squire:

⁷⁰ Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences, Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution*, Vol. 2, New York: The Masonic History Company, 1919, pp. 800-801.

The captain was made large amends for the unpleasant minutes which he passed in the conversation of his wife, (...) by the pleasant meditations he enjoyed when alone. These meditations were entirely employed on Mr Allworthy's fortune; for first, he exercised much thought in calculating, as well as he could, the exact value of the whole; which calculations he often saw occasion to alter in his own favour: and secondly, and chiefly, he pleased himself with intended alterations in the house and gardens, and in projecting many other schemes, as well for the improvement of the estate, as of the grandeur of the place: for this purpose he applied himself to the studies of architecture and gardening, and read over many books on both these subjects (...). He, at last, completed a most excellent plan; and very sorry we are, that it is not in our power to present it to our reader, since even the luxury of the present age, I believe, would hardly match it. It had, indeed, in a superlative degree, the two principal ingredients which serve to recommend all great and noble designs of this nature; for it required an immoderate expense to execute, and a vast length of time to bring it to any sort of perfection. (*TJ*, pp. 84-85)

Quite evidently, Captain Blifil plays a secondary role but this fragment serves as a source for the symbolic contrast between Tom and Mr Blifil, which is somehow the backbone of the novel. His concern for the improvements on Allworthy's estate must draw our attention, especially if compared to the first plate of Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* (1745). The plot of the series is a simple and conventional one, revolving around an earl who tries to force his son into an arranged marriage with a City alderman's daughter but, as is the case with several of Hogarth's works, it has a hidden masonic meaning that can be detected in *Tom Jones* as well.

In the scene, Hogarth captures the signature of the contract during which, as one may expect of such a formal meeting, “[t]he young couple is already bored, and the two dogs at their feet are a fitting comment on their present and future bondage.”⁷¹ This embarrassing situation brings to mind Blifil's awkward courtship of Sophia, imposed upon the girl after Mrs Western's comic misunderstanding of her niece's true feelings for Tom. No surprise that Blifil's

⁷¹ Elisabeth Soulier_Détis, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

attempt ends up being disastrous, as she “was resolved to place no confidence in him (...). Her behaviour to him, therefore, was entirely forced, and indeed such as is generally prescribed to virgins upon the second formal visit from one who is appointed for their husband.” (*TJ*, p. 279) If Hogarth begins right in the middle of the story, when there is no going back from Earl Squanderfield’s decision, Fielding will not let Blifil marry Sophia: Allworthy’s nephew is a dull character, devoid of all sincere feelings for other people, a Pharisee taking up a respectable disguise, until his double-facedness is finally exposed. And instead of love, his claim to Sophia is due to self-satisfaction, so that even her contempt for him:

served rather to heighten the pleasure he proposed in rifling her charms, as it added triumph to lust; nay, he had some further views, from obtaining the absolute possession of her person, (...) and 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. Besides all these views, (...) he had one prospect (...). And this was the estate of Mr Western; which was all to be settled on his daughter and her issue; for so extravagant was the affection of that fond parent, that provided his child would but consent to be miserable with the husband he chose, he cared not at what price he purchased him. For these reasons Mr Blifil was so desirous of the match, that he intended to deceive Sophia, by pretending love to her; and to deceive her father and his own uncle, by pretending he was beloved by her. (*TJ*, pp. 280-281)

As a matter of fact, the main reason for the interest in Sophia lies in her money, a goal he could achieve only by cultivating his friendship with Mr Western, even though the course of events allows Tom to triumph in the end after scraping the barrel. Therefore, Fielding delights in mocking married life with relation to the previous generation, that is, Bridget Allworthy and Captain Blifil. What initially looks like a good match, then turns out to be a total letdown for both of them. Pushing the parallel with *Marriage à la Mode* further, we can see the depressing encounter between Blifil and Sophia mirrored by the downcast eyes of the couple in the first print, while Captain Blifil is shown as a greedy father all too similar to

Earl Squanderfield, who strives to make his ‘architectural’ dream come true. In the same way as the depiction of the Captain’s wicked schemes, the whole series is permeated by the need of money for the construction of a new palace, a project to carry out through marriage only. The buildings then become prospective ideal houses for equally ideal masters, namely, Squanderfield’s newborn child and Mr Blifil. To this purpose, there is a convergence of several sources of symbolism, because:

the series is teeming with at least five types of allusions: mythological, Old Testament, New Testament, alchemic and freemasonic. Because of their combination, they all tend to the same end, i.e. staging the road to the perfection of man as a result of the union between a masculine and a feminine principle and as the outcome of the work done in lodges in pursuit of *sophia*.⁷²

In this light, the young Blifil should be deemed the perfect offspring, but he is nothing more than a champion of ruined plans, because he is doomed to fail. Of course, the same logic applies to his father who daydreams about Allworthy’s mansion boasting “an air of grandeur in it, that struck you with awe, and rival’d the beauties of the best Grecian architecture; and it was as commodious within, as venerable without” (*TJ*, p. 30). He simply follows the example of Squanderfield, who tries to imagine the completion of the “unfinished stately home,” that “bears a very strong visual resemblance to the illustration of the building of Solomon’s temple as represented in scores of masonic documents.”⁷³ Unfortunately, both men suffer an untimely death and their sons are entrusted with the restoration works, but then again, ironically enough, the respective heirs fail to do so as well, because the young Squanderfield receives a mortal wound from his wife’s lover Silvertongue, while Mr Blifil is miserably disowned by Mr Allworthy.

The Captain’s death has a particularly important meaning for the masonic reading of *Tom Jones*. Indeed, this unexpected event leaves Bridget to mourn over her husband and the little Mr Blifil becomes a ‘widow’s son,’ therefore he is

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

symbolically initiated like Tom should be. They come to represent two competing masonic traditions: on the one hand, Blifil who stands for the legitimate Hanoverian brotherhood embodied by the Grand Lodge of London, while on the other hand, the bastard Tom who, as an alter ego of the Young Pretender, gives voice to the clandestine network of Jacobite lodges.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS THE EAST IN PURSUIT OF SOPHIA

4.1 Out in the Pouring Rain: Punishment on the Road

The tension between hereditary claims provides us with a reading key for the close resemblance between Tom's travel and the Stuart Young Pretender's military campaign, which turns the threatening events of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion into one of Fielding's major concerns in the second section of the novel. Indeed, the narrator only makes the historical context explicit when Tom is "about thirty miles off" (*TJ*, p. 297) from home, at a country inn. As he comes across a company of soldiers, he receives the news that the English army is ready to face an impending attack from the north:

The serjeant had informed Mr Jones, that they were marching against the rebels, and expected to be commanded by the glorious Duke of Cumberland. By which the reader may perceive (a circumstance which we have not thought necessary to communicate before) that this was the very time when the late rebellion was at the highest; and indeed the banditti were now marched into England, intending, as it was thought, to fight the king's forces, and to attempt pushing forward to the metropolis. (*TJ*, p. 300)

Though we have been deliberately kept ignorant of this context for more than a third of the story, in fact this is an outspoken statement merely bringing to the surface all the previous allusions about the ongoing clash between political factions. And, to avoid being misled by Tom's early reactions to such information, we should carefully try to frame it. While talking to the officers of the company, in reply to one of them called Northerton, he says: "I think no man can engage in a nobler cause than that of his religion; (...) for my own part, tho' I love my King and Country, I hope, as well as any man in it, yet the Protestant interest is no small motive to my becoming a volunteer in the cause." (*TJ*, p. 304) Yet, we need not make too much of this proud nationalistic tone, in spite of Tom's

repeated remarks in favour of the Hanoverian claim. As a matter of fact, such mainstream line of thought can be called into question, if we proceed further into the Jacobite-masonic reading of the plot.

Indeed, harking back to the symbolic punishment for *cowans*, it is quite clear how this latter comes to be associated with the fear of the Jacobite invasion. In the novel, their surprising closeness is signalled by the nearly complete overlapping of the occurrences of the words ‘Jacobite’ and ‘rain’ or ‘rainy.’ The word ‘Jacobite’ appears four times in total, all of them between the ninth chapter of the eighth book and the seventh chapter of the twelfth book. For what the word ‘rain/rainy’ is concerned, it appears seven times,¹ and seventy-one per cent of occurrences are to be found between the eighth chapter of the eighth book and the twelfth chapter of the twelfth book. Moreover, some reflections must be made on the various uses of bad weather in the other parts of the novel too. The first two times, it is a light and ineffective rain, meaning that Tom’s punishment is not close at hand, but still looming large on the horizon. The night that Squire Allworthy discovers the baby on his bed, Mrs Wilkins affirms: “I would have it put in a basket, and sent out and laid at the church-warden's door. It is a good night, only a little rainy and windy; and if it was well wrapt up, and put in a warm basket, it is two to one but it lives till it is found in the morning.” (*TJ*, p. 29) Nevertheless, there is no heavy rain and, what is more, Tom is not even a toddler walking on all fours, therefore water cannot possibly run “in at his Shoulders, and out at his Shoes,” as the written formula of the ritual suggests. The second time that rain is mentioned, the boy is seen running in the bad weather rather than being overrun by water. He is relieved by Allworthy’s forgiveness for Black George and, as the narrator tells us, he “was so delighted with this news, that tho’ it was dark when they returned home, he could not help going back a mile in a shower of rain, (...) but, like other hasty divulgiers of news, he only brought on himself the trouble of contradicting it.” (*TJ*, p. 116)

These occurrences in the country section are tightly linked to the ones on the road. During his wanderings, as we have already underlined, he happens to

¹ It actually appears nine times, but in two cases it is used metaphorically, thus falling into a category that is irrelevant to this analysis.

stop at the Bell in Gloucester where the other people distort the events following his birth, and their ready-made legend has it that Allworthy's servants found him in box "full of rain-water" (*TJ*, p. 350). Through this twisted version of his origins, the real punishment can be finally carried out. And indeed, from this point onwards, he invariably has to face heavy showers of rain. After leaving Upton, accompanied by Partridge on the way to Coventry, we are informed that "[t]hey had not gone above two miles, when a violent storm of rain overtook them, and as they happened to be at the same time in sight of an alehouse, Partridge, with much earnest entreaty, prevailed with Jones to enter, and weather the storm." (*TJ*, p. 535) Then, after another stop, we read that Tom "was no sooner informed, by Partridge, that his horses were ready, than he (...) set forward towards Coventry, tho' the night was dark, and it just then began to rain very hard." (*TJ*, p. 544) This departure is followed by a comment of the narrator, who asks us to be sympathetic with the hardships that Tom and Partridge have to go through in such a dark and cold night. In a few minutes they glimpse a light in the distance and, right when an authoritative voice invites them to go in, the rain takes on its symbolic meaning for the last time. Jones answers to the man inside:

'You are very obliging,' (...) 'and I will accept your offer for a few minutes, whilst the rain continues; and here are two more who will be glad of the same favour.' This was accorded with more good-will than it was accepted: for Partridge would rather have submitted to the utmost inclemency of the weather, than have trusted to the clemency of those whom he took for hobgoblins; and the poor post-boy was now infected with the same apprehensions; but they were both obliged to follow the example of Jones. (*TJ*, p. 548)

We can remark that these passages about the falling rain are characterised by the search for a safe shelter, which is the result of Partridge's whiny requests. Tom seems determined to endure these difficulties and, only at the end, there appears a 'light' in the dark that prompts him to find a dry place, while his friend is visibly scared of the gloomy atmosphere around them. Their respective roles change and this leads him to accept the hospitality he is offered, thus finally putting a stop to his punishment. The narrator makes clear that the barn where the travellers find

some rest, somehow looks like an enchanted place. Of course, Partridge draws on his wealth of extravagant beliefs and says: “The Lord knows whither we have got already, or whither we are going: for sure such darkness was never seen upon earth, and I question whether it can be darker in the other world.” (*TJ*, p. 548). Even though the man firmly believes to be visiting something very like hell, the narrator laughs at him and downplays the causes of this obstinate fear, simply tracing them back to old ‘magic’ tricks for theatricals:

Had this history been writ in the days of superstition, I should have had too much compassion for the reader to have left him so long in suspense, whether Beelzebub or Satan was about actually to appear in person, with all his hellish retinue; but as these doctrines are at present very unfortunate, and have but few if any believers, I have not been much aware of conveying any such terrors. To say truth, the whole furniture of the infernal regions hath long been appropriated by the managers of playhouses, who seem lately to have laid them by as rubbish, capable only of affecting the upper gallery; a place in which few of our readers ever sit. (*TJ*, p. 549)

In fact, Tom and Partridge are neither before a ghostly creature nor a dangerous monster, but they have only come across a company of gypsies “now celebrating the wedding of one of their society.” (*TJ*, p. 549) They make the acquaintance of the king, with whom Tom starts a conversation about their community and customs. From this point of view, the episode might seem a quite simple one, but actually it is rather hard to reconcile its development to the rest of the novel, as it looks even more obscure than the Man of the Hill’s digression. For this reason, there has been relatively little critical advancement if compared to other much discussed parts of the work. George Sherburn, among others, voices this main trend in its reception when he says:

Here Fielding pauses in order to suggest the superiority of gypsy justice as compared with the commercializing of a wife’s virtue seen frequently in the cases of criminal conversation tried in the courts of King George II – and seen in Fielding’s *Modern*

Husband (1732). The neatly devised gypsy episode would be admirable in a periodical essay, but it adds nothing special to the tale of *Tom Jones*.²

The chapter is here belittled and dismissed as almost an idle authorial attempt to intrude upon the narration once again. But the problem with this community of vagabonds is that their presence is highly misleading, and potentially falls into more than one category of Fielding's concerns or objects of satire in *Tom Jones*. For example, as the king addresses Tom to welcome him, we are soon confronted with his unmistakably broken English, which could encourage a political reading of the character. Fielding may plausibly be launching an ironic attack against the reigning dynasty, because "the king's comic pronunciation of the language serves as a reminder of another king, the initial Hanoverian monarch, George I, who ascended to the monarchy with no knowledge of his new kingdom's language."³ Furthermore, these people manage to lead a 'quiet' life in England, though very far away from their homeland: an ideal state of things, if it were not for a stain on their reputation, that the king sums up affirming: "My people rob your people, and your people rob one another." (*TJ*, p. 553) Such statement only seems to confirm a long-standing stereotype about the gypsies living as outlaws. Shifting this point to the context of domestic politics, we must underline how theft "is an issue that (...) cuts both ways, since it was part of the rhetoric of both Hanoverians and Jacobites. It is also a reminder, again, of the king's resonant epigram: even at the level of monarchy, the British people rob one another."⁴ It implies that, once again, there appears to be no clear-cut political model, though there has actually been a strong argument in favour of a Jacobite reading of the community. Indeed, in a groundbreaking 1967 article, Martin Battestin writes that:

The account of the gypsy king's enlightened despotism, together with Fielding's interpolated denunciation of absolutism, establishes not only a moral, but a specifically political frame of reference (...). Within this frame, which is more sharply defined by a pattern of allusion associating Fielding's "Egyptian" band with

² George Sherburn, "Fielding's Social Outlook." *Philological Quarterly* 35.1 (1956): 18.

³ John Allen Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

the principles of English Jacobitism, the episode takes shape as an ambiguous parable of government (...). [T]he pattern and point of Fielding's political parable is relatively insignificant as a source of the episode's most distinctive features. For these, Fielding made amusing capital of the popular notion that the swarthy nomads "vulgarly called Gypsies" were in fact no less than displaced Egyptians (...). The meaning of this episode fully emerges, however, only through a knowledge of the associations it would have had for Fielding's contemporaries. To readers who have attended to the characterizations of Squire Western and Partridge and to the political part of the Man of the Hill's monologue, and who are acquainted with Fielding's campaign against Jacobitism conducted in his journals and pamphlets of 1745-49, his concluding diatribe against the folly and danger of an absolute, *jure divino* monarchy will already have suggested a specific focus (...). They function (...) *in bono et in malo*: on the one hand, they are used satirically to expose by contrast the immorality of English society and the inefficiency of constitutional government; on the other hand, the alternative political system they represent is at once untenable and absurd.⁵

In these terms, the meaning of the episode can possibly be connected with the criticism of the Jacobite tenet of absolute monarchy. Considering his handling of the gypsy leader, Fielding does not seem to reject this form of government, one that could even turn out to be more effective than the present Hanoverian descent. He just avoids praises because he is not fully convinced about it, on account of the utopian nature of an absolute king who never yields to the temptation of tyranny. Indeed, through the narrator, he comments:

absolute monarchy (...) requires three qualities very difficult, as it appears from history, to be found in princely natures: first, a sufficient quantity of moderation in the prince, to be contented with all the power which is possible for him to have. 2dly, enough of wisdom to know his own happiness. And, 3rdly, goodness sufficient to support the happiness of others, when not only compatible with, but instrumental to his own. (*TJ*, p. 553)

⁵ Martin C. Battestin, "Tom Jones and 'His Egyptian Majesty': Fielding's Parable of Government." *PMLA* 82.1 (1967): 68-73.

All this considered, we could conclude that Fielding still tries to remind us of the risks that unrestrained power incurs, particularly looking back to the charges laid at the door of the last Stuart king, James II. There is no need to put this reading aside, however, to understand that the encounter in the barn has a more complex texture, and plays a leading role on several levels. Therefore, as Robert Folkenflik suggests, “[t]he gypsy episode is neither a mere digression nor primarily part of a subplot, but centrally related to the main events, larger meanings, and literary traditions of *Tom Jones*.”⁶ And, what is more, we ought to wonder what the reason for the choice of this travelling company is, and what relationship it bears with its Jacobite counterpart. To this end, a short analysis of the gypsies’ living conditions under the Stuarts, and even before James I’s accession to the English throne, can help us form at least a general idea of their position in society. Harking back to late medieval laws against this ethnic group, David MacRitchie writes:

The Act of 1424 against “beggars and idle men,” (...) orders such people “to labour and pass to crafts, for winning of their living, under the pain of burning on the cheek, and banishing of the country.” That of 1449, for “the away-putting of sorners, feigned fools and vagabonds,” decreed “that *their ears be nailed to the tron* [the weighing-post of the public market-place], *or to another tree* [or beam], and *their ear cut off*, and [themselves] banished the country. And if thereafter they be found again, that they be hanged.”⁷

Curiously enough, the gypsies apparently fall victim to the same fate as Tom’s, their punishment invariably including the banishment from the country. First of all, we should underline that the above-mentioned Scottish word ‘sorners’ derives from the verb *to sorn*, meaning “[t]o obtrude one’s self on another for bed and board (...). Denoting the depredations made by an invading army. *Muses Thren.* – O. Fr. *sojourn-er*, *commorari*.”⁸ Moreover, the threatening part of the law reading

⁶ Robert Folkenflik, “Tom Jones, the Gypsies, and the Masquerade.” *UTQ* 44.3 (1975): 224.

⁷ David MacRitchie, *Scottish Gypsies Under the Stewards*, Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1894, p. 64.

⁸ John Johnston, John Longmuir eds., *op. cit.*, p. 505.

“that they be hanged” cannot go unnoticed, due to the meaning it has in *Tom Jones*.

The definition of ‘sorner’ somehow relates the gypsies to Tom, because they unjustly make their living out of the riches of a foreign country, in the same manner as the young protagonist has supposedly taken advantage of Allworthy’s estate for twenty years. And, as law inflicts death penalty on these people, so does Tom seem to be condemned from the start, and bound to be hanged in the end. As we have seen, however, this threat can symbolically be read as a necessary step towards the proper initiation of the protagonist. Therefore, we can here suppose that Fielding’s use of the gypsy episode contains much more than political allusions or that, as is the case for the rest of the novel, these latter strongly contribute to a larger esoteric pattern. For this purpose, we need reconstruct the magical aura hovering over the gypsies, at which Fielding tends to wink when he describes how Partridge is drawn into a trap, and says that “[a] young female gypsy, more remarkable for her wit than her beauty, had decoyed the honest fellow aside, pretending to tell his fortune.” (*TJ*, p. 551) The practice of fortune-telling is a widespread commonplace when one deals with the gypsies and, more specifically in this instance, it becomes a missing link between the culture of this population and a capacity typically attributed to freemasons, namely, clairvoyance or second sight.

In the second meaning that Jamieson provides for the verb *to sorn*, he refers to *The Muses Threnodie*, a poem published by the Scottish poet and historian Henry Adamson in 1638. The text can be understood as valuable evidence for this hypothetical masonic power because, by hinting at the restoration works of a bridge over the river Tay, he addresses his dedicatee Mr Gall and states:

Therefore I courage take, and hope to see
A bridge yet built, although I aged be;
More stately, firm, more sumptuous and fair,
Than any former age could yet compare.
Thus Gall assured me it would be so,
And my good genius truly doth it know:

For what we do presage is not in grosse,
 For we be brethren of the rosie cross;
 We have the mason-word and second sight,
 Things for to come we can foretell aright,
 And shall we show what misterie we mean,
 In fair acrosticks *Carolus Rex* is seen,
 Describ'd upon that bridge in perfect gold,
 By skilfull art this cleerlie we behold,
 With all the scutcheon of Great Britaine's King,
 Which unto Perth most joyfull news shall bring.⁹

If the “brethren of the rosie cross” possess the secret “mason-word and second sight,” as a consequence they can be said to share a really controversial ability with the gypsies, and it is quite interesting to note that the poem is apparently “the first known suggestion that Freemasons were endowed with ‘occult powers.’”¹⁰ But, what is more, the hidden mystery to which the author alludes, is meant to be the very name of “*Carolus Rex*,” the Stuart king Charles I who is on the throne right when Adamson writes the poem. As a matter of fact, he looks at the king as a masonic guide, thus affirming the outstanding role of the Stuart descent in the rise of the craft, in the same way as James Anderson does in his 1723 *Constitutions*, where he writes that:

the great Care that the SCOTS took of true Masonry, prov'd afterwards very useful to ENGLAND; for the learned and magnanimous QUEEN ELIZABETH, who encourag'd other Arts, discourag'd this; because, being a *Woman*, she could not be made a *Mason* (...). But upon her Demise, King JAMES VI. Of SCOTLAND succeeding to the Crown of ENGLAND, being a *Mason* King, reviv'd the *English* Lodges; and as he was the *First* King of GREAT-BRITAIN, he was also the *First*

⁹ James Cant ed., *The Muses Threnodie; Or Mirthful Mournings on the Death of Mr Gall*, Perth: Robert Morison, 1774, pp. 83-84.

¹⁰ Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge: the Strange and Fascinating History of the Knights Templar and the Freemasons*, New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011, p. 110.

Prince in the World that recover'd the *Roman* Architecture from the Ruins of *Gothick* Ignorance.¹¹

So far, we have seen how both the gypsies and the freemasons come to be credited with the power of second sight but, apart from Anderson's reference to James I as the first mason king of Great Britain, we need make clear the actual link between the Stuarts and freemasonry, through the lenses of such 'magical' practice. In so doing, we inevitably have to touch on a long tradition among the Highlanders, who would habitually report strange visions of future events, and come up with particularly bad omens during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Second sight becomes a Jacobite trademark: foreign commentators wrongly tend to overlap the belief in this power with a sense of belonging to the Highlanders, and the support for the Stuart cause. In order to correct such view, Juliet Feibel explains that:

the eighteenth-century discourse on second sight was political, linked to Jacobitism through cultural association and as a method of representing Jacobitical events as history. Second sight is not Jacobitical in the sense that an individual who experiences second sight, believes in it, or reports an instance of it is necessarily a Jacobite. Rather, (...) second sight was infused with Jacobite sentiment and content, but was not a Jacobitical argument in itself. As a form of history, written accounts of second sight offered an ostensibly neutral way to represent Jacobite events and provided a literary counterpart to the growing influence of "common-sense" Whig historiography. After Culloden, second sight lost its status as history in its own right, and became a mere object of historical inquiry, as scholars and writers sought to preserve the quickly-disappearing Highland traditions. Like the legends of Bonnie Prince Charlie himself, the unhappy endings predicted by second sight took on a sweet melancholy of inevitable loss.¹²

The inaccurate association between second sight and Jacobitism can be further demonstrated by noting that "Duncan Forbes, the Lord President of Scotland

¹¹ James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons. Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity*, London: John Senex and John Hooke, 1723, p. 38.

¹² Juliet Feibel, "Highland Histories: Jacobitism and Second Sight." *CLIO* 30.1 (2000): 53.

during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 (...) in earnest service of the Hanoverians, earned himself an unlikely place in cultural memory by making one of British history's most famous prophecies.”¹³ Forbes is thought to have predicted Charles Edward Stuart's final defeat while looking out the window from his house near Inverness, just when the Pretender was on the point of crushing the English army, thus announcing a Hanoverian triumph and contradicting this prejudiced parallel. In general, Jacobitism and second sight are easily pieced together, on account of the secretive nature of their respective messages: both of them serve the purpose of mutual understanding, where written words or spoken language jeopardise communication. Indeed, the support for the Pretender is often 'voiced' by codes and secret signs. Curiously enough, we might add, it is the same logic that governs masonic exchanges outside the lodge, in order to avoid revealing pieces of information.

On the whole, the presence of the gypsies along Tom's way is subject to various readings, all of them consistent with Fielding's overall design. Their dishonest way of living may be an amused comment on Tom's undeserved benevolence on Allworthy's part or, on the contrary, an allusion to his banishment from home. The gypsy company can also represent an embodiment of Fielding's literary device of digression: their custom of 'commorari' holds true if it means 'to stop,' 'to stay,' or 'to remain,' but it is also valid in the sense of 'to delay' and 'to linger.' In a certain way, they make the plot come to a standstill and momentarily keep Tom from proceeding on his journey. But if we read the episode symbolically, their function is to be seen under a rather different light: the encounter in the barn is essential for Tom to find a "light at some distance" (*TJ*, p. 547) and finally get access to it, so to join a group of people who are similarly 'born to be hanged.' In that strange place he is properly initiated and comes to be endowed with clairvoyance, that allows him by degrees to foresee the consequences of his imprudence: it is not by chance, indeed, that right after this episode he meets Lady Bellaston, who turns out to be his last blunder before he eventually learns to visualise the only worthy object of love, his dear Sophia.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

4.2 Back to Paradise: “The Pretender Shall Enjoy His Own Again”

At what serves as the final crossroads of the novel, Fielding quickens up the pace of Tom’s symbolic travel. To this end, he increasingly encourages us to notice the visual impact of the journey through England and its underlying meaning. Accordingly, Manuel Schonhorn reads the map of the protagonist’s movements in terms of numerology, trying to make sense of Fielding’s well-planned narrative design:

Fielding “forced” the gypsy episode into Book XII, chapter 12. Twelve is the number for cosmic order and salvation, linked to the perfection of the circle, or the completed cycle. Its traditional overtones of sacredness and justice almost make one expect the actions of the gypsy king affirming dramatically the symbolic content of the number. (...) A look at the map (...) of Tom Jones demonstrates that the movements of his characters to London, as far as he could control those movements along clearly mapped and known roads of 1745, make a perfect equilateral triangle. Sophia and Tom, leaving Upton, pass the Severn (XI, 2) and seem to be on the Worcester road (XI, 1) to London (XI,2). There are two principal roads leading out of Worcester to Warwickshire; through Warwick, one could pick up one main road to London; or by going north to Coventry, one could pick up another. Fielding moves Tom along the more northern one, to Coventry, as if to call attention to the developing equilateral triangle. (...) As much as the circle, the equilateral triangle was a symbol of proportion and symmetry, an equivalent to exact justice and order and harmony. In its “threeness” the triangle was an emblem of aspiration and perfection (...). The gypsy kingdom, we discover, is not at Meriden (...) nor in Coventry, but at the apex, it appears, of the book’s triangularity, in a pastoral landscape outside of Coventry. It thus appears to be the highest elevation traversed by Jones on the two-dimensional plane of the text. (...) We should recall that both of Tom’s major detours, foreboding evil and disorder, if sustained, were in a north-northwesterly direction: his first from his home to Bristol and the sea, diverted; his second, into the potentially destructive domain of the devil, the Man of the Hill. (...) [H]e shifts to a southeasterly direction, heading for London, salvation, and self-knowledge. (...) Parenthetically it could be suggested that Fielding, sitting as a magistrate in London, must have known that in

underworld and slang parlance “to go west” was to be carried out of Newgate jail to the gallow tree three miles west at Tyburn.¹⁴

Schonhorn justly suggests that Fielding’s insistence on the value of the number twelve is meant to convey a sense of fullness, a sort of arrival point: hence, the change of direction is quite telling, both because it signals that he has just acquired a superior form of self-knowledge, and because he literally swerves to the ‘right.’ The triangle which is being slowly drawn on the map need be interpreted as the geometrical sign standing for a ‘perfection in progress,’ besides concretely taking shape as the most powerful of all masonic symbols. In addition, the reference to the idiom ‘to go west’ contributes to the overwhelming feeling of Tom’s fast-approaching death which, as seen before, is necessary to let him rise up as a Master.

To sum up, as far as Tom’s travel is concerned, the gypsies represent the first step towards his final resurrection, but we must now take a look at the way in which his growing awareness is mirrored by the emerging Jacobite motif. At this point, Fielding needs to create a precise historical background and, at the same time, he deliberately keeps Tom’s partisanship ambiguous. Indeed, in spite of this latter speaking on behalf of the Hanoverians and the Protestant cause, the certainty about his ideals is repeatedly shaken by some intervening misunderstandings along the way. The first mention of the Jacobites is associated with the mockery of Catholic superstition and ‘nonsense,’ a posture that Fielding dramatises through Partridge’s funny comments. Expressing great concern for Tom’s decision to join the army on the march to crush the Highlanders, he says:

now my presence appears absolutely necessary to take care of you, since your intentions are so desperate; for I promise you my views are much more prudent (...). [A] Popish priest told me the other day, the business would soon be over, and he believed without a battle.’ ‘A Popish priest,’ cries Jones, ‘I have heard, is not always to be believed when he speaks in behalf of his religion.’ ‘Yes, but so far,’ answered the other, ‘from speaking in behalf of his religion, he assured me, the Catholicks did

¹⁴ Manuel Schonhorn, “Fielding’s Ecphrastic Moment: Tom Jones and His Egyptian Majesty.” *Studies in Philology* 78.3 (1981): 306-307.

not expect to be any gainers by the change; for that Prince Charles was as good a Protestant as any in England; and that nothing but regard to right made him and the rest of the popish party to be Jacobites.’ ‘I believe him to be as much a Protestant as I believe he hath any right,’ says Jones. ‘and I make no doubt of our success, but not without a battle. So that I am not so sanguine as your friend the Popish priest.’ ‘Nay, to be sure, sir,’ answered Partridge, ‘all the prophecies I have ever read, speak of a great deal of blood to be spilt in the quarrel, and the miller with three thumbs, who is now alive, is to hold the horses of three kings, up to his knees in blood. Lord have mercy upon us all, and send better times!’ ‘With what stuff and nonsense hast thou filled thy head?’ answered Jones. (*TJ*, pp. 355-356)

In the middle of the eighth book, where he utters these words, Partridge can still pretend to be “much more prudent” than Tom. But the dialogue with his young friend soon casts him under a ridiculous light: consciously or not, he becomes the spokesman of the Stuart claim, while trying to downplay the risks of possible battles. Unfortunately for him, moreover, here he comes to fall into the category of the ‘enthusiasts,’ a name which Fielding and many of his contemporaries use to indicate, with an air of contempt, such religious groups as Catholics and some dissenting churches. The next step in the narrator’s strategy soon calls into doubt the clear-cut divide between Tom and the Pretender, which is bound to be blurred by the usual distortion of hard facts. Indeed, Partridge realises to have been misled by the account of Tom’s fight with an officer, supposedly caused by the former’s Jacobite leanings. It is no surprise that, as is often the case with the poor man, he misinterprets other characters’ words and, accordingly, we see his astonishment at such outspoken loyalty to the Hanoverian faction:

For to inform the reader of a secret, (...) Partridge was in truth a Jacobite, and had concluded that Jones was of the same party, and was now proceeding to join the rebels. An opinion which was not without foundation. For the tall long-sided dame (...) had related the story of the quarrel between Jones and the officer, with her usual regard to truth. She had indeed changed the name of Sophia into that of the Pretender, and had reported, that drinking his health was the cause for which Jones was knocked down. This Partridge had heard, and most firmly believed. (*TJ*, p. 356)

Apart from being “in truth” a Jacobite, Partridge is always comically related to lies or, more precisely, to various shades of self-deceiving. On the one hand, this prodigious capability of misreading reality adds an interesting aspect to his inner taste for superstition, while on the other hand his blunders are necessary to turn tables, from time to time, on the readers’ momentary trust in Tom’s political support. For what concerns Partridge, he ingenuously makes use of the trite commonplace that pieces together heavy drinking with Jacobitism, clearly emerging through his blind acceptance of the episode.

Earlier in the novel, indeed, we assist to a sudden fighting scene involving Tom and the ensign Northerton, who makes fun of the traveller’s naive behaviour while drinking with his company of officers:

It now came to the turn of Mr Jones to give a toast, as it is called; who could not refrain from mentioning his dear Sophia. (...) But the lieutenant (...) said, he must have her sir-name; upon which Jones (...) named Miss Sophia Western. Ensign Northerton declared (...) ‘I knew one Sophy Western (...) that was lain-with by half the young fellows at Bath; and, perhaps, this is the same woman.’ Jones very solemnly assured him of the contrary (...). ‘Ay, ay,’ says the ensign, ‘and so she is; d – n me, it is the same woman; and I’ll hold half a dozen of Burgundy, Tom French of our regiment brings her into company with us at any tavern in Bridges-street.’ He then proceeded to describe her person exactly, (for he had seen her with her aunt) and concluded with saying, ‘that her father had a great estate in Somersetshire.’ (...) Jones, tho’ he had enough of the lover and of the heroe too in his disposition, did not resent these slanders as hastily as, perhaps, he ought to have done. (...) But now turning to the ensign with a stern aspect, he said, ‘Pray, sir, chuse some other subject for your wit: for I promise you I will bear no jesting with this lady’s character.’ (*TJ*, p. 305)

In the course of the eleventh book, after Sophia leaves Upton to proceed on her journey, the shifting political positions are rendered in the text by her identity being mistaken for that of the Pretender’s lover. This time, it is not Partridge, of course, who lights the spark of confusion but, quite in line with Fielding’s ability to exploit the comic potential of each social class, the ‘great’ discovery is directly made by the landlord she meets at her next stop. We are thus called to enter the

scene in order to overhear the conversation between the man and his wife, right when he eagerly asks her:

‘What she thought of the ladies lately arrived?’ ‘Think of them!’ said the wife, ‘why what should I think of them?’ ‘(...) One pretends to be come from Gloucester, and the other from Upton (...). But what people ever travel across the country from Upton hither, especially to London? (...) [W]hom do you think I have found them out to be?’ ‘(...) [T]hey are certainly some of the rebel ladies, who, they say, travel with the young Chevalier; and have taken a round-about way to escape the Duke’s army.’ ‘Husband,’ quoth the wife, ‘you have certainly hit it; for one of them is drest as fine as any princess (...). But what’s to be done, husband? If an she be a rebel, I suppose you intend to betray her up to the court. (...) ‘Pooh!’ answered the husband, (...) it is not so easy a matter to determine. I hope, before she goes away, we shall have the news of a battle: for if the Chevalier should get the better, she may gain us interest at court, and make our fortunes without betraying her.’ (...) While our politic landlord (...) was engaged in debating this matter with himself, (...) news arrived that the rebels had given the Duke the slip, and had got a day’s march towards London (...). [H]e had now (he said) discovered that she was no other than Madam Jenny Cameron herself. (*TJ*, pp. 471-473)

Through passages like this, Fielding attempts to dramatise the compelling threat of the '45 rebellion, even though by the time *Tom Jones* comes out, Charles Edward Stuart’s heroism has already become a distant memory. Nevertheless, when the narrator comes to touch on political matters, the story still seems to be tinged with the all too concrete fear of an unstable national power. After all, events such as the so-called Elibank Plot in 1751, a plan intended to kidnap George II and other members of the Royal family, demonstrate how Fielding cannot be said to make too much of the Jacobite dangerous agenda. Moreover, his concern extends to the shaky political views of the lower and middle classes, since the landlord scheming with his wife, only gives a smaller-scale picture of all those English people ready to take advantage of the winning faction, whatever it may turn out to be. When the man finally mentions Jenny Cameron, she makes for a powerful emblem of confusion at all levels, both in relation to Sophia and the general development of the plot. Indeed, not only are their identities carelessly

mixed up, but their own status of female heroines acquires a rather ambiguous overtone, as Jill Campbell notes:

Repeatedly, Fielding asserts Sophia's possession of (...) "Spirit" (...) a quality that is particularly associated with female Jacobites (...). He dwells most upon this quality and on the element of "natural Courage" in Sophia when she runs away from her father's house to avoid marriage to Blifil (...). The situation is reminiscent of Shakespearean comedy, and we might almost expect Sophia, like *As You Like It's* Rosalind or *Two Gentlemen's* Julia, to don male clothing as she sets out on her dangerous journey with her waiting-maid. Even without actual male masquerade, Sophia's venture away from home is also reminiscent of the adventures of Jenny Cameron and other daring female rebels.¹⁵

The interest for cross-dressing can be easily reconciled with Fielding's long career as dramatist, though not exclusively confined to it, since he somehow revives it when he publishes his medium-length piece of writing *The Female Husband* (1746), based on the true story of a Mrs Mary passing off for a certain Mr George Hamilton, and being arrested after her marriage with a young girl. Enticing as this aspect may be, the relationship between Sophia and Jenny is even closer and more complex than the male-female oscillation could suggest. The Highlands girl's identity becomes the object of many speculations during the period of the rebellion, in a way that a real-life Jean comes to be totally separated from her fictional counterpart Jenny. Thus, we can notice the exploitation of Jenny's well-known name "to establish the distinction between Jean and her fictional double, namely on the two traits that characterized Jenny – her rebellion and her physical closeness to the army. Jean is loyal and did not follow the troops [,] Jenny Cameron might be a fictional character."¹⁶ If we rely on these portraits, they appear to bear some resemblance to both Sophia and Jenny Jones. Indeed, Miss Western is primarily meant to be an obedient, charming country girl, complying

¹⁵ Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 171.

¹⁶ Allan I. Macinnes, Kieran German, and Lesley Graham eds., *Living with Jacobitism, 1690-1788: The Three Kingdoms and Beyond*, London: Routledge, 2016, p. 97.

with her father's wishes, but she also strongly reacts against his tyranny when setting out on a sort of 'travelling rebellion.' Jenny Jones (whose name is perhaps designed as the telltale sign of a historical model) can be described as a champion of identitarian 'revolutions' along with Partridge: she is a rebel while holding Bridget's secret in spite of Allworthy's pressing questions; she changes her name into Mrs Waters (the reference being, among others, most likely to her 'fluid' character and to her female nature, in keeping with typically Shakespearean imagery); she has a sexual affair with Tom, which breaks all the boundaries between 'maternal care' and lust. On the whole, we could conclude that these two figures are both supposed to help Tom find his own path to virtue and to hinder his progress, though totally unaware of that. The presence of Shakespearean elements, with respect to the theme of identity, is somehow instrumental to introduce a later episode. The numerous quotations, both explicit and implicit, from the Elizabethan playwright apparently culminate into Fielding's account of a representation of Hamlet, which serves as the final stroke to depict Tom as the fictional version of the Young Pretender.

As a premise, we should underline that the eighteenth century shows a renewed interest in Shakespeare's achievements, attributing to him the lead role of English bard. This critical attention clearly emerges through the various editions of his works, among which we can include William Warburton's *The Works of Shakespear* (1747), drawing material from Alexander Pope's 1725 edition, or the celebrated *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765) by Samuel Johnson, all of them contributing to the rising British canon.

From the wide range of Shakespearean plots, Fielding picks out the history of the Danish prince, which best allows him to adapt ancient history to contemporary needs. Well into the third section of the novel, in the middle of the sixteenth book, we see Partridge and Tom, together with their London landlady Mrs Miller and her daughter Nancy, spending a night at the theatre to watch the famous tragedy. To put the episode into a precise context, we must start from the title of the chapter, reading: "In which Jones receives a Letter from Sophia, and goes to a Play with Mrs Miller and Partridge." (*TJ*, p. 706) It refers to the message through which the girl tells Tom that, due to her aunt's support, she has finally

regained her freedom after her father's severe punishment, on condition that she will neither meet nor write to him anymore. Indeed, heaving a sigh of relief with a melancholy air, she writes:

[Y]ou will be pleased to hear that some of my afflictions are at an end, by the arrival of my aunt Western, with whom I am at present, and with whom I enjoy all the liberty I can desire. One promise my aunt hath insisted on my making, which is, that I will not see or converse with any person without her knowledge and consent. (*TJ*, pp. 706-707)

This letter comes as a reply to a preceding one, that Tom sends her in a dejected mood, holding himself responsible for all her suffering, and wondering: "Is there a circumstance in the world which can heighten my agonies, when I hear of any misfortune which hath befallen you?" (*TJ*, pp. 700-701)

The unjust imposition of Mr Western on his daughter, that aims at putting a stop to the dead end situation with Tom, mirrors Polonius' paternal stern attitude towards Ophelia. Firstly, we could recall Laerte's words, just before his departure for France. He urges his sister to be prudent, in case the prince will slyly attempt to win her heart, and reminds her that "best safety lies in fear." (*H*, I-iii; 43, p. 36),¹⁷ while the scene ends with the harsh statement that Polonius utters to seemingly thwart the girl's hopes. In the last part of their dialogue, he dryly says: "This is for all. / I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth / Have you so slander any moment leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. / Look to't, I charge you. Come your ways.", to which Ofelia coldly answers: "I shall obey, my lord." (*H*, I-iii; 131-136, pp. 40-42)

Both Shakespeare and Fielding let these family tensions come to light, right when the stratagem of the drama is being devised to meet the needs of meta-fiction. On the one hand, Polonius' decision precedes the fourth scene of the first act featuring the apparition of the ghost, that eventually leads to the 'mousetrap'

¹⁷ All quotations from *Hamlet* will be abbreviated as *H*, along with act, scene, line, and page number in brackets. References to the text are from: Nemi D'Agostino ed., *Amleto*, Milano: Garzanti, 2008.

scheme against Claudius; on the other hand, Tom's enthusiasm for Sophia's letter prompts him to go and enjoy the staging of *Hamlet*.

Let us have a close look at the states of mind paving the way to the episode in *Tom Jones*. After the initial clumsy reaction to the girl's letter, Tom looks forward to laughing at his friends' extravagance all through the play. Indeed, the narrator comments that: "as Jones had really that taste for humour which many affect, he expected to enjoy much entertainment in the criticisms of Partridge; from whom he expected the simple dictates of nature, unimproved indeed, but likewise unadulterated by art." (*TJ*, p. 708) Hence, we can establish a parallel between this representation and Hamlet's plot, that serves as "the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." (*H*, II-ii; 600-601, p. 106) In the course of the following scene, while laying out his plans to Horatio, the prince insists on his friend watching over the king's facial gestures. And with great subtlety, Hamlet stresses the importance of such analysis: "I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot, / Even with the very comment of thy soul / Observe my uncle. (...) Give him heedful note; / For I mine eyes will rivet to his face, / And after we will both our judgments join / In censure of his seeming." (*H*, III-ii; 78-80, 84-87, p. 124)

Let us proceed further into the night at the theatre. Once there, Partridge comes up with reflections on small and seemingly ridiculous details, thus showing the naive nature which characterises him throughout the novel. Then he turns to Mrs Miller's and calls her attention to the physical features of the man lighting candles in the theatre hall: "Look, look, madam, the very picture of the man in the end of the Common-Prayer Book, before the Gunpowder-Treason service." (*TJ*, p. 708) This curious remark actually brings Partridge's cultural background into relief. The mention of the notorious plot organised by Guy Fawkes and other Catholics in 1605 against James I, once again reminds us of the constant tension that Fielding creates between the Protestant faith supported by the constitutional Hanoverian monarchy, and the Catholic doctrine promoted by the Stuart absolutism. Within this frame of reference, the coward and superstitious Partridge represents the Jacobite culture in a wide sense, because he supports the Pretender's campaign and, perhaps even more irritatingly in Fielding's eyes,

because of his closeness to papists, as he labels the whole category of Catholics scornfully.

As the tragedy goes on, when the ghost appears, Partridge is totally overpowered by fear, and the narrator tells us that he “fell into so violent a trembling, that his knees knocked against each other” (*TJ*, p. 709), thus making for a perfect comic double of Hamlet at the moment when this latter begins to fake insanity. Indeed, at a certain point in the drama, Ofelia reports to Polonius having just seen the prince, and adds that he looked “Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other, / And with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors, he comes before me.” (*H*, II-i; 81-84, p. 66) Reflecting on the image of their trembling knees, the resemblance between Partridge and Hamlet as spokesmen of timorous claims can be taken even further. This similarity is largely centred on the name James (or Jack), which has a strong Jacobite appeal harking back to the first and last Stuart kings, James I and James II. It is often used to indicate an idiot, as its French version Jacques does through the idiom ‘faire le Jacques’ (literally ‘to act like a Jack’), meaning to act like a fool, a simpleton and, in general, to show physical and behavioural weakness. On the whole, Partridge and Hamlet are entrusted with tasks, both on a symbolic and a material level, that they are unable to carry out, even though they certainly comply with their own function of observers and commentators. Not surprisingly, during the staging of *The Mousetrap*, Ofelia turns to Hamlet and tells him: “You are as good as a chorus, my lord.” (*H*, III-ii; 240, p. 136) They can properly do little more than to follow the steps of the traditional Greek chorus, thus taking on a role that produces emotional reactions: that is why Hamlet wears a mask which exempts him from any rational discourse and allows him to lay charges against his uncle, who should be punished by death. In the same way, Partridge, naturally inclined to be a Jacobite, cannot find the courage to make his ideology too clear, therefore his exaggerated emotional response becomes the most powerful outward sign of which he is capable.

One more aspect is worth notice: once again, let us start from the title of Hamlet’s drama. Besides overtly referring to its own purpose as a plot against Claudius, *The Mousetrap* belongs to the semantic field of Hamlet’s outburst when

he rashly stabs the usurper in the back and shouts: “How now? A rat! Dead for a ducat, dead.” (*H*, III-iv; 23, p. 154) In both cases, the goal is to detect traitors like Claudius, who illegally took over his brother’s role, or like Polonius, who slyly hides behind the arras hanging to serve the wrong cause.

No doubt, Fielding makes an interesting use of this animal in *Tom Jones*, by literally employing it as a rodent and as synonym of unpleasant creature: in doing so, indeed, he repeatedly chooses the term ‘rat’ instead of ‘mouse,’ in order to stress the negative connotations that it has. Mr Western and his rude manners allow the word ‘rat’ to express all its semantic potential: as an indignant representative of the ‘country party’ (composed of the so-called ‘grumbletonians’) bitterly criticising the Whig politics of those years, he announces with an almost prophetic tone the coming of new times, when ‘newcomers’ must be finally sent away. Thus, while talking to his sister, he bursts out:

[‘]Do you think no one hath any understanding, unless he hath been about at Court? Pox! the world is come to a fine pass indeed, if we are all fools, except a parcel of Roundheads and Hannover rats. Pox! I hope the times are a coming that we shall make fools of them, and every man shall enjoy his own. That’s all, sister, and every man shall enjoy his own. I hope to *zee* it, sister, before the Hannover rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turneps to feed upon.’ (*TJ*, p. 262)

These words voice the latent and widespread resentment among many British citizens who, like Partridge and Squire Western himself, wish for a political restoration and the rediscovery of lost values. As further evidence of the strongly ‘partisan’ meaning of this claim, we can notice how Western states “every man shall enjoy his own” twice within the space of two lines: it can be best interpreted as a very telling quotation of the Jacobite song *The King Shall Enjoy His Own Again*.

To conclude the analysis of this episode, we can safely affirm that the frustrating efforts of the Danish prince become instrumental to the plot of *Tom Jones*, well beyond the limits of common intertextual references. Fielding turns Hamlet’s inner conflict, his paralysis, and the device of the theatrical entertainment, into witty pretexts to adapt the celebrated tragedy to the troubled

context of 1745. Thus, Partridge only echoes the uncertainty associated with the 'national drama' that the Pretender brings on the British stage. This latter, indeed, plays a lead role in what seems to be both a representation and a military campaign that, after the triumphant parade through the streets of Edinburgh at the end of 1745, increasingly appears to be bound to failure.

If the staging of *Hamlet* provides a mirror for the two travellers to look into, we should now focus on some events happening as they approach London and then face Tom's imprisonment. First of all, we need analyse a much-neglected episode which occurs in the fourteenth chapter of the twelfth book, after their departure from St. Albans, "about two miles beyond Barnet." (*TJ*, p. 559) It deals with the last of several robberies taking place throughout the novel and, in a certain way, it can be said to replicate the scene where Black George steals Tom's money towards the end of the sixth book. Actually, however, the thief here fails to carry out his plan, in spite of the situation seemingly taking a bad turn:

Our company were now arrived within a mile of Highgate, when the stranger turned short upon Jones, and pulling out a pistol, demanded that little bank note which Partridge had mentioned. Jones was at first somewhat shocked at this unexpected demand; however, he presently recollected himself, and told the highwayman, all the money he had in his pocket was entirely at his service; and so saying, he pulled out upwards of three guineas, and offered to deliver it; but the other answered with an oath, That would not do. Jones answered coolly, He was very sorry for it, and returned the money into his pocket. The highwayman then threatened, if he did not deliver the bank note that moment he must shoot him; holding his pistol at the same time very near to his breast. Jones instantly caught hold of the fellow's hand, which trembled so that he could scarce hold the pistol in it, and turned the muzzle from him. A struggle then ensued, in which the former wrested the pistol from the hand of his antagonist, and both came from their horses on the ground together, the highwayman upon his back, and the victorious Jones upon him. (*TJ*, pp. 559-560)

As is the case with minor scenes, readers often underrate this fight and, most of all, scholars of Fielding have always dismissed it as yet another way to hinder Tom's journey towards London. Nevertheless, the symbolic meaning of the

encounter with this poor would-be highwayman deserves greater attention and can be thrown into relief, especially when the narrator resumes it a few chapters later. To start with, soon after the brawl, we discover that the man is no wicked criminal but, as he himself says: “I could have had no intention to shoot you, for you will find the pistol was not loaded. This is the first robbery I ever attempted, and I have been driven by distress to this.” (*TJ*, p. 560) And the narrator gives us further details about the man’s precarious situation, which has prompted him to commit such mischief: “Jones (...) began to believe all the man had told him (...); namely, that (...) he had been driven to it by the distress he mentioned, (...) that of five hungry children, and a wife lying in of a sixth, in the utmost want and misery.” (*TJ*, p. 560) In the eighth chapter of the thirteenth book, when the scene has probably already slipped many a reader’s mind, we see Mrs Miller relate the visit she has just paid to a cousin of hers in dire straits and, quite surprisingly, we discover this latter to be the thief’s wife. Mrs Miller’s daughter Nancy lifts the veil of her identity and comments on the sad account: “I have always looked on my cousin Anderson’ (for that was her name) ‘as one of the happiest women.”” (*TJ*, p. 593) Then again, in the tenth chapter of the thirteenth book, the narrator rather unexpectedly goes back to it, and finally Tom learns that the poor Anderson and his aggressor are the same person. On a merely narrative level, the episode is actually not so relevant to our specific reading of *Tom Jones* but, when seen under a different light, it appears to be in line with its masonic background. Indeed, the surname Anderson¹⁸ can be easily traced back to the historical figure of the Scottish Presbyterian minister James Anderson, who publishes *The Constitutions of the Freemasons* in 1723, on behalf of the Grand Lodge of London. Such resemblance between the real-life Anderson and his fictional double becomes visible as Mrs Miller, expressing gratitude for Tom’s benevolence towards her cousin, tells him: “O you are an excellent young man, (...) yes, indeed, poor creature! he hath ventured everything – If he had not had one of the best of constitutions it must have killed him.”” (*TJ*, p. 598) Here Fielding plays with the

¹⁸ It is also spelled Enderson or Henderson but, in an appendix to his edition of *Tom Jones*, Sheridan Baker comes up with convincing evidence for the correctness of Anderson. See Sheridan Baker ed., *Tom Jones*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1995.

semantic range of the word constitution: on the one hand, the highwayman is thought to be strong enough to endure a long series of hardships; on the other hand, he does not risk to die of starvation anymore because, implicitly, he ‘wrote the constitutions’ at the right time. As a matter of fact, the wordplay applies to both the historical and the fictional character, because they go through a period of extreme poverty. For what the robber is concerned, he is supposedly guilty of having chosen “a love-match, as they call it (...); that is, a match between two beggars” (*TJ*, p. 592) but, as we come to realise later through Mrs Miller’s account of his misfortunes, “this absolute ruin hath been brought upon them by others. The poor man was bail for the villain his brother; and (...) the very day before her lying-in, their goods were all carried away, and sold by an execution.” (*TJ*, p. 593) Scant as it is, the biographical material about James Anderson hints at his constant lack of money, a contemporary rumour that Fielding may well have had in mind to depict his character:

He was an “outsider” in three ways. He was a Non-Conformist minister, he was a Scot, and he was poor. (...) That Anderson was poor becomes evidence that he had base motives, cynically using Freemasonry to make money. (...) The fact that he held the copyright of both editions of the *Constitutions* is taken to prove the point, and serves to “prove” a further point, that the *Constitutions* were a private venture, not an “official” masonic publication. In the light of Grand Lodge’s approbations (1723 and 1738) of his work this is ludicrous, but it meant that Anderson could be denounced without that reflecting badly on Grand Lodge itself. The shabby little Non Conformist Scottish money-grubber can be disowned. (...) Of Anderson’s personal life, little is known, not even the name of his wife. The couple had a son and a daughter, the former being born about 1717. It is said that his wife’s dowry was mostly lost in the South Sea Bubble, the great orgy of speculation that collapsed in 1720 and ruined thousands. But the suggestion that he may have been imprisoned for debt and that poverty drove him to volunteer to write the *Constitutions* rests on prejudice rather than evidence.¹⁹

¹⁹ David Stevenson, “James Anderson: Man & Mason.” *Heredom* 10 (2002): 94-99.

Two elements must draw our attention: at the same time, James Anderson is considered a “money-grubber” and his poverty derives from an unpredictable financial disaster. This is the picture that Fielding must have had before his eyes in those years, in spite of the historical evidence currently calling into question these prejudices. Indeed, the portrait of the Scottish minister that he gives, is most likely the result of Hogarth’s accounts, active membership in freemasonry during the 1730s, and visual rendering of the man (see, for example, his parody in *The Mystery of Masonry Brought to Light by the Gormogons*). On the whole, Fielding may have drawn a sort of unconscious parallel between Anderson and himself, due to the burden of constant hardships, and even to the probable imprisonment for debt. What we certainly know is that:

Anderson died in genteel poverty. (...) [A]llegations that he was only interested in Freemasonry to make money from writing about it and gaining subscriptions for other publications have been made, based on no discernible evidence – except that he was poor. (...) [I]ronically, Anderson’s whole career shows him as a man who proved highly unsuccessful in the life-skills of finding patronage and making money.²⁰

James Anderson being “highly unsuccessful” in “making money,” his link to Fielding’s highwayman gets even tighter: both lives take on a different meaning when symbolically connected with attempted robbery. But then we could wonder why we come across this very episode on the ‘threshold’ of the London section, on the eve, so to say, of Tom’s awakening. The answer lies in the banknote, the sum of money that this latter finds along the way in Sophia’s lost pocket-book. Not only does the bill originally belong to Miss Western, but it somehow reflects her identity; it can even be understood as a proper part of her character, momentarily in somebody else’s hands:

Unlike the anonymous and interchangeable paper money issued by the post-absolutist state, bills in Fielding’s day would be individually identifiable as a consequence of the individualized nature of paper money in the eighteenth century, which not only held the name of the drawer and the bearer, but often a number of

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

intermediary bearers who had endorsed it. It is entirely possible to read the history of a bill or note in its endorsements – the various hands through which it passed. Paper money is not government issued, neither anonymous nor impersonal in this period, but is something which can be “told” and narrated. These are identifiable, distinguishable objects whose history can be read from their surfaces, much like a novel. This fact gives a significant clue to the function of money in Fielding’s fiction. A readable bank note has obvious uses in Fielding’s romance plot of discovery, a plot which asks if money can (re)make the man.²¹

Building on this “individualized nature of paper money,” we can safely affirm that Anderson symbolically attempts to pull Sophia out of Tom’s hands, so to appropriate her ‘legacy.’ In masonic terms, it implies that James Anderson tacitly depredates the ancient lore of operative freemasonry, with the aim of exploiting it within the boundaries of the rising speculative form of the craft, being promoted by the Grand Lodge of London. Such metaphorical robbery clearly emerges as the two different traditions grow increasingly apart. The formation of the Grand Lodge comes as a response to the needs of several classes, and indeed:

To govern this body of men of mixed social rank (...) they formed a Grand Lodge, and (...) elected Anthony Sayer the first Grand Master for the Grand Lodge of England. (...) [W]ith his election, Freemasonry split further from its Operative roots and moved into the future of Speculative and, (...) occult and philosophical Freemasonry. (...) James Anderson (...) was asked to write a history of Masonry (...). In addition to always referring to “constitutions” in the plural, thereby demonstrating that this was not the idea of a lone individual or lodge but instead a synthesis, Anderson’s *Constitutions* contained an important element, an updated rendition of the Ancient Charges. (...) In the writing, accepting, and application of these guidelines, Anderson’s *Constitutions* became one of the earliest recorded landmarks of Freemasonry in the post-1717 era.²²

²¹ James Thompson, “Patterns of Property and Possession in Fielding’s Fiction.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3.1 (1990): 33-34.

²² Mark Stavish, *Freemasonry: Rituals, Symbols & History of the Secret Society*, Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2007, p. 11.

At odds with Anderson's role in speculative freemasonry, Tom represents the competing version of the craft, the one more strictly connected with the Stuart line of kings, of which he embodies the last would-be representative. Therefore, he must preserve the wealth of 'Western knowledge,' that is, his beloved Sophia from an illegitimate claimant to her 'riches.'

When Tom arrives in London, his wanderings finally come to an end. He is ready to undergo the last trial, that entails the step of symbolic death: the journey, as we have seen, is mostly a narrative device to let him acquire the necessary prudence for his future life, but what sort of travel can be seen as a model for Fielding's expedient? The fact that he makes Tom similar to the historical figure of the Young Pretender, should lead us to think that, at least to a certain extent, Andrew Michael Ramsay's *Les Voyages de Cyrus* (1727) can be considered the basis for the road section, and for its use as a metaphor of inner growth. Ramsay writes this mirror for princes, "which he dedicated to the Young Pretender," three years after joining the exiled court in Rome, where "he reached the pinnacle of his Jacobite career by becoming tutor to the young Prince Charles."²³ The editorial vicissitudes of Ramsay's work strikingly interweave with Fielding's circle of friends and literary models. The same year of its publication in French, Nathaniel Hooke translates it into English;²⁴ this latter need be numbered among Fielding's acquaintances, and Martin Battestin reconstructs their relationship thus:

HOOKE, Nathaniel (d. 1763), historian. HF's acquaintance with Hooke may have begun with their involvement in the controversy provoked by the publication in March 1742 of the **Duchess of Marlborough's** memoirs, in which she justified her conduct at the expense of Queen Mary, Queen Anne, Lord Oxford, and many others of high and low degree. Hooke served as the duchess's ghost in writing this work, for

²³ Doohwan Ahn, "From Greece to Babylon: The Political Thought of Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743)." *History of European Ideas* 37 (2011): 421.

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Ramsay's best-selling work, particularly within the wide context of his Jacobite politics, see Andrew Mansfield, *Ideas of Monarchical Reform: Fénelon, Jacobitism and the Political Works of the Chevalier Ramsay*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

which he received the extraordinary gratuity of £5,000. When the memoirs were attacked by an anonymous author, HF rose to defend it in his pamphlet, *A Full Vindication of the Dutchess Dowager of Marlborough*. But Hooke is best remembered as the author of *The Roman History*, published in four volumes over many years (vol. 1, 1738; vol. 2, 1745; the final two posthumously). In *A Journey from This World to the Next* (1743, I. ix), HF has the historian **Livy** praise this work, “which he said was preferable to all others”; in *Tom Jones* (1749, XV. iv), Lady Bellaston has read Hooke’s account of the rape of the Sabine women in his first volume.²⁵

As this short portrait suggests, Fielding somehow holds Hooke in high regard and, accordingly, has Lady Bellaston include him in her readings when she affirms: “if the story of Helen was modern, I should think it unnatural. (...) There is another story of the Sabine ladies, - and that too, I thank heaven, is very ancient. (...) I think Mr Hook tells us, they made tolerable good wives afterwards.” (*TJ*, p. 656) Therefore, Fielding must have been familiar with his output and, we can confidently conclude, with *The Travels of Cyrus* too. Moreover, this hypothesis reveals to be even better grounded if we consider that, with respect to Ramsay’s work, its model “would not be unusual for an 18th century reader familiar with Fénelon’s *Télémaque*.”²⁶ Indeed, Fielding structures *Tom Jones* not so much on the *Odyssey* as on the adventures of Ulysses’ son in search of his father. Of course, it is true that:

whenever Fielding refers to serious epic he has in mind primarily three poets: Homer, Virgil, and Milton. (...) The relationship between Homer and Fielding’s novel is different and more puzzling. (...) Fielding makes the *Iliad* the main source for his mock-epic battles and his extended heroic similes. But his use of Homer’s second great epic, the *Odyssey*, is more enigmatic. The *Odyssey* is not an important source of mock-epic: it contains no heroic combats, and its epic similes are short, pungent, and homely. Furthermore, Fielding’s allusions to the *Odyssey* are relatively casual and

²⁵ Martin C. Battestin, *A Henry Fielding Companion*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²⁶ Marialuisa Baldi, “Nature and Man Restored: Mysticism and Millenarianism in Andrew Michael Ramsay.” *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies* 3 (1998): 91.

incidental – and they inevitably seem so because the situations of Odysseus and Tom Jones are so obviously different.²⁷

But still Tom is much more reminiscent of Telemachus for what his age, attitude and final aim of the journey are concerned. Fielding's young protagonist travels through England looking for his origins and unknown father after all, though unconsciously. In this light, we can agree with Paul Hunter's claim that Fielding actually shifts his attention from Homer's celebrated protagonist to the minor hero of the same epic poem. He maintains that:

Tom's position and plight (...) resembles that of *The Odyssey's* second "hero," Telemachus, much more closely than that of his illustrious father, but Fielding's handling of the parallels is exceedingly complex. (...) The shadows of Telemachus and Ulysses interact for Tom throughout the novel (...). If the adventures of Ulysses implicitly suggest what Telemachus shall become (or what he must become in order to deserve Ulysses' place), the plot involving Telemachus himself provides insufficient evidence for us to be sure that the son will ever be as experienced and wise as his father. (...) [I]t is not primarily from Homer that Fielding took his interest in Telemachus or his information about him. Instead Fielding turned to a modern "epic," Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699) (...). Fénelon wrote his book for the private tutorial use of the Duke of Burgundy, potential heir to the throne of Louis XIV, and he took seriously both a philosophical and a practical function for it. (...) [I]ts surreptitious publication not only marked the abrupt end of Fénelon's tutelage and his favour at the French court but also meant that his book was to have a stormy popularity as (...) a treatise on education and politics. It was reprinted often and became widely known throughout Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century. (...) Fénelon details and supplements Homer's story of Telemachus, following his hero on numerous adventures in search of his father and in quest of the experience that will prepare him to rule in his father's place. (...) *Télémaque* (...) helps to account for both external and internal elements of Fielding's structure. (...) Fénelon had (...) subgrouped its eighteen books into three equal parts. Books 1-6 present Telemachus on the island of Calypso, books 7-12 describe his banishment, wanderings, and encounters with warring factions, and books 13-18 contain his descent to the

²⁷ Bruce Stovel, "Tom Jones and the *Odyssey*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 1.4 (1989). 263-264.

underworld in quest of his father, an examen of urban life, and his final return to his father and his home. Furthermore, like Tom, Telemachus becomes attached to three earthly ladies, and one of them dominates each of the three sections.²⁸

Such striking adherence on Fielding's part to the example of Fénelon allows us to state that, *Tom Jones* and *The Travels of Cyrus* overtly share an authoritative and modern model. If *Télémaque* clearly represents the quest for prudence, Ramsay's novel about the future Persian king adds a peculiar symbolic layer of meaning, which influences Fielding's design. As a matter of fact, Cyrus the Great cannot be simply depicted as the protagonist of an important stage in ancient history, because he is at the same time an eminent figure in the masonic tradition. Albert Mackey thus explains Cyrus' outstanding role with respect to the rebuilding of Solomon's Temple:

For the fifty-two years that succeeded the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnessar, that city saw nothing but the ruins of its ancient Temple. But in the year of the world 3468 and 536 B.C., Cyrus gave permission to the Jews to return to Jerusalem, and there to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. Forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty of the liberated captives returned under the guidance of Joshua, the High Priest, Zerubbabel, the Prince or Governor, and Haggai, the Scribe, and one year after they laid the foundations of the second Temple.²⁹

This portrait evidently takes on a sort of heroic overtone, since Cyrus is responsible for the construction of the second Temple of Jerusalem, a vital symbol for the craft. However, it will unfortunately be destroyed once again in 70 A.D. during the Roman siege. And, in modern times, while the masonic lore claims the spiritual restoration of this palace, the Stuart dynasty apparently appropriates Cyrus' project with the aim "to constitute London as the celestial New Jerusalem,

²⁸ Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975, pp. 133-135.

²⁹ Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences, Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution, Vol. 2*, New York: The Masonic History Company, 1919, p. 345.

a fitting capital for James thus cast as the British Solomon.”³⁰ Dramatic crises such as Charles I’s beheading in 1649 and James II’s exile in 1688 notoriously thwart these ambitious plans, for which reason, many years later the young Charles Edward Stuart goes on stage as the last member of his family to attempt the ‘restoration of the Temple.’ At this point, it becomes quite obvious that the parallel between Cyrus and the Young Pretender must be extended to Tom’s fictional mission which, at the end of the novel, he certainly has the credentials to carry out.

The last obstacle on his way is the imprisonment for the attempted murder of Mr Fitzpatrick. He actually runs the Irish man through with his sword to defend himself, then some men close by seize him, and the narrator promptly intervenes to blacken the situation:

The officer who commanded this gang very wisely concluded, that his business was now to deliver his prisoner into the hands of the civil magistrate. He ordered him therefore to be carried to a publick house, where having sent for a constable, he delivered him to his custody. The constable seeing Mr Jones very well drest, and hearing that the accident had happened in a duel, treated his prisoner with great civility, and, at his request, dispatched a messenger to enquire after the wounded gentleman, who was now at a tavern under the surgeon’s hands. The report brought back was, that the wound was certainly mortal, and there were no hopes of life. Upon which the constable informed Jones, that he must go before a justice. (*TJ*, pp. 726-727)

In keeping with the masonic symbolism that we have analysed so far, Tom’s imprisonment and ‘temporary death’ should rather be seen as necessary rite of passage to finally resurrect as a Master. This entails that all references to his impending execution need be read as bitter remarks only at a denotative level. The narrator must not be taken too seriously when, in the introductory chapter to the seventeenth book, he ponders on Tom’s case and plainly tells us that if he cannot get himself out of troubles, he “will do no violence to the truth and dignity of history for his sake; for we had rather relate that he was hanged at Tyburn (which

³⁰ Vaughan Hart, *Art and Magic in the Court of the Stuarts*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 105.

may very probably be the case) than forfeit our integrity, or shock the faith of our reader.” (*TJ*, p. 730) Similarly, Mr Western’s joyous reaction at the news of Tom’s disgrace does not deserve much credit, especially as he says: “‘What that,’ (...) ‘Murder! hath he committed a murder, and is there any hopes of seeing him hanged? – Tol de rol, tol lol de rol.’” (*TJ*, p. 738) Soon after he still insists on softly forcing Sophia into an arranged marriage with Blifil: “‘Well, well,’ cries the squire, ‘nothing of that kind shall be attempted; we will try a little longer what fair means will effect; and if this fellow be but hanged out of the way – Tol lol de rol. I never heard better news in my life (...).’” (*TJ*, p. 738)

As the end of the novel draws near, the amount of Tom’s soul-searching must surface and let him turn disaster into happiness. This process, however, can only unfold through a proper awakening, and that is why:

the structural progress of Tom’s narrative journey can be fruitfully understood as a spiritual quest rising toward a climactic epiphanic moment. (...) This epiphany occurs in the prison scene (...). Physically enclosed by the stone walls of the prison, Tom has entered (...) the belly of the whale, based upon the biblical story. Like Jonah, Jones has broken the law and become an outsider – a condition of alienation that has dynamic potentiality for personal transformation. Yet the prison scene also recalls another archetypal story, that of Theseus and the Minotaur. Tom has also arrived at the mythical center of the labyrinth. (...) In Fielding’s retelling of the myth, the Minotaur is Tom’s shadow-self, a coalescent formation of the hidden, darker recesses of his psyche that he has hitherto refused to acknowledge. It is only when he can confront this repressed shadow-self that he can truly begin to grow into the complete, organically whole identity that it is his quest to become. Tom’s is not an epiphany of an externally generated divine illumination, but rather an inner illumination. (...) [T]his is an *anagnorisis*, a (self-)discovery. Tom, finally seeing himself as he truly is, gets the opportunity to die to his old ways and re-emerge into a new, more evolved self. To coalesce the two mythologies (Hellenic and Hebraic) this scene solicits, Tom slays his old self just as Theseus slays the Minotaur, then emerges reborn from the womb/tomb of the whale. This moment of self-discovery and rebirth corresponds at the plot level to the *peripeteia*, or sudden reversal of fortune.³¹

³¹ Anthony W. Lee, “Epiphany end the Spiritual Quest in TOM JONES.” *The Explicator* 68.3 (2010): 162-164.

This passage is quite telling for what concerns the themes of self-discovery and death. We would not expect “inner illumination” of a novel like *Tom Jones*, because Fielding continuously makes us perceive the providential hand shaping events or incidents: in other words, we always suspect that an external source of salvation will most likely pull him out of prison at the right time, to let him marry Sophia. But providence only comes as a rather predictable turning point, when Mrs Waters informs Mr Allworthy and Mrs Miller that “she believed Jones would very shortly be released; for that the surgeon was gone, in company with a nobleman, to the justice who committed him, in order to certify that Mr Fitzpatrick was out of all manner of danger, and to procure his prisoner his liberty.” (*TJ*, p. 795) Besides this authorial intrusion, Tom is completely left to save himself through introspection and the discovery of an inner light. This process, along with the fact that he symbolically needs “to die to his old ways,” is strongly reminiscent of the final step to attain the master mason degree:

The light of a Master Mason is darkness visible, which points out the gloom that hovers about futurity. It is a mysterious veil which reason can never penetrate without the assistance of divine revelation. We stand on the very brink of the grave, which, when this transitory life shall have passed away, will receive us within its cold bosom. Emblems of mortality incite us to contemplate our inevitable destiny, and thus produce that great desideratum, a knowledge of oneself.³²

Tom thus resurrects as a Master and his fate must be finally sealed through the marriage with Sophia. This soon takes place and the narrator informs us that the couple, “within two days after their marriage, attended Mr Western and Mr Allworthy into the country.” (*TJ*, p. 822) Referring to the moment in which he is writing the story, he adds that “Sophia hath already produced him [her father] two fine children (...). Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected (...).” (*TJ*, p. 822)

³² George Oliver, *The Historical Landmarks and Other Evidences of Freemasonry: Explained, in a Series of Practical Lectures, with Copious Notes*, Vol. 2, New York: Masonic Publishing and Manufacturing, 1867, p. 102.

This scene of matrimonial happiness once more gives Fielding a chance to echo one of Hogarth's famous series, namely, *Industry and Idleness* (1747). Significantly, the main characters are named Thomas Idle and Francis Goodchild, two figures who bear a striking resemblance to Tom and Blifil. They serve their apprenticeship in Mr West's weaving factory and, as their names seem to foretell, Idle is condemned to be hanged while Goodchild is off to a good start. Indeed, in plate five we see the former on a small boat, his widowed mother crying for her son who is forced to become a sailor after Mr West has dismissed him, and a threatening gallows in the far distance. Goodchild, on the other hand, even manages to marry Mr West's daughter as the signboard reading "Goodchild & West" reveals in plate six. Such sharp contrast between their walks of life only deepens as the series develops. In plate eleven we observe that:

Idle's life has apparently come full circle from debauched youth to evil adulthood. The title of the print is dryly descriptive: "The Idle 'Prentice executed at Tyburn." Accompanied by a Methodist priest, who is vigorously preaching to him, the condemned apprentice rides in the cart that holds his coffin and is heading for the gallows.³³

After this humiliating scene, Hogarth shows the other face of the coin, the reward for hard work. In plate twelve, indeed, it is time to celebrate Goodchild's triumph over his former companion:

It is the Lord Mayor's procession, November 5th, which means it is Goodchild's day of glory – he has attained effectively the highest position he could dream of, that of mayor, and he is depicted parading in the streets, watched by Frederick, Prince of Wales in person. Comfortably seated in an ornate coach decked with the emblems of his status, the sword of state and the sceptre, he is being cheered by a delirious crowd. All the windows are graced by distinguished onlookers while the people wave their hats and blow trumpets. By using elements similar to some of the preceding

³³ Elisabeth Soulier-Détis, *"Guess at the Rest": Cracking the Hogarth Code*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2010, p. 193.

print, the plate suggests that Goodchild's fate is the exact opposite of that of Idle. Both are the centre of the crowd's attention, one for shame the other for fame.³⁴

On the whole, Hogarth's narrative structure seems to suggest that Fielding simply overturns the respective fates of the two men or, to put it another way, he plainly describes what is only confined to a masonic layer of meaning in *Industry and Idleness*. Fielding has Tom face embarrassing situations and sad moments, but he always prevents him from completely falling astray; he shows Blifil "lately turned Methodist, in hopes of marrying a very rich widow of that sect" (*TJ*, p. 821); and most of all, Blifil is turned out of doors and cannot even dream of a marriage to Mr Western's daughter.

To conclude, Fielding seems to follow in the steps of Hogarth's seemingly pessimistic plot, but then in fact he plays his own cards: Tom must affirm his own legitimacy as master of Paradise Hall, that is, as a 'young pretender' who can finally be restored to his own proper place.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

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