

**Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Chatto & Windus 1957; rep. Univ. of California Press 1957).**

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**CHAPTER IX: Fielding as Novelist: 'Tom Jones'**

LITERATURE yields few more interesting *causes célèbres* than the debate over the respective merits of the novels of Fielding and Richardson, a debate which continues today even though during the last century or so the supporters of Fielding have been in almost complete command of the field. [1] The main reason for the vitality of the controversy is the exceptional range and variety of the issues—the opposition is not only between two kinds of novel, but between two kinds of physical and psychological constitution and between two social, moral and philosophical outlooks on life. Not only so: the dispute has the advantage of a spokesman whose strong and paradoxical support for Richardson acts as a perennial provocation to the supporters of Fielding, who are dismayed to find Dr. Johnson, the authoritative voice of neo-classicism, pronouncing anathema on the last full embodiment of the Augustan spirit in life and literature. [2] One way of resolving this last difficulty has been to suggest that Dr. Johnson's attitude should not be taken too seriously because it was dictated by friendship and personal obligation—Richardson had once saved him from being arrested for debt.

Johnson's critical judgement, however, was not usually at the mercy of such considerations, and the supposition in any case runs counter to the fact that his enthusiastic endorsement of Richardson's novels was accompanied by a merciless awareness of the shortcomings of the man—witness his lethal jibe that Richardson 'could not be content to sail quietly down the stream of reputation without longing to taste the froth from every stroke of the oar'. [3] We should, then, consider Johnson's preference seriously, particularly in view of the consistency with which he recurred to his main charge. 'All the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson', he maintained, according to Boswell, was that between 'characters of manners' and 'characters of nature'. 'Characters of manners', of course, Johnson ranked much lower on the grounds that although 'very entertaining ... 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'. This distinction between Richardson and Fielding was more memorably expressed when Johnson said 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'; [4] and the same idea is present in the even more plainly invidious statement reported by Mrs. Thrale that 'Richardson had picked the kernel of life ... while Fielding was contented with the husk'. [5] This basic distinction does not involve any direct divergence from critical orthodoxy, but it perhaps does so implicitly, since the basis of Richardson's 'diving into the recesses of the human heart' was his detailed description of individual states of mind, a description which requires a minute particularity in the presentation of character, and which is therefore contrary to the usual neo-classical bias towards the general and the universal.

There is no doubt that Johnson's theoretical presuppositions were strongly in this direction, as he often proclaimed the doctrine that the poet 'must not dwell on the minuter distinctions by which one species differs from another'. [6] Yet his operative premises for fiction were apparently quite different, since he reproached Fielding for his reluctance to dwell on these very distinctions, telling Mrs. Thrale, for example, that 'Fielding could describe a horse or an ass, but he never reached to a mule'. [7] It would seem, then, that Johnson's vigorously independent literary sensibility tended to confirm at least one of the elements of the opposition described in the first chapter between neoclassical theory and the novel's formal realism. As for the discrepancy between Johnson's literary theory and his practical judgement, it need occasion little surprise: any body of doctrine is ambiguous in some of its applications, and especially when it is applied in areas for which it was not originally designed. In any case, Johnson's neo-classicism was not a simple thing (neither, for that matter, was neo-classicism); and his divergence

from his usual principles in the present instance must surely be regarded as yet another example of how the radical honesty of his literary insight raised fundamental issues so forcibly that later criticism cannot but use his formulations as points of departure; any comparison between the two first masters of the novel form certainly must begin from the basis which he provided.

## I

*Tom Jones* and *Clarissa* have sufficient similarity of theme to provide several closely parallel scenes which afford a concrete illustration of the differences between the methods of Fielding and Richardson as novelists. Both, for example, show us scenes where the heroine is forced to receive the addresses of the hated suitor their parents have chosen for them, and both also portray the later conflict between father and daughter which their refusal to marry this suitor provokes.

Here, first, is how Fielding describes the interview between Sophia Western and the odious Blifil: Mr. Blifil soon arrived; and Mr. Western soon after withdrawing, left the young couple together.

Here a long silence of near a quarter of an hour ensued; for the gentleman, who was to begin the conversation, had all that unbecoming modesty which consists in bashfulness. He often attempted to speak, and as often suppressed his words just at the very point of utterance. At last, out they broke in a torrent of farfetched and high-strained compliments, which were answered on her side by downcast looks, half bows, and civil monosyllables. -Blifil, from his inexperience in the ways of women, and from his conceit of himself, took this behaviour for a modest assent to his courtship; and when, to shorten a scene which she could no longer support, Sophia rose up and left the room, he imputed that, too, merely to bashfulness, and comforted himself that he should soon have enough of her company.

He was indeed perfectly well satisfied with his prospect of success; for as to that entire and absolute possession of the heart of his mistress, which romantic lovers require, the very idea of it never entered his head. Her fortune and her person were the sole objects of his wishes, of which he made no doubt soon to obtain the absolute property; as Mr. Western's mind was so earnestly bent on the match; and as he well knew the strict obedience which Sophia was always ready to pay to her father's will, and the greater still which her father would exact, if there was occasion ... [8]

Structurally, the scene is based on that typical device of comedy, total ignorance by one character of the intentions of the other as a result of a misunderstanding between third parties—Squire Western has been misled by the ineffable Mistress Western into thinking that Sophia loves Blifil, not Tom Jones. It is perhaps because this misunderstanding must be kept up that there is no actual conversation and little feeling of personal contact between the characters concerned. Instead, Fielding, acting as omniscient author, lets us into Blifil's mind, and the meanness of the considerations by which it is governed: at the same time the consistent irony of Fielding's tone suggests to us the probable limits of Blifil's role: we need not fear that he will ever get possession of Sophia's fortune or of her person, for, although he is cast as a villain, it is patently as the villain in comedy.

Blifil's misunderstanding of Sophia's silence leads on to the next comic complication, since it causes him to give Squire Western the impression that his suit has prospered. Western at once goes to rejoice with his daughter, who of course is unaware of how he has been deceived: Sophia, perceiving her father in this fit of affection, which she did not absolutely know the reason of (for fits of fondness were not unusual in him, though this was rather more violent than ordinary), thought she should never have a better second opportunity of disclosing herself than at present, as far at least as regarded Mr. Blifil; and she too well foresaw the necessity which she should soon be under of coming to a full explanation.

After having thanked the squire, therefore, for all his professions of kindness, she added with a look full of inexpressible softness, 'And is it possible that my papa can be so good as to place all his joy in his Sophy's happiness?' which Western having confirmed by a great oath and a kiss, she then laid hold of his hand, and falling on her knees, after many warm and passionate declarations of affection and duty, she begged him 'not to make her the most miserable creature on earth, by forcing her to marry a man she detested. This I entreat of you, dear sir,' said she, 'for your sake, as well as my own, since you are so very kind to tell me your happiness depends on mine.'—'How! What! says Western, staring wildly. 'O, sir,' continued she, 'not only your poor Sophy's happiness, her very life, her being, depends upon your granting her request. I cannot live with Mr. Blifil. To force me into this marriage would be killing me.'—'You can't live with Mr. Blifil!' says Mr. Western—'No, upon my soul, I can't,' answered Sophia.—'Then die and be d—ned,' cries he, spurning her from him ... 'I am resolved upon the match, and unless you consent to it, I will not give you a groat, not a single farthing; no, though I saw you expiring in the street, I would not relieve you with a morsel of bread. This is my fixed resolution, and so I leave you to consider on it.' He then

broke from her with such violence, that her face dashed against the floor; and he burst directly out of the room, leaving poor Sophia prostrate on the ground.

Fielding's primary aim is certainly not to reveal character through speech and action. We cannot be meant to deduce, for instance, that Sophia knows her father so poorly as to entertain any hopes of being able to hold him down to one position by force of logic; what Fielding tells us about Sophia's decision to break the matter to her father is obviously mainly aimed at heightening the comic reversal that is to follow. Similarly we cannot consider Western's threat—'No, though I saw you expiring in the street, I would not relieve you with a morsel of bread'—as characteristic of the man either in diction or sentiment—it is hackneyed trope that belongs to any such situation in melodrama, not to a particular Squire who habitually speaks the most uncouth Somersetshire jargon, and whose childish intemperateness is not elsewhere shown capable of such an imaginative flight. To say that Sophia's and Western's speeches are grossly out of character would be an exaggeration; but they are undoubtedly directed entirely towards exploiting the comic volte-face and not towards making us witnesses of an actual interview between a father and daughter in real life.

It is probably an essential condition for the realisation of Fielding's comic aim that the scene should not be rendered in all its physical and psychological detail; Fielding must temper our alarm for Sophia's fate by assuring us that we are witnessing, not real anguish, but that conventional kind of comic perplexity which serves to heighten our eventual pleasure at the happy ending, without in the meantime involving any unnecessary expenditure of tears on our part. Fielding's external and somewhat peremptory approach to his characters, in fact, would seem to be a necessary condition of the success of his main comic purpose: attention to the immediate counterpoint of misunderstanding and contradiction must not be dissipated by focussing interest on Sophia's feelings or on any other tangential issue.

A total contrast of purpose and method is offered by the way Richardson presents Clarissa's interview with Solmes, after her maid Hannah has warned her secretly that he is the husband that has been decided on for her. It is thus described in a letter to Anna Howe:

I went down this morning when breakfast was ready with a very uneasy heart ... wishing for an opportunity to appeal to my mother, in hopes to engage her interest in my behalf, and purposing to try to find one when she retired to her own apartment after breakfast; but, unluckily, there was the odious Solmes sitting asquat between my mother and sister, with so much assurance in his looks! But you know, my dear, that those we love not cannot do anything to please us.

Had the wretch kept his seat, it might have been well enough: but the bent and broad-shouldered creature must needs rise and stalk towards a chair; which was just by that which was set for me.

I removed it to a distance, as if to make way to my own: And down I sat, abruptly I believe; what I had heard all in my head.

But this was not enough to daunt him. The man is a very confident, he is a very bold, staring man! Indeed, my dear, the man is very confident! He took the removed chair and drew it so near mine, squatting in it with his ugly weight, that he pressed upon my hoop. I was so 271 offended (all I had heard, as I said, in my head) that I removed to another chair. I own I had too little command of myself. It gave my brother and sister too much advantage. I dare say they took it. But I did it involuntarily, I think. I could not help it. I knew not what I did.

I saw that my father was excessively displeased. When angry, no man's countenance ever shows it so much as my father's.

Clarissa Harlowe! said he with a big voice—and there he stopped. Sir! said I, trembling and curtsying (for I had not then sat down again): and put my chair nearer the wretch, and sat down—my face, as I could feel, all in a glow.

-Make tea, child, said my kind mamma: sit by me, love, and make tea.

I removed with pleasure to the seat the man had quitted; and being thus indulgently put into employment, soon recovered myself; and in the course of the breakfasting officiously asked two or three questions of Mr. Solmes, which I would not have done, but to make up with my father. Proud spirits may be brought to! whisperingly spoke my sister to me over her shoulder, with an air of triumph and scorn: but I did not mind her.

My mother was all kindness and condescension. I asked her once if she were pleased with the tea ...

Small incidents these, my dear, to trouble you with; only as they lead to greater, as you shall hear.

Before the usual breakfast-time was over my father withdrew with my mother, telling her he wanted to speak to her. Then my sister and next my aunt (who was with us) dropped away.

My brother gave himself some airs of insult, which I understood well enough; but which Mr. Solmes could make nothing of: and at last he arose from his seat. Sister, says he, I have a curiosity to show you. I will fetch it. And away he went; shutting the door close after him.

I saw what all this was for. I arose; the man hemming up for a speech, rising and beginning to set his splay feet (indeed, my dear, the man in all his ways is hateful to me!) in an approaching posture. I will save my brother the trouble of bringing to me his 271 curiosity, said I. I curtsied—your servant, sir. The man cried, madam, madam, twice, and looked like a fool. But away I went - to find my brother to save my word. But my brother, indifferent as the weather was, was gone to walk in the garden with my sister. A plain case that he had left his curiosity with me, and designed to show me no other. [9]

The passage is characteristic of Richardson's very different kind of realism. Clarissa is describing what happened 'this morning', and is 'as minute as' she knows Anna wishes her to be; only so can Richardson convey the physical reality of the scene—the party at breakfast, the jockeying for position over trifles, and all the ordinarily trivial domestic details which bear the main burden of the drama. The letter form gives Richardson access to thoughts and emotions of a kind that cannot issue in speech, and are hardly capable of rational analysis—the flux and reflux of Clarissa's lacerated sensibility as she struggles against parental tyranny on the battlefield of petty circumstance: as a result we have quite a different kind of participation from that which Fielding produces: not a lively but objective sense of the total comic pattern, but a complete identification with the consciousness of Clarissa while her nerves still quiver from the recollection of the scene, and her imagination recoils from the thought of her own strained alternation between involuntary revolt and paralysed compliance.

Because Richardson's narrative sequence is based on an exploration in depth of the protagonist's reaction to experience, it encompasses many minor shades of emotion and character that are not found in the passages from *Tom Jones*. Fielding does not attempt to do more than to make us understand the rational grounds on which Sophia acts as she does—there is nothing which would not fit almost any sensible young girl's behaviour in the circumstances: whereas Richardson's epistolary technique, and the intimacy of Clarissa with Anna, encourages him to go far beyond this, and communicate a host of things which deepen and particularise our picture of Clarissa's total moral being. Her shuddering ejaculation—'Indeed, my dear, the man is very confident', her scornful comment on her sister's intervention—'I did not mind her', and her admission of involvement in petty family rivalries—she regrets moving away from Solmes because 'It gave my brother and sister too much advantage'—all these details of characterisation must surely be overlooked by those who describe Richardson as a creator of 'ideal' characters: there is, of course, great will and tenacity in Clarissa, but it is very definitely that of an inexperienced young woman, who has her fair share of sisterly vindictiveness and pert selfassertion, and who, far from being an idealised figure of virgin sainthood, is capable of the catty and sardonic emphasis on Mr. Solmes as a 'curiosity'. Nor is she by any means a disembodied being; we have no indications of any physical reaction on Sophia's part towards Blifil, but we are given Clarissa's very intense one to Solmes—an instinctive sexual revulsion from 'his ugly weight'.

The same setting of personal relationships in a minutely described physical, psychological and even physiological continuum is shown in the brief scene which is the counterpart of the second passage quoted from *Tom Jones*. After two private interviews with her mother, Clarissa has been faced with a family ultimatum, and her mother is with her to receive an answer:

Just then, up came my father, with a sternness in his looks that made me tremble. He took two or three turns about my chamber, though pained by his gout. And then said to my mother, who was silent, as soon as she saw him: My dear, you are long absent. Dinner is near ready. What you had to say lay in a very little compass. Surely, you have nothing to do but to declare your will, and my will—but perhaps you may be talking of the preparations. Let us soon have you down - - your daughter in your hand, if worthy of the name.

And down he went, casting his eye upon me with a look so stern that I was unable to say one word to him, or even for a few minutes to my mother. [10]

Richardson and Fielding portray the cruelty of the two fathers very differently; that of Squire Western has an involuntary and exaggerated quality, whereas Mr. Harlowe's is that of ordinary life; the latter's callous resolve seems all the more convincing because it is only manifested in his refusal to speak to Clarissa—our own emotional involvement in the inner world of Clarissa makes it possible for a father's silent look to have a resonance that is quite lacking in the physical and rhetorical hyperbole by which Fielding demonstrates the fury of Squire Western.

## II

On further analysis, then, it appears that Johnson's comparison between Richardson and Fielding does not directly raise the question of which was the better psychologist, but depends rather on their quite opposite literary intentions: those of Fielding allotted characterisation a much less important place in his total literary structure, and precluded him even from attempting the effects which were suited to Richardson's very different aim. The full implications of the divergence can perhaps be most clearly and inclusively demonstrated in Fielding's handling of the plot in *Tom Jones*, for it reflects the whole of his social, moral and literary outlook.

Fielding's conduct of the action, despite a few excrescences such as the interpolated story of the Man of the Hill, and some signs of haste and confusion in the concluding books, [11] exhibits a remarkably fine control over a very complicated structure, and abundantly justifies Coleridge's famous eulogy: 'What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones*, the three most perfect plots ever planned.' [12] Perfect for what? we must ask. Not, certainly, for the exploration of character and of personal relations, since in all three plots the emphasis falls on the author's skilfully contrived revelation of an external and deterministic scheme: in *Oedipus* the hero's character is of minor importance compared with the consequences of his past actions, which were themselves the result of a prophecy made long before his birth; in the *Alchemist* the portrayal of Face and Subtle does not go far beyond the need for suitable instruments to carry out Jonson's complex series of chicaneries; while the plot of *Tom Jones* offers a combination of these features. As in Sophocles, the crucial secret, that of the hero's actual birth, is very elaborately prepared for and hinted at throughout the action, and its eventual disclosure brings about the final reordering of all the main issues of the story: while, as in Jonson, this final reordering is achieved through the unmasking of a complicated pattern of villainy and deception.

The three plots are alike in another respect: their basic direction is towards a return to the norm, and they therefore have a fundamentally static quality. In this they no doubt reflect the conservatism of their authors, a conservatism which in Fielding's case is probably connected with the fact that he belonged, not to the trading class like Defoe and Richardson, but to the gentry.

The plots of the novels of Defoe and Richardson, as we have seen, mirrored certain dynamic tendencies in the outlook of their class: in *Moll Flanders*, for example, money has a certain autonomous force which determines the action at every turn. In *Tom Jones*, on the other hand, as in the *Alchemist*, money is something that the good characters either have or are given or momentarily lose: only bad characters devote any effort either to getting it or keeping it. Money, in fact, is a useful plot device but it has no controlling significance.

Birth, on the other hand, has a very different status in *Tom Jones*: as a determining factor in the plot it is almost the equivalent of money in Defoe or virtue in Richardson. In this emphasis, of course, Fielding reflects the general tenor of the social thought of his day: the basis of society is and should be a system of classes each with their own capacities and responsibilities. The vigour of Fielding's satire on the upper classes, for example, should not be interpreted as the expression of any egalitarian tendency: it is really a tribute to the firmness of his belief in the class premise. It is true that in *Amelia*

he goes so far as to say that 'of all kinds of pride, there is none so unchristian as that of station'. [13] But that, of course, is only a matter of noblesse oblige; and in *Tom Jones* Fielding also wrote that 'liberality of spirits' was a quality which he had 'scarce ever seen in men of low birth and education'. [14] This class fixity is an essential part of *Tom Jones*. Tom may think it unfortunate that, as a foundling of presumed low ancestry, he cannot marry Sophia; but he does not question the propriety of the assumption on which their separation is decreed. The ultimate task of Fielding's plot therefore is to unite the lovers without subverting the basis of the social order; and this can only be done by revealing that Mr. Jones, though illegitimate, is genteel. This, however, is not wholly a surprise to the perceptive reader, for whom Tom's eminent 'liberality of spirit' has already suggested his superior pedigree; the recent Soviet critic, therefore, who sees the story as the triumph of a proletarian hero [15] is neglecting, not only the facts of his birth, but its continuing implications for his character.

Fielding's conservatism accounts for another and much more general difference between the plots of *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa*: for whereas Richardson depicts the crucifixion of the individual by society, Fielding portrays the successful adaptation of the individual to society, and this entails a very different relation between plot and character.

In *Clarissa* the individual must be given priority in the total structure: Richardson merely brings together certain individuals, and their proximity is all that is necessary to set off an extended chain reaction which then proceeds under its own impetus and modifies all the characters and their mutual relationships. In *Tom Jones*, on the other hand, society and the larger order which it represents must have priority, and the plot's function, therefore, is to perform a physical rather than a chemical change: it acts as a kind of magnet that pulls every individual particle out of the random order brought about by temporal accident and human imperfection and puts them all back into their proper position. The constitution of the particles themselves—the characters—is not modified in the process, but the plot serves to reveal something much more important—the fact that all human particles are subject to an ultimate invisible force which exists in the universe whether they are there to show it or not.

Such a plot reflects the general literary strategy of neo-classicism; just as the creation of a field of force makes visible the universal laws of magnetism, so the supreme task of the writer was to make visible in the human scene the operations of universal order—to unveil the handiwork of Pope's 'Unerring Nature, still divinely bright, / One clear, unchanged and universal light'.

This much wider perspective on character obviously reduces the importance which will be attached to the nature and actions of any particular individual entity—they are mainly interesting as manifestations of the great pattern of Nature. This informs Fielding's treatment of every aspect of characterisation—not only the extent to which his dramatis personae are individualised, but the degree of attention paid to their subjective lives, to their moral development, and to their personal relationships.

Fielding's primary objectives in the portrayal of character are clear but limited: to assign them to their proper category by giving as few diagnostic features as are necessary for the task. Such was his conception of 'invention' or 'creation': 'a quick and sagacious penetration into the true essence of all the objects of our contemplation'. [16] This meant in practice that once the individual had been appropriately labelled the author's only remaining duty was to see that he continued to speak and act consistently. As Aristotle put it in the *Poetics*, 'character' is 'that which reveals the moral purpose', and consequently 'speeches ... which do not make this manifest ... are not expressive of character'. [17] Parson Supple must never cease to be supple.

So it is that Fielding does not make any attempt to individualise his characters. Allworthy is sufficiently categorised by his name, while that of Tom Jones, compounded as it is out of two of the commonest names in the language, tells us that we must regard him as the representative of manhood in general, in accordance with his creator's purpose to show 'not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species'. [18] The scope of the word 'manners' has dwindled so drastically in the last few centuries—no doubt as a result of the way individualism has reduced the areas in which identity of thought and action is generally expected—that the phrase 'characters of manners' no longer means very much. It can perhaps be best explained in terms of the contrast with Richardson's 'characters of nature'.

Richardson's literary objective, as B. W. Downs has pointed out, [19] is not so much character—the stable elements in the individual's mental and moral constitution—as personality: he does not analyse Clarissa, but presents a complete and detailed behavioural report on, her whole being: she is defined by the fullness of our participation in her life. Fielding's purpose, on the other hand, is analytic: he is not interested in the exact configuration of motives in any particular person's mind at any particular time but only in those features of the individual which are necessary to assign him to his moral and social species. He therefore studies each character in the light of his general knowledge of human behaviour, of 'manners', and anything purely individual is of no taxonomic value. Nor is there any need to look inside: if, as Johnson said, Fielding gives us the husk, it is because the surface alone is usually quite sufficient to identify the specimen—the expert does not need to assay the kernel.

There are many other reasons for Fielding's predominantly external approach to character, reasons of a social and philosophical as well as of a literary order. To begin with, the opposite approach involved a breach of decorum: as Fielding's cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu pointed out, it was very bad manners for Richardson's heroines to 'declare all they think', since 'fig leaves are as necessary for our minds as our bodies'. [20] It was also consistent with the classical tradition as a whole, as we have seen, to avoid the intimate and confessional approach to personality; and in any case the philosophical problems of self-consciousness had only begun to receive attention some six centuries after Aristotle in the works of Plotinus. [21] Lastly, as was evident in the treatment of Blifil and Sophia, Fielding's comic purpose itself required an external approach, and for a compelling reason. If we identify ourselves with the characters we shall not be in any mood to appreciate the humour of the larger comedy in which they are risible participants: life, we have been told, is a comedy only to the man who thinks, and the comic author must not make us feel every stroke of the lash as his characters squirm under his corrective rod.

At all events, Fielding avowedly and even ostentatiously refused to go too deep into the minds of his characters, on the general grounds that 'it is our province to relate facts, and we shall leave causes to persons of much higher genius'. We have noted how little was said about the feelings, as opposed to the rational determinations, of Blifil and Sophia. This was quite conscious on Fielding's part: he had already remarked ironically of Blifil that 'it would be an ill office in us to pay a visit to the inmost recesses of his mind, as some scandalous people search into the most secret affairs of their friends, and often pry into their closets and cupboards, only to discover their poverty and meanness to the world'; similarly when Fielding came to present Sophia's feelings when she first learned of Tom's love, he excused himself in the words: 'as to the present situation of her mind I shall adhere to the rule of Horace, by not attempting to describe it, from despair of success'. [22] Fielding's avoidance of the subjective dimension, then, is quite intentional: but that does not, of course, mean that it has no drawbacks, for it undoubtedly has, and they become very apparent whenever important emotional climaxes are reached.

Coleridge, for all his love of Fielding, pointed out that in the soliloquies between Sophia and Tom Jones before their final reconciliation, nothing could be 'more forced and unnatural: the language is without vivacity or spirit, the whole matter is incongruous, and totally devoid of psychological truth'. [23] In fact, Fielding merely gave us a stock comic scene: elevated sentiments of penitent ardour on the hero's part were countered by wronged womanhood's equally elevated scorn of her faithless suitor.

Soon after, of course, Sophia accepts Tom, and we are surprised by her very sudden and unexplained reversal: the *dénouement* has been given a certain comic life, but at the expense of the reality of emotions involved.

This emotional artificiality is very general in Tom Jones. When the hero, for instance, is expelled from Allworthy's house we are told that '. . . he presently fell into the most violent agonies, tearing his hair from his head, and using most other actions which generally accompany fits of madness, rage and despair'; and later that he read Sophia's parting letter 'a hundred times over, and kissed it a hundred times as often'. [24] Fielding's use of these hackneyed hyperboles to vouch for the intensity of the emotions of his characters underlines the price that he pays for his comic approach: it denies him a convincing and continuous access to the inner life of his characters, so that whenever he has to exhibit their emotional life, he can only do it externally by making them have exaggerated physical reactions.

The fact that Fielding's characters do not have a convincing inner life means that their possibilities of psychological development are very limited. Tom Jones's character, for example, exhibits some development, but it is of a very general kind. Tom's early imprudences, his youthful lack of worldly wisdom, and his healthy animality, for example, lead to his disgrace, his expulsion from the Allworthy household, his subsequent difficulties on the road and in London, and his apparently irrecoverable loss of Sophia's love. At the same time his good qualities, his courage, honour and benevolence, all of which have been glimpsed at the beginning, eventually combine to extricate him from the nadir of his misfortunes, and restore him to the love and respect of those who surround him. But although different qualities come to the fore at different times they have all been present from the beginning, and we have not been taken close enough to Tom's mind to be able to do anything but take on trust Fielding's implication, which is that his hero will be able to control his weaknesses by the wisdom he has learned of experience.

In taking this essentially static view of human nature Fielding was following the time-hallowed Aristotelian view, which was actually held with much greater rigidity by most of the philosophers and literary critics of his time. [25] It is, of course, an a-historical view of character, as Fielding showed in *Joseph Andrews*, when he asserted that his characters were 'taken from the life', but added that the particular lawyer in question was 'not only alive, but hath been so this four thousand years'. [26] It follows logically that if human nature is essentially stable, there is no need to detail the processes whereby any one example of it has reached its full development; such processes are but temporary and superficial modifications of a moral constitution which is unalterably fixed from birth. Such, for example, is the premise of the way that although Tom and Blifil share the same mother and are brought up in the same household by the same tutors, their respective courses are unalterably set in different directions from the very beginning.

Once again the contrast with Richardson is complete. Much of our sense of Clarissa's psychological development arises from the way that her experience brings a continual deepening of her understanding of her own past: as a result character and plot are indivisible. Tom Jones, on the other hand, is not in touch with his own past at all: we feel a certain unreality in his actions because they always seem to be spontaneous reactions to stimuli that the plot has been manipulated to provide; we have no sense that they are manifestations of a developing moral life. We cannot but feel surprise, for instance, when, immediately after accepting 50 pounds from Lady Bellaston, Tom gives his famous lecture to Nightingale on sexual ethics. [26] It is not that the two actions are inherently contradictory—Tom's ethics have throughout been based on the much greater heinousness of harming others than of failing to live up to one's moral code oneself; but if we had been given some indication that Tom was aware of the apparent contradictions between his speech and his own past practice he might have sounded less priggish and more convincing. Actually, of course, separate parts of Tom's nature can hold very little converse with each other, because there is only one agency for such converse—the individual consciousness through which the whole repertoire of past actions operates—and Fielding does not take us into this consciousness because he believes that individual character is a specific combination of stable and separate predispositions to action, rather than the product of its own past.

For the same reasons personal relationships are also relatively unimportant in *Tom Jones*. If there is a controlling force independent of the individual actors and their positions with respect to each other, and if their own characters are innate and unchanging, there is no reason why Fielding should give close attention to their mutual feelings, since they cannot play a decisive role. Here, again, the scene between Sophia and Blifil was typical in that it reflected the extent to which the structure of *Tom Jones* as a whole depends on the lack of any effective communication between the characters: just as Blifil must misunderstand Sophia, so Allworthy must fail to see Blifil in his true light, and Tom must be unable either to understand Blifil's true nature or to explain himself properly either to Allworthy or Sophia until the closing scenes. For, since Fielding's view of human life and his general literary purpose did not permit him to subordinate his plot to the deepening exploration of personal relationships, he needed

a structure based on an elaborate counterpoint of deception and surprise, and this would be impossible if the characters could share each other's minds and take their fates into their own hands.

There is, then, an absolute connection in *Tom Jones* between the treatment of plot and of character. Plot has priority, and it is therefore plot which must contain the elements of complication and development. Fielding achieves this by superimposing on a central action that is, in essentials as simple as that in *Clarissa*, a very complex series of relatively autonomous subplots and episodes which are in the nature of dramatic variations on the main theme. These relatively independent narrative units are combined in a concatenation whose elaboration and symmetry is suggested in the most obvious outward aspect of the book's formal order: unlike the novels of Defoe and Richardson, *Tom Jones* is carefully divided into compositional units of different sizes—some two hundred chapters which are themselves grouped into eighteen books disposed into three groups of six, dealing respectively with the early lives, the journeys to London, and the activities on arrival, of the main characters.

This extreme diversification of the narrative texture reinforces, of course, Fielding's tendency not to dwell for long on any one scene or character. In the passages quoted, for example, there was none of the intensive treatment which Richardson gave to *Clarissa's* interview with Solmes; most of Fielding's time was spent on making clear the initial misunderstanding, and the scale of the scene allowed no more in the way of characterisation than a designing hypocrite, a trapped maiden and a heavy father. But even if there had been any full absorption in the feelings of Sophia, for example, it would soon have been terminated by the management of the ensuing scenes: for, just as we left Sophia immediately after Squire Western had stormed out of the room, and were thus spared any prolonged awareness of her sufferings, so in the next chapter our attention was soon switched away from her parting interview with Tom Jones by Fielding's announcement that '... the scene, which I believe some of my readers will think had lasted long enough, was interrupted by one of so different a nature, that we shall reserve the relation of it for a different chapter'. [27] This is typical of the narrative mode of *Tom Jones*: the author's commentary makes no secret of the fact that his aim is not to immerse us wholly in his fictional world, but rather to show the ingenuity of his own inventive resources by contriving an amusing counterpoint of scenes and characters; quick changes are the essence of Fielding's comic manner, and a new chapter will always bring a new situation for the characters, or present different characters in a similar scene for ironical contrast. In addition, by a great variety of devices, of which the chapter headings are usually significant pointers, our attention is continually drawn to the fact that the ultimate cohesive force of the book resides not in the characters and their relationships, but in an intellectual and literary structure which has a considerable degree of autonomy.

The effects of this procedure and its relationship to Fielding's treatment of character can be summarised in relation to a brief scene which occurs after Tom has heard that Allworthy is to recover from his illness. He takes a walk 'in a most delicious grove', and contemplates the cruelty of fortune which separates him from his beloved Sophia:

Was I but possessed of thee, one only suit of rags thy whole estate, is there a man on earth whom I would envy! How contemptible would the brightest Circassian beauty, dressed in all the jewels of the Indies, appear to my eyes! But why do I mention another woman? Could I think my eyes capable of looking at any other with tenderness, these hands should tear them from my head. No, my Sophia, if cruel fortune separates us for ever, my soul shall dote on thee alone. The chastest constancy will I ever preserve to thy image ...

At these words he started up and beheld—not his Sophia—no, nor a Circassian maid richly and elegantly attired for the grand Signior's seraglio ... but Molly Scagrim, with whom, 'after a parley' which Fielding omits, Tom retires to 'the thickest part of the grove'. [28]

The least convincing aspect of the episode is the diction: the speech habits manifested here obviously bear little relation to those we expect of Tom Jones. But, of course, they are a stylistic necessity for Fielding's immediate purpose—the comic deflation of the heroic and romantic pretences of the human word by the unheroic and unromantic eloquence of the human deed. *Tom Jones* is no more than a vehicle for the expression of Fielding's scepticism about lovers' vows; and he must be made to speak in terms that parody the high-flown rhetoric of the pastoral romance to give point to the succeeding wayside

encounter which belongs to the very different world of the pastourelle. Nor can Fielding pause to detail the psychological processes whereby Tom is metamorphosed from Sophia's romantic lover to Moll's prompt gallant: to illustrate the commonplace that 'actions speak louder than words', the actions must be very silent and they must follow very hard upon very loud words.

The relation of this episode to the larger structure of the novel is typical. One of Fielding's general organising themes is the proper place of sex in human life; this encounter neatly illustrates the conflicting tendencies of headstrong youth, and shows that Tom has not yet reached the continence of moral adulthood. The scene, therefore, plays its part in the general moral and intellectual scheme; and it is also significantly connected with the workings of the plot, since Tom's lapse eventually becomes a factor in his dismissal by Allworthy, and therefore leads to the ordeals which eventually make him a worthier mate for Sophia.

At the same time Fielding's treatment of the scene is also typical in avoiding any detailed presentation of Tom's feelings either at the time or later—to take his hero's faithlessness too seriously would jeopardise Fielding's primarily comic intention in the episode, and he therefore manipulates it in such a way as to discourage us from giving it a significance which it might have in ordinary life. Comedy, and especially comedy on an elaborate scale, often involves this kind of limited liability to psychological interpretation: it applies to Blifil's malice and to Sophia's sufferings in the scenes quoted earlier, and Allworthy's sudden illness and recovery, which have led to Tom's lapse, must be placed in the same perspective. We must not dwell on the apparent fact that Allworthy is incapable of distinguishing between a cold and a mortal illness, since we are not intended to draw the implications for his character that he is either an outrageous hypochondriac or lamentably unskilled in choosing physicians: Allworthy's illness is only a diplomatic chill, and we must not infer anything from it except a shift in Fielding's narrative policy.

*Tom Jones*, then, would seem to exemplify a principle of considerable significance for the novel form in general: namely, that the importance of the plot is in inverse proportion to that of character. This principle has an interesting corollary: the organisation of the narrative into an extended and complex formal structure will tend to turn the protagonists into its passive agents, but it will offer compensatingly greater opportunities for the introduction of a variety of minor characters, whose treatment will not be hampered in the same way by the roles which they are allotted by the complications of the narrative design.

The principle and its corollary would seem to lie behind Coleridge's contrast of the 'forced and unnatural quality' of the scenes between the protagonists in *Tom Jones* and Fielding's treatment of the 'characters of postilions, landlords, landladies, waiters' where 'nothing can be more true, more happy or more humorous'. [29] These minor characters figure only in scenes which require exactly the amount of psychological individuality which they are possessed of; relieved of any responsibility for carrying out the major narrative design Mrs. Honour can get herself dismissed from the Western household by methods which are at once triumphantly comic, sociologically perceptive and eminently characteristic; [30] nor is there any question of the violence to character and probability which colours the ways whereby *Tom Jones*, for example, or Sophia leave home.

Such is the pattern of most comic novels with elaborate plots, from Fielding and Smollett to Dickens: the creative emphasis is on characters who are minor at least in the sense that they are not deeply involved in the working out of the plot; whereas the *Tom Jones*'s, the *Roderick Randoms* and the *David Copperfields* are less convincing as characters because their personalities bear little direct relation to the part they must play, and some of the actions in which the plot involves them suggests a weakness or folly which is probably at variance with the actual intentions of their author towards them.

On the other hand, the type of novel which is perhaps most typical of the genre, and which achieves effects which have not been duplicated in any other literary form, has used a very different kind of plot. From Sterne and Jane Austen to Proust and Joyce the Aristotelian priority of plot over character has been wholly reversed, and a new type of formal structure has been evolved in which the plot attempts only to embody the ordinary processes of life and in so doing becomes wholly dependent on the

characters and the development of their relationships. It is Defoe and above all Richardson who provide this tradition with its archetypes, just as it is Fielding who provides that for the opposite tradition.

### III

Johnson's most famous criticism of Fielding's novels is concerned with their basic technique, but from his own point of view it was probably their moral shortcomings which were the decisive factor. It is certainly this with which he was concerned in his only published reference to Fielding, although even here it is only by implication. In the *Rambler* (1750) Johnson attacked the effects of 'familiar' histories whose wicked heroes were made so attractive that 'we lose abhorrence of their faults', apparently with *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Tom Jones* (1749) chiefly in mind. [32] He certainly later told Hannah More that he 'scarcely knew a more corrupt work' than *Tom Jones*, [33] and, on the other hand, praised *Clarissa* on the significant grounds that 'It was in the power of Richardson alone to teach us at once esteem and detestation; to make virtuous resentment overpower all the benevolence which wit, elegance, and courage naturally excite, and to lose at last the hero in the villain'. [34] We find it difficult today to share much of Johnson's abhorrence of the morality of *Tom Jones* and are, indeed, more likely to be unjust to Richardson, and to assume without question that his concern, and that of his heroines, for feminine chastity, can only be explained by prurience on his part or hypocrisy on theirs. But this may not be so, and, conversely, we must in fairness recognise that there are many moral offences in *Tom Jones* which receive a much more tolerant treatment than any Puritan moralist would have accorded them. Defoe and Richardson, for example, are unsparing in their denunciation of drunkenness; but when *Tom Jones* gets drunk in his joy at Allworthy's recovery, Fielding shows no reprobation: it is admittedly an imprudence which later contributes to the hero's expulsion, but Fielding's only direct comment is a humorous editorial development of the *in vino veritas* commonplace. [35] It is the sexual issue, however, which is crucial, both in the moral scheme of *Tom Jones*, and in the objections of its critics.

Fielding certainly does not endorse his hero's incontinence, and Tom himself admits that he has been 'faulty' in this respect; but the general tendency throughout the novel is surely to qualify the condemnation and make unchastity appear a venial sin—even the good Mrs. Miller, for example, seems to think she has put a fairly good face on matters by pleading to Sophia that Tom has 'never been guilty of a single instance of infidelity to her since ... seeing her in town'. [36] Fielding's plot obviously does not punish the sexual transgressions either of *Tom Jones* or of the many other characters who are guilty in this respect so severely as Richardson, for example, would have wished. Even in *Amelia*, where Booth's adultery is both more serious in itself than anything that can be charged against *Tom Jones*, and is treated much more severely by Fielding, the plot eventually rescues Booth from the consequences of his acts. There is therefore considerable justification for Ford Madox Ford's denunciation of 'fellows like Fielding, and to some extent Thackeray, who pretend that if you are a gay drunkard, lecher, squanderer of your goods and fumbler in placket holes you will eventually find a benevolent uncle, concealed father or benefactor who will shower on you bags of ten thousands of guineas, estates, and the hands of adorable mistresses—these fellows are dangers to the body politic and horribly bad constructors of plots'. [37]

Ford, of course, chooses to disregard both Fielding's positive moral intentions and the tendency of comic plots in general to achieve a happy ending at the cost of certain lenity in the administration of justice. For—although Fielding was long regarded as something of a debauchee himself and did not indeed have full justice done to his literary greatness until scholarship had cleared him of the charges made by contemporary gossip and repeated by his first biographer, Murphy—Fielding was in fact as much of a moralist as Richardson, although of a different kind. He believed that virtue, far from being the result of the suppression of instinct at the behest of public opinion, was itself a natural tendency to goodness or benevolence. In *Tom Jones* he tried to show a hero possessed of a virtuous heart, but also of the lustiness and lack of deliberation to which natural goodness was particularly prone, and which easily led to error and even to vice. To realise his moral aim, therefore, Fielding had to show how the

good heart was threatened by many dangers in its hazardous course to maturity and knowledge of the world; yet, at the same time and without exculpating his hero, he had also to show that although Tom's moral transgressions were a likely and perhaps even a necessary stage in the process of moral growth, they did not betoken a vicious disposition; even Tom Jones's carefree animality has a generous quality that is lacking in Clarissa's selfcentred and frigid virtue. The happy conclusion of the story, therefore, is very far from representing the kind of moral and literary confusion which Ford alleges, and is actually the culmination of Fielding's moral and literary logic.

The contrast between Fielding and Richardson as moralists is heightened by the effects of their very different narrative points of view. Richardson focusses attention on the individual, and whatever virtue or vice he is dealing with will loom very large, and have all its implications reflected in the action: Fielding, on the other hand, deals with too many characters and too complicated a plot to give the single individual virtue or vice quite this importance.

Besides this tendency of the plot, it is also part of Fielding's intention as a moralist to put every phenomenon into its larger perspective. Sexual virtue and sexual vice, for example, are placed in a broad moral perspective, and the results do not always produce the kind of emphasis that the sexual reformer would wish. Fielding knows, for example, and wishes to show, that some marriage designs may be more vicious than the most abandoned profligacy: witness Blifil whose 'designs were strictly honourable as the phrase is, that is to rob a lady of her fortune by marriage'. He knows, too, that moral indignation against promiscuity is not necessarily the result of a real love of virtue: witness the passage in which we are told that 'to exclude all vulgar concubinage, and to drive all whores in rags from within the walls is within the power of everyone. This my landlady very strictly adhered to, and this her virtuous guests, who did not travel in rags, would very reasonably have expected from her.' [38] Here Fielding's Swiftian suavety reminds us of the cruelty and injustice with which complacent virtue is too often associated; but a narrow-minded moralist might see behind the irony a shocking failure to condemn 'whores in rags', and even, perhaps, an implicit sympathy for them.

Fielding, then, attempts to broaden our moral sense rather than to intensify its punitive operations against licentiousness. But, at the same time, his function as the voice of traditional social morality means that his attitude to sexual ethics is inevitably normative; it certainly does not, as Boswell said, 'encourage a strained and rarely possible virtue', [39] but rather reflects, as Leslie Stephen put it, 'the code by which men of sense generally govern their conduct, as distinguished from that by which they affect to be governed in language'. [40] Aristotle's Golden Mean is often, perhaps, capable of a certain subversion of rigid ethical principles: and it is perhaps as a good Aristotelian that Fielding comes very close to suggesting that too much chastity in Blifil is as bad as Tom's too little.

There is a further reason why Johnson, who was, after all, an ethical rigorist in his own way, should have found *Tom Jones* a corrupt work. Comedy—if only to maintain an atmosphere of good-humour between audience and participants—often involves a certain complicity in acts and sentiments which we might not treat so tolerantly in ordinary life. Perhaps the most insistent note in *Tom Jones* is Fielding's worldly-wise good-humour, and it often persuades us to regard sexual irregularities as ludicrous rather than wicked.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick, for instance, is dismissed with the words: 'she lives in reputation at the polite end of town, and is so good an economist that she spends three times the income of her fortune without running into debt'. [41] Mrs. Fitzpatrick must remain true to character, and yet be included in the happy ending; nor can Fielding upset the conviviality of his final meeting with his readers to express his abhorrence at the lamentable source of income which we must surmise for his character.

On other occasions, of course, Fielding's humour on that perennial comic resource, sex, is much more overt: in Jonathan Wilde [sic], for example, when the captain of the ship asks the hero 'if he had no more Christianity in him than to ravish a woman in a storm?' [42] or in *Tom Jones* when Mrs. Honour gives her celebrated retort to Sophia's 'Would you not, Honour, fire a pistol at any one who should attack your virtue?'—'To be sure, ma'am, ... one's virtue is a dear thing, especially to us poor servants; for it is our livelihood, as a body may say: yet I mortally hate firearms.' [43] There is, of course, the

same broadening tendency in Fielding's humour here as in his treatment of moral issues in general: we must not forget that even the most virtuous indignation is capable of elementary logical fallacies, or that humankind's allegiance to virtue is capable of cautious afterthoughts. But the tacit assumption of much of Fielding's humour is surely one which suggests that 'broad-mindedness' in its modern sense, which typically tends to have a sexual reference, is part of the expansion of sympathy to which his novels as a whole invite us: a relish for wholesome bawdy, in fact, is a necessary part of the moral education of a sex-bedevelled humanity: such, at least, was the classical role of comedy, and Fielding was perhaps the last great writer who continued that tradition.

#### IV

As far as most modern readers are concerned it is not Fielding's moral but his literary point of view which is open to objection. For his conception of his role is that of a guide who, not content with taking us 'behind the scenes of this great theatre of nature', [44] feels that he must explain everything which is to be found there; and such authorial intrusion, of course, tends to diminish the authenticity of his narrative.

Fielding's personal intrusion into *Tom Jones* begins with his dedication to the Honourable George Lyttleton, a dedication, it must be admitted, which goes far to justify Johnson's definition of this form of writing—'a servile address to a patron'. There are numerous further references in the body of his work to others among Fielding's patrons, notably Ralph Allen and Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, not to mention other acquaintances whom Fielding wished to compliment, including one of his surgeons, Mr. John Ranby, and various innkeepers.

The effect of these references is certainly to break the spell of the imaginary world represented in the novel: but the main interference with the autonomy of this world comes from Fielding's introductory chapters, containing literary and moral essays, and even more from his frequent discussions and asides to the reader within the narrative itself. There is no doubt that Fielding's practice here leads him in completely the opposite direction from Richardson, and converts the novel into a social and indeed into a sociable literary form. Fielding brings us into a charmed circle composed, not only of the fictional characters, but also of Fielding's friends and of his favourites among the poets and moralists of the past. He is, indeed, almost as attentive to his audience as to his characters, and his narrative, far from being an intimate drama which we peep at through a keyhole, is a series of reminiscences told by a genial raconteur in some wayside inn—the favoured and public locus of his tale.

This approach to the novel is quite consistent with Fielding's major intention—it promotes a distancing effect which prevents us from being so fully immersed in the lives of the characters that we lose our alertness to the larger implications of their actions—implications which Fielding brings out in his capacity of omniscient chorus. On the other hand, Fielding's interventions obviously interfere with any sense of narrative illusion, and break with almost every narrative precedent, beginning with that set by Homer, whom Aristotle praised for saying 'very little in propria persona', and for maintaining elsewhere the attitude either of a dispassionate narrator, or of an impersonator of one of the characters. [45] Few readers would like to be without the prefatory chapters, or Fielding's diverting asides, but they undoubtedly derogate from the reality of the narrative: as Richardson's friend, Thomas Edwards, wrote, 'we see every moment' that it is Fielding who 'does *personam gerere*', whereas Richardson is 'the thing itself'. [46] So, although Fielding's garrulity about his characters and his conduct of the action initiated a popular practice in the English novel, it is not surprising that it has been condemned by most modern critics, and on these grounds. Ford Madox Ford, for instance, complained that the 'trouble with the English novelists from Fielding to Meredith, is that not one of them cares whether you believe in their characters or not'; [47] and Henry James was shocked by the way Trollope, and other 'accomplished novelists', concede 'in a digression, a parenthesis or an aside' that their fiction is 'only make-believe'. James went on to lay down the central principle of the novelist's attitude to his creation, which is very similar to that described above as inherent in formal realism: Trollope, and any novelist who shares his attitude, James says,

admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give the narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay. It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be) than the historian, and in so doing it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing room. [48]

There is not, of course, any doubt as to Fielding's intention of 'looking for the truth'—he tells us indeed in *Tom Jones* that 'we determined to guide our pen throughout by the directions of truth'. But he perhaps underestimated the connection between truth and the maintenance of the reader's 'historical faith'. This, at least, is the suggestion of a passage towards the end [of] *Tom Jones* when he proclaims that he will let his hero be hanged rather than extricate him from his troubles by unnatural means 'for we had rather relate that he was hanged at Tyburn (which may very probably be the case) than forfeit our integrity, or shock the faith of our reader'. [49] This ironical attitude towards the reality of his creation was probably responsible in part for the main critical doubt which *Tom Jones* suggests. It is, in the main, a very true book, but it is by no means so clear that its truth has, to quote R. S. Crane, been 'rendered' in terms of the novel. [50] We do not get the impressive sense of Fielding's own moral qualities from his characters or their actions that we do from the heroic struggles for human betterment which he conducted as a magistrate under the most adverse personal circumstances, or even from the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*; and if we analyse our impression from the novels alone it surely is evident that our residual impression of dignity and generosity comes mainly from the passages where Fielding is speaking in his own person. And this, surely, is the result of a technique which was deficient at least in the sense that it was unable to convey this larger moral significance through character and action alone, and could only supply it by means of a somewhat intrusive patterning of the plot and by direct editorial commentary. As Henry James put it: Tom Jones 'has so much "life" that it amounts, for the effect of comedy and application of satire, almost to his having a mind'; almost, but not quite, and so it was necessary that 'his author—he handsomely possessed of a mind—[should have] such an amplitude of reflection for him and round him that we see him through the mellow air of Fielding's fine old moralism ...'. [51] All this, of course, is not to say Fielding does not succeed: Tom Jones is surely entitled to the praise of an anonymous early admirer who called it 'on the whole ... the most lively book ever published. [52] But it is a very personal and unrepeatable kind of success: Fielding's technique was too eclectic to become a permanent element in the tradition of the novel—*Tom Jones* is only part novel, and there is much else—picaresque tale, comic drama, occasional essay.

On the other hand, Fielding's departure from the canons of formal realism indicated very clearly the nature of the supreme problem which the new genre had to face. The tedious asseveration of literal authenticity in Defoe and to some extent in Richardson, tended to obscure the fact that, if the novel was to achieve equality of status with other genres it had to be brought into contact with the whole tradition of civilised values, and supplement its realism of presentation with a realism of assessment. To the excellent Mrs. Barbauld's query as to the grounds on which he considered Richardson to be a lesser writer than Shakespeare, Coleridge answered that 'Richardson is only interesting'. [53] This is no doubt unfair as a total judgement on the author of *Clarissa*, but it indicates the likely limits of a realism of presentation: we shall be wholly immersed in the reality of the characters and their actions, but whether we shall be any wiser as a result is open to question.

Fielding brought to the genre something that is ultimately even more important than narrative technique—a responsible wisdom about human affairs which plays upon the deeds and the characters of his novels. His wisdom is not, perhaps, of the highest order; it is, like that of his beloved Lucian, a little inclined to be easy-going and on occasion opportunist. Nevertheless, at the end of *Tom Jones* we feel we have been exposed, not merely to an interesting narrative about imaginary persons, but to a stimulating wealth of suggestion and challenge on almost every topic of human interest. Not only so: the stimulation has come from a mind with a true grasp of human reality, never deceived or deceiving about himself, his characters or the human lot in general. In his effort to infuse the new genre with something of the Shakespearean virtues Fielding departed too far from formal realism to initiate a viable

tradition, but his work serves as a perpetual reminder that if the new genre was to challenge older literary forms it had to find a way of conveying not only a convincing impression but a wise assessment of life, an assessment that could only come from taking a much wider view than Defoe or Richardson of the affairs of mankind.

So, although we must agree with the tenor of Johnson's watch simile, we must also add that it is unfair and misleading. Richardson, no doubt, takes us deeper into the inner workings of the human machine; but Fielding is surely entitled to retort that there are many other machines in nature besides the individual consciousness, and perhaps to express his surprised chagrin that Johnson should apparently have overlooked the fact that he was engaged in the exploration of a vaster and equally intricate mechanism, that of human society as a whole, a literary subject which was, incidentally, much more consonant than Richardson's with the classical outlook which he and Johnson shared.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Frank Kermode, "Richardson and Fielding", *Cambridge Journal*, IV (1950), 106-114: and, for a detailed account of their literary reputations, F. T. Blanchard, *Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism* (New Haven, 1926), 265
2. See Robert E. Moore, "Dr. Johnson on Fielding and Richardson", *PMLA*, LXVI (1951), 162-181.
3. *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. Hill, I, 273-274, 266
4. *Life of Johnson*, ed. Hill-Powell, II, 48-49.
5. *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. Hill, I, 282.
6. *Rambler*, No. 36 (1750); see also *Rasselas*, ch. 10.
7. *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston, I, 555.
8. Bk. VI, ch. 7.
9. I, 68-70.
10. I, 75-76.
11. For a full account see F. H. Dudden, *Henry Fielding* (Oxford, 1952), II, 621-627.
12. Cit. Blanchard, *Fielding*, pp.320-321.
13. Bk. VII, ch. 10.
14. Bk. IX, ch. 1. See also A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard, 1936), pp.224, 245.
15. A. E. Elistratov, "Fielding's Realism", in *Iz Istorii Angliskogo Realizma* [On the History of English Realism] (Moscow, 1941), p.63.
16. Bk. IX, ch. 1.
17. Ch. 6, No. 17.
18. *Joseph Andrews*, Bk. III, ch. 1.
19. *Richardson*, pp.125-126.
20. *Letters and Works*, II, 291.
21. See A. E. Taylor, *Aristotle* (London, 1943), p.108.
22. Bk. II, ch. 4; Bk. IV, chs. 3, 14.
23. Cit. Blanchard, *Fielding*, p.317.
24. Bk. VI, ch. 12.
25. See Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1902), II, 73-74; R. Hubert, *Les Sciences sociales dans l'Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1923), pp.167 ff.
26. Bk. II, ch. 1. [recte Book V. ch.4.]
27. Bk. XIV, ch. 7.
28. Bk. VI, ch. 8.
29. Bk. V, ch. 10.

30. Cit. Blanchard, *Fielding*, p.317.
31. Bk. VII, Ch. 7.
32. No. 4.
33. *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, II, 190.
34. “Rowe”, *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Hill, II, 67.
35. Bk. V, ch. 9.
36. Bk. XVIII, ch. 10.
37. *The English Novel from the Earliest Days to the Death of Conrad* (London, 1930),p.93.
38. Bk. XI, ch. 4; Bk. IX, ch. 3.
39. *Life of Johnson*, ed. Hill-Powell, II, 49.
40. *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, II, 377.
41. Bk. XVIII, ch. 13.
42. Bk. II, ch. 10.
43. Bk. VII, ch. 7.
44. Bk. VII, ch. 1.
45. *Poetics*, chs. 24, 3.
46. McKillop, *Richardson*, p.175.
47. *English Novel*, p.89.
48. “The Art of Fiction” (1884); cited from *The Art of Fiction*, ed. Bishop, p.5.
49. Bk. III, ch. 1; Bk. XVII, ch. 1.
50. “ The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones”, *Critics and Criticism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago, 1952), p.639.
51. Preface, *The Princess Casamassima*.
52. *Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding*, 1751, p.43.
53. Cit. Blanchard, *Fielding*, p.316.