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AMBIGUITY

IN

TOM JONES

by

John C. Berry

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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AMBIGUITY IN TOM JONES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis maintains that ambiguity is an important element in Fielding's Tom Jones and deals with certain ambiguities in the novel. Specifically, it deals with the ambiguous treatment of the following characters: Squire Allworthy, Sophia Western, Mrs. Waters, Black George and Squire Western. An examination of this ambiguity is important to an understanding of Tom Jones.

The thesis maintains that neither Allworthy nor Sophia should be regarded as the moral pillars of Tom Jones; nor should they be regarded as unambiguously good. When we perceive them in more realistic terms, it is also necessary to re-examine our judgments of certain other characters in the novel, specifically, Mrs. Waters and Black George. Is the condemnation these two characters receive justified? This thesis maintains that it is not; therefore, we must re-examine the basis of judgment in Tom Jones. The character of Squire Western provides us with an insight into Fielding's psychology because he shows most clearly the problem of reconciling the rational and the animal in man.

The ambiguity in Tom Jones goes beyond language. We must examine the truth and consistency of those principles which seem to be advocated in the novel.

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INTRODUCTION

I wish to examine and discuss certain ambiguities in Tom Jones. In Seven Types of Ambiguity, William Empson defines ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of writing."¹ I wish to use the term as any behaviour, either act or judgment, which allows for reactions differing from those apparent in the text and therefore casts doubt on the meaning of the text in question. There are many examples in Tom Jones of things which are not as they seem.

The final chapter of Tom Jones seems to describe the perfect happy ending. Near the end we are told:

Whatever in the Nature of Jones had a Tendency to Vice, has been corrected by continual Conversation with this good Man, and by his Union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia. He hath also, by Reflection on his past Follies, acquired a Discretion and Prudence very uncommon in one of his lively Parts.²

I find hard to accept the idea of the reformed rogue being turned into a virtuous country gentleman.*

Moreover, there are in the final chapter some small variations from the dominant triumphant tone which suggest that the proclamation of Virtue's victory need not be taken at face value. In the final

¹William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, (3rd ed.; London: Chatto and Windus; 1963), p. 1.

²Henry Fielding, Tom Jones, ed. Sheridan Baker, (New York: W.W.Norton, 1973), Book XVIII, Ch. the last. p. 761. All quotation are from this edition.

*This idea was developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

sentence certain words, "Condescension" and "below" detract from an otherwise favourable comment:

And such is their Condescension, their Indulgence, and their Beneficence to those below them, that there is not a Neighbour, a Tenant or a Servant who doth not most gratefully bless the Day when Mr. Jones was married to his Sophia. (XVIII, Ch. the last)

These final words suggest that the idea of a happy ending may be treated as a joke and there may be more to it than this.* The final chapter, in its overall flamboyant tone and in its systematic reporting on the happy resolution of everyone's affairs, is in such variance with the reality of the world of Tom Jones that I think it is a clue to the ambiguity of the whole novel.

While I wish to use the term ambiguity in a somewhat wider sense, ambiguity in Fielding's work has received considerable attention in recent criticism. Glenn W. Hatfield, dealing with the use of words which are deliberately ambiguous, writes that the "language of irony...is for Fielding a way of exposing the corruption of words and rescuing them from the debased condition into which they have fallen."³ For example, Fielding uses the word "gentleman" defining it to mean: "a useless member of society."⁴ Such verbal irony is more obvious in a purely satirical work such as Jonathan Wild, but it is also present in Tom Jones.

Eleanor Hutchens' Irony in Tom Jones is a more general treatment of the deliberate ambiguities in the novel. She also points to verbal

*This idea was developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

³Glenn W. Hatfield, Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 6.

⁴Cited in Hatfield, p. 111.

irony and refers to "oblique verbal irony" in which the literal meaning fits the context while the connotative significance clashes with it.⁵ She suggests that the novel's combination of comedy and moral judgment leads inevitably to irony.

She also calls attention to ironies of plot.⁶ For example, Mrs. Waters' role is ironic because she first establishes Tom's low status as a bastard outsider by falsely acknowledging him as her son in the beginning of the novel, yet it is she who near the end first discloses to Allworthy Tom's true parentage thus restoring his status in Allworthy's family. As I will suggest later, there is even more that is ambiguous about Mrs. Waters' character and role in the novel.

Hutchens refers to certain specific instances of irony in the novel. For example, she suggests that Square's death-bed confession is ironical.⁷ She also refers to a "hint of incest" in Tom's relationship with Bridget. She calls Allworthy's judgment of Blifil and Tom ironical because he was led by his very goodness to take the side of the bad.⁸ These ambiguous situations are, I believe, open to other interpretation.

Hutchens discusses the use of the term prudence in Tom Jones. She suggests that there is little doubt that Fielding approved of prudence, but notes that he used the word unfavourably three times as often as

⁵Eleanor Newman Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones. (Alabama University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 39.

⁷Ibid., p. 40.

⁸Ibid., p. 67.

favourably.⁹ She writes: "It is one of the larger ironies of the novel that part of the task of the hero is to acquire one of the chief traits of the villain."¹⁰ Obviously ambiguity extends beyond verbal irony to the plot of the novel.

Empson in his essay on Tom Jones describes Fielding's style as "habitual double irony," by which he means the presenting of opposed views each with pretended sympathy while the author actually rejects both or holds a wise balanced position between them.¹¹ Fielding's very style forces the reader to perceive the ambiguity of his words and attempt to come to terms with it. Empson also notes certain ambiguities inherent in the treatment of Mrs. Waters and Black George which I believe are significant to the ambiguity of the novel as a whole.

Irony is also treated by A. R. Humphrys. He regards Fielding's irony as "corrective and orthodox; it undermines deviations from a healthy, sensible, social morality; it prunes society of perversions."¹² Humphrys refers, for example, to Fielding's method in reducing both Thwackum and Square through the use of a pattern of speech: "He suggested a narrowness of mind by the very narrowness of the phrases."¹³ as well

⁹Hutchens, p. 101.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹William Empson, "Tom Jones" in Ronald Paulson, ed, Fielding, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 124.

¹²A. R. Humphrys, "Fielding's Irony: Its Methods and Effects" in Paulson, ed., Fielding, p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. 22.

as by the ironical contrast between precept and practice. I believe there are other ambiguities in the novel not as pointed as the ironies Humphys suggests.

Ronald Paulson also gives great importance to irony in Fielding's work; he writes that it gave rise to a type of novel "in which irony plays much of the role that Richardson assigns to psychological detail..."¹⁴ and that this use assisted "in the transformation of irony from a rhetorical device to a vehicle of psychological, cognitive, and even metaphysical meaning." Paulson writes:

As a rhetorical device, irony influences an audience in order to convey a moral, presenting the reader with the discrepancy between what he is and what he ought to be. As a psychological device, it presents the discrepancy between what a character thinks he is and what he is. And as a metaphysical device, it presents the discrepancy between the apparent and the real...¹⁵

The power of Fielding's irony points up the necessity of examining that discrepancy between appearance and reality in Tom Jones.

Paulson also quotes A. D. McKillop as saying of the discrepancy between appearance and reality in Fielding's novels that it "is not treated as an ultimate metaphysical problem, as in Don Quixote. Fielding is not trying to present or pluck out the heart of a mystery; he is continuously corroborating a position which he has made clear from the first..."¹⁶ Whether or not we accept this statement, there is, never-

¹⁴Ronald Paulson, Fielding. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.; Prentice-Hall, 1962) p. 4.

¹⁵Paulson, p. 6

¹⁶A. D. McKillop, quoted by Paulson, p. 9.

theless, a clear recognition that there is a problem distinguishing between appearance and reality in Fielding, which I suggest is the result of ambiguity.

Andrew Wright deals with this problem in terms of the purpose of the novels, which he sees as a celebration of life rather than moralizing. He writes: "Traditional fiction pretends truth; Fielding mocks expectation by demonstrating Joseph Andrews to be false."¹⁷ He notes that the use of the narrator with his opening fanfares and interruptions reminds the reader that he is telling a story.

Wright also notes that the long moralizing passages with which Fielding introduces Tom Jones must not be taken at face value.¹⁸ The author always goes too far and thus invites more and less than a straightforward response. Similarly, the manner of telling the Man of the Hill's story, for example, with Partridge's constant interruptions, prevents the moralizing from making Tom Jones what Fielding does not believe in, a novel with a moral.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Wright insists: "To be sure, Fielding means what he says - there is plenty of evidence outside this novel to demonstrate his practice of what Joseph and Adams, Tom, Allworthy, Amelva and Dr. Harrison preach."²⁰ It is far from clear to me that the

¹⁷Andrew Wright, Mask and Feast, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 15.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰Ibid., p. 30.

preachings of these various preachers are totally free from ambiguity.

I believe that Wright's point about the moralizing passages can be made even more strongly. For example, in his dedication, Fielding claims that novel's purpose is the inculcation of prudence and virtue, the success of which in Tom is celebrated in the final chapter. He writes:

Besides displaying that Beauty of Virtue which may attract the Admiration of Mankind, I have attempted to engage a stronger Motive to Human Action in her Favour, by convincing Men, that their true Interest directs them to a Pursuit of her. (Dedication, 8).

But in the opening chapter of Book XV, he seems to contradict himself.*

There are a Set of Religious, or rather Moral Writers, who teach that Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness, and Vice to Misery, in this World. A very wholesome and comfortable Doctrine, and to which we have but one Objection, namely, That it is not true. (XV, i, 600)

He seems to have placed himself, as dedicator, among this set of ill-advised Moral Writers. This ambiguity forces the reader to consider Fielding's moralizing passages in terms of appearance and reality.

Wright concludes his discussion of Fielding as narrator by suggesting that "Fielding the comic observer and Fielding the moralist are united—that is to say reconciled, in Fielding the narrator..."²¹ But, Michael Irwin writes: "Tom Jones is no more a coherent whole than Joseph Andrews. Its didactic and narrative excellences are not only independent of, but almost inconsistent with one another."²² There is often a

²¹Wright, p. 15.

²²Michael Irwin, Henry Fielding, the Tentative Realist, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 86.

*This idea was developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

difference between the apparent teaching and the way in which it is presented: the effect points to a source of ambiguity.

Other problems of ambiguity in Fielding have also been dealt with in recent criticism, for example, the apparent ambiguities in Fielding's attitude to human nature. "One of the currently unanswered questions in Fielding criticism is the extent to which his works as a whole present a unified and consistent view of human nature," writes C. R. Kropf.²³ Kropf's article on Fielding's attitude to educational theory points up the problem. Fielding seems to have held, at various times, three distinct educational theories, and moved from a belief in the power of education to mold character in his early works to the belief that a person's character is untouchable to education which he seems to hold in Tom Jones.²⁴ Clearly Fielding does not base his view of reality on any single unified theory of human nature; any attempt to place any single precept at the core of Tom Jones will have to deal with the problem of ambiguity.

Obviously ambiguity in Tom Jones is an important subject for discussion. I wish, however, to take a somewhat different approach to that which has appeared in most recent criticism and examine ambiguity in the treatment of certain characters in the novel. I believe such an examination opens new avenues to understanding Tom Jones.

²³C. R. Kropf, "Educational Theory and Human Nature in Fielding's Works", in PMLA, January 1974, 113-119. 113.

²⁴Ibid., 118.

CHAPTER 1

TWO EMBODIMENTS OF PRUDENCE

TWO EMBODIMENTS OF PRUDENCE

Mr. Allworthy and Sophia Western are frequently seen as serving as good examples in Tom Jones and as advocates of the same principles that Fielding stands for. I wish to suggest, however, that their roles are really ambiguous.

More than any other character, Allworthy seems to represent the moral core of Tom Jones; superficially, the narrator describes him as the ideal Christian gentleman:

...there lately...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. (I,ii,27)

Indeed, the narrator is so generous to this gentleman, we may be pardoned in suspecting that this description is a hint that things are not all as they seem.

The narrator goes further and, in a truly glorious description, gives us a picture of Mr. Allworthy which places him not only among the first rank of humanity, but also seems almost to equate him with the divine:

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 to the blue Firmament before him, as Harbingers

preceding his Pomp, in the full Blaze of his Majesty up 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. (I,iv,32)

Thus we are told, Mr. Allworthy is even more glorious than the sun. Can this be accepted unambiguously?

This description contains an ambiguity. It is not clear whether the "his" in "his Creatures" refers back to "his Creator" or to "a human Being", although the use of the lower case would suggest the latter. The distinction does not seem to be clear in Mr. Allworthy's mind either; he likes to play God in his various roles as squire, justice, and guardian.

We are repeatedly told of Allworthy's wisdom and generosity. Yet it is striking that many of his actions have less than good results. For example, his guardianship of his sister is not sufficiently careful to prevent her from twice being seduced and made pregnant. Nor does he prevent her from making a hateful marriage with her second seducer. His plan to admit good conversation to his table as a means of adding to his own education leads to his sister's unhappiness because he chose his guests with insufficient care and failed to oversee their activities. Why Bridgit concealed her relationship with Summer, and her later relationship with Captain Blifil, from her brother is unclear. We could, of course, attribute this action entirely to Bridget's own character, but it might also be attributable to her knowledge that her brother would not approve of these relationships. If this were the case, we could fairly say that Allworthy has not acted in his sister's best interests and one could

fairly inquire into his real motives.*

We are often told that Allworthy is the wisest of men, yet there is little proof of this in the novel. In fact, he seems to be easily deceived and to be a very poor judge of character. His misjudgment is most obvious in the way he is deceived by young Blifil; it can also be seen in his relationship with Captain Blifil. Once he became his brother-in-law, Allworthy seemed unwilling to see him as the cruel greedy man that he was. If either Blifil, father or son, had succeeded to Allworthy's estate, all the good squire's benevolence would soon have been destroyed.

More important is Allworthy's failure to see through the real characters of Thwackum and Square, the two men to whom he entrusted the education of his wards, Tom and Blifil. Far from being ideal teachers of virtue and religion that Allworthy believes they are, they are actually the worst teachers he could possibly have employed. Far from correcting each other's faults, as Allworthy had hoped, they accentuate them. In their disputations they throw into doubt the principles each purports to stand for rather than confirming the united force these principles which Allworthy himself claims to believe. They are united by only one principle: self-interest. They possibly instill into Blifil a degree of hypocrisy he might have escaped without their influence. Tom Jones escapes the bad effects of their teaching only because of his good nature. In fact, the whole education scheme to which Allworthy devoted

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

so much attention is something of a disaster.

Allworthy's education scheme, by producing two such diverse people as Tom and Blifil, casts doubt on the whole value of education; in Tom Jones, Fielding seems to have come to believe that education is irrelevant to character.²⁵ As Kropf writes:

The surprising thing is not that Blifil emerges from his childhood such a bad character but that Tom emerges such a good one, and in that fact lies the importance of Fielding's use of education in the novel. In the terms commonly used in educational tracts, Tom's basic goodness must either arise from innate qualities or be learned: Fielding has been careful to eliminate the latter and so forces the reader to agree with the former.²⁶

Nevertheless, Allworthy is presented as the advocate of what is, as Fielding sees it, the mistaken view of education. Can we assume that this is the only area of knowledge in which he is mistaken?

The narrator warns us not to judge Allworthy for this mistake:

...the Reader is greatly mistaken, if he conceives that Thwackum appeared to Mr. Allworthy in the same Light as he doth to him in this History; and he is as much deceived, if he imagines, that the most intimate Acquaintance which he himself could have had with that Divine, would have informed him of those Things which we, from our Inspiration, are enabled to open and discover. Of Readers who from such Conceits as these, condemn the Wisdom or Penetration of Mr. Allworthy, I shall not scruple to say, that they make a very bad and ungrateful Use of that Knowledge which we have communicated to them. (III,vi,102)

Often, throughout the novel, when he reveals that Allworthy has made a mistake, the narrator issues a similar warning. We must begin to wonder if he does not protest too much.

²⁵Kropf, p. 117.

²⁶Ibid.

Mr. Allworthy is portrayed as the wisest and fairest of judges, as opposed to Squire Western, the most prejudiced and ignorant justice it is possible to imagine. Yet Allworthy makes vital errors of judgment in virtually every judgment we see him make: in the cases of Partridge, of Jenny Jones and of Tom himself. Jenny Jones deliberately misled him, of course, but Allworthy's failure to carry out a proper investigation has unhappy results not only for her, but for many people, and could have been disastrous for Tom.

Allworthy's judgment of Partridge also seems to have been unduly hasty even if, as we are told "...there was evidence more than sufficient to convict him before Allworthy; indeed more than sufficient to convince a Bench of Justices on an Order of Bastardy.." (II,vi,77) The fact that Partridge, in all probability, would have been convicted before any other justice does not alter the fact that Allworthy refused to give equal weight to Partridge's protestations of innocence. Fielding himself suggests that this is more than a small error when he stops to praise "...the great Wisdom and Sagacity of our Law, which refuses to admit the Evidence of a Wife for or against her Husband." (II,vi,75) Allworthy ignores this excellent legal principle and convicts Partridge solely on his wife's extremely biased evidence. In the light of this fact, can Fielding's reference to Allworthy's "natural love of justice," or his "Coolness of Temper" (II,vi,76) be entirely unambiguous? He does send for Jenny Jones, but when he learns that she's run away with a recruiting officer, he declared, "that the Evidence of such a Slut as she appeared to be, would have deserved no Credit; but he said he could not help

thinking that had she been present, and would have declared the Truth, she must have confirmed what so many Circumstances...did sufficiently prove." (II, vi, 76) This decision is both irrational and unjust, and cost Partridge his reputation and his means of making a living.

In Tom's case, Allworthy, acting on the advice of clever accusers, ejects Tom from Paradise Hall. In this case particularly, whatever Allworthy may believe, his method of trial is faulty. The narrator warns us: "The Reader must be very weak, if, when he considers the Light in which Jones then appeared to Mr. Allworthy, he should blame the Rigour of his Sentence." (VI, xi, 237) This may be true, but is this warning not also an invitation to examine Allworthy's actions more critically? In fact, he failed to conduct a proper trial. Assuming that Tom is guilty, he failed to make sure that the accused knew the nature of the charges against him in order to make a proper defence. As we are told, he does not confront Tom with his accusers but rather acts as both prosecutor and judge:

When Dinner was over, and the Servants departed, Mr. Allworthy began to harangue. He set forth, in a long Speech, the many Iniquities of which Jones had been guilty, particularly those which this Day had brought to Light; and concluded by telling him, 'That unless he could clear himself of the Charge, he was resolved to banish him his Sight for ever.' (VI, xi, 236)

This is surely a most improper way to conduct a trial. It should not be surprising that Allworthy's judgments are often mistaken if this is how he treats someone for whom he professes great affection.

We must examine the real reason Allworthy condemns Tom.* It is

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

not, in fact, because of the accusations which Blifil makes with Thwackum's support; rather he condemns Tom because of Western's report that Tom has been courting Sophia:

...your audacious Attempt to steal away the young Lady calls me to justify my own Character in punishing you. The World, who have already censured the Regard I have shewn for you, may think, with some Colour, at least of Justice, that I connive at so base and barbarous an Action. An Action of which you must have known my Abhorrence; and which, had you any Concert for my Ease and Honour, as well as for my Friendship, you would never have thought of undertaking. (*Ibid.* 237)

This is Tom's real crime in Allworthy's eyes: his young ward has offended against his sense of propriety, perhaps even his sense of property.*

Allworthy is repeatedly represented as being merciful, even too merciful. However, after unjustly condemning Partridge, he leaves him and his wife in near destitution and cuts off all his charity when Mrs. Partridge dies. Justice is more important than charity, to Allworthy; he condemns Tom for suggesting that they should be merciful to Black George.

...you carry this forgiving Temper too far. Such mistaken Mercy is not only Weakness but borders on Injustice, and is very pernicious to Society, as it encourages Vice. The Dishonesty of the Fellow I might perhaps have pardoned, but never his Ingratitude. (*XVIII, xi, 150-51*)

Tom cannot persuade Allworthy to be merciful to Black George and it is Tom, rather than Allworthy who shows mercy towards Blifil. Allworthy, who acted as guardian to this young man all his life and had led him

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

to believe he would receive his own entire fortune as an inheritance, now refuses to see him at all, as he tells Tom:

...do not flatter him with any Hopes of my Forgiveness; for I shall never forgive Villainy farther than my Religion obliges me, and that extends neither to our Bounty or our Conversation. (Ibid., 749)

Again Allworthy condemns a man without a hearing and precludes any hope for forgiveness because of the outrageous crime of ingratitude. This hatred of ingratitude resembles the anger of an outraged deity.

Martin C. Battestin writes that, "Prudence is the central ethical concept of Tom Jones."²⁷ We must accept this if we believe the usual view that Allworthy is totally admirable. If, however, Allworthy's treatment in the novel is ambiguous, we must regard the case for the preeminence of prudence as unproven.

Allworthy is surely the most prudent man in Tom Jones, yet he is capable of making very bad misjudgments as we have seen. Glenn W. Hatfield suggests that Allworthy is not the ideal prudent man.²⁸ Because of his good nature, he is too easily imposed upon by evil people. This would apply to his judgment of Blifil, but does it really apply to his judgments of Partridge or Tom? Surely he is ruled in these cases by his outraged sense of propriety.*

²⁷Martin C. Battestin, "Fielding's Definition of Wisdom", in Tom Jones, ed. Sheridan Baker, pp. 817-43. p. 819.

²⁸Hatfield, pp. 182-83.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

I cannot accept Hatfield's statement that, "Allworthy is presumably an example of one who, like Jones, lacks the natural gift of prudence and, having to learn it from experience, remains fallible."²⁹ Consider Allworthy's saintly demeanor on his supposed death bed and his behaviour throughout the rest of the novel: surely he is as close as it is possible to the ideal prudent man? Allworthy is fallible, but it cannot be admitted that his fallibility arises from lack of prudence.

Battestin cites an Eighteenth Century source as saying:

The prudent man alone is equipped to survive in a world of deceitful appearances and hostile circumstances, for only he "sees things in their proper colours, and consequently expects those things from them which ruin others by the surprise of their coming on."³⁰

In Tom Jones, however, it is not true that only the prudent man sees things in their proper colours. Throughout the novel I think it is fair to say that Tom perceives reality more clearly than Allworthy. In fact, the young man whose conspicuous fault is his lack of prudence is no more easily deceived than the older, most prudent man in the novel.

A conspicuous example of Allworthy being unable to see what a most imprudent man can see, occurs early in the novel. In the discussion of Blifil's action in releasing the bird Tom gave to Sophia, it is not surprising that Thwackum and Square should accept Blifil's explanation at face value. They are natural hypocrites; any prudence they evince is entirely motivated by self-interest. More surprising, perhaps, is

²⁹Hatfield, p. 183. .

³⁰Battestin, p. 823.

Allworthy's placid acceptance of his nephew's rationalizations; the prudent man is easily deceived and his failure to see through his nephew's character will have unfortunate consequences. In contrast, Western, who could hardly be called prudent, perceives Blifil's action absolutely correctly. Interrupting the debate between the cleric and the philosopher, he says:

...Pox of your Laws of Nature. I don't know what you mean either of you, by Right and Wrong. To take away my Girl's Bird was wrong in my Opinion; and my Neighbour Allworthy may do as he pleases; but to encourage Boys in such practices is to breed them up to the Gallows. (IV, iv, 122)

Western easily saw through Blifil's explanation to the essentials of the matter:

Moreover, having listened to the arguments of Thwackum and Square, he again makes a cogent comment:

'So between you both,' says the Squire, 'the young Gentleman hath been taught to rob my Daughter of her Bird. I find I must take Care of my Partridge Mew. I shall have some virtuous religious Man or other set all my Partridges at Liberty.'
(Ibid., 123)

Western has expressed his ideas in the only terms he understands, but he has, in fact, understood what Blifil is being taught by Thwackum and Square: the hypocritical use of precepts to justify self-interest. Unfortunately, Allworthy does not perceive this and Western is unable to communicate the perception to him. In this case, it is surely not prudence, but something closer to instinct, which sees things in their true light.

Hatfield suggests that Allworthy's misjudgment in this instance arises from a lack of prudence, from his unwillingness to believe bad

of people; he suggests that he is fallible because his prudence comes not from Nature but from experience.³¹ But is Allworthy really unwilling to believe evil of people? In his magisterial role, he has surely seen enough evil in people to convince him of its existence. He shows no unwillingness to perceive evil when he condemns Partridge and Tom in the first part of the novel, nor in his condemnation of Blifil and Black George at the end. Allworthy's fallibility arises, I believe, not from imprudence, but from his belief-in-precepts. This makes him vulnerable to an accomplished hypocrite like Blifil who has learned what his uncle likes to hear and gives it to him.* This belief in precepts leads Allworthy to place great faith in his own judgment and give prudence precedence over love in his condemnation of Tom.

Hatfield suggests that, "Sophia, alone, apparently, has the gift of prudence from Nature."³² In the incident of the bird, she judges correctly when Allworthy errs. But can we disregard her affection for the lost bird as an element in her judgment? Moreover, is her preference for Tom over Blifil really a matter of prudence at this stage? The narrator tells us: "The Gaiety of Tom's Temper suited better with Sophia, than the grave and sober Disposition of Master Blifil." (IV, iv, 120) Is this reaction not closer to instinct than to reasoned judgment?

³¹Hatfield, p. 182.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

³²Hatfield, p. 120.

Sophia judges Blifil's action correctly because it affects her directly. Prudence would surely dictate that she listen to the opinion of her elders before making this judgment; indeed Allworthy praises her for her willingness to do so later in the novel. But, in this instance, if she'd listened to the most conspicuously prudent of her elders, she'd have reached the opposite judgment to the correct one she, in fact, reached.

It should not be forgotten that Sophia's father also reached the same judgment in this case and also shared her admiration for Tom's action. as he says:

It may be Learning and Sense for ^{ought} ~~all~~ I know; but you shall never persuade me into it. Pox! you have neither of you mentioned a Word of that poor Lad who deserves to be commended. To venture breaking his Neck to oblige my Girl, was a generous spirited Action: I have Learning enough to see that. 'D--n me, here's Tom's Health. I shall love the Boy for it the longest Day I have to live. (IV, iv, 124)

Even if we accept Hatfield's belief that Sophia's judgment arises from natural prudence, a man with no natural prudence makes the same judgment instinctively.

Moreover, does Sophia's natural prudence make her any less fallible as a judge than Allworthy's learned prudence? In fact, Sophia's prudence seems to be one of, "those Cardinal Virtues which like good House-wives stay at home, and mind only the Business of their own Family..." (XV, i, 601)* It leads her, for example, to subordinate her love for Tom to her duty to her father. She never seriously considers

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

running away with her beloved, but, at one point, does seriously consider yielding to her father's wishes by marrying Blifil. When, after an argument with his sister, the squire treats his daughter affectionately, we are told,

...that had her Honour given to Jones, and something else perhaps in which he was concerned, been removed, I much doubt whether she would not have sacrificed herself to a Man she did not like, to have obliged her Father. (XVIII, ii, 711-12)

As so often in Fielding, it is the "something else" that is important. In this case, it is her love for Tom rather than the prudent desire of avoiding an unhappy marriage, which prevents her from acceding to her father's desires.

We must, however, ascribe many of her actions to two "stay-at-home" virtues she shares with Allworthy: concern for maintaining her reputation and a reasonable desire to preserve her fortune.* This helps explain why she condemned Tom for some of his actions later in the novel despite her correct initial judgment in his favour against Blifil. She seems to be torn by ambivalent feelings, her love for Tom opposed by her prudent desire to maintain her position in society. It is not prudence which drives her to flee her father's house; that was a bold and dangerous move and she was extremely fortunate to arrive in London unharmed. Her love is strong enough to enable her to abandon prudence in this instance, but it does not lead her to the obvious step of joining him when they are near to each other at Upton. Of course, the fact that Tom is abed with Mrs. Waters at the time of Sophia's arrival is largely

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

to blame for this, but it cannot be said that this is what causes Sophia's resolve not to see him.

Tom's sexual adventures don't seem to bother Sophia unduly. If anything, they add to his attractiveness in her eyes. Perhaps we're overly hasty if we assume that Fielding is being totally ironic when he refers to "The Penetration of Squire Western" in the title of a chapter in which the good squire expresses his opinion of the subject of fathering bastards:

It will do'n no Harm with hem, assure yourself; nor with any Body else. Ask Sophy there - You have not the worse Opinion of a young Fellow for getting a Bastard, have you, Girl? No, no, the Women will like un the better for't. (IV, x, 143)

Western may well be right on this subject. Sophia's behaviour, despite her becoming modesty, does nothing to refute it.

However, when it came to the point when she could have joined Tom if she had wished to do so, Sophia is unwilling to take this step. Instead she takes advantage of Tom's supposed "crime" of bandying her name about as an excuse for avoiding him. It strikes one as extreme delicacy to judge so severely what could have been regarded amiably as the result of extreme love. Later in London, when Tom has explained away his "crime", she is again prepared to believe the worst about Tom when she is given the letters he sent to Lady Bellaston. It is made clear that it is not the real situation which offends her, but rather some dishonour she perceives in Tom's actions. Sophia is not particularly adept at seeing things in their true light.

Nor does Sophia's prudence protect her from danger in at least one significant instance. Her prudence may be the factor which enables her to see through the story her cousin tells her and to realize there is

more to it than appears on the surface. Her sense of propriety and concern for her reputation lead her to withdraw from Mrs. Fitzpatrick's house to Lady Bellaston as quickly as possible. But her prudence does not enable her to see through the character of Lady Bellaston. As a result she is nearly raped, saved only by the timely arrival of her father. His visit to Lady Bellaston to retrieve his errant daughter would have delayed until too late if he had obeyed the dictates of prudence or the advice of his sister. In this case it was her father's crude almost instinctive actions, rather than prudence, which saved Sophia's virtue.

From beginning to end, Sophia's feelings seem to be ambivalent. She loves Tom but prudence prevents her from showing her true feelings until her Aunt's intimation of a possible marriage trick her into revealing them. It is possible if that had not happened she would never have allowed them to be exposed. If they had not been thus exposed, it certainly seems possible her love for Tom might not have been enough to prevent her from bowing to family pride and her father's desires by marrying Blifil. Surely it is erroneous to see Sophia as a young woman serenely in control of her thoughts and actions; her behaviour suggests that there is, in fact, a war with her between prudence and love. Even in the way she finally accepts Tom's suit she tries to reconcile this conflict. First, she asks Tom to wait and prove his virtue; finally she pretends her consent is that of a dutiful daughter.

If we were to believe that Sophia is the embodiment of prudence, we would have to compare her with that imprudent young man, Tom Jones. Which of the two is the more admirable? We are repeatedly told of Tom's

generosity and acts of charity, towards the Seagrims, for example. We are left to assume that Sophia's charity is of a more "stay-at-home" variety.* Fielding may believe that this is the more appropriate role for a woman, but ~~her~~^{she} certainly does not show her virtue as being of the kind "which is always busying itself without Doors, and seems as much interested in pursuing the Good of others as its own..." (XV, i, 601) While it can truly be said of Tom, that he was, "no-body's Enemy but his own," (IV, v, 124) it is not unduly harsh to suggest that Sophia's main concern is for herself.*

Tom, while in London, in a much worse position than Sophia, does not hesitate to donate all the money he has received from Lady Bellaston to aid Mrs. Miller's relatives. He is thus enabled to bring good results from his rather imprudent relationship with her Ladyship.* Even his early acts of charity, selling his horse and his Bible for the Seagrim's benefit are, in themselves, imprudent acts for which he is made to suffer by those who regard lack of self-interest as insanity. Even Allworthy regards Tom's acts of charity to the Seagrims as imprudent. Although Tom's account of their distress brings him to tears, he

at length dismissed Tom with a gentle rebuke, advising him for the future to apply to him in Cases of Distress rather than to use extraordinary Means of relieving them himself. (III, viii, 108)

Apparently, Allworthy's virtue had not been sufficiently busy out of doors to discover the Seagrim's distress for which he was the direct cause. Moreover, the discovery of Black George's solitary act of poaching

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

is enough to prevent the operation of Allworthy's charitable disposition in this case. Perhaps Allworthy really shares Blifil's belief that Justice is a higher Kind than Mercy. (III, x, III) Certainly in this case, "the poor Gamekeeper was condemned, without having any Opportunity to defend himself..." (Ibid, 112) and Mr. Allworthy "strictly forbid Tom to mention George any more..." (Ibid.) In this case, Tom turned from Allworthy and applied for help for the Seagrims to Sophia, thus involving her in her only act of charity described in the novel.

Tom exceeds not only Blifil but also Allworthy and indeed every character in the novel in the quality of his mercy. While Allworthy would condemn both Blifil and Black George, Tom is able to ameliorate Blifil's condition and would have pardoned George except for Allworthy's absolute horror at the idea. We must assume that Allworthy's is the prudent viewpoint, but can we believe it is the more admirable one? Since we are not told of Sophia's reaction to these judgments, we cannot know how merciful she would have been. However, in the only case in which we do see her act, Tom's, she is as willing to condemn as to forgive.

It is not pleasant to have to choose between Sophia and Tom, but if Sophia embodies prudence and Tom represents something other than prudence, the comparison surely does not lead us to admire prudence in preference to what Tom stands for. Tom does not become good when he becomes prudent; his goodness is already present, but he must also learn how to survive. Tom is not saved by his marriage to Sophia; he has already ^{been} saved by his knowledge acquired through experience and by Allworthy's discovery of his true birth. It might be fair to say

that it is Sophia who is saved by her marriage to Tom, saved by her love for a man of "lively parts" from the restrictive and ultimately destructive effects of prudence.

Both Mr. Allworthy and Sophia Western are most attractive characters, but it is a mistake to regard them as the moral pillars of Tom Jones or even to see them as unambiguously good. We must perceive them in more realistic terms, and it is also necessary to re-examine our judgments of certain other characters in the novel.

CHAPTER 2

TWO NONCONFORMISTS

TWO NONCONFORMISTS

There are two characters in Tom Jones who, for different reasons, stand apart from the morality advocated by Allworthy, who judges them both most severely. Mrs. Waters is forced to repent and abandon her way of life in order to be received back into the fold at the end of the novel. Black George, on the other hand, is the only character totally excluded from any of the benefits which are handed out so generously in the final chapter. I cannot accept these judgments as consistent with the characters as presented in Tom Jones; this disparity is a source of ambiguity in the novel.

Mrs. Waters, known as Jenny Jones at the beginning of the novel, is usually mentioned by critics regarding only her role in the resolution of the plot and her involvement in the supposed incest. Yet she is one of the most interesting characters in the novel. J. Middleton Murray writes about the attitude of Fielding and the reader to her:

Fielding's own sentiment about such women as Mrs. Waters is evident. They are more good-natured and more generous than many nominally more virtuous. He quite likes Mrs. Waters, and so do we. She is completely unmercenary, and she retained sufficient affection for Tom to do him a great service; and we may be pretty sure she made her lover happy...³³

I am sure most people would agree with Murray, but is this view reconcilable with Allworthy's or with the treatment Mrs. Waters receives at the end of the novel?*

³³J. Middleton Murray, "In Defence of Fielding," in Neil Compton, ed., Henry Fielding: Tom Jones, London: MacMillan, 1970. pp. 81-105. p. 100.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

The Jenny Jones we first meet presents a rather surprising figure:

This Jenny Jones was no very comely Girl, either in her Face or Person; but Nature had somewhat compensated the Want of Beauty with what is generally more esteemed by those Ladies, whose Judgment is arrived at Years of perfect Maturity; for she had given her a very uncommon Share of Understanding. This Gift Jenny had a great deal improved by Erudition. She had lived several Years a Servant with a Schoolmaster, ^{who by a very discovered a great Guiltless us parts in the} Girl, and an extraordinary Desire of learning (for every leisure Hour she was always reading in the Books of the Scholars), had the Good-nature, or Folly (just as the Reader pleases to call it), to instruct her so far, that she obtained a competent Skill in the Latin Language, and was, perhaps, as good a Scholar as most of the young Men of Quality of the Age. (I,vi,36)

We are given a picture of a physically unattractive but intelligent girl attempting to compensate for her lack of beauty by improving her mind in the normally acceptable ways.

Unfortunately, the results of her attempts are not entirely happy. In her desire for knowledge and her constant reading, she resembles the hero of an earlier novel by Fielding, Joseph Andrews. She lacks, however, not only his physical beauty, but also his calm acceptance of his position in society. Of Joseph, we are told:

He hoped he had profited somewhat better from the books he had read than to lament his condition in this world. That for his part, he was perfectly content with the state to which he was called; that he should endeavour to improve his talent, which was all required of him, but not repine at his own lot, nor envy those of his betters.³⁴

But of Jenny's intelligence we are told:

This Advantage, however, like most others of an extraordinary Kind, was attended with some small Inconveniences: For as it is not to be wondered at, that a young Woman so well accomplished

³⁴Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, ed. Martin Battestin (Boston: Riverside Editions, 1961). I,iii,18.

should have little Relish for the Society of those whom Fortune had made her Equals, but whom Education had rendered so much her Inferiors; so is it Matter of no greater Astonishment, that this Superiority in Jenny, together with that Behaviour which is its certain Consequence, should produce among the rest some little Envy and Ill-will towards her;...(I,vi,36-37)

It would seem that it was possible for a young footman like Joseph to acquire an education above his station without acquiring superior airs or alienating his peers, but not for a young woman like Jenny Jones. While it was a completely admirable act for Parson Adams to teach Joseph, it was possibly an act of folly for Partridge to teach Jenny.

Could not Jenny's desire to improve both herself and her station be regarded as an admirable quality? The combination of his beauty and his personality made Joseph really unsuitable for his position as a foot-man because he was too attractive to Lady Booby; to preserve his virtue, he was forced to leave the household. It is not at all clear how he would have survived if his true parentage had not been discovered. Jenny, on the other hand, attempts to deal with the situation that confronts her and succeeds in making a life of her own, although she certainly meets some pitfalls. She seems to have had several strikes against her before she even starts.

Jenny is a clever and ambitious girl trying to make her way in the world. Bridget Allworthy turns to her in her distress because Jenny is clever and reliable; she does the job well. Bridget's confinement is so well concealed that Allworthy never learns of it as he surely would if anyone had found out. Jenny has no difficulty deceiving Allworthy when he interrogates her. After the interrogation, she is sent "out of reach of reproach", a day's journey from Paradise Hall. Apparently it

never occurred to Allworthy or anyone else that she, Tom's presumed mother, might wish to stay and oversee the welfare of her child. Instead of taking Tom himself and sending the mother away, Allworthy could have returned him to the mother and used his charity to support them. Bridgit must have known her brother very well to have realized how quickly he would become attached to the child left in his bed and that he would be so intent on raising it as if it were his own. From this separation of the purported mother and child arises the supposed danger of incest later in the story.

We hear of Jenny next at Partridge's trial; her disappearance leads to his condemnation: "Jenny was not to be found: For that she had left her Habitation a few Days before, in company with a recruiting Officer." (II,vi,76) This action shows Jenny's independence and unwillingness to be confined by propriety; her respect for its rules may have been weakened by her part in Bridgit's scheme: she may have decided to do what she had already been condemned for. As we have seen, it led Allworthy to dismiss her as "a Slut" whose evidence would be of no value and who would have surely supported Partridge's original confession. Allworthy's statement shows that he had unfairly prejudged Partridge's case and might well have disbelieved Jenny even if she had been available to testify. His condemnation of her shows his hatred for any sign of independence in a woman, but he will eventually have to listen to and believe the evidence of this woman he has dismissed as "a Slut".

At this point, Jenny Jones disappears from the story. When she

reappears, at the bottom of Mazard Hill, she is transformed into Mrs. Waters, the woman whose life Tom saves. The narrator describes her thus:

The redeemed Captive had not altogether so much of the human-angelic Species: She seemed to be, at least, of the middle Age, nor had her Face much Appearance of Beauty; but her Clothes being torn from all the upper Part of her Body, her Breasts, which were well-formed and extremely white, attracted the Eyes of her Deliverer...(IX,ii,376)

Jenny Jones has certainly changed to become Mrs. Waters; while her face may still be plain, her person has attractions enough to hold Tom's attention at least. All we learn of her later gives no indication that she has retained any of her former interest in reading, or indeed, any of the resulting vanity. Indeed, she seems to have made men her exclusive interest in life.

While Mrs. Waters may lack Sophia's higher beauty, she is a real woman and as such is attracted to Tom, a real man of "lively Parts." We are told of her reaction:

When the Reader hath duly reflected on these many Charms which all centred in our Heroe, and considers at the same Time the fresh Obligations which Mrs. Waters had to him, it will be a Mark more of Prudery than Candour to entertain a bad Opinion of her, because she conceived a very good Opinion of him. (IX,v,387)

Tom's attraction leads her to engage him in "the whole Artillery of Love" which is one of the novel's most delightful passages.

Mrs. Waters invites Tom to her bed from no ulterior motive, but to satisfy her appetite and his. The love sequence comes immediately after the description of the meal; loving Sophia often deprives Tom of his appetite for food to his companion Partridge's great discomfort; loving Mrs. Waters never could. This connection between loving and eating is made explicit in another passage:

The Beauty of Jones highly charmed her Eye; but, as she could not see his Heart, she gave herself no Concern about it. She could feast heartily at the Table of Love, without reflecting that some other already had been, or hereafter might be, feasted with the same Repast. (IX,vi,394)

The judgment implied in these sentences is ambiguous: they either condemn Mrs. Waters for her lack of delicacy, or praise her for her tolerance.

The sentences which immediately follow indicate the latter judgment, for the narrator writes that hers is,

A Sentiment which, if it deals but little in Refinement, deals however much in Substance; and is less capricious, and perhaps less ill-natured and selfish than the Desires of those Females who can be contented enough to abstain from the Possession of their Lovers, provided they are sufficiently satisfied that no one else possesses them. (IX,vi,394)

Mrs. Waters has no real concern for delicacy, but, at least the narrator admits that she is a better woman than some who rigorously defend their virtue.

Unless we compare Mrs. Waters to Sophia, I see no need to believe that this passage contains either "irony" or "double irony".³⁵ Because she is willing to forgive Tom his various affairs with other women, it would be unfair to accuse Sophia of being one of "those Females". She is, however, certainly the embodiment of refinement or delicacy.* In answer to a comment by Tom, she insists that he change before she will marry him:

...said Jones.. 'The Delicacy of your Sex cannot conceive the Grossness of ours, nor how little one sort of Amour has to do with the Heart.' 'I will never marry a Man,' replied Sophia,

³⁵Empson, p. 142.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

very gravely, 'who shall not learn Refinement enough to be as incapable as I am myself of making such a Distinction.'
(XVIII,xii,754)

Sophia's gravity shows her to be determined to defend her delicacy; she needn't worry about love: the combination of her person and her property are enough to assure her of Tom's. But does her attitude really compare favourably with the generosity of spirit exhibited by Mrs. Waters?

We learn something of Mrs. Waters' history from the sergeant who broke up the fight at the inn in Upton:

He said, she was the Wife of Mr. Waters, who was a Captain in their Regiment, and had often been with him at Quarters. 'Some Folks,' says he, 'used indeed to doubt whether they were lawfully married in a Church or no. But, for my part, that's no Business of mine; I must own, if I was put to my Corporal Oath, I believe she is little better than one of us; and I fancy the Captain may go to Heaven when the Sun shines upon a rainy Day. But if he does, that is neither here nor there; for he won't want Company. And the Lady, to give the Devil his Due, is a very good Sort of Lady, and loves the Cloth, and is always desirous to do strict Justice to it; for she hath begged off many a poor Soldier, and, by her Good-will, would never have any of them punished.' (IX,vi,391)

This report really reinforces our generally good impression of Mrs. Waters. It is clear that she has maintained her independence in her relationship with Captain Waters. The merciful spirit she evinces in her desire to excuse poor soldiers from punishment, was even more clearly shown in her permitting Northerton to escape, although he's attempted to rob and murder her; she's willing to forgive and forget and get on with the business of life. Mrs. Waters may not be a completely virtuous woman, but she is certainly full of generosity, life, and love.

The narrator later recapitulates these facts. Although he suggests that her relationship with Northerton, "did her no great favour" (IX,vii,395), he refuses to judge her,

...though we are obliged to relate Facts, we are not obliged to do a Violence to our Nature by any Comments to the Disadvantage of the loveliest Part of the Creation. (IX,vii,396)

He does, moreover, add:

Women to their Glory be it spoken, are more generally capable of that violent and apparently disinterested Passion of Love, which seeks only the Good of its Object, than Men. (Ibid.)

This is surely a fair judgment of Mrs. Waters. It is certainly more applicable to her than to Sophia, who places her delicacy before her love for Tom.*. Sophia's love seems always to be prudently restrained and could never be described as a "violent Passion".

Tom may be able to say that his heart was unaffected by his casual affairs including that with Mrs. Waters. The same cannot be said of Mrs. Waters, as we are told when she comes to visit Tom in prison having learned that it was he who wounded Fitzpatrick:

...it was some Time before she discovered, that the Gentleman who had given him this Wound was the very same Person from whom her Heart had received a Wound, which, though not of a mortal Kind, was yet so deep that it had left a considerable Scar behind it. (XVII,ix,704)

She was very much affected by Tom, and having learned his whereabouts, visits him immediately, despite the forbidding nature of the prison, to reassure him of Fitzpatrick's survival. Although she is disappointed to find Tom so morose and moralistic, her affection for him leads her to work actively on his behalf. When she learns who he really is, she goes immediately to Allworthy because she thinks that it is he who has initiated the cruel persecution of Tom. Her action results directly in

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenb'ood, my thesis advisor.

his restoration to Allworthy's favour and his replacing Blifil in that position and as heir to Allworthy's estate. She takes all these actions from love of Tom, not from any hope for reward.

Mrs. Waters is, for me, the most interesting woman in Tom Jones. While it might be reasonable to call Sophia the embodiment of prudence, it would be a grave injustice to call Mrs. Waters the embodiment of sluttishness. Her early education and even her ambition to rise above her station, her devotion to those she loves, but especially her independence, set her aside from all other women in the novel. She is, in fact, more independent than most of the men in the novel. Her occasional dependence on such men as Captain Waters and Mr. Fitzpatrick arises from contemporary conditions which left a woman with no alternative form of work. Indeed, her relationship with Mr. Fitzpatrick is described as a job: "...a certain Office in the Gift of Mr. Fitzpatrick at that Time vacant, namely that of a Wife..." (XVII, ix, 704) Tom proves to be no more capable of supporting himself, when he arrives in London, and rapidly becomes dependent on Lady Bellaston. Nor is Allworthy really as independent as Mrs. Waters; he is the prisoner of his property and his moral code.*

But what is Mrs. Waters' fate in Tom Jones? At the end of the novel, in the final chapter in which the various fates are being

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

distributed, we are told:

As to those of lower Account, Mrs. Waters returned into the Country, had a Pension of 60l. a Year settled upon her by Mr. Allworthy, and is married to Parson Supple, on whom, at the Instance of Sophia, Western hath bestowed a considerable Living. (XVIII, Ch. the last, 760)

Is it credible that a character as independent as Mrs. Waters has been shown to be throughout the novel, could be happy with a character who, it can be fairly said, is the embodiment of dependence!* The entire passage reeks with the demeaning qualities of charity: servility and dependence. Could she ever be content to remain with so unmanly a man as Parson Supple?* I cannot believe it! This passage contributes to my belief that the final chapter of Tom Jones is ironic, a clue to the ambiguity of the entire novel.

In the interrogation by Allworthy, Jenny Jones shows her considerable intelligence, demonstrates that she sees right through him and recognizes him for what he is: a pious moralizer.* It is her job to deceive him about the true circumstances of Tom's birth and she succeeds brilliantly. When Allworthy presses her to reveal the name of the father, she stops his investigation by using two words, "Honour" and "Religion" to Mr. Allworthy, "Whom the least Mention of those sacred Words was sufficient to stagger..." (I, vii, 41)

Mrs. Waters, in her encounter with Allworthy, shows no less intelligence. She answers Allworthy's initial moralistic antagonism

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

with these words:

'Mr. Allworthy,' says she, interrupting him, 'I know I have Faults, but Ingratitude to you is not one of them. I never can nor shall forget your Goodness; which I own I have very little deserved...' (XVIII,vii,726)

She praises Allworthy's goodness and wisdom and acquits herself of the charge of ingratitude which, as we have seen, is a very serious one with him, and thus begins to gain his sympathetic attention.

Having succeeded in convincing Allworthy that her account of Tom's birth is true and that he should restore him to favour, she goes on to explain to him her own present situation:

'Indeed Sir,' says she, 'I was ruined by a very deep Scheme of Villainy, which if you knew, though I pretend not to think it would justify me in your Opinion, it would at least mitigate my Offence, and induce you to pity me; you are not now at Leisure to hear my whole Story; but this I assure you, I was betrayed by the most solemn Promises of Marriage, nay, in the Eye of Heaven I was married to him.' (XVIII,viii,731)

She almost seems to be recalling Allworthy's assertion in his interrogation of Jenny Jones that seduction is a kind of betrayal.

Allworthy is again convinced by her words, but can we also believe her? Surely her own life belies this statement that she was the victim when, in reality, she would prefer love to honour? She is not entirely subservient to Allworthy's morality in this speech; some of her old love of learning and resultant vanity emerges:

For after much reading on the Subject, I am convinced that particular Ceremonies are only requisite to give a legal Sanction to Marriage, and have only a worldly Use in giving a Woman the Privileges of a Wife; but that she who lives constant to one Man, after a solemn Affiance, whatever the World may call her, hath little to charge on her own conscience. (XVIII,viii, 731-32)

In response, Allworthy shows his usual contempt for any show of independent thinking in a woman:

'I am sorry, Madam,' said Allworthy, 'you made so ill an Use of your Learning. Indeed it would have been well that you had been possessed of much more, or had remained in a State of Ignorance. (XVIII,viii,732)

Allworthy must maintain his position of superior wisdom and moral domination.

At the end of this interview, we are told:

Mrs. Waters fell now upon her Knees before him, and, in a Flood of Tears, made him many most passionate Acknowledgements of his Goodness, which, as she truly said, savoured more of the divine than human Nature. (XVIII,viii,732)

While I can readily believe that this action softened Allworthy towards her, I find it hard to believe in this final submission to his wisdom. Nor can I believe that there is any possibility for happiness in the fate described for her in the final chapter. Both her submission and her fate are a negation of her life as shown in her love for Tom.

Black George is, like Mrs. Waters, a source of ambiguity in Tom Jones because of the difficulty of judging him. The common opinion of George is that he is a criminal deserving condemnation and this is the opinion that is expressed by Allworthy near the end of the novel; Tom and apparently the narrator acquiesce in the good squire's final judgment. It has been suggested that Tom's mis-education was actually worse than Blifil's because of his contact with Black George.³⁶ At best he has been considered a kind of "Noble Savage" whose condemna-

³⁶Kropf, p. 117.

tion and expulsion is nevertheless, necessary for the good of society.³⁷ Yet, there is considerable evidence that George loves Tom and is as true a friend to him, as he can be within the limits of his situation and character. Can we accept Allworthy's final condemnation of Black George?*

Fielding recognizes the difficulty in judging George and makes his case the basis for a short dissertation on judgment in one of his introductory chapters:

Now we, who are admitted behind the Scenes of this great Theatre of Nature, ... can censure the Action, without conceiving any absolute Detestation of the Person, whom perhaps Nature may not have designed to act an ill Part in all her Dramas. (VII, i, 248-49)

Surely this is an invitation to pardon George rather than join Allworthy's condemnation. As he concludes the chapter, "The worst of Men generally have the Words Rogue and Villain most in their Mouths, as the lowest of Wretches are aptest to cry low in the Pit." (*Ibid.*, 250)

George and Tom are associated in many ways. During much of Tom's young life, they were the only friends either had in the world. Tom makes love to Molly Seagrim and, for a while, believes he is the father of her illegitimate child. George made love to Molly's mother and sired her first child out of wedlock. George showed himself to be not entirely irresponsible by marrying Goody and making an honest woman of her, something which Tom, being a gentleman, is not prepared to do as we learn in a discussion between Molly and her mother:

³⁷Empson, p. 130.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

'Indeed Child, and so she had,' says the Mother sobbing, 'she hath brought a Disgrace upon us all. She's the vurst of the Vamily that ever was a Whore.' 'You need not upbraid me with that, Mother,' cries Molly; 'you yourself was brought-to-bed of Sister there, within a Week after you was married.' 'Yes, Hussy,' answered the enraged Mother, 'so I was, and what was the mighty Matter of that? I was made an honest Woman then; and if you was to be made an honest Woman, I should not be angry; but you must have to doing with a Gentleman, you nasty Slut; you will have a Bastard, Hussy, you will; and that I defy anyone to say of me.' (IV,ix,138-39)

In this exchange we can see the vast difference between the moral world occupied by Sophia and that in which the Seagrims live. While Sophia's is certainly more refined, is it necessarily better?*

An interesting sidelight is the fate of Molly's child; what happened to it?³⁸ In fact, it is never mentioned again. It is forgotten largely because Molly's pregnancy was part of the action of the plot, but it also was indicative of the insignificance of people of low degree in the world of Tom Jones. Yet the novel's hero was also a little bastard accident raised above his fated station in life.

Molly Seagrim and Sophia Western live in different moral worlds. A similar difference, also caused by the differences in their respective situations, separates the morality of Tom and George, or, to an even greater extent, Allworthy and George. Considering these differing circumstances, is it fair to suggest that Allworthy's morality is entirely right and George's entirely wrong.*

Our first impression of George is low indeed; we are told that.

³⁸Michael Irwin, Henry Fielding, The Tentative Realist. pp. 106-107.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

Tom had only one friend among the servants:

This Friend was the Gamekeeper, a Fellow of a loose kind of Disposition, and who was thought not to entertain much stricter Notions concerning the Difference between meum and tuum, than the young Gentleman himself. And hence this Friendship gave Occasion to many sarcastic Remarks among the Domestics, most of which were either Proverbs before, or, at least, are become so now; and, indeed, the Wit of them all may be comprised in that short Latin Proverb, 'Noscitur a socio,' which, I think, is thus expressed in English, 'You may know him by the company he keeps.' (III,ii,90)

The argument used later in the novel to defend the inn-keeper, Mrs. Whitefield, for her mistreatment of Tom when she is convinced that he is a "sorry Scoundrel", could equally well be used against George:

...a Man who is conscious of having an ill Character, cannot justly be angry with those who neglect or slight him; but ought rather to despise such as affect his Conversation. (VIII, ix,330)

The connection established between George and Tom is in various ways maintained throughout the novel.

We must ask, however, who is making these judgments? Are the servants who condemn George and Tom any more scrupulous about the difference between "meum" and "tuum" than they are? That they are not, we know from the case of Mrs. Wilkins, Allworthy's housekeeper, surely the most proper of servants, absolutely jealous of her reputation. From her own lips we learn something of her own behaviour during her years of service in her reaction to her treatment in Allworthy's will:

'Sure Master might have made some Difference, methinks, between me and the other Servants. I suppose he hath left me Mourning but, i-fackins! if that be all, the Devil shall wear it for him for me. I'd have his Worship know I am no Beggar. I have saved five hundred Pound in his Service, and after all to be used in this Manner. -- It is a fine Encouragement to Servants to be honest; and to be sure, if I have taken a little Something now and then, others have taken ten times as much...(V,xiii,186)

It is significant that she has saved the same sum that George later steals from Tom. She is surely as ungrateful in this action as George is in his, but more prudent and meaner. Does he really deserve condemnation more than she or any other servant? Is he severely punished, not because of his dishonesty or ingratitude, but because the lowness of his person exposes him to punishment?

Servants would seem to have the same attitude towards their master as, the narrator tells us, poor people have towards their neighbourhood squire.³⁹

...in every Parish almost in the Kingdom, there is a Kind of Confederacy ever carrying on against a certain Person of Opulence called the Squire, whose Property is considered as Free-Booty by all his poor Neighbours; who, as they conclude that there is no manner of Guilt in such Depredations, look upon it as a Point of Honour and moral Obligation to conceal, and to preserve each other from Punishment on all such Occasions. (XII, i, 474)

The narrator acknowledges the existence of different kinds of morality in the world; here his use of certain words such as "Honour" and "moral Obligation" would seem entirely ironical. Obviously this irony is present, but does it necessarily deny the rationality of the attitude of the poor?

In the same paragraph in which this passage appears, the narrator compares the attitude of the poor to the rich, with the attitude of the modern writer towards classical literature:

Now to obviate all such Imputations for the future, I do here confess and justify the Fact. The Antients may be considered as a rich Common, where every Person who hath the smallest Tenement in Parnassus, hath a free Right to fatten his Muse. (Ibid.)

³⁹Empson, p. 136.

The comparison suggests the poor ability of many moderns who feel free to plunder the classics, but Fielding makes a similar use of classical material, as he here admits. Does not this amiable comparison suggest that the poor may well be right in their attitude to the rich when their very survival depends on their adopting this approach? Poor people must look out for themselves; not every squire is as generous as Allworthy nor as careful of the welfare of "his Creatures".

Indeed, even Allworthy is capable of very bad management, which can leave those dependent on him, the Seagrim family, for example, in very bad straits indeed.⁴⁰ While the morality of the poor may not conform to the high ideals of a Mr. Allworthy, it is a morality which is appropriate to their situation.

George, and the other servants who take what they can from Allworthy in order to assure their survival, are not the only people who attempt to live off the good squire; several who retain pretensions to being gentlemen do so also. Thwackum and Square, for example, like Mrs. Wilkins, reveal their essential greed in their irritated reactions to the provisions on their behalf in Allworthy's will. Like George, they lack Mrs. Wilkins' opportunities to make up for any deficiencies in Allworthy's generosity. Unable to get at Allworthy's wealth by direct means, they seek to lay their hands on it by indirect means, as we are told:

...those two learned Personages...had from their first Arrival at Mr. Allworthy's House, taken so great an Affection, the one to his Virtue, the other to his Religion, that they had meditated the closest Alliance with him.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 135.

For this Purpose they had cast their Eyes on that fair Widow, whom, tho' we have not for some Time made any Mention of her, the Reader, we trust, hath not forgot. Mrs. Blifil was indeed the Object to which they both aspired. (III,vi,102)

In this endeavour they fail where an earlier dependent, Captain Blifil, had succeeded.

Condemning Tom for his pretension to Sophia, Allworthy speaks of heiress-hunting in terms nearly as harsh as those he normally reserves for ingratitude. In fact, he remains friendly towards Captain Blifil despite his success in this pastime, because the Captain is a gentleman. On the other hand, he is determined to punish George, a low scoundrel. Square escapes any share of Allworthy's wrath through confession and death; Thwackum is almost as immune to the good squire's anger although he can no longer rely on his generosity. Allworthy is persuaded to forgive even Blifil, the greatest villain of the group, to a certain extent. For Black George alone absolute condemnation is reserved.

The passage which introduces Black George explicitly connects him with Tom; there are, moreover, many similarities between them. It would be reasonable to say that George is what Tom might well have become had he been raised according to Captain Blifil's principles for the rearing of bastards: "...at the best, they ought to be brought up to the lowest and vilest Offices of the Commonwealth." (II,ii,60) Instead, because Allworthy imprudently decided to raise Tom as if he were his own son, Tom can consider himself a gentleman. From this decision arises the differences between Tom and George and it is the direct source of the major difference between them: the differing

consequences of their acts: For young Tom, stealing is a game; if caught, the worst he can expect is a severe beating from Thwackum and a pious lecture from Allworthy. For George, any violation of the law is serious business only to be undertaken to help support himself or his family or out of friendship for Tom. If he is caught thieving or poaching, he is subject to harsh laws Tom need never fear as long as he is a gentleman. At worst, George could be hanged for a comparatively minor offense. Even at best, he would be dismissed from his position, an economic disaster for himself and his family.

When Western catches Tom pursuing a bird on his land, he also sees another person with him whom he cannot identify; when he denounces Tom's behaviour he also reveals this to Allworthy. The other person was, of course, George, who begs Tom not to betray him. Tom, recalling that he had persuaded the gamekeeper to accompany him onto Western's land, against George's better judgment, determines not to expose his friend despite Thwackum's vigorous beatings. Despite Tom's sufferings, George declines to come forward; surely to have done so would have nullified Tom's courageous act? Moreover, Allworthy was permitting Thwackum to question under torture, a practice frowned on by British jurists even in the eighteenth century. While Tom possessed sufficient fortitude to resist under pain, he lacked caution and reserve and revealed the name of his companion to Blifil, who, motivated by his passion for truth, quickly passed this information on to his uncle at an opportune moment.

When Allworthy discovered Thwackum's torturing Tom beyond the

point he had intended, he tried to compensate^{with} him the gift of a horse. However, when Blifil informs him in whose defence Tom suffered, he doesn't hesitate to abrogate the effects of Tom's courage, for George's action has brought him into direct conflict with Allworthy's moral code. He condemns his behaviour:

...there was a great Difference between being guilty of a Falshood to excuse yourself, and to excuse another. He likewise urged, as the principal Motive to his inflexible Severity against this Man, that he had basely suffered Tom Jones to undergo so heavy a Punishment for his Sake, whereas he ought ⁹⁹ to have prevented it by making the Discovery himself. (III, v, ~~100~~)

But, could George afford to rely on Allworthy's kindness by coming forth as Tom did? George is responsible not only for himself, but also for his family; it was almost his duty to conceal his share of the misdemeanor. George simply cannot afford to live by the same code of honour as Allworthy and Tom.⁴¹

When Allworthy ejects Tom from Paradise Hall, he gives him a purse containing five hundred pounds of which he says:

...I can scarce think myself justifiable in what I am now going to bestow on you. However, as I have educated you like a Child of my own, I will not turn you naked into the World. When you open this Paper, therefore, you will find something which may enable you, with Industry, to get an honest Livelihood... (VI, xi, 237)

Tom, however, imprudently less concerned with what he has in hand than with what he has lost, throws away the purse in a moment of passion. Black George finds the purse and decides to keep it for himself rather than return it to his friend: this is George's great crime in the novel. Considering that Allworthy, with good logic but unjustly, has deprived

⁴¹Ibid., p. 136.

Tom of 6000 pounds and 500 pounds a year which he had promised him a short time before in his will, this crime of George's might not seem so severe. Allworthy has, in effect, robbed Tom of thousands of pounds to benefit Blifil who would also have the rest of the estate. On the other hand, George, who has nothing nor expectations of anything, steals from Tom an amount which is, to the best of his knowledge, a single year's revenue for his friend. To Allworthy, this is a major crime indeed:

The Dishonesty of the Fellow I might perhaps have pardoned, but never his Ingratitude...I am convinced the Fellow is a Villain, and he shall be punished; at least as far as I can punish him. (XVIII,xi,751)

Both Allworthy and Sophia are adept at thinking of aspects of a misdeed which they might pardon as long as they can also discover another aspect they could never forgive.

Black George absconded when he learned of the discovery of his crime and thus escaped the full force of Allworthy's wrath. We should not forget, however, that it was within Allworthy's power to punish George even unto death. That he is thinking of this possibility is clearly revealed by his mentioning, in the same speech in which he condemns George, "the Fate of a Highwayman, when I have been on the Grand Jury..." (*Ibid.*) Because Fielding excludes any such grim fate from his "happy ending", the modern reader does not perceive the fatal connotations of this passage. Surely Tom, in his desperate attempt to defend George in the face of Allworthy's implacability, is aware of them.

William Empson describes Tom's reaction as "the rather thrilling

coolness with which Tom does not reply to the harangue of Allworthy denouncing his forgiveness."⁴² Empson ascribes this thrill to the fact that the author, although he shows the reasons for George's actions and suggests the possibility of alternatives to Allworthy's morality, "never weakens the tone of moral shock with which he regards the behaviour of George."⁴³ Could it not rather be ascribed to Tom's realization of exactly what Allworthy means and what fate he intends for George?

Tom knows he can expect no further charity towards George from this man; he had learned this lesson before when Allworthy, misinformed by Blifil of George's poaching, forbade Tom to mention his friend again:

...as for his Family, he said; he would endeavour to keep them from starving; but as to the Fellow himself, he would leave him to the Laws, which Nothing could keep him from breaking. (III,x,112)

In that case, Tom did not hesitate "to try another Method of preserving the poor Game-Keeper from Ruin," (III,x,112) and applied to Sophia for help. Would he do any less when it was George's life that needed preserving? Someone sent a warning to Black George; is it unlikely it was Tom?

Surely George's action in retaining Tom's purse is not the monstrous insult to human nature which Allworthy's comments seem to suggest. To George, the money is indeed a fortune, one which would change the lives of his family significantly. After a life of abject poverty and total dependence, the temptation would be nearly irresistible

⁴²Ibid., p. 136.

⁴³Ibid.

as Tom himself says:

Consider, Sir, what a Temptation to a Man who hath tasted bitter Distress, it must be to have a Sum in his Possession, which must put him and his Family beyond any future Possibility of suffering the like. (XVIII,xii,750)

As far as I'm concerned, Tom's arguments for mercy are irrefutable. Can anyone seriously regard Allworthy's objection as being true morality?*

'Child' cries Allworthy, 'you carry this forgiving Temper too far. Such mistaken Mercy is not only Weakness, but borders on Injustice, and is very pernicious to Society, as it encourages Vice. (Ibid., 750-51)

I cannot accept that this is a successful refutation of Tom's well-reasoned arguments for mercy.

His determination to destroy George reveals in Allworthy an unreasonable lust for vengeance.* Perhaps Allworthy perceived his parting gift to Tom as a means of assuaging his feelings of guilt. Originally, he felt guilty for rejecting one he had come to regard as a son because of his own subservience to a moral code. Later these guilt feelings were renewed when he realized that he had committed a disastrous injustice. George's action nullified the effect of his gift which may explain Allworthy's extreme anger towards him.

In considering the various judgments of George, we must consider who is making these judgments. As we saw at the beginning, he had a bad reputation in the neighbourhood; so did Tom. However, as we have seen, the people who regarded them thus, whatever care they might have taken of their own reputations, were utterly selfish and corrupt. It is clear

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

that George is not an entirely irresponsible character. For example, he made an honest woman of Goody. Far from being an incorrigible poacher, he only commits this crime when his family is near starvation. Indeed, it is the fact that he has only sold game once which leads to his apprehension on that charge:

...Black George was pitched upon by him, as being a Person already obnoxious to Mr. Western, and one of no good Fame in the Country. He was, besides, the best Sacrifice the Higler could make, as he had supplied him with no Game since; and by this Means the Witness had an Opportunity of screening his better Customers...
(IX,x,112)

Again, George was the victim of what passed for justice at the time.

In fact, it might be said that George's final downfall is a result of his prudence. Instead of immediately spending the money he has appropriated from Tom, he prudently held on to all of it for future investment. He takes advantage of Western's visit to London to give the bank notes to old Nightingale "to lay out either in a Mortgage, or in some purchase in the North of England." (XVIII,iii,712) Mr.

Nightingale, not one of the more amiable characters in the novel, doesn't seem to regard his clients' affairs as confidential. Today, at least, we would not regard as strictly ethical his revealing of a client's business to an outsider, or even Allworthy's asking him to. Allworthy undertook this investigation not because he had evidence of a crime, but merely out of apparent malice against his former gamekeeper.

Nightingale is joined to Allworthy by a bond of social class which prevents him from hesitating a moment to comply with Allworthy's request.

When one considers what Black George has experienced from life, it would surely seem that he is forced to act in the way he does because

of his economic position. It should not be forgotten that Tom himself was saved from penury only by Lady Bellaston's generosity. Returning to his lodging after his encounter with her, he gives Partridge a fifty pound note which mystifies his companion for, "the only Way he could possibly find to account for the Possession of this Note, was by Robbery." (XIII,viii,550) Despite his preponderant self-interest, George is indeed Tom's friend even when he steals his purse:

he bore as much Gratitude towards him, as he could, and was as honest as Men who love Money better than any other Thing in the Universe, generally are. (VI,xii,240)

Even his obsession with money is surely produced by his social condition.

Moreover, his love for Tom is so great, he is even prepared to assist him with money when he is imprisoned, asking him:

'Perhaps, Sir,' said he, 'you may want a little Matter of Money upon this Occasion; if you do, Sir, what little I have is heartily at your Service.' (XVIII,ii,710)

From someone whose ruling passion is money, this is love indeed! Tom seems to be sensible of this for in his argument with Allworthy in favour of mercy he says:

Indeed, my dear Uncle, you must suffer me to call it Weakness rather than Ingratitude; for I am convinced the poor Fellow loves me, and hath done me some Kindnesses, which I can never forget; nay, I believe he hath repented of this very Act: For it is not above a Day or two ago, when my Affairs seemed in the most desperate Situation, that he visited me in my Confinement, and offered me any Money I wanted. (XVIII,xii,750)

To me, Tom's arguments are unanswerable.

After having provided the reader with all these circumstances which might excuse George's behaviour, the narrator seems to accept Allworthy's condemnation as the final judgment, just as Tom accepts his

uncle's opinions although he obviously still disagrees with him. The final word we hear on George is: "Black George hearing the Discovery had been made, run away, and was never since heard of..." (XVIII,xiii,760) Is this a fitting conclusion for the story of Tom's first and best friend? George's fate adds to the ambiguous quality of the final chapter of the novel. Are we perhaps meant to recall that, in fleeing, George is escaping a grim fate indeed?

The presence in Tom Jones of two nonconformists like Mrs. Waters and Black George forces the reader to reconsider the morality represented by Allworthy and Sophia. We must compare Mrs. Waters with Sophia.* The former stands for love and freedom, the latter for virtue and subservience to a moral code. Fielding has made Sophia all physical and moral beauty, but has given her a rival whose personality is so much more generous and vivacious she cannot be ignored. Fielding makes her bend her knee to Allworthy's morality near the end of the novel, but this triumph is ambiguous at best, undercut by the absurdity of the final chapter. There are two alternatives: either the author found this character too lively to stay put in her assigned role in the morality play, or, he wishes to indicate the possibility of other moralities and indicate the importance of making choices when we act and not abdicating our responsibility to some abstract moral code.

The treatment of Black George in Tom Jones also forces us to perceive some of the difficulties in relying on the kind of moral code

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

so important to Allworthy and Sophia.* Surely, Allworthy's apparent vindictiveness towards George must make us question his judgment, must make us compare his justice unfavourably with Tom's mercy?* It is interesting that the one character who receives no benefits whatever from the happy ending of the novel is a man so strikingly similar to Tom himself. The major difference between them is class, perhaps the strongest force in the novel.*

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

CHAPTER 3

AMBIGUITY IN FIELDING'S PSYCHOLOGY

AMBIGUITY IN FIELDING'S PSYCHOLOGY

In Tom Jones, Fielding is doubtless trying to show his understanding of human nature and psychology. Is there any ambiguity in Fielding's psychology? Not if we believe that his view of human nature is identical with Allworthy's. Allworthy holds to a common conception which sees man as distinguished from the lower animals by his ability to reason; the rational mind is given primacy in this view of human psychology: man can and should control his passions through the use of reason and propriety. This view presents no problems applied to such characters as Allworthy or Sophia. There are, however, other characters in the novel of whom the rationalist view is too one-sided because it fails to deal with the real ambiguity of their characters. An examination of the most interesting of these characters will reveal that Fielding's psychology is not Allworthy's rational defence of the primacy of reason.

Squire Western is indeed one of the novel's most interesting characters. He is a source of ambiguity both because of the difficulty of judging him and because of his psychological makeup. At first sight, our judgment seems clear-cut. He is clearly contrasted with Allworthy, the other country squire in the neighbourhood. Whereas Allworthy is temperate and cautious, Western is a drunkard and precipitous in all his actions. Allworthy is proclaimed the wisest judge in the land; Western, on the other hand, is exhibited as a fool nearly ignorant of the law. To compare Western with Allworthy seems to suggest a contrast between a caricature of the booby squire and the pre-eminent ideal gentleman.

But, as we have seen, Allworthy is not always the perfect judge. There are occasions, the case of Sophia's bird, for example, in which Western is a better judge of reality than his neighbour.* It has been suggested that Allworthy should not be considered as the moral centre of Tom Jones because he lacks vitality and for Fielding, moral health is closely related to physical stamina.⁴⁴ At one point Allworthy becomes so ill he thinks he's about to die; his abdication of his responsibilities at this point has very serious results. Western, on the other hand, remains an attractive figure to Fielding because of his robust and exuberant temper, despite the extravagances it led him into.

Western is no gentleman; he has the requisite social position, but none of the inclinations or manners required for that title. Despite his formal education, he behaves as if he is completely unlearned, and seems as uninterested in religion as in the classics. His habits and tastes are those of a complete boor. Yet it is he who performs some of the most heroic deeds in the novel, coming to the aid of Tom when the young man is about to be defeated by Thwackum and Blifil. As usual, the squire acts without thought:

...that honest Squire, happening in his Afternoon's Walk with some Company, to pass through the Field where the bloody Battle was fought, and having concluded from seeing three Men engaged, that two of them must be on a Side, he hastened from his Companions, and with more Gallagtry than Policy, espoused the Cause of the weaker Party. (V, xi, 200)

Thus Western demonstrates a kind of reckless courage, and even a

⁴⁴Wright, Mask and Feast, pp. 159-162.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

certain sense of justice which transcends prudence.

Later in the novel, Western rescues Sophia from Lord Fellamar's attempted rape. This is an act of some significance: as a result of Sophia's rescue, Tom Jones remains a comedy. If Western had not arrived in time, it might have become a tragedy in the style of Clarissa. Perhaps not much heroism was required for either of these acts, but Western's character and situation made him the ideal person to carry them out.

Western's social position enables him to assist Tom in his fight without a second thought. A man of lower estate would have to think twice before physically accosting either Blifil or Thwackum. Anyone dependent on the charity or friendship of Allworthy would be risking his livelihood at the very least. Consider the effect the incident had on Allworthy's regard for Tom, whom he had once treated as a son. A low person who attacked someone of higher rank might even be called before a magistrate with very serious consequences. Only a gentleman could attack another gentleman with relative safety. But it is impossible to think of any other gentleman in the neighbourhood willing to bloody his knuckles in order to rescue Tom, even in an unfair fight.

When Lord Fellamar tried to rape Sophia, Tom was not there to protect her. In fact, it was his affair with Lady Bellaston which led her ladyship to concoct the nefarious scheme; she perceives Sophia as a rival for Tom's affection and determines to remove her from the way. Mr. Allworthy was certainly not there. Had Western suddenly been transformed into the man Allworthy and Mrs. Western would like him to be, a gentleman careful of formalities, he would not have been there

either, but would have stayed in his lodgings, sending Lady Bellaston a note instead. But Western is no gentleman, so Sophia was saved.

Western is, of course, the obvious person to rescue Sophia; being her father, he can use parental authority to remove her from the dangers of Lady Bellaston's house. But let us speculate for a moment and imagine Allworthy placed in exactly the same situation which Western was able to deal with so directly. What would have been the results if Allworthy had found a gentleman attempting to rape his daughter? Would he not, as a gentleman, feel obliged to challenge that man to a duel? Could he possibly avoid duelling if the gentleman rapist actually had the effrontery to challenge the rescuer? It is impossible to know, of course, because Allworthy never did and probably never would allow himself to be placed in such a situation although his sister was twice seduced under his own roof.

Tom, unlike Allworthy, is impulsive, but, unlike Western he is also certainly a gentleman. Despite some pangs of conscience at the idea, he is willing to duel, especially if challenged. If he had had to rescue Sophia from Lord Fellamar, the consequences might have been very serious; consider how seriously the wounding of a mere commoner, Fitzpatrick, was treated.

But Western is no gentleman; having accomplished what he set out to do and incidentally restored Sophia to safety, he never thinks of accepting the challenge conveyed to him by Lord Fellamar's friend, the captain. Refusing to duel, he is taking, unconsciously, the stand advocated by most contemporary moralists, including Fielding, but one impossible for a gentleman to take. This incident exposes duelling

as a form of extortion which enables one gentleman, quite respectably, to threaten another with death or disgrace if he fails to comply exactly with his wishes; Western's attitude defeats this purpose.

Western will not enter the field of honour, but he is quite willing to engage the captain in a physical duel which may cause injuries, but is unlikely to be fatal:

If I had a Stick in my Hand, you would not have dared strike me. I'd have knocked thy Lantern Jaws about they Ears. Come down into Yard this Minute, and I'll take a Bout with thee at single Stick for a broken Head, that I will; or I will go into naked Room and box thee for a Belly-full. (XVI, ii, 644)

Recalling that he helped Tom against Thwackum and Blifil, we can assume that this is not an idle challenge.

To this challenge, the captain answers, "I see, Sir, you are below my Notice, and I shall inform his Lordship you are below his. - I am sorry I have dirtied my Fingers with you." (XVI, ii, 644) Western makes some attempt to prevent his departure, but is prevented from doing so by Parson Supple, "in which he easily prevailed, as the other though he made some Efforts for the Purpose, did not seem very violently bent on Success." (XVI, ii, 645) This seems to imply that Western's behaviour is cowardly, but is this fair? Fielding himself implicitly ridiculed the high pretensions of duelling by using the lofty language of the epic to describe Molly Seagrim's fight in the churchyard. Is Western to be condemned because he has discovered the truth about duelling not from high moral principles, but from practical considerations? If Western had engaged in a duel and been killed, Sophia's travail might well have continued, and Tom's happiness indefinitely delayed. Western has managed to preserve his daughter against all the weapons society brings against

her; his success permits the novel's happy ending. Western's actions are so important, he could almost be regarded as a heroic figure.

While Western's heroic actions deserve consideration, we most admire him for his love for Tom. He does indeed love Tom in whom he finds a fellow sportsman, a common spirit and, in general, a good companion. It is his fondness for the young man which enables Tom to be near Sophia to gain her affection. Allworthy blames Western for having Tom with him so much, as he tells him: "I could wish you had not given him so many Opportunities with her; and you will do me the Justice to acknowledge, that I have always been averse to his staying so much at your House..." (VI, x, 233) Western is blissfully unconscious of the need for such discretion:

...who could have thought it? What the Devil had she to do wi'n? He did not come there courting to her; he came a hunting with me.' (VI, x, 233)

It was Western's indiscretion which presented Tom with his opportunity to win Sophia, and for this kindness we must all thank the squire.

On the other hand, Allworthy's prudence might have prevented such a reckless young man as Tom, of dubious social status, from gaining a position in his house. We must not forget, however, that Allworthy did admit into his home at least two men, much more prudent than Tom certainly and doubtless of more secure social standing, but also with so much lower morals that they did not hesitate to seduce their host's sister. Allworthy was no more successful than Western in securing a woman in his care from undesirable love affairs.

Western loves Tom and finds him an ideal companion for himself, but he is enraged by the idea of a bastard without property as the

husband for his daughter. Although he has, at least on one occasion, seen deeper into Blifil's character than Allworthy, and certainly regards him as an excessively pious and most uncompanionable young man, he sees him as a most desirable son-in-law because he comes with Allworthy's property attached, as he says:

I was never more rejoiced in my Life: For nothing can lie so handy together as our two Estates. I had this Matter in my Head some Time ago; for certainly the two Estates are in a Manner joined together in Matrimony already, and it would be a thousand Pities to part them. (VI, ii, 210)

His attitude towards the marriage seems mercenary enough: however, we must not blame him too harshly. Practically everyone in the novel, with the possible exception of Tom, shares his belief, "a Parity of Fortune and Circumstances, to be physically as necessary an Ingredient in Marriage, as Difference of Sexes, or any other Essential..." (VI, ix, 229)

Western is not exclusively devoted to hunting, drinking and good company; he has been corrupted by love of money. This is also shown in his behaviour towards his sister, whose bullying contempt towards him, he finds extremely annoying, yet whose continuing residence in his home he encourages because he hopes to eventually get her money. For someone supposedly lacking in subtlety, Western handles his sister with surprising skill:

The Squire, tho' perhaps he had never read Machiavel, was, however, in many Points, a perfect Politician. He strongly held all those wise Tenets, which are so well inculcated in that Politico-Peripatetic School of Exchange-Alley. He knew the just Value and only Use of Money, viz. to lay it up. He was likewise well skilled in the exact Value of Reversions, Expectations, &c. and had often considered the Amount of his Sister's Fortune, and the Chance which he or his Posterity had of inheriting it. This he was infinitely too wise to sacrifice to a trifling Resentment. When he found, therefore, he had carried Matters too far, he began to think of reconciling them...

Having first, therefore, laid violent Hands on the Horses, for whose Escape from the Stable no Place but the Window was left open; he next applied himself to his Sister, soften and soothed her, by unsaying all he had said, and by Assertions directly contrary to those which had incensed her...(VI, ii, 211)

Surely this diplomatic ability is an anomaly if we regard Western as simply the epitome of the booby squire? Indeed he is much more complex than that.

Western, unlike Allworthy, often acts on impulse. We are told that, "he had not the least Command over any of his Passions: and that which had at any Time the Ascendant in his Mind, hurried him to the wildest Excesses." (VI, vii, 225) The spontaneous actions which result from these passions are not always good, but they are surprisingly often the right actions in the situation. Thus, as we have seen, he went to the rescue of Tom and later Sophia without stopping to think for a moment what he was doing. Almost always, what he does on impulse is better than what he does after sober reflection.

Although apparently closer to the animals than any other character in the novel, Western is only partly instinctual. The rest of his actions are dictated by what he conceives as society. It is that part of him which makes him abuse his wife and become a tyrant to Sophia. He has a particular view of the relationship between husband and wife, father and daughter; in each relationship, he believes, the former should command, the latter obey. This is the accepted convention to which Allworthy agrees too, but it is incompatible with love. Western's friendship with Tom is an impulsive action Allworthy would never have made. His rejection of Tom as a suitor for Sophia is dictated by his view of society: squires' daughters do not marry bastards without property.

Behaviour dictated by society is not necessarily particularly rational; he will really gain nothing materially by forcing Sophia to marry Blifil, but will only lose the daughter he loves. When impulsive, his actions, however brutish, are surprisingly often admirable in their effects. Only when he stops to reflect do they become selfish and sordid.

Western's love for Sophia is one of the most attractive elements of his character. Fielding makes clear that he loved her very much, for he tells us: "he loved her with such ardent Affection, that by gratifying her, he commonly conveyed the highest Gratification to himself." (IV, x, 145) He is willing to sacrifice his own comforts for her sake; he chases after her when she flees to London even though it is the middle of the hunting season. Her welfare is very close to his heart and, when he sees her in a faint, the effect on him is dramatic:

And now the Squire having burst open the Door, beheld an Object which instantly suspended all his Fury against Jones; this was the ghastly Appearance of Sophia, who had fainted away in her Lover's arms. This tragical Sight Mr. Western no sooner beheld, then all his Rage forsook him, he roared for Help with his utmost Violence; ran first to his Daughter, then back to the Door, calling for Water, and then back again to Sophia, never considering in whose Arms she then was, nor perhaps once recollecting that there was such a Person in the World as Jones: For, indeed, I believe, the present Circumstances of his Daughter were now the sole Consideration which employed his Thoughts.
(VI, ix, 230)

Plainly Western does place his love for Sophia first, far ahead of any consideration of propriety.

His love for her does not, however, prevent him from indulging in cruelty towards her:

Western beheld the deplorable Condition of his Daughter with no more Contrition or Remorse, than the Turnkey of Newgate feels at viewing the Agonies of a tender Wife, when taking her last farewell of her condemned Husband...Or, to hit the Case

still more nearly, he felt the same Compunction with a Bawd when some poor Innocent whom she hath ensnared into her Hands, falls into Fits at the first Proposal of what is called seeing Company. Indeed this Resemblance would be more exact, was it not that the Bawd hath an Interest in what she doth, and the Father, though perhaps he may blindly think otherwise, can in Reality have none in urging his Daughter to almost an equal Prostitution. (XVI, ii, 647)

This is not the only example in Tom Jones of such intended cruelty by a father to his daughter. The Quaker whom Tom meets early in his journey, and Peacock's uncle are both enraged when their daughters marry against their wishes.

Against Western's love for Sophia, we must also set his mistreatment of her mother. The hatred Western shows towards his wife tinges our whole view of him:

...she did not make all the Return expected to so much Indulgence: for she had been married against her Will, by a fond Father, the Match having been rather advantageous on her Side: For the Squire's Estate was upwards of 3000l. a Year, and her Fortune no more than a bare 8000l. Hence perhaps she had contracted a little Gloominess of Temper: For she was rather a good Servant than a good Wife; nor had she always the Gratitude to return the extraordinary Degree of roaring Mirth, with which the Squire received her, even with a good humoured Smile. She would, moreover, sometimes interfere with Matters which did not concern her, as the violent Drinking of her Husband, which in the gentlest Terms she would take some of the few Opportunities he gave her of remonstrating against. And once in her Life she very earnestly entreated him to carry her for two Months to London, which he peremptorily denied; nay, was angry with his Wife for the Request ever after, being well assured, that all Husbands in London were Cuckolds. For this last, and many other good Reasons, Western at length heartily hated his Wife; and as he never concealed this Hatred before her Death, so he never forgot it afterwards; but when any Thing in the least soured him, as a bad scenting Day, or a Distemper among his Hounds, or any other such Misfortune, he constantly vented his Spleen by Invectives against the Deceased; saying, - 'If my Wife were alive now, she would be glad of this.' (VII, iv, 257)

Western's treatment of his wife shows that the ability to love does not preclude the ability for implacable hatred. In his marriage, he encountered something he didn't know how to deal with, so he turned to his usual method of trying to deal with such a situation, avoidance and contempt.

I don't think it's fair to say that Western intended to be cruel to his wife. Marriage is difficult at the best of times; consider how difficult it must have been when the usual motives for marriage were economic and social with divorce virtually impossible.²³ Also consider the small number of happy marriages described in Tom Jones, and the large number of unhappy ones besides the Westerns: the Blifils,² the Partridges,² the Fitzpatricks² and others. To what extent can anyone believe in the happiness of some of the fantastic marriages contracted in the final chapter? Is it surprising that Western's marriage should be among the unhappy ones?

After her death, he might have forgotten his hatred for his wife if Sophia had not been a constant reminder of her existence. Indeed, it may have been Sophia who changed his feelings for his wife from indifference to active hatred.* He recounted his hatred mainly for Sophia's benefit, and was unhappy that she would not join him in it;

...as he loved her more than he did any other, so he was really jealous that she had loved her Mother better than him. And this Jealousy Sophy seldom failed of heightening on these Occasions: For he was not contented with violating her Ears with the Abuse of her Mother; but endeavoured to force an explicit Approbation of all this Abuse, with which Desire he never could prevail upon her by any Promise or Threats to comply.

Hence some of my Readers will, perhaps, wonder that the Squire had not hated Sophia as much as he had hated her Mother; but I

must inform them, that Hatred is not the Effect of Love, even through the Medium of Jealousy. It is, indeed, very possible for jealous Persons to kill the Objects of their Jealousy, but not to hate them. (VIII, iv, 257-258)

In his jealousy of her love for her mother, we may have the motive for Western's cruelty to Sophia.

Western's extreme jealousy of his daughter may show that Western's feelings for Sophia go beyond accepted parental love.* This would explain Western's extreme reaction when Mrs. Western informs him that Sophia is in love:

'How! in Love,' cries Western, in a Passion, 'in Love without acquainting me! I'll disinherit her, I'll turn her out of Doors, stark naked, without a Farthing. Is all my kindness vor 'ur, and vondness o'ur come to this, to fall in Love without asking me Leave.' (VI, ii, 209)

Western has less control over his emotions than anyone else in the novel; he reveals himself in this way more than any other character.

As we have seen, however, he is not unaware of society and its norms. By playing the role of the stern father and the acquisitive landowner, he may be sublimating his real ambiguous feelings for his daughter.* He says, "If she marries the Man I would ha' her, she may love whom she pleases, I shan't trouble my Head about that," (Ibid.) but we know from his reaction to Sophia's love for her mother that he cares very much whom she loves; nevertheless, he realizes that she must marry and leave his home. He deals with this problem by substituting for the expression of love and exertion of authority. He finds in rage an escape from another emotion he doesn't know how to deal with in his

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

mind.

If Sophia marries according to his instructions, she remains an extension of his will rather than being totally separated from him. He may see himself as an active force in the wedding just as he seems to see his land and his neighbours, "in a Manner joined together in Matrimony..." (VI, ii, 210) Separated from this land, Tom is a threat to Western when he seeks his daughter though formerly he had been treated as a brother. But when Tom is rejoined to the land, Western hesitates not a moment in reversing his opinion of him as a potential son-in-law; suddenly he is more satisfactory. Indeed Western becomes more anxious than ever for the marriage which will fulfill his plans.

Sophia's way of accepting Tom's proposal only at her father's express command satisfies Western's desire that her love for him be demonstrated by her submission to his wishes:

'What would my Papa have me do?' cries Sophia. 'What would I ha the do?' says he, 'why gi un thy Hand this Moment.' -- 'Well, Sir' said Sophia, 'I will obey you. -- There is my Hand, Mr. Jones.' 'Well, and will you consent to ha un tomorrow Morning?' says Western. -- 'I will be obedient to you, Sir,' cries She. -- 'Why then tomorrow Morning be the Day,' cries he. -- 'Why then tomorrow Morning shall be the Day, Papa, since you you will have it so,' says Sophia. Jones then fell upon his Knees, and kissed her Hand in an Agony of Joy, while Western began to caper and dance about the Room...(XVIII, xii, 755)

Western is overjoyed by her acquiescence. It may be that it is partly because he sees himself as a participant in the wedding that he uses the pronoun "we" instead of "they" in his rather indelicate aside to Allworthy: "I'll bet thee five Pound to a Crown we have a Boy tomorrow nine Months." (Ibid., 756)

Sophia's feelings for her father may also be somewhat ambiguous. Certainly they are cast in the mold of conventional filial devotion, but

Sophia Western is a young woman much devoted to convention.* Although fairly early in her life she picked Tom as her future lover, she is certainly more devoted to her father than to him. She refuses even to contemplate running away with Tom because this would be abandoning her duty to her father.

Sophia twice contemplates sacrificing herself for her father's happiness and only her love for Tom prevents her from doing so. We are told:

She revered her Father so piously, and loved him so passionately, that she scarce ever felt more pleasing Sensations, than what arose from the Share she frequently had of contributing to his Amusement; and sometimes, perhaps, to high Gratifications; for he never could contain the Delight of hearing her commended, which he had the Satisfaction of hearing almost every Day of her life. The Idea, therefore of the immense Happiness she should convey to her Father by her Consent to this Match, made a strong Impression on her Mind. (VII, ix, 274)

As we have seen, in her acceptance of Tom she ~~went~~^{goes} to great lengths to make Western think she's acting at his command. However, she may show more concern for her father because he is the one most in need of concern.

The relationship between Squire Western and his sister is also of considerable interest. Hate seems to be the main emotion between them, at least on his side. It's hard to say how far we can believe the narrator's assertion that, "the Lady had great Affection for her Brother." (VI, ii, 211) She seems to have adopted a mode of speech designed to cut her off from all human relationships. Nevertheless, they have worked out a relationship which enables them to live together,

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

if not in peace, at least without a permanent rupture. Again it is apparently greed which overcomes hate for Western, as greed overcame love to make Western willing to marry Sophia to Allworthy's land. Money is the usual substitute for affection in the world of Tom Jones.

In a world in which genteel people regulate their lives with careful attention to a rigid social code and conceal their emotions behind a facade of propriety, Western seems almost a throwback. His deep interest in hunting is itself something of a holdover from the primitive in the pre-industrial society of Fielding's time. He looks back to an earlier time with differing values; once his type of man was needed, but now he is an anachronism. Because he is so primitive, psychological problems appear more clearly in him than in other characters in the novel.

He may look back even further than primitive man. When he first mentions Western's love for Sophia, Fielding adds one word which suggests a reservation on that love: "Her Father, as hath been said, was fonder of her than any other human Creature." (IV, iii, 119). Perhaps Western could love an animal even more than he loves his daughter; certainly he finds animals easier to relate to than people.

Western is living proof that man is not as far removed from the animals as he would like to believe; as we have seen, his actions are often more instinctual than rational. This is strikingly illustrated when he interrupts his pursuit of Sophia to join a fox-hunt which happens to cross his path.* Fielding applies the fable of Grimalkin

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

and concludes:

The Truth is, as the sagacious Sir Roger L'Estrange observes, in his deep Reflections, that 'if we shut Nature out at the Door, she will come in at the Window; and that Puss, tho' a Madam, will be a Mouser still.' In the same Manner we are not to arraign the Squire of any Want of Love for his Daughter: For in reality he had a great deal; we are only to consider that he was a Squire and a Sportsman, and then we may apply the Fable to him...(XIII, ii, 477)

I believe we can go farther than this and say that his feelings for his daughter, like his hunting instinct, is a product of Nature. Western's subservience to his passions is an outward manifestation of the ~~the~~ subconscious power ~~which~~ which society could only deal with through repression. We see in Western the hopelessness of modern man's attempt to escape from his animal origins.

In his modern world, Western is constantly faced with problems with which he cannot adequately cope. Allworthy, on the other hand, had accepted a set of moral principles which guide his actions he has escaped such problems to a large extent by repressing his own nature. Western has drunkenness to fall back on:

...the Squire having ordered in another Bottle, which was his usual Method when any Thing either pleased or vexed him, did, by drinking plentifully of this medicinal Julap, so totally wash away his Choler, that his Temper was becoming perfectly placid and serene, when Mrs. Western returned with Sophia in the Room. (XVI, iv, 653)

It is not only when frustrated or aggrieved that Western turns to drunkenness, but all the time.

Is it likely that such a fool as Western is usually presented as being, would ever have any thoughts to trouble him? Yet we are told that, when he allowed Sophia to go to bed because of a headache,

the poor Man was, at the same Time, obliged to avoid his own Company, (if I may so express myself) by sending for a neighbouring Farmer to sit with him. (IV, x, 144)

Does this not suggest that Western has fixed himself in the role of booby squire in order to escape reflection? It is only in the role and in drunkenness that he can escape reality.*

He must find it hard to deal with death, that part of reality which gives life its ultimate ambiguity. As we have seen in his reaction to the captain's challenge, Western fears death more than dishonour. Though he may occasionally wish death on his enemies, he makes no attempt to articulate his own response to it.

There are, however, three characters in Tom Jones who do express themselves on the subject: Allworthy on his supposed death-bed, Tom in prison, and Square in his letter confessing all to Allworthy. All three statements are based on conventional religious trust, expressing a profound hope for the future. Square's confession is not without irony; it is a typical act of hypocrisy, playing it safe by getting religion at the end.⁴⁵ Surely its inclusion casts doubt on the other two. As with all other problems, Allworthy and his disciples have found a conventional answer, but is it the final answer? At least we can sympathize with Western's response of avoiding the problem entirely; somehow it seems more human than Allworthy's practice of regulating all his responses by a code of conventional morality.

The relationship between Western and Parson Supple is also

⁴⁵Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones, p. 40.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

interesting. If Western is an irrational man who finds it difficult to control his emotions, Supple is a rational man who seems to lack emotion. He is horrified by many of Western's actions, but remains with him because he prefers to be supported. Western is very like one whose passions are his whole being with no brain to control them. Supple, on the other hand, seems to be all brain with no passions to control.* They sometimes make a good pair; the parson can control the squire at least up to a point. But, if Western's behaviour sometimes suggests the folly of allowing the passions to control the mind, Supple surely reveals the sorrowful state of having no passions to control. His marriage to Mrs. Waters at the end of the novel is an astonishing idea!*

Western dwells in a society which does not know how to deal with the nature of man nor the reality of human psychology. It attempts to suppress passion by condemning those who "yield" to their natural responses, labelling them as "traitors" or "victims of treason". Thus unmarried mothers are sent to Bridewell and lovers are placed on trial and vilified in the community. Yet in Western we are given a character who has not obliterated his natural responses by adherence to a rigid moral code. In him we are shown that passions are not necessarily evil and that rational control is not the final answer. In him too, we see man's primitive animal origin which the novel's rationalist characters try to conceal behind layers of conventionality and propriety. I do not believe that we can, after examining characters as different as

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the two country squires in Tom Jones, accept the view that Fielding's psychology is an unambiguous belief in rationality.*

Dorothy Van Ghent supports the importance of the animal side of man in Fielding's view of human nature. She writes of what Fielding means by 'human nature':

Broadly it refers to that mixture of animal instinct and human intellection which is assumed to obtain in every personality. But, in many of the incidents in the book, its meaning tips to one side: it tends to lean heavily toward 'animal instinct', simply for the reason that the animal and instinctive part of man is (in the Tom Jones world) so frequently disguised or denied by the adoption of some formal appearance. Instinctive drives must therefore be emphasized as an important constituent of 'human nature'. 46

Clearly the ambiguity of human psychology is not represented only by Western in the novel.

Indeed, animal imagery is not associated exclusively with the character of Western. Fielding frequently uses it in a conventional way; for example, the Homeric simile is used entirely for comic effect to describe the situation of Tom and Sophia when they discover their love for each other:

As when two Doves, or two Wood-pigeons, or as when Strephon and Phyllis (for that comes nearest to the mark) are retired into some pleasant solitary Grove, to enjoy the delightful Conversation of Love...(VI, ix, 229)

Fielding seems to be deliverately undercutting the romantic quality of this scene, and, indeed, he adds a string of similes which even undercut the association with the animal world.

⁴⁶Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Tom Jones", Henry Fielding: Tom Jones, ed. Neil Compton, London: MacMillan, 1970. pp. 60-80, p. 64.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis adviser.

He uses a much stronger animal image to describe Sophia's situation in London:

The lowing Heifer, and the bleating Ewe in Herds and Flocks, may ramble safe and unregarded through the Pastures. These are, indeed, hereafter doomed to be the Prey of Man; yet many Years are they suffered to enjoy their Liberty undisturbed. But if a plump Doe be discovered to have escaped from the Forest, and to repose herself in some Field or Grove, the whole Parish is presently alarmed, every Man is ready to set his Dogs after her; and if she is preserved from the rest by the good Squire, it is only that he may secure her for his own eating.

I have often considered a very fine young Woman of Fortune and Fashion, when first found strayed from the Pale of her Nursery, to be in pretty much the same Situation with this Doe. The Town is immediately in an Uproar, she is hunted from Park to Play, from Court to Assembly, from Assembly to her own Chamber, and rarely escapes a single Season from the Jaws of some Devourer or other; For if her friends protect her from some, it is only to deliver her over to one of their own chusing, often more disagreeable to her than any of the rest: While whole Herds and Flocks of other Women securely, and scarce regarded, traverse the Park and Play, the Opera, and the Assembly; and though, for the most Part at least, they are at last devoured, yet for a long Time do they wanton in Liberty, without Disturbance or Controul.

Of all these Paragons, none ever tasted more of this Persecution than poor Sophia. (XVII, iv, 685)

Clearly the hunting instinct which Western exhibits so openly has not been completely submerged in more civilized society; the object of the hunt has merely been changed. The corruption which we have seen had begun to take hold of Western, the country squire, is, in the city, in complete control. Money and position are the sole objects of desire there. The primitive passions have been civilized; they have not disappeared.

Fielding uses an animal simile to describe the behaviour of Tom and Molly Seagrim when they are discovered by Thwackum and Blifil in the woods:

As in the Season of Rutting (an uncouth Phrase, by which the Vulgar denote that gentle Dalliance, which, in the well-wooded Forest of Hampshire, passes between Lovers of the Ferine Kind) if while the lofty crested Stag meditates the amorous Sport, a Couple of Puppies, or any Beasts of hostile Note, should wander so near the Temple of Venus Ferina, that the Hind should shrink from the Place, touched with that Somewhat, either of Fear or Frolic, of Nicety or Skittishness, with which Nature hath bedecked all Females...(V, xi, 197-98)

This is a conventional Homeric simile chiefly intended to be comic; it is followed by a fist-fight described in mock heroic style.

However, the imagery is singularly apt because of the nature of Tom's behaviour in the previous chapter in which he behaved not unlike a stag approaching a doe in heat.

Sent from Paradise Hall after his^d drunken fight with Blifil Tom is thinking rhapsodically of Sophia. In his words he swears to raise his love from his own very earthy level to her high moral plane:

No, my Sophia, if cruel Fortune separates us for ever, my Soul shall doat on thee alone. The chastest Constancy will I ever preserve to thy Image. Though I should never have Possession of thy charming Person, still shalt thou have Possession of my Thoughts, my Love, my Soul. Oh! my fond heart is so wrapt in that tender Bosom, that the brightest Beauties would have for me no Charms, nor would a Hermit be colder in their Embraces. Sophia, Sophia, alone shall be mine. What Raptures are in that name! I will engrave it on every Tree. (V, x, 195)

He has scarcely finished speaking these words when Molly appears;

Tom is still too much a man of "lively parts" for his love to remain for long at an idealistic level.

Tom's behaviour here partakes more of animal instinct than of human reason; it is such instinctive reactions which Allworthy and Sophia are trying to overcome by their devotion to propriety.* But

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

Fielding gives this ability to react instinctively to his hero, more than to anyone else, stressing it again the last chapter when he says of Tom: "He hath also, by Reflexion on his past Follies, acquired a Discretion and Prudence very uncommon in one of his lively Parts." (XVIII, Ch. the last, 761) This sentence, if not ironic, at least suggests the conflict between the two sides of the human nature.

Early in the novel, Fielding calls the reader's attention specifically to an animal image:

No otherwise than when a Kite, tremendous Bird, is beheld by the feathered Generation soaring aloft, and hovering over their Heads; the amorous Dove, and ever innocent little Bird, spread wide the Alarm, and fly trembling to their Hiding places. He proudly beats the Air, conscious of his Dignity, and meditates intended Mischief.

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 Præminence, and Schemes to effect her intended Discovery. The sagacious Reader will not, from this Simile, imagine these poor People had any Apprehension of the Design with which Mrs. Wilkins was now coming towards them; but as the great Beauty of the Simile may possibly sleep these hundred Years, till some future Commentator shall take this Work in hand, I think proper to lend the Reader a little Assistance in this Place.

It is my Intention therefore to signify, that, as it is the Nature of a Kite to devour little Birds, so it is the Nature of such Persons as Mrs. Wilkins, to insult and tyrannize over little People. This being indeed the Means which they use to recompense to themselves their extreme Servility and Condescension to their Superiors... (I, vi, 35-36)

Mrs. Wilkin's' behaviour cannot be described as rational; it is almost as instinctive as Tom's or Western's, yet it has earned her a reputation for high morality. It should also not be forgotten that she is, in this way, serving Allworthy by finding for him the mother of the infant left in his bed.

Mrs. Wilkins is not the only character whose devotion to propriety is not necessarily based on reason. Thwackum's obvious enjoyment of beating the devil out of Tom does not arise solely from moral principles. Even the women who attack Molly and create such an unseemly uproar in the churchyard would doubtless justify their actions on the grounds of the impropriety of Molly's dress and behaviour. The deep concern of the society represented in the novel for justice is not unambiguous; because justice was devised as a substitute for revenge does not mean the more primitive impulse was eliminated entirely. An examination of the philosophy of punishment in the eighteenth century, in which savage beatings, mutilations and most frequently death were prescribed for many quite minor crimes, seems to indicate that penalties were intended more as a form of revenge than as a means to deter criminals.

Clearly, the social behaviour of the "low" people in the novel is not particularly rational; they are presumably saved from a state of primitive savagery only by the diligence of their betters who have created a society which closely regulates their behaviour. But can we exclude irrationality from the motivations of the ruling class? Obviously, we cannot.

Apparently horrified by Tom's desire to forgive Black George, Allworthy tells him that, "when Dishonesty is attended with any blacker Crime, such as Cruelty, Murder, Ingratitude, or the like, Compassion and Forgiveness then become Faults." (XVIII, xii, 751) Surely he is

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

carrying his hatred for ingratitude far beyond the limits set by reason. Ingratitude is the fate of everyone who attempts to benefit his fellow man. Because he is a country gentleman, he seldom has to make obeisance to his own superiors and is able to see himself as a little king in his own domain, yet like Mrs. Wilkins he enjoys administering justice to his inferiors, if only to give himself the opportunity for charity. Allworthy finds great gratification in his power to do good as is suggested by this description of him:

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. (I, iv, 32)

If we eliminate the words of conventional piety, we may see in Allworthy a man who has trouble distinguishing between himself and God. It is fortunate that his inclinations are mostly for good.

The last sentence of Tom Jones is clearly linked to this early description of Allworthy. It says of Tom and Sophia:

...such is their Condescension, their Indulgence, and their Beneficence to those below them, that there is not a Neighbour, a Tenant or a Servant who doth not most gratefully bless the Day when Mr. Jones was married to his Sophia. (761)

This implicitly links the new regime set up by the Jones to that of Allworthy.

Indeed the future happiness of the people living in their domain does depend on their inclinations and therefore, very probably, on the success of their marriage. This system of local government, supposedly founded on reason, depends for its success on the real ambiguities of human psychology. Will Tom and Sophia's regime prove the success we are told it was? In the past, Tom has shown a concern for people which

led him to break the rules in order to help them; Sophia's devotion to rules and propriety make her an ideal bureaucratic ruler. Will that combination prove successful? The final sentence seems to confirm its success, but it also looks back to the Allworthy regime at the beginning of the novel. Does this not suggest we are about to embark on the same cycle again? To me, the ending seems ambiguous.

CONCLUSION

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Ambiguity is an important element in Tom Jones. Several critics have perceived this in Fielding's use of irony, but the novel's ambiguity goes beyond language. The treatment of some of the novel's most interesting characters must also be regarded as ambiguous. Moreover, the fantastic nature of the last chapter points to the ambiguity of the novel as a whole.

However, Fielding's significant use of irony forces the reader to re-examine the reality of what he presents. Because his style rests on the use of ambiguous language, we must consider the possibility that the judgments that are presented in the novel are also open to ambiguity. The ambiguous nature of such characters as Allworthy, Sophia, Mrs. Waters, Black George, Western and Tom himself, forces a review of the morality and understanding of human nature suggested by these characters. I find it impossible to agree that Allworthy and Sophia, for example, stand for Fielding's own principles in the novel. In any case, we must examine the truth and consistency of those ideas and principles which seem to be advocated in Tom Jones.

I cannot agree that, "Tom Jones is an exercise in the fictive definition of Virtue."⁴⁷ It is rather a novel which creates a fictional world in which concepts, people and nature interact much as they do in the real world. As in the real world, the results are often ambiguous.

Knowledge, Justice and Wisdom are ideas of too great importance to be contained within one precept such as "true prudence"; they are

⁴⁷Battestin, p. 818.

rather the properties of the artist and part of his labour.* Tom Jones is not chiefly a defence of any particular set of moral precepts. It is rather an exploration of a new literary form, an examination of the novelistic endeavour.

*These ideas were developed in discussion with Dr. Rosenblood, my thesis advisor.

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