



*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. V, Issue No. IX,
January-2013, ISSN 2230-
7540*

REVIEW ARTICLE

TOM JONES AS A PICARESQUE NOVEL

AN
INTERNATIONALLY
INDEXED PEER
REVIEWED &
REFEREED JOURNAL

Tom Jones as a Picaresque Novel

Amrit Lal

Email-amrit_soft@yahoo.com

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The History of Tom Jones a founding often known simply as Tom Jones is a comic novel by the English playwright and novelist Henry fielding. The novel is both a bildungsroman and picaresque novel. It was first published on February 1749, Tom Jones is among the earliest English prose works describable as a novel and is the earliest novel mentioned by W. Somerset Maugham in his 1948 book 'Great novelist and their novels' among the ten best novels of the world. Totaling 3461747 words, it is divided into 18 smaller books, each preceded by a discursive to the book itself.

The age of fielding was an age of prose and not of poetry. Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Stern are, the four wheels of the novel wain-like most of the greater eighteenth-century writers he saw himself as a moralist and satirist but he is much more besides. Walter Allen said, "Fielding it has become a cliché of criticism was a man and his heroines are the women of a man's man". Fielding had also in him a freakishness of wit, the excess of his grosser mood, which led to fantastic interludes and digression in his novels.

The society that fielding painted was a coarse and noisy one but fielding draws attention to the fact that, "its bark is worse than its bite," that it is more frivolous and thoughtless than deliberately bad. His genial humours playing over its rough surface, easily and spaciouly irradiates everyone who is not a hypocrite or a muff. The essential humanity of his characters is their most attractive asset and this it is that gives much astonishing vitality to his work.

Fielding was the first major novelist to unabashedly write fiction. At the sometime, he undertook an initial critical theory of the new fictional form he was creating together with the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), the introductory chapters preceding the individual books in *Tom Jones* constitutes the first extended body of work in English which attempts to define and explain the novel as a literary genre.

In the preface *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding described his own fictional form as "a comic romance" or a "comic epic poem in prose" and in *Tom Jones* as a "heroically, Historical prosaic poem a form of prosaic-comic-epic writing." In defining the novel as an epic genre, fielding emphasized its function in presenting broad picture of an era, but one, unlike verse epic in which primarily

the weaknesses of humanity are put on display. His insistence on conforming to one rules of probability rather than mere possibility is integral to the development of the novel as we know it. Fielding knew that he wanted to do in prose fiction and understood the novelty of his undertaking in a way many of his predecessors had not. He is not modest about pointing this out either.

"I shall not look on myself as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever, for as I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, So I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein." Tom Jones stands in a way is a typical symbol, symbolizing the common virtues and weaknesses of every-day life. Tom's Character is compounded out of the virtues and weakness of average humanity. He is the hero of the novel, but he is an unheroic hero. In making such a person the hero of his story, fielding has shown great courage, for at that time heroic connection still prevailed and the hero of a novel or romance was expected to have heroic qualities.

To quote Elizabeth Jenkins, "The character of Tom is a most original one for a hero, at a time when the heroic connection was in full force." Now a days are used to the hero who is a criminal or a neurotic, but such was not the case in the age of fielding. Tom Jones possesses a handsome and attractive personality. He is tall, robust and able-bodied. He is considered as one of the handsomest fellows in the world. His countenance is almost effeminate in its beauty, but any appearance of masculine frame and carriage. His personality has as much of the Hercules as of Adonis in its make up."

Tom was fond of all manly exercise. He is a tireless walker, a good swimmer and rider and he can fight with all the agility of a professional boxer. Tom has also a handsome character. He is extremely grateful and affectionate. He does not forget a good turn and he benefactors sincerely and affectionately. He is devoted to squire Allworthy who had adopted him as his son and was his only friend and benefactor.

When he is turned out of house, his heart bleeds more for his benefactor than for himself. To tell a lie is abhorrent to him but he tells even a lie to save his friend, the black George and his family, from utter ruin. No doubt Tom Jones is famous for its intricacy; it

is highly symmetrical in design. The novel has eighteen books, six for the beginning, six for the middle and six for the end conforming to the three parts recommended by Aristotle. The first six books give the cause of the action: Tom's open sensual nature.

The conflict with Belfil, the misunderstanding with squire Allworthy, Tom's love for Sophia contain both the consequences of which will bring about a resolution. The last six books plunge Tom into disastrous circumstance through his action and get him out of them again. When he is in prison about to be hanged, he hears that Sophia has refused to speak to see or see him again as result of his affair with lady Bellaston. As if this were not enough, he even has to face the possibility that he might have committed incest. But it is this last misfortune which also brings about his change of fortune' it is through Jenny Jones, Tom's purported mother who is now known as Mrs. Waters, that the truth of Tom's birth emerges. This brings about reconciliation with square Allworthy and Sophia and the downfall of Belfil. Tom Jones is generous and forgiving even to fault. He forgives others the injuries that they might have caused to him and is always ready to help others in their hour of need without caring for any risk and danger to himself. He helps Mrs. Millers, Mrs. Walters, the highwayman. He forgives Black George even when he knows his full treachery. He forgives even Belfil who had done his best to ruin him. He harbors no ill-will against anyone. Square Allworthy says "child, 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." Tom Jones is not an ideal hero. He has two serious faults an imprudent, reckless nature and is immoral in his dealing with women. The fact is that he "had naturally violent animal spirits" Which betrayed him into all manners of extravagances. He was considered incorrigibly wayward and imprudent and was, "one of the wildest fellows in England." He had no fixed principles and lived by pulse than by reason. Tom is unable to resist feminine charms again and again. In the novel he is involved in affairs with women.

Thus he has liaison with Molly Seagrim, Mrs. Waters and Lady Bellaston. Undoubtedly Tom Jones is Fielding's imperfect and mortal hero. Fielding gives voice to his philosophy of virtue through Tom Jones. In contrast to the moral philosophizing of many of Fielding's contemporaries of many of Fielding does not suggest that Tom's affair with Molly Seagrim, Mrs. Waters and lady Bellaston should reflect badly on his character. Rather, keeping with the Romantic genre, Fielding seems to admire Tom's adherence to the principles of gallantry, which require woman. Interestingly, all of Tom's love affair including his relationship with Sophia, his true love are initiated by the women in question which is Fielding's way of excusing Tom from the charge of lustful depravity.

Moreover, the fact that Tom's lovers induce a feisty, unfeminine wench and two middle-aged women suggest that his motives are various. Tom also treats women with the almost respect, obliging their desire to be courted by pretending to be the seducer even when they are seducing him. Tom refuses to abandon Molly for Sophia and is played by his obligations to lady Bellaston. None the less Tom's refusal of the tempting marriage proposal of Arabella Hunt- whose last name undercores the fact that Tom is hunted more often than he is the hunter-indicates that he has mended his wild ways and is ready to become Sophia's husband. Tom's gallantry reveals itself in his relationships with men as well as women, however. This spirit is evident in Tom's insistence on paying the drinking bill for the army men at Bristol and in his gallant defense of himself in the duel

The narrator provides that his purpose in the text will be to explore "human nature." As such his story goes between several extremes comedy and tragedy, Low and high society, moral and base. Squire Allworthy, a man defined by his interminable blindness, returns to his Somersetshire estate to find a child abandoned in his bed. He gives the child to his sister Bridget to look after, and they investigate to determine that the child's mother is a young woman named Jenny Jones. She leaves the area and Allworthy decides to raise the boy, Tom Jones. Tom is brought up alongside Allworthy's outlook, Thwackum and square. Belfil is a miserable and jealous boy.

Tom is an impetuous character who supports his friend, the poor gamekeeper black George Seagrim, even when that support cause him, Trouble meanwhile through relationship with square western. When he is revealed not to be the father of Molly's child. Tom is free to perceive his emerging love for Sophia. Belfil conspires against Tom, and he is unjustly turned out of Allworthy's house and away from Sophia. Further, because Tom is a bastard child, squire western refuses to support Tom's suit for Sophia and instead wishes her to marriage Belfil so that he can consolidate their lands. Sophia hates Belfil and is tortured by her father's cruel insistence. Allworthy gives Tom a fair sum of money to support himself, but it is stolen by black George. Tom considers joining the military. He meets up with Partridge, a teacher- cum-barber whose reputation was ruined when he was believed to be Tom's father years before. Partridge initially believes that he can return to Allworthy's favors if he reunites the man with Tom's but Partridge ultimately become a devoted companion along the way. Tom frequently shows his benevolent spirit by helping an unsuccessful highway man, a beggar and a lady in distress. All gestures which are richly repaid later in the novel.

The most original and memorable element of Tom Jones, However is the narrative voice informing the action and discoursing on the philosophy of writing to the reader in the introductory chapters. Fielding controls the reader's response thorough the urbane, to a presence of the figure of the omniscient author a

polished and rational gentleman with a pronounced sense of the ridiculous who emerges as the true moral focus in the novel. While this technique verisimilitude provided by the first person or epistolary forms used by Defoe and Richardson, the reading experience is enriched by the analysis of the all knowing author, while Fielding's aesthetics are mainly masculine, the moral assumptions exhibited in the novel are also frankly sexist by today's standards.

The characterization of Tom Jones displays a tolerance for virile young manhood he is a sensual youth, easily succumbing to temptation of a sexual nature. This tolerance does not work the other way round, however; the heroine Sophia is virginal and pure while the women who indulge in sensual pleasures are either tramps like Molly or hypocrites like lady Bellaston. An exception to this can be found in the portrayal of Jenny Jones who was originally of berated into living an "immoral" life and once having lost her virtue had no choice but to continue in her sinful ways.

Tom's sexual weakness is merely an expression of the animal spirits natural in able-bodies, healthy Youngman. Besides this it should be remembered that both Molly and Mrs. Waters are artful experienced women, and initiative, in reality comes from them and not from Tom. Again lady Bellaston is a corrupt, immoral woman who is bale to entangle Tom despite her. Tom has been called a blackguard, and a scoundrel, for accepting money from her for gratifying her passions that the character of Jones is "necessarily degraded by the nature of his intercourse with lady Bellaston. However it must be said in defense of Tom that he accepted money from lady Bellaston only when he was desperately in need of it and that he did not in reality realize at the time that it was particularly disgraceful to accept money in this way.

Nor do any of Tom's sexual lapses reflect in any way on the purity and depth of his love for Sophia. It is his love for Sophia that ennoble him and redeem in his character. It is an ideal love, a love for which he is ready to sacrifice everything even his life itself. He loves her, even when he is physically unfaithful to her it is full of her and is unutterably hers even when he is guilty of folly and indiscretion. To have her in his arms is the greatest happiness on earth for him and her displeasure the greatest punishment.

The other aspect of the novel is that Tom Jones is built on the picaresque model. It has a strong element of a picaresque. Its hero, Tom Jones is a foundling he is an illegitimate child with no parents to look after him. Through he is not a rogue, is in no way wicked at heart but he is imprudent and reckless and he is therefore, involved in a number of misadventures and vicissitudes as he passes through various scenes, meets with various incidents and comes in contact with a great variety of characters.

He even joins the army fights several times for a good cause and is strange characters as the man on the hill and the gypsies. The incidents are thrilling and sensational. However Tom Jones is essentially generous and benevolent at heart and his sexual laxity are merely the imprudence of youth and not an expression of wickedness. After every lapse he suffers from pangs of conscience and is true to his love in thought, if not in deed. Secondly the aim of the novelist is definitely moral. It is to show that real goodness is of the heart and one should judge, not by actions but by motives. Besides, innocence and virtue must ever be on their guard as they are often led astray and ensnared by the wicked and the cunning.

Fielding has truly been called the father of the English novel. His presentation of human life and human nature is comprehensive in its sweep and range. No aspect of human nature remains unrepresented in his novels. Here in the novel Fielding paints accurately town manners, the country life organized round the squire and the vicar occupying a less dignified place, stagecoaches and incidents on the road, inns and the underworld of vice and crime.

Henry Fielding compares his prefaces to the rule of dramatic unity. Fielding did establish with Tom Jones, however, was the role of the novel as the modern epic form. And many of the other "rules" he put forth plausibility over possibility on novelistic fiction today. Undoubtedly in Tom Jones, Fielding split the difference and gave us one of the most convincing happy books ever written. His hero may start out wandering through a pastoral paradise but once he finds and loses true love, he needs to defeat not only stormy nature, but thieves, pickpockets, crooked lawyers and the 18th century equivalent of political extremists as he battles his way back into his beloved arms. And the books happy ending which Coleridge praised as part of "one of three most perfect plots ever planned," depends as much on a purloined legal document as it does upon the secret of a noble birth

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