Fielding's Theory and Art of Composition

Thomas Radloff
Loyola University Chicago

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FIELDING'S THEORY AND ART OF COMPOSITION

by

Thomas Radloff, S.J.

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LIFE

Thomas Radloff, S. J., was born in Cleveland, Ohio, February 11, 1930.

He was graduated from Saint Ignatius High School, Cleveland, in June, 1948. The following August he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts and Science of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In August, 1952, he entered West Baden College, Indiana, and was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts Course of Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, from which school he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1953. He then entered the Graduate School of Loyola University to begin his studies for the degree of Master of Arts.

Presently he is teaching English and the Classics at the University of Detroit High School, Detroit, Michigan.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern pocketbook editions of the Great Books, written in an English style which fits our taste, make the immortal Iliad, Odyssey, and Aeneid read like the latest novels. The stories of men's hopes, fears, defeats, and successes, though they be of centuries past, still catch up the interest of anyone susceptible to human feeling. In substance, the old Greek and Latin best-sellers are not unlike our own; for they deal essentially with human nature, an eternally interesting subject. In form, however, the two differ to an extent. The characteristic features of the great epics of the past were first isolated and commented on by the philosopher and critic, Aristotle. The characteristic features of the modern novel were first isolated and commented on by Henry Fielding, homespun philosopher and critic in his own right. Fielding, of course, cannot be placed on a par with Aristotle, but credit must be given where it is due. Aristotle will always stand by himself as a trail-blazer. Fielding, on the other hand, acknowledging his indebtedness to Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus, applied the old classical standards of criticism in a new manner and added some few insights of his own to produce in the end what
he called "a new province of writing" and to which he gave the interesting title of "prosai-comi-epic writing." The problem arises: Just what was Fielding's new literary form, the comic prose epic?

Luckily enough, Henry Fielding was more than a philosopher and a critic; he wrote too. Occasion will present itself later to point out that he was preeminently a playwright who was forced to quit the theater by the Licensing Act of 1737. He turned to fiction. His talent of putting before his audience's eye a realistic portrayal of life was brought over into his fiction writing by the habits he had learned from a thorough understanding of the classical critics. He was aware of the mistakes of fiction writers of his own day too, and in reaction to them he formed new principles of his own. These latter, blended with the classical norms he knew so well, were the principles according to which he wrote his own immortal Tom Jones. Between the covers of this one book are found not only the principles of Fielding's theory, but also a perfect specimen of narrative fiction which demonstrates his principles in action. In brief, both his theory and art


2Ibid., I, 156.

3F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times (Oxford, 1952), I, 206-211. This author has a good explanation of the Licensing Act and its influence on Fielding.
of the comic prose epic can be found in *Tom Jones*. This thesis proposes to find them.

To consider *Tom Jones* in itself, without reference to the circumstances and influences under which it was written would open the door to misunderstandings. Accordingly, two important influences on his theory and art must be treated: (1) the classical traditions in criticism prevalent in his own times, and (2) other currents of literary criticism and thought which had some effect on his theory. After this literary-historical setting has been drawn, the distinction between what principles were actually brought over from the classical tradition and what were relatively new ought to be made. Again, to consider the theory alone, unrelated to the methods by which Fielding carried his principles into practice, would lead to errors in evaluating it. Hence, examples will be used when and wherever they prove a help toward clarifying the theory.

Finally, an enumeration of the essential elements must be set down in order to give a thumb-nail sketch of the theory of this new literary form; and some critical comments must be made on the art form this theory took in order to give a better understanding of the masterpiece to which subsequent writers have tried to conform. This masterpiece is, of course, the novel, *Tom Jones*.

The thesis falls into three natural parts: (1) the literary influences on Fielding's theory and art; (2) the long established
classical principles and the relatively new principles of Fielding's theory and art; (3) finally, a summary of his theory and art. To conclude an introduction then, this thesis is proposed as a study of the critical contributions of Henry Fielding which show how he worked out the problems of fiction writing into a unified, artistic masterpiece on the basis of critical premises which had their roots both in the remote past and in his own good sense of artistic symmetry.
CHAPTER II

THE EPIC AND FIELDING

Henry Fielding proudly styles his History of Tom Jones as a comic prose epic, a term which is now explained by critics with the words domestic novel of manners. Both names are equally confusing, and so, need an explanation. Let the explanation of Fielding's own terminology given in this chapter suffice for the time being, and the reader will discover for himself at the close of this work what is meant by the critics' title.

Consider the word epic first; the other two words modify it. The Iliad and Odyssey furnish familiar examples of heroic verse, heroic language, poetical embellishments, and other marks of style which deserve the title of epic. They were sung and listened to with the reverence of religion for hundreds of years. But new nations superseded the Greek and Roman, and their epics fell into oblivion. A time came for the rebirth to fame which is called the Renaissance. The classical epics were born again into new surroundings; however, they were not received everywhere and always with the customary reverence. They presented a problem to the literary world of the fifteen hundreds. Previously, during the Middle Ages, an ascetic suspicion of fleshy Greek beauty was
prevalent, and a conflict between the God of Sinai and the Zeus of Olympus seemed inevitable. The classical epics were designedly written as works of art; and although many classical critics claimed a didactic purpose in art, still a moral purpose in classical art seemed to be lacking. Renaissance thought was torn between two basic concepts. The classical epics were true art, but they seemed wholly incompatible with the predominantly Christian economy of thought then so prevalent.

With the rise of Nationalism came the desire for the men of Spain, France, Germany, Italy, and England to perpetuate their own nation in the memory of humanity as Homer and Virgil had done for theirs. The Iliad and Aeneid were steeped in the swell and tide of human nature; and aspiring writers recognized the fact. This it was that gave the classics their universal appeal, even after what might be called centuries of bookshelf burials. Human nature had not changed, they argued; it was still the prime ingredient of great and lasting literature. Social conditions had certainly changed—they had some effect on human nature; but human nature itself was the same. All agreed on the object of art, but few agreed on the way the object could and should be portrayed. Especially in France and Germany great controversies of the pen between the dogmatists and liberalists of interpretation arose around the principles of Aristotle's Poetics concerning tragedy. Greater controversies arose over Aristotle's treatment of the epic's principles, chiefly because of his vagueness concerning the
epic.¹ In England the rise of Nationalism and the decline of the theaters turned attention full upon the epic as an "up and coming" form in literature. Stories of romantic love, of chivalrous behavior, and of strange adventure still persisted as effects of the medieval literary spirit. In France there was a decided attempt to harmonize the forms of the epic and the romance; but the basic concepts of each form stood contrary to one another. A full century after these essays, Fielding would profit from their blatant imperfections. The epic was conceived as being preeminently true to life, while the heroic romance was greatly deficient in this matter. The romance was essentially invented. In reaction to medieval imaginative writing came the picaresque or anti-romance form. It was deliberately anti-heroic. Its characters were "deliberately vulgar rogues, thieves, vagabonds, —anyone outside the pale of gentlemanly and courtly society."² It was true that the picaresque novels were reactionary, that they were unpretentious, and that they gave vivid pictures of certain aspects of their times; "but they give no more a picture of the whole of an epoch, such as writers of serious narrative desired, than would a collection of short stories, mostly of the fabliaux variety."³ The

¹Ethel M. Thornbury, *Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic* (Madison, 1931), pp. 20-94. This author has a good outline of the development of epic theory from Aristotle to Fielding.

²Ibid., 36.

³Ibid., 36.
heroic romances and the burlesque anti-romances flooded the bookstalls of France and England during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—for what happened in France shortly went to England. However, the epic was still the concern of serious writers of this period:

The critical problem of the nature of the epic remained, and a good deal, first and last, was written on the subject. The epic does something which no other kind of writing does, and men desire to see their world done in epic sweep. Curiously enough, it was not Blackmore, or even Milton, nor any of the writers of the poetic epic who wrote of English civilization after the Reformation and the Civil Wars with the epic sweep. Fielding, who had read what many dull and, it would appear, not too wise critics had to say about epic structure, gave us the picture of the whole of modern life in the life and adventures of a young man who is for his world as representative a figure as Achilles was for his—Tom Jones.4

Before turning to Fielding's theory and art, however, some consideration must be given to the critical problem and to the theories of "many dull and, it would appear, not too wise critics" who tried to answer the problem.

The situation as it stood in France at this time can best be characterized by a consideration of four or five of its prominent critics and authors. French confusion, approximately one hundred years before Fielding's Tom Jones saw the light of day, can be seen in the person of George de Scudéry. In his 1654 Preface to Alaric he remarks that "the epic is a poem on an illustrious

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4 Ibid., 37.
(historical) subject, about an illustrious person (also historical), written with art to teach morals, upon the plan of the poems, not only of Homer and of Virgil, but also of Tasso, Ariosto, and other writers of the art epic and of romances." De Scudery has grouped the epic and the romance together; but their basic concepts are contrary: credibility versus the marvelous. He made an attempt to unravel the problem of verisimilitude, to decide whether the matter of the epic should or should not be historical, and, if historical, whether changes should not be made in the facts of history. He came to no evident conclusion. Either de Scudery was not a very deep thinker and passed over problems in ignorance, or he was not a very patient thinker and jumped to conclusions, sometimes ignoring seemingly unanswerable problems. De Scudery had the indirect influence on Fielding of making someone like Chapelain realize the need for an intelligent answer to the problem. Chapelain made the distinction between the epic and the romance which would give Fielding enough guidance to sail clear of the superficial romantic tradition.

Although Chapelain was largely responsible for forcing the three unities upon French drama, he was somewhat of an original thinker when it came to the epic. "In his La Pucelle, he failed, because he was no poet, to write an epic, but in his preface, he

really grappled intelligently with the problem of verisimilitude in the modern epic. . . . He had gotten away from the idea of the romance and the epic being much the same thing."6

Next for consideration comes Molière. He may seem to be a strange figure in this context; but Fielding was a playwright, and fortunately, a disciple of Molière.7 In his Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, Molière hails rules of good sense over ready-made rules. He points out that the artist's equipment is his experience seen through the eyes of common sense. This attitude undoubtedly gave Fielding the freedom of conscience to fashion rules of his own in regard to his new form. It might be well to point out here that Fielding not only idolized Molière's dramatic sense, but also thoroughly enjoyed his comic sense. It is his comic sense that Fielding invokes in Book XIII of Tom Jones.

"The spirit of Molière was for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England the Comic Spirit, as defined by Meredith later: a spirit of sanity and balance. Pretentiousness and dullness, the pseudo-heroic and the rigid conception of classical rules, were done for."8 Sanity and balance were what Fielding prized above all other assets of writing. It was this spirit of Molière's that

6Thornbury, p. 50.

7Dudden, Henry Fielding, I, 111-112. He gives a full account of the Molière-Fielding relationship.

8Thornbury, p. 52.
gave Fielding the ability to step back from the age in which he lived and to view it more objectively. It was this attitude of mind which enabled Fielding to see the comical side of life.

Perhaps it was with Molière's moral backing that Fielding ventured to include the word comic in the name of his new literary form. He undoubtedly felt even more secure in calling the new form a comic prose epic on the authority of the widely accepted French critic, Le Bossu, whose name will be mentioned again in connection with the word prose.

In his elaborate analysis of the serious epic, Le Bossu has something of an aside to say about the comic epic. In discussing the way in which the fable is made in comedy, he remarks: "Cette Fable est raisonnable & vrai-semblable; mais parce-que les noms sont feints aussi-bien que les choses, & que l'action n'est que particulière, & de familles communes; elle n'est ni Epique ni Tragique: Elle peut seulement être employée en une Comédie. Aristote nous apprend que les Poètes Comiques inventent & les choses & les noms." The difference between the comic in drama and the comic in epic is simply in the names invented for them.

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9R. Père Le Bossu, Traité du Poème Epicque (Paris, 1675), I, 39, quoted in Thornbury, pp. 99-100. This fable is reasonable and credible, but because the names are fictitious just as well as the plot, and the action is nothing but a particular one, concerned with ordinary people, it is neither epic nor tragic. This fable can only be employed in comedy. Aristotle maintains that comic poets invent both the plot and the names.
Consequently, the method of making a prose comic fable is practically the same as that for making a poetic epic fable. Though Le Bossu's remark actually says nothing about the comic epic, it does not close the door to Fielding's approach. Fielding felt that it opened the door for him.

It was stated above that Fielding called his new form the comic-prose-epic. The general phase through which the epic theory passed has been painted in broad strokes, and the names of a few critics whose influence seems most evident in Fielding have been mentioned. There remains a consideration of those theories of criticism which account for the word prose in Fielding's title for the new form.

Le Bossu was widely respected for his understanding of classical theory and criticism in Fielding's day. From his thorough study of the ancient epic he had come to intelligent principles not only of writing, but also of criticism. Homer and Virgil gave him the former; Aristotle and Horace gave him the latter. From these four he deduced his definition of the epic poem: "L'Epopeé est un discours inventé avec art, puru former les moeurs par des instructions dequisées sous les allégories d'une action importante, qui est racontée en Vers d'une manière vraisemblable, divertissante, et merveilleuse."\(^{10}\) He goes on to say:

\(^{10}\)Ibid., I, 14, quoted in Thornbury, p. 59. The epic is a narrative invented with art. Its purpose is to form morals by instruction disguised under allegories of a serious action. This action is related in verse, in a credible and marvelous fashion.
"Mais si l'on écrivait une Épopée en Prose, serait-ce un Poème Épique? Je ne le crois pas, parce qu'un Poème est un discours en Vers. Cela néanmoins n'empêcherait pas qu'elle ne fût une Épopée; de même qu'une Tragédie en Prose n'est pas un Poème Tragique & est toujours une Tragédie. Ceux qui ont dû si la Comédie Latine était un Poème, ou si elle n'en était pas un; n'ont point dû qu'elle ne fût une Comédie."

In other words, according to Le Bossu, the epic may be written in either prose or verse and still be an epic in the truest sense of the word. He mentioned that Aristotle did not discuss prose as a medium, but that he did point out that imitation and structure—not verse—constituted the essential qualities of the epic. Le Bossu added, however, that all critics and authors hold the epic poem to be a more excellent enterprise than the epic prose; and with that he confines his treatment to the epic poem alone. Another door opened for the Fielding approach.

Le Bossu contributed more to Fielding's theory and art than the mere external form of prose. Two of the critic's important ideas, both bearing on one point, laid the groundwork for

\[\text{Ibid., I, 29, quoted in Thornbury, p. 59. But if one were to write an epic in prose, would this still be an epic poem? I do not think so, because a poem is a narration in verse. Nevertheless, this fact would not prevent it from being an epic. Thus, tragedy in prose cannot be considered a tragic poem, although it is still tragedy. Those who have doubted whether Latin Comedy might be considered a poem, even if it were not a poem, have never hesitated to call it a comedy.}\]
Fielding’s treatment of characterization. First, Le Bossu saw that something more than the unity of a single hero held the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together—even something more than the treatment of a single historical fact like the storming of Troy. Le Bossu concluded that events in the *Iliad* were selected for narration on the basis of an ideal pattern which included, among other things, truths about human conduct. Fielding was preeminently taken up with human conduct and manners in writing *Tom Jones*. Secondly, as was mentioned above, there was a conflict between the ancient pantheism and eighteenth-century monotheism which influenced the development of the modern epic, and to this problem Le Bossu had an answer. A common principle forced on the epic at this time was that one could teach one’s moral in the epic only by having a hero who was the pattern of all virtue. Le Bossu answered: "Il faut donc ici faire le même distinction entre Héros en Morale, & un Héro en Poësie, que nous avons faite, entre le Bonté Morale, & la Bonté Poétique: & dire que comme Achilles à Mézence ont autant de part à la bonté Poétique qu’Ulysses & Enée: de même ces deux hommes cruels et injustes sont des Héros Poétique aussi reguliers que ces deux princes si justes, se sages & si bons." In other

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12 Ibid., I, 37, quoted in Thornbury, p. 62. We should, therefore, make the same distinction between the moral and poetic hero, which we made between the moral and poetic good. And we ought to say that Achilles and Mezenus played just as important a role for the poetic good as did Ulysses and Aeneas; so too, it would be true to say that these two cruel and unjust men are just as much poetic heroes as the two just, wise, and good princes.
words, the hero of an epic did not have to be perfect himself in order to teach manners. Le Bossu offered another key that Fielding would eagerly accept—realism.

One of the last barriers to Fielding's new approach in narrative fiction crumbled under the joint impact of Moliere's sanity and balance and Le Bossu's answer to the problem of mixing the romance with the epic. Le Bossu's theory of imitation, human nature as observed, had led him into a treatment of the marvelous—the material of the romances—and verisimilitude—the material of the epics. He believed that the marvelous existed to heighten the allegory of the epic and should not be confused with the probable and the credible. It should not be used to get heroes out of difficulties, but rather to reveal the divine in human affairs. The Christian God had conquered the pagan Zeus. Le Bossu further showed that to blend romances and epics as de Scudery had done, led to a hybrid form of no literary value, but that to make use of the marvelous without becoming ridiculous was possible.

One more French critic bears mentioning here, Madame Dacier. By her scholarly and palatable translations of the Iliad and Odyssey she greatly forwarded a correct understanding of the classical epics among the authors and critics of her own day. It was she who laid the groundwork for Le Bossu's interpretations in the critical prefaces she wrote to her translations. It is she whom Fielding acknowledges in the prefatory chapter to Book XI of Tom
Jones. Of the five editions of Homer which he owned, only two were in translation, Pope's and Madame Dacier's.\textsuperscript{13}

From the time of Dryden to the time of Fielding, English considerations of the epic caused no great conflicts such as occurred in France. In reality, interest in writing epics lagged after Milton's \textit{Paradise Lost} came from the press. The French repeatedly tried to give birth to a national epic, but the English were becoming more enamoured by the development of a popular type of literature represented by Defoe's narratives and by the true-to-life type of sketches in the \textit{Spectator Papers}. All the while, long-winded romances, much akin to those of the modern pocketbook thrillers, kept a place in the minds of the reading public. In England the day of the epic had passed.

The English world of literary currents and attitudes into which Fielding was stepping was in a state of anarchy. "The theater was very popular and had some very great actors and actresses and was soon to enjoy David Garrick. But the plays which were being written were for the most part, unbelievably puerile, or stiff and bombastic. It was the age of 'genteel' comedy, whose comedy excited the intelligence to rage or futile tears and whose gentility was as prudent as Pamela's own."\textsuperscript{14} In the field of nar-

\textsuperscript{13}In a generous appendix Thornbury gives a detailed account of Fielding's library.

\textsuperscript{14}Thornbury, p. 96.
rative fiction, besides the romances, there were numerous translations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*. And anti-romances, such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, were likewise extremely popular. The best work in either the drama or in narrative fiction during this period seemed to be satire or burlesque.

The English world of politics was one of corruption, bribery, and stagnation. Fielding turned to satire after the example of Pope and Swift. *Tom Thumb* and *Pasquin* are both satirical plays of Fielding's which attack contemporary politics. They earned him many enemies in positions of political influence, and in 1737 his theater was closed for good.

Stark reality faced Fielding. He had a wife and family to feed, clothe, and house. In 1728 he had begun law studies at the University of Leyden; but his heart and soul were enticed by writer's ink, not by law journals. He left the university after a year and from 1730 until 1737 wrote a number of fairly good plays. When the Licensing Act downed his true ambitions, he went back to law. In 1740 he was admitted to the bar. In the same year a book entitled *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* was published by an earnest and industrious printer named Samuel Richardson. Fielding, itching for the pen and tormented by an allergy-like,

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15Dudden, Henry *Fielding*, I, 75-114, 393-430, 539-578; II, 733-796, 955-994. He gives a good treatment of the political situations in England when he deals with Fielding's pamphlets, paper-editing, and law experience.
satirical bent of mind, anonymously published his parody of Pamela called Joseph Andrews. The author announced on the title page that it was written in the manner of Cervantes, and readers could easily see the spiritual kinship between the ridiculous and lovable Parson Adams and the equally ridiculous and lovable Don Quixote. In the preface to Joseph Andrews Fielding gave an account of the sort of thing he was trying to write, and for the first time makes mention of his new literary form. "Joseph Andrews was a parody, but Fielding repeats his definition of the thing he is writing in Tom Jones, which was not a parody."

Obviously then, he must have meant his preface to Joseph Andrews to be taken seriously.

The Epic, as well as the Drama, is divided into tragedy and comedy. Homer, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us a pattern of both these, though that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us, bore the same relation to comedy which his Iliad bears to tragedy. And perhaps that we have no more instances of it among the writers of antiquity, is owing to the loss of this great pattern, which had it survived, would have found its imitators equally with the other poems of this great original.

And farther, as this poetry may be tragic or comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise in verse or prose: for though it wants one particular which the critic enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely metre; yet, when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments, and diction, and is deficient in metre only; it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic, at least, as no critic hath thought proper to range it under any other head, or to

16 Thornbury, p. 97.
assign it a particular name to itself.\textsuperscript{17}

It was a commonplace of critical theory during the Renaissance that the comic epic was quite acceptable. This was based on Aristotle's comment in the \textit{Poetics} concerning Homer: "for his mock-heroic \textit{Margites} stands in the same relation to Comedy as the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey} to tragedy."\textsuperscript{18} It was Le Bossu who made the prose epic acceptable as was stated above.

In 1743 Fielding next published what he called his \textit{Miscellanies}, among which was another attempt at his new form. It was called the \textit{Life of Jonathan Wild}. Although he showed evidence of taking on a less satirical tone in his writing, still this last mentioned work is called "a cynical commentary on sham greatness, imbedded in the mock-heroic biography of a notorious eighteenth-century outlaw."\textsuperscript{19} From this time until 1749 when \textit{Tom Jones} was published, Fielding was employed in editing some journal such as the \textit{True Patriot} or \textit{The Jacobite}, or was busied with writing prefaces for other authors. At the same time he carried on a law practice, and for a while was a justice of the peace for Westminster. The constant practice in writing and the work in law

\textsuperscript{17}Fielding, \textit{Joseph Andrews}, I, vii.


\textsuperscript{19}Homer A. Watt and William W. Watt, \textit{A Dictionary of English Literature} (New York, 1945), p. 105. Perhaps Fielding was concentrating on his comic style in \textit{Jonathan Wild}. 
gave Fielding invaluable training in the art of expression and the art of understanding human nature in all its types with its faults and virtues. The courtroom must naturally be a place where all the good and ill tempers of human nature are unmasked.

In *Joseph Andrews* Fielding had sketched in the outlines of his theory of the new literary form he was creating, but in *Tom Jones* he developed it more thoroughly. The plot and action of the second work became the center of Fielding's attention. A greater unity than that of a single hero binds the *Jones* novel together.

Fielding had broken away from his own *Joseph Andrews*, from *Don Quixote*, and from *Robinson Crusoe*. "Both in theory, as expressed in the critical interchapters of *Tom Jones*, and in practice, Fielding made a momentous contribution to the development of the novel in England. He gave to the novel, by constructing in *Tom Jones*, at least, a beautifully balanced plot."20 Fielding's statements and practice of the theory of narrative fiction seem to have been a natural development of both the French critical theories discussed above and the Spanish picaresque novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes*, with their tendency to deal realistically with life.

Of immediate influence on Fielding is Richardson. Among the literary pairs in English literary history, Fielding and Richardson are not the least well known. However, they were not

20Ibid., 105.
complementary to each other as Addison and Steele, or as Wordsworth and Coleridge were. They were both reformers, seeking to arouse a depraved age to a consciousness of its shams and vices; but each used a different method. Richardson taught the beauty of virtue by example, while Fielding ridiculed the stark facts of vice to expose its ugliness. Fielding has a greater advantage because of his superior social relations, education, and range of experience, and his deeper understanding of and sympathy with the faults of human nature. It can safely be said that Fielding made his entrance into fiction via the satirizing of his predecessors as did Jane Austen and William M. Thackeray; but after beginning in ridicule he made a definite turn toward the serious.

The Renaissance along with incipient Nationalism had called attention to the epic and its structural principles. The inadequate attempts at intelligent discussion of its problems by writers like de Scudery stimulated men of genuine intellectual depth like Chapelain and Le Bossu to take up their pens and write. Chapelain saved the pure epic from de Scudery's tasteless romantic superficiality. Molière, though a dramatist, offered the leaven of sanity and balance. Sanity prescribed a common sense attitude toward the structural principles of the epic form, and balance prescribed a common sense attitude toward the serious, comical, and marvelous in epic content. Le Bossu, with the help of Madame Dacier, added the final directions, a realistic portrayal of human
nature and the permission to combine all through the medium of prose.

Unknowingly, these critics and authors provided the recipe according to which Fielding would prepare the cookery he speaks of in Book I, Chapter 1 of *Tom Jones*. He now needed only to reach into the cupboard of life for the ingredients, follow the new recipe, and the results, slowly baked in the oven of his genius, learning, experience, and feeling would come out a truly epical masterpiece most worthy of its age. It would prove a literary treat spiced with the tang of courage. For, whether Fielding had to face three critical readers or three hundred critical readers of the famous Grub Street circles, the fact remained that he was going out on a literary limb; and it took courage. The following chapters are dedicated to the spirit of Fielding's courage.
CHAPTER III

THE THEORY AND THE ART

Every one of the eighteen books of *Tom Jones* begins with an introductory chapter in a serio-comic tone. These chapters deal with various and sundry matters. Fielding philosophizes on a few of the more fundamental facts of human nature such as love and selfishness; he also gives several "crusts" for the critics, as he calls them; but most important are his remarks on the type of book he is writing; and this is of prime import for the thesis. Considerations of non-literary topics treated by Fielding have been omitted. Considerations of chapters which cover approximately the same ground synthesize the related matter. The actual working out of this procedure has left eight considerations or summaries. As frequently as possible Fielding's exact meaning has been illustrated by examples from the text. In some instances nothing more than a reference has been given because of the length of the quotations that would be involved. All of this summarizing and illustrating was done in the hope of arriving at some concrete knowledge of Henry Fielding's theory and art of composition as found in these introductory chapters and in the actual story of *Tom Jones*. In general the summaries will be given in close im-
itation of the author's style in order to give something of a vicarious experience of this great work of art.

In this investigation of Fielding's masterpiece two points must be kept in mind: first, he was aware that he was trying something new; and therefore wished to give a roadmap, as it were, to his reader for this new adventure in enjoyment. Secondly, he was afraid of his critics. By far the majority of his introductory chapters carry sharp references to the critics and give ample evidence of Fielding's concern to protect himself from them. He wanted to forestall their censures by anticipating their objections. Fielding was even hard on his critics, and he had little use for the Blue-Stocking Girls and their literary titterings. He held the critics of Grub Street in utter contempt, "the Beaus, rakes, Templars, wits, lawyers, mechanics, schoolboys, and fine ladies"¹ who passed judgment on literature about which they knew next to nothing. After these few remarks the remaining pages of this chapter treat those introductory chapters of the novel which follow the classical interpretations in criticism. In the next chapter those introductory chapters which contribute something entirely new to the theory of prose fiction are treated.

I. Book I, Chapter 1.² The author of a history of this sort


²Fielding, I, 1-13. In each of the four parts of Chapter III and IV the summarized sections will be footnoted in this manner.
ought to consider himself as one who owns and operates a public restaurant at which everyone is welcome for his money. In the case of the private banquet the attender must be satisfied with what is given to him; but in the case of a public eating place, the attender has a right to praise or condemn the dinner as he pleases. It is customary that a bill of fare or a menu be provided that those who are on the verge of entering a public restaurant may know what to expect, and that they may either stay or go off to another place more suited to their taste. Accordingly, the author of this work intends to give a bill of fare, not only for the whole entertainment, but also for each of its several parts. 3 The bill of fare for the whole: "The provision then, which we have made here is no other than Human Nature." 4 But the reader should not turn up his nose at this menu too quickly, for on consideration he will come to realize that such a provision allows for much variety and spice, though collected together under one name. The affect really depends upon the cookery of the author or the author's skill in dressing up the most ordinary subject-matter of entertainment. So in imitation of a contemporary master of the culinary arts, we shall put plain things before our guests and rise by degrees "as their stomachs may be supposed to decrease, to the very quintessence of sauce and

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3Fielding refers to the introductory chapters here.
4Fielding, I, 2.
spices . . . we shall represent Human Nature at first to the keen appetite of our reader in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragart it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affectations and vice which courts and cities afford.” To illustrate what Fielding means to do, a brief outline of the course of events and the characterization in Tom Jones must be given. This should show how he presents the more plain and simple life in the small towns and country and thereafter presents the high seasoning of affectation and vice in the big cities.

The novel consists of three clearly distinguishable parts. The first part is mainly introductory and covers a period of some twenty-one years. It gives a sketch of the three leading characters—Tom Jones, Sophia Western, and William Blifil—from their early childhood until they are twenty-one, nineteen, and twenty respectively. It also includes the introduction of the majority of the minor characters, which we can most logically divide into four groups according to their dwelling places. First, the Allworthy group: beginning with Mr. Allworthy, the rich and kind owner of the wealthiest estate in Sommersetshire, who determines to rear the young infant who is found on his bed one May evening

\[5\text{Ibid.}, I, 3.\]
\[6\text{Ibid.}, I, l-142.\]
\[7\text{Dudden, Henry Fielding, II, 597. He suggests this division.}\]
and afterwards is named Tom Jones. Then comes Bridget Allworthy, the squire's hypocritical and prudish sister of thirty-five or forty and singularly lacking all feminine charm. Next comes the colorful Captain Blifil who married Bridget for her money, and, after quarreling with her for two years, makes his amends by dying suddenly. Eight months after their marriage Bridget gives birth to a son who is destined to be the villain of the novel. Tom and young Blifil grow up together under Allworthy's roof. Their education is handled by the ultra-orthodox divine, Reverend Roger Thwackum, and the extremely unorthodox philosopher, Mr. Thomas Square. Both men live with the Allworthy family.

Secondly, the Western Family: Squire Western is a widower with an only child, Sophia, whom he loves as dearly as his dogs and horses. Sophia has been away from home in the care of her sophisticated and hypocritical aunt in order to learn the niceties of town life, and she now returns to preside over her father's household. She is waited on by the pert and loquacious Honour Blackmore.

Thirdly, the Seagrim group: "Black" George Seagrim is the shifty gamekeeper of the Allworthy estate. His second child, Molly, is unusually pretty, considering her parentage, and—though nearly three years younger than Tom Jones and less inexperienced and innocent than she leads Tom to believe—gains the better of his animal spirits and commences an intrigue with him.
Fourthly, there is a hodgepodge of minor characters, such as
the humorous Partridge and his wife Anne, the girl Jenny Jones,
who is first thought to be Tom Jones' mother, and Mr. Dowling,
Allworthy's lawyer, who eventually discloses the secret of Tom's
birth.

In this first part an account of the births and early lives
of Tom and Blifil are given. Then the narrative slides over the
space of twelve years when the story is resumed to give some in-
dication of the character of the two young boys—the reckless,
good-natured Tom and the malicious hypocrite, Blifil. As the two
boys grow to manhood we are told of Tom's troubles with Molly
Seagrim and his gradual falling in love with Sophia Western. Fi-
nally, there is a series of incidents which end in Tom's being
thrown out of the house by Allworthy, who has been wickedly de-
ceived by Blifil; Sophia, who is now in love with Tom, is informed
by her father that he has resolved to give her in marriage to
Blifil whom she utterly detests; and Blifil is in a state of com-
plete satisfaction since he will become sole heir to the Allworthy
estate and has the prospect of gaining the hand and the lands of
the beautifully young heiress who lives on the adjoining estate.
These gains at the expense of Tom are magnified by Blifil's sat-
isfaction. So the introduction concludes.

The second part of the novel tells the adventures of Tom and
Sophia from the time of their departures from their respective
homes until they reach London. The central point of this part of the book is the eventful night in an inn at Upton on Severn. Up until this time Sophia has been pursuing Tom. They are both staying at this same inn and are unaware of each other's presence. Sophia's maid finds out from a serving girl that a Mr. Tom Jones, gentleman, is in the house and is making love with a lady he has met there. On hearing this, Sophia takes leave immediately in the middle of the night for London. In the morning Tom finds out that a certain Sophia Western stopped at the inn the previous night but has left; so the pursuit takes on the opposite character with Tom now chasing Sophia. The time relationships have been worked out in great detail so that the two manage to miss each other all along the way.

The third part of the novel deals with the adventures of Tom and Sophia in London; and the scene, for the most part, is, as Fielding promised, laid in the very best part of town. A number of new characters—of the city brand—are introduced. Lady Bellaston, the friend to whom Sophia flees in London, turns out to be an unappetizing, middle-aged, artfully untrue woman of quality. Lord Fellamar, though he seems to be fundamentally a man of honor, is goaded on by Bellaston's ridicule to attempt a very dishonorable intrusion on the chastity of Sophia. Mrs. Miller, a

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8Fielding, I, 248- II, 143.
9Ibid., II, 147-421.
women with a tongue always ready to be of service to her friends, turns out to be Tom Jones' salvation in the big city; and when all would have condemned him—even Sophia—it was the warmhearted and simple Mrs. Miller who cleared his reputation and then caused Jones to be reinstated as the heir to Mr. Allworthy.

This is indeed a poor representation of the plot and characters of the novel, but at least it gives some indication of the general direction in which the action flows and some idea of who is involved in it. The three divisions of country life, the traveling through small towns, and the conclusion in the big city show what Fielding meant by wishing to first represent the "more plain and simple" and to rise by degrees to the "seasonings of affectation and vice." The action, of course, cannot be divorced from the characters Fielding has fashioned because it flows most naturally from everything we know about them. The plot of Tom Jones has been the object of much admiration on the part of truly great literary figures such as Coleridge, who puts it on a level with the Oedipus Tyrannus. The unity in the plot of Tom Jones is not held by the mere limitation of subject matter; for the book is quite long, full, and complex. Everything contributes to forward the action, even to the detail of rescuing a muff which had been thrown into the fireplace. In the complete development of his plot, Fielding was very conscious to keep within the bounds of probability. Two special points in this regard ought to be
mentioned: first, the skill with which he held the true circumstances of Tom's birth a secret, and secondly, the skill with which he ties up the loose ends of the story in a satisfying conclusion. Nothing is left unaccounted for or undecided. There are faults, however; and some will object to the supposed digression in the story of the Man of the Hill and in the life summary told by Mrs. Fitzpatrick. The story of the Man of the Hill gives Fielding an opportunity to develop Tom Jones' character for the reader. The pessimistic outlook of the Man stands in contrast to Jones' and, incidentally, Fielding's optimistic outlook which is contained in Jones' rebuttal. Furthermore, Jones' nobility of character shines through his statements when he evaluates human nature.\textsuperscript{10} The story of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, although it does not solicit a response from Sophia, does serve as a preface to what is to come in Sophia's first encounter with big city life. It gives the reader some indication of the high society life of the times for which Fielding had little sympathy.\textsuperscript{11}

As regards this particular introductory chapter, two things are important. First, Fielding insists upon giving a menu, as it were, for the novel. This custom is completely abandoned now, but for a time it was carried along by men such as Scott, Dickens,

\textsuperscript{10}Fielding, I, 400-401.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., II, 54-74.
Hardy, and especially Thackeray. Secondly, an insistence on a realistic purpose in the treatment of human nature with all its varieties is quite evident. This latter point is by far one of the most important and lasting contributions Fielding made to fiction. Occasion will present itself to call attention to this point again, later in this same chapter.

II. Book II, Chapter 1.\(^{12}\) We have given the name of history\(^{13}\) to this work and not a "life" or "an apology for a life" as is now in fashion. We intend to follow the method of those writers who deal with the revolutions of countries and not to imitate those who give a detailed account in the regularity of a series which includes the months and years of no remarkable happening. This latter type of history resembles the newspapers which always consist of the same general number of words used whether the news itself be important or trivial. It is the purpose of the pages of this history to follow the contrary method. "When extraordinary scenes present themselves (as we trust will often be the case), we shall spare no pains nor paper to open them at large to our readers, but if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy of his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history, but shall hasten on to matters of con-

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.}, \ I, \ 39-41.\)

\(^{13}\text{By the word history in this context Fielding means a fictitious biography as distinguished from a fantastic romance.}\)
sequence, and leave such periods of time totally unobserved."\textsuperscript{14} The reader should not be surprised then to find short chapters and long chapters, some containing the space of a day and some the space of years; and in some the history may seem to stand still while in others it may seem to fly. "For all which I shall not look upon 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."\textsuperscript{15}

Although Fielding feels free to gambol about as he likes in his new literary form, he makes it clear that the ease of the audience is his principal concern. He complements the inventive faculties of his readers. He supposes they will be able to gap the time passages and to provide for the natural course of events which would most likely take place at a given time in any of the character's life-patterns. Thus, a large gap containing the passing of some twelve years is assumed between the close of Book II and the opening of Book III. Fielding tells the reader that he expects him to be fully aware of the many insignificant details of children's youthful years and to supply them for himself. The other noteworthy example of swift passage of time is found in the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., I, 40.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., I, 40.
closing pages of the novel where Fielding paints the fate and fortunes of every important character with broad, generous strokes. This introduction of time-gaps was a decided advance over the styles of Defoe and Richardson. This is especially true with regard to Richardson's *Clarissa*, which ran well over two thousand pages in its first editions. This swift movement, which did not impair the unity of the novel, was something new to Fielding's times, although both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* exemplify the principle to some degree. This principle of selection and highlighting, then, is another one of Fielding's important contributions to the novel form as it is known today.

III. Book IV, Chapter 1.\(^{16}\) It is a realistic treatment of the subject-matter which distinguishes this type of history from the idle romances filled with monsters and produced by distempered brains; yet we do not intend that this type of history be nothing more than a factual account in the pure historic method. In order to be unlike such works, we have taken every possible occasion to intersperse sundry similes and descriptions and every sort of poetical embellishment throughout the whole work. "Without interruptions of this kind the best narrative of plain matter of fact must overpower every reader; for nothing but the everlasting watchfulness, which Homer has ascribed only to Jove himself, can be proof against a newspaper of many volumes."\(^{17}\) There is no more

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\(^{16}\) *Ibid.*, I, 104-106.

\(^{17}\) *Ibid.*, I, 104-105.
proper time for the inducement of one of the ornamental parts than when we are to introduce a character of some consideration on the scene of this "heroic, historical, prosaic poem." For this method we plead many precedents; for this art was well known and much practiced by the tragic poets who always prepared their audience for the reception of their principal characters.

Usually when Fielding carries on in the tone of the above summary, he has some burlesque intentions; but there are times when he does reach true poetic vigor of expression. It is this ability to poeticize that saves Fielding's realism from becoming what might be called an exaggerated realism so often attributed to the Stephen Crane school of modern America. Both his predecessors and his contemporaries lacked his ability in using these poetic embellishments, but those who followed him realized their value. Men such as Scott, Thackeray, and Hardy used them; and lyrical passages are common traits of fine novels today. For an example of such poetry in Fielding the one he himself refers to seems most appropriate, the introduction into the story of Sophia Western.18

IV. Book VIII, Chapter 1.19 "The great art of poetry is to mix truth with fiction in order to join the credible with the surprising."20 Every good author will confine himself within the

18Ibid., I, 107-109. The example is too lengthy to quote.
19Ibid., I, 324-330. He treats the marvelous again, II, 326.
20Ibid., I, 330. He took this quote from Pope's Bathos.
bounds of probability, though he must not be inhibited from showing many persons and things which possibly may never have fallen within the knowledge of a great part of his readers. If the writer observes the rules mentioned below, he hath discharged his part; and is then entitled to some faith from his reader, who is indeed guilty of critical infidelity if he disbelieves him. Nothing should be narrated which is beyond the scope of human capacities. Supernatural activities should be omitted. Ghosts ought not to be admitted. Miracles are to be completely rejected. Everything that happens must be able to be explained in reference to natural causes. Secondly, a writer should keep within the bounds of probability. Everyone will admit that many possible but improbable things can and do happen in real life. There may be ample evidence for such improbabilities, and the historian of public happenings will be justified in narrating them; but if the novel writer wants to avoid "that incredulous hatred mentioned by Horace," he ought to refrain from using such material in his narrations. This same principle ought to be followed in describing characters, and the writer ought not picture extraordinarily good or extraordinarily bad persons. It is true that both types have and do exist, but they are so few and far between that any representation of them in fiction is almost certain to cause incredulity in the reader. Thirdly, a writer should follow a rule of conformity of action with the character of the actor. "I will venture to say," writes Fielding, "that for a man to act in direct
contradiction to the dictates of his nature, is, if not impossible, as improbable and as miraculous as anything which can well be conceived.\textsuperscript{21}

These comments on the marvelous and its place in Fielding's theory are obviously the result of his experience in the field of drama, and he would be the first to acknowledge his indebtedness to Aristotle. However, the significance of these seemingly obvious rules of possibility and probability is that they are perhaps the earliest statement by a great narrative fiction writer of such rules; and they have been observed by all the truly great fiction writers ever since.

The importance of these rules to Fielding can easily be understood when we recall his intention of presenting human nature in its many varieties. The demand for credibility of presentation is another important contribution toward the advancement of the novel form. It gives the novel complete distinctness from the romance or fantastic narrative of his times. The romance would allow, and did allow at that time, the introduction of the improbable idealization of characters and the use of the supernatural to attain quaint effects. Fielding demands unconditional abstention from both of these in his new form. As is his custom, Fielding has considered the topic of the marvelous in this intro-

\textsuperscript{21}Fielding, I, 329. He means that the action must not only be possible and probable, but also congruous with the nature of the character who is performing it.
ductory essay because he intends to introduce a bit of it in the following chapters of Book VIII. For an example of his balanced use of the marvelous the entire Book VIII must be read; however, an example of how Fielding has run afoot of his own principles may be taken from an earlier book and serves to illustrate how he was subject to the human error of oversight. The illustration is contrary to Fielding's principle of a balanced presentation of character. He has often been accused of building too good a character for Sophia Western. Since he never shows anything to lessen the degree of perfection he first builds around her, but actually adds more to it in subsequent chapters, the reader can see quite clearly, simply by reading a few descriptions of Sophia, what prompted Fielding's critics to accuse him of improbability of character. She is a preeminently good heroine. For a supreme example of the credible mixed with the surprising the scene where Square is discovered in Molly Seagrim's garret should be read. This sophisticated tutor of Tom Jones has obviously been abed with Molly. The reader gives a hearty laugh along with Tom at the discovery and carries the secret with Tom down to the last period of the last sentence of the novel. Another example which proves to be a masterful touch of artistry by leaving the reader in utter

22 Ibid., I, 107-109. Until the end of the novel he shows his unchanging idolization of Sophia. Fielding had his wife in mind when he drew Sophia's character. This would account for the idealistic portrayal which, in a certain sense, slightly mars his work.
emotional confusion is the scene where Lord Fellamar molests Sophia. The reader feels a great horror that this priss should rifle the treasure he wishes Jones alone to have; yet Squire Western's entrance, though it saves the treasure of Sophia's chastity for the moment, threatens to sacrifice it to Blifil in an undesired marriage. Blifil is more odious than Fellamar. It is a situation for the reader which is charged with "out of the frying pan, into the fire."

The four introductory chapters discussed in this chapter of the thesis are very evidently of Aristotelian vintage. Fielding proposes human nature on his menu; Aristotle talks of men in action. Fielding's plot is bound into the organic whole which Aristotle insists upon. Fielding declares himself; he is not a mere historian, a relator of events as they happen. Aristotle drew a distinction between the tragedy or epic and the history. The one is philosophical and universal; the other is historical and particular. To avoid even the appearance of a factual report Fielding insisted on the poetical embellishments which Aristotle discussed. Finally, Fielding's demand for probable characters whose actions were probable is practically a paraphrase of Aristotle, if we allow for a few applications he made to the improbabilities in vogue during his own age.

Chapter IV will highlight the even greater courage which Fielding showed in attempting this new form, for what will be under consideration hereafter is decidedly more his own.
CHAPTER IV
THE THEORY AND THE ART CONTINUED

The elements of Fielding's theory and art which are treated in this chapter bear a definitely eighteenth-century flavor. They are less universal than the principles he derived from Aristotle through the French critics. In reality, they have less actual bearing on the structure and execution of fiction writing than the principles based on the Poetics. They show Fielding's preoccupation with the critics of his day, the Grub Street crowd he so detested. They show his reaction against the religious and moral attitudes of his times. The fact that they are not quite essential to the theory and art of fiction writing is proved by their having been dropped after a time by successful writers of fiction. Their importance should not be minimized, however, because at the time Fielding wrote, they were of an essential nature. Perhaps without these principles and precautions Fielding's works would never have been accepted by subsequent authors. Perhaps these authors would have desisted from imitating Fielding and the theory and art of fiction in narrative form might have been delayed another century and been brought to light by less worthy pens than his. Again, if narrative fiction should ever stray too
far afield, Fielding may do it a great service by standing as a signpost along the road of return. Aside from these possibilities they are a part of Fielding's theory, and they merit a full chapter to themselves.

I. Books V, X, and XI; Chapter 1 in each. The most difficult passages to read will be those which were the hardest to compose, namely, the introductory chapters which preface each of the eighteen books. However, they are "essentially necessary to this kind of writing, of which we have set ourselves at the head." Fielding does not feel obliged to offer a reason why these introductory chapters are essential; for who, he asks, demands a reason for the unity of time and the unity of place which are now established as essential to dramatic poetry? Why cannot a play contain the space of two days instead of one? Why cannot the audience be wafted fifty miles as well as five? Why must a play contain no more than five acts, or no less? "It is abundantly sufficient that we have laid it down as a rule necessary to be observed in all prosai-comi-epic writing." Here there is inserted a di-

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1Fielding, I, 156-160; II, 1-3; and II, 41-45 respectively.

2Ibid., I, 156.

3It is obvious that Fielding is being cynical at this point, both from what immediately follows and from what he has to say about the unities elsewhere.

4Fielding, I, 156.
gression concerning the critics which will be taken up shortly.

After this playful bit of egotism Fielding settles down to the true reason for the introductory chapters. He says he wants to avoid laying down a rule for posterity on the authority of *ipse dixit* alone, and so he proceeds to give his reasons for the chapters. The prime reason is one of contrast, which runs through all the works of creation and constitutes a large share of true beauty, both natural and artificial. Night and day serve to complement each other. Winter and summer, the same. The finest woman in the world would lose her charm in the eye of a man who had never seen one of another mould. Many women try to appear as ugly as possible in the morning in order to set off the beauty which they intend to show in the evening. One wonders whether Fielding has not gone playful again.

Anyone of the introductory chapters might serve as an example of this contrast. Besides giving his theory of narrative fiction and displaying his wonderful sense of humor, they serve to break the monotony of a long story simply because of the variety of matter they treat. They do not impede the flow of the action because those people who like to read books simply for the sake of being able to say they have read them can skip the interchapters without losing the thread of the story. Though it had its imitators this custom of the introductory chapters has never become universal, hence it cannot be considered as an important contribution to the
theory and art of fiction writing. Thackeray was Fielding's closest imitator in this matter, especially in his *Vanity Fair*. 1847 and 1848 were the years in which Thackeray wrote *Vanity Fair*, approximately a century after Fielding's *Tom Jones*.

Fielding's digression on the critics was mentioned above, and it runs on in the following manner. Critics were too complimented. They had been imagined to be much greater than they were, and so they assumed dictatorial powers to give laws to those authors from whose predecessors they originally received their laws. The critic is really nothing more than a clerk whose office it is to transcribe the rules and laws laid down by those whose strength of genius gave them the right to be literary lawmakers. In the course of time the laws of writing were no longer founded on the practice of the authors, but on the dictates of the critics. Hence has arisen a great error, for these critics of shallower capacities have mistaken mere form for substance. To this mistake time and ignorance, the two great supporters of imposture, gave authority, and consequently, many rules for good writing have been established which have not the least foundation in truth or nature, and which commonly serve no other purpose than to curb true genius.

The Greek derivation of the word critic means judgment; and, too often, in its English context the word judgment is taken in the related sense of condemnation. However, critics may be considered in another light and that is, at times they play the role
of common slanderers. The slanderer is not held in the fullest contempt as he ought to be, and naturally many will not sympathize with the utter rejection of the book-slanderer. But let them consider that a work of writing is the child of an author's brain; and just as a person cannot be called a bastard without implying that his mother is a whore, so too, a critic cannot slander a book without implying abuse to the author. 5 "Though there be some faults justly assigned in the work, yet, if those are not in the most essential parts, or if they are compensated by greater beauty it will savour rather of the malice of a slanderer than of the judgment of a true critic to pass a severe sentence upon the whole merely on account of some vicious part." 6 To condemn the whole would be directly against the sentiments of Horace:

Verum ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendor maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura— 7

To write within such severe bounds as this one of complete perfection in all detail is as impossible as to live up to some "splenetic opinions."

5 The criticism Fielding wished to obviate was the then common condemnation by sophisticates of a whole book for some defective parts. He has facetiously chosen an apt illustration.

6 Fielding, II, 44.

7 Fielding took these apt lines from the Ars Poetica, 351-353. But where the beauties shine in more number, I am not angry when a casual line, unequally flowing with some trivial faults, shows a careless hand or human frailty.
The following cautions are afforded both to the critic and to the common reader alike, who may be as learned in human nature as Shakespeare was, but may also be as stupid as his editors were: (1) the reader should not be too hasty to condemn parts of this history as inconsequential until he has come to the final conclusion and catastrophe; (2) the reader should not find too close a parallel between certain characters, who, though they are members of the same profession, will have their own individuality. To be able to preserve these characteristics and at the same time to diversify their operations is the mark of a good author. (3) To notice the nice distinction between two persons who have the same fault is another talent of fine discernment had by too few readers. (4) The reader ought not condemn a character as a perfectly bad one simply because he is not a perfectly good one on all occasions. Some books have such perfectly good characters, but because this author—Fielding means himself, of course—has never met such a person he does not include them in this history. To represent a totally good or totally bad man exposes the reader to overwhelming sorrow or shame. On the one hand, he despairs of ever seeing human nature scale the heights of such perfection; and

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8He refers here to the two landladies. One appears in Book VII and the other in Book IX.

9The jealousy of Mrs. Fitzpatrick and that of Lady Bellaston, for instance.
on the other, he is dejected at seeing the depths to which human nature can fall. However, when the reader is presented with a character, a more realistic character of mixed perfection and imperfection, he sees the imperfections as the great source of mischief that they are to oneself and to those whom one loves.¹⁰

The last two hints to readers and those who professionally review books are unquestionably meant to give the key to Fielding's development of his leading character's personality and role in the novel. To gain a true understanding of what Fielding means one can do nothing less than read Tom Jones. Fielding's point of view concerning the treatment of character might well have been included in the previous chapter where his classical principles were discussed. The discussion was reserved for this chapter because of the intimate relationship it has to eighteenth-century thought on character development. As was pointed out earlier, both Richardson and Fielding sought to reform their age—the former, by painting the glories of virtue; the latter, by ridiculing vice. Richardson's characters were too stilted and affected in their goodness of soul. He was obviously following the romance traditions which were popular at the time. Fielding's principles rise both from his reactionary impulses to Richardson and from his balanced insistence on a realistic approach which was

¹⁰Fielding's experience as a justice of the peace most certainly helped him form this principle of character treatment.
discussed along with the treatment of probability in the last chapter. The result is that Fielding's characters are artistically more effective simply because they are more real, and they are morally more beneficial because they attract a genuine sympathy from the audience and not the weak sentimentality of a Richardson sketch.

II. Book VII, Chapter 1. An interesting comment which gives evidence that Fielding's dramatic experience had an important role in fashioning his theory of the comic prose epic, is seen in his comparison of the world to a stage. His main contention is that a given actor may one time play the tragic hero and another time play the buffoon, and he gives the example of the actor David Garrick of Shakespeare fame. The summary-analysis follows. Likewise, in real life it is a matter of doubt whether some people are better entitled to the applause or the censure, the admiration or the contempt, the love or the hatred of mankind. Then look at the reaction of a theater audience on the occasion of the evil deed of an actor or character. The pit is divided between those who delight in heroic virtue and perfect character and who object to any villainy on the stage, and those who say that though the man is a villain, still the representation is a true one of nature. The boxes behave with their accustomed politeness; some ignore the scene, and those who pay attention to it either

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11Fielding, I, 259-262.
say he was a bad man or they will wait for the reports of the critics before they commit themselves. The upper gallery treats the incident with their usual vociferousness, using every term of scurrilous reproach. The middle gallery reacts with an equal degree of abhorrence though with less noise and scurrility. All the young critics call it "low" and fall agroaning.12

"Now we who are admitted behind the scenes of this great theater of Nature (and no author ought to write anything besides dictionaries and spelling books who hath not this privilege) can censure the action without conceiving any absolute detestation of the person. . . ."13 Anyone who has spent any length of time behind the scenes in the theater of life becomes acquainted with the several disguises put on and the fantastic capriciousness of the passions which are the stage directors and managers. A person of such experience will most readily understand the famous nil admirari of Horace, that is, to stare at nothing. A single bad act in life no more constitutes a bad character than a single bad part on the stage. The passions, like stage directors, force parts upon men without consulting their judgments. Upon the whole then, a truly candid man of genuine understanding is not likely to con-

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12 Fielding had a special dislike for the word "low" because many critics used it in condemning writers and their works with little discrimination and less meaning.

13 Fielding, I, 261.
demn hastily. He can censure the act without condemning the guilty party. The worst men have the words "villain" and "rogue" on their lips the most often. Thus far Fielding. This notion of too hasty a condemnation of individual characters was treated fully enough already, and the point to be noted here is that Fielding is really not making a plea for prudent judgment of character so much as he is arguing from comparison for a prudent judgment of a work of art as a whole.

An important contribution to narrative prose fiction comes in by way of Fielding's experience in drama. The dramatic conception of the novel helped to establish the important convention that the novelist, like the playwright, is assumed to be omniscient. Before Fielding's time the authors of fiction were accustomed to take a certain point of view and maintain that one alone throughout the entire book. Richardson, for example, tells the entire story of Pamela in a series of letters. The plot is unfolded to the reader through Pamela's letters, whether she receives them or sends them. Richardson placed unnecessary restrictions on himself and his reader. Fielding maintains that an author should be aware of all the undercurrents in human nature and therefore should write with an all-seeing eye. He maintains also that the audience or the reader should withhold his judgment until he has sufficient time to reflect on a complete characterization, a complete scene, or an entire production.
III. Book IX, Chapter 1; and Book XII, Chapter 1. These introductory chapters may well be considered the earmark of this type of writing. Many nondescript writers may attempt to benefit from the success which a few writers of more recent time have had in the writing of these histories; and therefore, the reader should have some proof of genuineness to go by in his selection of these histories for reading. We follow the example of the author of the Spectator who began his columns with Latin or Greek quotations. This meant that no ordinary cheap writer could imitate or plagiarize him without knowing something of these languages. "In the same manner I have so secured myself from the imitation of those who are utterly incapable of any degree of reflection, and whose learning is not equal to an essay." 16

To invent good stories and to be able to tell them well are rare talents, but many are of the opinion that it is quite easy and have put themselves to the task. Many of little learning and knowledge have attempted the writing of novels and romances, because nothing more seems necessary than plenty of paper and ink

14 Ibid., I, 403-407; II, 89-91.

15 Naturally plagiarism was quite common before the copyright laws could be enforced.

16 Fielding, I, 403. He was well aware of the talent it takes to write good essays and so he hoped to rid himself of the leeches who would naturally try to capitalize on the success he hoped to have.
with the natural God-given capacity to use them. At least, this seems to be the opinion of authors whose work evidences it.

The results have been the rise of a universal contempt for all historians who do not draw their material from records; and it is this fact that has made us assiduously avoid the name romance, although it could have been employed to entitle this type of writing. We have good authority for all of our characters, "no less indeed than the vast authentic Doomsday book of Nature," and the work has sufficient claim to the name of history.

"To prevent, therefore, for the future such intemperate abuses . . . especially as the world seems at present to be more than usually threatened with them, I shall here venture to mention some qualifications, every one of which is in a pretty high degree necessary to this order of historian."17 First is genius, without a full vein of which no study, says Horace, can avail. This means the power to penetrate into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences. The power of mind for this activity is twofold, invention and judgment.18 Invention rarely exists apart from good judgment; "for just how we can be said to have discovered the true essence of two

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17Fielding, I, 405.

18By invention Fielding does not mean the creative faculty, as is commonly supposed, but rather that of discovery, of finding out, of having a "quick" sagacious penetration into the true essence of all objects of contemplation.
things, without discerning their essential differences, seems to me hard to conceive."19 This last element naturally belongs to the province of judgment. Secondly, even if a man be a genius he would not be adequate to the task of writing a good history if he were not in possession of a good share of learning. Nature can only provide us with the capacity for certain achievements or with the tools of a profession. Learning must fit them for use, must direct them, and must contribute at least part of the material for a great masterpiece. "A competent knowledge of history and the belles-lettres is here absolutely necessary. . . . Homer and Milton were both historians of our order, and they were masters of all the learning of their times."20 Thirdly, there is another sort of knowledge beyond the power of learning which is had only by conversation. No matter how well human nature has been described, the true practical working of it can be found only in the world. The like is true in other kinds of knowledge, for the practical working out of physics must be found in the world. Characters portrayed in a second-hand fashion are "but faint copies of a copy," are nothing more than shadows and have no depth. This conversation must be of a universal nature with all ranks and degrees of men. The affectations of the higher society life will be understood from the standpoint of the lower and 2 con-

19 Fielding, I, 405.
20 Ibid., I, 406.
verso. In the one, we find examples of plainness, honesty, and sincerity; in the other, we find examples of refinement, elegance, and a liberality of spirit which is scarcely ever seen in men of low birth and education. Fourthly, and lastly, none of these qualities of the historian will be of much avail unless he has the final quality of feeling, unless he has a good heart. The author who will make me weep, said Horace, must first weep himself. "In reality, no man can paint a distress well which he doth not feel while he is painting; nor do I doubt, but that the most pathetic and affecting scenes have been writ with tears. In the same manner, it is with the ridiculous. I am convinced I never make my reader laugh heartily but where I have laughed before him..."22

Fielding uses the contrast between high and low life merely for the sake of variety. Being born of noble parents, he was fully conversant with polite circles and was aware of the masks often worn by people in high society. It is his resentment of writers like Richardson that occasioned this introductory chapter, and fortunately has occasioned this insight into what he thought a

21 Fielding is swiping at Richardson's ignorance of the upper classes of society about which he often wrote in an affected manner. Richardson was of lower birth than Fielding and Fielding always felt as though Richardson was stepping a little out of line in attempting publication.

22 Fielding, I, 407. It is precisely in this matter that Fielding so far outstrips Richardson. Fielding's characterization is three dimensional; Richardson's is flat, lifeless.
writer should be. These requirements are still the essential ones for good writing and are taught in college writing and critical courses today. They might be considered as a preface to his actual theory rather than a part of it. This much can be said for them in their relation to his theory: they strongly support his realistic treatment of character and action.

IV. Book XV, Chapter 1.23 There is a doctrine taught by a certain religious set of moral writers that virtue is the true road to happiness and vice to misery, in this world.24 The one objection to this doctrine is that it simply is not true. It is true only in regard to the prudential virtues which teach the housewife to stay at home and mind her own business, but this seems more a matter of wisdom than of virtue. Unselfish virtue, which is always intent upon pursuing the good of others most surely leads not to happiness, but too often to "poverty and contempt, with all the mischiefs which back-biting, envy, and ingratitude can bring upon mankind."25 Fielding chooses to dispute the doctrine on which these notions are founded as unchristian, untrue, and destructive of the noblest arguments for immortality of the soul. He would rather hold that unselfish virtue is rewarded

23Ibid., II, 238-239.

24One need only recall the title of Richardson's Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded to guess who one of the moral writers might be.

25Fielding, II, 238.
in the life hereafter. Here is another obvious result of Fielding's realistic outlook on life and fiction writing. Even his religious attitudes are peppered with a wide-open-eyed facing of facts. He saw that there was no necessary causal connection between the good life and earthly happiness. His belief in this fact is best shown in the character of Tom Jones, and his deep religious sincerity appears when he asserts that the Christian charity which Tom shows should not look for its reward in earthly happiness.

Fielding's religious principles were, nevertheless, rather sentimental. A reader can safely assume that he places his most cherished ideas in the mind of his hero, Jones, and that it is through the mouth of Jones that Fielding speaks. Naturally he expects readers to be most sympathetic to the ideas of the character who most commands their sympathy in the story. When Tom Jones discusses the problem which faces Nightingale after the latter has gotten Miss Nancy Miller pregnant, the highest reason Tom has to offer to Nightingale for making Miss Miller an honorable woman again is the reason of feeling good. "And do not the warm, rapturous sensations which we feel from the consciousness of an honest, noble, generous, benevolent action, convey more delight to the mind than the undeserved praise of millions?" Jones admitted earlier to Nightingale that he himself had gotten a number of wo-

26 Ibid., II, 224.
men pregnant, but that he had never intended to do them harm. In other words, his intentions were just those of returning a little affection and of pleasing the ladies. As long as no harm was intended what wrong could there be in it? The conscience rests peacefully in the atmosphere of good feeling. This is, to say the least, a rather sentimental view of morality.

The fundamental moral attitude of Fielding is set off in very sharp contrast to both Defoe and Richardson who incessantly taught the middle-class doctrine of "be good and you will be happy throughout life." Fielding's theory of fiction does not provide the happily-ever-after endings. It provides his good characters, the ones who have that feeling of satisfaction that comes from never having intended harm to another, happiness at the end of the novel. It is not given in payment of their behavior however. With prudence and good fortune alone do they gain whatever happiness this life has to offer.

It would be puerile to mock Fielding for his mistaken notions of morality. Though they are basically unsound, still they are sincerely believed by him. He does not hold vice up for admiration; he does the opposite: he ridicules it. When he does present it, the situations are usually mirth-provoking. The danger lies in the fact that moral guilt could become a laughing matter. By the "good feeling" notion he certainly means that peace of mind which comes from the conviction that no one has been offended by a given action. Fielding paints characters with extremely lax
consciences. Though this is undesirable in itself, it has resulted in a more realistic portrayal of character in Fielding than in any of his contemporaries.

The seven introductory chapters mentioned in this chapter are very evidently of eighteenth-century vintage. They embody all Fielding's reactions to the writers of his times. At first, they may seem rather isolated with no important relationships existing between them. Actually they have a strong common bond. They all show a tendency toward realism, the antithesis of eighteenth-century sentimentalism so much in vogue when Fielding wrote his Tom Jones.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The novel, as a literary form, is now taken for granted. A fairly consistent experience in reading good novels naturally tends to dull one's perception of the great advantages which accrued to the art of prose fiction through the courageous advances of Henry Fielding.

In Fielding's eighteenth century, just as in the twentieth, the reading public were a great determining factor in what was written and how it was written. The greater part of Fielding's audience was, by far, middle-class Puritans and tradesmen. Their tastes for right conduct and orthodox standards of morality and good manners influenced both the material and the form of all eighteenth-century fiction. They were receptive to the implications of the new philosophy of the sentimental moralists who emphasized the innate goodness of every man regardless of his birth or upbringing. Fielding's contemporaries, notably Richardson, fell prey to the demands of public opinion. Richardson's doctrine of chastity as found in his Pamela is a great example of how much he was influenced by his age. To Fielding, Pamela became an object of satire for this very reason. In his eyes a man was not
bound to be a pious preacher, nor was he bound to be a seducer of unsuspecting maidens; a woman, though made of very solid flesh and bone and somewhat free of speech, was still to be pure in conduct. These general impressions he gives are unquestionably a result of his realistic creed.

Fielding had no blueprint to spread out before him of what prose fiction should be. He could only look back to the Greek and Roman classics, and more immediately to the writers of a century or so before him. The classics cannot be underrated in their influence, but they are a far cry from the novel form that Fielding created and the form as it is today. He had the idealistic fiction of the Elizabethan era, best exemplified in Sidney’s *Arcadia*. It painted an imaginary world of beauty and romantic escape from life. He had the embryonic novel of manners in John Lily’s *Euphues* with its psychological analysis of the conduct of real life. He had, also, the picaresque story of adventure, a form made popular in England by Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveler*. It was an anti-romantic or more realistic story of a rogue-hero with touches of vice and folly. The seventeenth century did little or nothing in a positive way to help Fielding, for it held to an interest in the artificial narratives of French romantics even after reactions against it in the *novelle* and Puritan zeal for moral edification. The development of the novel waited on the development of prose which came at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Both Defoe and Richardson made attempts at writing prose
fiction, but each failed in some phase or other to solve such a complex problem. It was Fielding then, profiting from the mistakes of these two writers in particular and extracting the universal principles of fine literary art from the great masters of the past, who conceived the theory of the novel and immediately produced a finely wrought example of that theory. It was Fielding who built the bridge between the classical epic and the modern novel. The following points constitute the basic tenets of Fielding's theory and sum up his contributions to the formation of the modern novel:

1. In Tom Jones Fielding has constructed a finely balanced plot which holds its solid unity amid great complexity of both action and character. Critics and authors have long marvelled at its compactness and its lucidity—even though it contains a myriad of incidents. Samuel Taylor Coleridge put Tom Jones on a par with the Oedipus Tyrannus.

2. Although his realism can be traced to other sources, never before had a work remained so consistent in realism of both action and character.

3. His insistence on selection and emphasis gave him a great advantage over his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, notably Richardson with his two thousand paged Clarissa.

4. Writing from an omniscient point of view had been restricted to drama. In fiction some particular point of view had been maintained. Fielding's introduction of omniscience into
prose fiction writing at this time allowed for a less stilted treatment of both character and action, which was another phase of his realism.

5. Fielding's introductory chapters had some imitators among subsequent writers, but the influence was not great. Use of such chapters faded out after Thackeray.

6. The insistence on credibility and probability in treating character and action alike is another facet of Fielding's realistic creed.

7. His enumeration of the necessary qualifications of a good author of comic-prose-epic writing may appear as a challenge to some later novelists. A writer with these qualities would be incapable of painting an affected picture of human nature if he were true to himself.

8. Among his "crusts" for the critics Fielding gives, by chance, some notion of his superb delineation of character. Two characters of the same profession will show different human characteristics, such as the two innkeeping women in Books VII and IX. Two men with the same fault may appear quite different. This insight shows a distaste on Fielding's part for the idealizing of characters into groups of totally good and totally bad.

9. His repeated insistence on the realistic approach is tempered nicely by his acknowledging the need for poetical embellishments to save the work from becoming a mere factual report.

10. His moral and religious outlook on life, though somewhat
sentimental at its basis, is flavored with the realistic fact that good people often have much to suffer in this life, even from the very fact that they are good.

So much for a synopsis of Fielding's theory. From this the reader can conclude with Ethel Thornbury that "in giving to English literature this new province of writing, Fielding accomplished what so many others had attempted and failed. He had written a modern epic."¹ The epic, in its classical form, had been shelved. It was an antique that was to be admired, a work of art to be dusted off from time to time, reread and appreciated, and then put back on the shelf again. The theory of the classical epic would need revision to fit modern tastes. Thornbury remarks that the world in which Greek heroes moved was a thing of the past and that the new world offered no grandiose storming of Troy or founding of Rome. But modern times brought with them their own conflicts and men found that "their struggles are with their own natures—how to do right, or to learn what is the right thing to do—and with the fairly settled and prosaic society around them."² The ten point summary shows how Fielding accomplished this task.

"Whatever theory of art one may hold, the one essential thing in any work of art is that it be a whole."³ This Fielding grasped

¹Thornbury, Fielding's Theory, p. 165.
²Ibid., 165.
³Ibid., 165.
from his appreciation of the universal principles in classic theories. In giving this wholeness or unity to his work, "Fielding thus made his novels works of art and made possible the great development of the modern novel as a literary form." Fielding had certainly built a bridge, a bridge called The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling. Once the superstructure of this bridge has been studied there remains only to comment on its graceful arches and gossamer-like lines, its towering strength and delicate poise.

Fielding, the man, came well equipped to the task destiny had designed for him:

Nature had bestowed on him many splendid endowments. He had an insatiable curiosity, which perpetually spurred him on to investigate life in all its phases; he had a power of exact observation, combined with a faculty for generalization, i.e., for discerning and bringing to light the universal truths and principles which underlie the observed particulars; he had the creative imagination, the inexhaustible inventiveness, which is found only in fiction-writers of the very highest rank; he had sympathy and sensibility, without which there can be no real understanding of human existence; and he had humor—natural, spontaneous, perennially abundant—enlivening everything he said or wrote. He was blessed also with other gifts—a singularly retentive memory, an aptitude for incisive criticism, a talent for satire and irony, and a capacity for throwing off, apparently with unlabored ease, arresting and memorable dicta. No other novelist ever proceeded to his task with a finer intellectual outfit.

With all of this behind him what, then, are the most outstanding artistic characteristics of Fielding's new literary art form?

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4 Ibid., 165.
5 F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding, II, 1091-1092.
They have already been dealt with piece by piece. The following remarks sum up the artistic heritage he left to later writers of prose fiction.

To the reader who has taken up Tom Jones for pure enjoyment Fielding's most outstanding characteristic is his humor. It is abundant, natural, and not very often touched with bitterness. It is neither fantastical nor bizarre but deals with facts of nature and of life. "Life," he said, "everywhere furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous." There are few instances of coarse humor in Jones. His satirical humor never settles on an individual, but rather on groups or classes, or contemporary society, or on humanity in general. Since he loved his fellow-men too much to be boorish, his satire remained purely constructive. He had an eye for the incongruous, the mirthful humor which excites laughter and nothing more, such as the "natural beauty of virtue"—Square crouching behind the rug in Molly Seagrim's garret. Finally, his ironical humor is, on the whole, quite indulgent, never condemning.

If Fielding's humorous vein was balanced, his pathetic sense was no less perfect. Two things are necessary for true pathos: a truly pathetic situation, and no overdue reaction to it. The facts Fielding relates, aside from the way in which he tells them, are sufficiently moving to incite genuine pathos. There is no affectation of the Dombey and Son variety.

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Again, in telling his story Fielding chose one of three possible ways. A narrative may be recounted in a series of letters. Richardson used this method in *Pamela* and achieved a fine character analysis. It may be told through the mouth of one of the principal characters. Defoe used this method in *Robinson Crusoe.* Finally, it may be told directly by the author. Fielding used this method and developed his narrative to the fullest in a straightforward manner which allowed for his own personal observations. Some may find Fielding's personal observations a bit distracting, too intrusive. They are pleasant enough, always deal with the matter at hand in a direct or indirect way, and add to the thread of the plot by explaining possible obscurities. They do not detract from the novel.

Possibly only Shakespeare outdoes Fielding in character portrayal. His delineations are of the highest quality:

> What a wonderful art! What an admirable gift of nature was it by which the author of these tales was endowed, and which enabled him to fix our interest, to awaken our sympathy, to seize upon our credulity, so that we believe in his people . . . love and admire those ladies with all our hearts, and talk about them as faithfully as if we had breakfast with them this morning in their actual drawing rooms, or should meet them this afternoon in the Park. 

His characters are surprisingly alive so that they impress themselves on our memories as real people do. Their part in the story

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may be forgotten, but their personalities continue to exist in the memory of the reader. This is certainly an achievement in characterization. Perhaps the fact that he drew his characters, to some extent, from real life accounts for the impression they make. Richardson tends to paint them too simply. Fielding did not use flat, solid colors, but rather "shaded in" his characters in the half-tones of real life. At the same time he showed the complexity of each individual without vagueness or indefiniteness. "Almost every one of them, indeed, impresses us as an individual of most undeniable individuality, plainly differentiated from all others of the same type, temperament, profession or class."8 And all of this was gained, says Dudden, "by a tactful exercise of the art of selection."9 Richardson, in his Pamela, gave a minute psychological analysis of character through the heroine's letters. Fielding, however, gives the inner life of a character through dialogue, as Shakespeare had done. A short conversation brought out in the right manner was all Fielding needed.

The characters of Tom Jones are surprisingly interesting; for although they are almost antique in regard to manners, dress, and customs, they are, strangely enough, quite modern. They are closer to our own day than Austen's characters, or Thackeray's, or the Bronte sisters'. Only his perception of the genuine in human

8 Dudden, II, 1096.
9 Ibid., II, 1096.
nature can account for this.

Fielding's correlation of characters and incidents shows his real artistry. In his time two types of novels were popular: the novel of incident and the novel of character. Each type is good, of course; but the ideal novel should combine both, that is, the incidents should spring naturally from the characters in the novel. "In this respect Tom Jones must be acknowledged a masterpiece. Such a consummate correlation of incidents and characters had never been surpassed, and seldom equalled, since." 10 The structure of incidents was not simple, nor were there only a few characters. Tom Jones is crowded with people, but each is given an artistic relation toward the rest of the characters. Never do they lose their proper proportion.

The Jones novel is a structural masterpiece of plot-building, comparable to the best in literature. Not an incident, not a remark is meaningless. All, down to the least detail, add to the advance of the story. There is not a major or minor character who does not play a distinctive role in the unravelling of an extremely intricate plot. "Fielding, then, is distinguished not only as a great creative genius, but also as a supreme constructive artist. He was the first in England to elaborate the architecture of the novel." 11

10 Ibid., II, 1099.
11 Ibid., II, 1102.
Fielding believed that a work of art should carry with it didactic elements. This is, perhaps, the one thing on which he and Richardson agreed. If there was a possibility of ruining all his artistic endeavors, it would most likely be in the field of moralizing. Even here Fielding shows his delicate skill, his attitude for balance. He kept the picture he was trying to draw uppermost and the moral to be drawn secondary:

Instruction is inextricably woven into the plot. Nor is this all. For Fielding was not content to leave the story to teach its own lesson. He could not refrain from interpolating comments, to make quite sure that the lessons should not be overlooked. Yet in this book the didactic element is not, on the whole, unduly painted. Even the chorus-comments are not superfluous. They do not divert our attention from the picture; they only interpret what is exhibited, and help us to appreciate its deeper implications. Judicious instruction of this kind, which really illuminates and explicates the subject, is in no wise detrimental to a work of art.12

Much emphasis was placed on Fielding's realistic approach in previous chapters. "His aim was to present a strictly veracious picture of that real human world which he had so diligently observed and studied. That was the primary thing. He had no use for fanciful idealizations. He did not desire to describe the world as it ought to be, or as he would have liked it to be; he wished to describe it simply as it was."13 F. Homes Dudden makes special note that this does not imply that Fielding cherished no

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12F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding, II, 1110.

13Ibid., II, 1092.
ideals. He was not the Hogarth of fiction who merely portrayed the crass realism of his times, for, while he did picture the eighteenth-century social world realistically he has in mind a much happier state of affairs than the one he so accurately described. And as Dudden further points out, his purpose in showing men and women what they actually were was to shame them into becoming what they might be, but in reality were not.

Fielding neither glossed over the ugly and hideous, nor did he omit what was beautiful, he simply drew what he saw with utmost candor. This does not mean that he attempted the factual report of a newspaper column. "He translated his experiences: he did not merely record them. All the items were passed through the alembic of art, and redistilled into new composition." What was said concerning his character treatment can likewise be said of his entire production: besides giving a satisfying surface picture he also brought to light what lay beneath the surface—the facts. Consequently, he not only gave a picture of real life as it was lived in his own times, but also struck upon the universal and underlying essentials which give his writings that strangely modern character mentioned above.

There remains the matter of Fielding's literary style. It can best be characterized in the word simple. This element of style, which Horace so strongly advocated, seems to have been

\[14\text{Ibid., II, 1094.}\]
Fielding's by nature. There is a careful economy of words throughout the whole novel. The usual pitfalls for the common writers—repetition, cliché, and circumlocution—he side-stepped with consummate ease. His attitudes are at once scholarly yet familiar, authoritative yet congenial. All his other artistic talents are equalled by this one of precise and excellent expression.

From what has been said in the preceding chapters, Scott's often-quoted appellation, "the celebrated Henry Fielding, Father of the English Novel," seems true enough. Perhaps the credit should go to Richardson and his accepted example of the first modern novel in English, Pamela. "Fielding, at any rate, is the father of English prose epic—a form which has been of great significance in the work of many of his great successors, many of whom have freely acknowledged their indebtedness."15 And, though Fielding was not the sole originator of the novel, strictly speaking, he was the first to give an excellent example of those essentials in a technically perfect piece of art. These essentials were a fully integrated plot, a convincing realism in characterization, a flowing course of action which leads to a full and satisfying conclusion, a most natural dialogue, and finally, a meaningful interpretation of life. Fielding established once and for all the form of the novel—which, perhaps, is the most original

15Thornbury, Fielding's Theory, p. 166.
production of all English literature. No one would deny this creative genius the title of an artist.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Thomas Radloff, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

September 27, 1951

Date

Signature of Adviser