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SATIRE AND SYMPATHY:
SOME CONSEQUENCES OF INTRUSIVE NARRATION
IN TOM JONES AND OTHER COMIC NOVELS

by Jonathan Coe

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Warwick University

Department of English and Comparative Literature

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SUMMARY

This thesis aims to reinterpret Tom Jones by putting it into some previously untried comparative contexts. As well as using the traditional points of reference such as Lucian, Swift and Sterne, I compare Fielding's satire with Flaubert's; his narrative poetics with Dickens's and Beckett's; his strategy of intrusion with George Eliot's; and his literary politics with Brecht's.

I start by assuming the ambivalence of Tom Jones, but rather than seeing this as a conscious ironic duality, I argue that it derives from literary, moral and political uncertainty. The intrusive narrator is seen as an index of vacillation between first- and third-person narration, while conservative satiric influences are shown to complicate rather than strengthen the book's moral decisiveness. Its form, moreover, is shown to be dialogic, and unable to keep at bay either the reader's subjectivity or the flux of historical reality. But Fielding's achievement, I finally suggest, is to have put these factors into the service of his awareness of the always judgmental nature of literature.

The thesis therefore takes on several previously uncovered areas: it is very specific about the nature and extent of the narrator's presence in Tom Jones; it draws new analogies between social and literary forms (in the sections on conversation) and political and literary structures (in the section on Fielding's plays). It thereby reveals new areas of Fielding's writings which can be treated as literary theory; finds detailed affinities between Fielding and writers not normally associated with him; and eventually constitutes a reading of Tom Jones as an inconclusive and open-ended text which implies not a denial but a redefinition of its historical importance.

References and Abbreviations

First references are generally given in footnotes, subsequent references in the text. In the case of Fielding's works, however, nearly all the references are given immediately in the text itself, and are to the editions listed in the first section of my bibliography (pp. 310-12).

The only two commonly used abbreviations which need explaining are:

Works: always refers to Henry Fielding, Complete Works: With an Essay on the Life, Genius and Achievement of the Author ..., edited by W.E. Henley, 16 vols (London, 1903)

Prose Works: always refers to The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, edited by Herbert Davis et al., 16 vols (Oxford, 1939-74)

I'm aware that Hugh Amory (see bibliography, p. 320) has suggested revisions to the Wesleyan text of Tom Jones, and that some of these were subsequently incorporated into the one-volume American edition. However, because of its accessibility, I've continued to use the original, two-volume Wesleyan edition (Oxford, 1974).

Chapter One

THE SYMPATHETIC TRADITION (I) - ENTER THE NARRATOR

(i) Fielding and Eliot

This thesis is partly a reinterpretation of Tom Jones and partly a highly personal piece of literary theory. The reader travelling through its pages will see that at this stage in my development I am still rather uneasily poised between formalist and Marxist critical approaches: but neither of them has a monopoly on insights, in my view. I didn't choose Tom Jones because it seemed like the classic illustration of my argument; at the time when the choice had to be made I didn't have an argument. I chose it because I knew it well and liked it: it felt like a book I could live with for three years. Luckily, though, it soon came to appear that it would suit what I eventually saw to be my purpose, which was, to put it bluntly, to examine the relationship between narrative and polemic within a single text. I became interested in the fact that Fielding, in spite of his massive legal and journalistic (i.e. political) commitments, should still have made the time to write such a big novel: what was it that he thought he could say about reality in this form and no other?

So, acting on the assumption (backed up by a huge mass of critical opinion) that Tom Jones was morally, politically and formally coherent, I cheerfully set about probing its relationship of form and content; so that if I had persisted in this line of enquiry, I would have ended up positing what Terry Eagleton has recently called 'that glib counterposing of coherent fiction to

chaotic reality' which he sees as being 'the purest critical cliché'^{1*}. Fortunately, and largely by virtue of having ploughed through Fielding's journalistic output, I came to see the error of my ways, and arrived at the conclusion that Tom Jones is not a cohesive framework within which contradictions are magically reconciled, but merely a playground in which Fielding was able to let his contradictory impulses engage with each other in friendly combat. I still feel, then, that some of the critical orthodoxies are sound: the insistence on Fielding's historical importance, and on his ironic complexity. In fact I stretch the claim for his historical importance even further, particularly in my fifth chapter when I argue that he is a major influence on Samuel Beckett. What I do disagree with is the idea that Fielding's irony is necessarily a means of passing intentionally complex judgments: I see it as being often a technique of evasion. The sorts of stylistic and formal acrobatics which have therefore become entrenched, through Fielding's influence, in novelistic tradition, were not derived from a grand magisterial expansiveness but from uncertainty, inconsistency, and an unwillingness or inability to make definite moral and political commitments. I felt that one (if not the only) way of showing this would be a microscopic scrutiny of the novel's ambiguities of form; this is the substance of my first four chapters, in which I look at a succession of devices - the characterised narrator, the idea of self-evident fiction as a means of truth-telling, the presence of direct commentary, the dialogic aspects of narrative - and place them within different contexts (the nineteenth-century novel, classical satire, Fielding's other novels and plays, mock-encyclopaedic satire)

* Footnote references are given at the end of each chapter.

in order to get a fresh sense of where Fielding's affinities lie.

* * *

I shall start with the so-called 'intrusive' narrator. The standard text for any investigation into this topic is Wayne Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction². Much of what he said about Fielding still holds true, but I think there's scope for enlargement and further specification. My argument about Tom Jones is going to be that it is marked by a deep divide between satiric hostility towards and sympathetic insight into its characters, and Booth seemed to recognise that the obtrusive narratorial presence is a crucially determining factor in this respect: 'It is his wisdom and learning and benevolence that ... set its tone between the extremes of sentimental indulgence and scornful indignation' (p. 217). Nevertheless, the link is stated rather than argued for. This seems to be because Booth sees the narrator as being a reconciler exclusively of moral rather than literary attitudes: 'In a fictional world that offers no single character who is both wise and good ... the author is always there on his platform to remind us, through his wisdom and benevolence, of what human life ought to be and might be'. There is no real analysis of how, formally and stylistically, this is brought about: looking for some sense of moral coherence, Booth recognises that it must depend upon the presence of a morally exemplary and clear-sighted character; he also recognises that Fielding is this character; but then glosses over exactly what sort of 'character' Fielding is - clearly not one like Allworthy or Sophia - and thereby fails to account for the artistic coherence of the book; even though he is adamant that it exists. 'Yet somehow,' he writes, 'a genuine harmony of the two dramatized elements is

produced.' I want to clear up some of the mysteries raised by the word 'somehow'.

Part of Booth's problem is his failure to discriminate between different kinds of intrusion. There are two basic kinds: either a coming-clean about the fact that the author exists, that s/he is responsible for the words on the page and that, if there were no author, there would be no story (because no-one to record it), or, more gravely, an outright admission that the story is in fact being made up by the author. Henry James attacked the second of these in a well-known and widely-respected passage: 'Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away,' he says, and then goes on to specify:

I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only "making believe". He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay.³

It would be useful at the outset to show that this is not Fielding's kind of intrusion at all. For one thing the terminology of James's argument - his concepts of author and reader as friends, and of novelist as historian - derives from Fielding and already

implies that Fielding and James are broadly in the same camp. This is tenuous evidence, though. More helpful to find a passage which actually does commit the 'terrible crime', so that we can see what it looks like and then check whether Fielding himself ever does the same thing. Fortunately Booth supplies us with such a passage, only a few pages before his remarks on Fielding: it is from George Eliot's Adam Bede. Booth is happy to see it simply as a legitimate means used by Eliot to build up friendly relations between author and reader: it is 'wholly defensible when seen as contributing to our sense of travelling with a trustworthy companion, an author who is sincerely battling to do justice to his [sic] materials'. Its most important effect is 'to involve us on the side of the honest, perceptive, perhaps somewhat inept, but certainly uncompromising author in the almost overwhelming effort to avoid falsehood' (pp. 214-15).

But we have to ask here what, exactly, is meant by 'falsehood'. Eliot and Booth both seem to have quite specialised definitions of 'truth' and 'falsehood' in mind, since Eliot is prepared to admit that her story has no basis in historical reality:

I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind ...
I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath.⁴

The appeal to legal imagery as the ultimate assertion of honesty is again like Fielding, but in the phrase which I have emphasised Eliot gives the game away as to what it is that she is being honest about. She is honestly recording what she sees in the mirror, but

'The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused' - so her story is, by her own confession, a faint, confused, disturbed and defective version of reality. Fielding never admits anything of the sort.

Eliot's use of the 'mirror' image has further implications. It attempts to express, in precise language, the nature of what she sees as the novelist's task, and in doing so has recourse to metaphor. In this phrase Eliot recognises, rightly, and expresses, figuratively, the fact that all novels are metaphors: but what ought to follow from this recognition is an awareness that it is no part of a metaphor's job to explain its own nature. Its nature is taken for granted as a condition of our reading and understanding it. When Shakespeare says, in sonnet 116, that love

is the star to every wand'ring bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken

he does not go on to explain that love is, in fact, not a star at all, but an emotional quality which he describes like this because, being a poet, he tends to describe things as they have mirrored themselves in his mind: partly because he hasn't got the space, and partly because the reader is already well aware of it. Eliot has much more space to play with than Shakespeare. but her phrase is still an offence against economy. It is also, in James's terms, the 'betrayal of a sacred office' because it violates the novel's metaphoric status: it breaks the fragile pact between author and reader which is one of the foundations of the acts of writing and reading fiction, and which centres on a shared understanding which Philip Sidney baldly formulated in 1595: 'Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth'⁵.

I want to come back to this passage from Adam Bede, because it implies an interestingly direct relationship between author and reader. First, though, it remains to be seen whether Fielding's own authorial presence is of the same order. The obvious passage to look at is Tom Jones XVII. i, in which he toys with the reader's expectations regarding the resolution of the story. On a first reading he seems to be even more overt than Eliot about the inventive nature of his role as narrator:

But to bring our Favourites out of their present
Anguish and Distress, and to land them at last on the
Shore of Happiness, seems a much harder Task; a Task
indeed so hard that we do not undertake to execute
it. (p. 875)

notwithstanding any Affection which we may be supposed
to have for this Rogue, whom we have unfortunately made
our Heroe, we will lend him none of that supernatural
Assistance with which we are entrusted ...

(pp. 875-76)

In fact, though, he never actually claims absolute creative power of the sort that the vocal 'reader' in Adam Bede is claiming on Eliot's behalf. To engineer a happy ending is 'a Task ... so hard that we do not undertake to execute it': why hard, if the author has sole creative control? He will lend Tom 'none of that supernatural Assistance with which we are entrusted': entrusted by whom? Fielding expresses obedience to a higher authority, where Eliot puts the turns of her narrative down to her own subjective version of 'truth'.

One of Fielding's euphemisms for the higher authority to which he feels bound is 'probability'⁶. It 'may very probably be the Case'

he tells us in this chapter, that Jones will be hanged; it is 'more than probable' that Sophia will end up marrying Blifil or Lord Fellamar. Elsewhere, in a similar situation, he is even more explicit about bringing this criterion to bear on his narrative: 'we would rather have suffered half mankind to be hanged, than have saved one contrary to the strictest rules of writing and probability' (Jonathan Wild, IV. vi, p. 140). But the issue is not taken so seriously in Jonathan Wild. In II. xii, it becomes the occasion for a sustained joke at both Wild's and the reader's expense: Fielding announces that his hero has been 'miraculously' saved from drowning, digresses for two pages on how even the most amazing miracles can be explained in natural terms, and then finally tells us that Wild was able to reach the boat in two minutes, not with the aid of dolphins or sea-horses, but because he was 'a good swimmer' and the sea was 'a perfect calm' (pp. 79 - 80). Nevertheless the example from IV. vi already suggests a certain dualism in Fielding's allegiance to probability: to say that the saving of Heartfree by unnatural means would have been contrary to the strictest rules of writing and probability implies that the two are not entirely the same. The 'rules of writing' must include something more, or at least other, than 'probability' as Fielding would have expected his readers to understand the word. Tom Jones XVII. i specifies further. Again explaining his reluctance to deliver a character from the gallows by unnatural means, Fielding says, 'we will do no Violence to the Truth and Dignity of History for his Sake; for we had rather relate that he was hanged at Tyburn ... than forfeit our Integrity, or shock the Faith of our Reader'. The extent of Fielding's intrusiveness in Tom Jones can therefore be approached in terms of his notion of the relationship between history and probability,

because in this way we can see how fictional a status he is prepared to concede Tom Jones in statements made within the work itself.

Johnson defines 'probability' first, as we might expect, as 'likelihood', and then as 'appearance of truth', which is more suggestive. Novels on one level sustain an 'appearance of truth' and on another they are advertised falsehoods, and I think Fielding understood this very well: Tom Jones thrives on its comic possibilities. Take his half-serious analysis of the position of the 'Historian', as compared to the writer of fiction or romance, in VIII. i. The historian, Fielding claims, is in a difficult position, because 'he is obliged to record Matters as he finds them' (p. 400 - 'finding', of course, being the original meaning of 'inventing'), and is therefore committed to truth, but because truth is often much stranger than what people are prepared to accept as fiction - is often, in fact, improbable - the historian is more likely to arouse his reader's disbelief, 'that incredulous Hatred mentioned by Horace'. Furthermore 'Historians' are worse off than real historians (not that Fielding makes this distinction) because they 'deal in private Character, ... search into the most retired Recesses, and draw forth Examples of Virtue and Vice, from Holes and Corners of the World': 'we have no publick Notoriety, no concurrent Testimony, no Records to support and corroborate what we deliver'. This pretence opens up a fertile vein of irony. Fielding writes, 'what it is not possible for Man to perform, it is scarce possible for Man to believe he did perform'. This suggests, for one thing, a closer sympathy between character and reader than is usually supposed to exist in Fielding's novels. The task of each is shown to be the same - the performance of nearly impossible acts: in the character's case, to behave as interestingly

and as unusually as is consistent with possibility, and in the reader's, to achieve belief in this behaviour: but both, by being told to keep within the bounds of possibility, are shown to operate within the same world and according to the same laws. In addition, Fielding's statement insists, quite unambiguously, that readers of 'Histories' must believe in the truth of what they are told: there are no qualifiers on the word 'believe'. At the same time the whole raising of the question of belief admits the possibility that what is offered to readers as truth may in fact be falsehood, if the author is unscrupulous. This establishes a situation in which readers are required, for the purposes of their enjoyment of the book, to accept fiction as fact while bearing in mind that the direction it takes depends not (like fact) on the chance collision of circumstances, but on the conscious choices of an author in whose competence for the job we must trust. Fielding, playing at 'private historian', never says this, but he implies it as fully as he dares in order to generate humour and excitement. (Eliot, then, can ill afford to make fun of the posture, as she does in Middlemarch, chapter fifteen⁷.)

With these thoughts in mind, a phrase such as that used to describe Tom's 'Torments' as 'those in which we left him in the last chapter' comes to seem distinctly double-edged. It means either 'those in which we (author and reader, as spectators) last saw him', or 'those in which we (royally, the author) left him having first put him there'. Such double meanings keep the language of the chapter insistently alive, because they insistently engage the reader in active participation and discrimination. The jokes in this chapter revolve around the narrator's mock-helplessness in the face of the

self-destructive behaviour of his reprobate hero: the onus is continually on Tom to save himself, and his own responsibility for his predicament is emphasised: 'the Calamities in which he is at present involved, owing to his Imprudence', 'If he doth not therefore find some natural Means of fairly extricating himself'. The most that the narrator can do is to 'lend him ... Assistance'. In this way Fielding generates a suspense which can best be described as psychological: does Tom, on the evidence of his past behaviour, have the strength of character to redeem himself? (We know that this is the central question because the narrator has already told us, in VIII. i, that 'Conservation of Character' is necessary to any 'History' and has suggested ways in which it is tied up to the issue of probability.) The suspense is meant to contribute to enjoyment but does not constitute it, because we already know that the book is going to have a happy ending: Fielding makes this clear in the first two paragraphs of the chapter. Enjoyment in this case consists, rather, in the friction between suspense and the narrator's cheerful implications (not, importantly, promises) of a comic resolution. True, his intentions, and his controlling presence, are very obvious, but they are never stated, and once we recognise this we can enjoy their obviousness for the breezy authority which it gives to his jokes. Only in this way can Fielding put himself in a position to dismiss the tragic alternative with a flick of his finger: 'What then remains to complete the Tragedy but a Murder or two, and a few moral Sentences.'

Eliot, therefore, digresses in order to incorporate a statement of aesthetics. Fielding 'digresses' (although only from the ostensible plot) in order to engage in some cheerful teasing of the reader, to

give our expectations and responses a violently direct shaking-up, and happens to find statements of aesthetic and generic principle useful for this purpose. Eliot appropriates metaphoric vocabulary and puts it at the service of a critical discourse. Fielding takes critical vocabulary and makes it the basis of a provocative address to the reader which still respects the novel's fictive status. He has acknowledged, in VIII. i, that there do exist forms of writing (which he calls 'Romance' or 'Fiction') in which authors can do anything they please; and because the most that 'History' can offer is the probable, which is still only the appearance (in Johnson's definition) of truth, readers have no way of telling which kind of book it is they are reading; thus the only power Fielding claims for himself in XVII. i is the power to choose between genres; and the only promise he makes is that he will not, at this late stage, desert history for romance. He is not claiming omnipotence. Eliot's argument has similarities, but her doggedly straightforward approach invalidates it on the spot. Several critics seem to have noticed this. Joan Bennett compares her intrusions with Thackeray's in Vanity Fair:

the predominantly satiric intention of Vanity Fair is totally unlike her own predominantly compassionate intention. It is essential to her effect that the reader should fully participate in the lives of her characters and identify himself as closely as possible with them. Thackeray, on the contrary, in Vanity Fair invites and suggests detached observation and critical amusement at the expense of his worldlings. He makes use of the essay to establish himself as showman and to create a

relation between himself and the reader which serves his purpose.⁸

I'm sure this is basically right: the difference between satire and compassion is the central one. Nevertheless it is not (in Fielding at least) as stark a dichotomy as Bennett would have us believe: might we never want to bring 'detached observation' to bear on people with whom we also sympathise and identify? And what is the 'relation' between author and reader which Bennett conveniently brushes off with a definite article? In Fielding it is satiric, certainly, but it is also 'compassionate' or at least sympathetic in that it involves playing both on the reader's trust in the author, and on the emotional response which both author and reader are supposed to feel for the characters (Fielding is not just being facetious when he talks of 'our Favourites', 'poor Jones' and 'any Affection which we may be supposed to have for this Rogue').

So perhaps this relationship ought to be the next object of scrutiny. I hope that I have shown, as groundwork for the investigation, that Fielding's kind of 'intrusion' is of a specialised and, though insistent, really quite limited sort. James must have recognised this because, in the course of some brief remarks about Fielding, instead of accusing him of the 'betrayal of a sacred office', he praised him on the grounds that,

Fielding's fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style ... somehow really enlarge, make every one and every thing important.⁹

But the means by which this comes about is clearly complicated: even James took refuge in the word 'somehow'.

* * *

We might linger briefly on the passage from Adam Bede, as a way of getting started on the issue of author-reader relationships. In the first sentence of her digressive chapter, Eliot singles out one of her readers - in fact, to be more specific, one of her lady readers - and claims to be able to 'hear' her criticisms. W.J. Harvey, who by and large approves of this chapter, strongly objects to this particular technique. Our concept of the 'omniscient author convention' must be extended, he claims,

to cover the relationships existing, or assumed to exist, between writer and reader. Seen thus, a successful use of the convention depends upon the author's tact, upon delicacy of tone, and George Eliot is here being tactless; we feel insulted at being identified with such a crass reaction as George Eliot assumes us to have.¹⁰

I feel, however, that it is Harvey rather than Eliot who makes the assumptions: he assumes that 'we' are meant to identify with the crass reaction of the reader, but this would seem to be at odds with the fact that Eliot takes pains, not only to dissociate male readers from the reaction and even all but one of her female readers, but to particularise the reaction further by putting it into inverted commas and recorded speech. In fact, in the form in which she presents the reader's reaction, no effort is made to distinguish it from the sort of comment which any of her characters might make: the reader is as singularly delineated, and speaks as directly, as the characters in the novel. Harvey sees this and dislikes it: 'the reader is repelled by having his reactions determined for him; he feels himself, and not the characters, to be a puppet manipulated by

the author': but the preponderance of masculine pronouns points up the wrong-headedness of Harvey's argument. One specifically female reader is having her reactions determined for her, and the rest of us are being invited to sit back and watch the argument between this reader and the author precisely as if it was an argument between two characters. (And by 'the rest of us' I mean every reader, because the effect of Eliot's distancing presentation is to preclude, not encourage, identification with the reaction even among those 'lady' readers who have the option.)

Harvey appears to be objecting mainly to what he construes as authorial arrogance - Eliot's conception of each reader as a 'puppet' to be 'manipulated by the author'. For my part I must admit that this seems like a perfectly good description of the novel-reader's role, particularly in that it stresses that our own situation is closer to the characters' than to the author's: we are equally at his or her mercy. Obviously we tend to sympathise with the characters in books, not their authors, because we know what it is like to be manipulated, and it is easier to sympathise with our fellow-citizens than with a dictator. Many authors have recognised this state of affairs: for Dickens, say, it is a large and mortifying problem (see below, pp. 30-31). One possible way around it is for authors to try to become characters themselves. Earlier, talking about the argument between Eliot and her 'lady reader', I said that we watch it 'as if it was an argument between two characters': what I really meant was that that was how we would like to watch it, and I think that Harvey's instinctive revulsion for the technique (because it certainly doesn't come off here) is best explained by observing, not that Eliot pitches her portrayal of her reader at too

low a level, but that she is afraid to descend to that level herself. She is not afraid to become a character in her own novel - a few pages later she is chatting comfortably to old Adam Bede himself about clerical matters - but she shies away from the implication that this puts her on any sort of par with her readers, that she too is now one of those for whom we are supposed to feel familiar sympathy. Authors who intrude, in order that their intrusions do not appear 'intrusive' in a hostile sense, have to ensure that they belong in the worlds into which they introduce themselves: the inconsistency here arises because within a few pages Eliot has gone from being a lofty (because mock-humble) and creative (because avowedly transforming) author who describes 'men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind', to being a figure who is now of the same order as her created central character, and who can have a cosy fireside conversation with him in his dotage (mirroring his words in her mind all this time, presumably).

One might say, simply, that the saving grace which Eliot lacks is humour. By this I mean that she lacks the kind of buoyant confidence in the invincibility of her own position as author which might enable her to address her readers without condescension or fear of indignity. Probably this is because, unlike Fielding, she is not male and not an aristocrat. Fielding may be high-handed with his readers (see VI. i), he may know that he is likely to have the edge over them when it comes to erudition, but his sense of superiority never seems to feed off the fact that he is writing and they are merely reading his book. Instead he has the nerve to put author, character and reader on an equal footing, making for a relationship which is playful because we are aware, simultaneously, of the many senses in which that footing is in fact far from equal.

I might have compared this playfulness with examples from other comic writers, especially Sterne and Thackeray, but I thought it would be more interesting to show how it resembles things which we find in less obviously similar writers. From Sterne, in fact, we can learn very little about how conventions operate, because he hardly ever allows them to. His continual asides to an unnamed 'Madam' in Tristram Shandy do bear a sidelong resemblance to Eliot's address to 'one of my lady readers':

— But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all December, - January, and February? - Why, Madam, — he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica.

— How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, That my mother was not a papist. — Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to repeat it over again, That I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing. - Then, Sir, I must have miss'd a page. - No, Madam, - you have not miss'd a word. - Then I was asleep, Sir. - My pride, Madam, cannot allow you that refuge.¹¹

Where Eliot was solemn, however, Sterne in these examples advertises and communicates the pleasure he takes in breaking a convention which he knows is only there so that it can be broken in interesting ways. This is not, finally, all that illuminating, for it would be hardly new to point out that the narrator in Tristram Shandy is also a character, or even that this might be the case in other novels: there is such a thing as first-person narration, after all. What I'm

suggesting is that Fielding has (already) found a way of sidestepping the distinction between first- and third-person narration. Before considering the specific implications of this for Tom Jones, we could pause to examine the new areas of similarity it implies between the methods of Fielding and Dickens.

(ii) Fielding and Dickens

Having hinted at a specialised (although obvious) sense in which Fielding is a character in his own novels, we should be wary of developing this into the attractive proposition that the same is true for all authors. It is true, for instance, of Thackeray in Vanity Fair, but even there critics have been tempted to overstate the fact. When Dorothy Van Ghent complained that Vanity Fair encompassed two clumsily contradictory worlds, 'the order of imaginative reality, where Becky lives, and the order of historical reality, where William Makepeace Thackeray lives'¹², Ioan Williams rightly countered that,

the obvious and easy answer is that the narrator is as much a part of the created world as Becky Sharp or Rawdon Crawley. If he is not Thackeray himself, who is he but a character? Thackeray took care, towards the end of the novel, to put the narrator into the world which he was describing by making him give an account of his original meeting with the people whose story he has been telling.¹³

However, it is a bit much to add, as he does, that the narrator

'after all, is as finely realised as Becky Sharp'. We mustn't get carried away here, because by reducing narrators so simply to the status of characters we are suggesting that only those narrators who state their existence and enter explicitly into some kind of dramatised rapport with the characters can in any way be considered present within their own novels or, therefore, functional within these novels as anything other than instruments of reportage. I would like to argue that what is true of Fielding is also true of many less obviously intrusive authors, but not that they all need to characterise and particularise themselves as blatantly as he (or Thackeray) does. The creation and delineation of the 'narrator' in Tom Jones is merely Fielding's literal-minded version of a process which takes place when any author seeks to communicate with readers through the intervening medium of created, fictional personalities.

Dickens is a good example of a less intrusive 'intrusive' narrator. His intrusions are like those of a chorus, designed to put the particular events of the narrative into a wider context. The technique has its English origins in Fielding, who is sometimes quite open about it ('I ask Pardon for this short Appearance, by Way of Chorus on the Stage', Tom Jones, III. vii, p. 141), but for whom, more often, it is a question of stylistic habit in which relation of narrative facts merges within the same sentence into generalised statement:

The Bill being made and discharged, Jones set forward with Partridge carrying his Knapsack; nor did the Landlady condescend to wish him a good Journey; for this was, it seems, an Inn frequented by People of

Fashion; and I know not whence it is, but all those who get their Livelihood by People of Fashion, contract as much Insolence to the rest of Mankind, as if they really belonged to that Rank themselves.

(Tom Jones, VIII. vii, p. 430)

Dickens's generalisations are rarely so comfortable. They tend to be characterised by bursts of rhetoric and by stylistic uneasiness, and to be generated only by events of signalled importance, such as death. Little Nell's death in The Old Curiosity Shop gives rise to this outburst:

Oh! it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven.¹⁴

In The Old Curiosity Shop there are, as I shall argue, some interesting combinations of intrusiveness and reticence: however, this is not one of them. Paul Dombey's death scene in Dombey and Son is more sophisticated:

The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and

nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion - Death!

Oh thank GOD, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!¹⁵

The reflection is slightly more achieved this time because the imagery in which it is couched has been anticipated earlier in the novel: spectators of Paul's declining health have repeatedly described him as looking 'old-fashioned'. Even so there is no ostensible rationale behind the application of this phrase to the fact of death, and the narrator's efforts in this direction - his reference to fig leaves as 'our first garments' - are not felicitous. Dickens's habitual ironies seem to dissolve in intrusive contexts like this into a mannered obliqueness which adds further levels of obscurity to an already tortuous rhetoric ('regards not quite estranged' is a fair example). The death of Richard at the end of Bleak House marks an advance, though:

A smile irradiated his face as she bent to kiss him. He slowly laid his face down upon her bosom, drew his arms closer round her neck, and with one parting sob began the world. Not this world, oh, not this! The world that sets this right.¹⁶

Again we find Dickens relying heavily on a phrase, 'beginning the

world', which bears a decidedly indirect relation to the event described. But 'The world that sets this right' is concise, in that it actually functions as irony, obliging the reader to play some part in creating its meaning, a process which, if we were not to resist but to enter into the spirit of the passage as Dickens obviously expected his readers to do, would be far more tellingly didactic than the visually literal descriptions of cherubs and seraphims which we get in the other two novels. The most important feature of this extract, though, is the fact that the death is being narrated by Esther. The catch at heart repetition of 'Not this world, oh, not this!' may not be the use of language we accept readily from an intrusive narrator in the Fielding mould, but it is exactly what we expect from a Dickensian heroine. Since I've stated that my interest lies in forms of narrative which combine first- and third-person perspectives, I might be expected to consider the bi-focal method of Bleak House in some detail; but I believe it is too schematic, too consistent and fully-worked for my purpose. Bold formal decisions throw less light on authorial procedure than nervous tics, insistent habits of thought and expression. Bleak House would not, I suspect, help me to home in on that specific fact about narrators' participation in their own novels which Fielding has grasped and so fruitfully enlarged upon in Tom Jones.

The Old Curiosity Shop, however, might, for two reasons. One, because of its narrator's peculiar appearance, and disappearance, as a 'character', near the beginning of the novel; and two, because the central character in this novel, the one through whom and in whose voice Dickens provides much of his generalised commentary, is palpably unable to bear the weight of so much reflection, with the result that the artifice of the convention is uncommonly visible to

the reader: it is never far from the surface of the text and therefore belongs, in this instance, to the experience of reading, not just of criticising. Take, for example, Nell's reflections shortly after witnessing the death of the schoolmaster's favourite pupil:

But the sad scene she had witnessed, was not without its lesson of content and gratitude; of content with the lot which left her health and freedom; and gratitude that she was spared to the one relation and friend she loved, and to live and move in a beautiful world, when so many young creatures - as young and full of hope as she - were stricken down and gathered to their graves. How many of the mounds in that old churchyard where she had lately strayed, grew green above the graves of children! And though she thought as a child herself, and did not perhaps sufficiently consider to what a bright and happy existence those who die young are borne, and how in death they lose the pain of seeing others die around them, bearing to the tomb some strong affection of their hearts (which makes the old die many times in one long life), still she thought wisely enough, to draw a plain and easy moral from what she had seen that night, and to store it, deep in her mind.

(Chapter xxvi, p. 194)

The early use of the word 'lesson' immediately sets this passage off from narrative proper: Dickens at this stage is clearly not interested in smoothing over the crack between narrative and polemic, but in an overt didacticism. Nervousness only creeps into

the passage when he checks himself by saying, 'And though she thought as a child herself': this seems to be a sudden wavering of confidence as to how much of his own morality he can safely pass off as being Nell's. The alert reader is therefore aware not only of the existence of a narrator who has personal views to air, but also that this narrator is attempting to deceive us by passing them off as the views of his central character. This is a fact about fiction which we normally reserve for that critical part of our minds which, even as we read, is not exactly dormant but nevertheless does not itself succumb to the author's invitations to trust; that part which knows that everything is 'only a story', but does not prevent the rest of the mind from reading on. The shabbiness of Dickens's pretences in The Old Curiosity Shop, I would argue, encourages readers to become critics.

This is even more obvious, perhaps, when he attempts to implant in Nell's mind his own not moral but humorous reflections:

"Have you had a bad night, ma'am?" asked Nell.

"I seldom have anything else, child," replied Mrs. Jarley, with the air of a martyr. "I sometimes wonder how I bear it."

Remembering the snores which had proceeded from that cleft in the caravan in which the proprietress of the waxworks passed the night, Nell rather thought she must have been dreaming of lying awake.

(Chapter xxviii, p. 210)

The terms and the tone of this observation are both Dickens's, and they are offered to the reader with no regard for the fact that they are horribly at odds with Nell's supposed naivete.

This matters because the extent to which Nell's thought processes are being deliberately dressed up rather than simply recorded remains ambiguous. Dickens is neither making his presence clear, nor bothering to disguise it; this keeps the reader guessing and, therefore, thinking about the issue of authorial presence even harder than we do in Fielding, where it can be taken for granted. Hence The Old Curiosity Shop presents an unusual and interesting case.

Who, then, is the narrator of this novel? The question turns out to be complex, because Dickens never originally intended the book to be as long as it is, and as soon as he realised that the story could be extended to the length of a novel, he had to modify his narrative stance importantly. The Old Curiosity Shop was originally to be the title of that episode which takes up only the first chapter of the existing novel¹⁷: this episode appeared in a single number of Master Humphrey's Clock and is introduced as a personal adventure of Master Humphrey himself:

Although I am an old man, night is generally my time for walking. In the summer I often leave home early in the morning, and roam about the fields and lanes all day, or even escape for days or weeks together; but, saving in the country, I seldom go out until after dark, though, Heaven be thanked, I love its light and feel the cheerfulness it sheds upon the earth as much as any creature living. ...

But my present purpose is not to expatiate upon my walks. The story I am about to relate, arose out of one of these rambles; and thus I have been led to

Speak of them by way of preface.

One night, I had roamed into the city, and was walking slowly on in my usual way ...

(Chapter i, pp. 1-2)

By the end of Chapter iii, however, Dickens has in mind a series of adventures at which it would be impractical for Master Humphrey to be always in attendance, tagging along in order to be able to report back to readers. Thus he does away with him in a short, functional paragraph:

And now, that I have carried this history so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, I shall for the convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves.

(Chapter iii, p. 28)

There is a further complication. Nell's great uncle, referred to throughout the book as 'The Single Gentleman', is introduced in the list of characters as 'brother to Little Nell's grandfather; Master Humphrey, the narrator of the story'. This refers to a concluding passage which Dickens wrote for Master Humphrey's Clock but did not include in any published editions of the novel. In it, Master Humphrey reveals that the opening adventure was, in fact, 'fictitious'; that his part in the story did not begin with his meeting Nell in the street at all; and that he is, truth to tell, none other than 'The Single Gentleman' himself:

"Yes," I pursued, "I can look back upon my part in

it with a calm, half-smiling pity for myself as for some other man. But I am he indeed; and now the chief sorrows of my life are yours." 18

I don't want to dwell on the brazenly ramshackle nature of Dickens's technical devices in this instance. I am intrigued, rather, by the fact that these radical shifts of narrative perspective do not, in effect, matter, and by what this fact implies. When I say that they don't matter, I mean that we read Dickens's explanatory paragraph at the end of Chapter iii, and then, perhaps having experienced a small feeling of critical dissatisfaction fairly characteristic of the process of reading this novel, we go on reading as though nothing has happened. It makes no difference to the essential readability of the book whether it is being narrated by a character or by an 'impersonal' author; Master Humphrey is abandoned for the purely technical reason that he can't be expected to go traipsing around England with Nell and her grandfather, jotting down their sayings in a notebook. This suggests that, even in an ostensibly impersonal narrative like this, the distinction between first- and third-person narration is by no means absolute.

One of the consequences of this situation is described by Taylor Stoehr in his book Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance¹⁹. He gives examples (pp. 46-47) of Dickens's habit of passing from first- to third-person narration as a means of helping 'to intensify the emotion'. It happens in A Tale of Two Cities, 3, xiii, in Our Mutual Friend, I, xiv, 3, iii and 3, viii, and, of course, on a much larger scale, throughout Bleak House. Stoehr takes it to be characteristic of 'the peculiar combination of immediacy and detachment which informs Dickens' typical narrative stance' (p. 57).

This is true as far as it goes: it tells us something about the effect which Dickens achieves, but nothing about the unspoken conventions which allow him to mess about with the reader's point of view in this way. Sometimes he uses the device quite extensively, as when, in narrating the death of Gaffer Hexam in Our Mutual Friend, he slides from third-person narration into a series of rhetorical questions which have their origin in the words of his daughter ('Father, was that you calling me? Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before! Words never to be answered, those, upon the earth-side of the grave') but which are in fact supposed to be spoken by the winds which blow about his corpse:

A lull, and the wind is secret and prying with him;
lifts and lets fall a rag; hides palpitating under
another rag; runs nimbly through his hair and beard.
Then, in a rush, it cruelly taunts him. Father, was
that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the
dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a
heap? Was it you, thus baptized unto Death, with
these flying impurities now flung upon your face?
Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy
ground as you lie here, is your own shape. Did you
never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak,
Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners
left you! ²⁰

Occasionally the technique is less signalled, more oblique, as in this transition from third- to first-person two pages later:

"I wish it had not been a part of his singular . . .

and entertaining combination to give me the slip under these dreary circumstances at this time of the morning," said Lightwood. "Can we get anything hot to drink?"

We could, and we did. In a public-house kitchen with a large fire. We got hot brandy and water, and it revived us wonderfully.

But this example from Book 3 of Our Mutual Friend is even more telling, because even less noticeable: Pleasant Riderhood is anxiously watching her father return to consciousness after he has narrowly escaped death by drowning:

There is intelligence in his eyes. He wants to ask a question. He wonders where he is. Tell him.

(3, iii, p. 446)

The imperative 'Tell him' functions in two ways: either it is an instruction which Pleasant gives to herself, or it is spoken in the narrator's own voice, in which case he is telling her what to do next. Either way it constitutes a very sudden and fleeting change of narrative perspective, whether by switching to the mode of interior monologue or abandoning the pretence of narrative impersonality.

As a command barked by the narrator to one of his characters it tallies with Stoehr's theory that Dickens's characters were 'real' to him, in that he used to visualise them with a practically hallucinatory intensity. For this he provides reasonably convincing evidence from Dickens's memoranda books (pp. 43-44, 50 of The Dreamer's Stance). On top of that, he claims, there is evidence that Dickens sometimes even thought of himself as becoming his characters, and it is the operation of these two processes which

gives rise to 'the peculiar combination of immediacy and detachment' mentioned earlier. But a more recent critic has gone much further than this in pursuing the theoretical implications of Dickens's strangely concrete relationship with his own characters, and in documenting its manifestations in the sorts of odd stylistic habit of which I've just given examples. The book in question is Mark Lambert's Dickens and the Suspended Quotation²¹, and one of the most useful things it does is to shift the focus of attention away from any notion of Dickens as unique hallucinating genius, and to argue instead that he demonstrates in exaggerated form the universality of certain paradoxes inherent in the act of adopting any kind of narrative position.

What Lambert means by a 'suspended quotation' is the local intrusion which an author makes whenever s/he interrupts a character's speech with an 'inquit':

"I don't know, sir," Mark rejoined, much more sadly than his custom was, though from a very different cause than Martin supposed, "what I can say to this, in the way of thanking you." ²²

He sees these as being essentially acts of aggression: Dickens knows the special attractiveness which conversation has over description for his readers (Lambert, pp. 74-86), and suspects therefore that his readers' affection is largely for the characters rather than for himself (this relates to what I was saying on p. 15); consequently the jealousy which he feels towards his own characters results in a reluctance ever to leave reader and character alone together, in case they get on too well and forget that they owe their friendship in the first place

to the author:

even a sympathetic character provokes jealousy when he holds the microphone for a while, and Sam Weller's memorable story of the sausage factory [Pickwick Papers, chapter xxxi] will not quite be allowed to reach its end without the rather undistinguished insertion, "said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr. Pickwick's horror-stricken countenance." When a just God is not needed, we find the anxious cicerone: "Yes, Sam's story is funny, but look, signore, I make it even funnier. Aren't you glad I'm here?" (p. 110)

Lambert compares readers to tourists, and Dickens to a tour guide who wants to be found indispensable. Dickens differs from Fielding, he suggests, in that his love of his readers is 'manifested as aggression against rivals rather than snappishness toward the courted' (p. 117). Fielding's open challenges directed at the reader's judgment and powers of response (as in Tom Jones, XI. ix, p. 614) establish 'a relationship between novelist and reader that would simply be impossible, unthinkable in Dickens' (p. 180), because 'This powerful and charming person [the author] seems to need us, to need us far too much to risk offending, to need us far too much even to think of testing' (p. 117). What Fielding and Dickens do have in common is the basic situation they find themselves in, which Lambert calls an 'erotic triangle ... the peculiarly intense and intensely peculiar triangle of characters/readers/author'.

Before going back to Tom Jones, I'd like to show what effect

the existence of this triangle has on the language of a halfway-house novel like The Old Curiosity Shop. This in itself will start to send us back in Fielding's direction, because one of the most obvious consequences is the appearance of a vocabulary which irresistibly recalls Tom Jones, and in particular a certain sort of metaphor which is used to describe the narrative process. In a famous introductory chapter (XVIII. i), Fielding compares himself and his readers to travellers making a long journey together in a stagecoach. Dickens uses the same figure more sporadically, but since his novel is more picaresque than Tom Jones he is also able to tie it in closely with his description of the journey being made by Nell and her grandfather. Since many of the characters spend much of the book travelling, we are constantly asked to imagine ourselves in the narrator's company hotfooting it after them:

Kit - for it happens at this juncture, not only that we have breathing time to follow his fortunes, but that the necessities of these adventures so adapt themselves to our ease and inclination as to call upon us imperatively to pursue the track we most desire to take ... (Chapter xxxviii, p. 281)

Kit's mother and the single gentleman - upon whose track it is expedient to follow with hurried steps, lest this history should be chargeable with inconstancy, and the offence of leaving its characters in situations of uncertainty and doubt ...

(Chapter xlvii, p. 349)

How Mr. Chuckster, entranced by this monstrous fact, stood for some time rooted to the earth, protesting within himself that Kit was the prince of felonious characters, and very Emperor or Great Mogul of Snobs, and how he clearly traced this revolting circumstance back to that old villainy of the shilling, are matters foreign to our purpose; which is to track the rolling wheels, and bear the travellers company on their cold, bleak journey. (Chapter lxix, p. 522)

The magic reel, which, rolling on before, has led the chronicler thus far, now slackens in its pace, and stops. It lies before the goal; the pursuit is at an end. (Chapter The Last, p. 547)

Occasionally the collision between references to the reader's figurative (although in fact 'real') and the characters' real (although in fact fictitious) journeying occurs with a suddenness which makes for quite exciting effects:

To what more conversation this might have led, we need not stop to inquire; for the wheels of the carriage were heard at that moment ...

(Chapter lxix, p. 520)

The suggestion that we would have to 'stop' to inquire further reminds us, gently, of the journey metaphor and the sense of progressively urgent motion in which we are caught; this is then taken up in the mention of carriage wheels, and the reader's and the characters' experience, the processes of reading and of being

read about, seem momentarily very similar. This depends on a denial of the ideas of author as shadowy creator, and readership as amorphous mass: author and reader are singular and personalised, and enjoy a direct rapport. For example, Dickens specifies in Chapter xli that to go into details about a particular incident 'would take more time and room than you and I can spare' (p. 309, my emphasis) where one might have expected the more equivocal 'we'. A more extreme example can be found in his method of introducing Chapter xxxiii:

As the course of this tale requires that we should become acquainted, somewhere hereabouts, with a few particulars connected with the domestic economy of Mr. Sampson Brass, and as a more convenient place than the present is not likely to occur for that purpose, the historian takes the friendly reader by the hand, and springing with him into the air, and cleaving the same at a greater rate than ever Don Cleophas Leandro Perez Zambullo and his familiar travelled through that pleasant region in company, alights with him upon the pavement of Bevis Marks.

The intrepid aeronauts alight before a small dark house, once the residence of Mr. Sampson Brass.

(p. 244)

Like Fielding, and like any narrator who imagines himself as a vivid physical presence, Dickens has to forfeit any claim to omniscience: he can only pretend to know as much about his characters as anybody who ever met them could hope to know. I mentioned earlier that he dropped the Master Humphrey narrator-figure because of the impracticality involved: the need to show how

Master Humphrey could possibly have found out all these things about the characters. Interestingly, though, in the last chapter, he does make a half-hearted attempt to explain just that: for we are told that 'The Single Gentleman' (whom Dickens had intended to reveal, remember, as Master Humphrey himself) spends his last days following his late brother's footsteps and attempting to piece together the missing parts of the story:

For a long, long time, it was his chief delight to travel in the steps of the old man and the child (so far as he could trace them from her last narrative), to halt where they had halted, sympathise where they had suffered, and rejoice where they had been made glad. Those who had been kind to them, did not escape his search. The sisters at the school - they who were her friends, because themselves so friendless - Mrs. Jarley of the waxwork, Codlin, Short - he found them all ...

(p. 553)

Half-hearted as this pose is, it is borne out by instances earlier in the book where the narrator is at pains to claim that his story is founded upon authority, and is not simply being made up: these tend to be more convincing because, rather than straining to force a sense of conclusion or last-minute coherence, they take the form of casual asides and therefore have the tone of Dickens at his least formally manipulative. (The ploy is, of course, taken straight from Tom Jones.) Take the following parenthesis, dropped in to allay the doubts of a reader who might be starting to suspect that the narrator is telling us more than he could possibly know:

Well, this was her sister, her little sister, much

younger than Nell, whom she had not seen (so the story went afterwards) for five years ...

(Chapter xxxii, p. 241)

And, to bolster the effect, Dickens closes this paragraph with a few words seemingly designed to remind us that even stories which do not have an obvious source are nevertheless not necessarily invented, but may have their origin in the narrator's observation and remembrance of particular details:

Their plain and simple dress, the distance which the child had come alone, their agitation and delight, and the tears they shed, would have told their history by themselves.

Much of the book's arch, imitation-Fielding ironical humour depends on this convention. Dickens uses it to imply that Mrs. Jarley drinks spirits with her tea:

having her eyes lifted to the sky in her enjoyment of the full flavour of the tea, not unmingled possibly with just the slightest dash or gleam of something out of the suspicious bottle - but this is mere speculation and not distinct matter of history - it happened that being thus agreeably engaged ...

(Chapter xxvi, p. 196)

This is actually quite an elaborate joke, since it suggests that things which cannot be verified as matters of fact (whether there is any alcohol in the tea) might actually contribute to a fuller sense of the truth than those which can (Mrs. Jarley's assurance

that what she is drinking is only tea); in this way it strongly conveys the idea that (of course, as we know all along) the only real and truthful 'authority' in this book is the narrator's creativity, which we are always in fact prepared to trust more than his various fictional authorities, such as the things which he makes his characters say. Nevertheless, the joke conveys this idea by stating exactly the opposite, and continues to do so when it reappears a few pages later:

For herself, she said, she was troubled with a
lowness ... which required a constant stimulant;
though whether the aforesaid stimulant was derived
from the suspicious bottle of which mention has been
already made or from other sources, she did not say.

(p. 201)

Again, Mrs. Jarley does not say, consequently there is no 'historical' evidence for the narrator's suspicions, consequently he leaves it at that; but this mock deference towards his supposed source material is clearly a way of hinting that he doesn't need to rely on such information to arrive at the truth. As jokes these are nothing special but they do inspire us with a keen sense and acceptance of the nature of fiction by sustaining an ironic pretence of historical veracity. This pretence crumbles sometimes and towards the end of the novel it is practically abandoned, which may explain why many readers find Nell's death scene so uncomfortable. The pages which describe her death are, needless to say, one of the most notorious stumbling blocks in Dickens (as Oscar Wilde said, 'One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell

without laughing'²³) but I think we can explain their failure in terms other than those of excessive sentimentality: there is also a radical narrative inconsistency. When, for instance, Dickens passes from straightforward narration ('Some - and they were not a few - knelt down') to quasi-intuitive psychological generalisation ('All were sincere and truthful in their sorrow' - Chapter lxxii, p. 543) he betrays the standpoint of that figure whom the reader is supposed to have come to trust as 'the narrator' throughout the book. How can he know this, if he cannot even be sure what Mrs. Jarley drinks from her tea cup? The sentiment is only excessive because it swamps the narrator's self-consciousness, hence his self-control. This means, as so often in this book, that a passage which remains desperately unsatisfactory to read becomes a handy object for critical scrutiny, because its failure consists of gaps which allow us to see far more of the narrative mechanism than we are ever allowed to see in some of Dickens's other, more ~~accomplished~~ accomplished novels.

(iii) 'Tom Jones' and 'Amelia'

In the introduction to his book The Created Self, John Preston expressed the hope that his approach 'might prompt other more radical enquiries into the nature of the reader's role in fiction'²⁴. Lambert's book is one such enquiry, and I hope that, in its theoretical aspects, this project too, by choosing to focus on one central text, will take the same issue further and show some of the unexpected sorts of narrative and psychological interest which can be generated by exploiting the narrator-reader relationship within

a particular work. Preston believes, like D.W. Harding before him²⁵, that readers of novels partake of 'an ideal conversation': 'the reader is in a pseudo-situation, but a real relationship. He really does make contact with another mind, he does enter into a dialogue' (pp. 5-6). Preston is, however, usefully cagey about the nature of this dialogue:

Of course it looks as if there cannot be literally a discussion. After all ... the writer cannot even predict his reader, still less converse with him. Similarly the reader can only be creative to the extent that the text will allow. Yet it does seem to me that the discourse is a real and not a fictional one. It is a strange one, certainly, in which the writer reaches out to an unseen and unforeseeable reader, and the reader wishes to respond to an absent writer who has already said his last word.

The novelists whom Preston discusses (Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne) all, he claims, 'think of the novel as a process, not a product, and as a situation for the reader, not a received text.'

The idea of the writer reaching out to 'an unseen and unforeseeable reader' recalls George Eliot's address to 'one of my lady readers' and W.J. Harvey's objection that 'the reader is ... having his [sic] reactions determined for him'. His implication is that authors are on shaky ground when they try to predict their readers' responses, but Eliot is only making literal and explicit a presumed relationship which exists between most authors and readers: authors are, consequently, engaged in a constant process

of predicting their readers' responses from the moment they take up their pens. This relationship is an intrinsic part of the pleasure to be derived from reading novels, but authors such as Eliot and Fielding who want to dwell and capitalise upon it do so at the risk of treading on their readers' toes. In this section I want to explain how Fielding managed, by and large, to minimise this problem in Tom Jones, in terms of his awareness of the varieties of fictional interest: in particular, his awareness of the importance of 'action'; his belief that novelistic action is something to be performed not only by characters, but by author and reader; and his ability to trigger off action in the receptive reader by the provocation of linguistic detail (this, for Fielding, seems to be the only thing that non-narrative language is for in a novel). I shall also try to argue that in Amelia these processes go slightly askew: this explains why its characters are more complex, but it also accounts for that novel's failure in other areas.

A good example of what I mean by Fielding's awareness of the importance of action occurs at the end of Tom Jones XI. ix. He is here already making use of the journey image so beloved of Dickens in The Old Curiosity Shop to strengthen the reader's sense of not just observing but accompanying the characters in their experience:

We will therefore take our Leave of these good People, and attend his Lordship and his fair Companions, who made such good Expedition, that they performed a Journey of ninety Miles in two Days, and on the second Evening arrived in London, without having encountered any one Adventure on the Road worthy the Dignity of this History to relate. Our Pen, therefore, shall imitate the

Expedition which it describes, and our History shall keep Pace with the Travellers who are its Subject. Good Writers will indeed do well to imitate the ingenious Traveller in this Instance, who always proportions his Stay at any Place, to the Beauties, Elegancies, and Curiosities, which it affords.

(p. 612)

Now the passing of two days in which nothing happens 'worthy the Dignity of this History to relate' presents a very specific problem to Fielding. The headings to the individual books of Tom Jones ('Containing Two Days', 'In which the History goes forward about Twelve Hours', 'Containing the same individual Time with the former', etc.) indicate that he is acutely conscious of the space of time which each part of the action is meant to occupy. Also he seems to be interested in making the passage of novelistic time correspond, as schematically and as tangibly as possible, with the time it takes for the novel to be read. For instance, although there is clearly no way that the twelve year gap between Books II and III can be made to feel like twelve years, Fielding still asserts, jocularly but unambiguously, that the time lapse is as real for his readers as for his characters:

As we are sensible that much the greatest Part of our Readers are very eminently possessed of this Quality [Sagacity], we have left them a Space of twelve Years to exert it in; ... (III. i, p. 118)

This is part of an elaborate apology for having missed out such a long period of time, similar to the one which he produces at equal

length in II. i, in the course of which he assures us that his history will not be like 'a News-Paper, which consists of just the same Number of Words, whether there be any News in it or not'.

The apology sounds superfluous - why should we expect Tom Jones to resemble a newspaper, rather than those works which are in this respect its more obvious forerunners (Homer, Virgil, Defoe, Swift), and in which there is ample precedent for glossing over periods in the hero's life, particularly his childhood? Instead of seriously answering a potential criticism, then, Fielding, who cannot really 'leave' his readers 'a Space of twelve Years', leaves them three or four digressive pages as an emblem of that gap; and fills these pages with an 'action' (the narrator's teasing and instruction of the reader) which precisely because it is of a different order from that which takes place between characters, can defy the narrative time-scale.

The same thing happens in XI. ix: Fielding promises that his pen 'shall imitate the Expedition which it describes', but in fact this is not what it does at all. Instead he digresses for three paragraphs on the different kinds of traveller - travellers for pleasure, and travellers for business ('On they jogg, with equal Pace, through the verdant Meadows, or over the barren Heath, their Horses measuring four Miles and a half per Hour with the utmost Exactness; the Eyes of the Beast and of his Master being alike directed forwards, and employed in contemplating the same Objects in the same manner'). At this point, at the end of the chapter, the word 'Sagacity' crops up again, just as it did at the end of III. i. This is an interesting coincidence. Fielding says that it is up to the reader to apply his remarks to 'the Boeotian Writers, and to

those Authors who are their Opposites', and adds,

thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine
that we intended, when we began this great Work,
to leave thy Sagacity nothing to do, or that
without sometimes exercising this Talent, thou
wilt be able to travel through our Pages with
any Pleasure or Profit to thyself. (p. 614)

More significant than the word 'Sagacity' itself is the fact that Fielding chooses to end both these passages, both concerned with not simply standing in for but in a curious way enacting the passage of an uneventful period of time, with reiterations of the message that the reader is required to participate creatively in this kind of action: the sort which must take precedence when purely narrative interest is at its lowest.

Of course, reiterating the message is not enough: the reader must not simply be told, but cajoled and stimulated into action. This is a crucial factor in considering the success of Tom Jones, because it concerns the novel's attitude to language - how hard Fielding makes his words work. There isn't time here for a comprehensive survey of his methods, only some general remarks and isolated examples. The word 'Sagacity' leads us straight onto a well-trodden path: the reader's obligation to judge, the reader as juror, Fielding as magistrate, the pseudo-legal situation which has been recognised by all the best critics of the book. Preston:

if Fielding is watchful of his readers, interested in the way they take his story, this is because their judgment is in the long run part of that story.²⁶

Empson:

the unusual thing about Fielding as a novelist is that he is always ready to consider what he would do if one of his characters came before him when he was on the bench ... As to the reader of a novel, Fielding cannot be bothered with him unless he too is fit to sit on a magistrate's bench, prepared, in literature as in life, to handle and judge any situation.²⁷

The point is worth remembering, as well as being in danger of over-emphasis by now: we mustn't let the word 'judgment' persuade us that Fielding's method is simply to present us with a character or an incident, lay out the pros and cons of their various interpretations, and then push us firmly in the direction of a verdict. The act of judgment as encouraged in the reader of Tom Jones is more slippery than that. Its commonest starting point is a pose of uncertainty on the narrator's part. In this example (where the concept of sagacity reappears yet again), Blifil, accompanied by Thwackum, has just noticed Tom disappearing into the grove with Molly Seagrim. He tells Thwackum, but refrains from mentioning Tom's name,

and why he did so must be left to the Judgment of the sagacious Reader: For we never chuse to assign Motives to the Actions of Men, when there is any possibility of our being mistaken. (V. x, p. 258)

Blifil's policy of keeping valuable information to himself until the most opportune moment for disclosure is later fully explained

(VI. x, pp. 308-09). The reasons turn out to be surprisingly complex and lengthy, so it seems unlikely that Fielding here expects us to know exactly what he is implying: the irony functions instead as a gesture towards the general shadiness of Blifil's behaviour. This is quite typical, because he wants us to develop attitudes, not opinions: he delineates the space within which our judgments are to be located, but after that our freedom of movement is quite considerable. I'm going to develop this point in Chapter Four, and for now I'd like to steer back to the issue of the novel's 'attitude to language', which is very centrally exposed by this example. The tension which I explored earlier (see above, pp. 10-11), between the reader's awareness that Fielding is really a creator (and therefore omniscient), and our willingness to play along with his pose as 'Historian' (whose knowledge is necessarily limited), is precisely what brings the language to life here: suddenly even innocuous words like 'chuse' and 'possibility' seem double-edged (at least).

But, it might be countered, surely this tension is present in any novel, and readers are always both aware that the whole thing is being made up, and prepared to pretend that the characters are, for the duration of the story, real. Of course this is true: all that's different about Tom Jones is the way it capitalises on this arrangement for two particular purposes - to give the reader something to do, and to make the linguistic fabric of the book perpetually interesting. I've discussed both of these very briefly, but in order to find out more about how it's done, we could now look at the methods not of a novel which ignores such possibilities altogether, but of one in which Fielding tries a similar tactic but gets it wrong: Amelia.

One useful consequence of equating narrator with magistrate and reader with juryman is that it establishes who's boss. As we have seen, the relationship between narrator and reader in Tom Jones, while friendly, is essentially one of master and servant: the narrator himself may be subject to the higher authority of probability, but he makes sure that we as readers know our place (VI. i). The mistake George Eliot made in the Adam Bede passage was to appear at the reader's beck and call. If we start to feel that we have the power to change the course of the story, the narrator's personal version of it is no longer so interesting. If we look at Amelia carefully we find, perhaps to our surprise, that the narrator and the reader are if anything more fully particularised than in Tom Jones. The nature of their relationship is made quite specific, and it is now one which subverts the tenuous hierarchy of the earlier novel. Consequently the capacity for 'judgment' with which we as readers are potentially endowed is of quite a new order. The narrator is far more offhand about it, which means both that he allows us much more freedom than previously (more than we might want, in fact), and, instead of constantly nudging and provoking us, he tends to leave it to us whether we bother to use it or not. (He seems to assume, rather wearily, that we will.)

Take the chapter headed 'Containing wise Observations of the Author, and other Matters' (IV. iii) - a heading which leads us to expect something like the Tom Jones narratorial intimacy. Actually, we find that the chapter is taken up with a fairly detailed description of an intensely depressing scene of domestic unhappiness, largely without comment except of a highly formal and distant kind, characterised by the syntactical awkwardness which we also find in

Dickens at his most embarrassed ('Such is ever the Fortitude of perfect Innocence, and such the Depression of Guilt in Minds not utterly abandoned' - p. 162). Framing this are an authorial introduction, which contains a brief and very unconfiding bit of autobiography ('I have in the Course of my Life seen many Occasions to make this Observation' - p. 161), and an address to readers, by way of apology for the sentimental dialogue between Amelia and her children: 'This little Dialogue we are apprehensive will be read with Contempt by many' (p. 167). The sense of 'apprehensive' as meaning 'Anticipative of something adverse' had recently become operative (the OED gives Pope's Iliad and Pamela as its earliest examples): in any case it is clear that there is something very pessimistic about this remark. For Fielding to be 'apprehensive' of our 'Contempt' is very odd after his buoyant assertion in Tom Jones II. i that he is the monarch of a 'new Province of Writing', and sole devisor of laws which 'my Readers, whom I consider as my Subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey'. This sentence from Amelia has the tone of a transgressor, not a legislator.

The fact is that Fielding's conceptions both of author and reader have been modified between Tom Jones and Amelia by factors which are best explained in biographical terms. For one thing he seems newly conscious of a kind of 'judgment' available to readers which it is not within his power to control. No amount of friendliness on the part of the narrator of Tom Jones can, of course, guarantee that every reader will return the compliment: this is not the point, anyway, since what his irony aimed to do most of the time was simply to limit our options - to try to make us feel fools if we didn't respond as expected. Amelia is more ambitious than that:

it carries a far wider awareness of the possible reader responses, including the most aggressively hostile, and is therefore weighed down with a built-in sense of premature defeat, given the impossibility of effectively countering them all. It bears the marks, in short, of Fielding's increasing sense of embattled isolation in the face of his virulent literary enemies²⁸. The people addressed in the more personal passages of Amelia are not readers, then, but critics: the vocabulary bears this out, for in place of Tom Jones's 'sagacious Reader' we often find 'critical Reader' or just 'Critic'. A good example of this can be found at the end of I. vi. It shows that Fielding is on his guard against two sorts of critical attack - the purely literary, and the purely personal. First he is worried that the sudden change in Miss Mathews's character might appear improbable: 'it may be necessary to whisper a Word or two to the Critics, who have perhaps begun to express no less Astonishment than Mr. Booth ...' (p. 44). Then, in the course of providing examples of female mutability, he includes an incriminating anecdote:

and yet, all Appearances notwithstanding, I myself
(remember, Critic, it was in my Youth) had a few
Mornings before seen that very identical Picture of
all those ingaging Qualities in Bed with a Rake at a
Bagnio, smoaking Tobacco, drinking Punch, talking
Obscenity, and swearing and cursing with all the
Impudence and Impiety of the lowest and most abandoned
Trull of a Soldier. (p. 47)

The effect of a nervous admonition like 'remember, Critic, it was in my Youth' on the friendly reader is to create a sense of both

exclusion and embarrassment. In his attempt to pacify the enemy he has forgotten his friends: the author/character/reader triangle has been superseded by one of author/character/critic. And Fielding is so busy preventing unsympathetic responses from the critics that he has little time to spare to stimulate and direct his preferred responses in the reassuring manner of Tom Jones.

When readers (specifically) are asked to judge, it is usually in a coldly offhand way. Take the issue of Booth's infidelity to his wife, brought out most crucially in IV. i:

The Governor then, having received his Fee, departed; and turning the Key, left the Gentleman and the Lady to themselves.

In Imitation of him, we will lock up likewise a Scene which we do not think proper to expose to the Eyes of the Public. If any over curious Readers should be disappointed on this Occasion, we will recommend such Readers to the Apologies with which certain gay Ladies have lately been pleased to oblige the World, where they will possibly find every thing recorded, that past at this Interval.

But tho' we decline painting the Scene, it is not our Intention to conceal from the World the frailty of Mr. Booth, or of his fair Partner, who certainly past that Evening, in a Manner inconsistent with the strict Rules of Virtue and Chastity ... (pp. 153-54)

(If we compare the terms of the narrator's disclaimer here with similar passages in Tom Jones we already find an important

difference. When Tom meets Molly Seagrim, there ensues 'a Parly, which, as I do not think myself obliged to relate it, I shall omit' (V. x, p. 257); his night with Lady Bellaston is brushed off with, 'It would be tedious to give the particular Conversation which consisted of very common and ordinary Occurrences' (XIII. vii, p. 717). 'I do not think myself obliged' reminds us that Fielding is his own master, whereas to 'decline' painting the scene in Amelia implies the presence of vocal readers making a special request. He may send them in the direction of more suitable reading matter but his tone is positively deferential compared with the advice - 'it would be wiser to pursue your Business, or your Pleasures (such as they are)' - with which he dismissed a section of his readership in Tom Jones, VI. i.)

... We desire therefore the good-natured and candid Reader will be pleased to weigh attentively the several unlucky Circumstances which concurred so critically, that Fortune seemed to have used her utmost Endeavours to ensnare poor Booth's Constancy. Let the Reader set before his Eyes a fine young Woman, in a manner a first Love, conferring Obligations, and using every Art to soften, to allure, to win, and to enflame; let him consider the Time and Place; let him remember that Mr. Booth was a young Fellow, in the highest Vigour of Life; and lastly, let him add one single Circumstance, that the Parties were alone together; and then if he will not acquit the Defendant, he must be convicted; for I have nothing more to say in his Defence.

(p. 154)

The evidence is (in terms of volume, at least) substantial, and we have no doubt as to the narrator's opinion, so it is unsettling to find the chapter ending on this note of defeat. The clause 'why he did so must be left to the Judgment of the sagacious Reader' was a way of saying, "This is so obvious that I won't bother to spell it out for you; work it out for yourselves", even though the issues involved were quite complex: this was how sure Fielding felt of his reader's basic like-mindedness, whereas in Amelia even when the narrator himself thinks that the verdict is incontestable, he gives up in the attempt to convince everybody. This is disappointing, because in novelistic terms 'everybody' doesn't matter (Fielding is addressing an individual, not a species). He still sees the novel as a court-room, with the readers as jury and the narrator as masterful presenter of the evidence. But by using biography again, remembering that his attempts to win business for himself as a barrister had been unsuccessful and dispiriting²⁹, and that he had just embarked upon the long and thankless chore of his spell at Bow Street³⁰, we can perhaps understand the readiness to give in. Fielding does not ignore his readers in this novel, but he does waste most of his time on those with whom there is no possibility of fruitful dialogue; and this in turn kills off the language of Amelia, for instead of the multiple meanings from which it was our task to pick and choose in Tom Jones, we find the very opposite - an account of motive, emotion and psychology made doggedly explicit, purposely so as to counter the possibility of wrong-headed interpretations.

* * *

Obviously, these theories about Fielding's version of the

narrator/reader relationship and the 'dialogue' of which it ideally consists could only be made concrete if we had some theoretical writings of his own on the subject to refer to. One could comb the introductory chapters to Tom Jones for references but the gleanings would be patchy. It took me quite a while to realise, in fact, where this theorising is to be found. It's quite extensive, and consists, most notably, of Tom Jones VIII. xi-xiv, and Amelia, II and III. These passages, which consist of a long personal narrative given by one of the characters, to an audience of one or more other characters who listen and sometimes interrupt, can be seen as sustained externalisations of the processes of novel-writing and novel-reading. In this respect they throw interesting light on the novels in which they respectively appear.

Let's start with the Man of the Hill's story in Tom Jones. This story is told to two listeners, Jones and Partridge, who can be seen as standing for good readers and bad readers respectively. Their various reactions and interruptions to the story offer a range of possible reader responses and suggested uses of narrative. Only one of these seems to be common to both of them:

'Yes, yes,' cries Partridge, 'I have seen such Mothers; I have been abused myself by them, and very unjustly; such Parents deserve Correction as much as their Children.' (VIII. xi, p. 452)

'... To see a Woman you love in Distress; to be unable to relieve her, and at the same Time to reflect that you have brought her into this Situation, is, perhaps, a Curse of which no Imagination can represent the Horrors

to those who have not felt it.' 'I believe it from my Soul,' cries Jones, 'and I pity you from the Bottom of my Heart.' He then took two or three disorderly Turns about the Room, and at last begged Pardon, and flung himself into his Chair, crying, 'I thank Heaven I have escaped that.' (VIII. xi, ~~446-47~~ pp. 456 - 57)

In both cases, then (Partridge comically, Jones seriously), they relate the events of the narrative to the events of their own lives. This seems for Fielding to be a necessary precondition of readership: he sees readers, as I have stressed, as individuals whose responses will consequently, and to an extent beyond the control of the author, be shaped by their own personal/historical experience.

Otherwise, the responses of Jones and Partridge have little in common; but before detailing the differences, we should consider the nature of the narrator, as exemplified by the Man of the Hill himself. Firstly, he has distanced himself from historical reality: the first impression we have of him is his extraordinary position of isolation:

'I should imagine, by this Collection of Rarities,' cries Jones, 'that your Master had been a Traveller.'
'Yes, Sir,' answered she, 'he hath been a very great one; there be few Gentlemen that know more of all Matters than he; I fancy he hath been crost in Love, or whatever it is, I know not, but I have lived with him above these thirty Years, and in all that Time he hath hardly spoke to six living People.' (VIII. x, pp. 446-47)

This narrator is therefore treading a thin line between a necessary and legitimate isolation (corresponding to the rare glimpse which we are afforded of Fielding writing Tom Jones in 'the little Parlour in which I sit at this instant' - XIII. i, p. 683³¹) and a bland indifference to the facts of everyday reality (he makes no effort to follow Jones when he runs to Mrs. Waters's rescue). Note also that 'few Gentlemen ... know more of all Matters' than the Man of the Hill: five chapters later Fielding states that novelists should have 'a good Share of Learning' and 'another Sort of Knowledge beyond the Power of Learning to bestow', that which is 'to be had by Conversation', 'with all Ranks and Degrees of Men' (IX. i, pp. 491-94). The Man of the Hill is, then, in these respects a fairly typical narrator. His obligation, as novelist, to use his gift, and the peculiar nature of that gift, whose substance consists in language, not objects, are suggested in an exchange with Jones:

'... I am really concerned it is no otherwise in my Power, than by Words, to convince you of my Gratitude.'

Jones after a Moment's Hesitation, answered, 'That it was in his Power by Words to gratify him extremely ...'

(VIII. x, p. 450)

Like the narrator of Tom Jones, the Man of the Hill is engaged in a constant process of predicting his readers' requirements and reactions: 'but I have, I believe, satisfied you with this Taste' (VIII. xi, p.454); 'But I am afraid I tire you with my Rhapsody' (VIII. xiii, p. 471); 'Here I will not trouble you with what past at our first Interview: For I would avoid Prolixity as much as

possible' (VIII. xiii, p. 474). (In these last two examples, Jones, the good reader, defers to the narrator's authority; Partridge, whose expectations have been politely misjudged, insists on hearing all the details.) Finally, it is clear that his act of narration has a close and intimate relationship with conversation: it arises out of conversation (VIII. x, pp. 450-51), and dwindles into conversation (VIII. xiv, p. 480) - in fact the whole 'History', as presented, is little more than a slightly one-sided conversation. Conversation was described by Fielding as a 'reciprocal Interchange of Ideas'³², and seen in this light, as a form of discourse in which the addressee's reaction to each statement is instrumental in determining the nature of the next, its closeness to narrative is obvious. In narrative this addressee is absent, but in a physical and temporal sense which the Man of the Hill episode, in its literalisation of the process, is able to ignore.

Not much need be said about Tom's responses. The virtues of a good reader, it seems, are primarily negative - attentiveness and deference to the narrator's decisions. Thus when the Man of the Hill arouses his curiosity about an episode, but says that he would prefer not to relate it, Tom is satisfied that he must have good reason: 'Jones desired him to pass over any thing that might give him Pain in the Relation' (VIII. xi, p. 455). Partridge, though, is not so easily brushed off: 'O pray, Sir, let us hear this, I had rather hear this than all the rest'. A greedy curiosity, then, seems to be one of the dominant characteristics of the bad reader. When the Man of the Hill declines to describe his reunion with Mr. Watson, Partridge cries, 'Pray let us hear all ... I want mightily to know what brought him to Bath' (VIII. xiii, p. 474). And, as if

to emphasise that curiosity is the only impulse which keeps the bad reader reading, Fielding has Partridge fall asleep as soon as the story is over, even though Tom and the Man of the Hill go on to have a heated argument about human nature:

As for Partridge, he had fallen into a profound
Repose, just as the Stranger had finished his Story;
for his Curiosity was satisfied, and the subsequent
Discourse was not forcible enough in its Operation
to conjure down the Charms of Sleep.

(VIII. xv, p. 486)

Bad readers are also uncreative: they are no good at picking up hints from the author and working out details for themselves. See, for instance,

... in our Return the next Morning to Oxford, I met
one of my Cronies, who acquainted me with sufficient
News concerning myself to make me turn my Horse
another Way

where 'sufficient News' is not enough for Partridge, who wants to know, 'Pray Sir, did he mention any thing of the Warrant?' (VIII. xi, p. 456). So it's not surprising that he also accepts it as part of the narrator's job to throw in a few moral generalisations occasionally: the Man of the Hill apologises for his 'Rhapsody' on the superiority of Christianity to Philosophy, but Partridge answers, 'Not at all ... Lud forbid we should be tired with good Things' (VIII. xiii, p. 471).

The bad reader is obsessed with detail at the expense of the

whole³³. Partridge is not satisfied simply to know that the Man of the Hill received a wound at the battle of Sedgemoor:

'Pray, Sir, where was the Wound,' says Partridge.
The Stranger satisfied him it was in his Arm, and
then continued his Narrative.

(VIII. xiv, p. 479)³⁴

This obsession leads him to notice every mistake the narrator makes: the Man of the Hill describes how, on meeting a friend, 'I fairly confessed to him that I had no Money in my Pocket; yet not without framing a Lie for an Excuse, and imputing it to my having changed my Breeches that Morning'; yet later he tells this friend that he has had a mutton chop for dinner:

'Some people,' cries Partridge, 'ought to have good Memories, or did you find just Money enough in your Breeches to pay for the Mutton Chop?'

(VIII. xii, p. 463)

(This is like the critics who ignored the larger merits of Amelia in their triumph at pointing out that Fielding had forgotten to repair his heroine's broken nose.) As these examples make clear, one of the worst things about Partridge as reader is that although he has nothing to say he cannot keep quiet. At one point he interrupts with a whole story of his own, thereby giving us insight into the nature of Fielding's attitude towards interpolated narratives (VIII. xi, pp. 458-60). Jones, the good reader, initially objects to the interpolation, but the Man of the Hill consents, perhaps because it allows him a breathing space. Both end up finding

the story amusing, so that our final impression is that such interruptions, while tiresomely irrelevant, nevertheless make for useful changes of mood and tone, and can be incidentally entertaining: I would imagine that this is roughly how most modern readers feel about Fielding's own exercises in this manner, particularly the story of Leonora in Joseph Andrews, II, iv and vi.

Partridge's interruptions are usually just pedantic, however: some of them are rather like footnotes, and they help to convey some impressively complex feelings about the conflict between narrative and explication. Sometimes he is merely stupid, as when he deadens the impact of some welcome irony on the part of the Man of the Hill:

'It was at present my Fortune to be destitute of that great Evil, as it is apprehended to be by several Writers, who I suppose were overburthened with it, namely, Money.' 'With Submission, Sir,' said Partridge, 'I do not remember any Writers who have called it Malorum; but Irritamenta Malorum. Essodiuntur opes irritamenta Malorum.' (VIII. xii, pp. 461-62)

Similarly:

'Time, however, the best Physician of the Mind, at length brought me Relief.' 'Ay, ay, Tempus edax Rerum,' said Partridge. (VIII.xiii, p. 471)

But some of his remarks are a mixture of the comic and the useful:

'By this Xantippe (so was the Wife of Socrates called, said Partridge) - By this Xantippe he had two Sons ...'
(VIII. ix, p. 451)

Partly this adds to our sense of Partridge's foolishness, and the Man of the Hill's repetition delicately registers his irritation; but it also tells unclassical readers something that they may not have known before. It is a neat way of incorporating a footnote, one which for some readers would have been merely distracting if offered straight. The same issue is raised again a few pages later, when Partridge, standing for uninformed readers, is genuinely in need of explicative help. The Man of the Hill is repeating a conversation with a gambler:

"... Follow but my Counsel, and I will shew you a Way to empty the Pockets of a Queer Cull, without any Danger of the Nubbing Cheat."

'Nubbing Cheat,' cries Partridge, 'Pray, Sir, what is that?'

'Why that, Sir,' says the Stranger, 'is a Cant Phrase for the Gallows; ... I doubted not, from his many strong Expressions of Friendship, but that he would offer to lend me a small Sum ... but he answered, "Never mind that, Man, e'en boldly run a Levant; (Partridge was going to enquire the Meaning of that Word; but Jones stopped his Mouth) ...'

(VIII. xii, p. 464)

Now there is no reason why Partridge should be expected to know the meaning of the phrase 'run a Levant'; and Fielding himself recognised the usefulness of explaining cant phrases, for he does so in footnotes during the early chapters of Jonathan Wild; yet Jones, the good reader, still acts to prevent another interruption. Fielding is not here putting forward an easy solution to a problem

about the presentation of texts; but he is reproducing, in a comic and very concrete way, the interplay of various reader responses - curiosity, irritation, frustration, enjoyment. In the process he makes a much more truthful and feeling contribution to literary theory than in any of the eloquent introductory chapters to Tom Jones. His method - to make Jones and Partridge representative of two roughly divided and opposed sections of his readership - is literal and schematic in a manner consistent with the methods of the novel generally.

Actually, Miss Mathews's role as the 'reader' of Booth's narrative is equally consistent with the methods of Amelia. I've argued that Fielding gets into trouble by trying to anticipate all the readers of Amelia, not only the 'good' ones; in the same way, Miss Mathews's responses to Booth's narrative are meant to cover the whole range of possible reader responses, a fact which makes our relationship with her complicated and unsatisfactory. It should be noted at the outset that Booth (like Fielding himself in I. i) is addressing his reader personally and thereby inviting interruption and reaction: 'Would you think, Miss Mathews, that the Misfortune of my Amelia was capable of any Aggravation!' (II. i, p. 67).

If we compare Miss Mathews's reactions with those of Jones and Partridge, we find that they testify convincingly to the shift in Fielding's attitude towards fiction which took place between Tom Jones and Amelia. For instance, she now, as they never did, comments on the psychological probability of the narrative: she thinks it inconsistent that Amelia's sister should have endeavoured to further the match between Amelia and Booth:

Here Miss Mathews laughed; of which Booth begged to know the Reason; she, at last, after many Apologies, said, 'It was the first good Thing she ever heard of Miss Betty; nay,' said she, 'and asking your Pardon for my Opinion of your Sister, since you will have it, I always conceived her to be the deepest of Hypocrites.'

(II. vii, p. 89)

Very occasionally she makes a footnote-like interruption, as when she relates Booth's doctrine of the ruling passion to the writings of Mandeville, thus initiating a short discussion about whether or not he 'proves Religion and Virtue to be only mere Names' (III. v, p. 115). Where Partridge was just quibbling, though, her display of learning is more profoundly related to her characterisation as a sensualist, since she concludes, 'if he denies there is any such Thing as Love, that is most certainly wrong. - I am afraid I can give him the Lye myself'; and this characterisation is in itself related to action, to the suspenseful and increasingly pressing question of whether she is going to seduce Booth or not. This brief discussion, therefore, localises the interdependence of learning, intellect, emotion and actual experience in Amelia and in Fielding's new post-Richardsonian fictional mould generally.

Consequently it's not surprising to see that most of Miss Mathews's responses are those of the 'sentimental' reader: Books II and III are both a celebration and a parody of the sentimental genre. Miss Mathews still enjoys a direct relationship and access to the characters in Booth's narrative, but the rapport is now also on an emotional level: why else should she phrase her attitude towards Sergeant Atkinson like this - 'You have made me half in Love

with that charming Fellow' (III. viii, p. 124)? Naturally, she is no more ironically aware of the inadequacy of her position than Partridge was of his: but whereas Partridge could always be undermined by a verbal thump on the head from Jones, Miss Mathews, being less crudely wrong-headed, demands a more subtle approach. The only irony throughout this episode therefore arises from Fielding's own infrequent incursions: 'Here Booth stop'd a Moment, and wip'd his Eyes; and Miss Mathews, perhaps out of Complaisance, wip'd hers' (II. iv, p. 79) where the throwaway 'perhaps' encourages a flicker of reader effort - is it being implied that the sentimental response is in fact all a sham? What this example also shows is that, given that Booth's narrative to Miss Mathews represents a complete microcosm of the sentimental fictional mode, that mode itself contains very few possibilities for irony, which has to be supplied by a genuine intruder: Fielding himself, reaching into this new 'text' of which he is not even the narrator. This was not true of the fictional mode of Tom Jones, as represented by the narrator/good reader/bad reader triangle played out in VIII. xi-xiv.

Anyway, quite often Miss Mathews is an uneasy surrogate for most readers of Amelia, since it is her taste which specifically determines the nature of the narrative. Time and again she insists that we dwell on emotional detail:

'... I will omit likewise the tender Scene which past between Amelia and myself previous to her Departure.'

'Indeed I beg you would not,' cries Miss Mathews, 'nothing delights me more than Scenes of Tenderness. I should be glad to know, if possible, every Syllable which was uttered on both Sides.'

(III. i, p. 101)

Fielding then intrudes most interestingly, to say that 'we will, according to our usual Custom, endeavour to accommodate ourselves to every Taste' (the author, it seems, being at the reader's beck and call, rather than vice versa as in Tom Jones),

and shall therefore place this Scene in a Chapter by itself, which we desire all our Readers who do not love, or who perhaps do not know the Pleasure of Tenderness, to pass over; since they may do this without any Prejudice to the Thread of the Narrative.

But Fielding is not being completely honest: unsentimental readers who take him up on his offer to miss out the chapter will find at the beginning of Chapter iii (p. 106) an important reference to a casket which they will not have heard of before. Chapter ii, the 'Scene of the tender Kind', is as central to the 'Thread of the Narrative' as any other - so we are obliged, on Miss Mathews's insistence, to sit through a scene which Fielding admits is of specialised interest. She does the same thing for us in II. i (p. 69): 'I should be glad to hear every Step of an Amour which had so tender a Beginning. Tell me every Thing you said or did, if you can remember it.' This might be less annoying if Fielding did not introduce himself at all in Amelia: readers are happy enough to feel and think as the characters do only as long as there is no still higher authority to obey, such as a narrator; but Fielding often tries to nudge us into an appropriate response or attitude simply by having a character, such as Booth, adopt that attitude himself: 'At this Remark, Booth, though enough affected at some Parts of the Story, had great Difficulty to refrain from Laughter'

(I. viii, p. 52); 'Here Booth smiled, but happily without her perceiving it' (I. ix, p. 56). The best readers, such as Tom, keep their responses to themselves, and in his case there was always Partridge around to make us feel better if we weren't quite living up to his example; but Booth's reactions (like Miss Mathews's) seem to close our options off. The sorts of readers who enjoy Fielding's novels in the first place don't usually mind being told what to do: but they would prefer to get their edicts from God rather than from one of his prophets, whenever this is possible - and it always feels like a possibility in Amelia, for all its new narratorial restraint.

This is not to deny the cleverness with which Fielding characterises Miss Mathews's sentimental attitudes as a mixture of feeling and calculation. His willingness to indulge her in this form of response is shot through with a suspicion that the whole process may well be a form of vicarious and rather unprincipled enjoyment. Sentimental readers, it is suggested, do not need to have emotion emblematically spelt out for them, in the form of the pallor and the blushes which fill the pages of the courtship scenes in Tom Jones. Miss Mathews feels Booth's emotions immediately and instinctively:

'To describe my Sensation till she returned to herself, is not in my Power.' - 'You need not,' cried Miss Mathews.
(II. ii, p. 73)

On the other hand, Fielding is here playing, with an adventurousness which is not to be found in the comparable passage of Tom Jones, on the dual nature of Miss Mathews's situation: her response to fiction (Booth's 'History') and her response to real life (the fact

that she is locked in a cell alone with him). Her emotional sympathy with Booth the character becomes increasingly an index of her emotional sympathy with Booth the man. The more we become aware of her intention to seduce him, the more suspect her pleasure in the 'Scenes of Tenderness' starts to seem:

'There is nothing so difficult to describe, and generally so dull when described, as Scenes of excessive Tenderness.'

'Can you think so?' says Miss Mathews, 'surely there is nothing so charming! - O! Mr. Booth, our Sex is d—n'd by the Want of Tenderness in yours - O were they all like you - certainly no Man was ever your Equal.'

(III. vi, p. 117)

'And can you really,' cry'd he, 'laugh at so much Tenderness?' 'I laugh at Tenderness! O Mr. Booth,' answered she, 'Thou knowest but little of Calista.' 'I thought formerly,' cry'd he, 'I knew a great deal, and thought you of all Women in the World to have the greatest - of all Women!' - 'Take Care, Mr. Booth,' said she. - 'By Heaven, if you thought so, you thought truly ...'

(III. ix, p. 134)

Also, her response to Amelia the character is warped by her jealousy of her as Booth's real-life wife:

'... for with all her Simplicity I assure you she is the most sensible Woman in the World.'

'It is highly generous and good in you,' (said Miss Mathews, with a sly sneer) 'to impute to Honesty what

others would perhaps call Credulity.'

(II. ii, pp. 70-71)

'At my Return into the Room, Amelia insisted on my exchanging my Coat for one which belonged to the old Woman's Son.' - 'I am very glad,' cried Miss Mathews, 'to find she did not forget you. I own I thought it somewhat cruel to turn you out into the Rain!'

(II. vi, p. 85)

Fielding's semi-conversion to the sentimental mode has sparked off in him a new awareness of the interpenetration of fiction and life. In Tom Jones he seems to have felt capable of maintaining a distinction between them, a distinction which in Amelia he allowed to blur, while implying nonetheless that to do so need not always be healthy: as soon as readers accustom themselves to the new and delicious indulgence of the emotions now afforded by novels, they may forget, as Miss Mathews does, that these same emotions must be kept under control in real life. This vein of criticism can only be maintained by a fundamentally anti-realistic device - the suggestion, however distant (a pregnant authorial 'perhaps', a purposeful clash between what the character says and what we know of her) that the characters are not alone together in complete isolation: that they are figures in a more complicated relationship, standing between a commanding narrator and a reader awaiting guidance.

However, because the narratorial presence is by and large so distant in Amelia, it is of only limited help in answering the questions I am trying to raise about Tom Jones, and I don't anticipate coming back to it much. I do think, though, that Books II and III provide an exceptionally useful guide to the narrator/reader

relationship as imagined by Fielding in the last stage of his development. So here is a final example, by way of recapitulation. As I said at the beginning of this section (p. 40), Fielding knows not only that something must always be happening in a novel, but that when nothing is happening among the characters, things can be made to happen between narrator and reader, as a form of compensation. In the light of which, consider this extract from Amelia, III. xii (pp. 146-47):

'During my first Year's Continuance in this new Scene of Life, nothing, I think, remarkable happened; the History of one Day would, indeed, be the History of the whole Year.'

'Well, pray then,' said Miss Mathews, 'do let us hear the History of that Day; I have a strange Curiosity to know how you could kill your Time; and do, if possible, find out the very best Day you can.'

'If you command me, Madam,' answered Booth, 'you must yourself be accountable for the Dulness of the Narrative. Nay, I believe, you have imposed a very difficult Task on me; for the greatest Happiness is incapable of Description.'

'I rose then, Madam - '

'O the Moment you waked, undoubtedly,' said Miss Mathews. —

'Usually,' said he, 'between Five and Six.'

'I will have no usually,' cry'd Miss Mathews, 'you are confined to a Day, and it is to be the best and happiest in the Year.'

'Nay, Madam,' cries Booth, 'then I must tell you the Day in which Amelia was brought to Bed, after a painful and dangerous Labour; for that I think was the happiest Day of my Life.'

'I protest,' said she, 'you are become Farmer Booth, indeed. What a Happiness have you painted to my Imagination! You put me in mind of a News-Paper, where my Lady such-a-one is delivered of a Son, to the great Joy of some illustrious Family.'

'Why then, I do assure you, Miss Mathews,' cries Booth, 'I scarce know a Circumstance that distinguished one Day from another. The whole was one continued Series of Love, Health, and Tranquillity. Our Lives resembled a calm Sea.' —

'The dullest of all Ideas,' cries the Lady.

This passage seems to me to be performing a very similar function to the introductory chapter of Tom Jones (III. i) which aimed to suggest the passing of twelve years. It shows that where there is a gap to be filled, and the characters are not doing much, narrator and reader are free to indulge in a teasing conversation among themselves; and it also shows, I think, that it is much more interesting (and flattering) for us to be actively engaged in such conversation, than to be listening to someone else's.

The point of this chapter, then, has been to specify the nature of Fielding's intrusions in Tom Jones, and to see how this modifies our perception of his methods from the perspective of some of the later novelists who felt his influence. I'm now going to reverse the angle of approach and look at the predominantly

satiric influences feeding into Tom Jones, since I suspect that it is here that we might find most of the clues as to the origins of his particular narrative strategy.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Terry Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism' in Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985 (London, 1986), pp. 49-64 (p. 51).
2. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961).
3. Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' in Partial Portraits (London, 1919), pp. 373-408 (p. 379).
4. George Eliot, Adam Bede, edited by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 221 (Chapter 17).
5. Sir Philip Sidney, An Apology for Poetry: or The Defence of Poesy, edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1965), p. 123.
6. For a comprehensive discussion of this subject, see Douglas L. Patey, Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic Theory and Literary Practice in the Augustan Age (Cambridge, 1984). A short discussion which usefully relates it to Fielding's own practice is Robert V. Wess, 'The Probable and the Marvellous in Tom Jones', Modern Philology, 68 (1970), 32-45. A recent book by Mitchell Kalpakgian, The Marvellous in Fielding's

Novels (Washington, D.C., 1981) turned out to be very disappointing.

7. George Eliot, Middlemarch, edited by W.J. Harvey (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 170. There is a certain admiration in her remarks, too, but I feel that the tone overall is gently mocking - in particular when she qualifies the word 'historian' with 'as he insisted on calling himself'.
8. Joan Bennett, George Eliot (Cambridge, 1948), p. 106.
9. Preface to The Princess Casamassima, vols V and VI of the New York Edition of the Novels of Henry James, 26 vols (New York, 1907-18), V, p. xiv.
10. W.J. Harvey, 'George Eliot and the Omniscient Author Convention', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 13 (1958), 81-108 (pp. 88-89).
11. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, edited by Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford, 1983), pp. 9, 47.
12. The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953), pp. 139-40.
13. Thackeray, Literature in Perspective series (London, 1968), p. 68.
14. The Old Curiosity Shop, The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (London, 1951), p. 544 (Chapter lxxii): future page references in the text. I have used this series for all my quotations from Dickens in this chapter, except where, as is the case with Dombey and Son and Martin Chuzzlewit, there is a Clarendon edition available.
15. Dombey and Son, edited by Alan Horsman, The Clarendon Dickens

- (Oxford, 1974), p. 225 (Chapter xvi).
16. Bleak House (London, 1948), p. 871 (Chapter lxxv).
 17. See Robert L. Patten, "'The Story-Weaver at his Loom": Dickens and the Beginning of The Old Curiosity Shop', in Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation, edited by Robert P. Partlow, Jr. (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1970), pp. 44-64 (esp. p. 52).
 18. Master Humphrey's Clock (London, 1840-41), vol. 2, no. XLV, pp. 224-25.
 19. Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca, New York, 1965).
 20. Our Mutual Friend (London, 1952), p. 174 (I. xiv).
 21. Mark Lambert, Dickens and the Suspended Quotation (New Haven and London, 1981).
 22. Martin Chuzzlewit, edited by Margaret Cardwell, The Clarendon Dickens (Oxford, 1982), p. 351 (Chapter xxi).
 23. Quoted from Hesketh Pearson, Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit (New York, 1946), p. 208.
 24. John Preston, The Created Self: the Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (London, 1970), p. 3.
 25. He cites Harding's essay, 'Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction', British Journal of Aesthetics, 2 (1962), 133-47.

26. The Created Self, p. 120. For further comment on this insight, see below, pp. 106-07.
27. 'Tom Jones' in Using Biography (London, 1984), pp. 131-57 (p. 157).
28. See F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works and Times, 2 vols (Oxford, 1952), II, 717-27.
29. Dudden, I, 244-46.
30. Dudden, II, 733-35.
31. Dudden tentatively identifies this as a room in a seventeenth-century house in Twerton-on-Avon (II, 593).
32. 'An Essay on Conversation', in Miscellanies, Volume One, pp. 119-52 (p. 120). I will be devoting the whole of my fourth chapter to a discussion of the implications of this definition.
33. cf. Pope's Essay on Criticism, lines 233-288.
34. Partridge fails to appreciate that novelistic detail is by nature selective. For a lively comic example of what happens when it ceases to be so, see Michael Frayn, The Tin Men (London, 1965), pp. 99-102. Partridge's insane passion for irrelevant detail was inherited by Stan Laurel - who was, like him, the stupider partner in a great comic double act. See the 1934 film Sons of the Desert:
HARDY: And besides, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
LAUREL: Jack who?

or:

HARDY: To catch a Hardy, you have to get up very early
in the morning.

LAUREL: What time?

Chapter Two

THE SATIRIC TRADITION (I) - SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT TRUTH

(i) Fielding and Fantasy

In XII. viii of Tom Jones, Fielding refers to 'the great, useful and uncommon Doctrine, which it is the Purpose of this whole Work to inculcate' (p. 652). The point of this chapter will be to ask why, if all he wanted to do was inculcate a doctrine, he had to write a novel about it rather than just stating it straight out. I shall approach this question indirectly, getting as far away from realism as Fielding's writings will allow: if we look at his excursions into satiric fantasy, we shall see that he was attracted to the genre as a context within which to make decisive judgments; and I hope eventually to show that the new realism of Tom Jones waters this decisiveness down into a more complex and contemplative state, so that the whole novel can be read as a statement on the problematics of interpretation. At the same time I want to keep the issue of formal structuring to the foreground, by considering the different ways in which humour is used as an organising principle in Tom Jones and in the fantastic writings.

Fielding's answer to my question - 'Why a novel?' - would be that 'Examples work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts', but this conviction, expressed in 1742, seems to have faded towards the end of his career. It is possible to trace, in fact, a growing disenchantment on his part with the idea of fiction as a vehicle of truth, on the basis that his fiction actually gets less fictitious. At first, for instance, he thought of fantasy as a workable genre: Tom Thumb is an example from the plays, A Journey from this World to

the Next from the prose. Then with Joseph Andrews his characters start to assume a vestige of psychological probability which is refined in Tom Jones and becomes the centre of attention in Amelia. 'Realism' leads to non-fiction, and Fielding's last writings are some legal tracts and a diary. He was suspicious of fiction especially in its more outrageous forms, and his early preference for it may have had more to do with the impulse to imitate his classical idols than with a temperamental inclination towards this sort of inventiveness. To account for the drift away from these imitations, we have the evidence of a certain (documented) disenchantment with the classics (his rejection of Aristophanes as immoral¹, his wish that Homer had been a prose historian²), his growing admiration for Richardson, and the revitalised sense of language as a tool for judicial reform which attended the last phase of his legal career.

Unfortunately, contemporary discussions of 'fiction' were couched in terms applicable only to poetry: the first novel-orientated literary theory of the eighteenth century is Fielding's own. Also, this ground has been fairly thoroughly gone over of late (see the notes to p. 395 of the Wesleyan Tom Jones for a resumé); but we could still usefully remind ourselves of the points of reference. Dryden referred to fiction as the 'resemblance' of a 'true story'³, and this definition seems to have been widely accepted. He expanded on it in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy:

For the spirit of man cannot be satisfied but with truth, or at least verisimilitude; and a poem is to contain, if not τὰ ἔτυμα, yet ἐτύμοιςιν ὁμοίω, as one of the Greek poets has expressed it.⁴

Eighteen years earlier, Hobbes was making the same point: 'For as

truth is the bound of Historically, so the Resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of Poetical Liberty'⁵. These are basically just reiterations of Aristotle and Horace. Addison seems to have been the first really to expand on them, in the Spectator, no. 315 (1 March 1712). He borrowed his distinctions from French critics such as Rapin, Le Bossu and Dacier: Dryden's 'verisimilarity' has become 'la Vraisemblance', which gets re-translated back into English as 'the Probable':

If the fable is only probable, it differs nothing from a true history; if it is only marvellous, it is no better than a romance.⁶

Taking the lead from Le Bossu's criticism of the Odyssey⁷, Addison introduces into English a new sense of 'truth': the 'Natural, Moral or Political Truth' which may be discovered in seemingly fantastic stories by 'Men of greater Penetration' (p. 146). He refers to this as 'the hidden Meaning', and speaks of it as an ingredient of narrative which exists behind and in addition to 'the plain literal Sense'. What he is saying, therefore, almost amounts to a defence of fantasy on the grounds of allegorical significance; but not quite, because the passages which he is defending (the Sirens, Circe and Polyphemus episodes from the Odyssey) are, he argues, 'probable' in any case because 'they are Fables, which considering the Opinions of Mankind that prevailed in the Age of the Poet, might possibly have been according to the Letter'.

In both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones we find Fielding writing disdainfully about fantasy, and expressing the belief that a book which fails to conserve consistency of character is as impossible

and as unworthy of serious consideration as the stupidest romance or fairy story. Against this we have to consider the fact that he wrote fantasies himself, and that these were plainly intended to be vehicles for 'truth' as much as Tom Jones was. But at this point we must distinguish between some contradictory senses of 'truth'. Truth can either mean 'exactest copying' (truth to life), or something more exalted - some sort of moral truth, a 'lesson' about 'human nature' which certainly has a bearing on real life but which for some reason depends on fiction for its clearest articulation. It is this quality which I am going to refer to as 'Meaning' (just as Addison called it 'the hidden Meaning'), reserving 'truth' for its more limited, 'exactest copying' sense. This is important because for Fielding himself the distinction seems to have blurred towards the end of his career, and he seems to have felt that unless what he wrote was true, it couldn't mean anything useful. I think that a good way of starting to think about the meaning of Tom Jones, then, would be to consider Fielding's fantastic writings first, because there the concepts of meaning and truth cannot be so easily confused: the balance between their dependence on and independence of each other is suddenly clearer and magnified.

Two of his better known discussions of 'the marvellous' provide a useful way in to his fantastic writings. In Tom Jones VIII. i he declares that 'Man therefore is the highest Subject (unless on very extraordinary Occasions indeed) which presents itself to the Pen of our Historian, or of our Poet' (p. 400). Fielding never broke this rule even 'on very extraordinary Occasions indeed' - even when adopting wholeheartedly the conventions of the Vision or the travel-parody. However strange the lands which his

characters visit, these characters themselves retain their human qualities and do not even encounter the strange and impossible creatures in which Lucian's True History revels so delightedly. (One exception offers itself - the 'Papers Proper to be Read Before the Royal Society'⁸, for which Fielding created the Chrysisus, a creature which has the property of sticking to the hand of whoever touches it; the allegorical content is so overt here, though, that the animal hardly counts as an invention at all; and the impossibility has a visible point, to remind us that the attitude towards money which the Chrysisus represents is equally insupportable to any rational mind.) Hence he is entitled to his dig at the less conservative fantasists:

As for Elves and Fairies, and other such Mummery,
I purposely omit the Mention of them, as I should be
very unwilling to confine within any Bounds those
surprizing Imaginations, for whose vast Capacity the
Limits of human Nature are too narrow ...

(VIII. i, p. 400)

The choice of the epithet 'surprizing' aligns these writers with the monsters of their own creation: their 'vast Capacity' makes them prodigies, inconsistent with the common order of authors, a real life equivalent of the badly-drawn character who is made 'to act in direct Contradiction to the Dictates of his Nature', which is 'as improbable and as miraculous as any Thing which can well be conceived' (p. 405).

Fielding had made similar points, in similar words, in Joseph Andrews, à propos of

those Persons of surprising Genius, the Authors of immense Romances, or the modern Novel and Atalantis Writers; who without any Assistance from Nature or History, record Persons who never were, or will be, and Facts which never did nor possibly can happen: Whose Heroes are of their own Creation, and their Brains the Chaos whence all their Materials are collected. (III. i, p. 187)

Again the writers are made to seem as unnatural as their own impossible creations. 'Authors of an inferiour Class', says Fielding with sarcastic humility,

are obliged to support themselves as with Crutches; but those of whom I am now speaking, seem to be possessed of those Stilts, which the excellent Voltaire tells us in his Letters carry the Genius far off, but with an irregular Pace.

The careless jumbling together of the two images of writing and walking (all the more since the use of stilts is patently absurd and inefficient if walking is the main object of the exercise) creates a quasi-surreal combination, once more reminiscent of Lucian when parodying particularly gratuitous examples of grotesquerie in the True History. Meanwhile we should not pass by the implications of Fielding's basic complaint that their 'Brains' are the origin of all their writings, and that these brains are, in his view, chaotic.

In Tom Jones, IV. i we find the same complaint coming up again. The chapter begins, 'As Truth distinguishes our Writings, from those idle Romances which are filled with Monsters, the Productions, not

of Nature, but of distempered Brains ...' (p. 150). The sense of 'truth' must be specialised here, since there is an obvious way in which Tom Jones is not true at all; and although he is referring mainly to that novel, 'our Writings' does not exempt any of the others, so that we may assume that the Journey, for instance, equally partakes of 'Truth' in this special sense. Given that it deals in impossibilities (it is not even a Christian fantasy), what are the governing principles which keep it, to Fielding's mind, from 'Chaos'? Allegory is only a partial explanation, because although most of the incidents have a particular allegorical application, the real-life ideas to which they refer are themselves ordered randomly. That is to say, the order in which Fielding satirises notions of disease (I. ii-iii), avarice (iii), sexual licence (iii), death (iv) and Fortune (vi) is determined by the sequence of events in the story. Compare this with the more purely allegorical structure of A Tale of a Tub, where what would otherwise be a badly told story about three brothers and their coats becomes, on one level, formally satisfying by virtue of its correspondence to an organised account of church history. (Except that it is continually interrupted by random digressions: the joke of their randomness, however, is only perceptible because there is a visible structure which is being clearly disrupted.)

Nor can we point to a superficial finesse of structure as a sign of order. Fielding seems so conscious of the inconsequentiality of arrangement in the Journey that he introduces the 'incomplete manuscript' joke as if in the hope that he could laugh off the deficiency by means of a parodic convention. It might be easier simply to say that for Fielding, any imitation of a classical author (Lucian,

in this case) would belong by definition to a specific genre and could not therefore be considered chaotic. But there were also more recent precedents, and Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels are important in this respect, both for their popularity and because they had brought into prominence the relation between fantasy and truth-telling. The two works have only a few devices in common: but in particular they share the idea of voyage and shipwreck (with consequent loss of personal property) as preparation for the processes of education which their heroes undergo. (The idea resurfaces in Fielding's Journey in, paradoxically, its least allegorical form - the hero actually dies and loses his body.) That aspect which most appealed to contemporary readers, then - the exoticism - is in fact only a by-product of the main point, which is that Crusoe and Gulliver learn not only from being put in a new environment but from being cut off from their old one. Rasselas, the third important fantasy of this period (all of them determinedly documentary in style, one might remark) capitalises on and complicates this convention: on the one hand, its characters journey into the real world, explicitly to learn from it; on the other, the exotic location is a way of ensuring that the observation is not confined to, or even very concerned with, eighteenth-century England: the truths aim to become more general.

Defoe wrote a curious explanation of the allegory of Robinson Crusoe in his 'Preface' to Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe ... Written by Himself⁹.

It's hard to decide how seriously it should be taken, given that one of its more blatant functions is to accelerate the sales of a book of old essays by linking it with the name of a best seller. Defoe's

claims are exaggerated ('the present work is not merely the product of the two first volumes, but the two first volumes may rather be called the product of this' - p. ix) and his application of the terms 'allegory', 'history', 'truth', 'emblematic', etc. seem hopelessly ambiguous when compared with Fielding's. One moment he talks of 'the real story which the island-life is a just allusion to' (p. xii), inviting us to read Crusoe's adventures as a vast allegory of his own career, then he claims 'It is most real that I had a parrot and taught it to call me by my name' (p. xi). Elsewhere (in 'A Vision of the Angelic World', which concludes the book) the distinctions blur still further: the events described in Robinson Crusoe are true, apparently, but they did not take place on a desert island:

The first case was, when I crept into the dark cave in the valley, where the old goat lay just expiring, which, wherever it happened, is a true history, I assure you. (p. 241)

In general, though, Defoe's drift is clear, and Crusoe is revealed (for the purposes of his present work) to be a veiled account of his own life:

in a word, the 'Adventures of Robinson Crusoe,' are one whole scheme of a real life of eight and twenty years, spent in the most wandering, desolate, and afflicting circumstances that ever man went through, and in which I have lived so long in a life of wonders, in continued storms, fought with the worst kind of savages and man-eaters ... ('Preface', p. xi)

The parallels are not entirely opportunistic. The image of man as man-eater is sustained enough to reappear on p. 106, in the course of 'An Essay on the Present State of Religion in the World', during which Crusoe, deep in conversation with an 'old gentlewoman', defends his belief that man is more savage than the brutes:

but man for baser ends, such as avarice, envy,
revenge, and the like, devours his own species, nay,
his own flesh and blood ...

So the claim for allegory is put forward with some seriousness: more seriousness than subtlety, perhaps, for the first 'Reflections' which arise from the story take the shortest route towards relating it to ordinary life: 'it seems to me that life in general is, or ought to be, but one universal act of solitude': 'man may be properly said to be alone in the midst of the crowds and hurry of men and business' (Chapter i, 'Of Solitude', p. 2). But Robinson Crusoe was more important for popularising the travel adventure than for throwing open its possibilities as a vehicle of meaning; that seems to have been an afterthought in Defoe's case, his main interest being in making exoticism believable by means of a quite unimaginative realism. Besides which, he lacked humour, and this, as I shall argue, is the quality which had the potential to bring this genre to life in a very particular way.

Fielding's own most Crusoe-like work is his account of the adventures of Mrs. Heartfree, which takes up four chapters of Jonathan Wild (IV. vii-ix, xi). As in Crusoe and Gulliver, the central character is shipwrecked and stripped of personal property; as in Gulliver, the exotic country (Africa, in this case) is found

to be subject, after all, to exactly the same corruptions as our own. Fielding's technique is not strictly 'allegorical', though, and the adventures are not strictly fantastic in that his version of Africa involves less exoticism than what he sees as primitivism: hence its coherence with the rest of the book, which concerns itself with human motivation at its most basic, and affords laughter of the most Bergsonian type (see below, p. 86). Nevertheless, several of the elements are not 'probable' in any sense that Fielding would have allowed, or indeed in the sense that the petty thefts, gambling scenes and sexual encounters which make up the rest of Jonathan Wild are probable: the most obvious examples would be the strange hermit Mrs. Heartfree meets in IV. ix (a chapter headed, 'Containing incidents very surprising' - 'surprising' being a word Fielding often invoked to talk about fantastic genres), and the tribal chief introduced in IV. xi, who seems to speak a nonsense language ('SCHACH PIMPACH' is the only example we're given) closely related to that spoken by the Ptfghsiumski in the Voyages of Mr. Job Vinegar from the Champion.

Even if rather unobtrusively, then, the fantastic nature of these elements is still signalled, a fact which enables us to look especially closely at the way in which they contribute to the meaning of the book. Presumably Fielding uses them to reinforce a meaning which the rest of the book already expresses. I'm not going to attempt a paraphrase of this meaning, but it seems fairly clear that it consists mainly of a commentary on human greed and sexual licentiousness, and these are also prominent in Mrs. Heartfree's narrative. The episodes revolve around her attempt to hang on to two items of property - her jewels and her chastity. The latter comes

under particularly heavy fire, first from the French captain (p. 142), then from the English captain (pp. 144-46), then from the Count (pp. 151-52). These assaults are increasingly violent, but also take place increasingly under a veneer of kindness and gallantry, a progression which culminates in the behaviour of the hermit (pp. 152-55). He appears uncivilised ('He was naked, except his middle and his feet, if I can call a body so which was covered with hair almost equal to any beast whatever'), but underneath this exterior he is very civilised indeed ('a gentle air', 'his courteous behaviour', 'kind accents'), and underneath this exterior he is as bad as the others ('he presently removed all doubt by throwing himself at my feet and expressing the warmest passion for me'), although in a more civilised way ('he would rather die the most cruel death by my coldness than gain the highest bliss by becoming the occasion of a tear of sorrow'). Next Mrs. Heartfree is propositioned by the tribal chief, whose tactics, while highly uncivilised according to Western codes of behaviour, actually cause her much less pain:

The second day after my return from court one of his officers, whom they call SCHACH PIMPACH, waited upon me, and, by a French interpreter who lives here, informed me that the chief magistrate liked my person, and offered me an immense present if I would suffer him to enjoy it (this is, it seems, their common form of making love). I rejected the present, and never heard any further solicitations; for, as it is no shame for women here to consent at the first proposal, so they never receive a second. (p. 160)

Her final suitor is a gentle sea-captain (rather like the one who rescued Gulliver at the end of Book IV) who 'at first, made me a tender of his affections; but ... soon behaved in a manner very pleasing to me, regarding my sex only so far as to pay me a deference, which is very agreeable to us all' (p. 161).

In their treatment of sexual appetite, then, these episodes, although quite out of keeping with the stylised realism of the rest of the book, share with it a mechanics of predictability. The sexual misdemeanours of Wild and his colleagues are always unexpected, in the sense that the habitual irony (or more accurately sarcasm) of the book implies an attitude towards sex which is continually telling us that the characters oughtn't to behave in this way; but in a more simple sense, they are always expected, because they are always happening. This constitutes the comic element in the revelation, for example, that Tom Smirk has been hiding in the closet during the whole interview between Wild and Laetitia (I. x); and Fielding's measured, matter-of-fact reportage adds to our sense of this revelation as part of a clockwork process, rather than as part of the random flow of human motives and actions (however 'realistic' the context at this point). In Bergson's words, we are laughing at 'une certaine raideur de mécanique, là où l'on voudrait trouver la souplesse attentive et la vivante flexibilité d'une personne'¹⁰. Mrs. Heartfree's adventures come towards the end of the book, at a time when this method might be becoming slightly tired; they therefore aim to reinforce the conflict by finding new ways of suggesting the unpredictable. With each new protector, we are meant to think, 'Surely this one can't possibly be going to assault her'. (At the same time, they introduce a new sort of predictability, because we slowly begin to get the hang of the joke.) This section is not only

thematically consistent with the rest of the book, then: it is technically consistent, because it reworks the same comic method in a fresh context - which seems, for Fielding, to have been sufficient justification for combining realistic and unrealistic genres within the same work. He seems to have regarded this repetition of a certain type of humour as amounting to a unifying force. This brings us on to a central point about the potential homogeneity of comic fantasy, and also about eighteenth-century notions of humour.

(ii) Fielding and Comic Fantasy

In an article for the Champion, 20 March 1739/40 (the one which introduces the voyages of Job Vinegar, in fact), Fielding wrote:

To omit Robinson Cruso, and other grave Writers, the facetious Capt. Gulliver is more admired, I believe, for his Wit than his Truth; and I have been informed, that several ignorant People doubt at this Day whether there be really any such Places as Lilliput, Laputa, &c. ¹¹

Here he seems to be using 'Truth' only in the sense of 'veracity', a quality which he must at this stage, therefore (since we know that he admired Gulliver's Travels very much) have considered less important than 'Wit'. He is praising Swift for, among other things, his ability to invent such fictions instead of being a mere recorder of facts; but the word 'facetious' also alerts us to the fact that he wants 'Wit' to mean not just ingenuity but humorous

ingenuity. This is not to say that Fielding would have admired Gulliver's Travels simply for parodying a genre which Robinson Crusoe took seriously (the parody is there, but it is peripheral): his admiration testifies to a belief that this very facetiousness is a way of redeeming a work from the 'Chaos' which characterised 'the modern Novel and Atalantis Writers'. A theory of laughter was just emerging - first articulated by Francis Hutcheson in his Dublin Journal articles of the 1720s - which held that its origins lay in a heightened perception of incongruities and the yoking together of opposed ideas. This theory has an obvious bearing on comic allegory. Not only could it explain why a humorous writer might have quicker access to the most apt allegorical equivalences; it would also mean that the writer who maintained a consistently humorous attitude would always, by the very nature of his task, be concerned with locating contradictory ideas and transforming them into equivalents. The pursuit of laughter in this sense becomes a way of maintaining consistency of attitude, purpose and even organisation, however haphazard the surface arrangement.

Hutcheson did not express himself very clearly, or provide very good examples. He is good at demonstrating the limitations of Hobbes's theory of laughter (if laughter arises from superiority then 'I see not how we should ever meet with a composed countenance anywhere'), but his own version is confusing:

That, then, which seems generally the cause of laughter is the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas as well as some resemblance in the principle idea.¹²

This is, nevertheless, the first statement of what came to be an enduring theory. In 1776 it was endorsed, expanded and dignified by James Beattie in his essay 'On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition'¹³; in 1804 it was expressed by Jean Paul Richter in a joking form - 'Joking is the disguised priest who weds every couple'¹⁴; Friedrich Vischer (1846) 'defines joking as the ability to bind into a unity, with surprising rapidity, several ideas which are in fact alien to one another both in their internal content and in the nexus to which they belong'¹⁵; Baudelaire in 'De l'essence du Rire' (1855) described laughter as 'à la fois signe d'une grandeur infinie et d'une misère infinie', 'l'expression d'un sentiment double, ou contradictoire', which shows 'dans l'être humain l'existence d'une dualité permanente, la puissance d'être à la fois soi et un autre'¹⁶.

Freud provides by far the most thorough analysis of humour, jokes and the comic, and finds grounds for questioning the adequacy of all of these theories. But he rejects the Hobbesian position with as much emphasis as Hutcheson or even Pope¹⁷ ever did: 'the feeling of superiority bears no essential relation to comic pleasure'¹⁸; and once we have sifted through the careful distinctions between jokes and the comic (distinctions which he was the first to make), and assimilated the important new idea of 'economy of psychological expenditure' as a source of comic pleasure, we find an account of laughter not radically different from Hutcheson's:

For jokes do not, like dreams, create compromises;
they do not evade the inhibition, but they insist
on maintaining play with words or with nonsense
unaltered. They restrict themselves, however, to a

choice of occasions in which this play or this nonsense can at the same time appear allowable (in jests [Scherz]) or sensible (in jokes [Witz]), thanks to the ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of conceptual relations. Nothing distinguishes jokes more clearly from all other psychical structures than this double-sidedness ... (p. 230)

My point is not to uphold this interpretation as a comprehensive account of comic methods, but to suggest that its partial truth has been accepted by most writers on the subject; and that this means, in effect, that for a satiric writer, laughter will be a determining influence on structure, not in the sense of the organisation of parts, but in terms of stabilising the relation between content and meaning.

Gulliver's Travels is a particularly good example of comedy in which the process of 'binding into unities', of finding analogies between disparate elements, need not be a merely comfortable question of reconciling supposed opposites: its hostility consists of reminding us that there are things which we would rather keep separate, but which it then combines anyway: Man and Yahoo, Reasonable Animal and Houyhnhnm, English politics and Lilliputian politics, longevity and the Struldbruggs. The consistency of this method lies deeper than the surface inconsistencies which can so easily be cited if one wants to make out that the book is patchy. Here, for example, are four comparable extracts, each aiming at the same target, but from obviously different directions:

1a. That, the other Part of the Parliament consisted as

an Assembly called the House of Commons; who were all principal Gentlemen, freely picked and culled out by the People themselves, for their great Abilities, and Love of their Country, to represent the Wisdom of the Whole Nation. (II. vi, p. 128)¹⁹

- b. And he desired to know, whether such zealous Gentlemen could have any Views of refunding themselves for the Charges and Trouble they were at, by sacrificing the publick Good to the Designs of a weak and vicious Prince, in conjunction with a corrupted Ministry.

(II. vi, p. 130)

2. These unhappy People were proposing Schemes for persuading Monarchs to chuse Favourites upon the Score of their Wisdom, Capacity and Virtue; of teaching Ministers to consult the publick Good; of rewarding Merit, great Abilities and eminent Services; of instructing Princes to know their true Interest, by placing it on the same Foundation with that of their People: Of chusing for Employments Persons qualified to exercise them; with many other wild impossible Chimaeras, that never entered before into the Heart of Man to conceive; ...

(III. vi, p. 187)

3. I told him, that a First or Chief Minister of State, whom I intended to describe, was a Creature wholly exempt from Joy and Grief, Love and Hatred, Pity and Anger; at least makes use of no other Passions but a violent Desire of Wealth, Power, and Titles: That he applies his Words to

all Uses, except to the Indication of his Mind; That he never tells a Truth, but with an Intent that you should take it for a Lye; nor a Lye, but with a Design that you should take it for a Truth ...

(IV. vi, p. 255)

4. ... this Leader had usually a Favourite as like himself as he could get, whose Employment was to lick his Master's Feet and Posteriors, and drive the Female Yahoos to his Kennel; for which he was now and then rewarded with a Piece of Ass's Flesh. ... But how far this might be applicable to our Courts and Favourites, and Ministers of State, my Master said I could best determine.

(IV. vii, pp. 262-63)

There is a clear consistency about these four extracts: each is designed to sustain Swift's thesis that parliamentary governments, and prime ministers in particular, are corrupt. The first does so by answering a naive view with a cynical, more particularised one; the second by sarcastically claiming that a system which we know to be sensible is actually insane; the third by stating the case with a rhetoric of completeness, in a context of revitalised honesty; the fourth by pointing out similarities between parliamentary corruption and animal nastiness. In the first three extracts, Gulliver's positions are contradictory: first he believes that parliaments should not be corrupt, and that the English one isn't; then he believes that it should be corrupt; and finally that they should not be corrupt, but that the English one is. Only the fourth extract, taken out of context like this, is strictly allegorical.

All four passages show a consistency in method, by operating on the assumption that things seem more true when they are told obliquely.

In this respect the King of Brobdingnag's answer, and Gulliver's words to the Master Houyhnhnm (1b, 3), merit special attention, because they seem to be an explicit statement of what Swift means, except that in context they acquire a special force which might tell us something about the energy which the form of Gulliver's Travels seeks to generate. Both are part of long, eloquent lists of faults and corruptions. The King's takes the form of a question, for he is (or Swift is pretending that he is) voicing doubts with a tentativeness at odds with his confident placing of the adjectives ('weak and vicious', 'corrupted') in which the main thrust of his argument is located. Gulliver's main rhetorical device in the third extract is a vocabulary of completeness: 'wholly', 'no other', 'all', 'never'; the exuberance derives not only from his having arrived, he feels, at the truth, but from his discovery that the truth is simple, and admits of no exceptions. Each version, importantly, is new to the teller: the King has only just heard of the English constitution, and these are his first thoughts about it; this is Gulliver's first attempt to describe it since he lost the desire to 'say the thing which is not'.

Cumulatively, these four extracts therefore testify to a conviction, central to the methods of Gulliver's Travels, that the true nature of an idea can best be established when we examine it from every angle and every perspective (just as the first two books examine mankind through both ends of the telescope). As a result of this experiment, the proposition 'Parliamentary government is

corrupt' emerges triumphant. The narrative form of the book concerns itself with creating contexts within which this realisation can seem fresh; its satiric and comic elements are meant to enable us to accommodate different viewpoints at once: these viewpoints include the meaning ('Parliamentary government is corrupt'), and the narrative substance, a facetious caricature of truth (consisting of propositions such as 'people who want ministries to be uncorrupt are insane' and 'Yahoos exist') which we must be made to entertain if the meaning is to appear new and newly convincing.

Fielding's Journey from this World to the Next works in a very similar way, although he wants to put across meanings which are less hostile. Comparison with Gulliver (and with other comic fantasies) shows that the obvious and radical differences have far more to do with the nature of the meaning than with assumptions about the aptness of fiction and laughter as aids to truth-telling, assumptions which seem to be more or less identical for both authors. However, I want to establish as specifically as possible what it was that Fielding thought could be done with this form and no other: what meaning he felt could only be conveyed by abandoning truth. This can best be done by making quite particular comparisons with his avowed predecessors in the comic-fantastic tradition - Lucian, Rabelais, Swift. And, to make matters easier, I'm going to concentrate on a comic theme on which each of these authors played variations: meetings with the dead. For instance, both Gulliver (III. vii-viii) and the narrator of Fielding's Journey (I. viii-ix) are introduced to Homer, following a precedent set by Lucian in the True History:

I then asked if the textual experts were right in rejecting certain lines in his poems as spurious.

'Of course not,' he replied. 'I wrote every word of them. The trouble about these wretched editors is that they've got no taste.'

Having satisfied my curiosity on this point, I asked him what was the precise significance of the use of the word wrath in the opening sentence of the Iliad.

'No significance whatsoever,' he answered. 'It was the first word that came into my head.'²⁰

Fielding keeps the venerated writer's tone of amused indifference, but transfers it to Shakespeare ('Faith, gentlemen, it is so long since I wrote the line, I have forgot my meaning' - I. viii, p. 39): he presents Homer as being kinder to his critics and translators (Madam Dacier sits in his lap, he expresses a desire to meet Pope), whereas Swift, while retaining some of Lucian's specific detail ('his Eyes were the most quick and piercing I ever beheld') produces a more brutal variation. Homer and Aristotle are introduced to their commentators, but it turns out that 'both of them were perfect Strangers to the rest of the Company, and had never seen or heard of them before' (Gulliver, III. viii, p. 197). All critics, apparently, not only the mistaken ones, are not only laughable but beneath notice. And while Lucian and Fielding are content merely to put them out of countenance, Swift envisages a less comfortable situation: 'these Commentators always kept in the most distant Quarters from their Principals in the lower World, through a Consciousness of Shame and Guilt, because they had so horribly misrepresented the Meaning of those Authors to Posterity.'

Two elements in particular characterise this tradition of satiric meetings with the dead: it offers authors the chance both

to rewrite history, and to fantasise about future systems of judgment. Sometimes these strands are kept distinct, sometimes they merge: in each author, there is a noticeable shift of emphasis. Lucian (whom Fielding followed most closely, borrowing, for instance, the figure of Minos as archetypal judge), is not primarily interested in apportioning particular credit or blame. In Menippus Goes to Hell, it is true that Dionysus, about to be punished for 'several monstrous crimes', is subsequently pardoned because he 'had always been very generous to intellectuals'; and a few individual cases are decided by Rhadamanthus on the Island of the Blest in the True History:

The second was a matrimonial case, in which both Theseus and Menelaus claimed conjugal rights over Helen. The verdict was that she should cohabit with Menelaus, on the ground that he had suffered considerable inconvenience and danger on her account, and also that Theseus had three wives already, viz. Hippolyta, Phaedra, and Ariadne.

(pp. 275-76)

Elsewhere, the roles and behaviour of the 'dead' characters in the True History convey a sense not so much of authoritative and judicial placing, as of general appropriateness or simply of character conservation. Socrates keeps 'talking shop and ruining the atmosphere of the party with his peculiar brand of irony'. This aspect is retained, peripherally, by Fielding, who tells us that in Elysium 'every soul retained its principal characteristic, being, indeed, its very essence' (Journey, I. viii, pp. 38-39), but it is basically at odds with his vision (exemplified most famously

in the sentimental first paragraph of I. viii) that everything gets transformed in the other world. Lucian's more cynical point is that habits of thought are in most cases too deeply ingrained even for that. He is not concerned, essentially, with locating the truth about historical individuals; they appear only as a vehicle for wider observations - another frequent one being that death makes earthly distinctions meaningless, as Menippus Goes to Hell again makes clear:

In fact, with such a mass of skeletons lying around, all looking much the same, all staring horribly through eye-sockets and displaying lipless teeth, I despaired of ever being able to distinguish between Thersites and Nereus, Irus and Odysseus, Agamemnon and the local butcher. ...

What was almost too much for me was the spectacle of Philip of Macedon sitting in a corner, trying to make some money by mending rotten shoes - though admittedly there were plenty of other people like Xerxes, Darius, and Polycrates to be seen begging on the streets.²¹

This theme is taken up with a vengeance by Rabelais, and extensively particularised, in II. xxx of Gargantua and Pantagruel. But the hugeness of his list derives far more from his cruel delight in the process of table-turning, than from an appetite for meting out individual punishments. Any attempt to read a consistent system of judgment into his list is defeated by the zany illogicality of the detail: 'Dido sold mushrooms', 'Trajan was a fisher of frogs', 'Romulus sold taxed salt', 'Hector was a sauce-taster'²². It could be argued that Rabelais is disruptive of the tradition: he subverts

its more signalled satiric purpose and instead of claiming that earthly injustices do not matter, because they will be righted by a subsequent higher justice, he claims that they do not matter because there is no such concept as justice anyway. Here, everyone is levelled not by divine justice, but by reduction to a more pervasive common denominator, namely the insistence that these and all historical figures are inseparable from the physical world in its most basic manifestations, which the list renders in detail and at length. This is too radical for either Swift or Fielding.²³

What I wish to demonstrate from a survey of this tradition is that Fielding, more than any of his predecessors, saw it as a context in which fresh judgments could be made. He shows both more faith and more interest in the judicial process for which the conventions allowed scope. Swift is comparable, but while not as radical as Rabelais he is interested in being as destructive as possible within his own conservative limits: absolute confidence about matters of historical fact ('Next I saw Hannibal passing the Alps, who told me he had not a Drop of Vinegar in his Camp' - III. vii, p. 195) leads into a severe decisiveness:

I desired that the Senate of Rome might appear before me in one large Chamber, and a modern Representative, in counterview, in another. The first seemed to be an Assembly of Heroes and Demigods; the other a Knot of Pedlars, Pickpockets, Highwaymen and Bullies.

(p. 196)

Swift exploits the new clarity with which Gulliver can see these 'truths' mainly as a means towards reaching and expressing decisions,

where Fielding prefers to retain a surface irony:

My curiosity would not refrain from asking him [Cromwell] one question, i.e., whether in reality he had any desire to obtain the crown? He smiled, and said, "No more than an ecclesiastic hath to the mitre, when he cries Nolo episcopari." Indeed, he seemed to express some contempt at the question, and presently turned away.

(I. ix, p. 43)

In effect this is just as decisive, but Fielding still leaves an element of the thought-work to be done by the reader, cajoling us into a shadowy imitation of the judge's role. His interest in that role becomes even more explicit in Chapter vii of the Journey, and in the Champion for May 24, 1740, and it pervades his presentation of Allworthy (in particular) in Tom Jones, but is there removed from its previous, avowedly unreal setting. I'm now going to consider the difference that this makes.

(iii) Allworthy and Other Judges

John Preston has some useful things to say on this subject in his chapter, 'Tom Jones (ii): The "Pursuit of True Judgment"', from The Created Self:

The book, then, is not concerned with judgments made in detachment and isolation ... For if our judgments are an expression of our own moral identity, they are also an expression of community, of our attitude to others.

(p. 123)

This pinpoints the central tension in Fielding's treatment of the judgment theme in Tom Jones. Taking the lead from Preston, we could say that not only do judgments affect the whole social community (the characters), but they also affect the novel's community of events. In other words, whereas Minos's judgments in Chapter vii of the Journey are isolated dicta, which have no implications for any of the given characters other than those to whom they are individually addressed, Allworthy's verdicts in Tom Jones are significant not so much in themselves as for their consequences. Minos's judgments can only have one of three possible consequences: the character is either admitted to Elysium, consigned to the bottomless pit or sent back into the world to live another life. The question "What if he gets it wrong?" is therefore not a very interesting one. It would be unfortunate, certainly, if someone were sent to the bottomless pit by mistake: what it wouldn't be, though, is intriguing. Allworthy's responsibilities are in this sense much more momentous, and this is why more interest is taken in the issue of the reliability of the evidence (it is tacitly assumed that everyone tells the truth - or at least gives it away - to Minos).

By setting aside this consideration in the judgment scene of the Journey, Fielding is opting for an easy universality, which he achieves by ensuring that each case is treated in signposted isolation. A beautiful spirit appears, begins to ogle Minos and boasts of having refused a large number of lovers: we have never met her before, and within a few lines she is gone, never to be met again. As a piece of traditional novelistic characterisation this would be absurd, but Fielding is writing in the confidence

of his reader's responsiveness to another tradition. In the absence of any immediate contextual relevance, we are meant instinctively to bring to bear on this figure all that we know of its relevance to the real world: hence, for "beautiful promiscuous lady" we interpret "all beautiful promiscuous ladies". Similarly, in the same chapter, for "miserable old politician" we interpret "all miserable old politicians"; and, in the comparable judgment scene from the Champion²⁴ for "affectedly grave man" we interpret "all affectedly grave men", and so on. Fielding was to claim, in his first novel, that 'I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species'²⁵: we can now see, then, that this feature of his novelistic practice had its origins in a specifically satiric trick of generalisation. Of course, the technique is not in itself complex, and could easily get boring: if these figures are to have a merely emblematic quality, why place them in a narrative at all, even an unrealistic one? Fielding tries to get round this problem by always showing them in action. We are not simply told that the beautiful spirit is promiscuous, it is shown by her behaviour; more than that, in fact, it has to be inferred from her behaviour:

She began to ogle Minos the moment she saw him. She said she hoped there was some merit in refusing a great number of lovers, and dying a maid, though she had had the choice of a hundred. Minos told her she had not refused enow yet, and turned her back.

(Journey, I. vii, p. 32)

As for the grave young gentleman:

Mercury assured him, that he would suffer no person

to go aboard with that vast quantity of wisdom. A violent dispute arose, but the matter was soon compromised, and on his agreeing to put off his gravity, he was permitted to retain his wisdom.

(Works, XIV, pp. 317-18)

A distinction should be kept in mind here, between the parts played by narrative and irony in particularising the two examples. By showing his characters in action (even if only in the act of speaking) Fielding makes them at least nominally dynamic. More importantly, by only implying, in a joking form, the truth behind their words, he is trying to bring the reader into action. Consequently (when it works) a dynamic relationship is set up between the reader and the emblematic character. In these instances he aims at a union of the universal and the particular by means of isolation, narrative and irony.

Tom Jones addresses the same problem in a different and much more complicated way. John Preston's remark about moral identity and the community is a good point from which to start examining it. One could say of Allworthy that, as an expression of his own moral identity, his judgments are flawless; as an expression of community and of his attitude to others, they are seriously flawed. As Preston says,

Thus Shaftesbury bids "self-love and social be the same." What he does not allow for is the difficulty, the stress of living up to these principles. Fielding has to test Shaftesbury's ideals in the thick of life.

(p. 123)

'The thick of life' needs elaborating. It immediately brings up the question of evidence, for Allworthy fails to live up to his own ideals mainly because he is in the habit of believing whatever people tell him. In one of his earliest and most grandiose descriptions of Allworthy, Fielding chooses to stress the fact that he is primarily a man of intention:

a human Being replete with Benevolence, meditating
in what manner he might render himself most acceptable
to his Creator, by doing most good to his Creatures.

(I. iv, p. 43: my emphases)

This suggests, at least, that Allworthy feels a basic uncertainty about his ability to put his ideals into practice. Straight after this paragraph comes a famous undercutting effect, in which Fielding, having brought the reader to the top of a hill, suggests that we 'slide down together' in case we break our necks. Partly this passage is designed to ridicule Allworthy, perhaps: but it also testifies to a genuine anxiety about style, and elsewhere we find that, when dealing with Allworthy, Fielding's concerns tend to be more subtle than those of ridicule. It is not ridiculous, for instance, that he condemns Tom and banishes him from the house on the evidence which Blifil lays before him in VI. x. Reading Blifil's speech (pp. 307-08) carefully, I found twenty-five different points at which he says or does something which puts Allworthy at a disadvantage²⁶. These include his sustained pretence that the whole point of his telling the story is to petition for Tom's forgiveness; flagrant misrepresentation of the facts (he claims to have given Tom 'a gentle Hint of the Indecency of his Actions' when we know that

this took the form of a cruel taunt); and more insidious means, such as the dovetailing of his insinuations into the terms of Allworthy's own speeches (Allworthy says, "I think I have shewn Tenderness enough towards him, and more, perhaps, than you ought to thank me for." "More, indeed, I fear than he deserved," cries Blifil': he seizes on Allworthy's 'more ... than' construction in order to make it sound as though he is merely picking up the thread of the same argument, and the narration slips suddenly into the present tense so as to highlight the opportunism behind this tactic).

This is not, then, a ridiculous situation: its connotations are too serious, both in terms of its implications for Tom, and of what it tells us about Allworthy, who appears now as a man pressured by his position into the need to make decisive judgments even in the face of unmanageable complexities. It thus strongly evokes a different sort of response, one closely connected with laughter, certainly, but not with hostility. Again we are being made to entertain different viewpoints at once, but not in the manner I described earlier when discussing Gulliver's Travels. There, I argued that to accept (temporarily) as true Swift's proposition "Yahoos exist" was to be admitted to a plane on which it was possible to entertain with fresh conviction a proposition such as "Parliamentary government is corrupt". It is not these propositions themselves which are contradictory: the laughter is meant to arise, rather, from the clash between the new conviction and the reader's 'normal' state of mind, a state in which we allow such convictions to lie dormant. Disapproval and latent/complicit approval (what are we doing about it?) of a bad system of government therefore tug

against each other: the resulting satire is essentially conservative because they resolve into a comfortable feeling (laughter). To go back to my original terms of reference, Swift's 'meaning' ("Parliamentary government is corrupt") has nothing to do with 'truth' in the sense of truth to life. It is arrived at by means of a narrative lie.

It seems clear, on the other hand, that in Tom Jones we cannot separate meaning from truth in the same way at all. To explain the comic quality of this incident in the same terms, would involve arguing that Fielding means to inculcate the conviction that "Evidence is not always reliable", and that this conviction clashes with the reader's assumption that "Evidence is usually reliable" in order to provoke laughter. This is highly unconvincing: these factors are present, but seem incidental. In Gulliver, having arrived at the meaning, we can put narrative to one side, whereas in Tom Jones we have to look for the meaning in the narrative. It consists of a set of narrative propositions (in Todorov's sense²⁷), each of them individually 'true to life' and therefore seemingly unexceptional, but so superimposed as to require us to entertain them simultaneously, provoking a complex emotional and intellectual response in the reader where the most that the contradictions forced on us by Swift provoked was laughter.

In this incident, for example, the reader's experience consists of the superimposition of two different perspectives, mediated via the narrator himself. Hence we are able to see exactly the relationship between reality, misrepresentation and misapprehension because we alone are in a position to watch all of them taking place. Blifil, although of course he knows what is happening, does not regard himself

with the necessary disgust - he does not interpret his own actions correctly, and therefore does not perceive them correctly (I'll develop this point in the next chapter). And whereas Allworthy later comes to see how blind he has been, he never experiences this incident, like the reader, as an immediate, fully comprehensible event. Part of this episode, then - the part with which I am most concerned - exists outside the experience of the characters. To accommodate it within the field of narrative, we have to expand our definition of that word to mean not only what takes place between characters, but what the reader sees to take place between characters²⁸.

The privilege of superior knowledge is obviously one which all readers of fiction enjoy, but it is particularly important in Fielding's case for two reasons. First (partly because his plotting owes so much to stage comedy) he is repeatedly drawn to the starkest dramatic ironies, in which the reader is often apprised of more than the combined knowledge of all the characters involved. Second, he is acutely conscious of the presence of his audience, frequently reminds us of our privileges, and enjoins us - since we are the only ones in full possession of the facts - to make responsible judgments. Preston touches on this area in his reference to Tom Jones VII. i:

Actually Fielding's way of envisaging this relationship [between narrator and reader] has less to do with inns and law-courts than with the theatre, and especially with the audience He is interested more in the audience than the play, ~~as~~ we see also from several other passages in the novel [e.g. XVI. vi] ... if Fielding is watchful of his readers, interested in the way they take his story,

this is because their judgment is in the long run
part of that story. (pp. 118-20)

'In the long run part of that story' is an important, if incomplete, insight. In effect the audience is not so much part of the story as of the meaning: that is to say, the 'meaning' of this book could now be defined as that aspect of the narrative which remains incomprehensible to the characters but is still susceptible to judgment by the audience. It is therefore a version of reality, but one so complete that it could not be conveyed except in a novel which addresses itself so directly to the relationship between events and our apprehension of them.

Thus Allworthy's and Blifil's views of the episode react to form a compound version which is in itself quite different from either; just as (to vary the analogy) two primary colours intermixed will lose their distinctive qualities and produce a third, new colour. Earlier I described the method of Gulliver's Travels as being to test the truth of each proposition by examining it from different angles. Tom Jones tends to arrive at its meaning by superimposing all the possible viewpoints so as to form a single, composite and unique picture accessible only to the reader. One of the functions of the talkative narrator is to ensure that the line between the reader and the narrative remains clearly enough drawn for this method to take effect. If one were to ask, then, what Fielding 'meant' by letting Allworthy fall for Blifil's lies at this point, we might answer that he meant to make us feel, simultaneously, the need to judge and the dangers of judging; and that he reconciles them only in the sense that he renders a

moment at which their co-existence becomes clear (to us, that is: if it were clear to the characters then it would frustrate any action). Tom Jones therefore differs from Fielding's fantastic writings in that its meaning is now inseparable from narrative: previously we were able to detach one from the other in response to ironic coercion.

In order for the moment to be affecting, the reader must be kept aware of all its causes and possible consequences. Blifil's distortions ('he filled the House with Riot and Debauchery') only raise our indignation if we keep in mind the facts with which they are to be compared; and the cruel irony of 'a Secret which I feared might be fatal to him' depends on our knowledge that this is the very outcome which Blifil intends and seems likely to bring about. Again, as in Gulliver's Travels, this means that the jokes and ironies have an organising purpose. Our response to humour is quicker and more consistent than some of our other, more conscious habits of thought: consequently (although they may not be included specifically for this purpose) jokes have a way of bringing small but important ideas rapidly to mind. When readers meet a sentence in which a humorous combination of contrasts is signalled, they can often recall the necessary details with sudden agility. For instance, Blifil's misrepresentation of his quarrel with Tom enables us to reconstruct the original incident (even though the two are separated by twelve chapters) simply because we know that at every point he is relating the exact opposite of what actually happened. Humour, then, is a means of strengthening the relations between the parts of a large-scale comic work, as well as being able to combine perspectives in order to form

a composite and not otherwise achievable vision.

The satiric works to which, on the evidence of Tom Jones, Fielding was indebted, seem to have influenced him in three ways. They reconciled him to the idea that fiction could be one way of telling the truth; they taught him something about the interdependent relationship between humour and structure; and they suggested the possibility of not merely presenting events but also passing judgment on them. I've tried to show that, even without taking into account the narrator's presence, the judgments required of the characters and the reader of Tom Jones tend to be newly problematic; and I'd now like to add a further layer of complexity, by considering the extent to which, as Fielding's career progressed, narratorial commentary came to complicate this already predominantly ironic habit of expression.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Covent-Garden Journal, no. 10 (4 February, 1752), I, 194.
2. Preface to the Voyage to Lisbon, p. 185.
3. 'A Parallel Betwixt Painting and Poetry' in 'Of Dramatic Poesy' and Other Critical Essays, edited by George Watson, Everyman's Library, 2 vols (London, 1962), II, 181-208 (pp. 186-87).

4. 'Of Dramatic Poesy' and Other Critical Essays, I, 47.
5. 'The Answer of Mr. Hobbs to Sr. William Davenant's Preface before Gondibert' in Literary Criticism of Seventeenth-Century England, edited by Edward W. Taylor (New York, 1967), pp. 279-90 (p. 286).
6. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, The Spectator, edited by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford, 1965), III, 144.
7. Traité du Poème Épique (1675), book v, chap. iii. English translation: Monsieur Bossu's Treatise of the Epick Poem ... Made English, with a Preface upon the Same Subject, by W.J., 2nd ed., 2 vols (London, 1719).
8. Miscellanies, Volume One, pp. 191-204.
9. Originally published London, 1720. Reprinted as Volume III of Romances and Narratives by Daniel Defoe, edited by George A. Aitken, 16 vols (London, 1895). Page references and quotations in the text are from this edition.
10. Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique in Oeuvres, edited by André Robinet and Henri Gouhier (Paris, 1959), pp. 381-485 (p. 391).
11. 'The Voyages of Mr. Job Vinegar' from the 'Champion', edited by S.J. Sackett, Augustan Reprint Society, no. 67 (Los Angeles, 1958), p. 1.
12. Quoted from Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, edited by Scott Elledge, 2 vols (Ithaca, New York, 1961), I, 383. Hutcheson's three essays were first printed in the Dublin

Journal, nos 10, 11 and 12 (5, 12, and 19 June 1725), then reprinted first in an anthology of essays by various authors, A Collection of Letters and Essays on Several Subjects, lately Publish'd in the Dublin Journal, 2 vols (London, 1729) (sometimes known as Hibernicus's Letters), then in his own Reflections Upon Laughter, and Remarks Upon the Fable of the Bees (Glasgow, 1750). The eighteenth-century argument about laughter has been fairly well documented: see especially Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Chicago, 1960), and J.W. Draper, 'The Theory of the Comic in Eighteenth-Century England', JEGP, 37 (1938), 207-23. Failing these, there is only one place to look for a more thorough range of references, viz. my own Bibliography of Eighteenth-Century Writings on Laughter (M.A. dissertation, Warwick University, 1984).

13. In Essays: On Poetry and Music as they Affect the Mind; On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition; On the Utility of Classical Learning (Edinburgh, 1776).
14. Cited from Freud's introduction to Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, translated by James Strachey, edited by James Strachey and Angela Richards, The Pelican Freud Library, 6 (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 41. Freud is quoting from Richter's Vorschule der Aesthetik, 2 vols (Hamburg, 1804).
15. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 41. He is paraphrasing F.T. Vischer, Aesthetik, 3 vols in 4 (Leipzig and Stuttgart, 1846-57), I, 422.

16. 'De l'essence du Rire, et généralement du Comique dans les Arts Plastiques' in Oeuvres Complètes, edited by Claude Pichois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1976), pp. 525-43 (pp. 532, 534, 543). A translation is available in 'The Painter of Life' and Other Essays, translated by Jonathan Mayne (London, 1964), pp. 147-65.
17. Writing of Hobbes's theory that laughter springs from pride, Pope said, 'I very rarely laugh with that view, nor do I believe children have any such consideration in their heads': letter to Henry Cromwell, 30 December 1710, Correspondence, edited by George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956), I, 111-12. Fielding, incidentally, seems to have accepted Hobbes's theory: see 'An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men', Miscellanies, Volume One, pp. 159-60. Hobbes put forward the theory in Human Nature, IX. viii, and Leviathan, I. vi: The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, edited by W. Molesworth, 11 vols (London, 1839-45), IV, 45-47 and III, 46.
18. Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 256.
19. Page references are to the text of Gulliver's Travels in Swift's Prose Works, edited by Herbert Davis et al., 16 vols (Oxford, 1939-74), vol. XI.
20. The True History, II, 20, in The Works of Lucian, Loeb Classical Library, 8 vols (London, 1913-67), I, 247-357. I'm quoting from Paul Turner's Penguin Classics translation, in Satirical Sketches (Harmondsworth, 1961), pp. 249-94. Future page references in the text.

21. Satirical Sketches, translated by Paul Turner, pp. 106, 108. Menippus Goes to Hell is in vol. IV of the Loeb Works of Lucian, pp. 71-109.
22. Quoted from J.M. Cohen's translation (Harmondsworth, 1955), pp. 266-68.
23. In fact its nearest equivalent in the satiric-fantastic tradition occurs in Flann O'Brien's The Dalkey Archive (London, 1964), in which the scientist De Selby, having discovered that 'a de-oxygenated atmosphere cancels the apparently serial nature of time', goes deep-sea diving and encounters various historical figures under water; among them St. Augustine, with whom he has a lengthy interview:
- You admit you were a debauched and abandoned young man?
 - For a pagan I wasn't the worst. Besides, maybe it was the Irish in me.
 - The Irish in you?
 - Yes. My father's name was Patrick. And he was a proper gobshite.
- [On the subject of Origen of Alexandria's self-castration:]
- How could Origen be the Father of Anything and he with no knackers on him? Answer me that one.
 - We must assume that his spiritual testicles remained intact.
- (pp. 34-36)
24. May 24, 1740: Works, XIV, 316-21. Future references in the text.
25. Joseph Andrews, III. i, p. 198.
26. Proceeding point by point, they are:
- (1) Blifil winds Allworthy up by constantly putting off the

revelation.

- (2) He pretends to be petitioning for Tom's forgiveness.
- (3) He dovetails his insinuations into the terms of Allworthy's own speeches.
- (4) 'myself and all the Family': he aligns himself with the family, to the exclusion of Tom.
- (5) He uses purposely emotive language: 'Tears', 'Riot', 'Debauchery'.
- (6) He refuses to allow the possibility that drinking and singing and roaring might be signs of relief and joy.
- (7) He calls his own cruel taunt 'a gentle Hint'.
- (8) His claim that Tom 'fell into a violent Passion' is a lie.
- (9) He again invokes the ideas of forgiveness and gratitude.
- (10) He claims to have been insulted on Allworthy's behalf, not his own.
- (11) He makes his account more colourful by mentioning the devil.
- (12) His claim that he and Thwackum were 'exulting' in Allworthy's recovery is a lie.
- (13) His use of 'unluckily' is patently insincere.
- (14) 'a Manner not fit to be mentioned' puts up a pretence of decency while remaining perfectly explicit.
- (15) He claims that Thwackum showed bravery (when we know it was only malicious curiosity).
- (16) 'I am sorry to say it': he is not sorry to say it.
- (17) Tom did not 'fall upon' Thwackum.
- (18) Thwackum is not a 'worthy Man'.

- (19) Blifil did not endeavour to protect Thwackum.
- (20) He invokes the idea of forgiveness again.
- (21) He did not prevail with Thwackum to forgive him.
- (22) He claims to have suppressed the story out of consideration for Tom.
- (23) He says he has 'unadvisedly dropped a Hint of this Matter' after telling the whole story in considerable detail.
- (24) He claims to have told the story because Allworthy commanded him to.
- (25) He offers to intercede on Tom's behalf (but doesn't).

27. See 'The Grammar of Narrative' in The Poetics of Prose, translated by Richard Howard (Oxford, 1977), pp. 108-19. This in turn is basically an abstract of Todorov's Grammaire du Décaméron, Approaches to Semiotics, 3 (The Hague and Paris, 1969).
28. I seem to have arrived at a very similar conclusion to that reached, after a philosophic and character-orientated reading, by Bernard Harrison in Chapter 2 of his Fielding's 'Tom Jones': The Novelist as Moral Philosopher (London, 1975): 'Fielding's concept of character, in short, is founded in the notion of the coherence of a man's speech and action when seen from different viewpoints; and further, in the notion that only truth and simplicity can survive, without lapsing into incoherence ... the scrutiny it must undergo as the planes and mirrors of transposed points of view turn and shift about it' (p. 45). I've merely taken his argument slightly further, and onto a more theoretical plane, by applying it to the ways in which readers perceive narrative, not just character.

Chapter Three

MODES OF COMMENTARY

(i) Fielding's Plays

In his book Occasional Form, John Paul Hunter mentions Fielding's conviction 'that action is not autonomous and that the act of interpretation impinges upon the act of perception'¹. So far so good. Few people would disagree that 'the act of interpretation impinges upon the act of perception': what is more open to objection is Fielding's way of interrelating the two in his novels. One might argue that in Tom Jones the act of interpretation over-impinges upon the act of perception, precisely because Fielding is always anxious to put forward interpretations for us. I take this to be at the back of any statement of distaste for intrusive narration, even a non-academic one such as Ford Madox Ford's:

... the technique to which he paid attention was that of eighteenth century wit and the cumulative effect he sought after was that of introducing his shapely person, with whisking skirts and whirling, clouded cane, more and more prominently on to the stage of his novel. Until there should be no soul in the audience that should not cry: 'A damned clever fellow, this author,' with all the ladies inscribing as fast as they may his bon mots on their tablets.

... having satisfied himself that his self-introduction would give no offence, from that moment onwards Fielding gave himself carte blanche and pirouetted and winked

across his pages whenever - and that was often enough -
the mood occurred to him.²

Ford's chauvinism wouldn't cut much ice in the academic world today, but at the same time he represents a certain 'common sense' attitude to intrusive narration which hasn't yet, to my knowledge, been fully exploded. What I want to do over the course of the next three chapters is to arrive at a realisation of the potential for open-endedness which Fielding's intrusions allow. In this chapter, I shall trace the progress of his nervousness of leaving his readers to make up their own minds. In the fourth chapter the emphasis will shift onto characters, initially to show how Fielding satirises attitudes which appear to be morally and intellectually inadequate, but finally to argue that he sees possibilities of energy and progression both in them and in the literary forms to which they are analagous. We shall then focus on the reader in chapter five, able to see more clearly, with any luck, the extent to which Fielding was able to build an awareness of his readers' responses into the fabric of his book.

Although I used the word 'progress' just now, I should be surprised to find that Fielding's nervousness of leaving the reader alone actually increases during the course of his literary career. Rather, it progresses in the sense that it solidifies and gradually fits more comfortably into a generic framework (until Amelia, that is). For this reason, my approach in this chapter will be selectively chronological, and the best and most concrete place to start is with the self-referential plays, with their awkward, semi-ironised author figures. Before doing so, though,

I think the following statement should be borne in mind. It comes from Fielding's last piece of writing, the 'Author's Preface' to The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon:

As there are few things which a traveller is to record, there are fewer on which he is to offer his observations: this is the office of the reader; and it is so pleasant a one, that he seldom chooses to have it taken from him, under the pretence of lending him assistance. Some occasions, indeed, there are, when proper observations are pertinent, and others when they are necessary; but good sense alone must point them out. I shall lay down only one general rule; which I believe to be of universal truth between relator and hearer; this is, that the latter never forgive any observation of the former which doth not convey some knowledge that they are sensible they could not possibly have attained of themselves. (p. 184)

There are a couple of problems with applying this statement as broadly as I intend: it was made twenty years after the plays were written, and Fielding is specifically discussing travel-writing. But in the absence of any evidence to the contrary it seems fair to suppose that what he wrote in 1754 he also believed in 1730; and he does describe it as a 'general' rule, one which holds 'between relator and hearer', not just between travel-writer and travel-reader. And it shows without doubt that Fielding, who is one of the authors most frequently accused of over-intruding, was highly conscious of the dangers of doing just that. So we can

assume that when he does put forward his own commentary, whether in the plays or in the novels, he does not do so lightly, with a view merely to reinforcing the obvious. His intrusions - if he kept to his own rule - should always be adding something to the meaning; and to appreciate that this is the case, we must keep in mind the expanded sense of 'meaning' which I've been arguing for in the previous chapter.

* * *

The author figures in Fielding's plays are the subject of a happy but superficial critical consensus, which agrees that they are prototypes for the narrators of the novels, only not as good³. It ought now to be possible to add something to this. For instance, why are they not as good? Rawson says that 'Often ... they are rather foolish figures, whose power to transmit any impulse of self-expression from Fielding is very limited'. Preston agrees, describing Trapwit from Pasquin as 'the vain author of an incoherent and unfunny comedy', but uses this point to support his highly dubious argument that Fielding's most self-advertising remarks in Tom Jones are intended as a parody of bad authors. Both critics are in fact on dodgy ground, although Preston's is slightly the dodgier: the fact that he finds the comedy in Pasquin unfunny does not mean that Fielding considered it unfunny and therefore intended it parodically. We are dealing in subjectivity and conjecture here, but which seems more likely: that the boorish Squire Tankard is meant to be a critique of contemporary playwrights' stereotypical presentations of country squires, or that he is an early and not

very successful sketch of Squire Western? And while Rawson is right to say that Trapwit is 'often' a rather foolish figure, this still leaves us with the fact that often, rather disconcertingly, he is not:

I could name you some comedies, if I would, where a woman is brought in for four acts together, behaving to a worthy man in a manner for which she almost deserves to be hanged; and in the fifth, forsooth, she is rewarded with him for a husband ...⁴

This is simply shrewd, and has a tone not unlike the narration of Tom Jones; and even some of Trapwit's more questionable remarks are open to the same reading. Here, for instance, we may be intended to think that he believes what he says (in which case he is being foolish), but perhaps he is being icily sarcastic:

Ay, interest or conscience, they are words of the same meaning: but I think conscience rather the politer of the two, and most used at court.

(III: Works, XI, p. 194)

(In support of the latter interpretation, we might remember that this cool re-definition of words such as 'Conscience' is something that Fielding went in for later, in the 'Modern Glossary' in no. 4 of The Covent-Garden Journal: see below, pp. 175 - 83.)

I think that Fielding certainly felt an element of contempt for Trapwit and his other author figures, and I'll shortly explain why, but at the same time it is not enough to see him merely as ironically distancing himself from them. True, they talk and behave foolishly, but there is too a strong sense that they are in a

desperate situation, one in which Fielding had also found himself both as a playwright and later as a novelist, and which consequently provides one of the most illuminating points of contact and contrast between the authors of the plays and the narrator of Tom Jones. 'Harry' Luckless, the playwright of The Author's Farce, is probably the most obvious and straightforward Fielding-surrogate, so we might use him to localise a central question: what, essentially, is shown to be his motivation - what does he spend most of the play trying to do? It can be answered in terms gradually more specific: to survive; to make money; to write successful plays; - at which point we can stop, having arrived at the question which The Author's Farce most fundamentally addresses - 'What constitutes a successful play?' - and which it attempts to answer in both aesthetic and political terms.

By 'political' I mean to point out that The Author's Farce is largely concerned with the various power structures and networks of private interest which a play must negotiate before reaching the stage and reaching a sympathetic audience. (It is not until The Historical Register that the word is explicitly used in this connection, with Sourwit's question, 'how is your political connected with your theatrical?'⁵). The aesthetic criteria by which a play succeeds, in Fielding's terms, are established glancingly by such throwaway remarks of Witmore's as, 'in an age of learning and true politeness, where a man might succeed by his merit, there would be some encouragement'⁶: the unimpeachability of ideals such as 'learning', 'true politeness' and 'merit' remains unquestioned in this play, as it does, by and large, throughout Fielding's work. These are not enough, however, at a time when 'party and prejudice

carry all before them' to ensure that a play will 'do'. This is to be determined by other, political, considerations, which the characters then spend their time trying to manipulate:

BOOKWEIGHT: ... but a play which will do on the stage, will not always do for us [booksellers]; there are your acting plays, and your reading plays.

(I. vii: Works, VIII, p. 208)

SPARKISH: No, no, no. It will not do.

LUCKLESS: What faults do you find?

MARPLAY: Sir, there is nothing in it that pleases me, so I am sure there is nothing in it that will please the town. ⁷

SPARKISH: What dost think of the play?

MARPLAY: It may be a very good one, for aught I know; but I know the author has no interest.

SPARKISH: Give me interest, and rat the play. ⁸

WITMORE: ... I tell you the town is prejudiced against you and they will damn you, whether you deserve it or no. If they should laugh till they burst, the moment they knew you were the author they would change their faces and swear they never laughed at all. ⁹

So, before we attempt to draw direct comparisons between the author figures in the plays and the narrators of the novels, we must remember this important distinction between the two genres: novelists, once an authoritative text is in print and in circulation (a

comparatively easy process in the eighteenth century), have sole control (insofar as anyone has any control) over their readers' responses; whereas even once a play has reached the stage, it can be disrupted both by the actors and by the audience. To read a novel is to be engaged in a private exchange between two minds, but a 'play', as Fielding was well aware, is a social occasion (or rather a series of social occasions, involving a large crowd of participants and taking place within the enclosed space of the theatre) for which the author can only ever be partially responsible. And the eighteenth-century playwright had to please an audience whose standards, as Fustian complains in IV. i of Pasquin, were often arbitrary:

At length, after having waded through all these difficulties, his play appears on the stage, where one man hisses out of resentment to the author; a second out of dislike to the house; a third out of dislike to the actor; a fourth out of dislike to the play; a fifth for the joke sake; a sixth to keep all the rest in company. Enemies abuse him, friends give him up, the play is damned, and the author goes to the devil: so ends the farce. (Works, XI, p. 205)

('Farce' here refers revealingly both to the play itself and to the business of putting it on: the two are seen as inseparable.) Fustian is exaggerating for comic effect, but Arthur H. Scouten's introduction to The London Stage: 1729-1747¹⁰ contains some more sober illustrations of the extent to which audience responses could influence the nature of the performance:

If some unexpected contretemps threatened to affect

the regular procedures, the problem was often laid before the audience. The Daily Advertiser of 14 January 1736 describes such a crux on the preceding night: "The Gentleman who perform'd the Character of Osman in the Tragedy of Zara the first night having declin'd it, that Part was read last Night; and it being submitted to the Determination of the Audience, whether the Play should be continu'd, or the Repetition of it deferr'd till somebody was studied in the Part, they unanimously declared for the Continuation of the Play."

(p. clxvi)

Consequently, if the audience is capable of influencing the performance in this way, we can even recognise a sense in which they become the performance. Scouten again:

Not all the actors were on stage. The Earl of Egmont records another charming episode, the nuances of which did not escape the rest of the audience: "The Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke, the Princesses were all at the Play. When the Prince came into the box he made a bow to the Duke and Princesses; the Duke returned it, but the Princesses did not, upon which the house hissed them. Very soon after Princess Carolina sounded away, upon which the Princesses left the Play, the Duke leading them out. When he returned, he made another respectful bow to the Prince." ¹¹

Fielding's sensitivity to this aspect of theatre-going cannot be over-emphasised. On a simple level, the potential absurdity of

a situation in which it is desire for social rather than aesthetic pleasure which motivates people to attend theatres becomes the subject of much incidental satire. From The Modern Husband, for example:

MRS. BELLAMANT: What is the play tonight?
LADY CHARLOTTE GAYWIT: I never know that. Miss Rattle
 and I saw four acts the other night, and came away
 without knowing the name. I think, one only goes to
 see the company, and there will be a great deal tonight.

(III. v: Works, X, p. 49)

Or from The Historical Register:

LORD DAPPER: Really, this is a very bad house.
SOURWIT: It is not indeed so large as the others,
 but I think one hears better in it.
LORD DAPPER: Pox of hearing, one can't see - one's
 self, I mean; here are no looking glasses.

(I: Works, XI, p. 247)

If we pay more than passing attention to some of Fielding's less obvious jokes, though, we can see that the idea of audience-as-author was central to his thinking about theatre. Take this incident from Pasquin:

TRAPWIT: ... I must desire a strict silence through
 this whole scene. Colonel, stand you still on this
 side of the stage; and, miss, do you stand on the
 opposite. There, now look at each other.

[A long silence here.]

FUSTIAN: Pray, Mr. Trapwit, is no body ever to speak

again?

TRAPWIT: Oh! the Devil! You have interrupted the scene;
after all my precautions the scene's destroyed; the best
scene of silence that ever was penned by man.

(III: Works, XI, p. 196)

The nearest parallel I can think of is with John Cage's 4'33", of which part of the rationale is that since no human being is physically capable of remaining silent (Cage conducted experiments in bank vaults to prove that, even in conditions of otherwise absolute silence, the workings of the nervous system remain audible) the performed work is never a 'silent piece of music' but an indeterminate event whose exact nature will depend upon the behaviour of the audience. And the American experimental composers of the 'sixties who followed in Cage's wake, particularly the Fluxus aggregation associated with LaMonte Young, have in fact a specific affinity with Fielding in their preoccupation (in Michael Nyman's words) with the audience 'as an object of experimental curiosity, as something less than passive spectators':

Along with other Fluxus composers, LaMonte Young was fascinated by the audience as a social situation. Three of the 1960 compositions are ostensibly 'audience pieces'. In Composition 1960 No. 3 listeners are told that for some specific time or other they may do anything they wish. In No. 4 the audience is told that the lights will be turned off for a time; the lights are switched off, and at the end an announcement may (or may not) be made 'that their activities have been

the composition'. No. 6 reverses the performer/ audience relationship - performers watch the audience in the same way as the audience usually watches the performers. Non-performers are given the choice of watching or being the audience. ¹²

This can also be argued from slightly more familiar territory, namely XVI. v of Tom Jones, in which Partridge goes to the theatre with Jones and Mrs. Miller. Fielding goes to some lengths to stress that Partridge himself is the primary source of the evening's entertainment: 'as Jones had really that Taste for Humour which many affect, he expected to enjoy much Entertainment in the Criticisms of Partridge' (p. 852). Furthermore, this is by no means a private enjoyment:

Thus ended the Adventure at the Playhouse; where Partridge had afforded great Mirth, not only to Jones and Mrs. Miller, but to all who sat within hearing, who were more attentive to what he said, than to any Thing that passed on the Stage.

(p. 857)

As Battestin points out in a footnote, this scene seems to have been inspired by the Spectator, no. 335 (25 March 1712), in which Sir Roger de Coverly attends a performance of Philips's The Distrest Mother¹³. Addison's treatment is quite different, however, and the main difference is one of volume: the respective volumes at which Sir Roger and Partridge make their remarks. Sir Roger 'whispered me in the Ear' and 'muttered to himself' (p. 241), whereas Partridge

invariably 'cries'. Partridge's comments 'caused much Laughter in the Neighbourhood', whereas in order to hear Sir Roger at all 'two or three Waggs who sat near us' had to 'lean with an attentive Ear'. At Philips's play, 'there was a very remarkable Silence and Stillness in the Audience during the whole Action', the only conversation being in the 'Intervals between the Acts'; Partridge talks and diverts the audience continuously - and yet they are meant to be watching Hamlet, of all plays. Fielding is, in short, massively more preoccupied than Addison with the public, social and generally non-aesthetic aspects of dramatic entertainment.

Temperamentally, then, Fielding found it congenial to think and to talk about the theatre in political terms. Eurydice Hissed is the most concrete example: a play (Eurydice) is used as a sustained and precise metaphor for a piece of legislation (the Excise Bill). In The Historical Register for the Year 1736, Medley is given a long speech which also makes the analogy very clear:

you may remember I told you before my rehearsal that there was a strict resemblance between the states political and theatrical; there is a ministry in the latter as well as the former; and I believe as weak a ministry as any poor kingdom could ever boast of; parts are given in the latter to actors, with much the same regard to capacity, as places in the former have sometimes been, in former ages, I mean; and though the public damn both, yet while they both receive their pay, they laugh at the public behind the scenes; and if one considers the plays that come from one part, and the writings from the other, one would be apt to think the same writers

were retained in both. (II: Works, XI, pp. 257-58)

Where does the writer fit into the political model? Fielding is inconsistent on this subject: in The Historical Register the theatre manager Theophilus Cibber is seen as a sort of Prime Minister ('prime minister theatrical' - p. 258): presumably this leaves the author as King, ostensibly in charge but actually powerless to get the ministry to carry out his intentions. (Analogies between kingship and authorship are also toyed with in the absurd denouement to The Author's Farce.) On the other hand in Eurydice Hissed the author is Prime Minister, mock-deferentially apologising to the people for having attempted to impose an unwelcome Bill/play.

Either case is quite different from the political model upon which Tom Jones is based. At the end of XII. xii Fielding expresses his ambivalent attitude towards absolutism. He concludes that theoretically a benign dictatorship is the best of all possible systems, but in practice no one could ever be found good enough to preside over such a system:

And here we will make a Concession, which would not perhaps have been expected from us, That no limited Form of Government is capable of rising to the same Degree of Perfection, or of producing the same Benefits to Society with this. Mankind have never been so happy, as when the greatest Part of the then known World was under the Dominion of a single Master; and this State of their Felicity continued during the Reigns of five successive Princes ...

In reality, I know but of one solid Objection to absolute Monarchy. The only Defect in which excellent Constitution seems to be the Difficulty of finding any Man adequate to the Office of an absolute Monarch ...

(pp. 671-72)

'The only Defect in which excellent Constitution' combines sarcasm and understatement in a manner reminiscent of other passages from Tom Jones: it suggests that at heart Fielding considers absolutism as stupid as the 'very wholesome and comfortable Doctrine' to which, in XV. i, he has only one objection, 'namely, That it is not true' (p. 783). Nonetheless, his admiration for absolutism as a theory is unequivocal, and he is himself prepared to apply it to spheres of activity other than the obviously political. From the introductory chapter to Book II it is clear that he sees the relationship of reader to author in Tom Jones as being parallel to that between subject and benign tyrant:

For as I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing, so I am at liberty to make what Laws I please therein. And these Laws, my Readers, whom I consider as my Subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey; ...

(p. 77)

He goes on to qualify this point by saying that he is not a 'jure divino Tyrant', but that he rules over his subjects 'for their own Good only, and was created for their Use, and not they for mine': so, in the revised Author's Farce of 1734, Marplay is presented as a bad author because he is indifferent as to whether his works satisfy the public or not: he calls the audience's

hisses 'Harmless music, child, very harmless music' (II. ii: Works, VIII, p. 216). The author is elected by his readers, and must do his job properly; given these provisos, though, his power is complete. Considering what Fielding said about absolutism in the passage quoted above, we can conclude that he thinks that the political model of Tom Jones is therefore a good one. What The Historical Register implies, then, is a condemnation of drama not because it is like politics, but because it is like the wrong sort of politics: it was patterned, to Fielding's mind, after a system (parliamentary democracy) which at its best was open to abuse, and at the time (during Walpole's ministry) was thoroughly corrupt. So it's not just that the author figures in his plays are 'Often ... rather foolish'; they are wrongheadedly pursuing an ideal of artistic omnipotence in a basically flawed medium. Since this is also what Fielding himself was doing (and consciously, at that) we can explain their inconsistency - the way they veer from ironic insight to crass self-advertisement - in terms of his uneasy ambivalence towards his own calling: a powerful determination to succeed combined with an equally powerful contempt for the whole exercise. (Hence he can at first vilify Walpole in The Historical Register and then immediately identify with him for the purposes of Eurydice Hissed.) These figures are inconsistent because Fielding can feel only a patchy respect for them.

His rule about authorial commentary, as quoted earlier, was that readers are entitled to resent it whenever it 'doth not convey some knowledge that they are sensible they could not possibly have attained of themselves'. Medley, Trapwit and Luckless have already failed the test on one count, because much of what they say will be

foolish: this is inevitable, since they are idealistic playwrights and therefore foolish by definition. But their commentary is also negligible because it consists of remarks not upon 'real life' but upon a world which owns up to its own artificiality. Unlike the narrators of the novels, the playwrights are candid about having created their characters:

Pugh, Sir, you must have one fool in a play; besides,
I only writ him to set off the rest.

(Trapwit in Pasquin, I: Works, XI, p. 171)

Zounds, sir, would you have him a prophet as well as
a politician? You see, sir, he knows what's past, and
that's all he ought to know; 'sblood, sir, would it be
in the character of a politician to make him a conjurer?

(Medley in The Historical Register,
I: Works, XI, p. 245)

Consequently, they have relinquished their claim to the historical truth of their writings, a claim which Fielding never gives up in his novels, and which (as I argued in the first section of my first chapter) is one of the most fruitful sources of irony in Tom Jones. In XVIII. ii, the reader is invited, 'by turning to the Scene at Upton in the Ninth Book ... to admire the many strange Accidents which unfortunately prevented any Interview between Partridge and Mrs. Waters' (p. 916); in Pasquin, Trapwit is so pleased with one of the scenes from his own play that he says, 'Faith, this incident of the fan struck me so strongly, that I was once going to call this comedy by the name of the Fan' (I: Works, XI, p. 192). There

is an enormous difference between these two comments: Frank Kermode was wrong, in response to the Tom Jones passage, to complain that 'Fielding cannot forbear to draw attention to his cleverness'¹⁴. In fact Fielding is drawing attention to the intricacy of real life (it being taken as read that 'History' reproduces it accurately), whereas Trapwit is puffing up his own powers of invention. Preston argues, as I have mentioned, that we are meant to laugh at his boastfulness. As it is, we can't tell: but even if this is so, the best that the format would ever allow is a rather feeble double irony. 'This scene is one continual joke', Trapwit says, of one of the bribery scenes in his comedy (pp. 172-73), and there may be a comment of Fielding's behind this line (i.e. 'England's pretensions to political integrity are a joke') but it barely makes its presence felt through the wall of Trapwit's essentially smug and redundant self-advertisement.

(ii) Joseph Andrews

The avowedly creating author figures in Fielding's plays are therefore in an impossible position. They attempt to justify their satire on the grounds that it is true to life, but because there is nothing in their plays which pretends to be historically true - because it is all openly mediated through a distorting consciousness - we can never assess this truth to life, and so never know whether to trust them or not. The only 'reality' the rehearsal plays purport to represent is the reality of petty literary debate between writers and critics. So once again, the

extent to which Fielding is prepared to acknowledge his own creativity seems to be a crucial factor; perhaps this is where we should start in discussing the modes of commentary employed in his first novel.

All I want to establish here is that Fielding does not maintain his position quite as firmly as he does in Tom Jones. In general, his standpoint is clear: Joseph Andrews is a 'true History' (III. i, p. 191), and the class of writers Fielding identifies himself with is 'Biographers' (p. 186). 'Fertile Invention', 'Heroes ... of their own Creation' and 'forming Originals from ... their own Brains' are all phrases used pejoratively in III. i to characterise the writers of 'Romances'. But his famous dictum, 'I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species', and his claim that 'The Lawyer is not only alive, but hath been so these 4,000 Years', come dangerously close to being statements of transformative creativity. The lapse probably testifies to the intensity of his aggravation that a whole crop of libellous works had recently been attributed to him (the most damaging being a lampoon on Pope, Blast upon Blast and Lick for Lick ...¹⁵): hence we shortly find him promising, in the Preface to the Miscellanies, that 'I will never hereafter publish any Book or Pamphlet whatever, to which I will not put my Name'. But it's unfortunate that he should have let this anxiety impinge upon the narrative framework of Joseph Andrews and undermine the authority of the narrator's claim to historical accuracy, especially as the pose is often rigorously upheld elsewhere in the novel by means of stylistics which anticipate Tom Jones:

When he came back to the Inn, he found Joseph and Fanny sitting together. They were so far from thinking

his Absence long, as he had feared they would, that they never once miss'd or thought of him. Indeed, I have been often assured by both, that they spent these Hours in a most delightful Conversation: but as I could never prevail on either to relate it, so I cannot communicate it to the Reader.

(II. xv, p. 168)

Backing out of the relation of sexual details for 'historical' reasons (because they are private, and therefore either not important or not reliable enough) is a ploy which Tom Jones uses repeatedly, but is not to be found in Amelia¹⁶. This, in miniature, is what I shall be arguing for the rest of the chapter: that the mode of commentary employed in Joseph Andrews is a slightly inconsistent prototype of that used in Tom Jones, whereas Amelia's methods are radically different. That doesn't sound like a very new argument, but I hope to be very specific about where those differences lie, and the object of the inquiry is not, ultimately, to compare the three books, but to achieve an early sense of the extent to which Tom Jones seeks to impose its own judgments on us.

Rawson, in the essay already cited, makes a useful comparison between a line from Pasquin and a sentence from Joseph Andrews¹⁷: Trapwit prefaces a scene with the remark, 'now, sir, you shall see some scenes of politeness and fine conversation amongst the ladies' (beginning of Act II: Works, XI, p. 178); a passage from Joseph Andrews is footnoted with, 'Lest this should appear unnatural to some Readers, we think proper to acquaint them, that it is taken verbatim from very polite Conversation' (IV. ix, p. 314).

Rawson comments that 'Another difference is that Trapwit speaks in advance, whereas the footnote in Joseph Andrews comes after we have experienced most of the dialogue ... But this is not in itself as important a difference as it might seem'. It strikes me as being a very important difference indeed. To go back to Hunter's point about Fielding's insistence that 'the act of interpretation impinges upon the act of perception', the problem with Trapwit's line is that it fails to establish anything of the sort, simply because no act of perception has, at the time when he speaks it, taken place. It alerts us to the fact that we are about to witness a certain sort of satirical scene, and ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ that sense it, or the memory of it, colours and permeates the ensuing dialogue, but its effect at the time of speaking is still fairly flaccid. But the Joseph Andrews footnote, which could hardly be more internal to the dialogue upon which it is a gloss (it even comes in mid-sentence) not only frames 'a vividly specific incident ... inside the author's knowing grasp of the world's ways', it literally contains and re-states that incident, by forcing upon the reader a rapid mental recapitulation and reappraisal of it. The incident is therefore related twice: once without comment and once within the context of comment, and it is the second version which lingers and bears the authorial stamp of approval.

I take the simultaneous conveyance of narrative and commentary to be one of Fielding's most important practices, and it seems to be something which novels can and plays can't do. This is a basic difference between the two forms, one which Fielding never really faced up to, and which arises from the ambiguous nature of the author's 'presence' within any dramatic work. When we read a book

we are always conscious that it is the author who is immediately responsible for the existence of the words on the page (whether s/he claims to have invented them or merely to be recording them), whereas the words which make up a play are seen primarily to be issuing from the actors. Of course this is not to say that play audiences are duped into forgetting that the author exists; but they are aware that, whoever wrote the words, a more urgent and recent reason for their being able to hear them at all is that actors are speaking them. (As also in films: and it is this distinction which informs a cynical observation made by the disillusioned screenwriter in Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard: 'Audiences don't know somebody writes a picture. They think the actors make it up as they go along'¹⁸.) There is therefore in drama a quite clear distinction between the nature of the existence of the author and the existence of the actor; the former has no place within the theatre itself and if we are conscious of his act of creation at all it is as an act of writing which has only a distant connection with what it is now a spoken text. The theatre's illusion of spontaneity rules out any possibility of presenting or incorporating the author's role, which is essentially private, premeditated and has already happened. Thus although in one sense Trapwit's comment comes before the scene in Pasquin, in another sense it comes after it (i.e. after it has been written), and is merely an independent piece of criticism existing in arbitrary relation to a pre-ordained text; there is no sense of process. (Fielding's playwrights don't alter their plays: the purpose of the rehearsals is to achieve as faithful a reproduction of the text as possible.) On the other hand even non-intrusive novelists share with their characters the same

medium of communication, namely the printed word; and any piece of reported speech in a novel is 'spoken' to the reader at the same time as it is written. The character's fictional act of speaking and the author's real act of writing are absolutely interdependent and are, in fact, one and the same action.

This puts us in a position to see why Fielding's kind of novel actually opened up a new (at the time) dimension both of realism and of scope for fruitful interaction between reportage and comment. There are, as it were, two quite distinct levels of reality in Joseph Andrews: the (pretended) 'reality' of the events - such as Joseph's and Fanny's 'delightful Conversation' - and the reality of Fielding's transcription of these events. Bits of playfulness such as his insistence that he can't transcribe their conversation because nobody ever repeated it to him are used to enforce our sense that both levels are equally real: the device is a logical trompe l'oeil, by which we are encouraged to believe that the existence of something which we know to be real (Fielding's act of writing) is dependent on the existence of something (the supposed chain of events which make up the story) whose claims to reality might otherwise be questionable. And the trick works both ways because we are also aware that the events of the story would not exist (in the sense of never entering our consciousness) if Fielding was not there to communicate them to us. The two levels of reality are thus sharply visible, sharply distinct and yet interdependent, whereas in what we might (mainly for convenience, by going back to the comparison I made in Chapter One) call the George Eliot mode, they are never openly defined and their relationship is left evident but disconcertingly vague. As for drama, a form from which, as I

have been arguing, the author is in an important sense absent, it is hard to see how any such relationship could be established at all: Fielding would have been wiser not to try.

But if Joseph Andrews marks a massive advance in his thinking about form, his practice is not yet perfect. Still keeping Hunter's words in mind, what we are looking for is an ideal mode of presentation in which the act of interpretation is absolutely inseparable from the act of perception, and I believe that this is not in fact pulled off until Tom Jones. A comparison of the first chapters of these novels should bring the point out, since they both, in a playful way, contain serious explanations of what Fielding intended by the two books. Joseph Andrews begins:

It is a trite but true Observation, that Examples
work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts.

Tom Jones begins:

An Author ought to consider himself, not as a Gentleman
who gives a private or eleemosynary Treat, but rather as
one who keeps a public Ordinary, at which all Persons
are welcome for their Money.

A difference is already clear: Fielding explains Joseph Andrews (although it is not made explicit yet) in terms of the relationship of one thing to another - the relationship of 'History' to life, of one person's life to another's - and the areas which this relationship illuminates. The novel is therefore seen as related to the reader's experience but also, by implication, separate from

it. Tom Jones, though, is already described and envisaged in terms which incorporate the reader's perception of it. The reader's possible responses to the book are seen as factors which determine its nature.

The first chapter of Joseph Andrews is one long sense unit which does not come to the point until the very last paragraph:

The authentic History with which I now present the Public, is an Instance of the great Good that Book [Pamela] is likely to do, and of the Prevalence of Example which I have just observed: ...

Fielding thereby refers the reader back to the ideas raised in the first sentence, but it is the material enclosed within this framing device which fuels the cheerful irony of 'the great Good that Book is likely to do'. This consists of a list of supposedly exemplary biographies, all patently chosen for their tackiness: The History of Jack and the Giants, The History of Guy, Earl of Warwick, The Most Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendom, Cibber's Apology and finally Pamela itself¹⁹. So clearly his comment has a double irony, both forward- and backward-looking: seen as part of this tradition, Pamela is unlikely to do much good, and seen in the context of the behaviour of Lady Booby (which takes up the next few chapters) its insufficiency is obvious: books, Fielding argues, cannot inculcate chastity - at least, not that sort of book. But then, he has gone out of his way in the Preface to argue that Joseph Andrews is a new sort of book altogether, and the first chapter now makes this claim more specific: it is revealed to be an exemplum about the insufficiency of exempla.

He implies that it will be the first of these 'Histories' fully to recognise the problematic nature of the process by which 'Examples work ... forcibly on the Mind'.

There are plenty of local instances of this theme in Joseph Andrews: Parson Adams's grief at the near death of his son, following immediately after his speech about emotional fortitude (IV. viii) is one of its best known demonstrations of the fact that theory often fails to make contact with actual life. This is a point which the novel illustrates repeatedly and very well. The fact that it illustrates it, though, is exactly what I want to emphasise. Fielding sees a fundamental inadequacy in the way that 'Example' seeks to relate to the complexities of real life, but his solution is simply to contrive a more complex kind of example. This is not radical enough: it makes no attempt to break the circle, whereas the restaurant simile which opens Tom Jones already recognises that readers, unlike characters, live in a world governed entirely by chance (a world over which the author himself has no control), and conceives of the novel as a system whereby this unpredictability is formally catered for (unpredictability of taste, in this case). The defeating randomness of real life, as represented by the reader's perception, seeps into Tom Jones to a far greater extent than it does into Joseph Andrews.

A comparison of some intrusive passages from the two books would make this clearer; not sly intrusions, but substantial chunks of direct first-person commentary - for example, Joseph Andrews, IV. vii (pp. 299-301) and Tom Jones VI. iii (pp. 282-83). The former consists of an immensely long paragraph, lasting two pages in the Wesleyan edition, arguing the case that 'Habit ... hath so vast a

Prevalence over the human Mind, that there is scarce anything too strange or too strong to be asserted of it' (p. 299). The subject is male/female relationships (what we would nowadays call sexual politics), the perverseness of which Fielding explains away by describing how 'at the Age of seven or something earlier, Miss is instructed by her Mother, that Master is a very monstrous kind of Animal' and how, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, women instinctively lose this antipathy and 'Love instantly succeeds to Fear'. The tone throughout is arch, and the argument confused, but the sheer elaborateness of the passage cannot be denied; and again, it aims to teach this novel's usual lesson - that people do not act in accordance with what they are taught by lessons.

Fielding is making a complex enough point, but the way in which he suddenly relates it to his story is anything but complex:

Thus indeed it happened to Lady Booby, who loved Joseph long before she knew it; and now loved him much more than she suspected.

He therefore proposes a complex state of feeling in the female sex generally, and a complex state of feeling in Lady Booby specifically, but forges a direct connection between them by means of a single word, 'Thus'. This strikes me as being extremely confident about the relationship of Example to Life. It also leaves precious little for the reader to do (except agree with the narrator), and it also fails to widen the context of the particular instance in the way that Fielding's footnote about dialogue being 'taken verbatim from very polite Conversation' did. Complex instance follows complex example sequentially, their actual point of contact ('Thus') being

very basic, whereas in the 'polite Conversation' passage simple reportage was juxtaposed with simple comment to produce in the reader a perception that the complexity of the situation lay not exclusively in either but in the relationship between the two.

(I am not saying, then, that Joseph Andrews is in general over-schematised or over-didactic. On the contrary it contains some of Fielding's most devastating silences and non-intrusions - another weapon in the armoury of the intrusive narrator - such as his flat throwing in of the information, 'who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost' regarding the postillion who lends the naked Joseph his coat (I. xii). At moments like this the task of piecing together the fragments into an ironic world-view is entirely the reader's. But the present chapter is about the role of direct commentary in Fielding's narratives, and it does seem to me that the commentary in Joseph Andrews has a less interesting bearing on the action than is the case in Tom Jones.)

The 'Digression concerning true Wisdom' in VI. iii of Tom Jones makes an interesting comparison. Fielding's definition of true wisdom turns out to be disappointing: he expresses it in 'a simple Maxim', which is 'not to buy at too dear a Price'. This is extended into a monetarist vision of the world as a 'grand Market', where 'Commodities' such as Honours, Riches and Pleasure are to be traded for the currency of Health, Innocence, Reputation, etc. The tone is sweetly reasonable, the comparison is inventively sustained, ~~and~~ if this were a passage from one of Fielding's periodical essays one might think that the reader was intended simply to concur. However, the ostensible meaning is seriously undermined both by the context and by the placing of that passage

which is designed to link the general observation to the specific events of the story:

And here, in Defiance of all the barking Critics in the World, I must and will introduce a Digression concerning true Wisdom, of which Mr. Allworthy was in Reality as great a Pattern as he was of Goodness.

(p. 282)

Now the reader can hardly fail to be aware of the inappropriateness of regarding Allworthy as a pattern of true wisdom at this point: we have just seen him listen to the news of Blifil's proposed marriage to Sophia with composed pleasure, completely unaware either of Blifil's real character or of Sophia's own attachment to Tom. It is in fact one of the most glaring instances of his blindness. There is nothing wrong with the commentary Fielding then appends to this incident (at least not within the terms of the philosophy he expresses throughout Tom Jones); what is wrong is its applicability to this particular character at this particular moment, which is a judgment the reader alone is left to make: a creative disjunction opens up between the commentary and the action. Furthermore the linking passage ('of which Mr. Allworthy was in Reality as great a Pattern ...') comes before the extended commentary; in Joseph Andrews ('Thus indeed it happened to Lady Booby ...') it came afterwards. So whereas we read the Joseph Andrews commentary in a state of one-dimensional suspense, wondering "What has this got to do with the story?", our reading in Tom Jones is much more complicated, since we read in the knowledge that the commentary has in effect very little to do with the story, that its failure to

solve or illuminate the predicament of Allworthy's blindness is the reason why Fielding has put it there. In this sense it satisfies his criterion for the inclusion of intrusive material, that it conveys a certain 'knowledge' which readers 'are sensible they could not possibly have attained of themselves' (see above, p. 118). This is the advantage of presenting commentary and action simultaneously, so that each reaches us in the context of the other.

(iii) Amelia

The part played by commentary in Fielding's narrative, then, does not simply consist of his telling us what to think. Nevertheless this should not blind us to the fact that he still does intend to tell us what to think, and that commentary has a crucial role in this strategy. His aim is to nudge us in the direction of attitudes and judgments which may be suggested to us from two possible sources: the narrator himself, or the characters. If we go back to Mark Lambert's perception of 'the peculiarly intense and intensely peculiar triangle of characters/readers/author' (see above, p. 31), we can see that the only members of this ménage à trois over whose opinions the author has absolute control are his/her own and the characters'. So far, in Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews, we have seen how Fielding seeks to form his readers' opinions by means of an interplay between his own values (as expressed in the commentary) and the practical working out of these values in the action. But this is only one of the ways it can be done, and does not take account

of the fact that there are also characters whom we are encouraged to trust and whose values we are encouraged to accept. (It is solely by means of such characters, of course, that ostensibly non-intrusive narrators can put their own opinions across in their novels at all.) I mentioned this device towards the end of Chapter One, where I suggested that it works better in non-intrusive novels, because people resent getting their edicts from prophets whenever there is a chance of getting them direct from God instead (see above, p. 64). Fielding uses it most pervasively in Amelia, and although an extended examination of its manifestations in that novel would take us way off the issue of direct commentary, it's worth at least touching on because Tom Jones sometimes does it too, although usually in harness with, rather than isolation from, authorial comment. We might thereby pinpoint a central difference between the two novels: namely, that Fielding's particular habits of intrusion in Tom Jones keep the acts of perception and interpretation simultaneous and interdependent; in Amelia (as before, in the plays), their relationship seems by comparison disappointingly random.

I'll start, for the sake of preserving some sort of continuity, with an example from Tom Jones which has already been discussed earlier in this chapter - the scene where Partridge goes to see Hamlet with Jones and Mrs. Miller. Partridge himself is always a contradictory figure; I find myself unable to decide how lovable Fielding means us to find him. He is introduced as 'one of the pleasantest Barbers that was ever recorded in History' (chapter heading to VIII. iv), but he ends up married to Molly Seagrim, which is presumably not a fate Fielding would inflict on a favourite character, and in between he is seen to express many of the book's

most hated attitudes - Jacobitism, pacifism (XII. iii, p. 631), disloyalty (XII. vii, p. 645), dishonesty (XII. xiii, p. 675), etc. Scene for scene, Fielding encourages quite definite responses towards him: it's just that these responses, taken together, often contradict one another. The playhouse scene is quite a useful model for the ways in which Fielding likes to imply and project attitudes without actually saying anything in his own person: thus, just in case, after watching Partridge respond to Hamlet on what Fielding presumably means us to regard as a hopelessly basic emotional level, we might be inclined to feel contempt for him, we are helpfully steered away from this response by being told how Jones and Mrs. Miller, the 'reliable' characters, react:

Thus ended the Adventure at the Playhouse; where Partridge had afforded great Mirth, not only to Jones and Mrs. Miller, but to all who sat within hearing ...

(XVI. v, p. 857)

We now know that we should be laughing, not criticising: Partridge's foolishness poses no threat. The situation is further stabilised by an earlier detail:

... Jones asked him, 'which of the Players he had liked best?' To this he answered, with some Appearance of Indignation at the Question, 'The King without Doubt.' 'Indeed, Mr. Partridge,' says Mrs. Miller, 'you are not of the same Opinion with the Town; for they are all agreed, that Hamlet is acted by the best Player who ever was on the Stage.'

The reference to an agreed body of opinion which can be identified

with 'the Town' adds a further level of comfort, in a gesture which is highly characteristic of the methods of the book generally. Without it, this passage would be more reminiscent of Fielding in his Amelia mode, in which it is not uncommon to have laughter recommended as the only sensible response to complex characters (see the examples I gave on pp. 63-64, above), and in which this recommendation is often made by other characters, unassisted by an intrusive narrator. Something like this happens at the end of the chapter in which Mrs. Bennet's pretensions to learning are unveiled (a particularly puzzling chapter to modern readers, who find it hard to see what is wrong with these pretensions anyway), although the recommended response, put forward by the Booths, consists of a slightly mocking superiority rather than laughter outright:

She then took Occasion ... to comment on that great Absurdity, (for so she termed it,) of excluding Women from Learning ...

Tho' both Booth and Amelia outwardly concurred with her Sentiments, it may be a Question whether they did not assent rather out of Complaisance, than from their real Judgment. (VI. vii, pp. 258-59)

These similarities should not suggest, however, that the last third of Tom Jones, for all its city scenes, decadent atmosphere and more potentially tragic range of incident, comes especially close to the narrative and ironic stances of Amelia (or lack of such stances, I should say). Comparison of the figures of Allworthy and Dr. Harrison shows that the theme of instability (the fluctuating fortunes of idealism in a realistic world) can itself be treated

with different degrees of stability. Allworthy can still be entrusted with an immense speech on the subject of 'to what Dangers Imprudence alone may subject Virtue' (XVIII. x, pp. 959-61), one which obviously speaks for Fielding himself, given the space which he allows it, and given that he says similar things elsewhere in his own voice (Amelia, VIII. iii, p. 320); and yet we might object that Allworthy is the very last person who ought to be speaking on this subject. It is not even as if, at this late stage in the book, he has fully learnt the lesson of his own short-sightedness: immediately after the speech he gives his assessment of Tom's chances of marrying Sophia:

'I fear your Case is desperate: I never saw stronger Marks of an unalterable Resolution in any Person, than appeared in her vehement Declarations against receiving your Addresses ...'

Wrong again. But the fact that someone who so often misunderstands human nature can be appointed as spokesman for some of the book's most cherished beliefs indicates the extent to which Fielding feels in control of the reader's exact reponse to anything he makes Allworthy say. This is because the commentary in Tom Jones constitutes a level of 'truth' (supposedly) of which we are always conscious (whether Fielding is actually talking to us or not in any given passage), and which therefore enables us, whenever any character makes any statement, immediately to judge it according to a standard which is, within the novel's own terms, absolute.

In Amelia this level is missing, so the standards by which we judge its characters are either those of the other characters,

or our own (as shaped by personal experience), and these are both highly variable. Our introduction to Allworthy in Tom Jones is to have Fielding telling us what a nice man he is (I. ii, p. 34). The first judgments we hear on Dr. Harrison are from Miss Mathews, an unreliable character ('one of the best Men in the World he is, and an Honour to the sacred Order to which he belongs' - II. iii, p. 77); then from Fielding, only outside the text proper ('In this Chapter the Reader will perceive a Glimpse of the Character of a very good Divine' - heading to II. iv); and we are then left to judge him according to his behaviour (in fact we are explicitly instructed to do so: '"You will judge," replied Booth, "by the Sequel, whether I have reason to think him so." - He then proceeded as in the next Chapter. '), except that this behaviour is itself presented to us as narrated by Booth, i.e. another unreliable character. Some of the Doctor's actions turn out to be much weirder than anything Allworthy was capable of: they include smuggling Booth into Amelia's house in a hamper (II. v)²⁰, and searching the Booths' flat on the suspicion that they have been living beyond their means (VI. iv, IX. i). Since he is already shown to be unreliable, then, and is often deliberately presented to us from unreliable viewpoints, it's not surprising that a comparable speech of Dr. Harrison's is subject to even more qualifications than those ironically imposed on Allworthy's. An extreme example would be the reading of his letter on adultery in Amelia X. ii. Not only is it presented from a completely unreliable viewpoint (it is read aloud for a joke by a group of young 'Bucks' at a masquerade), but the character who comes to its rescue is Colonel Bath, whose own personal morality has until now been presented as questionable (he is obsessed by duelling).

Furthermore, it is not until the beginning of X. iv that we even find out that the letter was from Dr. Harrison at all.

What Amelia seems to be setting out to show, in passages such as this, is the impossibility of correctly judging events at the same moment as we perceive them: the Doctor, writing his letter, had not allowed for its being read in this sort of situation; and we, hearing the letter, do not allow for the fact that it is from the Doctor. In this sense Amelia is admirably true to life. But in order to achieve the effect Fielding is forced into complex and unpredictable stratagems - the withholding of information, changes of viewpoint, the presentation of whole slabs of narrative from a single character's restricted perspective - which mean that the reader of Amelia is rarely in the same position as the reader of Tom Jones; that is to say, in possession of all the information needed in order to arrive at a 'correct' judgment, a judgment which can then be brought to bear at once on the relevant action, colouring, ironising and vitalising it.

This is not to say that the commentary in Tom Jones is merely there to establish a norm against which deviance can be gauged; rather, it's a question of providing some sense of completeness, so that the insufficiency and partiality of the characters's outlooks becomes perceptible. (Of course, it has to be done largely through reference to norms and generalisations.) Allworthy makes very good speeches about Imprudence and Virtue, but he doesn't understand the depth of love Sophia feels for Tom. Partridge may have a fund of authentic ghost stories, but he doesn't know much about Shakespeare. The commentary doesn't fill in these gaps in the characters' consciousness, it makes them visible, and does so by

gesturing towards a sort of inclusiveness rather than assuming that the matter can simply be left to the reader's superior knowledge. This is why hardly any characters are introduced to us in Tom Jones without an early authorial assessment: something general but decisive, so that we know how each character measures up to the book's scale of values (and hence whether or not to trust what they say), and so that any unpredictability they may subsequently manifest can be seen in a context and recognised as such. XIII. v is full of these sketches, since Tom has just arrived in London and is being introduced to a whole new group of characters:

As for Miss Nancy, tho' a very little Creature, she was extremely pretty, and the Widow had all the Charms which can adorn a Woman near fifty. As she was one of the most innocent Creatures in the World, so she was one of the most chearful. She never thought, nor spoke, nor wished any ill, and had constantly that Desire of pleasing, which may be called the happiest of all Desires in this, that it scarce ever fails of attaining its Ends, when not disgraced by Affectation. In short, though her Power was very small, she was in her Heart one of the warmest Friends. She had been a most affectionate Wife, and was a most fond and tender Mother. ...

Nor was Jones a little pleased with the young Gentleman himself, whose Wine he had been drinking. He thought he discerned in him much good Sense, though a little too much tainted with Town Foppery, but what recommended him most to Jones were some Sentiments

of great Generosity and Humanity, which occasionally dropt from him; and particularly many Expressions of the highest Disinterestedness in the Affair of Love. On which Subject the young Gentleman delivered himself in a Language which might have very well become an Arcadian Shepherd of Old, and which appeared very extraordinary when proceeding from the Lips of a modern fine Gentleman, but he was only one by Imitation, and meant by Nature for a much better Character.

(pp. 705-06)

(Superficially, this portrait of **N**ightingale seems to be taken from Jones's viewpoint, but in fact it reads more like authorial commentary, partly because ⁵₂ we know that the narrator of Tom Jones doesn't really have the access to his hero's thought processes which he is here feigning; indeed, it slips unobtrusively into the direct mode in the last two clauses.)

This commentary establishes terms within which Nightingale's and Mrs. Miller's subsequent behaviour can appear unexpected and yet still explicable; it delineates a framework which marks the boundaries of their freedom of movement, whereas in Amelia any such framework has to be deduced from the movements themselves. This can be a frustrating activity, even when the commentator under whose guidance we are working is the most 'reliable' character in the book, Amelia herself. A good example would be the impossibility of forming any coherent judgment of the character of Mrs. James from the things which Amelia says and thinks about her. At first it seems simple enough: we are given a broad hint by means of the

same very basic form of character-commentary which was used to fix a verdict on Partridge's behaviour at the playhouse. Mrs. James has just visited the Booths and, in spite of their former intimacy, has behaved very distantly towards them:

Booth and his Wife, the Moment their Companion was gone, sat down to Supper on a Piece of cold Meat, the Remains of their Dinner. After which, over a Pint of Wine, they entertained themselves for a while with the ridiculous Behaviour of their Visitant. But Amelia declaring she rather saw her as the Object of Pity than Anger, turned the Discourse to pleasanter Topics.

(IV. vi, p. 180)

Our instructions could hardly be clearer: we are permitted to find Mrs. James's behaviour ridiculous, but are reminded that there is a more serious view to be taken as well. (Notice, though, at what a distance interpretation impinges upon perception using this method: her behaviour is reported with flat documentary realism, and the suggested judgment is a separate tail-piece rather than a filtering lens through which the original incident might have been viewed.) A few chapters later, not only has the verdict been modified, but it is now offered as an ambiguous blend of character/narrator-commentary:

Amelia soon after took her Leave without the least Anger, but with some little unavoidable Contempt for a Lady, in whose Opinion, as we have hinted before, outward Form and Ceremony constituted the whole Essence of Friendship; who valued all her Acquaintance alike, as

each Individual served equally to fill up a Place in her visiting Roll, and who in reality had not the least Concern for the good Qualities or Well-being of any of them. (V. iv, p. 208)

This sounds pretty final, especially since Amelia has just given her a sound telling-off for her unfriendliness. Yet, forty pages later, we find that this reproof has had its effect:

The Lady had so well profited by Mrs. Booth's Remonstrance, that she had now no more of that Stiffness and Formality which she had worn on a former Occasion. On the contrary, she now behaved with the utmost Freedom and Good-Humour, and made herself so very agreeable, that Amelia was highly pleased and delighted with her Company. (VI. v, p. 245)

This is more in the nature of narration than commentary; Fielding's next direct remarks about Mrs. James come in VIII. ix, and are extremely confusing:

Mrs. James now behaved herself so very unlike the Person that she lately appeared, that it might have surprised any one who doth not know, that besides that of a fine Lady, which is all mere Art and Mummery, every such Woman hath some real Character at the Bottom, in which, whenever Nature gets the better of her, she acts. Thus the finest Ladies in the World will sometimes love, and sometimes scratch, according to their different natural Dispositions, with great Fury

and Violence, tho' both of these are equally inconsistent with a fine Lady's artificial Character.

Mrs. James then was at the Bottom a very good-natured Woman; and the Moment she heard of Amelia's Misfortune, was sincerely grieved at it ...

(pp. 343-44)

My point here is not only to remark that the commentary in Amelia is inconsistent both in its source (who provides it) and in its content, but to show what effect this has on the more specific theme I've been treating throughout this chapter. The inconsistency in Amelia makes it practically impossible to sustain a steady opinion about a character for any length of time during which the narrator himself is silent. Confronted with the narrator's own shifting standpoints, we either hold our judgments in suspension until the next piece of commentary comes along, in which case these judgments, being held back, cannot colour and modify every incident, as they do in Tom Jones; or else we believe whatever the narrator has told us most recently, until informed otherwise, so that we might read several chapters, for example, in the light of our opinion that Mrs. James is shallow and unfeeling, only to find, when Fielding next addresses us, that we are apparently wrong. Either way we are denied the opportunity afforded to us by Tom Jones: the opportunity for an ever-present (because consistent) level of interpretative suggestion, affecting us simultaneously with our perception of the narrated incidents.

* * *

I have attempted to show, then, what is different about Fielding's use of commentary in Tom Jones, but I'm conscious of not yet having touched upon some implications of that commentary about which many readers and critics still feel uneasy. In fact, by stressing the narrator's implied claims to a sort of completeness, I might have been fuelling this unease. As I have said, one consequence of our always knowing what the narrator feels (and wants us to feel) about a particular incident, is that the incident can then never appear one-dimensional (as happens too often in Amelia), however simple its 'psychological' content. It will always consist of a number of different viewpoints fully comprehended, assimilated and adjusted by a consciousness - the narrator's - which is itself in any case psychologically fleshed-out. But some readers may feel that this leaves them with too little to do. Rawson puts the pro-Fielding case slightly one-sidedly at the end of his essay on 'Dialogue and Authorial Presence in Fielding's Novels and Plays': he has just quoted a speech of Pamela's, in which Richardson's heroine refers to housekeepers in general as 'those sort of creatures', and he remarks that 'the words reflect a Pamela somewhat other than the one which the novel as a whole invites us to see':

The point is not that Fielding would have been incapable of recording sentiments like Pamela's, but that he would normally have felt compelled to present them as repellent. No character of his can get away unscathed with saying 'those sort of creatures' of anyone, and if intrusion is the price to pay for this, it may be felt not to be too high.²¹

Basically I agree with this statement, but it still leaves a lot to be argued. In particular, if we are happy with the idea that Fielding dictates not only the action of Tom Jones but also the attitude which we are expected to take towards it, then we might wonder precisely what role this leaves for the reader to play.

Having spent the first half of this thesis trying to reach a fuller understanding of the narrator in Tom Jones, then, I now intend to swing the balance of attention on to the reader. This will involve moving the critical frame of reference away from the Booth/Preston/Rawson axis, and towards a slightly more recent, if not really more innovatory, tradition, namely the particular brand of reception theory represented most notably by Wolfgang Iser. In fact we don't have to look far into Iser's book The Implied Reader²² to find sentiments which, in their advocacy of reader-participation, would seem at first to be questioning the value of a supposed authorial decisiveness such as that implicitly advocated by the quotation from Rawson given above:

The participation of the reader could not be stimulated if everything were laid out in front of him [sic]. This means that the formulated text must shade off, through allusions and suggestions, into a text that is unformulated though nonetheless intended. Only in this way can the reader's imagination be given the scope it needs; the written text furnishes it with indications which enable it to conjure up what the text does not reveal.

(p. 31)

Iser has his own, not over-exciting, theories about how the

narrative strategy of Tom Jones encourages reader-participation, and I shall discuss these fully in Chapter Five. But rather than switching over suddenly to his particular form of inquiry, it strikes me that there is a more logical way of starting to shift the perspective, in that we have not yet exhausted the implications of D.W. Harding's notion of the novel as an 'ideal conversation', or of John Preston's development of this idea, where the novel becomes a dialogue in which 'the writer reaches out to an unseen and unforeseeable reader, and the reader wishes to respond to an absent writer who has already said his last word' (see above, p. 39). To think of the novel in terms of conversation might be one way of seeing whether the process of mutual exchange between narrator and reader does actually take place in novels like Tom Jones, or whether it is the product of the fertile imaginations of certain literary theoreticians. Also, it reveals two new areas of Fielding's writing which we can now treat as literary theory: his own writings on conversation, and the examples of directly reported conversation which fill his novels and plays. The relationship between these two areas is not especially simple: Fielding had an exalted view of conversation, but he was aware that the practice rarely measured up to the ideal. Frequently we find that dialogue in his novels breaks down into the disjointed, the random and the anthologising, which means that its main affinity is often less with conversation as treated by subsequent novelists, than with satiric devices such as the mock-anthology and the mock-dictionary. In the next chapter, then, I shall again be placing Tom Jones inside a satiric rather than a novelistic tradition.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. John Paul Hunter, Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance (Baltimore and London, 1975), p. 50.
2. The March of Literature: From Confucius to Modern Times (London, 1939), pp. 582, 588.
3. E.g. F.W. Bateson, English Comic Drama, 1700-1750 (New York, 1963), pp. 142-43; Hunter, Occasional Form, pp. 49-75; Preston, The Created Self, p. 96; Claude Rawson, 'Dialogue and Authorial Presence in Fielding's Novels and Plays', in Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper (London, 1985), pp. 261-310 (pp. 271, 303).
4. Act III: Works, XI, p. 197. There are some reasonably good individual editions of Fielding's plays, particularly in the Regents Restoration Drama Series. These have been consulted and are listed in the bibliography, but for the sake of consistency all quotations will be taken from the plays as printed in Henley (except where I am quoting from the earlier version of The Author's Farce). So references to the text will be to act, scene (where applicable), volume and page number.
5. Act I: Works, XI, p. 242.
6. The Author's Farce (revised version), I. v: Works, VIII, p. 204.
7. The Author's Farce (1730 version), edited by Charles B. Woods, Regents Restoration Drama Series (London, 1967): II. i, p. 25.
8. Ibid., II. ii, p. 26.
9. Ibid., II. ix, p. 36.

10. The London Stage, 1729-1747, edited by Arthur H. Scouten, 2 vols (Carbondale, Illinois, 1961), I, clx-clxxvii, 'The Audience'. This is Part 3 of The London Stage, 1660-1800 ..., edited by William van Lennep et al., 11 vols (Carbondale, Illinois, 1960-68). See also Dane F. Smith, The Critics in the Audience of the London Theatres from Buckingham to Sheridan: A Study of NeoClassicism in the Playhouse, 1671-1779 (Albuquerque, 1953), and Allardyce Nicol, A History of Early Eighteenth-Century Drama, 1700-1750 (Cambridge, 1929).
11. The Diary of Viscount Percival, Afterwards First Earl of Egmont, edited by R.A. Roberts, 3 vols (London, 1920-23), II, 511. Quoted from Scouten, The London Stage ..., p. clxxiii.
12. Michael Nyman, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond (London, 1974), p. 71.
13. The Spectator, edited by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford, 1965), III, 239-42.
14. 'Afterword' to his edition of Tom Jones, Signet Classics (New York, 1964), p. 857.
15. For further details, see F. Homes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works and Times, I, 402.
16. Compare, for instance, the different disclaimers used by Fielding when dealing with Jones's and Booth's sexual lapses: 'Here ensued a Parly, which, as I do not think myself obliged to relate it, I shall omit' (Tom Jones, V. x, p. 257). 'In Imitation of him [the prison governor], we will lock up

likewise a Scene which we do not think proper to expose to the Eyes of the Public' (Amelia, IV. i, p. 153). In Amelia, for the first time, Fielding omits the details not because they are trivial but because he considers them indecent.

See also my comparison of these passages on pp. 49-50.

17. Order from Confusion Sprung, pp. 271, 303.
18. Sunset Boulevard (1950). Any quotations from films included in this thesis, unless otherwise attributed, are my own transcripts from screenings rather than from published screenplays.
19. A fuller list of Fielding's possible references is given in Battestin's footnote to this passage, from which these titles were selected.
20. Richardson considered this incident to be proof that Fielding 'has little or no invention' (Letter to Anne Donnellan, 22 February 1753: Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, edited by John Carroll (Oxford, 1964), p. 197), and even Battestin, judging from the footnote to his edition, seems a bit baffled by it. I would like to put forward a specific and simple explanation: it is a parody of the Trojan Horse story, perfectly consistent with Fielding's use of the Aeneid throughout this section. The two best (out of many) studies of his allusions to Virgil in this novel are Lyall H. Powers, 'The Influence of the Aeneid on Fielding's Amelia', MLN, 71 (1956), 330-36, and Robert Folkenflik, 'Purpose and Narration in Fielding's Amelia', Novel, 7 (1973-74), 168-74.

21. Order from Confusion Sprung, p. 301.
22. Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore and London, 1974).

Chapter Four

THE SATIRIC TRADITION (II) - SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(i) Fielding and Conversation

Eighteenth-century theories of, and attitudes towards, conversation have been pretty thoroughly explored¹. So, in quoting contemporary essays on the subject, I shall confine myself to two authors whose practice in this area I shall also be discussing specifically and at some length. Both Swift and Fielding were, conveniently and significantly, interested in and articulate about the nature of what they saw as its civilising influence. Both wrote essays on the subject, and there are points in each of these essays where the frame of reference starts to extend by implication in an attempt to give conversation both an artistic and a religious significance:

The two chief Ends of Conversation are to entertain and improve those we are among, or to receive those Benefits ourselves. (Swift)²

Good Breeding then, or the Art of pleasing in Conversation, is expressed two different Ways, viz. in our Actions and our Words, and our Conduct in both may be reduced to that concise, comprehensive Rule in Scripture; Do unto all Men as you would they should do unto you.

(Fielding)³

Fielding refers the reader back to Matthew 7:12, and Luke 6:31 - back, in fact, to the central tenet of Christian humanism.

Swift's remark, meanwhile, recalls Horace: 'Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae'⁴. In arguing for the importance of conversation, therefore, both authors have recourse to maxims which were also recognisably fundamental to traditional theories of religion and literature.

Fielding also argues that, as an expression of sociability and as a function of language, conversation constitutes one of the clearest distinctions 'between the Human and the Brute Species' (p. 120). A capacity for conversation is inseparable from a capacity for reason; the one is a codification of the other:

The audacious Anedes, who is extremely amorous in his Inclinations, never likes a Woman, but his Eyes ask her the Question; without considering the Confusion he often occasions to the Object: he ogles and languishes at every pretty Woman in the Room. As there is no Law of Morality which he would not break to satisfy his Desires, so there is no Form of Civility which he doth not violate to communicate them.

(p. 139)

This is Fielding's rhetoric at its most organised, coping as it does with an expansive concept of conversation, which he sees as any, even non-verbal, communication taking place within a civilised context (in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, therefore, he quite often uses it to mean sex). Within the terms of this definition, his confidence in the solidity of the connection between a 'Law of Morality' and a 'Form of Civility' is absolute: the 'As there is ... so there is' structure reproduces the connection with classical symmetry. The described consequence

of Anedes' bad conversation is revealing, too: it consists of 'Confusion'. Two senses of the word seem to be operative here, expressing both the humanistic and the literary/theoretical nature of Fielding's interest in conversation. It refers to the emotional turbulence into which the violated woman is thrown, with attendant reddening, hot flushes, etc.; but also, related to this, it refers to the disruption of a harmonious and desirable state of order, and thereby has echoes of the 'Chaos' from which, Fielding was to complain in Joseph Andrews, bad authors assembled the materials for their writings (see above, p. 79).

His implied chain of connections between conversation, civility, morality and rationality is coherent, then, but complex. He seems to believe that the ability to articulate and communicate feelings is important not only because it distinguishes man from animals, but because it can call those feelings into question, test their claim to general acceptance and perhaps lead to the suppression of those which are anti-social. An extreme example of the latter would be the behaviour of the sailors and watermen who jeer at the diseased Fielding at the beginning of the Voyage to Lisbon; behaviour which, he claims, is essentially animal and would never be encountered in circles which have been trained in the arts of civilised conversation:

It may be said, that this barbarous custom is peculiar to the English, and of them only to the lowest degree; that it is an excrescence of an uncontrolled licentiousness mistaken for liberty, and never shews itself in men who are polished and refined, in such manner as human nature requires to produce that perfection of which it is

susceptible, and to purge away that malevolence of disposition of which, at our birth, we partake in common with the savage creation.

This may be said, and this is all that can be said; and it is, I am afraid, but little satisfactory to account for the inhumanity of those who, while they boast of being made after God's own image, seem to bear in their minds a resemblance of the vilest species of brutes; ... (pp. 202-03)

The most precise definition of conversation given by Fielding in his essay strengthens the interpretation that he considered it valuable because it was a way of calling ideas into question:

The primitive and literal Sense of this Word is, I apprehend, to Turn round together; and in its more copious Usage we intend by it, that reciprocal Interchange of Ideas, by which Truth is examined, Things are, in a manner, turned round, and sifted, and all our Knowledge communicated to each other.

(p. 120)

Swift's and Fielding's essays, therefore (the work of authors who also wrote humorous accounts of conversation in decay), express a belief that conversation is analagous in its aims and methods to both poetry and Christianity, and that in the 'turning round' of ideas, these ideas become somehow more nearly true. The notion of a reciprocal passage of information is central to these theories: explicit in Fielding's phrase, 'reciprocal Interchange of Ideas', implicit in Swift's insistence on the two chief ends of conversation,

which include 'to receive those Benefits ourselves', and in his indication of 'two Faults in Conversation ... an Impatience to interrupt others, and the Uneasiness at being interrupted ourselves' (p. 92).

It follows that Fielding is loud in his condemnation of one-sided conversations: 'as a Man is not to make himself the Subject of the Conversation, so neither is he to engross the whole to himself' (p. 145). (Incidentally, if we were to substitute 'Novel' for 'Conversation' in that sentence, we would have a fair statement of the anti-intrusionists' complaint against Fielding.) He adds, with regard to the phrase 'good Companion', 'I have scarce ever heard that Appellation given to a very talkative Person'. Yet Fielding's novels are full of one-sided conversations, rendered at great length and with a considerable sense of revelry in their comic potential, such as the speeches of the two maidservants from Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, Mrs. Slipslop and Mrs. Honour. It seems appropriate, given the class sentiments expressed in the Voyage to Lisbon passage, that the most offending conversationalists in Fielding should be servants; on the other hand (and we should remember, anyway, that he married his maid), Slipslop and Honour are also readily identifiable as the stock of an established conservative literary/comic tradition. In fact on a number of occasions Fielding signals that Honour is being brought on purely for comic relief, rather like one of Shakespeare's clowns: see for instance the chapter heading to VI. vi: 'Containing a Dialogue between Sophia and Mrs. Honour, which may a little relieve those tender Affections which the foregoing Scene may have raised in the Mind of a good-natur'd Reader'.

A speech of Mrs. Honour's taken from IV. xii seems characteristic.

(I'll punctuate it with bracketed numbers to make analysis easier):

To be sure, one can't help pitying the poor young Man,
(1) and yet he doth not deserve much Pity neither, for
demeaning himself with such Kind of Trumpery. (2) Yet
he is so pretty a Gentleman, I should be sorry to have
him turned out of Doors. (3) I dares to swear the Wench
was as willing as he; for she was always a forward Kind
of Body. And when Wenches are so coming, young Men are
not so much to be blamed neither; for to be sure they do no
more than what is natural. (4) Indeed it is beneath them
to meddle with such dirty Draggle-tails, and whatever
happens to them, it is good enough for them. (5) And yet
to be sure the vile Baggages are most in Fault.

(p. 197)

This helps us to see more clearly what Fielding finds wrong with
(and funny about) Honour's sort of one-sided conversation. He
defined conversation as a reciprocal interchange of ideas by which
truth is examined. Ideally, a conversation should, therefore, consist
of a series of statements each containing the implied question,
"Is this true?", to which the participant's responding statement
should then be an answer. In this respect conversation is, in fact,
a continual process of question and answer. What Mrs. Honour does
is not to abolish this process but to incorporate it within a
monologue and thereby keep it all to herself. Thus, having stated
that the correct response to Jones's situation is pity, she questions
the truth of this statement at (1) and immediately disagrees with
herself; and having in this way stated that one should not pity him,

she questions the truth of this statement at (2) and disagrees with herself again (on grounds which have no basis in the logic she has been using up until now, namely that he is 'pretty'). At (3) she begins to rationalise her pity by blaming Molly in terms progressively more general: by referring to her specific behaviour ('the Wench was as willing'), her general behaviour ('she was always'), the general behaviour of young men ('when Wenches are so coming'), and human nature in general ('no more than what is natural'). At (4) she trips on her own logic: if men, as she has just argued, are general paradigms of virtue, then 'it is beneath them to meddle with such dirty Draggel-tails'. She then questions the truth of this statement and at (5) disagrees with herself again.

At one level - the level to which Fielding's essay by and large addresses itself - this is simply discourteous: it leaves Sophia with nothing to do but to break in 'with a more peevish Voice than she had ever spoken to her in before ... "Prithee why dost thou trouble me with all this Stuff? ..."'. Unlike Fielding's 'good' narrators, such as the Man of the Hill, Honour pays no attention to the demands of her audience (see above, pp. 54-55). More importantly, though, if the interchange of ideas is not reciprocal, then there is no way in which their truth can be examined: there is nothing to guarantee that everything Honour says is not nonsense (as indeed it usually is). She is, in effect, abusing the cognitive possibilities of dialogue which have recently been stressed in a book by Gary J. Handwerk:

Ethical irony begins with the recognition that this state necessitates an expansion of the frame of reference, given that well-balanced alternatives can remain

undecidable at the level of the text or utterance. Most characteristic of ethical irony, however, is the insistence that such expansion of context can only effectively occur through the integration of another subject. Whether intentional or unintentional, the limitation on awareness that generated a verbal incompatibility is embedded in the discourse of the individual. This discourse, however, is part of the system of language with which that individual subject tries to define itself, and which is a priori social. Hence the subject requires another subject, requires the entrance into dialogue, if it is to chart its own meaning.⁵

Conversation, then, very much like Tom Jones itself, tests the truth of ideas by presenting them from different viewpoints. An idea is stated, and agreed upon or disagreed with; this agreement or disagreement then becomes the statement of a new idea, which in turn can be agreed or disagreed with. Sociability - the recognition of our dependence on, and obligation to consult with, other people - thereby becomes the agent which determines an orderly and truthful progression from one idea to another. But if conversationalists (or novelists) adopt the role of a jure divino tyrant, ignoring the requirements of their listeners (or readers), then not only are they being rude, but 'Chaos' and 'Confusion' ensue, because their power becomes absolute and therefore (potentially) goes completely out of control: arbitrary ideas follow each other in random succession. The consequence of this can be seen when, for example, Mrs. Honour tries to construct

an argument designed to persuade Sophia not to kill herself:

Let me beseech your La'ship not to suffer such wicked Thoughts to come into your Head. O lud, to be sure I tremble every Inch of me. Dear Ma'm, consider - that to be denied Christian Burial, and to have your Corpse buried in the Highway, and a Stake drove through you, as Farmer Halfpenny was served at Ox-Cross, and, to be sure, his Ghost hath walked there ever since; for several People have seen him. To be sure it can be nothing but the Devil which can put such wicked Thoughts into the Head of any body; for certainly it is less wicked to hurt all the World than one's own dear Self, and so I have heard said by more Parsons than one. If your La'ship hath such a violent Aversion, and hates the young Gentleman so very bad, that you can't bear to think of going into Bed to him; for to be sure there may be such Antipathies in Nature, and one had lieverer touch a Toad than the Flesh of some People -

(VII. vii, pp. 349-50)

It's easy to identify the various factors which are arguing against each other in this speech: panic, self-interest, attempts at rational argument, attempts to support these attempts by referring to received wisdom ('several People') and authority figures ('Parsons' - though she may of course mean 'persons'). It's also easy to account for the underlying arbitrariness in terms of emotional turmoil, although I don't want to get involved here in character-based criticism. The point is that the absence of a connective

thought-process, which conversation and discussion with another party (such as Sophia) might have imposed, means that Honour's speech breaks down into a randomly arranged list of ideas. And, because this randomness derives from the fact that the discourse is entirely self-addressed and internal, it is, necessarily, a discourse without an audience: 'Sophia had been too much wrapped in Contemplation to pay any great Attention to the foregoing excellent Discourse of her Maid'. There is, in effect, nothing to listen to: and so nobody listens.

If, then, a good conversation is meant to resemble a novel, which literary form does a bad conversation such as this resemble? One answer is that it resembles the dictionary or encyclopaedia. We should not be fooled by the alphabetical arrangement of ideas in these forms into thinking that such an arrangement is in any other way logical or rational. In Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians, Hugh Kenner sketches out the decline of the encyclopaedia, showing how it once had a 'hierarchic plan', whereas because of the sheer volume of twentieth-century knowledge it is now impractical either for a single mind to organise this material or for the organisation to be anything other than alphabetically coherent:

Thus Bartholomew de Glanville, an English Franciscan friar, wrote about 1360 a most popular work, De proprietatibus rerum, in 19 books, beginning with God and the angels and ending with colours, scents, flavours and liquors, with a list of 36 eggs. ... But open the Encyclopaedia Britannica itself, and the

first topic on which you will receive instruction is the letter A, and the second is the meaning of the term "A-1 at Lloyd's", and the fourteenth is the Aardvark. This is sublimely nonsensical, like conversation [my emphasis] in Wonderland ...

The mark of the Encyclopaedia, then, is its fragmentation of all that we know into little pieces so arranged that they can be found one at a time. Nothing, except when a cross-reference is provided, connects with or entails anything else; nothing corrects anything else, or affords perspective on anything else. And nobody, consequently, is talking to anyone else. Least of all is the contributor talking to the reader ...⁶

Kenner has just described a work which is the very antithesis of one of Fielding's novels: in Tom Jones the narrator (contributor) goes out of his way to talk to the reader, and one of the whole points of the novel, as polemic, is to argue for the fact that there is nothing in life which does not 'entail' something else. One would therefore expect Fielding to despise the encyclopaedia/dictionary form as a vehicle of any kind of truth. So it would be helpful to examine briefly his one venture into the genre, the 'Modern Glossary' from The Covent-Garden Journal, no. 4 (I, 155-57), since it throws into clear relief his sense of the relationships between social and literary forms, between starkness of form and paucity of content, between the author's duty to question and the reader's ability to answer, and, ultimately, between narrative and other forms of logic.

(ii) Conversation and Narrative

In keeping with my methods so far, comparison still seems to be the most constructive strategy if what we are aiming at is a recognition of the idiosyncrasy of Fielding's approach to traditional forms. Looking for a work with which to compare his 'Modern Glossary', I decided upon Flaubert's Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues⁷. I shall try to keep the comparison concise, though: even though Flaubert's was an immense undertaking, occupying him, in effect, from the age of nine onwards⁸, we should remember that all we are dealing with in the case of Fielding is one of a series of twice-weekly magazine articles, no more than a few pages in length.

The comparison is nonetheless an interesting one, because the two works seem at first to be very similar but turn out to be different both in purpose and execution. Fielding explains his purpose thus: 'I shall here give a short Glossary of such Terms as are at present greatly in Use, and shall endeavour to fix to each those exact Ideas which are annexed to every one of them in the World' (p. 154). (The phrase 'those exact Ideas' is the one to keep in mind.) There follows a list of fifty-five words, in rough alphabetical order, together with their modern 'definitions', such as:

MODESTY. Aukwardness, Rusticity.

PROMISE. Nothing.

SERMON. A Sleeping-Dose.

SUNDAY. The best Time for playing at Cards.

Although much larger, Flaubert's Dictionnaire is, in general format, quite similar, and indeed certain specific usages occur

in closely-related forms:

(Fielding) LEARNING. Pedantry.

(Flaubert) ÉRUDITION. La mépriser comme étant la
marque d'un esprit étroit. (p. 269)

The sentiment is almost the same, but Fielding's method is simpler: by giving many of his words precise, one-word redefinitions he implies that those who use them in their debased sense still have precise ideas in mind; one would only have to substitute 'pedantry' for 'learning' in one of their sentences to find out exactly what they meant. He is amused by the automatic (and hence comprehensible) nature of their mental processes - the feeble-mindedness is not seen as vicious, because it can be reduced to a list of definite instances. Even 'Fool', although it is 'A complex Idea, compounded of Poverty, Honesty, Piety and Simplicity', can be coped with in this way^S: 'complex' is not the same as 'indefinable', and when Fielding does find a word ('Good') which is of 'as many different Senses as the Greek word $\epsilon\chi\omega$, or as the Latin Ago', it is still not dangerous because 'it is but little used by the Polite'. The Polite tend to steer clear of words to which they cannot give an exact (if inverted) meaning - except when the very violence of their usages seeks to conceal or make up for an uncertainty as to what they mean, a fact which Fielding grasps and then gives a precise ironic turn: 'SHOCKING. An Epithet which fine Ladies apply to almost every Thing.'

Flaubert's 'definitions', though, are more in the nature of a guide for mindless people, telling them what ideas they should attach to a given word (in this way he implies that they are doubly

mindless, since they even need a handbook to mindlessness). The difference is explicit in the two formats: Flaubert's is a dictionary of ideas, Fielding's of words (he takes the nature of the ideas for granted). This is why 'NONSENSE' is defined by Fielding as 'Philosophy, especially the Philosophical Writings of the Antients, and more especially of Aristotle' (getting more and more precise), whereas Flaubert reverses the procedure, saying of 'Philosophie', 'On doit toujours enricaner' (p. 322). For 'RELIGION' Fielding gives 'A Word of no Meaning; but which serves as a Bugbear to frighten Children with'. By answering nouns with nouns, or at least with noun clauses, he feeds our sense that there is a precise meaning to all these words, ironically absent from the text, and to which the 'Polite' usages stand in sharp antithesis. For 'WIT' he gives a long list of these nouns: 'Prophaneness, Indecency, Immorality, Scurrility, Mimickry, Buffoonery, Abuse of all good Men, and especially of the Clergy.' Again, the length and fragmentariness of the definition emphasises its essential precision and control: 'WIT' can be classified under as few as six specific headings, followed (just to make sure that the writer has it fully in his grasp) by one more general account which can then in turn be rendered more particular.

Flaubert responds very differently to the word 'wit', in a way which reminds us that his dictionary is not about the misleading use of words, but about the mechanical process by which one word becomes inseparable from a reductive set of associated ideas: 'Esprit: Toujours suivi d'«*étincelant*»' (p. 270). There is therefore an overtly moral dimension to Fielding's glossary which is lacking from Flaubert's. Fielding still believes, in effect, in the mechanical

possibilities of language, in the specific application of one idea to one word: he's only annoyed because of the fact that some people invert this process. In other words he separates the issue of morality from that of linguistic usage, whereas in Flaubert we have merely the implied sense of a moral outrage directly prompted by the violence he sees being done to language. The assumptions behind these two works are therefore radically different: in fact when Flaubert mocks those who would describe religion as 'Encore une des bases de la Société', we cannot help but feel that he is mocking an attitude with which Fielding himself would have been in sympathy.

Also, Fielding cannot bring himself to take fully on board the conventions of the dictionary. He does not stick to the randomness of the alphabetical arrangement, but re-orders it for identifiably artistic effect:

WORTH. Power. Rank. Wealth.

WISDOM. The Art of acquiring all Three.

This inability to enter wholeheartedly into the requirements of the parodied form is like his occasional habit of dropping the sarcastic mask in Jonathan Wild:

He [Mr. Bagshot] had indeed, it must be confessed, some small deficiencies to counterbalance these heroic qualities; for he was the silliest fellow in the world, could neither write nor read, nor had he a single grain or spark of honour, honesty, or good-nature, in his whole composition.

(I. xii, p. 33)

What we therefore lose at such moments in the 'Modern Glossary' is a full and unqualified sense of the extent to which the dictionary could be rendering, and parodying, the insanely random question and answer of a bad conversation, or (as in Flaubert) the irresistibly funny progress of a conversation in which everything is agreed upon and every response is mechanical. The most noticeable stylistic trait in Flaubert, but largely absent from Fielding, is the introduction of definitions with the words 'all' or 'always':

Images.	Il y en a toujours trop dans la poésie.
Imperatrices.	Toutes belles.
Imperialistes	Tous gens honnêtes, paisibles, polis, distingués.
Imagination.	Toujours «vive».

(all p. 91)

We could introduce a further comparison to emphasise the analogies between this sort of list and narrative itself. The nearest English language equivalent to Flaubert's dictionary is the 'Catechism of Cliché' compiled by Flann O'Brien (under the pseudonym Myles na Gopaleen) for his column in the Irish Times in the 'forties¹⁰. Interestingly, he approaches the subject from neither Fielding's nor Flaubert's angle. Instead of plucking examples at random from real-life conversation and arranging them in an alphabetical order which echoes and parodies their original context, he takes a conventional narrative form (such as a newspaper letter or article) and deconstructs it into a sequence of routine questions and answers between unspecified speakers in order to expose its automatism:

Of what nature is the newspaper in which one craves
the courtesy of its space?

Invaluable and widely read.

For what purpose does one crave the courtesy of its space?

Saying a few words anent the gas supply.

In criticising the Gas Company, what does one wish to make
it clear one holds for the Electricity Supply Board?

No brief.

Of what nature is the attitude of the Gas Company to say
the least of it?

High-handed and dictatorial in the extreme.

In what hands should such service not be and why?

Private; because it is a public utility service.

What would the situation be were it not so tragic?

Humorous.

Why is it necessary for the Government to take immediate
steps to safeguard children from the injuries to health
that may be caused by gas rationing?

Because the children are the men and women of tomorrow.

And what does one hope one's letter will catch?

The eye of the powers that be.

(pp. 205-06)

What is Mr Blank made after 109 years of faithful
service with the firm?

The recipient of a clock and handsome set of carvers.

By whom?

His friends and colleagues.

And as what?

A small token of their esteem.

What, according to the person making the presentation, does Mr Blank carry with him and where?

The best wishes of the firm and staff; into his well-earned retirement.

In what are these wishes expressed by the person making the presentation?

In the course of a witty and felicitous speech.

How does Mr Blank reply?

Suitably.

What does he declare himself to have received and from whom?

Nothing but kindness from all those he was privileged to come in contact with.

What did the proceedings then do?

Terminate.

(p. 204)

The model for this is, presumably, the Ithaca episode (Episode 17) of Ulysses, which is by far the most sustained and remarkable instance of traditional narrative being openly replaced by the pendular swing of question and answer. But the reason I have chosen to quote O'Brien at such length instead is that he makes explicit the connections of this technique with responses which are routine and mechanical. His catechism and Flaubert's dictionary are classic illustrations of the Bergsonian theory of laughter. This in turn connects up with what (in case it was beginning to look as though I'd forgotten) is my main concern: the extent to which it is at all possible for authors to open up

a space in their text where suitably-minded readers are able to exercise a measure of creative responsiveness. O'Brien's and Flaubert's method is to reproduce, almost to the point of caricature, the process of question and answer, of request for and supply of confirmation, which lies at the heart not only of conversation but also of certain kinds of relationship between narrators and readers.

For all the tentativeness with which he enters into the spirit of the form, Fielding's 'Modern Glossary' operates by methods broadly similar to these. What's especially revealing, then, is the way in which the re-definitions of the Glossary differ from comparable instances in the novels and plays, where we tend to find that the more elaborate context impinges upon and qualifies the reader's 'space'. Take, for example, the Glossary's definition of 'Honour':

HONOUR. Duelling.

On one level, this is not a definition of honour, but of duelling, which is defined, negatively, as 'something dishonourable'. On another, as a definition of honour, it is, by Fielding's standards, extremely open-ended: in fact, far from defining honour, it gives us the name of one thing which 'Honour' is not. From this basis readers must call to mind the network of assumptions built around the practice of duelling and, knowing that these are being signalled as not having anything to do with honour, must then construct their own definition; the only authorial guideline being, in effect, that these assumptions are to be excluded. (In the same way Flaubert demands that for once we conceive of a sort of wit which is something other than 'sparkling', and O'Brien demands that we imagine a

retirement which is not 'well-earned'.) In Tom Jones, though, Mrs. Fitzpatrick offers this definition of honour: 'his Designs were strictly honourable, as the Phrase is; that is, to rob a Lady of her Fortune by Way of Marriage' (XI. iv, p. 583). Here, context - the surrounding apparatus of novelistic detail - allows Fielding to have it both ways. Exactly the same thought process is expected of the reader (imagine what honour is really like), but at the same time we are aware of a backdrop of qualifying elements: the mitigating parenthesis, 'as the Phrase is'; the characterisation of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, which leaves us free to suppose that she is talking in a tone as much of personal pique as of wide-ranging cynicism; and the assurance which Fielding has given us, in his sympathetically humorous treatments of Captain Blifil's marriage, and Blifil's design against Sophia, that the effects of dishonourable attitudes towards marriage need only be temporarily harmful. (One might digress to suggest that the novel form itself allows for the possibility of conditions being improved in time, whereas the static, disjointed Dictionnaire and 'Modern Glossary' do not.) In other words the contextual material which qualifies the extremism of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's definition of honour does so by means external to the basic mechanism of the joke. The joke itself is not interfered with.

(iii) Fielding and Swift

There is also another sense in which Fielding is able to have it both ways: rather an obvious one, at first, but which, when set beside the work of a temperamentally very different author, might

prove to have unexpected implications. Stated simply, it would be that Fielding is in a better position to celebrate the energy of his more vicious or stupid characters' speeches, because there are always other, more admirable characters around to act as stabilising and moralising agents. This contrasts with Swift, who often only projects stupid characters, leaving us alone with them in an alarming intellectual vacuum, as in A Trritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind, and A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation ...¹¹. If it were actually that simple, then our preference for either Fielding's or Swift's method, the question of whether or not we want to have values spelt out for us somewhere in the text, would be purely a matter of taste. The issue is complicated, however, by the presence of Fielding's narrator: as I argued in Chapter Three, it's easy enough to have values imposed on us by characters, and easy enough to have them imposed on us by a narrator (although Swift does neither explicitly); but those values become very slippery when suggested to us by characters via a characterised narrator. Anyway, I've jumped the gun a little: the point should be argued more distinctly by the end of this section.

The example I've already quoted, where Sophia fails to listen to one of her maid's immense inconsequential speeches, is a typical instance of Fielding's double-sidedness. The exact phrase is, 'Sophia had been too much wrapped in Contemplation to pay any great Attention to the foregoing excellent Discourse of her Maid' (VII. vii, p. 350). The point that the substance of Honour's speech is of no practical use is thus made very insistently, since Sophia ignores it precisely because she is in the process of forming an important plan of action using only her own resources. Yet because

the novel conditions us to accept the fact that, wherever our sympathies may lie, we only attend to those characters the narrator wants us to attend to, we happily listen to Mrs. Honour's monologue even though we know that Sophia is meanwhile forming urgent and admirable resolutions. Two attitudes towards her speech are implied: that it is funny, and that it should be ignored; and, because Sophia is taking care of the latter, the reader feels less guilty about succumbing to the pleasures of the former. In this way the word 'excellent' becomes charged: it can either be taken sarcastically or straight.

Swift has no intention of letting us off the moral hook in this manner. In Polite Conversation, not only is there no narrator to regulate our degree of attention to each character, but there would, in fact, be nothing such a narrator could do, because there is no distinction between any of the characters anyway. They all manifest the same degree of stupidity, so that at best they are neutral in their responses to each other's remarks, and at worst they even congratulate each other:

Miss. Mr. Neverout, I'm hot, are you a Sot?

Neverout. Miss, I'm cold, are you a Scold?

(p. 142)

Whereas in Tom Jones somebody, either narrator or character, would have remarked upon the feebleness of this retort, Neverout adds, with a measure of self-satisfaction, 'Take you that', and then Lady Smart congratulates him: 'I confess that was home.' Similarly,

Neverout. Well, Miss, I'll think of this.

Miss. That's Rhyme; if you take it in Time.

Neverout. What! I see you are a Poet.

Miss. Yes, if I had but the Wit to show it.

(p. 138)

Clearly, then, we would be wasting our time if we looked to any of these characters for signs of the sort of intelligence which Swift admires; but while there is, effectively, no narrator, there is a compiler (the pseudonymous 'Simon Wagstaff') who might, perhaps, provide some sort of equivalent for Fielding's stabilising presence. Yet his characterisation in the 'Introduction' does not inspire confidence. It suggests a mind which, although more powerful than any which operates within the collection itself, has managed to transform method into a sort of madness:

I determined to spend five Mornings, to dine four Times, pass three Afternoons, and six Evenings every Week, in the Houses of the most polite Families; of which I would confine my self to Fifty; ... Which Practice I have followed ever since, to this very Day; except, when I happened at any Time to be sick, or in the Spleen upon cloudy Weather; and except, when I entertained four of each Sex in my own Lodgings once a Month, by Way of Retaliation.

(p. 100)

The most comfortable way to respond to this would be to assume that Swift is making straightforward fun of his fictional compiler. But any reader who comes to Polite Conversation with biographical information about Swift will find the assumption hard to make. The

sorts of figures which Wagstaff flaunts in his next paragraph in order to puff up his own diligence as a researcher (he 'had made the greatest Part of my Collection in twelve Years', but found that it 'could not be brought to any Degree of Perfection, in less than sixteen Years more') in fact correspond exactly with the span mentioned by Swift himself elsewhere regarding the composition of this work¹². We know full well, in other words, that Swift is the compiler, and that the particular brand of exhaustiveness on show here could only be achieved by a manic feat of perseverance (comparable to Flaubert's in his work on the Dictionnaire, or its novelistic counterpart, Bouvard et Pécuchet¹³). Whereas Fielding limits the scope of his portrayals of stupidity by means of particularisation, Swift denies himself the compromise of a sketched-out wholeness of vision, being apparently distrustful of its assumptions; being less interested, one might say, in fiction.

In spite of our unresolved uncertainties about the identification of Swift with Wagstaff, there is still a certain amount of recognisable irony which we can latch on to in the 'Introduction'. Obviously the collection is not designed to constitute 'a great Compass of real and useful Knowledge' (p. 103); and this vein is even more obvious in the writer's praise of 'the divine Mr. Tibbalds' and 'that great Master of the poetick Quire, our most illustrious Laureat, Mr. Colly Cibber' (p. 121). But even these sarcasms do not add up to a wholehearted criticism of Wagstaff: they might be his own. Swift, therefore, does make a satiric purpose felt, while refraining from inserting explicit suggestions of his own superiority. This means in effect that he implicates himself to a very large extent with the stupidity of his characters. The conversations in Polite Conversation

are not, in Fielding's sense, conversations at all, but random anthologies of feeble contemporary repartee. The characters do not agree or disagree with one another. Nobody, to borrow Kenner's words, is being talked to, and certainly nobody is listening: but by the same token neither is Swift/Wagstaff listening in any sense which involves a readiness to engage with or to respond. (He perceives these conversations but does not interpret them, to revert to the terminology of Chapter Three.) He would be as much to 'blame' as any of the characters, if blame were ever an issue which came into play in Polite Conversation.

But the narrator's effective absence has consequences not only for the degree of overttness with which Swift implies, or fails to imply, a moral dimension, but also for the organisation of this work. The absence of a presiding intelligence entails a concomitant and stifling absence of communication, attention, consequence, cause and effect or progress. This was obviously the feeling of the eighteenth-century dramatisers of the dialogues, who felt obliged to impose a romantic 'plot' in which, for instance, Neverout (renamed Mr. Modern) ended up marrying Miss Notable¹⁴. Needless to say, these attempts to impose a new and qualifying context upon the anthology are self-defeating: they fail to take account of the fact that the anthologised remarks already have a context. What they do not recognise (or cannot accept) is that there is, in fact, no such thing as a remark made 'out of context': however stark and isolated its presentation might be, it will always only acquire meaning by reference to its environment, its surrounding apparatus; and the meaning acquired will actually be all the more inviolable if this environment consists of the ostensible absence of a context.

This seems to be the case with Polite Conversation, where the repartee takes place within the complete and alarming absence of any recognisable context, other than that which is constituted by endless repetition.

I am trying to draw a distinction between Swift and Fielding which centres on the difference between the nature of the creativity which each demands of his reader. Essentially, the difference is that Swift, when presenting instances of stupidity and viciousness, leaves it up to the reader to create a context in which these instances can be placed and gauged according to certain norms: he aims to provoke in his reader a re-creation and hence reassessment of moral and intellectual values. Fielding provides that context. (He may then imply and involve us in its potential unreliability, but I shall come to that shortly.) The point can be brought out by looking at their respective attitudes towards a fairly concrete issue, such as marriage. Swift deals aphoristically with marriage in his 'Thoughts on Various Subjects'. Here are two examples, one early (Prose Works, I, 244), and one late (Prose Works, IV, 247):

WHAT they do in Heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not we are told expressly; that they neither marry, nor are given in Marriage.

VENUS, a beautiful good-natured Lady, was the Goddess of Love; Juno, a terrible Shrew, the Goddess of Marriage; and they were always mortal Enemies.

The second thought, although seemingly more dogmatic, is less imprisoning than the first. It puts forward a positive assertion - "Marriage and Love are incompatible" - with which we are in theory at liberty to disagree; although because we are obliged to construct

this assertion ourselves on the basis of Swift's implied antithesis, we have followed through, in playful and abbreviated imitation, the original thought process, and have thus proved to ourselves, on one level, that it is sound. Having arrived at the assertion we appear to be locked there: there is no reassuringly wider context to appeal to for escape or qualification. The first example does the same thing only more worryingly, because what it locks up and presents to us as final is not a conclusion but a conclusive ambiguity:

'WHAT they do in Heaven we are ignorant of' announces itself as the first half of an unanswered question; but this tentativeness is then established as an absolute, both by Swift's language of emphasis ('expresly') and by the stark isolation in which the thought is presented.

Tom Jones is not short of aphorisms on the subject of marriage, but they are not accompanied by this sense of deadlock:

'tho an Affection placed on the Understanding is by many wise Persons thought much more durable than that which is founded on Beauty, yet it happened otherwise in the present Case. Nay, the Understandings of this Couple were the principal Bone of Contention, and one great Cause of many Quarrels which from time to time arose between them; and which at last ended, on the Side of the Lady, in a sovereign Contempt for her Husband, and on the Husband's, in an utter Abhorrence of his Wife.

(II. vii, p. 104)

The apparent deadlock reached at the end of this extract looks vicious but is in fact implied to be unnecessary, both internally

in this paragraph and by means of a wider reference to the pervasive vocabulary of the book. It seems unnecessary that Mrs. Blifil should conceive a 'sovereign' contempt, or the Captain an 'utter' abhorrence, when these responses are set against the possibilities of moderation which are proposed elsewhere: the possibility - ironically undermined, but present - of sober observation ('many wise Persons'), of ranges of alternatives rather than extremes of disagreement ('principal Bone of Contention', 'one great Cause'), and of states which are not quarrelsome (the quarrels only arise 'from time to time'). In this context, and in the context of the other virtues of moderation which it is one of the intentions of the plot to espouse, the Captain and his wife can be seen, not to be imprisoned within an institution for which - as Swift suggests - there is no human alternative, but simply to be comically unaware of potentially saving areas of flexibility.

Meanwhile, Fielding continues to set up oppositions:

It was always a sufficient Reason to either of them to be obstinate in any Opinion, that the other had previously asserted the contrary. If the one proposed any Amusement, the other constantly objected to it. They never loved or hated, commended or abused the same Person. (p. 106)

These characters still seem to be a prey to needless extremes ('constantly', 'loved or hated'), but the next sentence offers a new means of release:

And for this Reason, as the Captain looked with an

evil Eye on the little Foundling, his Wife began now to caress it almost equally with her own Child.

The implications are optimistic. Through the agency of plot, effects which will finally conduce to the book's affirmative conclusion are found to be compatible with the same deadlocks which in Swift's 'Thoughts' are paralysing. Questions which Swift found, or chose to regard as, unanswerable, are to some extent answered in Tom Jones by means of thematic self-reference and a schematised network of cause and effect.

A few pages earlier, Fielding has given a more dramatic rendering of matrimonial discord. Partridge's wife, we are told,

vowed, that as she was sure of his Guilt, she would never leave tormenting him till he had owned it, and faithfully promised, that in such Case, she would never mention it to him more. Hence, he said, he had been induced falsely to confess himself guilty, tho' he was innocent; and that he believed he should have confest a Murder from the same Motive.

(II. vi, p. 99)

The incident recalls another of Swift's later 'Thoughts on Various Subjects': 'I HAVE known Men of Valour, Cowards to their Wives' (Prose Works, IV, 245). Swift's is again a less genial, more pointed version: it hangs on the sharp Valour/Cowards antithesis in which Fielding is not interested, since it is established by his behaviour elsewhere (the wider context making a difference again) that Partridge is already a coward under any circumstances. His amusement is directed at the extremes of

cowardice to which Partridge's wife is capable of driving him; and although the joke about murder seems more diffuse than Swift's thought, it is really working within a closely limited system of particular character definition which enables him to beg the question of whether wives in general are capable of being so fierce to their husbands as to make them confess murder. (I get the impression that Fielding just wouldn't have considered the question a very useful one.) Swift's tidy 'Pensée' in fact leaves much more in the air. Its whole point is to challenge or to undermine our faith in the pretensions of a word such as 'Valour' to be all-encompassing; and its brevity and pithiness give much less of a sense of conclusion than Fielding's joke, even though that was immediately followed by further qualifications and developments. Swift's thought says nothing which could be developed in such a way: it is a question posing as a statement.

As I said before, though, the starkness and isolation of examples such as this should not lead us to suppose that no part of their meaning is dependent upon reference to their surroundings. Actually this particular thought is part of a series beginning with the exclamation, 'HOW inconsistent is Man with himself!', and is thus less without a recognisable context than some of the other 'Thoughts on Various Subjects'. Some of its sense of deadlock, then, is itself contextual, deriving from the fact that it is part of a progressively more confusing list: one which does accumulate, even if only in volume and in its effect of oppression. Our awareness that this is happening should alert us to the realisation that to talk of these epigrams as being 'isolated' is in any case a simplification. However Swift intended them to appear (if at all),

we read them now so that each new thought reaches us in the light of a cumulating amount of information about the personality, opinions and prejudices of the writer. This is not to say that the content of any particular sentence throws very much light on any other: but we begin to have a sense of connection between sentences which, being bounded and final and self-contained, ought not to allow for connections at all:

MEN are content to be laughed at for their Wit,
but not for their Folly,

IF the Men of Wit and Genius would resolve never to complain in their Works of Criticks and Detractors, the next Age would not know that they ever had any.

AFTER all the Maxims and Systems of Trade and Commerce, a Stander-by would think the Affairs of the World were most ridiculously contrived.

(Prose Works, IV, 248-49)

The connection is primarily stylistic: the sense of turning to a new subject is counteracted by a sense that the new subject is going to be treated in exactly the same way. Certain techniques of balance, of confident generalising ('the Men of Wit and Genius', 'all the Maxims and Systems') subsequently shown up as being ridiculous or insufficient, begin to constitute a unifying influence, which involves not a consistency of attitude but a consistent interest in the momentary insight achieved by treating or phrasing different ideas in one particular way. Some readers will therefore instinctively start to create a context, even if

it seems to have been the author's express intention not to provide one.

In the light of this, we can move towards an evaluative comparison of Swift's and Fielding's methods, if we adopt the criteria of the question which I raised at the end of my third chapter: does Fielding give the reader too little to do? Does he not fail in that area in which Swift is so rigorously agile, the provocation in the reader of a 're-creation and reassessment of moral and intellectual values' (see above, p. 189)? (This is, by the way, a formal rather than a moral question: the ability to provoke is the major issue, and morality only enters into it because moral values happen to be the intellectual currency of these particular writers.) The answer to this question is, I believe, different for Tom Jones than for most of Fielding's other writings. Let's reconsider the double-edged nature of his attitude towards stupidity, which is basically very hostile but which also contains a rather perverse dash of celebration, as exemplified by one of his very earliest characterisations, Sancho Panza in Don Quixote in England¹⁵. Like Mrs. Honour, Sancho has only a loose grasp of logical thought-processes, and like the characters in Polite Conversation, he tends to substitute anthologised scraps of cliché and jargon for original thought:

Nay, nay, like enough; all men cannot do all things;
one man gets an estate by what another gets a halter.
All is not fish that swims. Many a man wants a wife,
but more want to get rid of one. Two cuckolds see each
other's horns, when neither of them can see his own.

Money is the fruit of evil, as often as the root of it. Charity seldom goes out of her own house; and ill-nature is always a-rambling abroad. Every woman is a beauty, if you will believe her own glass; and few, if you will believe her neighbours.

(I. vi, p. 25)

For a similar instance of sustained plagiarism and inconsequentiality in Swift, we might look to his Critical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind:

Thus Men are led from one Error to another, till with Ixion they embrace a Cloud instead of Juno; or, like the Dog in the Fable, lose the Substance in gaping at the Shadow. For such Opinions cannot cohere; but like the Iron and Clay in the Toes of Nebuchadnezzar's Image, must separate and break in Pieces.

(Prose Works, I, 247)

In many respects the methods of these extracts are very similar. Sancho, like the author of the essay, runs scraps of received wisdom together, both as a substitute for his own thought and in the belief that this random accumulation will, if only by force of volume, amount to something of substance. Yet while Swift's piece is indisputably an attack on certain sub-Baconian habits of mind (upon the whole notion of 'habit' as an intellectual safety-net, in fact), Fielding's is equally indisputably a celebration of an individual comic character.

I can see three factors which determine this difference. The first is simple: Swift's author's classical allusions are more

pretentious than Sancho's proverbs. The second is to do with context. As with Polite Conversation, there is no reference within the Trritical Essay to an alternative intellect which might provide a point of comparison: the vacuum is complete. Sancho's foolishness can, however, be regarded from many different levels, and these are explicitly introduced and personified; disorganised, by Fielding's later standards, but present. They range from Dorothea's level-headedness to the drunken inanity of Badger (III. xiv), which, unlike Sancho's simplicity, is not only disruptive but actually threatens the play's comic resolution. There is a sense that Sancho's anthologising (which oddly testifies to activity but not strength of mind) is one of the wayward materials which the play sets out to make sense of, whereas the boorishness of Badger's advances to Dorothea (on p. 64 she calls him a 'nauseous, filthy wretch', a judgment which the play does not seek to qualify) has simply to be suppressed. And the third factor follows on from this point: Swift does not grade or distinguish between the objects of his satire. Fielding, for example, sees simplicity as being less threatening than a malevolent sexuality. In his own terms, the consequences for humour are that intellectual shortcomings are funny, while moral shortcomings are not. This belief permeates even a later, more complex work such as Jonathan Wild, where the Wild/Heartfree polarity, which we might expect to give rise to a double act in the Jones/Partridge vein, never takes on a comic life because it is based upon an incompatibility between moral rather than intellectual views of the world. Neither Heartfree nor Wild is especially intelligent, although this is not regarded as funny in Heartfree's case because he is also 'good'. But Wild is meant to

be comic, as I argued in my second chapter, because of his mechanical predictability, which means that even his more subtle aspects are readily understandable:

Heartfree ... who, indeed, had with the utmost difficulty been brought to entertain the slightest suspicion of her inconstancy, immediately abandoned all distrust of both her and his friend, whose sincerity (luckily for Wild's purpose) seemed to him to depend on the same evidence.

(III. v, pp. 95-96)

The parenthesis corresponds to an exhalation of relief on Wild's part, a sudden gladness that he has, almost against his own expectations, succeeded in putting another lie across. Any laughter, then, is again directed at an intellectual shortfall, Wild's momentary transparency. The joke is extremely comfortable (like the book as a whole) because Fielding is inviting us to laugh at the potential stupidity of the wicked. Swift, in the Tritical Essay at least, is focusing with single-minded attention on what he believes to be the wickedness of stupidity.

In this respect we would be right to conclude that Fielding's Sancho and Wild are less impressive creations than the personality implied by Swift's essay. They leave the reader morally satisfied (if we happen to share Fielding's morality) but also redundant: the questions they pose are answered with an uncompromising (if not exactly legitimate) sense of wholeness by, in Don Quixote in England, the other characters, and, in Jonathan Wild, by the narrator, whose obsession with sarcasm is

an evident mark of certitude. But this is not so simply the case with Tom Jones because, I suspect, of the narrator's potential but unrealised omniscience. His poses of uncertainty are not mechanical tricks of style but part of a strategy designed to stimulate the reader: if he does not exactly aspire to involve us in the text in Swift's manner, he at least means to keep us on the move. He does so by means which range from the purely linguistic ambiguity of his use of a word such as 'excellent' to describe one of Mrs. Honour's speeches (see above, p. 185), to a more explicit feigning of his limitations, as here, where it is Jones's turn to have to listen to one of the maid's immense monologues:

Whether Jones gave strict Attention to all the foregoing Harangue, or whether it was for want of any Vacancy in the Discourse, I cannot determine; but he never once attempted to answer. (XV. vii, p. 809)

Reading Fielding at his worst is like having a conversation with a man who has already made up his mind about every subject under the sun. But this is not the sense I have of Tom Jones. Even a transparent pretence at uncertainty such as 'I cannot determine' implies a flexibility of narratorial presence which provides a substitute - by no means an equivalent - for Swift's determined and devastating absence. The phrase 'I cannot determine' still amounts to a question which the reader is obliged to answer. Granted, we are all but told, through the context of the book as a whole, what the answer is supposed to be, but this is hardly less true of Swift, because, as I have been arguing, readers are inclined to create such a context even if the author has gone out

of his way not to provide one.

I'm suggesting, then, that readers are kept equally active by both Swift and Fielding, and that it is only in the nature of the activity that the difference lies. Swift requires that we reconstruct the real authorial personality behind works such as Polite Conversation and the Tritical Essay; once we have done so we may find that we are deadlocked within a meaning - an attitude towards conversation, towards marriage, towards learning, which is emphatically decisive. We have moved towards an understanding of this meaning only to find that its nature is to block any further freedom of movement. In Tom Jones it is not nearly so difficult to work out the author's real opinions: Fielding usually tells us straight out. (Preston would argue that the narrator's opinions and Fielding's are not necessarily the same: this is certainly occasionally true, but you only have to think of the massive ironical gulf between Swift and the author of the Tritical Essay, or between Fielding and the narrator of Jonathan Wild, to realise that nothing like this is in any central way going on in Tom Jones.) We are not therefore, implicated in these opinions to the extent that we are in Swift's; we have not followed them through, we have not arrived at them ourselves. But what we are implicated in, is a context in which these opinions are put to the test. By engaging us in a particularised narrative, Fielding is able to imply (rather than state) a fixed opinion - for example, that Mrs. Honour's monologues are not worth listening to - and then to apply it to a specific situation and leave it for the reader to decide, not whether the opinion is right in principle, but whether it meets the contingencies of the shifting flux of particular contexts. This is why so much of Fielding's irony in

Tom Jones seems pale compared to Swift's (and why Jonathan Wild has been hailed as his most Swiftian work): he does spell things out for us, but only so that his opinions can then be reflected back on to specific characters and situations, creating new ironies, new spaces for the reader to move into; new questions for the reader to answer. In this way the novel seems to hover in a radically undecided way between satiric and sympathetic literary forms.

I'll end this chapter by quoting from Wayne C. Booth, who has recently called for a complete reappraisal of the way in which we value the 'unity' of literary works:

It will be obvious to any literary historian that literary works have tended not to do justice to our dialogical natures Just as in our individual lives we are tempted to close out voices prematurely, in order to keep things simple and to dominate the world, authors have generally experienced an irresistible temptation to impose monological unities upon their works. Many of the greatest achievements, great when viewed from the perspective of Aristotelian formalism, will thus appear seriously maimed when we ask whether their forms reflect dialogue or monologue. ¹⁶

'Aristotelian formalism' is certainly the perspective from which it's been traditional to praise Tom Jones: I hope I've shown, nevertheless, that its form does reflect dialogue, that Fielding intended this, and that he was often impatient with works which didn't. But in any case it's now time to ask, with some rather negative help from Wolfgang Iser, how usefully we can go on talking

about the 'form' of Tom Jones without taking into account its implication with historical reality. Which is where the reader comes in.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. The pioneering studies were by Herbert Davis: 'The Conversation of the Augustans', in Richard Foster Jones et al., The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope, edited by F.R. Johnson et al. (Stanford, 1951), pp. 181-97, and 'The Augustan Art of Conversation' in his Jonathan Swift (New York, 1964), pp. 260-76. Ann Cline Kelly, 'Swift's Polite Conversation: An Eschatological Vision', Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 204-24, helpfully explores the links between Augustan conversation and 'the humanist courtesy tradition'. Clive Probyn, in 'Realism and Raillery: Augustan Conversation and the Poetry of Swift', Durham University Journal, n.s., 39 (1977-78), 1-14, touches on the relationship between conversational and literary form, although from quite a different perspective to my own.
2. Hints Towards an Essay on Conversation, in Prose Works, IV, 87-95 (p. 92).
3. 'An Essay on Conversation', in Miscellanies, Volume One, pp. 119-52 (p. 124).

4. Ars Poetica, 333.
5. Gary J. Handwerk, Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan (New Haven and London, 1985), pp. 2-3.
6. Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians (London, 1964), pp. 2-3.
7. Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues, edited by Lea Caminiti (Naples and Paris, 1966). Page references will be given in the text.
8. A letter to Ernest Chevalier, 31 December 1830, contains the seeds of the project: 'et comme il y a une dame qui vient chez pape et qui nous contes toujours de bêtises je les écrirait'. Correspondance, edited by Caroline Franklin-Grout et al., 13 vols (Editions Louis Conard: Paris, 1926-54), I, 1.
9. The classic study of 'Fool' as a complex idea is of course William Empson's in The Structure of Complex Words (London, 1964), pp. 105-57. Empson's concept of complexity is far removed from Fielding's, however, the point of his book being an attempt 'to separate various entities in the habitual use of a single word, for example Senses, Implications, Emotions and Moods' (p. 39).
10. Reprinted in The Best of Myles (London, 1968), pp. 201-27.
11. Prose Works, I, 246-52; IV, 97-202.
12. Letter to Pope, 12 June 1732: 'Yet I have a thing in prose, begun above twenty-eight years ago, and almost finished. It will make a four-shilling volume, and is such a perfection of folly, that you shall never hear of it till it is printed,

and then you shall be left to guess.' Correspondence, edited by Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford, 1963-65), IV, 31.

13. See my M.A. Dissertation, 'Beckett and the Double Act: Comic Duality in Fiction and Drama' (University of Warwick, 1984), pp. 12-19, for a discussion of this novel which bears on the issues raised in this chapter.
14. See George Mayhew, 'Some Dramatizations of Swift's Polite Conversation', Philological Quarterly, 44 (1965), 51-72.
15. Works, XI, 5-72. References in the text are to act, scene and page.
16. Wayne C. Booth, Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 8 (Manchester, 1984), p. xxi.

Chapter Five

THE SYMPATHETIC TRADITION (II) - ENTER THE READER

(i) Iser and Ingarden

A welcome side-effect of reception theory has been that Fielding has stayed at the forefront of the debate about novelistic practice (right where Wayne Booth put him in 1961, in fact). But, reading Iser's essay, 'The Role of the Reader in Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones'¹, we might wonder whether its contribution has really extended beyond that. In a sense, Iser's critical method is well suited to Fielding's fiction, since both are characterised by an endearing literal-mindedness; but although Iser manages to provide a solid and trustworthy foundation for an understanding of Fielding, and successfully reconciles his insights with his theoretical principles, he evinces next to no sensitivity to the more subtle manifestations of 'indeterminacy' and 'negation' to be found in Tom Jones. This is partly, I suspect, a matter of personal temperament, but finally a wider problem to do with formalism in general.

The first indication of Iser's interest in Fielding is his Heidelberg dissertation of 1952, published the same year under the title Die Weltanschauung Henry Fieldings². I don't propose to speculate here on which came first, his admiration for Fielding or his theory of literary response (recently articulated most fully in The Act of Reading³), but shall merely remark on the compatibility of the one with the other: Tom Jones is tailor-made for a literary theory whose central concerns are spots of indeterminacy, schematised aspects, primary and secondary negations,

horizons of expectations, etc. Perhaps it is because of this very clear compatibility that Iser's method of relating text to theory tends to be rather blunt. To start with, his explicit concern with reader response even at its most basic levels of operation means that he has to spend a great deal of time reiterating points which, far from being new, would be obvious to his own audience from the most cursory reading of the novel. So he writes of:

the rich repertoire of contemporary norms incorporated into the novel and presented as the respective guiding principles of the most important characters. In general, these principles are set out as more or less explicit contrasts. This applies to Allworthy (benevolence) in relation to Squire Western (ruling passion), and to the two pedagogues, Square (the eternal fitness of things) and Thwackum (the human mind [as] a sink of iniquity), in their relations to each other and, individually, to Allworthy. There are also other facets of this novel that are set out in contrasts: for instance, love, in the sequence of Sophia (the ideality of natural inclinations), Molly Seagrim (temptation), and Lady Bellaston (depravity). There are other contrasting relations along the same lines, but these are frequently only the background to set off the hero. Thus we have the contrasting relationship between Tom and Blifil: the latter follows the norms of his instructors and gets corrupted; the former goes against them, and becomes all the more human.

(p. 52)

This already sounds overschematised enough, but its dangers become

even more apparent when we realise the kind of dogmatism it leads Iser into. A few sentences later he states that 'clearly the reader cannot look through the contrasting perspectives of norm and hero simultaneously - instead he will switch from one to the other'. But I have, as you may recall, spent most of the second and third chapters of this project in arguing that it is exactly this simultaneity of perspective which makes Tom Jones interesting. It is not 'clear' to me at all why the reader cannot look through the perspectives of norm and hero simultaneously, in fact there are clearly instances where it happens, although perhaps we have to look to the unit of the sentence or even of the clause in order to identify them. Take, for example, the beginning of VI. xi, when Jones is just about to report to Mr. Allworthy for punishment:

The poor young Man attended at Dinner, as usual; but his Heart was too much loaded to suffer him to eat. His Grief too was a good Deal aggravated by the unkind Looks of Mr. Allworthy; whence he concluded that Western had discovered the whole Affair between him and Sophia. But as to Mr. Blifil's Story, he had not the least Apprehension; for of much the greater Part he was entirely innocent, and for the Residue, as he had forgiven and forgotten it himself, so he suspected no Remembrance on the other Side.

(p. 309)

Even the word 'unkind' combines at least three simultaneous perspectives: the 'norm' (if we take it neutrally to mean that Allworthy is just looking severely - and hence, by his own

standards, justly - at Tom), Tom's (if we take it to mean something like 'unfair'), and one which is more in touch with the wider implications of the plot: if we allow it, that is, to mean that Allworthy is acting in defiance of his sense of kinship with Tom (which, incidentally, is also the opinion of a different 'norm' - public opinion, which, we are told at the end of the chapter, censured Allworthy as Tom's 'inhuman Father'). Furthermore, a clause such as 'as he had forgiven and forgotten it himself' is simultaneously an expression of Tom's perspective on an event and a reminder, by implication, of the complexion which Blifil (and therefore everyone else) has put on it. In his preoccupation with the larger-scale schemata of the novel Iser misses out on stylistic sparks such as this: but it is here, in Tom Jones, that half of the action is taking place.

I'm not saying that Iser's penchant for large-scale observation isn't admirable, but it does lead him to miss out on some of the activity taking place on less obtrusive levels, activity which not only does not fit in with many of his general assertions, but which, in its cumulative effect, must come eventually to assume importance on an equal scale: he only doesn't notice this because it's the effect of a mass of tiny detail rather than a few bold strokes. This is true not only on the issue of perspective, but on the whole issue of narrative 'gaps' which is his focus in the section on the reader's role in Joseph Andrews:

In the second theoretical essay, for example, he says that reading his book is like a journey, during which the occasional reflections of the author are to be

regarded as resting places which will give the reader the chance to think back over what has happened so far. As these chapters interrupt the narrative, Fielding quite logically calls them "vacant pages" [II. i, p. 89]. Now these "vacant pages" are themselves large-scale versions of vacancies that occur right through the text, for instance in the Lady Booby scene.

(pp. 39-40)

Even the scene that Iser refers to, however, is still on a fairly large scale: or, to be more specific, it is still an instance of an explicit and obvious gap, one where Fielding is clearly and in his own voice addressing the reader and, it seems, telling us to use our own imaginations:

You have heard, Reader, Poets talk of the Statue of Surprise; you have heard likewise, or else you have heard very little, how Surprise made one of the Sons of Croesus speak tho' he was dumb. You have seen the Faces, in the Eighteen-penny Gallery, when through the Trap-Door, to soft or no Musick, Mr. Bridgewater, Mr. William Mills, or some other of ghostly Appearance, hath ascended with a Face all pale with Powder, and a Shirt all bloody with Ribbons; but from none of these, nor from Phidias, or Praxiteles, if they should return to Life - no, not from the inimitable Pencil of my Friend Hogarth, could you receive such an Idea of Surprise, as would have entered in at your Eyes, had they beheld the Lady Booby,

when those last Words issued out from the Lips of
Joseph. (I. viii, pp. 40-41)

By confining his discussion to instances such as this, Iser gives the impression that the only creative gaps in the texts of Fielding's novels, the only occasions on which the reader has anything to do, are either the big self-conscious digressions ("vacant pages") or direct and flamboyant mock-heroic apostrophes. I would have thought that the biggest gaps in this scene are created through dialogue: it is here that things are only half-stated, so that the reader has to forge connections with things said elsewhere in the novel in order to hunt out larger meanings. For example, Joseph's protestation:

'Madam ... that Boy is the Brother of Pamela, and would be ashamed, that the Chastity of his Family, which is preserved in her, should be stained in him.'

As presented, a bland statement of principle: but, if the reader links it with the scepticism of Richardson's novel which Fielding voiced in the very first chapter, it throws up some altogether more interesting and complicated questions about chastity, reflecting back both on Lady Booby (who, it was implied at the end of I. i, would have learnt nothing from Pamela's example, even if it had been a good one - see above, p. 140) and on Joseph (who appears all the more heroic because we know that he doesn't really have the example of a virtuous sister to support him in his resolve).

This should alert us to the fact that there is a paradox inherent in the idea that narrative 'gaps' can be opened up by

authorial intrusion; a paradox which Iser has not negotiated. One could argue, indeed, that the purpose of Fielding's intrusions in cases like these is actually to close such gaps. Although, as Iser remarks, 'The narrative breaks off', this does not mean that 'the reader has room to enter into it'; and then to say that 'the reader's imagination is left free to paint in the scene' is simply wrong. Far from leaving us free, Fielding deliberately bewilders us with a profusion of literary and pictorial detail. Iser is right to point out that, on reaching the moment at which he must give some impression of Lady Booby's extreme surprise, Fielding realises that it cannot be done in straightforward narrative terms, but his solution is not at all to leave the whole thing to a freely creating reader's imagination. In fact it is more like a technique from Tom Jones which I discussed in my first chapter (see above, pp. 41-42), where Fielding, faced with the problem of how to make his readers experience, as tangibly as possible, the passage of a period of twelve years, does it by leaving them three or four digressive pages filled with an 'action' (the narrator's teasing of the reader) which precisely because it is of a different order from any 'action' which takes place between the characters, can stand outside the narrative time scale. He recognises that what is needed, in order to be emblematic rather than descriptive of Lady Booby's surprise, is simply something different, something other than mere narrative. The reader therefore feels a shift from the ordinary to the extraordinary, certainly, but purely in stylistic and non-descriptive terms, and by means of a style which is consciously engrossing and cajoling, so that it effectively blocks any exercise of anarchic creativity on the reader's part⁴. When the narrative breaks off,

then, it is in order to give the narrator room to enter into it, not the reader. Besides, Iser has done nothing to argue for the specificity of this metaphor: his methodology does not allow for or sustain the image of reader, character and narrator being physically present to one another, in the way that, say, Mark Lambert's does.

I should say that my quarrel is not exclusively with Wolfgang Iser, nor do I think that the shortcomings I've mentioned are simply the shortcomings of a particular mind addressing itself to a particular text. Rather, the problem lies with a whole movement in criticism which has marked out the eighteenth-century novel as one of its main areas of investigation. The formal design of Tom Jones is undoubtedly elaborate and even diagrammatic, which means, no doubt, that it is a proper area of investigation for formalist critics. However, at the level of semantics it is quite often subversive, playful, spontaneous, ironic and ambiguous. Roman Ingarden, whose model from The Literary Work of Art⁵ Iser seems in large measure to have adopted, identifies this level as being the second of the four 'strata' which make up a literary work, 'The Stratum of Meaning Units', but so far this particular bit of terminology has not been put to any great use in investigating, for instance, how it is that an irony and an approach to perspective as complex and as potentially disorientating as Fielding's come to support an aesthetic and philosophic system as coherent (so we are told) as that embodied in Tom Jones.

If this, then, is perhaps something that Booth, Preston and Rawson have followed through more interestingly than Iser, then what I have been arguing so far is a case for the inadequacy of reception by the standards of New Criticism. A quite different case

could be made from an opposite perspective, in the sorts of terms summarised by Robert C. Holub in his useful critical introduction to reception theory⁶. He argues that Ingarden's chief weakness 'has less to do with his insistence on an adequate concretion of the text than with his failure to account for the always situated nature of both the work of art and its recipient'; he 'conceives of the reader as an ideal individual, divorced from and independent of any larger collectivity' (p. 29). Iser falls prey to the same trap:

Throughout The Act of Reading we encounter a competent and cultured reader who, contrary to Iser's wishes, is predetermined in both character and historical situation. This reader must be attuned to the social and literary norms of the day. In the eighteenth century he/she must have a good command of, say, Lockean philosophy ...

(p. 97)

This objection is pertinent to my thesis, since I have been trying, ever since I discussed the Adam Bede episode in Chapter One (see above, esp. p. 15), at least to keep in mind the specific and individual nature of each reader's response: to suggest, in fact, that authors can only enter into genuine dialogue with their readers if they have a particular 'reader' in mind rather than an amorphous 'readership'. In any case one cannot define what Tom Jones achieves without also asking the question of who it achieves it for.

Iser makes some attempt to incorporate specific issues of readership into his chapter, but his efforts in this direction seem naive. Take, for instance, these remarks à propos of the first chapter of Tom Jones, in which he describes Fielding's method as

'Revealing human nature through a fabric of social contrasts':

there is the reference to a socially differentiated public that has varying degrees of familiarity with the opposed poles of town and country. Here, as in Joseph Andrews, we see Fielding trying to gauge the disposition of his readers by means of class orientation and then to transcend it through the representation of human nature. (p. 49)

Although I have no reason to doubt that Fielding himself believed that 'class orientation' could be 'transcended' by the representation of 'human nature', it is impossible that the readership of Tom Jones should have been anything like as 'socially differentiated' as Iser implies, or, indeed, as much as the audience for one of Fielding's plays would have been. Tom Jones sold, initially, for 18 shillings⁷. This would in itself have determined a certain exclusivity since, according to W.A. Speck, novels normally sold 'for between 2s 3d and 5s, and although this was beyond the means of labourers it was within the reach of tradesmen and craftsmen'⁸. In terms of sales it was, according to Battestin, 'a splendid and instantaneous success'⁹, and was, according to a quotation from An Apology for the Life of Bampfylde-Moore Carew, to be found 'in every Hand, from the beardless Youth, up to the hoary Hairs of Age'¹⁰. However, 10,000 copies were printed in 1749, which was enough to satisfy public demand until the fifth edition of 1763, and out of a population of roughly 5.7 million¹¹ this is obviously only a very small proportion. Now that the population is ten times what it was in 1749, the equivalent audience would be 100,000, which

does not even approach, for example, the viewing figures that even a very high-brow film would attract for one screening on BBC 2 or Channel 4, and would certainly not qualify the book for best seller status in the paperback lists. Figures for literacy in the mid-eighteenth century are not readily available, but Speck makes the following generalisations:

There was virtually no illiteracy among the gentry and professions, including government officials; among tradesmen and craftsmen it varied between five and forty per cent, while husbandmen, servants and labourers were the most illiterate section of the population, between forty-five and sixty per cent being unable to sign marriage registers for the years 1754-84. Since substantially more women were illiterate than men, then female servants were probably among the least literate people in eighteenth-century England, which makes the highly articulate correspondence of Richardson's Pamela a most unlikely feat in reality. (p. 84)

Given the fact of a far from universal literacy, then, and the evidence of its somewhat prohibitive price, it seems clear that the commercial 'success' of Tom Jones was confined to a well-educated and well-paid elite. Fielding, of course, would have been well aware of where his market lay, so it is misleading of Iser to read 'The Introduction to the Work, or Bill of Fare to the Feast' as if to imply that Fielding believed his book would cut through class barriers and provide an image of human nature accessible to all. (What Fielding is saying is that his characters will show that 'human nature' is a

constant, independent of class; but Iser picks this up as well, to be fair.) I've analysed this passage briefly myself in my third chapter (see above, pp. 139-41), but could re-state my point now in the following terms - remembering that what is at stake is the extent to which the novel resembles a dialogue rather than a speech (i.e. the extent to which the author is conscious of addressing one person rather than many people). One piece of evidence for this would be whether the reader's individual predispositions are at all catered for. This is not a question of whether Fielding took pains to make his work as accessible to a farm labourer as a cabinet minister; clearly he didn't, although he did differentiate, to a certain extent, within the social/intellectual grouping which he was aware of addressing - as for example in his distinctions between the 'mere English Reader' and the 'classical Reader'. Rather, it's a question of his knowing that he cannot control his readers' experience in the way that he can his characters'; knowing that his readers' tastes are unpredictable just as their lives are; but seeing that there are ways in which he can cater for this unpredictability (hence the restaurant simile), draw it into the novel by means of his authorial presence, and thereby make the whole process of reading the novel seem less artificial. It is this process of reading, in fact, not the 'plot', that constitutes the main subject of the novel, and this is naturally a cast iron way of ensuring that the subject continually interests, involves and bears relevance to the reader. This strikes me as being very intelligent about what the novel, as a form, can and can't do, and Iser does Fielding a disservice by making out that he believed it would work for all readers; he believed only that it

would work for all his readers.

* * *

Tom Jones presents a problematic case for formalist critics. On the one hand, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, it seems to be a tailor-made example of the elaborately schematised literary work of art. On the other, it is a polemical work, written in the hope that it would change people's attitudes, and written simultaneously with some of the author's most highly political journalism; its appearance, in February 1749, was a public and political event as well as the last stage in a process of artistic self-expression. Any attempt to analyse it must somehow mediate between these two aspects, and try to show how Fielding felt that his chosen form - a 'literariness' which is self-conscious and clearly signalled - related to the reality with which the novel is contiguous and which it was intended to modify. The problem, then, is not that of the relationship between form and content, but of the relationship, as Fielding conceived it, between literary form and non-literary reality.

I imagine that this will mean leaving the methods of formalism behind, but before we do so, there is one respect in which a quick look at some of the twentieth-century theorists could be useful. It will also be a way of leading back towards the examination of specific texts, which will be a relief for some. The term which I'd like to examine, briefly, is 'polyphony'. This word is at the heart both of Ingarden's theory of the literary work of art, and of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of a kind of novel which expresses a 'plurality

of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses', pioneered, he claims, by Dostoevsky, although 'This does not mean ... that Dostoevsky is an isolated instance in the history of the novel, nor does it mean that the polyphonic novel which he created was without predecessors'¹². Before considering the different uses which these writers make of the word, it is as well to remember the OED definition:

Mus. The simultaneous combination of a number of parts, each forming an individual melody, and harmonizing with each other; the style of composition in which the parts are so combined; polyphonic composition; counterpoint.

An aspiration towards harmony, therefore, is latent in any recourse to the word. Ingarden is perfectly explicit about this:

To put it more precisely, both the individual strata and the whole which arises from them show themselves - given, of course, an appropriate attitude on the part of the reader - in manifold aesthetic value qualities which, in unison, of themselves produce a polyphonic harmony. (p. 370)

Bakhtin's theory of novelistic polyphony seems at first to allow for a more disruptive, more contradictory total effect; but it transpires, from the way in which he defends Dostoevsky from the implications of a reductively monological reading, that, like Ingarden, he has his eye on an ideal of higher unity:

If Dostoevsky's highly heterogeneous material had been

developed within a unified world corresponding to the unified monologic consciousness of the author, then the task of joining together the incompatible would not have been accomplished, and Dostoevsky would be a poor artist, with no style at all In actual fact, the utterly incompatible elements comprising Dostoevsky's material are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses; they are presented not within a single field of vision but within several fields of vision, each full and of equal worth; and it is not the material directly but these worlds, these consciousnesses with their individual fields of vision that combine in a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of a polyphonic novel.

(pp. 15-16)¹³

Several objections can be raised, and the first observation to make is not that all art aspires to the condition of music, but that too much formalist theory aspires to reduce all art to the condition of music (Bakhtin is wearing his formalist hat at this point). The readings (eventually) thrown up by such theories are not necessarily insensitive, but there is something pretentious about the specificity with which the analogy is offered. It is misleading to suggest that the play of different elements within a novel can produce a fugal sort of harmoniousness, for instance, if the precise identification of these elements cannot even be agreed upon. If we identify the polyphony of strata (Ingarden) as well as the polyphony of characterised voices (Bakhtin), then we already have two polyphonies, and the resulting noise would surely be

chaotic rather than harmonious, like hearing BWVs 538 and 540 played simultaneously¹⁴; and there is still the potential for further polyphonies not yet identified (Tom Jones, for example, might be thought to evince a polyphony of genres). More damagingly, total subscription to such an analogy would tempt the critic to propose a simple opposition between formal organisation and informal reality, when the two are, on the contrary, inseparable - a fact made perfectly clear by Tom Jones and by some of the novels which adopt its methods. (I shall spend the rest of this chapter discussing two of these.) The narrator of Tristram Shandy, for instance, is deeply and comically frustrated by the fact that novels are not like pieces of music.

I'm left with the impression that Iser is torn between the alluring precision of Ingarden's theoretical model and his perhaps more temperamental inclination towards close textual criticism in the Anglo-American vein. Inevitably this leads to oversimplifications because it puts him in a position where he must, for instance, square his account of the interaction of 'schematised views' at a particular moment in Joseph Andrews (The Implied Reader, p. 38) with the very specific connotations which this term has in Ingarden's conception of the literary work of art (Sections 8 and 9, pp. 255-87). All too often this means that his description of the reader's function comes to resemble a sort of literary painting-by-numbers: Fielding supplies the outlines, we bring the paint¹⁵. What his theory thereby misses out most seriously is the sheer variety of Tom Jones.

(ii) Fielding and Sterne

Some discussion of Tristram Shandy is by now overdue. Opportunities

for comparison with Tom Jones have been so numerous that I have always tended to wait until the next one should come along; for between them, these two novels constitute the eighteenth century's most interesting body of English literary theory. Consider, for example, how aptly this quotation would have fitted into my fourth chapter:

Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all; — so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.

For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own.¹⁶

The relevance of these ideas in general to my interest in Tom Jones is obvious (hence important: otherwise I wouldn't have included a quotation which is so over-familiar from writings about Sterne). Nonetheless I made a conscious decision to hoard Tristram Shandy up until that point in my discussion when I would be talking about modern literary theory, its claims for the eighteenth-century novel, its claims for the musicality of the novel generally, and, in this case, its (occasional) exaggeration of the dichotomy between novelistic form and the reality which such a form purports to express.

Before coming on to these specific issues, we should establish a broader basis of comparison between Fielding and Sterne. Each has seemingly quite different ideas about the sorts of 'truth' which their novels apparently represent. Both writers refer to themselves, occasionally, as 'historians', neither without irony: the overtones of Fielding's claims in this direction have been discussed briefly in Chapter One, and I'll return to them in Chapter Six. Sterne's irony is more local and more elusive, but usually there is an element of mockery attached to the term. Sometimes this means a straightforward put-down:

O Trim! would to heaven thou had'st a better historian!
— would thy historian had a better pair of breeches!
(V. vi, p. 288)

Sometimes he seems uncertain whether to adopt it or not: of metaphors, he says that 'there is nothing more dishonest in an historian, than the use of one' (III. xxiii, p. 164) - yet this is in the context of admitting quite openly that he does use them. An instance from IV. xxvii (p. 257) is more telling:

It is not my business to dip my pen in this controversy
— much undoubtedly may be wrote on both sides of the
question — all that concerns me as an historian, is to
represent the matter of fact, and render it credible to
the reader ...

This is reminiscent of one of Flann O'Brien's mannerisms, usually invoked when he is at his most hostile: outrageous examples of pretentiousness, he claims, interest him 'as a scientist':

You must keep this strictly under your hat but I received an invitation to be in attendance at 86 St. Stephen's Green last Thursday evening to hear a 'paper' on ... guess? ... 'The Function and Scope of Criticism'. It interests me as a scientist that there is to be found today in this humble island a young man who is anxious to explain this matter to me ...

I am not acquainted with the Daddy Christmas who wrote the foregoing matter but it interests me as a scientist.¹⁷

In both the eighteenth- and twentieth-century examples the technique is the same: the writer claims to be practising a consciously limited discipline (history, science) in order to avoid discussing the full implications of something which essentially bores him. At the back of the joke is disdain for the discipline adverted to: the postures of scientist and historian are adopted in order not to have to embark on a different kind of investigation which, it is suggested, might have been more strenuous and illuminating.

Sterne, then, sees the role of historian as being one-track and narrow-minded; the pose does not sit as easily or as often on him as it does on Fielding. On the other hand the sort of reality which he seeks to represent is both more complex than Fielding's and has none of his pretensions to scope. While Fielding agonises over whether incidents are 'worthy the Dignity of this History to relate' and looks down on Pamela for its particularised rendering of the consciousness of a chambermaid, Sterne spends the first four books of Tristram Shandy describing the first day of the narrator's life.

In terms of literary politics, this puts him in the Defoe/Richardson, anti- or post-Augustan camp. Some of his comments even lend themselves to interpretation as anti-Fielding polemic:

Now this, you must know, being my chapter upon chapters, which I promised to write before I went to sleep, I thought it meet to ease my conscience entirely before I lay'd down, by telling the world all I knew about the matter at once: Is not this ten times better than to set out dogmatically with a sententious parade of wisdom, and telling the world a story of a roasted horse — that chapters relieve the mind — that they assist — or impose upon the imagination — and that in a work of this dramatic cast they are as necessary as the shifting of scenes — with fifty other cold conceits, enough to extinguish the fire which roasted him. (IV. x, p. 225)

While possibly hostile to Fielding's sort of fiction, though, Sterne would fit equally uneasily into the Richardsonian mould. What sets him apart from Richardson and Defoe is both the self-conscious mania of his particularisation and the consequent anxiety which dogs his authorial procedures. In fact the dominant characteristic of Tristram Shandy is the narrator's desperate awareness of the impossibility of achieving a literary form sealed off from reality: he is distraught at the thought of the facts of a random and changing reality constantly eluding his authorial control.

Presumably this accounts for his appeal to twentieth-century writers and readers: Sterne pretends to be looking for (in Beckett's words) 'a form that accommodates the mess':

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos, and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else.¹⁸

In a sense what I want to argue is that Tom Jones, too, has not so much found 'a form that accommodates the mess', but realised that the two can in any case not be separated; although, of course, it has a very different temperamental and philosophic starting point. Sterne adopts Fielding's journey imagery, for example, but sees it (just as he sees the novel) as a potential metaphor for disorder rather than progress:

— WE'LL not stop two moments, my dear Sir, — only, as we have got thro' these five volumes, (do, Sir, sit down upon a set — they are better than nothing) let us just look back upon the country we have pass'd through. —
— What a wilderness has it been! and what a mercy that we have not both of us been lost, or devoured by wild beasts in it. (VI. i, p. 329)

If we compare this with Fielding's famous farewell to the reader in Tom Jones, XVIII. i, we find at least three major points of difference. One, is that Fielding explores the full implications of the idea of reader as travelling-companion, i.e. he allows for the possibility of reader-narrator dialogue and two-way exchange, whereas Sterne doesn't (his particularised addresses to 'Sirs' and 'Madams' merely alert us to the fact that the actual responses of

these people are rarely allowed to appear in the text: when they do, as in I. xx, the reader is automatically appropriated to Sterne's purpose and turned into a character). Second, Sterne's conception of the place of his book in the real world is both more concrete and more pessimistic than Fielding's: it might, at worst, be useful for sitting on. Third, Fielding insists on the journey as a means of arriving somewhere, and is comparatively uninterested in the nature of the journey itself, whereas Sterne explores its possibilities as an imagined landscape: also, for him, the fact that it is a wilderness (and that he has traversed it successfully) can be treated as a cause for celebration.

My task for the rest of this section, a frankly Sternean one, is to keep these three themes in mind at once; so please be patient if they threaten to disappear from view occasionally. But the basic difference between the two authors is this: Fielding sees the novel as an opportunity to build up a real relationship with his reader, the discourse of which is furnished by an additional, sketched-out pseudo-reality (the 'narrative'), and the object of which is to modify the reader's beliefs and consciousness. Sterne wants to use his novel as a means of expressing as precisely as possible the nature of empirical reality: he, his book and his readers will not contain that reality, but will be contained by it, as objects. Of the two, it is hard to say which author has set himself the more difficult task, but Sterne's method has more scope for making his difficulty the actual subject of the novel. His chief problem, as has often been pointed out, is that he is saddled with a largely linear form in which to present a non-linear reality. (He gives a literal demonstration of this in VI. xl, pp. 379-80.) A good deal

of work has been done on the ways in which he tried, or might have tried, to solve the problem by borrowing methods from different art forms - ones better suited to giving renditions of simultaneity. William Holtz, for example, in his book Image and Immortality, has related Sterne's novelistic practices to Lessing's theories of the pictorial arts¹⁹. Two American academics, Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston, have produced a screenplay based on Tristram Shandy. According to their article in Eighteenth-Century Studies, it aims 'to focus on four interrelated concepts that we feel are crucial to the uniqueness of the original novel', and these include, 'the simultaneity of time, which is at the thematic and stylistic center of the novel'²⁰; 'we aim to work for simultaneity through vertical density, a multilayering of the visual images (such as optical inserts, superimpositions, split screen), and through depth focus in which all of the elements involved in an event are presented within the same frame, giving the viewer the option of where to look' (p. 488 - I hope that they have seen Jacques Tati's Play Time). The film is supposed to end with a sequence consisting of 'various characters doing musical renditions of Lillabullero in a range of musical and cinematic styles, ending with Tristram popping out of the Shandy clock like a cuckoo, leading the audience in a singalong as they file out of the movie house' (p. 491). The fact that the film has not yet been made is therefore a cause for qualified regret (meanwhile the project may interest us as scientists).

William Freedman's article 'Tristram Shandy: The Art of Literary Counterpoint' is both better and more relevant than either of these efforts²¹. It provides a selection of quotations to show the pervasiveness of musical imagery in the novel, and a potted theoretical

account of the nature of musical time. His thesis is that,

in order to be genuinely true to experience - both physical and mental - Tristram must confront the problem of simultaneity, a problem that only music has the equipment to handle - through harmony and, more important for Tristram, through counterpoint.

(p. 273)

The only trouble with this essay is that, like Iser and Ingarden, Freedman uses his insights to further his quest for that elusive mirage of formal perfection. He says that Sterne believed the novel should be 'at least consistent and harmonious with itself', and that 'in Tristram Shandy as in music, the criterion of truth and value is ... internal coherence and consistency' (p. 270). I would argue that the only consistent thing about Tristram Shandy is its inconsistency; the only thing we can rely on is its incoherence. To suppose otherwise is to be blind to some of Sterne's most obvious sarcasms: for instance, his mention of 'that necessary equipoise and balance, (whether of good or bad) betwixt chapter and chapter, from whence the just proportions and harmony of the whole work results' (IV. xxv, p. 252) - especially when this is promptly undercut with 'For my own part, I am but just set up in the business, so know little about it'. As with Iser, theory fails in the face of evidence at the level of the meaning unit.

But the more dangerous implication is that Sterne has somehow solved the problem of the linearity of the novel by his importation of musical terms: this suggests that the novel is capable of achieving

a self-contained internal harmoniousness sealed off from the damaging chaos of real life. Freedman lets the cat out of the bag near the end of his article: 'Of course Tristram cannot literally keep both his main plot and his digressions moving simultaneously' (p. 276). But on what level are we meant to be discussing this book, other than the literal? He goes on to say that 'Tristram ... constantly juggles the two lines of movement', and refers to this as a 'contrapuntal technique'. There are important differences between counterpoint and juggling, too obvious to need spelling out here; and although Sterne's continual appropriation of musical terminology justifies the contrapuntal analogy, the 'juggling' metaphor is in some ways much more suitable, since at least it does justice to the fragility of the enterprise, the narrator's panic at the perpetually imminent collapse of his own efforts.

Why anyone should want to argue for the coherence of Tristram Shandy, or for the harmony with which it reconciles literature and life, is a mystery to me. In fact I don't think we can start making useful comparisons with Tom Jones until we have laid suitable emphasis on its sense of stress and anxiety; on its futile effort to escape, that is, a form of literary representation which it paranoically assumes to be dishonest. This sense of fighting a losing battle is apparent, for example, from the narrator's obsession with the uncontrollability of the relationship between narrative and real time:

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume — and no further

than to my first day's life — 'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it — on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back — was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this — And why not? — and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description — And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should live just 364 times faster than I should write — It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write — and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read.

Will this be good for your worships eyes?

(IV. xiii, p. 228)

Sterne is taking care not to be guilty of two related kinds of dishonesty: the dishonesty of telling an incomplete story, and the dishonesty of writing a supposedly 'true' story which does not take account of the process of writing it. This joke is taken up and given sinister political overtones in Joseph Heller's Good as Gold, when Gold quizzes an old college friend (now a White House spokesman) about the President's new volume of memoirs:

"There was one more thing. But I decided not to go into it."

"What was that, Bruce?"

"Well, Ralph, he must have spent an awful lot of time

his first year in office writing this book about his first year. Yet, nowhere in the book does he say anything about being busy writing the book."

Ralph cleared his throat softly. "That's a point I think we overlooked. I'm glad you didn't go into it."

"Where did he find the time?"

"We all pitched in and helped," Ralph replied. "Not with the writing, you understand, but with most of the other junk a President has to attend to. Every word was his own."

Gold said he understood.

"This President really knows how to delegate responsibility, Bruce. Otherwise, he never would have gotten it done. It would be a lot like Tristram Shandy trying to write down the story of his life. Bruce, remember Tristram Shandy and that paper I copied from you?" ²²

Both these passages deal with the impossibility of writing and living at the same time: the President gets around it by means of a political trick, Sterne bravely tries to do it anyway. Both are engaged in writing (highly fictional) autobiographies, therefore both assume that it is essential to (pretend to) represent the truth faithfully, and therefore both find themselves deadlocked by their lack of control over the disparity between the time which it takes to write and the time which it takes to do.

This is not a problem for Fielding - partly, of course, because Tom Jones is not, ostensibly, the history of the narrator's life, but more importantly because he likes to think that the relationship

between literary form and real life is much clearer cut than Sterne does. As he says in II. i:

My Reader then is not to be surprised ... if my History sometimes seems to stand still, and sometimes to fly. For all which I shall not look on myself as accountable to any Court of Critical Jurisdiction whatever: For as I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing, so I am at liberty to make what Laws I please therein.

(p. 77)

In other words, Fielding chooses his form, and this in turn determines which aspects of reality he concentrates upon, whereas in Tristram Shandy reality dictates Sterne's choice of form (i.e. formlessness). This leads him into extreme forms of experimentation, such as the three pages of parallel translation which open Book IV, with the reader's eye continually obliged to switch from page to page in order to pick up the jokes in dog Latin ('nasus est falsus', 'Carbunculus inest, ait uxor'); the sudden transposition of the action to France in Book VII; and the disruption of chapter orders in Book IX. One of the impressions we receive from these experiments is to do with narratorial personality: Tristram Shandy is clearly a book about indignity and the narrator's desperate stratagems are, by Fielding's standards, essentially undignified. Sterne is prepared to do anything in the service of truth to life, while Fielding has other things to think about - his own 'Dignity and Ease', which he sees as being very much at stake when choices have to be made about whether or not incidents are 'worthy of being recorded in a Chronicle of this Kind' (III. i, p. 116).

This is too simple, though: an account which stresses Sterne's

integrity and Fielding's high-handedness won't stand up for long. There is something equally high-handed in Sterne's reference to the 'common writer' (i.e. one who is actually capable of 'advancing' in his telling of a story): among the connotations listed by Johnson are 'Vulgar; mean; not distinguished by any excellence; often seen; easy to be had; of little value; ... Of no rank; mean; without birth or descent'. Furthermore, any point about the different tones which the two narrators adopt must also take into account the differences in their (implied) theories of literature: Fielding takes a much more functional view of his work and this in turn entails his putting a greater emphasis on the reader's involvement. Thus when he compares a novel in which nothing happens to 'a Stage-Coach, which performs constantly the same Course, empty as well as full' (II. i, p. 76), the comparison can be related to the stage-coach imagery of his last introductory chapter: and there, the travellers in the coach are not the characters, but the narrator and the reader. Therefore it is not the mere fact that nothing is happening to the characters which determines that a passage of time should be left unrecorded, but the fact that it offers nothing for the narrator and the reader to talk about. The participants in a conversation, Fielding believed, 'should be ... equally interested in every Subject not tending to their general Information or Amusement; for these are not to be postponed to the Relation of private Affairs, much less of the particular Grievance or Misfortune of a single Person'²³. He conceives of the novel as a stage-coach, within which narrator and reader can conduct a conversation, while a changing landscape passes by the window, constituting a narrative and furnishing subjects for their discourse; a novel which does not contain such a dialogue

is 'empty' of passengers and may as well not run. But according to Tristram Shandy, VI. i, the travellers are walking through a landscape - are in much closer contact with reality - and can afford to congratulate themselves on negotiating such a 'wilderness'. Sterne's image does not have Fielding's functional overtones: a stage-coach is something you pay for and get into with the primary object of being taken somewhere.

While Sterne's kind of novel is philosophical, then, Fielding's is, for want of a better word, political. Both writers are sensitive to the simultaneous nature of experience, but while Sterne struggles against it Fielding is constantly looking for tricks by which it can be side-stepped or turned to advantage (a bit like the President in Good as Gold). At least, he admires characters who are able to do this; for himself as narrator the problem does not arise, because he feels entitled to choose which incidents to relate and which to ignore. This distinction between the two authors holds true even for very local instances. The joke at the bottom of the whole Widow Wadman/Uncle Toby story, which Sterne considers 'the choicest morsel of what I had to offer to the world' (IX. xxiv, p. 520), is based on the parallel operation of contradictory thought processes:

— You shall see the very place, Madam; said my uncle Toby. Mrs. Wadman blush'd — look'd towards the door — turn'd pale — blush'd slightly again — recovered her natural colour — blush'd worse than ever; ...

— You shall lay your finger upon the place — said my uncle Toby. — I will not touch it, however, quoth Mrs. Wadman to herself. (IX. xx, p. 514)

It's a fairly simple double entendre, consisting of a pun on 'place', which Mrs. Wadman takes to mean 'groin' while Toby uses it to mean 'the gate of St. Nicolas'. What's remarkable is the length for which Sterne manages to protract it, until it is anticlimactically defused in Chapter xxvi. Verbal misunderstandings in Tom Jones never last this long: Fielding usually includes them for a much more punchy effect:

'Was your Mistress unkind then?' says Jones. 'Very unkind indeed, Sir,' answered Partridge; 'for she married me, and made one of the most confounded Wives in the World.'

(VIII. ix, p. 438)

At first, a similar effect seems to be taking place, but in fact the conflicting thought processes are not being given such free play as they were by Sterne. Partridge's is a wilful misunderstanding of his master's meaning, and a redefinition of his words rather than a misconception. So although the two meanings of 'unkind' coincide in time very briefly, this moment of simultaneity is transitory, and our primary sense is of meanings following each other in temporal succession. In this respect, the jokes are like the respective plots in which they appear: Sterne's is static, Fielding's progressive.

I hope that this illuminates my suggestion that Tom Jones is a more political novel than Tristram Shandy. The point is that it has a temporal dimension which is largely lacking in Sterne: Fielding seizes on the form's potential for enacting change in narrative terms and for provoking it in the reader. I could reiterate a remark I made in Chapter Four (see above, p. 183), to the effect that Tom

Jones allows for the possibility of conditions being improved in time, whereas the static and disjointed Tristram Shandy does not. This depends, of course, on the controlling influence of a benign author in consultation with a co-operative reader, interested in but detached from the action (not hopelessly implicated in it, as Tristram is, or reduced to the status of bemused spectator, as his reader is). For Sterne, then, simultaneity is the finally unintelligible and unchangeable condition of reality, of which his novel is merely mimetic (if in a celebratory way); for Fielding, it can be a sign of order as much as disorder, and moments at which this is true must be seized upon, rendered, and learnt from.

An example: the simultaneity with which both the following jokes are concerned revolves around a body/spirit dichotomy. The characters' words are seen as being in a potentially disruptive or contradictory relationship with their bodily activities:

'Ho! are you come back to your Politics,' cries the Squire, 'as for those I despise them as much as I do a F—t.' Which last Word he accompanied and graced with the very Action, which, of all others, was the most proper to it. (Tom Jones, VII. iii, p. 337)

In Tristram Shandy IV. xxvii (too long an episode to quote in full), a hot chestnut rolls off the dining table into Phutatorius's open fly, causing him to shout out the word 'ZOUNDS!', which everybody assumes is meant to be a comment on the argument then taking place between Yorick and Didius on the other side of the room. The result in Sterne's version is chaos and misunderstanding: if mental and bodily functions operate simultaneously and independently, and yet

both have the same verbal means of expression, the consequences can only be disorientating. Fielding, however, sees the collision as being a triumph of ironic coincidence, offering the perfect expression of Western's boorishness and punishing him with a moment of cruel comic indignity.

Sterne was a priest, Fielding was a political journalist and legal reformer, and we can see aspects of these callings reflected in their novels. Sterne rules out the possibility of worldly harmony altogether and instead sees his job as being to render the chaos. Fielding, by no means glibly optimistic (see for example the well-known opening sentence to XV. i), posits a consciously artificial, hence consciously ideal, version of reality in which harmony is (eventually and at great emotional expense) achieved, and encloses it within a real action - the narrator's relationship with the reader - in which the necessary processes of change, judgment and development are encouraged to take place. The intrusive narrator ambiguously mediates between these two levels. Fielding's overt engagement with social and political issues is replaced in Tristram Shandy by self-advertisement and by a solipsism which occasionally achieves the status of a philosophic outlook²⁴. In opting for first-person narration Sterne obliges himself to conflate Fielding's two levels of reality, so that his book has to be regarded simultaneously both as an expression of and an object in the real world: something to be read and something to be sat upon. All of these factors - despair, a sense of chaos, and extreme authorial self-consciousness - testify to affinities with modernist and post-modernist writing, and particularly, if one example were to be singled out, with Beckett's novels. John Fletcher has written

stolidly on this subject, and arrived at conclusions which can now be taken as representing a critical orthodoxy:

[Beckett] lacks too completely the moral, social and political preoccupations of Cervantes, Swift, Fielding and Voltaire, to be ranged finally with them He shares Sterne's ultimately bitter humour and sour philosophy, and his preference for generalized, undirected laughter to counter his own black humours; like Sterne's, too, his books are really amoral rather than immoral because their assumed context is a world of chaos, without system or meaning. They are both, Beckett self-avowedly, Sterne by implication, nihilists; their wit and their irony, though always brilliantly clever and amusing, are built on little but despair. ... Beckett and Sterne are not interested in improvements; the world is both too mad and too cruel to be capable of change. The only refuge from misery, for them, is the sly smoking-room jest. ²⁵

This is all very well, but I suspect that an analysis more rooted in specifics might bring out more similarities between Fielding and Beckett than Fletcher has noticed: I'm talking especially about the nature of authorial presence. The following comparison is designed to start answering a question which I've been hovering around for 230 pages now, and which is the last item to be dealt with before a final chapter which will look at Tom Jones in isolation from other literary works. This question is, "Is it a first- or third-person narrative?" I want to try to penetrate the ambiguity

which surrounds the narrator's implication in both his characters' world and his reader's: the two Beckett novels I've chosen to discuss are shot through with a similar uncertainty. I'm sure that this is at the heart of the double-sidedness of Tom Jones generally. Sterne's presence in Tristram Shandy is by comparison simple (for all the complicating simultaneity of the older and younger Tristrams): Tristram is a mask for the expression of his own (lack of) beliefs, and while there may be interesting and purposeful inconsistencies, the relationship remains essentially one-dimensional. But the narrator of Tom Jones seems to have managed to bridge the two levels of reality, being acquainted with his characters and in conversation with his reader, yet without at any time actually being the subject of the novel in the way that Tristram is. This is a very elusive posture, but Fielding succeeds in concretizing it. Here we may find a way of accounting for the contradictory explicitness with which the novel at once criticises and celebrates, negotiates between judicial rigour and achieved geniality, and sets out to change reality by re-inventing it.

(iii) Fielding and Beckett

You have to be careful when writing about Beckett: his characteristic combination of lucid meanings obscurely juxtaposed tends to elicit a bizarre sort of criticism. And, since much criticism is still confused as to whether or not its job is to paraphrase the philosophical content of texts, Beckett has suffered more than most, partly because his work abounds in such content and partly because,

when paraphrased, it doesn't amount to much: John Fletcher's view is that 'if one distils a philosophy of life from Beckett's novels, it reveals itself as remarkably uninteresting' (Samuel Beckett's Art, p. 12). The hallmarks of Beckett criticism are elaborate sub-Beckettian titles - 'The Harpooned Notebook'²⁶, 'Beckett's Search for Unseeable and Unmakeable'²⁷ - and the regression of normally level-headed critics into a form of florid paraphrase: John Fletcher on The Unnamable:

In this novel one is made to feel ... the fear of the nothingness that haunts our attitudes droites et phrases claires (Bataille), that waits, sinister and menacing, behind the elements of our discourse, behind the words which fall strangers from our lips as soon as uttered.²⁸

Hugh Kenner on Malone Dies:

we nearly do not notice how the lethal rages that shake the man before us bespeak a quiescent monster who was long ago otherwise.²⁹

Two reasons for this phenomenon spring to mind. One is that Beckett's style is catching: Kenner remarks, earlier in the same book, that 'this exposition begins to sound like a page out of Watt, which is unsurprising, since the style of Watt is the most efficient that can be discovered for expounding the kind of material Watt contains' (p. 76). The other is that Beckett's works are nearly all, in terms of content, works of philosophy and/or literary theory, so it is not surprising that critics who think it is possible to divorce this content from its form and dwell on it

in isolation tend to find that they are merely rehearsing ground which has already been covered in the original.

I hope I can avoid this trap. It ought to be possible, for Beckett belongs, as Robert C. Holub implies by using the phrase with reference to Iser's tastes in modern literature, with 'the traditional avant-garde'³⁰, and there should be no reason why his narrative strategies cannot be discussed in exactly the same terms as Fielding's, since they have plenty in common. Watt seems to be the most useful of his works, in this respect; particularly, in fact (and I made a similar point about The Old Curiosity Shop in Chapter One) because it is a not fully achieved, even unfinished, novel, one in which authorial objectives therefore show through quite visibly. I shall try to keep this in mind, and to refrain from referring to it - as some are tempted to do with even the slightest of Beckett's writings - as if it was a fully realised masterpiece. Beckett himself referred to it as 'only a game, a means of staying sane, a way to keep my hand in'³¹, and said, elsewhere:

It is an unsatisfactory book, written in dribs and drabs, first on the run, then of an evening after the clod-hopping, during the occupation, but it has its place in the series, as will perhaps appear in time.³²

My basic argument about Watt and Fielding is as follows. I should mention at the outset, though, that it originated, and has already been expounded at length, in my M.A. dissertation, 'Beckett and the Double Act: Comic Duality in Fiction and Drama'³³. What follows, then, is in the nature of a brief recapitulation. The

comic double act, in almost any of its manifestations - whether Quixote and Sancho, Jones and Partridge, Mr. Shandy and Uncle Toby, Bouvard and Pécuchet, Dedalus and Bloom, Laurel and Hardy, Vladimir and Estragon - seems always to have these characteristics: a proneness to verbal misunderstandings which testify to the unreliability of viewpoints made up of two contradictory perceptions; and a sense of purposeless energy, whereby its participants articulately and lengthily urge each other on, precisely in such a way as to preclude the possibility of real advancement. If we take Cervantes as being the model version, Fielding's innovation in Joseph Andrews was to take one character: (Parson Adams) and to make the narrator his partner in the double act: in Joseph Andrews it is the narrator who picks up Adams's words and reinterprets them, interrupts him, brings him down to earth and fills out the possible responses to him in order to adumbrate a composite and comic world-view.

Beckett's early fiction picks up on this idea both by specific reference to Fielding and, in a more general way, by means of employing a narrator who inhabits a no man's land between first- and impersonal third-person narration. Thus we find the ostensibly impersonal narrator of More Pricks Than Kicks suddenly adverting to his intimacy with the hero, claiming that he and Belacqua 'were Pylades and Orestes for a period, flattened down to something very genteel'³⁴; the narrator of Murphy manifesting towards his hero both a possessive loyalty (he 'is not a puppet'³⁵) and a sort of mockery ('this monstrous proposition', 'this ludicrous broadsheet'³⁶) which is demonstrative primarily of intimacy, and which therefore only makes the reader feel excluded from the character/narrator rapport; and, in Watt, the culmination of this

'series', we find a narrative which for its first 123 pages appears to be of the standard third-person type, but is then revealed to have been passed down by word of mouth from Watt himself to the narrator, his friend Sam, a process which, together with the grotesque verbal and physical intimacy accompanying it, then becomes the subject of the book's third section:

And if Watt had not known this, that Erskine's key was not a simple key, then I should never have known it either, nor the world. For all that I know on the subject of Mr. Knott, and of all that touched Mr. Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and of all that touched Watt, came from Watt, and from Watt alone.³⁷

This reminds me of a casual parenthesis from Tom Jones:

Jones, to whom all the Resolutions which had been taken in Favour of Blifil were yet a Secret, was at first almost struck dead with this Relation; but recovering his Spirits a little, mere Despair, as he afterwards said, inspired him to mention a Matter to Mr. Western, which seemed to require more Impudence than a human Forehead was ever gifted with. (VI. vii, p. 297)

The slotting in of 'as he afterwards said' suggests a deeply ingrained nervousness about the legitimacy of recording psychological processes; and Watt, which is always on the look-out for ways of putting a comic complexion on the literal-minded and the ponderous, adopts Fielding's convention wholeheartedly³⁸.

Fielding's characteristic narrative posture, then - one foot

in the world of his characters, one in the world of his readers - is retained by Beckett and used as a point from which to start examining the problematics of narratorship. Sam and Watt constitute a double act in the sense that each has brought the other into being, each keeps the other alive, and yet for all the physical and verbal energy with which they relate to each other they never actually get anywhere. At first they share the same garden (in the grounds of a lunatic asylum, apparently) but subsequently, having been transferred to adjacent gardens, their meetings are confined to a space between the gardens where the fences run parallel, and as they talk they march endlessly up and down within this space:

And then turning, as one man, we paced back the way we had paced back the way we had come, I looking whither we were going, and he looking whence we were coming. And so, up and down, up and down, we paced between the fences, together again after so long, and the sun shone bright upon us, and the wind blew wild about us.

(p. 161)

Watt's telling of his story involves a perpetual struggle against Sam's imperfect hearing and Watt's own increasingly strange speech impediments:

Say he'd, No, waistcoat the, vest the, trousers the, socks the, shoes the, shirt the, drawers the, coat the, dress to ready things got had when. Say he'd, Dress. Say he'd, No, water the, towel the, sponge the, soap the, salts the, glove the, brush the, basin the, wash to ready

things got had when. Say he'd, Wash. Say he'd, No,
water the, towel the, sponge the, soap the, razor the,
powder the, brush the, bowl the, shave to ready things
got had when. Say he'd, Shave.

These were sounds that at first, though we walked pubis
to pubis, seemed so much balls to me.

(p. 165)

This can all be read as a comic meditation on the bizarre communion which subsists between a narrator and his creation: a journey which never involves arriving anywhere, a dialogue in which neither participant ever hears the other properly. Watt is Beckett's most direct address to these paradoxes, for in Molloy he tried a different solution (or perhaps a different way of questioning), by having a central character which he referred to elsewhere as the 'narrator/narrated'³⁹. Apparently he conceived 'Molloy and what followed the day I became aware of my stupidity. Then I began to write the things I feel'⁴⁰. The trilogy therefore marks a distinct advance - which is exactly why I want to stay with Watt.

Watt is remarkable because it fully concretizes the narrator/character relationship while having hardly any sense at all of a reader: this is one of the respects in which it differs most markedly from Tom Jones. The best explanation for this is the biographical one, but before considering that, it is helpful to look at one of Beckett's most mature statements on the relationship between narrators and readers, his 1980 novella, Company. It may seem far-fetched to compare this work, so different in scope and tone, with Tom Jones. (Fielding wrote very little on the subject of

old age, mainly, I imagine, because he never attained it himself. In fact it is hard to think of two authors whose public writing lives coincide so little: Fielding was forty-seven when he died at Lisbon, Beckett was forty-six when Waiting for Godot first started his public career in 1952. Fielding's unsentimental account of his own physical sufferings at the beginning of the Voyage to Lisbon has a certain Beckettian heroism about it, though, and might make for an interesting comparison with Malone Dies.) Nevertheless, Company is a sustained contemplation of the questions which the narrative poetics of Tom Jones cannot help but imply: who, in the act of narration, is the narrator addressing, and who, in the act of reading, is the reader listening to? The book starts with the image of a man lying on his back in the dark, listening to a voice whose source is unknown, uncertain as to whether the voice is addressing him, uncertain as to whether the events narrated by the voice are supposed to have happened to him or to somebody else. Even before this much has been established, ambiguity has been raised about the status of readership by the ninth word of the book, 'Imagine', which could (as could the instruction 'Quick leave him' on the next page) be either spoken by the voice, and addressed to the listener, or spoken by Beckett, and addressed to us. I picked out this same ambiguity in a passage from Our Mutual Friend (see above, p. 29), where it was impossible to tell whether Pleasant Riderhood was addressing herself, or whether she was being curtly addressed by her narrator.

As it develops, Company shifts from focusing on a reader unsure of his narrator, to the uncertainty, more lonely and damaging, of

a narrator unsure of his reader. By page 59 the 'he' of the narrative has begun to refer to the speaker:

Wearied by such stretch of imagination he ceases and all ceases. Till feeling the need for company again he tells himself to call the hearer M at least. For readier reference. Himself some other character. W. Devising it all himself included for company.⁴¹

This states more or less explicitly that the narrator is also a character in his own narration, and that he too only exists by virtue of being 'devised' in the course of his own narrative act. The resulting unending spiral is subsequently rendered by means of a tortuously complex syntax: 'Devised deviser devising it all for company' (p. 64); 'Can the crawling creator crawling in the same create dark as his creature create while crawling?' (p. 73); 'What visions in the dark of light! Who exclaims thus? Who asks who exclaims, What visions in the shadeless dark of light and shade? Yet another still?' (p. 84). Beckett also uses word-play in order to add to this sense of organised confusion: even 'hearer' is a half-pun on 'hero', which is another way of blurring the distinction between reader and central character; 'lying' is used towards the end of the book (pp. 76, 87) to suggest the acts both of being supine and of telling stories; and when the voice decides to call his hearer 'H', he soon changes his mind and calls him 'You', which could also be 'U' for 'Unnamable' (p. 43).

Beckett would presumably see these devices as ways of finding 'a form that accommodates the mess' - the mess in this case being that which ensues when a writer takes up his pen in order to invent

a non-existent self who then tells a pack of lies to a reader he will never meet; the whole affair being complicated, of course, by the fact that there is no such thing as pure fiction, that novels are necessarily autobiographical, imagination is shaped by memory, and readers' perceptions of a story will be determined by the nature of their own subjective experience. In Company Beckett strains every linguistic and stylistic muscle in his effort to cope with this state of affairs. Fielding's approach is more robust, and has more to do with the double act which Beckett has by now left behind. In 'Beckett and the Double Act' I argue that comic duality is a parody of the infinity of types contained within particular characters, and that it achieves the capacity to show an infinity of contradictions in conflict. The partners in a double act, whose responses to each other are always broadly predictable (Sancho will bring Quixote down to earth) but, in terms of detail, completely unpredictable (he has an infinity of verbal and physical means to choose from), come to constitute and represent the total possible response to one another. In the same way Fielding reduces reality to two distinct levels: the story of Tom, Sophia, etc., and the story of the reader and the narrator. By mediating between these levels, by making one a comment on the other, by making readers think and feel with the characters (meaning 'at the same time as', not 'in sympathy with') he finds a way of fulfilling one of the basic criteria of a worthwhile fiction: he frees us to engage with an educative story, without feeling that this story is either irrelevantly particularised or hermetically sealed off from the concerns of our own, real, lives. By using duality, he achieves a convincing parody of wholeness.

Meanwhile I want to return to Watt. For all the despair which

characterises and closes Company, Beckett did there seem to be reconciled, in a dissatisfied way, to the idea that, even before you start inventing characters, the primary preconditions for fictive communication are a narrator and a reader. Watt, on the other hand, is distinguished by its readerlessness. This is the sense, I feel, in which it is most unfinished, and in the light of which the claims made for it (in a book-length study) by one John C. Di Pierro seem marginally overstated:

A close examination ... shows each distinct structural element fused together to create a single, unified view of the universe. The composite elements of Watt form a tightly and deftly woven web of intricately-related, discrete parts contrapuntally structured around one cohesive unity.⁴²

It is also worth remarking that Di Pierro praises the dialogue of Watt for being 'marvelously realistic': further than that, I don't think his book can be of much help to us. Beckett's 'single, unified view of the universe', together with its appendix of additional material by which he admits to being so bored and tired that he never bothered to incorporate it properly, was written mainly in the evenings at Roussillon in 1942-43, during the occupation. Beckett was in hiding, passing himself off as a farm labourer. His wife Suzanne was with him, as were a handful of English acquaintances who were in a similar predicament. According to Deirdre Bair's sporadically reliable biography,

the endless monotony was destroying them in different ways. For Beckett especially, the endless round of walks

and radio news was having a serious effect.

(p. 326)

These were the circumstances of its composition, and they present a striking contrast with those in which Tom Jones was written. The circumstances of its reception are even more telling. First it was rejected by Routledge, the publishers of Murphy; then Beckett put it into the hands of agents in Ireland, England and the United States; in 1947 it was provisionally accepted by Hamish Hamilton, and then rejected by them; finally it was published by the Olympia Press in 1953, having been sold to a publisher 'who thought he had bought another dirty book and did not bother to read it'⁴³. Of the first edition of Murphy, meanwhile, only 718 copies had been sold; the other 782 were remaindered in 1942.

Watt, therefore, is the work of a writer acutely conscious of his place within a novelistic tradition (which included Fielding), and simultaneously aware that nobody was reading him at all. The implications of this, for its choice of form and for the form of most of Beckett's subsequent work, are considerable. Watt contains two long interposed narratives in the Leonora/Man of the Hill mould: the 'short statement' made by Arsene to Watt (pp. 37-62), and the story of Louit and Mr. Nackybal, as told by Arthur to Mr. Graves (pp. 168-96). Neither of these stories has the slightest attention paid to it by its 'reader'. Arthur addresses Mr. Graves directly several times, first with statements ('Details, Mr. Graves, details I detest, details I despise, as much as you, a gardener, do', p. 180), then with questions ('And when did you cease, Mr. Graves, to use a line, a measure, a plumb, a level, and so to place and so to thin

your seed, before sowing it?', p. 181), but his listener remains emphatically silent. As for Arsene's narrative:

his declaration had entered Watt's ears only by fits, and his understanding, like all that enters the ears only by fits, hardly at all. He had realized, to be sure, that Arsene was speaking, and in a sense to him, but something had prevented him, perhaps his fatigue, from paying attention to what was being said and from enquiring into what was being meant.

(p. 77)

Watt is the first of Beckett's works to contain examples of those seemingly interminable monologues which become the staple content of his later novels and also crop up in many of the plays: they seem to have originated in his sense of the absurdity of a situation in which he was voluminously putting words into a public form (the novel) without the complementing factor of a public interested in reading them. On those very rare occasions when the narrator of Watt does address a reader, it is either by distant implication (rhetorical imperatives such as 'Add to this the notorious difficulty ...', 'Add to this the obscurity ...', p. 72), or as part of the parody of academic conventions which is carried on in the footnotes ('For the guidance of the attentive reader ...', p. 211). Otherwise, at the expense, which he accepts, of seeming absurd and of writing an absurd book, he is as self-sufficient and as little in need of an audience as was Arthur while narrating to an impassive Mr. Graves, 'leaning on his fork ... while the shadows lengthened'. This is a far cry from Fielding's view of his situation, as concretized in the Man of

the Hill episode (see above, pp. 52-60); there the narrator was liberally supplied with not one but two readers, whose vocal and contradictory responses to his text amounted, true to the nature of the double act, to a satisfyingly complete image of a genuinely public reception.

In this way, we can find a new way of accounting for the buoyancy of Tom Jones as contrasted with the pessimism and introversion of Watt. Watt is the work of a writer who is not even confident that his readers exist, and this also filters through into a social diffidence on the narrator's part, as to whether he even merits the attention of such readers anyway: Beckett was (compared to Fielding) socially obscure, and at the time of writing Watt even his nationality was ambiguous. Consequently he has recourse to a different kind of elitism, an aggressive intellectualism implicitly backed up by the myth that the artist or the writer can transcend social stratification. In this respect the progression throughout Beckett's career has been from the intellectual and allusive pyrotechnics of More Pricks Than Kicks to a militant emphasis on the obscure and the gnomic. Things were simpler for Fielding, since this essentially Romantic myth had not yet been re-invented, so that his choice of a neoclassical and backward-looking (for all its innovations) form was an assertion of social as much as literary superiority over the likes of Richardson and Defoe: his famous letter in praise of Clarissa⁴⁴ (without at all wishing to deny its generosity, warmth and candour - qualities evident to an extent which we would never expect from Richardson himself) has something of the liberal condescension of the minor aristocrat towards the gifted bourgeois: as we know from the Essay on Conversation, and from Tom Jones, IX. i,

this was exactly how Fielding thought that the nobility could best demonstrate their 'Liberality of Spirit'.

So Tom Jones was written by a man at the peak of his literary career, confident that in both social and literary terms he deserved and would win the attention of his readers. (Fielding's loss of confidence in his reader is, as I argued in Chapter One, one of the main reasons why Amelia falls so flat: see above, pp. 47-51.) This determines the authority and directness with which he engages in dialogue with his reader, just as Beckett's lack of a reader determines his inclination towards long monologues in which no account is taken of the interests of the addressee. Neither of these writers, then, whatever their published theories or known intentions, can in fact be said to have found a form which 'accommodates the mess': instead 'the mess' (a needlessly disdainful term) has, inevitably, wormed its way into their respective forms. This is especially true once we realise the extent to which each novel was shaped by the author's conception of his relationship with his reader. Both Fielding and Beckett have ended up using forms which clearly embody their awareness of the extent of their readership and the nature of their reader. This, then, is another of the ways in which the dreaded 'chaos' of real life permeates the structure of Tom Jones, which thereby rises above the status of an 'exemplum' because, unlike a parable, it does not disdain to contain the reality which it sets out to comment upon.

I am grateful to Iser's essay on Tom Jones, which first got me thinking along these lines, and the title of the book from which it comes (The Implied Reader) is inspired. My own feeling is that Tom Jones implies readers rather than a reader, so it seems a useful

exercise to end this chapter by trying to remember exactly who these readers are. The contemporary reader of Tom Jones has already been discussed: if the splendidly named Bampfylde-Moore Carew is to be believed, its appeal was not limited to any particular age group; but it was more likely to be read by men than women (Dr. Johnson was shocked to learn that Hannah More had read it). It assumes a good general level of education, although Fielding tends to translate any Latin or Greek quotations. Its vocabulary (the sixteenth word is 'eleemosynary' - I can remember contemplating giving up at that point), range of technique (especially mock-heroic) and reliance on verbal irony assume a reader who is already widely read and who will appreciate learned jokes which contribute significantly to the total meaning and structure. Fielding also believed, of course, that 'I shall be read, with Honour, by those who never knew nor saw me, and whom I shall neither know nor see' (XIII. i, p. 683). F.T. Blanchard has surveyed the changes in Fielding's reputation up until 1926⁴⁵: the fact that he deals with critical rather than popular reaction does not indicate selectivity, but merely shows that the reading of this novel has gradually become an abstruse pastime, and is now confined, I would imagine, almost exclusively to the staff and students of institutes of higher education (Tom Jones, unlike Joseph Andrews, is slightly too long to be much studied in schools). Probably more people saw Tony Richardson's film of Tom Jones in 1963 than have read the book since. Nevertheless it is true that Fielding is still read 'with Honour', if not very widely, and I hope that this chapter has offered at least one new reason for his longevity: Fielding could not predict, and made no allowances for, the historical circumstances of his future readers, and, like any old book, Tom

Jones requires the modern reader to make an effort in constructing an imagined social context. But it rewards the effort with a directness which is not available to novels with less or non-intrusive narrators. Its central 'action', as I have said, is the relationship between the narrator and the reader, and this action is always taking place, whenever the book is being read, and always, by definition, takes place in the present. In this sense the central 'events' contained in Tom Jones have been taking place every year since 1749, and will not stop taking place until the book passes out of vogue altogether.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Wolfgang Iser, 'The Role of the Reader in Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones', in his The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore and London, 1974), pp. 29-56.
2. Wolfgang Iser, Die Weltanschauung Henry Fieldings, Buchreihe der Anglia, Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie, vol. 3 (Tübingen, 1952).
3. Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (London, 1978).
4. For a militant modern anti-reader stance, consider this remark

- by B.S. Johnson (whose roots could be traced back to Fielding, via Beckett, Joyce and Sterne): 'Indeed I would go further and say that to the extent that a reader can impose his own imagination on my words, then that piece of writing is a failure. I want him to see my (vision), not something conjured out of his own imagination. ... If he wants to impose his imagination, let him write his own books.' Introduction to Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs? (London, 1973), p. 28.
5. Roman Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and Theory of Literature, translated by George G. Grabowicz, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, 1973).
 6. Robert C. Holub, Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction, New Accents (London, 1984).
 7. Introduction to the Wesleyan Tom Jones, p. xlvi.
 8. W.A. Speck, Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760, The New History of England, 6 (London, 1977), p. 84.
 9. Introduction to the Wesleyan Tom Jones, p. liii.
 10. An Apology for the Life of Bampfylde-Moore Carew, 2nd ed. (London, 1751), p. 2. Cited from the introduction to the Wesleyan Tom Jones, pp. liii-liv.
 11. The estimate is from Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, The Pelican Social History of Britain (London, 1982), p. 381.

12. Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature*, 8 (Manchester, 1984), pp. 6, 44. I realise the dangers of over-simplification involved in calling Bakhtin a formalist. For a long and instructive bout of agonising over how we should classify him, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984), pp. 2-3.
13. Not nearly enough work has been done on the specific application of Bakhtin's theory to literary texts; but a promising study currently in progress is Achmed-al-Issa's Ph.D dissertation, Polyphony in the Fiction of Henry James (University of Warwick).
14. I can think of only one example of a work in which this has been done to harmonious effect - Darius Milhaud's String Quartets nos. 14 and 15, which can also be played together, simultaneously, as a string octet.
15. This joke against Iser also appears in Terry Eagleton's heavily humorous article, 'The Revolt of the Reader', in Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985 (London, 1986), pp. 181-84 (p. 182). However, I had written this chapter before I read his article.
16. II. ix, pp. 87-88. Page references are, as I mentioned before, to Ian Campbell Ross's edition (Oxford, 1983).
17. Flann O'Brien, The Best of Myles (London, 1968), pp. 253, 255. Originally printed in the Irish Times in the 'forties.
18. From an interview with Tom F. Driver, 'Beckett by the Madelaine', Columbia University Forum, 4 (1961), 23.

19. William V. Holtz, Image and Immortality: A Study of 'Tristram Shandy' (Providence, 1970). See especially pp. 63-64.
20. Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston, 'A Critical Adaptation of Tristram Shandy', Eighteenth-Century Studies, 10 (1977), 484-92 (p. 486).
21. William Freedman, 'Tristram Shandy: The Art of Literary Counterpoint', Modern Language Quarterly, 32 (1971), 268-80.
22. Joseph Heller, Good as Gold (London, 1979), p. 49.
23. 'An Essay on Conversation', in Miscellanies, Volume One, pp. 119-52 (p. 145).
24. The extent of Tristram Shandy's 'engagement with social and political issues' is another under-studied subject. It may be that I will be proved wrong in denigrating it on this account, by a Ph. D thesis now being written at Oxford University by Carol Watts.
25. John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art (London, 1967), p. 95.
26. H. Porter Abbott, 'The Harpooned Notebook: Malone Dies and the Conventions of Intercalated Narrative', in Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives, edited by Morris Beja et al. (Ohio, 1983), pp. 71-79.
27. David Read, 'Beckett's Search for Unseeable and Unmakeable: Company and Ill Seen Ill Said', Modern Fiction Studies, 29 (1983), 111-25.
28. John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London, 1964), pp. 191-92.

29. Hugh Kenner; A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London, 1973), p. 108.
30. Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction, p. 97.
31. Quoted from Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (London, 1978), p. 327. She gives as her source Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (Princeton, 1970), p. 222, but he only quotes six words of this statement, and doesn't say where they are from.
32. Letter to George Reavey, 14 May 1947: Bair, p. 364.
33. Warwick University, 1984. Among other things I spend some time finding specific evidence for Beckett's familiarity with Fielding in the form of direct allusions, many of them from More Pricks than Kicks.
34. Samuel Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks (London, 1970), p. 40.
35. Murphy (London, 1963), p. 86.
36. Murphy, pp. 31, 66.
37. Watt (London, 1963), p. 123.
38. Incidentally, I have only found one published remark by Beckett on Fielding. He comes to his defence in the course of reviewing Ezra Pound's Make It New in a brief, sarcastic (I take it) sentence: 'The suggestion that Fielding was deficient in comprehension of the novel as a form, because we have no notes (no?) from his hand on the subject, is very nice' - 'Ezra Pound'

- in Disjecta (London, 1983), pp. 77-79 (p. 78): the original review would have appeared in 1934. Pound's comment is to be found in his essay 'Henry James' (1918), now available most accessibly in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, edited by T.S. Eliot (London, 1954), pp. 295-338 (p. 337). What's interesting is that Beckett seems to be recognising the status of Tom Jones as literary theory.
39. Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, p. 94. He gives no source for the quotation, apart from telling us that it comes from 'a letter'.
40. Deirdre Bair's translation (her biography, p. 367) of a remark made by Beckett in 1961: 'J'ai connu Molloy et la suite, le jour où j'ai pris conscience de ma bêtise. Alors, je me suis mis à écrire les choses que je sens': to be found in Ludovic Janvier, Samuel Beckett: Par Lui-même (Paris, 1969), p. 21.
41. Samuel Beckett, Company (London, 1980).
42. John C. Di Pierro, Structures in Beckett's 'Watt' (York, South Carolina, 1981), p. 3.
43. Alexander Trocchi, quoted in Bair, p. 433.
44. First published by E.L. McAdam, Jr., 'A New Letter from Fielding', Yale Review, second series, 38 (1948-49), 300-310. Recently reprinted as an appendix to Sarah Fielding, Remarks on 'Clarissa', Augustan Reprint Society, nos. 231-232 (Los Angeles, 1985).

45. Frederic T. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist: A Study in Historical Criticism (New York, 1926, reprinted 1966).

Chapter Six

SATIRE AND SYMPATHY

(i) Fielding and History

In this chapter I'm going to put forward a final argument which will place the 'form' and 'content' of Tom Jones (using these words as shorthand) in a new relationship: new in the sense that it will invert one of the orthodoxies of Fielding criticism. So far, of course, I've been preoccupied almost exclusively with issues of form, and I've taken it for granted that we know roughly, what the novel's content consists of - what Fielding meant by Tom Jones. His own claim that it puts forward a 'great, useful and uncommon Doctrine' has encouraged critics to see it as a coherent moral and political statement, so that any element of ambivalence has tended to be located in the style: as with Empson in his assertion that 'the style of Fielding is a habitual double irony'¹; or (choosing almost at random, but also recognising a connection with the terms of my own discussion) Brian McCrea when he says that 'The hallmark of Tom Jones is its superb balance between satire and sentiment'²; or Henry Knight Miller:

The recognition that man has within himself unresolved dualities is not in itself so remarkable. It is Fielding's dramatic and comic exploitation of this source of incongruities in human behaviour that is remarkable. But I have thought it nevertheless worth stressing that a great part of Fielding's strength comes from his ability

to entertain and give full weight to both the major opposites in the elemental dichotomies of man's nature Intimately and personally engaged on the great comic battleground of human nature he was: but he also sat on a high seat above it, a benignant umpire, and afforded each side its due.³

Miller recognises that his view is vaguely connected with Empson's, for he adds, in a footnote, 'This, I take it, is something along the lines of what Mr. Empson means by Fielding's "habitual double irony"'. I'll come back to Empson's reading, which is still one of the most interesting and complex, at the end of this chapter, but meanwhile I want to highlight some of the assumptions latent in this praise of Fielding as the great artist of duality. The most striking of these is the assumption that, through the act of writing fiction, Fielding achieves some kind of magisterial control over his own inner contradictions. This is clearly present in McCrea's identification of a 'superb balance'; and although Miller talks about the recognition of 'unresolved dualities', he claims that Fielding is in a position to exploit them, stresses his 'strength' and 'ability', and finally grants him the omnipotence of a 'benignant umpire'.

The more I contemplated the political and moral content of Tom Jones, and the more I waded through the frequently ugly polemical journalism which Fielding was turning out at the same time, the less convincing this interpretation came to seem. Yes, there are contradictions and dualities in the novel, and its irony clearly expresses and gives full weight to them; but what began to seem

suspect was the idea that Fielding was, even latently, aware of these contradictions, and that he consciously or semi-consciously chose the form of Tom Jones in order to express them. Instead it started to look as though the form chose itself, that it grew out of his own deep-seated ambivalences rather than being fashioned to encompass them. I stand by my statement in the last chapter that 'Fielding chooses his form, and this in turn determines which aspects of reality he concentrates upon' (see above, p. 232), but must qualify it by saying that I mean 'reality' only insofar as Fielding perceived it, and there were certain important aspects of reality - namely, the contradictions inherent in his own political and moral position - which he could not perceive and therefore could not control; instead they are the controlling agents, in that they cannot help but pre-date and influence the form which his novel would take. In this sense Fielding's 'double irony' and 'balance', which Brian McCrea is quite right to describe as 'superb' and from which so many later writers have learnt, were invented, as it were, by accident.

The job now is to identify some of the contradictions and to show the part they play in vitalising the language and structure of the novel. For the rest of this section I shall concentrate on the most overt aspect of Fielding's politics - his attitude towards the English constitution, as activated by the '45 rebellion. Then I shall look at the way Tom Jones treats women (specifically Sophia) and the working class (specifically Black George and Mrs. Honour) - groups of characters with whom, as novelist, he is supposed to sympathise, even though his more temperamental inclination, as

aristocratic male, is to satirise. Finally, by linking these ambiguities of belief to the large-scale ambiguity of form which, as I have been trying to show, characterises the novel's 'intrusive' strategy of narration, we should arrive at a new sense of the nature and origins of the literary tactic of double irony.

* * *

As the Wesleyan edition progresses, and as more and more of Fielding's journalism is being admitted into the canon from which Murphy and Henley (among others) excluded it, more attention is gradually being paid to the nature and extent of his political commitment. This thesis has not been a historical project and I have not uncovered any new information in this area; instead I'm going to take the available material and see how it affects the ideas which I've been putting forward so far. As well as McCrea's book, 'available material' includes Thomas Cleary's (better) Henry Fielding: Political Writer⁴, and some (even better) unpublished notes by John Goode, whose thoughts about the specific application of the political context to the meaning of Tom Jones gave me a considerable head-start on the road to the conclusions which I eventually reach in this section.

I've already touched on some of the ironical consequences of the fact that Tom Jones advertises itself as a 'History'. But Fielding is, as I have also argued, obviously more in earnest about this than Sterne was, and the role of historian would have implied for him certain responsibilities. The sense of 'history' as meaning merely 'story' was by the mid-eighteenth century almost obsolete: the OED

gives only two examples after 1632. Johnson's definition 'Narration; relation' is given second place to the more decisive 'A narration of events and facts delivered with dignity'. (History and dignity were quite definitely linked in Fielding's mind, too.) Tom Jones's pretence that it is dealing solely with matters of verifiable fact persistently (so persistently that we tend not to notice it) colours its style: there's the example I quoted earlier, where the narrator momentarily recounts Tom's thought processes and then explains away his insight, almost embarrassed, with 'as he afterwards said' (see above, p. 243); and others, even more unobtrusive, such as,

he ... told his Sister he had a Present for her; for which she thanked him, imagining, I suppose, it had been a Gown or some Ornament for her Person.

(I. iv, p. 44)

(My emphasis. With hindsight, this is an even more elaborate joke, because the narrator is deliberately supposing wrong: only he and Allworthy's sister know at this point that she is Jones's mother, so they are party to a conspiracy, he to deceive the reader, she to deceive the other characters.) History involved more than mere factual accuracy, however. Herbert Davis⁵ cites Pierre LeMoine's Of the Art Both of Writing and Judging of History ..., which appeared in 1695 and argued that,

the Historian (hardly otherwise more than a Tale-teller) becomes a Statesman and a Soldier; makes himself Judge of Princes and their Ministers; and Arbitrator of their good and evil Actions: ...⁶

He is Judge, and Judgment reaches the Bad as well as the Good: His Function is a publick Witness, and 'tis the part of a Witness to conceal nothing.

(p. 110)

On this level, too, Fielding fulfills the role of historian: for, as I argued in Chapter Three, the narrative method of Tom Jones ensures that no event reaches us without a simultaneous and built-in judgment.

Shifting away from these generalities, though, we find that there were different versions of history available for Fielding to model himself upon. Davis's essay is based in part upon Ernst Cassirer's The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (1932)⁷, which claims to trace the beginnings of modern historiography and takes as its central texts Bayle's Dictionary (1690), Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws (1748) and Voltaire's Essay on Manners (1751). The advances made by these works can be summarised roughly as follows. Bayle secularises and de-providentialises history: Cassirer compares his dictionary with

the last great attempt at a purely theological presentation of history, namely ... Bossuet's Discourse on Universal History. Here once more is a sublime plan of history, a religious interpretation of the universe. But this bold structure rests on feet of clay so far as its empirical foundations are concerned. For the truth of the facts on which Bossuet builds can only be assured by a logically vicious circle. The authority of all historical facts, according to Bossuet, is based on the authority of the

Bible. The authority of the Bible in turn rests on the authority of the Church, whose authority rests on tradition. Thus tradition becomes the foundation of all historical certainty - but the content and value of tradition can only be proved on the basis of historical evidence. Bayle is the first modern thinker to reveal this circle with ruthless critical subtlety and to point untiringly to its fateful consequences. In this respect Bayle accomplished scarcely less for history than Galileo did for natural science. (p. 207)

The dictionary, as I've already said (see above, pp. 173-74), is an essentially random genre, structured only according to a superficial and arbitrary system (the alphabet). Montesquieu and Voltaire, while retaining Bayle's commitment to the fact as the unit of knowledge, are also concerned to restore pattern:

The facts are sought, sifted and tested by Montesquieu not for their own sake but for the sake of the laws which they illustrate and express. ... The Spirit of the Laws is a political and sociological doctrine of types. Montesquieu proposes to show that the forms of government which we call republic, aristocracy, monarchy and despotism are not mere aggregates of accidentally acquired properties but that each of these forms is, as it were, pre-formed, the expression of a certain structure.

(pp. 209-10)

Whereas in Montesquieu, 'political events still occupy the centre of the historical world', in Voltaire, 'the concept of the mind has

gained broader scope'; but his methodology also entails a shift of attention away from the individual lives of the so-called 'important' figures:

it is Voltaire's intention to raise history above the "all-too-human", the accidental, and merely personal. ... It is not the sequence of events which interests Voltaire, but the progress of civilization and the inner relationship of its various elements. ... As the real weaknesses of previous historiography Voltaire sees, on the one hand, the mythical conception and interpretation of events and on the other, the cult of heroes. These weaknesses are mutually interdependent, representing simply a twofold expression of the same fundamental deficiency. For the cult of heroes, leaders, rulers sprang from this mythologizing tendency of history writers, who still continue to satisfy this appetite.

(pp. 216-17)

At the time of writing Tom Jones Fielding could only have known the first of these works; but he would have known earlier works by Montesquieu and Voltaire, and might at least, in any case, have been expected to be in touch with the intellectual current which produced them. The point is that he takes no account of their developments, and his version of history seems, at first, to be an intensely conservative one: for Tom Jones imposes an emphatically providential pattern on its action, and celebrates the heroic deeds of a central character whose actions are mythologised even in the course of their telling.

Ronald Paulson has some useful things to say on this last point⁸. He suggests that one of the forces which may be tugging against Fielding's innate historiographical conservatism is the influence of the euhemerist analysis of myth carried out in the Abbé Banier's Mythology and Fables of the Ancients, explain'd from History (of which Fielding owned a translation, and which he cites by name in Tom Jones, XII. i, p. 619). Banier's method is to reduce mythology to history by explaining, for example, 'that the Minotaur with Pasiphae, and the rest of that Fable, contain nothing but an Intrigue of the Queen of Crete with a Captain named Taurus' (quoted from Paulson, p. 177), and this practice has close affinities with Fielding's penchant for travesty and mock-heroic. Thus in the scene of Tom's graveyard battle with Molly Seagrim's attackers (IV. viii), he is using mock-heroic to present at once the reality (a local scuffle) and the story which the myth-making villagers will eventually make of it (a Homeric battle): we have, in Paulson's words, 'the sense of a myth being simultaneously created and analysed' (which ties up with my 'simultaneity of presentation and judgment' theme). This is clearly one of Fielding's ways of debunking the heroic version of history; but to understand their more radical undercurrents, we must look at how Fielding mythologizes Tom in relation to more recent history, in the events of the '45.

John Goode sees the most uncomfortable aspect of Tom Jones as being its sense, lacking in both Montesquieu and Voltaire, of 'history as flux' - a constantly shifting context of ideologies and social conditions which cannot be assimilated by a fictive (or mock-historical) framework based on the integration of a benign providence with an affirmative view of human nature (both of which

are left-overs from the older forms of history). This is where the '45 comes in, because it proposed to Fielding certain salient questions about government and authority (national, local, familial and even narratorial) to which he responded, perhaps under the pressure to sustain a gruelling journalistic output, in a contradictory way. This sense of the '45 as being both intrinsic and external to Tom Jones - as being centrally there but not being subject to the narrator's control in the way that the other events are - is confirmed by Thomas Cleary, who has a theory that its very inclusion was practically an afterthought. Tom falls in with the infantrymen who are marching north to fight the Pretender in VII. ix; this places the action of that chapter in November or December 1745, and yet we know from the headings to Books VI and VII that only three weeks and one day have elapsed since the evening of Allworthy's recovery, which was described as 'a pleasant Evening in the latter End of June'. Cleary says:

This violation of chronology underlines the peculiarity of the sudden introduction of the "Forty-five" into the novel and, together with other evidence, may indicate that Fielding decided to impose the background of the "Forty-five" on the novel in the course of a partial revision after its main action had been elaborated. ... In short, even those characters ... who are aware of the rebellion are only occasionally so, and not a single character, including the narrator, alludes to the "Forty-five" in Books I-VI and XIII-XVIII.⁹

This would seem to be at odds with the more commonplace insistence

on its centrality, such as Paulson's 'What the parable of the Good Samaritan and Fénelon's Telemachus meant to Joseph Andrews the Rebellion of '45 means to Tom Jones' (p. 175), or Anthony Kearney's argument that 'Fielding was writing with the whole episode very much in the forefront of his mind'¹⁰.

Personally I find Cleary's theory convincing, but then I don't think it negates or undermines the importance of the rebellion as context: if Fielding was prepared radically to revise the central third of his novel, and to disrupt its impeccable chronology, it would have had to be for an important reason. So Paulson and Cleary are not really at odds, and even Kearney's claim that the rebellion was at the forefront of Fielding's mind in the planning of Tom Jones can be allowed to stand, since the whole of the novel, not just its middle section, describes the same conflict between different theories of government as was at the heart of the '45, viz. that between pre-1688 paternalism and the Lockean social contract, as acted out by Allworthy and Tom. Although modelled on Lyttleton (by now treasurer in the Pelham ministry) Allworthy represents, at a local level, precisely the kind of government explicitly rejected by Locke in his first Treatise (1690). It's not hard to find stylistic evidence for qualifications on Fielding's admiration for him - as, for example, John Preston has done¹¹; but even the plot, especially in its early stages, shows him up as well. In the very first paragraph in which Allworthy appears, at the beginning of I. ii, we are told how wealthy he is: Fortune had been 'very profuse' with her endowments, and he was 'decreed to the Inheritance of one of the largest Estates in the County'. The implications of this are only gradually made apparent when we realise, as the novel progresses, how many families are

therefore dependent on Allworthy for financial support - the Blifils, the Seagrims, the Partridges, the Millers. And yet at the end of II. v, for example, Allworthy has to ask Captain Blifil 'who that Partridge was whom he had called a worthless Fellow' (p. 97): it seems he doesn't even know who his dependents are. At Partridge's trial (II. vi) his behaviour is strangely inconsistent: he deprives him of his annuity (p. 101) and then, acting out of 'Charity', gives him and Jenny a small amount of money, 'just sufficient for their Sustenance' (p. 103). Later on he does exactly the same to Black George, and, of course, to Tom; in each case, conscience seems to prick him into an awareness of the needlessness of his severity.

Allworthy acts from admirable but inflexible principle, Jones acts from the more ad hoc and so more efficient dictates of 'good nature', and the conflict between the two systems finally comes to a crisis over the question of whether or not to forgive Black George. Jones has by now (XVIII. xi, p. 969) acquired greater stature than Allworthy - as Empson puts it, 'when Tom rises above Allworthy he is like a mountain'¹² - and is all for forgiving George on the basis of 'some Kindnesses, which I can never forget', but Allworthy claims that 'Such mistaken Mercy is not only Weakness, but borders on Injustice'. Interestingly, the conflict remains unresolved. As Battestin indicates in his footnote, Fielding was in fact of Allworthy's persuasion, at least by the time he wrote Section x of An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers: 'though mercy may appear more amiable in a magistrate, severity is a more wholesome virtue'¹³; and Tom doesn't bother to dispute the point, because it's time to get dressed to see Sophia (similarly in Book VIII he abandons the army on her account, long before he has seen any

action). The modern reader has a flickering but potent sense of Tom's moral grandeur, yet we can't be sure that Fielding intended this effect, and it certainly doesn't do George any good: he runs away, deserting his family, and is never heard of again (XVIII. xiii, p. 980).

Tom's role is both anti-Jacobite and anti-paternalist. (Allworthy, of course, is not a Jacobite, but his system of local government resembles the pre-1688 constitution in that his dependents have not elected him and have no power of redress when he gets things wrong.) What's noticeable, though, is that Tom is strangely inconsistent and ineffective in the role, and this can only be because it calls for qualities which are essentially unheroic. The allegorical set-up, insofar as one can be detected, has Blifil representing the Stuart and Tom (being illegitimate) the Hanoverian line (which had no hereditary right to succession). As Paulson points out, the book then proves that 'Blifil, despite his technical claim to inheritance, is morally disqualified from his right to carry on the Allworthy-Western line, while Tom demonstrates his right to the title of successor' (p. 182: I find it curious, incidentally, that this sentence, published in 1978, appears almost word for word on p. 72 of Kearney's article, published in 1973). But even this schema breaks down, because although Prince Charles was technically the legitimate heir (like Blifil) he was also, in 1745, the glamorous interloper and challenger (like Tom). Thus the rebellious behaviour into which Tom's high spirits naturally lead him, for which he is initially punished but which turn out to be the driving moral force behind the whole book, are bound to recall not only the revolutionary events of 1688 but also

the cavalier exploits and wanderings of the Pretender. Paulson concludes, sensibly enough, that 'This is not to suggest that he [Fielding] is in any way more sympathetic to the Prince's cause than he was in The Jacobite's Journal, but only that a common myth of alienation from one's true home and wandering as exile or fugitive tie together these two heroes' (p. 185).

The view that Fielding was writing a coherent, conservative and providential mock-History in which Tom unproblematically succeeds to Allworthy's position and values can therefore be seen to have several cracks in it; and even Fielding's basic pro-Hanoverian ideology is undermined by the fact that the hero of his novel bears something of a resemblance to the villain of his political world-view. The disruptive influence of historical reality cannot in fact be over-emphasised: and I have not even attempted to probe Fielding's ambiguous relationship to Locke, or what Brian McCrea calls 'the confusions and self-contradictions in Locke's political writings' (p. 10), or the very unstable nature of party ideology in the 1740s. (Historians are still quarreling, but the divisions were at least slippery enough for Fielding to suggest, in the first number of the True Patriot, that the labels might be abandoned altogether without making any difference: 'I am of no Party; a Word which I hope, by these my Labours, to eradicate out of our Constitution: This being indeed the true Source of all those Evils which we have reason to complain of' - p. 35.) The most we can say, I feel, is that there is a genuine radicalism pushing against a passionate conservatism in most of Fielding's work, and that the '45 made this especially visible, since it prompted the conservative in him to leap to the

defence of a constitution which had been established less than sixty years earlier by revolutionary methods. The consequence of this paradoxical position for Tom Jones is that the novel's total structure, which has been so lavishly praised for its sense of formal enclosure, retains a strong element of very open-ended irony.

(ii) Women and Workers

We could now look at how this ideological tension affects characterisation, starting with some of the contradictions inherent in Fielding's attitude towards Sophia.

It would be a waste of time to look in Fielding for signs of a twentieth-century feminist sensibility (although this is almost what we get in Richardson). Nevertheless, he's been attracting attention recently from feminist critics, and this has already resulted in a considerable broadening and deepening of our understanding of the strengths and limitations of his female characterisations. The most useful groundwork to be done here is historical: to establish the nature and extent of feminist debate in the early eighteenth century; to establish links between this debate and the sorts of conservative habits of thought towards which Fielding was inclined; and to establish definite evidence that Fielding was himself familiar with and interested in this debate. Again, by collating the work which has now been done in this area and applying it specifically to the modes of irony deployed in Tom Jones, I hope to show that the ironic triumph pulled off by Sophia at the end of the novel is the result of conflict and uncertainty in Fielding's position rather than the

manipulation of a worldly-wise duality.

His pamphlet of 1746, The Female Husband, is a good place to start, because it makes the limits of his support for feminism immediately clear, and in a way which tallies with the terms of my argument so far¹⁴. It has been given an excellent feminist reading by Terry Castle¹⁵, who tries to negotiate between its confused mixture of one-sided moralising ('if modesty be the peculiar characteristick of the fair sex, it is in them most shocking and odious to prostitute and debase it' - The Female Husband, p. 51), sadistic particularisation ('those persons who have more regard to beauty than to justice, could not refrain from exerting some pity toward her, when they saw so lovely a skin scarified with rods, in such a manner that her back was almost flead' - p. 50) and reluctant admiration for the sheer courage and adventurousness of the transvestite heroine. This mixture, Castle claims, while giving rise to some of Fielding's 'more revealing antifeminist sentiment', also signals

a larger ideological tension ...: between his wish for "natural" distinctions between the sexes - a theology of gender - and his countervailing, often enchanted awareness of the theatricality and artifice of human sexual roles. One could say that in The Female Husband the satirist - conservative in values, committed to maintaining boundaries and preserving through irony an ideal typology of pure forms - comes into contact with the theatrical entrepreneur (which Fielding also was): the radical at heart, given to suspending boundaries

and creating illusory, mutable, impure forms.

(p. 604)

A figure who, from a 1980s perspective, would fit our concept of a true feminist - committed to total independence and the subversion of gender roles at every level - therefore elicits a response basically of abhorrence (though tinged with a certain respect); whereas Fielding's own idea of the perfect woman, as exemplified by Sophia (and, in an even more complicated way, by Amelia) is shot through with a quite different sort of ambivalence. This leads a feminist such as Katharine Rogers simply to become impatient with her (and him):

every one of Fielding's amiable women is emotionally dependent on a man and derives strength from her love for him. When a demonstrative outburst from her father so affects Sophia's "dutiful, grateful, tender and affectionate heart" that she almost agrees to marry Blifil, she is saved only by her word of honor given to Tom and her love for him.¹⁶

Fluent Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who is eloping from her husband, declares that women are as intelligent as men. She makes many complaints of her husband's stupidity, to which Sophia pointedly fails to respond. When she exhorts Sophia to make sure that the man she marries will be able to tolerate superior intelligence in his wife, Sophia primly replies: "I shall never marry a man in whose understanding I see any defects before marriage; and I promise you I would

rather give up my own, than see any such afterwards".

(p. 266)

Fielding's amiable women ... are incapable of seeing any fault in the men they love. Sophia is convinced that callous Squire Western is "the best of fathers" ...

(p. 267)

Rogers makes these remarks in the course of comparing Fielding unfavourably with Richardson, and they are probably irrefutable. In fact the discrepancy between the two writers in this respect could easily be accounted for in very conventional terms, by arguing that Richardson's genius is for portraying the psychological activity of his characters, while Fielding's is for portraying the psychological activity only of his narrator, which means that he restricts himself to the rendering of a male consciousness. Unfortunately what Rogers misses out is the fact that Fielding understands this consciousness itself very thoroughly, and so, even if he understands little about how women feel, he does understand how men feel about women; consequently he knows a lot about misogyny, and much of the support given to women in Fielding's novels is therefore given negatively, in the form of anti-misogynist satire. This is one of the conclusions reached by Angela Smallwood in her new book, Fielding and the Woman Question: 'While Fielding refuses positive support for feminism, he attacks misogyny'¹⁷.

Comparing him with Richardson, then, we can explain Fielding's shortfall in the presentation of female characters purely in aesthetic terms, but this means begging the question, since there is clearly an ideological factor at work too. What we must remember

is that the sort of feminism which Fielding inherited has a history traceable back to conservative and Christian habits of belief. The crucial figure here is Mary Astell, whom Joan K. Kinnaird has characterised as a 'protofeminist'¹⁸. Kinnaird identifies the origins of Astell's feminism in two contradictory sources: Descartes, from whom she derived methodological support, a faith in the equal intellectual capacity of all human beings, and a belief in the sole authority of the thinking self; and traditional Anglicanism, which insisted explicitly upon the patriarchal structure of the family and the constitution. Astell and the other protofeminists (such as Hannah Woolley and Lady Mary Chudleigh),

seem to have accepted the idea of distinct masculine and feminine natures. Men and women differed physically, and since emotions were rooted in the body, it followed that the two sexes enjoyed different temperaments, different sensibilities, and different gifts. God had therefore allotted to each sex its proper sphere: as Mary Astell pointed out, men were made for public life, women for private life.

(Kinnaird, p. 74)

This all fits very nicely with Fielding, especially when Kinnaird argues that feminists who have 'attacked "the feminine mystique" as an expression of male chauvinism, [are] quite unaware that this mystique had been, to a large extent, the conscious creation of the early English feminists' (p. 75). Thus when Tom says to Sophia, during their final interview, 'The Delicacy of your Sex cannot conceive the Grossness of ours', this is not just (as many readers

would take it today) the overstated emanation of a very guilty conscience, but an expression of support for one contemporary stream of enlightened female opinion.

Even before she begins to act, then, Sophia is in a deeply ironic position, although there is no need to suppose that Fielding perceived it as such. She, Tom, Allworthy (possibly), the narrator and the reader all see her as being at least on an intellectual par with the best of the male characters, and yet they all expect her to play a submissive role. Her relationship with her father makes the paradox especially clear. Fielding is, for a start, perfectly candid about the extent of Squire Western's love for her: 'Her Father, as hath been said, was fonder of her than of any other human Creature' (IV. iii, p. 158). My argument is that Fielding's sexual politics have the effect of multiplying ironical meanings, and this is already one of his more massively ironic statements. Consider: 'as hath been said' refers the reader some ten pages back to the end of Book III (p. 149). There Fielding specified 'Every Thing which the Squire held most dear; to wit, his Guns, Dogs and Horses', and introduced Sophia by describing her as 'a young Lady of about seventeen Years of Age, whom her Father, next after those necessary Implements of Sport just beforementioned, loved and esteemed above all the World'. Stage one of the joke is therefore that Western loves Sophia less than his dogs and horses; stage two are that these animals are really only implements of his own pleasure, so what Fielding is in fact saying is that Western loves Sophia less than he loves himself; the final stage, given that he is still 'fonder of her than of any other human Creature', thereby manages to imply that Western himself is less than human.

But even though the narrator has, by such devices, taken care to establish a pretty devastating attitude towards Western, Sophia is still capable of coming out with remarks like this:

She had preserved the most inviolable Duty to him in all Things; and this her Love made not only easy, but so delightful, that when one of her Companions laughed at her for placing so much Merit in such scrupulous Obedience, as that young Lady called it, Sophia answered, 'You mistake me, Madam, if you think I value myself upon this Account: For besides that I am barely discharging my Duty, I am likewise pleasing myself. I can truly say, I have no Delight equal to that of contributing to my Father's Happiness; and if I value myself, my Dear, it is on having this Power, and not on executing it.'

(IV. x, p. 191)

There is certainly a not very attractive primness audible here, but we must always take care, when considering what Sophia has to say, to remember what a dangerous game she's playing. The novel surrounds her with treacherous men and women, and her way of coping with the situation is usually to say exactly what she means while couching it in the terms expected of her. Everything she says therefore centres around the fundamental irony of her status as an independently thinking being trapped within a restrictive system: it is very often covertly rebellious (as opposed to what she does, which is often overtly rebellious). Her reply to her companion amounts to the assertion that she obeys her father because it pleases her to; it is only the companion, Fielding reminds us, who calls this 'Obedience', and in

any case Sophia will shortly stop obeying her father altogether. Likewise her reply to Mrs. Fitzpatrick - 'I shall never marry a Man in whose Understanding I see any Defects before Marriage' (XI. vii, p. 595) - which Rogers called a 'smug evasion', is in fact fiercely autonomous in its unsisterly withdrawal of support for a woman weak enough to have been swayed by her physical attraction towards a stupid man; the second half of her answer, 'I promise you I would rather give up my own, than see any such afterwards' is a decisive rhetorical put-down but otherwise means nothing, since she has already said that she would never allow the situation to arise.

Sophia's talent for exploiting the irony of her own position, for winning victories on her opponents' own terms, comes to a head in her final scene with Tom and her father. In this scene, with an impressive command of situational irony, she plays two expected codes of behaviour off against each other in order to obtain what she wants. Prudish morality demands that she punish Tom for his transgressions (plus the fact that he has actually hurt her) and at first she can see no way out of this; as it is, only Western, by virtue of his very boorishness, has the power to cut through the protocol - 'I tell thee 'tis all Flimflam' (XVIII. xii, p. 974). Sophia, though, sees an opportunity to harness this power to her own use, and is able to pass off what is really her own inclination as an act of reluctant obedience towards her father: 'I will be obedient to you, Sir ... to-morrow Morning shall be the Day, Papa, since you will have it so' (p. 975). This is the final triumph of Sophia's opportunistic policy of obeying her father only when it suits her; and it shows that it is within the capability of an otherwise impotent woman to exploit male power for her own ends, if

she has the intelligence. From here on, of course, Fielding's feminism breaks down, because what Sophia most wants to do at this point is to enter into a submissive relationship with Tom: it hardly invalidates Rogers's point that 'every one of Fielding's amiable women is emotionally dependent on a man and derives strength from her love for him'. Perhaps the only answer to that is that Fielding doesn't seem to have rated emotional independence much as either a male or a female virtue: Tom and Booth are massively dependent on Sophia and Amelia for emotional (though not, of course, financial or physical) support.

Angela Smallwood's book provides by far the most thorough and sensible analysis yet available of Fielding's attitude towards his female characters. It shows how the twentieth-century view of Fielding has been constructed within a reductively male critical tradition initiated by Henley and Cross; gives details of the sorts of feminist arguments that were current in Fielding's time and finds evidence, both inside and outside Tom Jones, that he was familiar with them; and culminates in an extended reading of Amelia which comes excitingly close to explaining the central paradox of that novel's idealisation of the submissive wife - 'Amelia's role of perfect wife expresses Fielding's concept not of the ideal woman so much as of the ideal person' (pp. 299-300). Above all it remains well aware of the limits of Fielding's feminism and manages to avoid that seductive but dangerous line of argument, the Richardson/Fielding comparison. You simply can't play these authors off against each other for evaluative purposes. Richardson's creative sympathies are with the oppressed woman, and Clarissa is thus a passive, stifled, impotent book; it attracts our pity. Fielding's sympathies are with the (relatively)

enlightened eighteenth-century male, and Tom Jones is thus dynamic, a book in a position to get things done; it cheers us up, as far as it goes. But this is description, not evaluation. All I've tried to show is that Fielding's inconsistent treatment of his female characters, besides being unsatisfactory by modern standards, complicates the texture of the book and accounts for much of the irony which many readers still find so engaging. One might observe, for instance, that it is only when Sophia is around that he ever makes explicit reference to his female readers:

Her Sensations, however, the Reader's Heart (if he or she have any) will better represent than I can ...

(IV. v, p. 169)

Sophia, who, angry as she was, was likewise set forth to the best Advantage, for which I leave my female Readers to account ...

(XVIII. xii, p. 970)

So that those unlucky Minutes which had been spent in changing the Ribbons, had prevented the Lovers from Meeting at this Time. A most unfortunate Accident, from which my fair Readers will not fail to draw a very wholesome Lesson.

(VI. vi, p. 293)

All of these addresses are to some extent ironic: in the last example, 'fair' seems to vacillate between at least three meanings - 'female' (individualising the reader), 'impartial' (casting the reader as judge), and 'beautiful' (playing on the idea of women's supposed jealousy of each other's beauty). If it is for ironic complexity that

we are supposed to value Tom Jones, then, we should recognise that its ambivalence, and especially its ambivalence towards women, was not something that Fielding would necessarily have been aware or in command of.

* * *

All the same, his attitude towards women is not nearly as problematic as his attitude towards 'the poor'. Rather than attempting a full-blown investigation of this area, though, I'm going to continue one of the themes introduced earlier in this chapter, and show how the ideological conflict between Tom and Allworthy is localised around their different responses to the novel's main representatives of the working class, the Seagrim family. Finally, I shall return to a consideration of Fielding's treatment of a very difficult character, one he finds laughable but whom he also clearly likes: Mrs. Honour - a working woman.

George Seagrim, who works first as Allworthy's and then as Western's gamekeeper, presents a fascinating problem affecting plot, characterisation and ethics which the book can never quite solve; and again, this open-endedness is traceable back to the fact that Fielding was never really sure how to treat such people in real life. The problem is exemplified by his nickname, 'Black George': how did he come by it? It might be a reference to his character - even at the end of the book Allworthy is still talking about 'the black Ingratitude of this Fellow' (XVIII. xi, pp. 968-69); or it may simply be a reference to his physical appearance: in Partridge's words, 'he hath a most remarkable Beard, the largest and blackest

I ever saw' (XV. xii, p. 829). These, then, respectively are the suspicious and the open-minded interpretations of George: either he is a born villain, dishonest by temperament, or he is simply a badly-off worker, driven to acts of dishonesty by his straitened circumstances.

When Jones forgives the highwayman who attempts to rob him at the end of Book XII, he is subsequently amply rewarded with gratitude: this, apparently, is a straightforward case of well-placed compassion for 'those Highwaymen who are, by unavoidable Distress, driven, as it were, to such illegal Courses, as generally bring them to a shameful Death' (XI. xiv, p. 681). But Black George is more difficult because nobody, not even the narrator, seems to be especially sure of his motives. Even in more explicit and overtly polemical contexts, Fielding was undecided about 'the poor'. In his pamphlet of 1753, A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor, before he outlines his specific and not very attractive plan (the poor are to be confined en masse in a new 'County Workhouse', on the basis that they 'cannot be so well nor so cheaply provided for in many bodies as they may be when collected into one'¹⁹) his attitude towards the underprivileged seems divided between compassion and irritation:

That such wretchedness as this is so little lamented, arises therefore from its being so little known; but, if this be the case with the sufferings of the poor, it is not so with their misdeeds. They starve, and freeze, and rot among themselves; but they beg, and steal, and rob among their betters. ... Stop your coach at what

shop you will, however expeditious the tradesman is to attend you, a beggar is commonly beforehand with him; and if you should not directly face his door the tradesman must often turn his head while you are talking to him, or the same beggar, or some other thief at hand, will pay a visit to his shop! (pp. 141-42)

Compassion and severity, then, two powerful opposites, are focussed uncomfortably upon the same class of people; and even, in the case of Tom Jones, upon the same person. Here the compassion comes from Tom and the severity from Allworthy. I've already (pp. 273-74) mentioned that they are still arguing over him right at the end of the novel, but there are earlier clashes too. We are introduced to George in III. ii:

This Friend was the Game-keeper, a Fellow of a loose kind of Disposition, and who was thought not to entertain much stricter Notions concerning the Difference of meum and tuum, than the young Gentleman [Tom] himself.

(p. 119)

A moral judgment, of sorts, but we don't take it too seriously because the narrator's ironic strategy at this point is to use the idea of dishonesty (of which Tom is continually being accused) as a euphemism for innate goodness. Tom and George now go poaching together; Tom gets caught but won't betray his friend, and George lets him suffer as a result of covering up for him; then Blifil tells Allworthy about George's involvement, and he is sacked; Allworthy gives Tom a horse as compensation for having punished him unfairly, and Tom sells this

horse in order to raise money to save George's family from starving - an action which reduces Allworthy to (highly inconsistent) tears of admiration, and of which the narrator says, glowingly, 'it was not difficult to reconcile to the Rule of Right, an Action which it would have been impossible to deduce from the Rule of Wrong' (III. viii, p. 144). Allworthy is about to reinstate George, when he is framed again by Blifil, this time for poaching hares; and Allworthy falls for the story, as usual.

This is all fascinating stuff, and we can sense Fielding's relish in the cumulating complexity of the situation, but that seems to be as far as his interest in Black George goes: he is a problem rather than a character, and the narrator's subsequent attempts ostensibly to analyse his psychology are either flippantly epigrammatic ('he ... was as honest as Men who love Money better than any other Thing in the Universe generally are' - VI. xii, p. 314) or more impressive as displays of technique than of sympathy: the whole 'Discussion of a knotty Point in the Court of Conscience' (VI. xiii) is brilliantly clever, but doesn't develop George's character at all from the point at which we were introduced to him. Our sense, in fact, is that everyone is more interested in manipulating George than in understanding him: Blifil uses him as part of his power struggle with Tom and Allworthy, the narrator uses him as an occasion for indulging in a particular comic routine. And in Tom, again, we see only the unrealised potential to clean up this problem. He is clearly capable of an energetic and sensible compassion, but Fielding won't quite let George deserve it (he does steal Tom's vital £500, and all he ever does in return is carry a few notes to Sophia). Besides, are Tom's motives really as good as they seem? Perhaps he is only

supporting George's family because of his sexual attraction towards Molly - to whom, even at the end of the book, he gives 'much the greatest Share' of the money set aside for the Seagrims. Black George remains merely a focus of unresolved enquiry: unresolved because Fielding, while finding in his central character a means of projecting genuine sympathy, can also scarcely refrain from registering an instinctive distrust which keeps him at arm's length from the basic issue of the relationship between poverty and theft.

It's hard to be entirely satisfied with the way Fielding uses Black George: for one thing, he hardly ever speaks, and so is never allowed to make much impact on the linguistic fabric of the text. This is important because, democratically speaking, characters should be allowed to have a voice; and novels become verbally richer for every new contribution they accept to their fund of discourses. Fielding certainly seems to have known this, and it's not as if he was shy about attempting 'low' dialogue, since he's extremely generous with the space he gives to Mrs. Honour. I've already discussed the formal implications of her monologues in some detail (see above, pp. 168-73, 184-85), so it would be useful to return to them briefly now, in order to give a specific and local instance of how these questions of form tie up with Fielding's approach to his characters.

Book VI, Chapter vi presents a typical monologue, and if we look closely at exactly what Fielding is encouraging us to find funny, we can see that it all boils down to clumsiness of expression: her grammar is bad (she says 'more properer' and 'most handsomest') and she is very repetitious (she keeps saying 'to be sure'); when we see an example of her letter writing (XV. x, p. 825) we find that

her spelling is terrible too; and Mrs. Slipslop, in Joseph Andrews, had all of these faults, plus a tendency to use the wrong vocabulary. Above all, as I said before, Mrs. Honour appropriates the methods of dialogue and incorporates them into monologue, answering her own questions and moving from one question to another in no particular order. Her speeches are simply randomly arranged lists of ideas. Considered as works of literature, then, they preclude the kind of dialogic narrator-reader exchange upon which Tom Jones is based, and are, instead, more like the satiric mock-anthology or mock-dictionary.

Now the mock-dictionary works by leaving a huge shortfall between question and answer: questions are followed by such obviously insufficient answers that readers are meant to be provoked into the creative effort of filling in the gaps themselves. This is exactly the way that Sophia responds to Mrs. Honour. Fielding presents her monologues with a measure of comic exaggeration, of course, but they are also determinedly, even cruelly realistic in the way they expose her crudity of feeling and expression: her hopelessly misspelt letter is closer to what a chambermaid would really have written than anything we find in Pamela. Yet he also presents Honour (and Slipslop) as having an unerring insight into her mistress's feelings: these speakers have a habit of touching their listeners' nerve-ends.

'"What do you mean by running on in this Manner to me?" cries Sophia' (VI. vi, p. 292), and a minute later she is running off to the canal to meet Tom. Honour never fails to provoke her into some sort of resolute action, and this is because the incessant jumbled to-ing and fro-ing of her speeches always, in the end, decodes into the naked truth; just as the shortfall between the claims of a dictionary (to

give accurate definitions) and its actual content ('HONOUR. Duelling') can be a way of making the reader see the truth in its bluntest possible form. Mrs. Honour therefore makes more sense as a character if we also regard her as a narrator, with Sophia as her reader. She is full of potential meaning, but it can only be realised when she comes into contact with a suitable reader: she and Sophia together generate the correct impulse, which is for Sophia to run off to meet Tom as quickly as possible. The meeting ~~because~~^{between} satirised (because stupid) maid and satirised (because love-lorn) mistress can in this way make for richly sympathetic moments, as at the end of Joseph Andrews, IV. vi:

'I say again I wish I was a great Lady for his Sake, I believe when I had made a Gentleman of him, he'd behave so, that no body could deprecate what I had done; and I fancy few would venture to tell him he was no Gentleman to his Face, nor to mine neither.' At which Words, taking up the Candles, she asked her Mistress, who had been some time in her Bed, if she had any farther Commands; who mildly answered she had none; and telling her, she was a comical Creature, bid her Good-night.

(pp. 298-99)

'A comical Creature' is, of course, an exact description of Slipslop. Fielding refuses to sentimentalise her and has no qualms about laughing at her lack of education: at the same time he can see that she understands Lady Booby better than Lady Booby understands herself. It is only through the interaction of both these insufficient characters that the real nature of the situation, in all its humour

and poignancy, can be made apparent. In other words, both narrator and reader have their part to play in producing meaning.

(iii) Fielding and the 1980s

Empson presented his theory of double irony with a characteristic mixture of pseudo-geometric specificity and throwaway colloquialism which makes it rather baffling:

Single irony presumes a censor; the ironist (A) is fooling a tyrant (B) while appealing to the judgment of a person addressed (C). For double irony A shows both B and C that he understands both their positions; B can no longer forbid direct utterance, but I think can always be picked out as holding the more official or straight-faced belief. In real life this is easier than single irony (because people aren't such fools as you think), so that we do not always notice its logical structure. Presumably A hopes that each of B and C will think 'He is secretly on my side, and only pretends to sympathise with the other'; but A may hold some wise balanced position between them, or contrariwise may be feeling 'a plague on both your houses'.²⁰

The tendency has therefore been to use the theory mainly as a springboard for vague claims about Fielding's duality, as Henry Knight Miller did in the passage I quoted earlier (pp. 262-63). One of the few serious and detailed responses it got was from Claude

Rawson, who nevertheless objected to it because 'it suggests that the main doctrinal points are made by means of an essentially evasive irony rather than by what is often an emphatic explicitness'²¹. In support of this claim, he quotes a sizeable extract from VI. i ('Of Love') where Fielding does indeed seem to be putting forward a sophisticated sexual morality 'not ... by any "trick" of the ironic tone but by explicit qualifications'. He doesn't really succeed in damaging Empson's case, though, because Empson cunningly took care to provide himself with an escape clause, by saying that 'the style of Fielding is a habitual double irony; or rather, he moves the gears of his car up to that as soon as the road lets it use its strength'. Rawson seized on one of the main doctrinal essays, where we expect to find Fielding being explicit, and where his style often tends to be a bit stiff; but Empson's examples are mainly from passages where characterisation, plot, dialogue and narratorial comment are all in full interpenetrative swing.

He said 'I do not want to make large claims for "double irony"', but started off by making very large claims indeed: namely, that 'some speakers convey it all the time by a curl of the tongue in their tone of voice'. In other words, he was not talking about a trick of literary style peculiar to one novelist, but about a habit of expression which has filtered down into the consciousness of every educated English and American speaker. Fielding didn't invent it, then, but he can, according to Empson, be said to have brought it to a point of formal perfection and to have put it into the service of a healthy argument. But he too was far from explicit about what Fielding's position actually was - it may be a 'wise balanced' one or it may consist of 'a plague on both your houses'; presumably

Empson felt that it was closer to the former since he later described it as 'humanist, liberal, materialist, recommending happiness on earth and so forth' (p. 134). My aim in this chapter has been, having accepted Empson's account of 'double irony' as a feat of style, to be rather more precise about the nature of the beliefs it embodies; and to suggest that, instead of being 'wise' and 'balanced', these beliefs are ironic because they are contradictory and inconsistent.

This, I must stress, is an argument for, not against, our continuing to admire Tom Jones for the complexity of its judgments. The novel is characterised, in fact, to an extent which has not really been recognised, by a quality which we nowadays tend to expect of satire if it is not to fall into preachiness, namely a sense of complicity with the objects satirised. Fielding satirised Jacobitism mercilessly but could not help finding in its figurehead certain heroic qualities which he projected by association onto his own hero; he sympathised with Sophia in her misfortunes but could not resist satirising women (such as Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mrs. Bennet) who made serious attempts to break the vicious circle of male dominance; and he satirised Black George for his dishonesty but also used Tom as a way of dropping out hints at a more enlightened sympathy. Such contradictions, however, have a quite different effect when expressed in a novel rather than a journal or a legal pamphlet, because they get transferred through irony (verbal, structural, character-based) into a dialogic form; and dialogue - between speaker and listener, narrator and reader - is a 'reciprocal Interchange of Ideas' which works towards a shared understanding, rather than a resolution, of contradictions. The

polemical pamphlet presumes a unified and decided consciousness, whereas the novel presumes an authorial consciousness which is open-ended because it must allow for the interaction of characters and the input of an imaginative reader.

Nevertheless this distinction cannot precisely be applied to Tom Jones, which is, unmistakably and complicatingly, a polemical novel. And only in this way can we now understand the function of the intrusive narrator, whose job is to square polemical explicitness with a system of moral and political beliefs which are in many ways undecided. Thus the novel's chain of incidents is coloured and permeated with a running commentary in a relationship which is not, as in Joseph Andrews, a simple question of example and precept: the effect of the action is often to qualify, sometimes even to invalidate the commentary - I gave an example of this in Chapter Three (see above, p. 144). I've explored some of the ambiguities it leads to, and suggested that they might align Fielding with even quite an experimental writer such as Beckett; but while we're considering Fielding's polemics, there's another twentieth-century analogy that might be illuminating. His political intent becomes more apparent if we take note that in one respect his methods are very like Brecht's²². Brecht's theory of alienation (Verfremdung) is too well known to need lengthy summarising here. He believed, in Jonathan Culler's words, that 'there is ... a demystificatory political potential in any dramaturgy that abandons a theatre of characters and inner psychological states for a theatre of situations and surfaces': 'effective theatre requires not empathetic identification with major characters but a critical distance that enables us to judge and comprehend their situation'²³. What Fielding and Brecht therefore have

in common is a rejection of realism in favour of reality: if there is to be an element of reality in their novels and plays, it should not be the fake reality of psychologically 'believable' characters and situations, but the genuine reality of the reader's act of reading, or the actors' and audience's physical presence in the theatre. In Brecht's theatre,

Narrative

turns the spectator into an observer, but
arouses his power of action²⁴

- which is also a precise description of what happens in Tom Jones.

Differences emerge if we look at two comparable instances of the technique, from the end of The Threepenny Opera and the end of Tom Jones. In both cases, it looks as though the hero is about to be hanged, but he is suddenly reprieved. Brecht lets Macheath off the hook by giving Peachum this piece of verse:

Dear audience, we are now coming to
The point where we must hang him by the neck
Because it is the Christian thing to do
Proving that men must pay for what they take.

But as we want to keep our fingers clean
And you're the people we can't risk offending
We thought we'd better do without this scene
And substitute instead a different ending.

Since this is opera, not life, you'll see
Justice give way before humanity.

So now to stop our story in its course
Enter the royal official on his horse.²⁵

(We should remember, by the way, that this passage is a free paraphrase of an author not far historically removed from Fielding himself.) The equivalent passage in Tom Jones is from XVII. i: it is, in fact, the very same passage which served as my first example in this thesis, and which I compared with an extract from George Eliot:

as to poor Jones, such are the Calamities in which he is at present involved, owing to his Imprudence, by which if a Man doth not become a Felon to the World, he is at least a Felo de se; so destitute is he now of Friends, and so persecuted by Enemies, that we almost despair of bringing him to any good; and if our Reader delights in seeing Executions, I think he ought not to lose any Time in taking a first Row at Tyburn. (p. 875)

The difference between the two authors is not an essential one, more a question of degree. Brecht is aggressively parodic, sarcastic towards his audience ('you're the people we can't risk offending') and completely open about his audience's awareness of the artificiality of theatrical form and the nature of social reality. Fielding's is a far more teasing approach: he hovers on the brink of coming clean about his inventive control, but his ambiguity of phrasing ('we almost despair of bringing him') just about sustains the pretence of his subservience to the dictates of historical accuracy. But they are both making the same political point: traditional art-forms do not

actually resemble real life, one is much more comfortable than the other, and might we therefore not use art as way of reflecting on the implications of this distinction? The fact that Brecht's version is far more assertive and uncompromising reflects not only a stylistic difference but, behind it, a more decided political position. As Barthes said of Brecht,

Son exemplarité ... ne tient à proprement parler ni à son marxisme ni à son esthétique (encore que l'un et l'autre aient une très grande importance) mais à la conjonction des deux: à savoir d'une raison marxiste et d'une pensée sémantique: c'était un marxiste qui avait réfléchi sur les effets du signe: chose rare.²⁶

The fact that Fielding cannot bring himself to forego the pretence of historical reality, by means of which he is still able to indulge a measure of sympathy for the objects of his satire, arises, I would suggest, from the contradictions which I've been attempting to retrieve from beneath the surface of Tom Jones: a literary conservatism (Fielding as late Augustan, the novelist as benign tyrant) underpinned by a necessarily ambiguous narrative stance (half-way between first- and third-person narration), and a conservative and authoritarian morality shot through with radically sympathetic undercurrents.

This is not, I hope, to underestimate the sureness of tone with which Fielding exploits the distinction between literature and real life in passages such as this. If his beliefs were at heart disorganised, there is still much to admire in the aesthetic position that he shares with Brecht - the idea that however 'realistic' a work of art, the author has not really expressed anything until he

has also expressed an attitude towards his material. Fielding does it in a number of ways, not all of them remarkable: in terms of plot, for instance, goodness is rewarded and wickedness punished according to a schema which does not exactly break any formal moulds. But the idea of plot-as-morality has long since ceased to be regarded as feasible on the level at which Fielding practised it. His main achievement, instead, is as a practitioner of style as morality: for narrating and interpreting events at the same time and in the same words.

I think that this makes him important, because literature cannot put forward a version of reality without also putting forward a judgment on it (even if the judgment consists of a bland neutrality); so a complete reading of a piece of literature involves not merely a response to its content, but an awareness of the extent to which it expresses and persuades us of an attitude towards that content. In case this seems contentious, I'll conclude with some recent examples. Take the question of video nasties, which preoccupied many of the newspapers about four years ago. One of the most controversial films under discussion was called I Spit On Your Grave - an unassuming little entertainment in which a vacationing writer, Jennifer Hills, is repeatedly and brutally raped by three men, and then proceeds to revenge herself on her attackers by killing and/or castrating them. The film was disliked by most critics - 'loathsome', 'very cruel', 'degrading and squirm-inducing' were some typical epithets²⁷ - but has since elicited at least two extended articles arguing for its merit:

For many 'nasty-seeking' viewers ... the most disturbing thing about the film will not be its profanity or its

nudity or its violence; it will be the awareness - perhaps for the first time in their lives - of how unnervingly traumatic rape is.²⁸

the film is not cast as a study of her personal reactions. It is a study of what rape constitutes as an act of domination by men over a woman. It studies the hollow and brutal motives of men who will do such a thing.²⁹

There's a serious, if well-intentioned, wrong-headedness at work here. Starr refers to another reviewer who complained that the audience for I Spit On Your Grave consisted of 'men who laughed, told jokes and cheered during the scene in which Jennifer Hills is stalked, raped and shown in the nude', and admits that 'several of the film's recent New York City showings (which I attended) produced similar audience response' (p. 53). What these reviewers should have been stressing, then, is that, supposing that it was a film designed to dissuade men against rape, it was, as such, an obvious failure: it had no idea of how to persuade its audience of its own attitude towards the material. The same is true even of a much more intelligent film like Scorsese's Taxi Driver (1976), which also drew a divided critical response:

I imagine that some people who are angered by the film will say that it advocates violence as a cure for frustration. But to acknowledge that when a psychopath's blood boils over he may cool down is not the same as justifying the eruption.

(Pauline Kael)³⁰

It was no surprise to learn that the young psychopath who

attempted to assassinate President Reagan in 1981 had seen this film several times and was obsessed by Jodie Foster, who plays the teenage whore.

(David Shipman)³¹

Again, despite the film's other merits, its susceptibility to irreconcilable interpretations is a sign of failure at an important level: it lacks either an attitude, or the ability to articulate it in terms comprehensible to its audience.

It might be argued that Tom Jones itself falls into the same trap, for it had a stormy reception and was considered by some to be so immoral that it had caused the earthquakes which hit London that year. But this indicates, on the contrary, that its critics knew only too well what the book was attempting to argue for: as Empson says, 'His readers have always felt sure that he is somehow recommending the behaviour of Tom Jones, whether they [my emphasis] called the result healthy or immoral' (p. 132). Empson's casual 'somehow' here is just as pregnant as the one dropped by James in his sentence of praise (see above, p. 13): what it recognises is that although we have a firm sense that Fielding endorses his hero's values, he can also be noticed registering qualifications and reservations - touches of satire underlying the basic sympathy. This means that Tom Jones is characterised not so much by a 'superb balance between satire and sentiment' as by a persuasive combination of ambivalent attitudes (more ambivalent, from a modern perspective, than Fielding could have intended) firmly put across. In other words, Fielding devised a type of narrative which allowed for an obvious polemical intent without being either formally or morally simplistic.

Among some of today's novelists, there seems to remain only a dim sense of this possibility. A recent remark made by Martin Amis seems characteristic:

The 19th-century way of pointing to morality was to have your villains either punished or converted at the end, and to have good people rewarded in a very naive ... [sic] in the 20th century, it's a) woollier, and b) since the novelist doesn't want to go around dealing out punishment and reward, all he can do to show you what he thinks is to write about it in a certain way, with a certain spin on it.³²

Amis recognises the importance of style as morality, then, but obviously has only the vaguest of grasps of how it can be done ('a certain spin'). So in his latest novel, Money, his critique of male sexuality is carried out in a series of comic episodes surrounding masturbation (the hero is caught in the act by his girl friend) and rape (the hero tries it but finds that he is physically weaker than the girl) which hopelessly rebound upon themselves because the most this strategy can do is to make the acts appear lovably ridiculous.

To write a flexible, unpreachy but polemical novel requires far more rigorous thinking about the possibilities of the form than this, as well as a practised ear for the detailed local ironies which will be the main unit of argument. Tom Jones obviously can't be usefully imitated any more, but it would help if people started to realise what Fielding did in it. In this respect we still haven't fully understood its devices - the stance of the narrator, midway

between his characters' and his reader's worlds, the pretence at historical veracity, the implications of the book's affinities with conversation, its unwillingness to uphold any distinction between literary form and 'chaotic' reality; and we haven't fully appreciated the extent to which it embodies, not a smugly cohesive world-view, but a complex of social and moral beliefs in a state of crisis and transition. I'm not proposing a comprehensive programme of enforced reading of Fielding as a cure for today's social and literary malaises: I'm only saying that this is how I have come to read him, in the three-year process of compiling this thesis. My own feelings now are that I understand him better and admire him more.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. William Empson, 'Tom Jones' in his Using Biography (London, 1984), pp. 131-57 (p. 132).
2. Brian McCrea, Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth-Century England (Athens, Georgia, 1981), p. 167.
3. Henry Knight Miller, Essays on Fielding's 'Miscellanies': A Commentary on Volume One (Princeton, 1961), p. 269.
4. Thomas R. Cleary, Henry Fielding: Political Writer (Waterloo, Ontario, 1984).

5. Herbert Davis, 'The Augustan Conception of History', in Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800, edited by J.A. Mazzeo (New York and London, 1962), pp. 213-29.
6. Quoted from the English translation (London, 1695), p. 117.
7. Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, translated by Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, 1951). There is a good book-length study of the relationship between history and narrative, with particular reference to Fielding: Leo Braudy, Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding, and Gibbon (Princeton, 1970).
8. Ronald Paulson, 'Fielding in Tom Jones: the Historian, the Poet and the Mythologist', in Augustan Worlds, edited by J.C. Hilson et al. (Leicester, 1978), pp. 175-87.
9. Henry Fielding: Political Writer, pp. 265-66. Brian McCrea points out a couple of minor exceptions to this claim in his book, p. 236.
10. Anthony Kearney, 'Tom Jones and the '45', Ariel, 4 (1973), 68-78 (pp. 68-69).
11. E.g. in The Created Self, pp. 124-28.
12. Using Biography, p. 145.
13. Works, XIII, 119.
14. Fielding, The Female Husband, in 'The Female Husband' and Other Writings, edited by Claude E. Jones (Liverpool, 1960).

15. Terry Castle, 'Matters not Fit to be Mentioned: Fielding's The Female Husband', ELH, 49 (1982), 602-22.
16. Katharine M. Rogers, 'Sensitive Feminism versus Conventional Sympathy: Richardson and Fielding on Women', Novel, 9 (1976), 256-70 (p. 264). There was a totally unconvincing reply from Anthony Hassall: 'Women in Richardson and Fielding', Novel, 14 (1981), 168-74.
17. This book is due to be published by Harvester later this year. I'm extremely grateful to Dr. Smallwood for letting me see the typescript (to which all page numbers in my text refer) and for being willing to share her ideas about the possible relationships between Fielding's novels and eighteenth-century feminism. This quotation comes from p. 139 of her typescript.
18. Joan K. Kinnaird, 'Mary Astell and the Conservative Contribution to English Feminism', Journal of British Studies, 19 (1979), 53-75 (p. 55).
19. Works, XIII, 171.
20. Using Biography, p. 132.
21. C.J. Rawson, 'Professor Empson's Tom Jones', Notes and Queries, n.s. 6 (1959), 400-04 (p. 400).
22. For different analogies between Fielding and Brecht, specifically with reference to Jonathan Wild, see David Nokes's Introduction to his edition of Jonathan Wild (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 14-15, and Claude Rawson, Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal

Under Stress (London, 1972), pp. 111-12, 209-11.

23. Jonathan Culler, Barthes, Modern Masters (Glasgow, 1983), pp. 53, 51.
24. From Brecht's notes to Mahagonny. Cited from John Willett, The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects, revised edition (London, 1977), p. 170.
25. Bertolt Brecht, Collected Plays, edited by John Willett and Ralph Mandheim, translated by John Willett et al., 8 vols (London, 1970 -), II, ii, p. 78.
26. 'Réponses', Tel Quel, 47 (1971), 89-107 (p. 95).
27. Robert Ebert, 'Why Movie Audiences Aren't Safe Any More', American Film, March 1981; Gene Siskel, 'Sneak Previews' (PBS TV, 23 October 1980); Alan Jones, Starburst, no. 46. All quoted from The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media, edited by Martin Barker (London and Sydney, 1984), pp. 117, 50, 49.
28. Marco Starr, 'J. Hills is Alive: A Defence of I Spit On Your Grave', in The Video Nasties, pp. 48-55 (p. 54).
29. Martin Barker, '"Nasties": A Problem of Identification', in The Video Nasties, pp. 104-18 (p. 116).
30. 'Underground Man', in When The Lights Go Down (New York, 1981), pp. 131-35 (p. 135).
31. The Story of Cinema: An Illustrated History, 2 vols (London,

1982-84), II, 1222.

32. From an interview in New Musical Express, 26 April 1986,
p. 11.

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Each section is arranged alphabetically by author, except for the first, which is arranged alphabetically by (short) title.

In compiling this bibliography, I have used the guidelines laid down in the MHRA Style Book (London, 1981). These abbreviations have been used:

- ELH: Journal of English Literary History
HLQ: Huntingdon Library Quarterly
JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLR: Modern Language Review
PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association
PQ: Philological Quarterly

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