

Tom Jones and the Forty-five

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TO an even greater extent than *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones* is the history of its own times. This is not simply because Fielding provides us with a panoramic view of eighteenth-century society, or moves about in areas which Richardson ignores; it is rather because *Tom Jones* universalizes the condition of England in 1745 and gives it the status of myth.

This, of course, was the troubled period of the Jacobite rebellion; an event which alarmed and committed Fielding, and which prompted him to an extraordinary burst of literary activity. As Rupert C. Jarvis, in his study of this activity, has remarked "the rising was something of a watershed in Fielding's life,"¹ and the extent of his involvement with the anti-Jacobite cause can be measured by the appearance between October and November 1745 of *A Serious Address to the People of Great Britain*, *The History of the Present Rebellion in Scotland*, *A Dialogue between the Devil, the Pope and the Pretender*, and a weekly journal, *The True Patriot*, which was to run until June 1746. The collapse of the rebellion in April 1746, moreover, did not mean the end of Fielding's patriotic journalism: between December 1747 and November 1748, he wrote *The Jacobite's Journal*, a paper which ironically argued on behalf of the Jacobite cause. And in 1749, of course, came *Tom Jones*, a novel whose action is unmistakably set in 1745.

Tom Jones' real relation to the Forty-five, however, has yet to be fully worked out. While critics have tended to regard the rebellion as largely incidental to the main concerns of the novel, I should like to argue that Fielding was

writing with the whole episode very much in the forefront of his mind. *Tom Jones*, I think, can be seen, at least in part, as a comic working out of the anxieties which disturbed Fielding between 1745 and 1749. His horrified vision of the nation in danger of being put "under the Protection of a bigotted Popish Prince, educated in the highest Principles of absolute Power"² finds expression in his greatest novel, as well as in his pamphlets and journals, and the comedy of *Tom Jones* has a corresponding darker side. Though the danger passed in 1746, and patriotic Englishmen could breathe again, the extraordinary confusions of the Forty-five revealed a moral disorder in the nation that could not easily be forgotten: *Tom Jones*, I think, while it celebrates an order brought out of great disorder, recreates the elements of the drama which disturbed Fielding in 1745, and represents a coming to terms with the whole experience.

The first six books of the novel contain no clear references to the Jacobite rebellion — and indeed few political references at all, except a few asides on Western's comic Toryism and Mrs. Western's equally comic Whiggism — and this fact alone would indicate that the first third of the novel was written before the late summer of 1745 when the uprising took place.³ But, whatever Fielding's original intentions for the novel, once Tom's journey gets under way in Book VII, the Jacobite theme comes much more obviously to the fore. This can be seen, for example, in the way Fielding places Tom's journey in the context of 1745: Tom falls in with a company of soldiers marching north to fight the rebels, and Fielding adds:

By which the reader may perceive (a circumstance which we have not thought necessary to communicate before) that this was the very time when the late rebellion was at the highest; and indeed the banditti were now marched into England, intending, as it was thought, to fight the king's forces, and to attempt pushing forward to the metropolis.⁴

This is clearly more than a gratuitous gesture towards an actual historical event: Tom's history connects with the

history of England at this point, and his expulsion from Paradise Hall coincides with the moment of crisis which faced the nation in 1745.

From this point on, the rebellion and all that it implies is worked into the main themes of the novel. Fielding's own reactions to Jacobitism show themselves in several different ways, some of them mainly comic, some much more serious. His intense dislike of the Protestant Jacobites, for example, those "who profess the Protestant Religion, while they wish well to the Designs of a Popish Pretender"⁵ is comically worked out in the self-interested antics of Partridge who backs both sides (VIII, ix and XII, vii). Partridge's notable lack of patriotism — which contrasts with Tom's hearty enthusiasm for "the glorious cause of liberty" (VII, xi) — is echoed throughout the kingdom by unthinking Englishmen. The roadside inns are full of self-interested vacillators who utter such incongruities as: "All's our own, boy, ten thousand honest Frenchmen are landed in Suffolk. Old England for ever!" (XI, ii). Though the handling of these episodes is chiefly comic, Fielding presents us with the idea of a corruption working itself through the nation no less insidious than its counterpart the Jacobite invasion itself.

Fielding, however, is not simply the parodist of Jacobitism in *Tom Jones*: in at least two episodes he speaks out in much sharper tones against the implied dangers of the cause. The first of these is where Tom and Partridge encounter the Man of the Hill and hear his lengthy history, and the second takes place when they meet the gipsies on the road to Coventry. In both digressions we are confronted with cautionary reflections which directly relate to Fielding's anti-Jacobite feelings.

The Man of the Hill episode has been attacked as a clumsy interpolation in the main narrative,⁶ but one thing it does do is to frame both Tom's own history and the Forty-five within a larger perspective. The old man's career offers both parallels and contrasts with Tom's; both

suffered at the hands of a villainous brother, and both wandered into temptations of one kind or another — the old man's being rather more extravagant than Tom's. On the face of it, the world of the 1680's, the time of the old man's youth, seems to have exhibited the same follies and vices as the world of 1745. Both, moreover, were politically turbulent times and in 1685 as in 1745 rebellion was in the air. But having lured us to draw these parallels, Fielding immediately makes a striking contrast between the two historical moments: in 1685, when the old man took up arms in Monmouth's cause, there was a Protestant rising against a Catholic king; in 1745, when Tom likewise took up arms for the Protestant cause, the rising was "in favour of the son of that very King James, a profest Papist, more bigotted, if possible, than his father, and this carried on by Protestants, against a king who hath never, in one single instance, made the least invasion on our liberties" (VIII, xiv). The old man, who still belongs to the world of 1685, supplies the appropriate objective judgment on this extraordinary turnabout, when he replies: "you tell me what would be incredible of a nation which did not deserve the character that Virgil gives of a woman, *varium & mutabile semper* . . . Prodigious indeed! a Protestant rebellion in favour of a Popish prince! The folly of mankind is as wonderful as their knavery . . ." (VIII, xiv).⁷

If the world of 1685, whatever its other corruptions, at least had a glimmer of the old Protestant fervour, the world of 1745 was all too ready to give credence to the lies and deceptions of the Jacobites. In the gipsy episode, as Martin C. Battestin has shown,⁸ Fielding sets up an ironic image of the utopia promised by the Jacobite absolutism. The gipsies indeed govern their affairs with admirable justice, but having contrasted the highmindedness of this alien society with the corrupt standards of contemporary English society, Fielding quickly backtracks and denounces the principle of absolute rule upon which the

gipsy society is based. However it may work in the quaint world of the gipsies, arbitrary power can only be pernicious in a modern civilized society, and the Jacobites who advocate it open the way to an absolute tyranny. Fielding concludes this lengthy digression by saying, half-apologetically,

The honest lovers of liberty will we doubt not pardon that long digression into which we were led at the close of the last chapter, to prevent our history from being applied to the use of the most pernicious doctrine which priestcraft had ever the wickedness or the impudence to preach. (XII, xiii)

Like the Man of the Hill episode, the gipsy episode, with its open commentary on the dangers of Jacobitism, is only partly integrated into the novel. Fielding, one feels, in both cases is over-anxiously stating an argument which, in this form at least, belongs to the pamphlets rather than to the novel. On the other hand, both episodes testify to the fact that there were aspects of the Jacobite rebellion which Fielding could only partially come to terms with in his fiction.

He is more successful, however, when he deals with the Jacobite theme less obtrusively and uses the fortunes of his main characters to exemplify, and partly allegorize, the confusions of England in the Forty-five. This is not to argue that Fielding had in mind anything like a system of exact correspondence between what happened in the Forty-five and what happens in the novel; none the less, the parallels are sufficiently clear to argue that he did use the rebellion as a basic matrix for the working out of the novel. Allworthy and Western whose great estates attract a succession of claimants, figure as contrasting types of parent and landed squire — both, however, representative of a sound social order; while Tom and Blifil, in their respective roles as hero and villain, represent opposing types of inheritor — Blifil, despite his technical claim to inheritance, is clearly morally disqualified from his right to carry on the Allworthy-Western line, while Tom, who

is as uncorrupt as his half-brother is corrupt, clearly proves his title as successor. For much of the novel, however, the truth is lost, and Blifil's control of both families suggests the nightmare of an England under the control of the Pretender.

Blifil's successful deception of his uncle and Western, and his ousting of Tom from his rightful inheritance, is achieved by no ordinary degree of hypocrisy: like the Jacobite Pretender he appears at times to be in league with the Devil himself (XII, x; XVII, ii; XVIII, v) and joins to this an undoubtedly Popish cunning. When he leaves Sophia, for example, after his unsuccessful attempt at courtship, he "earnestly begged that no violence might be offered to the lady . . . in the same manner as a Popish inquisitor begs the lay power to do no violence to the heretic, delivered over to it, and against whom the Church hath passed sentence" (VII, vi). Soon afterwards he convinces Allworthy of his good intentions "with such equivocations, that he preserved a salvo for his conscience; and had the satisfaction of conveying a lie to his uncle, without the guilt of telling one" (VII, vi). With this brand of Jesuitical artifice, he has little difficulty in persuading Allworthy that Tom has laid a plot to disinherit him (XVII, vii).

Blifil, of course, is no Catholic prince — and his special kind of sneaking cant links him as much with the Quakers and Methodists in the novel as with the Catholics (VII, x; VIII, viii; XVIII, xiii). None the less, Fielding clearly heightens his villainy with this suggestion of Popish equivocation and links him more closely with the Pretender. This connexion is also made apparent in their parallel careers as usurpers: both move from a position of imminent triumph to ignominious defeat; both take this defeat at the hands of the appropriate hero: the Pretender at the hands of the "glorious" Duke of Cumberland, Prince of the Hanoverian line; Blifil at the hands of Tom, the newly recognized heir to Allworthy's estate. Each villain,

moreover, behaves despicably at the moment of defeat. Of the Pretender's cowardly conduct at Culloden, Fielding wrote:

Thus hath he given a better Evidence than hath yet been produc'd by any Writer in his Favour of his Legitimacy. It seems indeed hard any longer to deny that he is truly descended from James the II^d, and is the Third of his Family who hath basely deserted his own Cause, after having sacrificed the Blood of Thousands of deluded Wretches to support it.⁹

Blifil, too, in the hour of defeat reveals the strain of wretchedness that he inherited from his father. When Tom goes up to his room to deliver the verdict of banishment:

Blifil was at first sullen and silent, balancing in his mind whether he should yet deny all: but finding at last the evidence too strong against him, he betook himself at last to confession. He then asked pardon of his brother in his most vehement manner, prostrated himself on the ground, and kissed his feet: in short, he was now as remarkably mean, as he had been before remarkably wicked. (XVIII, xi)

Both villains at the moment of crisis behave in a base-born manner. Neither, in fact, deserves on grounds of personality alone to take the prize he claims.

If Blifil is the base pretender of the novel, bringing blight and evil in his wake,¹⁰ Tom is clearly the redeeming hero. Not that Fielding casts him simply as that, for during the course of the novel he is likened to a variety of epic figures — Ulysses, Aeneas, Don Quixote, Orpheus and Hamlet. Tom is partly epic hero and partly romantic lover, and Fielding is certainly not above parodying some of his exploits — the famous eating scene at Upton (IX, v), for example, comes readily to mind. Ironically enough, as far as appearances go, it is Tom rather than Blifil who cuts the figure of the Pretender as he moves through the countryside, a dispossessed but undoubtedly romantic character; a bastard in a "laced waistcoat" (VII, x). It is Tom, moreover, who seems to threaten disorder in the households of Allworthy and Western. He is a pretender not only to

Sophia's hand — a lady whose "birth and fortune," as Blifil delights in telling him, have "made her so infinitely your superior" (VII, ii); but also to Allworthy's estate — "it seems very surprising," says the sly Dowling, "that you should pass for the relation of a gentleman, without being so" (XII, x). For much of the novel Tom appears in the role of the disreputable adventurer; or, as Lady Bellaston informs Lord Fellamar, "one of the lowest fellows in the world . . . a beggar, a bastard, a foundling, a fellow in meaner circumstances than one of your lordship's footmen" (XV, ii).

The confusions of Tom's journey to London — that is, the mistaken identities, the wrong turnings, the general uproar of flight and pursuit, and so on — are partly a reflection of Tom's own sense of dislocation, but even more so, I think, a reflection of a more prevalent social and moral disorder. These are the times when the stable world of the Allworthys and the Westerns — like the kingdom itself — gives way to a kind of anarchic state: the villain is able to masquerade as the hero, while the hero is forced to take to the road like a villain; even the heroine is obliged to run away like a delinquent and can easily be mistaken for "that nasty, stinking wh-re, (Jenny Cameron they call her) that runs about the country with the Pretender" (XI, viii).

By no means all these confusions are treated comically. Though a good deal of laughter is generated by the boisterous misunderstandings along the route to London, the implications for Tom and Sophia are real enough. Even Partridge's lugubrious observations sometimes have their serious side. At one point, for example, he remarks with great allegorical insight: "The Lord knows whither we have got already, or whither we are going: for sure such darkness was never seen upon earth, and I question whether it can be darker in the other world" (XII, xii). This darkness envelops the action of the novel as it enveloped the England of the Forty-five. The right way has been

lost in *Tom Jones* and the establishing of real identities, like the unmasking of the Jacobite Pretender, ultimately, one feels, owes as much to the mysterious workings of Providence as it does to the efforts of clear-sighted men.

Despite Fielding's threats to end the novel in tragedy, however — and one wonders whether he got a certain unhealthy satisfaction in contemplating a conclusion of murder and incest (XVII, i) — the reader is never in much doubt that Providence will see it through. In the reversal of fortunes which takes place near the end, Blifil and Tom exchange roles and assume their real identities. The two brothers have been anti-types from the beginning, and when the confusions are cleared up in the final chapters, Tom's misdemeanours dwindle to nothing beside Blifil's villainies. If Tom is advised by his uncle to be more prudent in future, this is clearly no recommendation to take Blifil's kind of prudence as a model (XVIII, x). Tom, at least, is capable of self-improvement; Blifil is beyond redemption and is fittingly banished to the remote north (XVIII, xiii).

The ending of the novel celebrates the restoration of order with Tom and Sophia entering upon their rightful inheritance. Their marriage unites and secures the two great estates which have been endangered by two generations of Blifils, and also creates a model world of contented social order with happy neighbours, tenants and servants. There is even room for a comic dispossession when Tom and Sophia move into Western's house and the old Squire moves happily off to another property. The arrival of Parson Adams (who also figures in Fielding's political writings as well as in *Joseph Andrews*) as Allworthy's new chaplain and promised tutor to Sophia's children augurs well for the future of this model of an ideal England.

Shortly after the victory at Culloden, Fielding wrote:

Whoever will cast his Eyes a few months backwards, and attentively consider the Situation in which the Public then stood, will, when he compares it with our present Condition, be obliged to own, that no Nation hath ever

emerged so suddenly from the very Brink of Ruin, to a state of present Safety, and to the fairest Prospect of future Felicity.¹¹

The ending of *Tom Jones*, with its joyful contemplation of social and moral order, celebrates an emergence from the brink of ruin which undoubtedly relates to the history of the Forty-five.

Having said this, I must reiterate that *Tom Jones* is in no sense an exact allegory of the Forty-five. The original impulse of the novel belongs to the period before the rebellion and there is much in its picaresque and comic form to remind us of the earlier fiction. As the numerous studies of Fielding have shown, it is also a novel that defies any too simple categorization of its concerns: in part, at least, it deals as much with the question of what fiction is, as with the narration of fictional events. Its main characters, too, clearly relate to an allegorical tradition which is a-historical, and Tom's journey towards self-knowledge and self-identification reminds us of *Everyman* and *Pilgrim's Progress* as well of the Forty-five.

None the less, when this has been conceded, there can be no doubt that Fielding was disturbed enough by the Forty-five to explore some of its implications in *Tom Jones*. The movement from crisis to victory in the novel illuminates the larger drama which faced the nation in 1745: the domestic discords and betrayals of the novel, and its themes of inheritance and mistaken identity, correspond with the critical issues which troubled England in that year. Its ending corresponds to the mood of jubilation which followed the routing of the Jacobite forces in April 1746.

Tom Jones, then, is very much the patriotic novel — the epic of its own times. At the same time, however, its significance is by no means limited by the historical events which it explores and interprets. Rather it is the Forty-five itself which takes on new interest and meaning in the universalizing myth of Fielding's novel. In *Tom Jones* we have a superb dramatization of the forces which bring about ruin or victory in a nation's history, and, in this way,

the happenings of the Forty-five are set in their own wider context.

NOTES

- ¹Rupert C. Jarvis, "Fielding and the Forty-Five," *Notes and Queries*, 201 (1956), 392. Jarvis, however, is concerned with the pamphlets and says little about *Tom Jones*. His three interesting articles appeared in the following numbers of *Notes and Queries*: (1956), 391-94 and 479-82, and 202 (1957), 19-24.
- ²*The True Patriot*, No. 6 (10 December 1745). Pages not numbered.
- ³Martin C. Battestin, "Introduction," in *Tom Jones*, Twentieth Century Interpretations, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 6.
- ⁴Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (London: Collins, 1955) VII, xi. This edition is based on the 3rd ed. (1749). Subsequent references to the text are in parentheses and are to the Collins ed.
- ⁵*The True Patriot*, No. 24 (8 to 15 April 1746).
- ⁶See, for example, Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 268.
- ⁷As Gerard E. Jensen has shown, Fielding made several revisions in this chapter for the third edition of the novel. These revisions considerably sharpened his polemic against the Jacobites and set out "his pious and fervid concept of Patriotism" more clearly than in the other editions. "Proposals for a Definitive Edition of Fielding's *Tom Jones*," *The Library*, 18 (1937), 314-30.
- ⁸Martin C. Battestin, "Tom Jones and 'His Egyptian Majesty': Fielding's Parable of Government," *PMLA* 82 (1967), 68-77.
- ⁹*The True Patriot*, No. 27 (29 April to 6 May 1746).
- ¹⁰Irvin Ehrenpreis plausibly suggests that Blifil's name is a compound of "blight and evil." *Fielding: Tom Jones*, Studies in English Literature (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), p. 62.
- ¹¹*The True Patriot*, No. 26 (22 to 29 April 1746).