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# Moral basis in Fielding's irony

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# MORAL BASIS IN FIELDING'S IRONY

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There rarely has been published a book in any language which is lighter, brighter or more "mirthfully ironic" than Tom Jones.[1] Yet, the modern emphasis on Fielding's serious concern for moral values tends to obscure the nature of his comedy. This comedy is an agent through which he shows his reader mankind's shortcomings. Specifically through the use of all types or irony, we are made to see the ridiculous nature of many of our actions as well as the necessary methods of correction.

Fielding does not intend, however, to ridicule mankind; he does not hold folly and vice up to scorn, but rather to be inspected. Fielding avoids biting satire; his humor in Tom Jones is without malice. His reader is not angered but made to smile when shown his vanities, hypocrisies and misconceptions. It was Fielding's strong belief that ideas of grave importance should be compatible with a comic method.

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[1]F. Holmes Dudden, Henry Fielding: His Life, Works and Times (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 694.

He believed that both wit and humor could be successfully exerted on even the most solemn of subjects.[2]

Fielding's masterpiece, Tom Jones, is the embodiment of this idea. Although the comic tone pervades the novel, one is continually aware of the fact that the author is not only interested in amusing, but also in mildly instructing. Briefly, the nature of the intent of this comedy in Tom Jones is founded on a universal standard which appeals to reason and common sense. According to Fielding, any private actions or social manners which are not based on either of these two are probably mere affectations. All men are allowed to see the absurdity of humanity and to see what is in contrast with what should be.[3]

Beneath everything which Fielding wrote, he shows a firm belief in the irony of life and in the beauty of sanity. This is the more serious undercurrent which runs beneath his comic spirit; this spirit is merely a weapon for making men see their follies.[4] The purpose of this paper is to show that irony is the agent of this comic spirit, and is used to express Fielding's moral code; that is to say, that Fielding's irony

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[2]William B. Coley, "Background of Fielding's Laughter," Journal of English Literary History, XXVI (June, 1959), p. 232.

[3]Aurelien Digeon, The Novels of Fielding (London: George Rutledge and Sons, Ltd., 1925), pp. 169-170.

[4]Ethel M. Thornbury, Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Studies, 1931), P. 160.

has a firm moral basis. In the first half of this paper, I shall attempt to explain both the purpose of and methods used in this irony. The second part of the paper will deal specifically with Tom Jones and will endeavor to show the many types of irony there. Tom Jones is by no means the only one of Fielding's works which exemplifies this use of irony. However, it is, of all Fielding's works, the best example and most thorough use of irony; and, therefore, I have formed my discussion around this novel.

Fielding's intentions in writing Tom Jones were to correct what he believed to be corruptions and hypocrisies in his society. In this novel, Fielding is especially successful in giving an honest and forthright portrayal of human life in the first half of the eighteenth century in England. In so doing, he was able to satirize existing conditions, habits, and laws.[5] It is, however, through the irony in this particular novel, that the author establishes his attitude toward his world. It is through the ironies that he implies its moral and aesthetic inadequacies, "his irony is inseparable from the decorum of his style." They work together to control our reactions to his world; his statements affirm his underlying moral-aesthetic viewpoint.[6] Fielding's ability to articulate this standard of morality places him with the great masters of universal laughter such as Aris-

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[5]Virginia E. Dorey, Satire of Fielding's Dramatic Works (Master's Thesis, U. of Va., August, 1950, #1767), p. 36.

[6]Robert Alter, Fielding and the Nature of the Novel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 102.

tophanes, Cervantes, Rabelais and Moliere. These men all saw discrepancies in the social order around them and were able to reveal the false nature of mankind. Their audiences were made aware of their shortcomings, yet so clever were the writers that the realization was not painful but delightful. Fielding, like these men, shows a subtle appreciation of values which enhances his reader's ability to observe.[7]

Even before Fielding began his writing of Tom Jones, he had developed an effective satirical method which can be seen as a preliminary step toward the irony in Tom Jones. Much of the early satire found in plays and essays is biting and aimed directly at particular individuals; whereas in Tom Jones, the milder irony is aimed at types of persons and at all mankind.

Between the years 1730 and 1737, Fielding was very much involved in the theater. Most of his plays were satirical comedies; Tom Thumb, Tragedy of Tragedies, The Letter Writers, The Distrest Mother, The Covent Garden Tragedy, The Welsh Opera, Temple Bean, Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild, Pasquin and The Historical Register are all typical of this sort of play. Frequently in these plays, Fielding has a prompter add critical comments from the wings or directly from the stage. In Pasquin, for example, Fielding has the authors, Trapwit and Fustian, along with the Prompter, constantly interrupt the players in order to interject their own thoughts or comments which are usually satirical.

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[7]Digeon, pp. 169-170.

Trapwit interrupts the Prologue:

> Trapwit: Oh! dear sir, seem a little more affected, I beseech you, advance to the front of the stage, make a low bow, lay your hand upon your heart, fetch a deep sigh, and pull out your handkerchief: to you, then, mighty sages of the pit..."[8]

This obvious satire is directed at the overly emotional plays so loved by the "sages of the pit." Fielding also used these interjections to comment on current social manners. Trapwit claims to be about to continue with his play and "show scenes of politeness and fine conversation among the ladies." The conversation then continues:

> Place (a player): Pray, Mrs. Mayoress, what do you think this lace costs a yard:
> Fustian: A very pretty beginning of a polite conversation, truly.
> Trapwit: Sir, in this play I keep exactly up to nature, nor is there anything said in this scene that I have not heard come out of the mouths of the finest people of the age. Sir, this scene has cost me ten shillings in chair hire, to keep the best company, as it is called.[9]

This device of authorial interjection is carried over into Tom Jones, in which a large number of the ironical remarks are made by the narrator.[10] Fielding refrains from putting too many clever witticisms into the mouths of his characters, who might thus sound too clever to be believable.[11] Fielding's satire

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[8]Henry Fielding, Pasquin from Miscellaneous Writings (New York: The Jenson Society, 1903), p. 122.

[9]Ibid., p. 134.

[10]John Butt, Fielding (London: Longman's Greene and Co., 1954), pp. 9-13.

[11]Dudden, p. 690.

goes beyond contemporary people.

Both Tom Thumb, which appeared in 1730, and the Tragedy of Tragedies burlesque heroic tragedy. Tom Thumb burlesques the tragedies of Dryden, Lee and Banks as well as other plays which exhibited heroic characters. The plot of Tom Thumb follows the diminutive hero, Tom, conqueror of "millions of giants." The irony comes through absurd incongruity; for Tom Thumb, the famous warrior, is welcomed cordially in King Arthur's court and promised the hand of the King's daughter in marriage. However, Tom is swallowed by a cow. The play was a huge success, and people were delighted by the incongruity of an alleged tragedy making them laugh.[12] Both The Distrest Mother and The Covent Garden Tragedy burlesque pseudo-classical tragedy. These clever, satirical performances, of course, appeal mostly to the connisseurs of dramatic modes. In the art of burlesque, Fielding surpasses all of his contempories. In fact, the Tragedy of Tragedies, Fielding's most intellectual accomplishment in drama, is considered to be one of the best burlesques in English literature.[13]

One of Fielding's earliest plays, The Letter Writers or A New Way to Keep at Home, satirizes two old men who attempt to keep their young and skittish wives at home. These old men send anonymous letters to their wives threatening violent death if they dare leave home. An ironic situation develops because

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[12] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[13] Ibid., p. 226.

the wives, realizing that the husbands sent the letters, go out even more, and to add to the humiliation, incur added expense by hiring an extra footman for protection. At the end, the old men come to realize their errors, and one of them cries, "If I could bring her to be only as bad as she was before, I should think myself entirely happy."[14]

In 1731, Fielding's Welsh Opera or The Grey Mare the Better Horse was staged at Haymarket. In form it is a ballad opera, but in substance it is a "topical satire," filled with allusions to persons and incidents which were attracting attention in the political and social worlds. Fielding had previously satirized his contemporaries in plays such as Tragedy of Tradedies; however, the allusions to people such as Sir Robert Walpole had been discreetly disguised. The Welsh Opera is far more audacious. Fielding put characters on the stage representing Robert Walpole, William Pulteney, the Prince of Wales, Queen Caroline, and even the King himself.[15] Made bold by the tolerance of the authorities, Fielding extended this play from two to three acts and made the allusions more pointed. He also renamed this play The Grub Street Opera. Here Fielding boldly shows King George II disposing all matters of importance to his energetic wife. At one point, Fielding has the King say, "Let

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[14]Henry Fielding, The Works of Henry Fielding, Vol. I (London: A. Millar, 1762), p. 458.

[15]Dudden, p. 89.

her govern while I fmoke (sic)."[16]

In addition to representing actual people in his drama, Fielding's plays are also rich in characters who are not what they seem to be. Lady Gravely, the affected prude in the Temple Bean and the false Valences in The Fathers, are examples of this type of character. Other plays show ironic incongruities. For example, The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild proves that the "great man" is no better than a gangster.[17]

Through nearly all of Fielding's early work, we see the author recounting adventures to display the ridiculous through the use of irony. The affectation which his irony unearths arises basically from vanity and hypocrisy. This is true in characters from Mrs. Gravely (Temple Bean) to Lady Bellaston (Tom Jones.) This type of character is portrayed as pretending to have more modesty, learning and gentility than he or she actually has.[18]

In addition to the plays, a second literary form which greatly interested Fielding was the journalistic essay. It is, in fact, the essay in which we can see the germ of irony which came to fruition in Tom Jones. In the summer of 1739, Fielding, along with half a dozen book sellers and several businessmen, formed a partnership in a wartime newspaper, The Champion.

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[16]Henry Fielding, The Works of Henry Fielding, p. 478.

[17]Butt, p. 15.

[18]Ibid., p. 17.

This paper summarized home and foreign news, reviewed books, and attacked or burlesqued Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole. Fielding took the persona of Captain Hercules Vinegar, who set up a "Court of Censorial Enquiry" for the trial and punishment of offenders whom the laws of the King had failed to reach. Thus, through this persona, Fielding castigated all kinds of contemporary abuses. Later in the paper's development, an entire family of Vinegars arose. Each one had a different aspect of life to satirize.[19]

Besides his attacks on Walpole, Fielding made a series of attacks on a current literary figure, Colley Cibber. He satirized Cibber's pretentious affectation to classical learning. He brought Cibber, under a pseudonym, before the Court of Censorial Enquiry to be tried by Captain Vinegar on a charge of murdering the English language.[20] Fielding's targets were always affectation and hypocrisy.[21] In his famous preface to Joseph Andrews, Fielding declared that "Affectation is the only true source of the ridiculous."[22] It is, furthermore, the root of all uncharitableness, and therefore the object of his cor-

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[19]Dudden, pp. 250-252.

[20]Ibid., pp. 257-262.

[21]Dorey, p. 73.

[22]Henry Fielding, "Author's Preface" to Joseph Andrews from The Works of Henry Fielding, p. xxxiv.

rective ridicule.[23]

In The Champion, Fielding wrote time and time again of the deception of the world by appearance. One is prone, according to Fielding, to rely on outward appearance in judging a man or situation; frequently one draws the wrong conclusion. The nature of this deception is that the apparent sign of good is often the real sign of evil, and the appearance of evil is often the sign of good.[24] Although Virtue and Wisdom are the natural enemies of Folly and Vice, in appearance this is not always so. They can disguise themselves and appear to go hand in hand.[25]

Fielding used a variety of forms in The Champion: allegory, in imitation of Swift; a letter from a fictitious correspondent; the solemn exhortation; the character sketch; dissertation on a grave topic; and finally the light, humorous satirical pieces. Of all these methods, he is most effective with ironical humor, and he used it most often. As far as the style used to write The Champion, we find it neither very elegant nor elevated. However, the writing is generally good, and like Tom Jones, marked by a variety of allusions to class-

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[23]Martin C. Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1927), pp. x-xi.

[24]Eleanor N. Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones (University, Ala.: Univ. of Ala. Press, 1965), p. 19.

[25]Robert N. Roth, A Study of Henry Fielding's The Champion (Master's Thesis, U. of Va., 1952, #1876), p. 37.

ical authorities.[26] From these literary endeavors, Fielding brought a wealth of experience in satire to the production of Tom Jones.[27] It is probably because of this early interest in portraying ironic situations that Fielding was able to develop his ironic technique to near-perfection in Tom Jones.

To understand Fielding's moral code, one must first come to grips with the fact that, according to Fielding, evil is often disguised in the habits of the good.[28] Here we have one of the classic situations of irony: the paradoxical nature of reality. In these situations, the present reality, when compared to the ideal looks ridiculous and is often a source of humor. It is in this that Fielding excells. His moral code emerges through these ironies. According to this moral code, every deed must be judged not merely by its consequences, but also by its motives. Fielding firmly believed that "the moral value of an action is essentially dependent upon the state of mind of the man who has committed it."[29] Virtue lies not in the accomplishment of the action but in the intention. The irony comes into play when we see that frequently a seemingly good action is inspired by a selfish motive. We also perceive irony in the conflict between natural feelings and the appear-

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[26]Dudden, pp. 264-266.

[27]Butt, p. 29.

[28]Roth, p. 37.

[29]Digeon, pp. 164-165.

ances which disguise them.[30] The moral conflict is between the character and the conduct. Fielding never allows an action to pass at face value. He emphasizes the discrepancy between appearance and reality by discussing the motivation behind the action.[31] Through comparisons and contrasts of character and situation, he instructs his reader that sanity must prevail and that orthodox morality is important.

Although moral correction is Fielding's purpose, irony is definitely his agent. A good deal of Fielding's instruction deals not with warnings against vice, but with the explanation of the nature of virtue. He had very definite ideas on this subject and felt strongly that many people in his era did not fully comprehend its meaning. Too much emphasis was placed on the appearance which a man's life gave, whereas what was truly virtuous was often something which did not give that appearance at all.[32] The essence of morality is in making distinctions. Sins of the flesh are not so unvirtuous, according to Fielding, as are sins of greed or uncharitableness to one's neighbor. The irony is, however, that often, as we see in Tom Jones, generosity and unselfishness are responsible for many

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30Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), pp. 68-69.

31Ronald Paulson, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth Century England (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 143.

32Dudden, p. 683.

a man's being victimized by the scheming world. However, without the virtues of generosity and unselfishness, man cannot be happy; ironically the world often punishes him for them.[33]

Fielding's attempt to enlighten his readers about the ironies in life was in keeping with eighteenth century trends. Moralization in comedy was a very prominent practice. His concept of irony is that it brings about a conclusion through indication of the opposite.[34] Fielding satirizes the actions of people leading their ordinary lives. He believed and states in the preface to Joseph Andrews that "life everywhere furnished an accurate observer with the ridiculous."[35] Fielding's irony, in contrast with the sharp satire of his contemporaries, is particularly interesting in its intent. Rather than being radically disturbing (such as that of Swift), Fielding is gently satirical of any deviation from a healthy and reasonalbe social morality. His irony is that of "integration rather than disintegration."[36] The most important characteristic of Fielding's irony is sanity. He was attempting to create social stability through his irony, and he was, at the same time, trying to re-

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[33]Bergen Evans, "Introduction" from Tom Jones (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), p. viii.

[34]Hutchens, p. 25.

[35]Fielding, "Author's Preface" to Joseph Andrews, p. xxxi.

[36]A.R. Humphreys, "Fielding's Irony: Its Methods and Effects" from Fielding : A Collection of Critical Essays, Ronald Paulson, ed., (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 183.

inforce orthodox morality.[37] In this respect, Fielding's irony represents the social stability of his age.[38] It is, however, through a satire of this same society that Fielding conveys to his readers his thorough dislike for hypocrisy and affectation.[39]

In the moral code which emerges from this use of irony, we see much that goes against the grain of the standard eighteenth century thought. In contrast to many philosophers who believed that man is "a creature depraved and totally bad," Fielding believed that much of the evil in the world arrived here purely by accident.[40] Swift believed that men are born with very little moral sense and, therefore, depend on guidance from the church as well as from tradition in general. Fielding believed, on the other hand, that man is naturally good.[41] He would not, however, overlook the presence of evil; "Though I am unwilling to look on human nature as a mere sink of iniquity, I am far from insinuating that it is in a state of perfection."[42]

Fielding's irony "prunes society of its perversions."[43] He attempts to show man's deviations from a "good" moral code.

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[37] Ibid., p. 16.

[38] Roth, p. 52.

[39] Dorey, p. 86.

[40] Battestin, p. 69.

[41] Paulson, p. 136.

[42] Battestin, p. 57.

[43] Humphreys, p. 12.

In showing this deviation, the irony of what is said and what is intended emerges. Man frequently covers a selfish action with an "unselfish excuse." This type of irony reinforces scorn for theory, as opposed to practive, and deviation from common sense. We are convinced that folly, being too prevalent, can never be too much chastised; and common sense, being infrequent, can never be too much reinforced. Fielding's irony pours scorn on hypocrisy. Fielding, writing for the average eighteenth century reader, was trying to encourage good sense. In persuading his readers to use good sense, Fielding had the zeal of the practical reformer.[44]

In attempting to encourage good sense, Fielding's method is strikingly uncomplicated. In his preface to Tom Jones, he asks for the reader's attention and appreciation in both the aesthetic and moral aspects of his book. He continues to say that he hopes his irony would not only amuse but would also draw the serious reader into a consideration of critical matters. He asks his reader to exert his keenest power of judgment and sensation.[45]

Fielding wanted to expose man to himself so that he might contemplate his shortcomings and try to reduce them.[46]

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[44]Ibid., p. 14.

[45]Maurice Johnson, Fielding's Art of Fiction (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pa. Press, 1961), p. 86.

[46]Roth, p. 52.

This exposure consists largely of revealing a character's real identity and removing all false appearances.[47]

Fielding added another aspect to the eighteenth century belief that all writing should have a moral in that he insisted that a writer should blend the "agreeable with the useful." He felt that instruction should be made as palatable as possible.[48] His method was simply to create situations in which he could expose vices and faults, and demonstrate the ridiculous actions resulting from affectation.[49] Fielding achieved this mixture of the agreeable and the useful through his use of irony. There is no doubt, however, that his purpose is moral. He does not, however, tell his story with the graveness of Richardson. In this respect, Fielding owed a great deal to the romance writers of his day. It was they who began the theory that it was necessary for an author to remove all that was dry, harsh or severe from morality and "varnish" it with something so natural and agreeable that it would amuse those whom it was teaching.[50] One of the clearest proofs of Fielding's aim is found in his invocation of Genius, Humanity, Learning, and Experience which opens Book XIII of Tom Jones:

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[47]Thornbury, p. 156.

[48]Arthur L. Cooke, "Henry Fielding and the Writers of Romance," P.M.L.A., XLII (March, 1947), pp. 990-991.

[49]Dorey, p. 31.

[50]Cooke, p. 993.

> Come, thou that hast inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Shakespeare, thy Swift, thy Marivaux, fill my pages with humor, till mankind learn the good-nature to laugh only at the follies of others and the humanity to grieve at their own.[51]

In spite of his mockery of mankind, Fielding had a high regard for humanity and understood mankind. He never blames individuals for their actions, but rather shows them how ridiculous they look.[52] Fielding believed that in order to write with moral purpose, the author must have a good heart, and be capable of feeling. He must, however, also possess wit, "decorated by imagination." Finally, as Fielding said, he must "know the secret of all hearts."[53]

Although modern critics consider the absence of the author a requirement in achieving realism, in Fielding's case, the absence of the narrator would be harmful. Had he simply set down the facts, he would have relinquished the opportunity to use verbal irony.[54] Fielding's admitted purpose of instructing is furthered by his making comments when he feels that his irony is not sufficient to achieve the purpose, and his lessons

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[51]Fielding, Tom Jones from Miscellaneous Writings, Part 3, pp. 262-263.

[52]Dorey, p. 39.

[53]Cooke, p. 992.

[54]Hutchens, p. 32.

might be overlooked.[55] In considering Fielding's method, one is immediately aware that the success of this irony is due largely to his attitude. As a narrator, he is totally detached from the action and situations which he creates, and he takes the reader aloft with him. From an elevated position, the action is observed and comment on.[56] Although narrating, he gives us the impression that he is merely an observer.[57] If reality is observed from too close a vantage point, it is apt to become blurred.[58]

In Tom Jones, we are able to laugh at mankind, as we seem not to be a part of what is transpiring at the moment. It is only slowly that the meaning of Fielding's irony dawns on us. This is a philosophic book concerning judgment and the understanding necessary for good judgment. Our attention is focused on the mind which perceives and judges events. We learn, therefore, to look beneath the surface and discover that one single bad act does not make a man a villan.[59]

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[55]Dudden, p. 1110.

[56]Alter, p. 101.

[57]Humphreys, p. 16.

[58]Alter, p. 101.

[59]John Preston, "Tom Jones and the Pursuit of True Judgment," ELH XXXIII (Sept., 1966), pp. 316-317.

Before beginning a discussion concerning irony, the reader must realize that the basic concept of irony is the bringing about of a conclusion by indication of its opposite and, as stated earlier, the author must be detached in order to achieve this effect. For the purpose of examining ironic technique, it is expedient to divide all irony into two categories: verbal and substantial. Verbal irony is achieved through the position or choice of words; whereas substantial irony is achieved through action, statement, or symbol. In substantial irony, acts and events often defeat expectation by purposely arousing one's expectation and emphasizing an outcome by seeming to lead to its opposite. In verbal irony, words are so chosen or arranged that their denotation, connotation, tone or implied reference points to a certain conclusion, and by so doint, enforce their opposites.[60] Although substantial and verbal ironies are the two most basic types, Fielding uses the whole tradition of irony: dialectic, practical and rhetorical. Because of the large range of his irony, and the diversity of its application, Fielding's use of irony is unsurpassed.[61]

The use of these types of irony will have two main effects on the reader. First there is the light and almost sportive irony which communicates a sharp but pleasant sting to the

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[60]Hutchens, pp. 37-39.

[61]Ibid., p. 25.

reader. This irony criticizes but does not condemn. Fielding castigates what is false and wrong.[62] The reader must be consciously alert in order to seize upon Fielding's variety of irony.

According to Eleanor Hutchens, the most authoritative source on irony in Tom Jones, Fielding makes good use of four types of verbal irony: denotative, tonal, referential, and connotative. All of these types come under the heading of verbal irony. With these types of irony, Fielding focuses our attention to his language.

Miss Hutchens deals with denotative, tonal, and referential irony all in one chapter. She devotes, however, an entire chapter to connotative irony. The reason for this is that Fielding's connotative irony has three techniques: "the shift up, the shift down, and the shift aside."[63] All of these resolve themselves into a single technique in that they all suggest what is not true or good or appropriate and throw it into sharp relief with what is good or appropriate. For example, we have George's killing of the hare seen in a most ironic light when it is called base and barbarous; Mrs. Wilkins' real motives are clearly outlined when her mourning is described in terms of variance with the occasion; the nature of Square's designs on Molly Seagrim is seen as deplorable when "pleasing

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[62]Dudden, p. 1108.

[63]Hutchens, p. 145.

ideas" are mentioned.[64] Furthermore, the reader, shocked by the inapplicability of the ironic word's connotation, makes his own correction and laughs all in an instant, and thus is a participant with the author in forming judgments.[65] Because connotative irony, along with substantial irony, introduces the "prudence theme", this paper treats it last in the discussion of verbal irony and immediately before the discussion of substantial irony.

To Fielding, man uses language as an instrument in two directions. On the one hand, it is often the way in which man justifies his hypocrisies and deceives others. Square and Thwackum both serve as good examples of this. "They give opposite justifications for the same pharisaical morality."[66] Thwackum believed in the total corruption of humanity, and he said that he would leave mercy to heaven.[67] On the other hand, language allows for moral analysis. There is a great deal of irony in this two sided nature of language; the same words can be used toward either good or evil ends. One can easily grasp the idea that Fielding's irony finds its basis in morality.[68]

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., p. 146.

[66] Digeon, p. 152.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Hutchens, p. 10.

Denotative irony needs little illustration or comment. It is simply a flat substitution of a false word for a true one:

> The great are deceived if they imagine they have appropriated ambition and vanity to themselves. These noble qualities flourish as notable in a country church...as in the drawing room.[69]

The word "noble" in this description is obviously used ironically and lets us know exactly what Fielding's opinion is. "Denotative irony sounds a brief, sharp crack of sarcastic humor, without those reverberative qualities that carry the effect of other kinds of verbal irony beyond the boundaries of the ironic words themselves."[70]

Tonal irony stands somewhere between connotative and denotative irony in subtlety and staying power. It is one of the "life-giving excellences of Fielding's prose" because through it one can continually hear the cadences, modulations, pauses and accelerations of the human voice. Tonal irony depends less on the words used than on the raising and lowering of the diction. It is achieved by the sequence in which the words are arranged, by the ordering of clauses and phrases, and sometimes by punctuation. When it depends on the words used, it generally relates to certain words requiring a certain tone of voice when they occur at a given point in the sentence. Words such as indeed never, only are examples of words which demand standard tones

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[69]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part I, pp. 204-205.

[70]Hutchens, pp. 69-70.

when placed in relation with other parts of the sentence. A beautiful example of this sort of irony is found in Fielding's moral comment on Mr. Western:

> It was Mr. Western's custom every afternoon, as soon as he was drunk, to hear his daughter play on the harpsichord.[71]

Here the subordinate clause is casually dropped where something else would be expected (such as, "after finishing his dinner").[72] The moral comment on Western is obvious.

The next type of irony which Miss Hutchens treats is referential irony. Referential irony is the use of words "which by implication, compare or refer a subject to something else which, in comic disparity or dissimilarity, points up the real nature of the subject."[73] Fielding uses this type of irony mainly to give a subject an air of dignity which it does not deserve, thereby making it appear ridiculous. This purpose is generally to emphasize the subject's lack of dignity. To cite an example of this from Tom Jones:

> Now there was an office in the gift of Mr. Fitzpatrick at that time vacant, namely that of a wife: the lady who had lately filled it had resigned or at least deserted her duty. Mr. Fitzpatrick, therefore, having thoroughly examined Mrs. Waters on the road, found her extremely fit for the place which, on their arrival at Bath, he presently conferred upon

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[71]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part I, p. 194.

[72]Hutchens, p. 77.

[73]Ibid., p. 88.

her, and she without any scruple accepted.[74]

The subject is kept, through this use of irony, under comic-moral surveillance.[75]

Connotative irony, more than any other form of verbal irony, contributes to the moral and comic view, andit makes this contribution with an air of ease that distinguishes the entire novel. The other types, because of their obvious nature, add to its exuberance; nevertheless, connotative irony could, without their assistance, perform all the most important functions of verbal irony in Tom Jones. To begin with, connotative irony reflects Fielding's comic-moral belief that a thing may be good or true in one sense but bad in another. To illustrate this type of irony, used to achieve moral criticism, one can look at the episode dealing with Square and Molly Seagrim: "...some well chosen presents from the philosopher so softened and unguarded her heart..." The words "softened" and "unguarded" apply in a literal sense to Molly's coming to terms, but the connotations direct the reader to contrast her case with that of an innocent victim of seduction. The words, therefore, retain their literal meanings, but through connotations, serve to comment on the character.[76]

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[74]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 4, p. 241.

[75]Hutchens, p. 49.

[76]Ibid., p. 47.

These are the four types of verbal irony, and the examples show the moral intent of each. From these examples, we see Fielding's most typical procedure which was to arrange a statement so that its counter meaning slowly dawns on the reader.[77] A fine example of this use of language is found in Fielding's treatment of Bridget's sensual desires. These desires would, if discussed outright, be crude. Fielding, instead, has us infer it, hiding the fact behind clever innuendos. This sort of innuendo implies "a hovering moral judgment." We derive Fielding's innuendo through the discrimination of verbal ambiguities rather than from the "knowing smirk and tattletale whisper of gossip."[78]

The structure of Tom Jones is one of the major examples of substantial irony. The basic pattern of this structure is seen in the activities of the antagonist, Blifil and the protagonist, Tom. They set up the major thematic contrast of cold purdence with impulsive goodness. Behind Blifil forms a line of villains, most notably Square and Thwackum, who try to destroy Tom. These villains are fought to some degree by Allworthy, whose lack of judgment makes his effectiveness in this capacity questionable. After Tom has performed the t asks and undergone the suffering necessary to maturing him, he is reconciled to Allworthy and Western. The villains, who had been dangerous to

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[77]Alter, p. 101.

[78]Ibid., p. 104.

Tom in his youth, are now rendered powerless. Tom, who had the worst imaginable start and who was given very little chance ever to amount to anything, turns out to be "the happiest of all human kind."[79] From this structural irony, one draws a moral lesson in that one (Tom) must acquire prudence in order to compliment his other good qualities. The point is stressed that Tom, who does not veil his natural drives, must learn discretion. We immediately recognize Tom's natural goodness because he has given free rein to it and because he has not developed a mask of appearance.[80]

This leads to Tom's need to acquire prudence. The "prudence theme" illustrates both substantial and verbal irony. It fits into substantial or structural irony in that Tom, who is good, is to acquire, in order to reach full maturity, a trait which all of the evil characters possess. This trait, like language can be used to further either good or evil ends. The evil characters, of course, use prudence to achieve their own selfish ends.[81] On the other hand, it illustrates verbal irony because the association is at odds with the context; yet the word retains most of its literal definition.[82]

The necessity for prudence to complete goodness is one

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[79]Morris Golden, Fielding's Moral Psychology (Amherst, Mass.: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1966), p. 141.

[80]Van Ghent, p. 68.

[81]Johnson, p. 116.

[82]Hutchens, pp. 101-102.

of the major themes of Tom Jones. Fielding obviously approved of prudence, because Tom does not acquire the author's full approval until he has added prudence to his other good traits. When Tom's fortunes approach their lowest, Fielding reminds us that "the calamities in which he is at present involved are owing to his imprudence."[83] Also when matters improve in the last book, Allworthy emphasizes the point:

> You now see, Tom, to what dangers imprudence alone may subject virtue... Prudence is indeed the duty which we own ourselves.[84]

However, despite this positive theme, Fielding uses the words prudence, prudent, and prudential ironically three times as often as he uses them favorably.

To show the reverse prudence theme, one may cite Lady Bellaston. Though she was quite imprudent in protecting her virtue, she was extremely prudent in protecting her reputation. Nightingale breaks the news to Tom that Lady Bellaston has had other lovers who have preceeded him and that he should feel no obligation to her. "She is remarkable liberal where she likes, though let me tell you, her favours are so prudently bestowed that they should raise a man's vanity rather than his gratitude."[85] Ironically, Tom is genuinely grateful for her favours, because

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[83]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 4, p. 187.

[84]Ibid., Part 4, p. 314.

[85]Ibid., Part 4, p. 88.

he is oblivious to her designs as well as to her promiscuity.[86]

When prudence is used to describe Allworthy's housekeeper, Mrs. Deborah Wilkins, it is used with an unfavorable connotation. When she responded to Allworthy's urgent summons in the middle of the night, she was thrown into a terrible fright upon seeing her master in his night shirt. Fielding wrote of the incident:

> ...and the situation which she found her master, will highly justify and applaud her conduct, unless the prudence which must be supposed to attend maidens at that period of life at which Mrs. Deborah had arrived should a little lessen his admiration.[87]

Fielding ironically presents her senseless behavior as the natural manifestation of prudence. Here irony finds the mark of hypocrisy, one of Fielding's favorite targets.[88]

One of the ironies which Fielding unveils is that meanness and selfish calculation are latent in prudence, and ready to flare up whenever a decent motive is absent. That is to say that the word prudence is a major illustration of connotative irony. For example, Mrs. Wilkins' prudence is at first seen to be mere affectation. However, when she

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[86]Hutchens, pp. 110-111.

[87]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 1, p. 10.

[88]Hutchens, pp. 106-107.

learns the identity of the mother of the abandoned baby, the connotation of her prudence changes to sheer villainy: "...she returns triumphant with the news that she has pounced upon the mother of the abandoned baby, and obtained a confession. Then the prudent (my italics) housekeeper was again dispatched to bring the unhappy culprit before Mr. Allworthy,..."[89] The context makes it clear that Mrs. Wilkins is a hypocritical, merciless busybody. It is important here to recognize the connotation of prudent modifying housekeeper. Housekeepers are supposed to be prudent. Fielding, therefore, retains to some degree the favorable connotation, but the irony remains strong.[90]

The apparent contradiction between the positive and the negative meanings of prudence suggests something of the novel's moral purpose. Fielding realized that prudence, the value of which he teaches, involves a degree of calculation. On the other hand, he implies that to live the good life, one must have a capacity for spontaneous feeling and action. The last ideal hardly seems compatable with prudence. This contradiction is embodied in his use of the term. The meaning of this word is repeatedly tested.[91]

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[89]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 1, p. 27.

[90]Hutchens, p. 108,

[91]Alter, p. 39.

In Book IV, Chapter VI, Fielding makes excellent use of double irony. He shows Tom's lack of prudence as it is understood by society, and he adds his own comments with an ironical tone which could almost be considered satirical. He apologizes for Tom's early indifference to all the charms of Sophia. He says that many people will scorn the hero's lack of prudence in neglecting an opportunity to possess himself of Mr. Western's fortunes. Fielding pretends to agree with Tom's critics and says there is no excuse for Tom's lack of prudence.[92] In this instance, Fielding has appealed to our judgment. The reader is made to guess; he is never told outright whether the author is to be taken at his word or not.

The two prudence themes, positive and negative, in Tom Jones may be thought of as one theme given dual treatment. While teaching the desirability of prudence, Fielding points out that it is not the only important trait, and therefore should not get in the way of other more admirable virtues.[93] However, other virtues may be endangered if prudence is not present. This is the case of Tom. Tom's exuberance sometimes ends in pain for others as well as for himself. He is persecuted by a wicked society, but the persecution

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[92]Hutchens, p. 115.

[93]Ibid., p. 117.

benefits him in that it makes him a more balanced person. Tom's good nature drives him to extremes of generosity and love. He is oblivious to appearances, and Fielding keeps emphasizing Tom's need for prudence. Tom finally achieves balance at the end of the novel in his acquisition of this quality.[94] Through Tom, Fielding also tries to show that one's inner good nature does not necessarily assure him a reputation for being a moral man. Tom is judged by nearly everyone as a rogue. Through this ironic incongruity (the exact opposite of Blifil), Fielding hopes to make good men wise enough to protect themselves with prudence.[95] This necessity for prudence to accompany goodness is a major theme of Tom Jones. Jones finally acquires "a discretion and prudence very uncommon in one of his lively parts."[96]

Fielding's distrust of words is one reason for his dealing at such length with the idea of prudence as well as with similar qualities which, ironically, have been made to seem trivial by society. "Such qualities which are necessary to describe, support, and direct the good disposition, become counters for the ill-disposed in their operations in the corrupt world of appearances."[97] Prudence, for example,

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[94]Paulson, p. 138.

[95]Dudden, pp. 684-685.

[96]Eleanor Hutchens, "Prudence in Tom Jones," Philological Quarterly, XXXIX (Oct., 1960), p. 496.

[97]Golden, p. 150.

becomes a mask for cold withdrawal, or manipulation as with Blifil; love becomes a delusion or hypocritical name for lust as with Lady Bellaston; reason becones an excuse for repression of others as with Thwackum; and charity, the most glorious ideal of all, becomes a word invoked by selfishness.[98]

Fielding frequently defines his terms by first showing their false senses and then building them back up by means of "exemplification" of their true meanings. Prudence is perhaps, of all of Fielding's terms, the one which is submitted to the most severe ironic test. The negative meaning operates in collaboration with the positive definition.[99]

Prudence is not the only much-used word in Fielding's ironic vocabulary. There are many others. This vocabulary consists of words which he and others of his time believed to be in the process of becoming corrupted. Great man, to cite another example, had become so contaminated by its association with the politically powerful that Fielding believed its original sense of moral grandeur was being lost through popular usage.[100] Sentence after sentence in Fielding's fiction proves to be, after a second consideration, a series

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[98]Ibid., p. 151.

[99]Glenn W. Hatfield, "Fielding's Irony and the Corruption of Language," Dissertation Abstract, XXV (Aug., 1964), p. 1194.

[100]Ibid., p. 1195.

of words and phrases in invisible quotation marks, the terminology used by polite society to hide its dishonesties: innocent freedoms, matrimonial charms, people of fashion, virtue, honor, love.[101] His irony tried to separate the growth of corruption from the original or proper meaning of language. Many of these much used words acquired a built-in potential for irony.

Fielding's ironic response to the corruption of language is not limited to purification or defining particular words. His distrust of language, in general, as the medium of truth and his sense of the subjective limitations of the human agent of truth are reflected in his techniques and mannerisms. The self-conscious manipulation of style, the prefaces to chapters, along with other intrusions are all attempts to objectify the author and the process of communication. This is to free them from suspicion of bias or insincerity, the most basic of all corruptions.[102]

Fielding's controlled pattern of writing is in complete accord with his basic love of stability and reason. Even his interruptions in the narrative are confined to a special chapter which acts as a preface to each book. One must, however, reread Tom Jones in order to appreciate fully

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[101]Alter, p. 37.

[102]Hatfield, p. 1195.

the clearness of the construction. It would be impractical to take the entire book apart piece by piece; however, I will note three important divisions: the beginning, the middle, and the end. To begin with, the first fifty pages bring the characters without confusion onto the stage. Chapters IX and X, situated mathematically in the middle of the book, narrate the central point of the action. These chapters are set in the Upton Inn, where the two pursuits, (Sophia after Jones and Western after Sophia), come to a halt under one roof. It is at this point that Fielding moves toward the denouement by ironically reversing the process and having Tom pursue Sophia on the road to London where they finally unite.[103] We can see the aesthetic necessity of the extensive plot in Tom Jones because the epsiodes must culminate functionally toward an end in which character is revealed. Thus we see Fielding's extraordinary control as he uses various episodes, yet achieves "unity of action."[104]

Fielding always has control of his characters, even under themost farcical situations. This is a necessary quality if one is to achieve effective irony, for the effectiveness of irony rests largely in its subtle nature. The author must be constantly aware of exactly what each of his characters does and says in order to lead his reader to the mes-

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[103]Digeon, pp. 172-175.

[104]Van Ghent, p. 68.

sage. His method deals with sharp, formal contrasts of character or point of view.[105] His irony is forthright in its purpose of reinforcing common man's natural tendancy toward good sense.[106]

Being a moral theorist, Fielding was interested in a variety of moral codes in the society around him. The contral governing class in Tom Jones acts by one code and is too proud to look at any other. Fielding shows their narrow concept of honor which generally meant only that a gentleman had to duel when insulted. Fielding implies that the upper class would be happier and better judges of others if they recognized other codes.[107]

Fielding's presentation of the aristocracy's lack of humanity is ironic. Ideally, the aristocracy should do the guarding, governing, and thinking, and most important of all, should set the moral standard for the nation. Herein lies a great discrepancy between what is and what should be. According to Fielding, luxury has corrupted the upper classes. It has encouraged the baser passions through the lure of satisfactions and thus rewarded selfishness.[108]

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[105]Humphreys, p. 191.

[106]Ibid., p. 184.

[107]William Empson, "Tom Jones," Kenyon Review, XX (Spring, 1958), pp. 230-231.

[108]Golden, p. 121.

Fielding condemns the upper class for wanting to increase their own power and position by denying humanity to others. The upper class have very little ability to judge, for they tend to base all moral judgments on superficial manners.

Ironically, Fielding shows the middle society, or untitled gentry, to be far better morally because they lack the power to do comparable evil. The wealthy members of the middle class, like Allworthy, may be excellent men who possess power. It is power which gives Allworthy his ability to excel. These untitled members of the gentry are far enough away from the artificiality of London not to be influenced by its affectations; furthermore, they have no one above them. However, while such freedom may lend itself to goodness, it can also produce the likes of Squire Western. Fielding's irony, however, displays the middle class, like those above them, in a constant battle for esteem and prerogatives. They have their virtues of plainness and honesty, but they also have a great deal of selfishness, partly excused as a necessary trait for survival in their position of lowness and servility.[109] In addition, the lower class has as much of a predilection to snobbery as the upper class. Fielding steps forth himself to comment on the lower reaches of society:

> Nor are the women here less practiced in the

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[109] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

> highest feminine arts than their far superiors in quality. Here are prudes and coquettes. Here are dressing and ogling, falsehood, envy, malice, scandal; in short, everything which is common to the most splendid assembly, or politest circle.[110]

This turmoil over class distinctions is full of ironies. The novel is set "on the road" where officers may or may not be gentlemen, village girls may pass as "Captain's wives," and servants act like great ladies. Tom, the apparent bastard, shows the courtesy and consideration of a gentleman, whereas someone of breeding such as Mrs. Fitzpatrick completely lacks moral fibre. Jones, who saves Mrs Waters' life by rescuing her from Northerton, shows his kindness and good breeding to further advantage by reconciling Mrs. Waters and the landlady. "Whether cold, shame or the persuasion of Mr. Jones prevailed most on Mrs. Waters, I will not determine, but she suffered herself to be pacified."[111] Fielding is very subtle and coy with his ironic description of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's affair with "the noble peer." At any rate, she had been going to great lengths to impress Sophia with the fact that she had been completely abused by her husband only to begin an affair with another man.

Sophia was soon eased of her causeless fright

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[110]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part I, p. 205.

[111]Ibid., Part 2, p. 337.

> by the entry of the noble peer, who was not only an intimate acquaintance of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, but in reality a very particular friend of that lady. To say the truth, it was by his assistance that she was able to escape from her husband... and he had delivered many an imprisoned nymph from durance.[112]

In London the upper classes are "so entirely made up of form and affectation that they have no moral principles at all."[113] Their violent passions are covered with superficial good manners, and they are deluded into believing that their social inferiors are also their moral inferiors. Lady Bellaston, evil and selfish under her veneer, suggests to Lord Fellamar that they have Tom abducted by a press gang. Since penalties for crimes committed by the nobility are small, she has little to fear from the law.[114]

In the lower classes, we see an ironic combination of tyranny and servility. Mrs. Wilkins, for example, is extremely obsequious to anyone of higher social status; yet she tyrannizes her inferiors. This same trait appears in the waiting women of Sophia and Mrs. Western. Their superficial codes of propriety are totally disconnected from their inner disposition, just as prudence for Blifil, reason for Square, and honor or character for a serving woman are used as the perversions of attractive ideals.[115] Honor

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[112] Ibid., Part 3, p. 148.

[113] Ibid., Part 3, pp. 342-343.

[114] Golden, pp. 110-111.

[115] Ibid., p. 112.

says to Sophia, "I hope your ladyship will not mention a word, for he gave me a crown never to mention it... one's virtue is a dear thing to us poor servants, for it is our livelihood."[116] Although her betrayal is unconscious, her lack of virtue is obvious. Mrs. Wilkins' anger at being lumped together with the rest of the servants is subject to ironical treatment. "It is a fine encouragement to servants to be honest; and to be sure, if I have taken a little something now and then, others have taken ten times as much, and now we are all put in a lump together."[117] Just as in the case of Honour, we see one of Fielding's favorite ironic devices - misused logic.[118]

Not even the men servants are spared by Fielding. They are shown as judging others just as the rest of society judges. They judge their masters not on their moral or intellectual qualities, but on their wealth and social position. Through the power of their masters, they expect, of course, to enhance their own prestige.[119]

Fielding makes other comments on society, veiling them in comic irony. An example of this device is Partridge's story of the horse thief who was convicted without

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[116]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 2, p. 119.

[117]Ibid., Part 1, p. 304.

[118]Eleanor Hutchens, "Verbal Irony in Tom Jones," P.M.L.A., LXXXVI (October, 1962), p. 46.

[119]Golden, p. 113.

having a chance to defend himself. However, the thief's ghost, according to Partridge, rights the wrong by returning to beat up the man who brought the charges against him. The latter told the story to Partridge and as Partirdge says, "he had not drank above a quart or two of liquor at the time."[120] We can easily detect Fielding's sympathy with the poor convicted man crushed by justice, but they there is the almost sudden comic conclusion.[121]

The great danger in the division of society is the self-enclosure of the classes: noblemen, for example, cannot understand the problems of poverty, and therefore their interest in helping its victims and their own moral improvement are quite limited. The wealthy have difficulty in sympathizing with goals not attainable through money, and the lower classes, who must fight to live and satisfy their own appetites, understand no motive but selfishness. As we watch the ironic implications of the blindness of one class toward another, our awareness of the variety of human nature in society is increased.[122]

Fielding believed that his contemporaries laid too much importance on pious speech, seemly action and decorous behavior. In order to explode this fallacy, he created an

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[120]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 2, p. 271.

[121]Digeon, p. 192.

[122]Golden, p. 122.

effective incongruity in his villain, Blifil. Outwardly, Blifil is irreproachable, discreet and prudent. Inwardly, he is vile and selfish. Through the ironic juxtoposing of inward and outward qualities, Fielding teaches his reader not to make moral judgments based on appearances. We learn to base our opinions on "inner nature."[123] Fielding wanted to set the reader up as a judge who never loses perspective.[124] We are made aware of the ironies of what *is*, as opposed to what *seems*.

In *Tom Jones* life is reduced to a conflict between instinctive feeling and inhibited feeling. Inhibited feeling is regulated by: "intellectual theories, rigid moral dogmas, economic conveniences, doctrines of 'chic' or social 'respectibility.'" This constitutes the broad thematic contrast in *Tom Jones*. Therefore, in the novel there is:

> "...a constant eruptive combat, and the battlefield is strewn with debris of ripped masks, while exposed human nature - shocked to find itself uncovered and naked - runs on shivering shanks and with bloody pate, like the villagers fleeing from Molly Seagrim in the famous churchyard battle.[125]

Time and again in Tom Jones, the conflict arises in the irony of appearance versus reality, particularly the conflict between natural andinstinctive feelings and the

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[123]Dudden, p. 683.

[124]Paulson, pp. 140-142.

[125]Van Ghent, p. 68.

appearances which disguise them.[126] Other conflicts of the same nature such as benevolence versus malevolence, warm-heartedness versus cold-heartedness constitute the substantial irony of Tom Jones. Just as the straight-forward plot moves from misfortune to prosperity, Tom represents the favorable qualities and Blifil the bad ones in a playing of the theme. Although Tom is good and Blifil evil, the ironic treatment has Tom seem to be the devil and Blifil a saint.[127]

An excellent example of this appearance versus reality theme is the incident in which Blifil releases Sophia's pet bird. The scene shows vivid character portrayal: Blifil's wickedness is disguised and made to look like kindness and poor Tom comes to grief because of his generosity.[128] Blifil's deliberate deceit in this deed finds its irony in its plausibility. The plain lie is ironic if the teller mistakenly believes that he is deceiving the auditor, but here the irony is not in the lie itself, but in defeat of the liar's expectation. Blifil is a master of the plausible lie. His alleged reason for carrying off the bird is framed to fit in with known circumstances and to make his underlying aims appear to be the reverse of what they are.[129] Another

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[126] Ibid., p. 69.

[127] Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones, p. 67.

[128] Thornbury, pp. 66-67.

[129] Hutchens, p. 49.

of the most classic examples of appearance versus reality is the scene in which Square is discovered cowering under the covers of Molly Seagrim's bedroom. Square has appeared, until this moment, as a thoroughly virtuous man. Now in an instant we see him for what he is, a hypocrite guided by lust.

Ironic complexity comes into play when the reader is made to realize that besides action, even a man's motive is difficult to evaluate as being good or evil. One must remember that Fileding's subject matter is human nature. Through Fielding's use of real flesh and blood, his revelation of goodness has more impact than it would had he used characrers who were either all good or all bad.[130] If one is constantly good, as Tom is not, his goodness seems inhuman and has little reality. Mrs. Honour's motive in her decision to help Sophia escape from her father was not completely good. Although she did want to help Sophia, her position if she were an accomplice would be obviously more favorable, as she could tell Squire Western of his daughter's plans and be in his good graces, or she could hold her knowledge over Sophia's head using it as a means of bribery. Thus her action is good, but her motives are definitely mix-

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130Van Ghent, p. 68.

ed and mainly selfish.

Tom and Sophia are both imperfect. When each contemplates giving up the other for the sake of honor and filial piety, they swell with secret pride at their own nobility. The irony rests in the result that what they most dreaded to do becomes desirable - not for noble reasons, but for reasons of vanity.[131]

One of Fielding's most successful methods of showing the discrepancy between appearance and reality is through the use of contrasts: not only contrasts of characrers, but contrasts of situations. The whole structure of the novel is characterized by quick changes of mood or scene which often bring about a comic effect. A new chapter will bring a new situation for the characters, or different characters in a similar scene for ironical contrast.[132]

This technique was probably acquired from his experience in the theater. In the wild, free-for-all at the Upton Inn, for example, Squire Western has no trouble quickly directing his chase of Sophia to a chase for a fox. Many of the smaller, less obvious action changes read like stage directions.[133] Surprise often comes into play in the con-

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[131]Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones, p. 45.

[132]Watt, "Fielding as A Novelist" from Twentieth Century Interpretations of Tom Jones (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), pp. 26-27.

[133]Alter, p. 50.

tradiction between word and deed of a character. Square, the philosopher, gives a profound discourse on ethics and good conduct and immediately thereafter bites his tongue and fails to restrain an earthy curse. The surprise is caused by our sudden realization of Square's lack of self-control.[134]

This contrast also includes ironic reversals of situations. Captain Blifil's dreams of the land which he will inherit upon Allworthy's death are shattered when he dies first.[135] Fielding generally uses happy, rather than unhappy reversals so that the irony is comic rather than tragic.[136] Western's reversal of emotion when he hears Sophia is in love, against his orders, shows his inability to control his passions.[137] Sometimes Fielding will reverse a truth to reveal a person's moral fibre. Mrs. Wilkins is exposed as a hypocrite when Fielding states that she is in a "great fright" at seeing Allworthy in his shirt. Here the narrator is reporting as fact the lies which the characters are telling.[138] After Mrs. Wilkins had taken such a long time to fix her hair, one might think that she expected to be called into Allworthy's room. Her fright is explained by

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[134]Digeon, p. 188.

[135]Hutchens, Irony in Tom Jones, p. 42.

[136]Ibid., p. 43.

[137]Ibid., p. 54.

[138]Ibid., p. 56.

Fielding:

> It will not be wondered at that a creature who had so strict a regard for decency in her own person should be shocked at the least deviation from it in another.[139]

This concise antithesis produces an ironic formulation and makes us look at Mrs. Wilkins' two unrelated actions - one as a result of vanity, the other of prudery.[140] The two actions are related; ironically, however, they are not related in the way which Fielding leads us to believe. Mrs. Wilkins perhaps had a vague expectation of being called at that hour to Allworthy's room. However, she would scarcely admit this to herself, and her shock at seeing him in his shirt might be a spinster's fear of what she unconsciously anticipates. Thus we are led to consider all of these unmentioned factors by Fielding's seemingly simple and uncomplicated explanation.[141]

Fielding's use of obvious contrasts of characters is one of his methods of calling our attention to what he considers to be right. Using Tom and Blifil as pivotal characters, Fielding has demonstrated this contrast of two opposing extremes. Tom's naivete causes him, as well as the reader, many anxious moments. His naivete frequently puts him in a bad light, and he thus appears to have evil designs.

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[39]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 1, p. 10.

[40]Alter, p. 55.

[41]Ibid., p. 54.

This fantasy, which began on the day he was born, develops the myth of his wickedness. It is ironic, indeed, that Fielding's thoroughly good natured character and kind hearted hero is taken for a rogue by almost everyone. On the other hand, we have Blifil, who is a villain, but who, through careful disguise and other surreptitious design, appears saintly. Throughout his life, Blifil continued to do harm while pretending to be noble. Blifil is a honey-tongued hypocrite.

One can divide all of the characters of the novel into categories of good and evil with Tom leading the former list and Blifil the latter. Fielding shows the good characters, like Tom, constantly having their good intentions and deeds misunderstood as being evil; while he shows the evil characters constantly engaged in masking and disguising their intentions and deeds so as to have them considered benevolent. Therefore we are presented with the ironic situation of having the naturally good thought to be bad, as in the case of Tom, and the naturally bad thought to be good (Blifil ).

In some of the characters, the irony rests in their mixed nature. One minute they project one image, and the next minute they project one completely different. This is seen in the subtle handling of Harriet Fitzpatrick. She is both good and false, sensitive and unscrupulous. Her actions are totally incongruent. While travelling to Lon-

don with Sophia, she begins to describe the agonies of childbirth. In the course of this conversation, she shifts from being an object of one's compassion to becoming a pretentious boor (bragging of her linguistic ability). Originally going to London to seek protection at the home of an Irish peer, she never once goes to his home. She is seen at the end of the book, living in the polite end of London spending three times her income yet managing to stay out of debt.[142]

This ironic conflict of traits is also a conflict between benevolence and malevolence. We see malevolence through self-interest. On the other hand, benevolence involves a candor as one's working attitude toward one's fellow man: a disposition to expect the best of human nature. Tom and Allworthy both make mistakes because of their impulses and misjudgments. They are obviously at a disadvantage when pitted against the self-interest of Blifil, Thwackum, Square or Lady Bellaston. Ironically, candor will often win over seemingly superior circumstances. Tom's difficulties in the end are cleared up; whereas the evil traits of other characters result in adverse conditions (Blifil is disinherited).[143]

Allworthy's good nature is different from Tom's in

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[142]Elizabeth Jenkins, Henry Fielding (London: Morrison and Gibb, Ltd., 1948), p. 71.

[143]Alan D. McKillop, "Some Recent Views of Tom Jones," College English, Vol. 22 (Oct., 1959), p. 19.

that his feelings are not divorced from his mind; his emotions are not so raw as those of Tom. When Allworthy's values are reversed and shrewdness takes the place of natural good feeling, a comic effect is achieved. An example of this is Allworthy's turning Tom out of his house because Thwackum, Square and Blifil told him that Tom had been drunk during Allworthy's sickness and was generally leading a villainous existence. In other characters - Thwackum, Square, Lady Bellaston - shrewdness becomes intelligent because it does not have its base in natural feelings. (It is necessary here to remember Fielding's belief in the natural goodness of man). Tom takes his place at the other extreme because he acts from the heart.[144]

We find effective irony in many of the character sketches. Nothing could be more completely ironical than the portrayal of Captain Blifil who, having indulged in a surrepticious affair with Bridget, tries to convince her brother, Allworthy, of the necessity for punishing bastard children for the sins of their parents.[145] Captain Blifil also uses a discourse on Christian charity as an appropriate occasion for slandering a man who had never done him any harm. However, the irony reaches its peak when in the midst

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[144]Van Ghent, p. 77.

[145]Dudden, p. 692.

of his thoughts of the fine estate he would inherit from Allworthy, Blifil dies thus taking the measure of "that proportion of soil which has now become adequate to all his future purpose..."[146]

There is irony in Allworthy's theory of education. Allworthy had Tom and Blifil educated at home to escape the vices of public school. When we come to know the tutors, Thwackum and Square, we wonder just how much worse public education could be. The irony becomes more complex when we see Allworthy, who had missed the advantages of a formal education, speak in an educated and liberal manner as opposed to the corrupt, but genuinely learned Dr. Blifil.[147]

From the preceeding discussion, it is clear that recent Fielding studies, in inadvertently concealing his role as a satirist, in order to emphasize the moralist, have done a great disservice to an important literary achievement. It is easy to see that Fielding intended Tom Jones to be morally instructive, but he did not feel an obligation to impart instruction with the gravity that Richardson used. His chief ethical ideas that are exposed through the use of irony are the following: the beauty of virtue, the value of "goodness of the heart," the necessity of prudence and

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[146]Fielding, Tom Jones, Part 1, p. 112.

[147]Golden, p. 120.

and the existence of good as well as evil elements in human nature, which should not be judged too harshly.

Fielding made his point about human nature so vivid that fifty years later Jane Austen said:

> The greatest powers of the mind are displayed in the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the livliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.[148]

This praise honored Fielding's efforts in pioneering this unique literary endeavor, for he had undertaken what he felt was one of the most useful as well as entertaining of all kinds of writing. He believed his irony capable of furnishing exquisite ridicule. However, of all the types of humor there is none more likely to be mistaken than irony. It is, therefore, the most dangerous to use. Furthermore, many readers have no taste for it, and when it is carried to great lengths, they are very likely to become bored by it.[149]

Thus Fielding's irony is in direct line with Friedrich Schlegel's definition of it: the analysis of thesis and antithesis.[150] Fielding's method of dialectic analysis is the unfolding or revealing his characters and articulating

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[148]Dudden, p. 678.

[149]Morris Golden, Henry Fielding's London (London: Sampson Low, Mareten and Co., 1910), p. 171.

[150]Alter, p. 39.

his theme of morality. The irony works on the reader not only to make him aware of mutually qualifying meanings, but also to implicate him in a particular relationship with the narrator. This relationship is important in winning the reader's assent to the values affirmed by the novel and engaging his sympathetic appreciation for this type of literary endeavor.[151]

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[151] Ibid., p. 40.

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