

Tom Jones and the "Clare-obscure":
A Response to Andrew Varney, Bernard Harrison,
and Lothar Černý*

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Connotations 3.2 sees an intriguing juxtaposition of two articles. In one, Bernard Harrison suggests that a major merit of Fielding's *Tom Jones* is that it takes issue with a commonplace eighteenth-century opposition between "Principle and Appetite" (154), and so counters a pervasive philosophical culture of systems of fixed, dualistic "conceptual oppositions" (161)—Good/Evil, Reason/Passion, and so on—in favour of a more flexible, dynamic and challenging moral universe. In crucial episodes "appetite wields the sceptre of Principle, passion turns out to lie at the heart of goodness" (162). Readers are encouraged to revise their mental maps in the light of Fielding's radical course in moral orienteering, with the novel's ironies, paradoxes and deceptions stimulating them to be "sufficiently intelligent and candid" (168) to recognize that their habitual cultural assumptions are under review. Harrison uses this argument to attempt a partial rehabilitation of Wolfgang Iser's readings of Fielding. This seems curious, in that Iser's readings are distinguished by an inveterate reliance on dualistic forms, whether this be the "polarity" of the two elements of Abraham Adam's name, the "two negative poles" of Adam's behaviour versus that of the world, "two sides of a contrast"¹ in Book V, chapter i, Fielding's disquisition on his

*Reference: Lothar Černý, "Reader Participation and Rationalism in Fielding's *Tom Jones*," *Connotations* 2.2 (1992): 137-62; Brean S. Hammond, "'Mind the Gap': A Comment on Lothar Černý," *Connotations* 3.1 (1993): 72-78; Andrew Varney, "Brightness and Beauty, Taste and Relish: Advertising and Vindicating Eighteenth-Century Novels," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 133-46; Bernard Harrison, "Gaps and Stumbling-Blocks in Fielding: A Response to Černý, Hammond, and Hudson," *Connotations* 3.2 (1993/94): 147-72; Lothar Černý, "'But the poet . . . never affirmeth': A Reply to Bernard Harrison," *Connotations* 3.3 (1993/94): 312-17.

"new Vein" of "Contrast,"² or many others. "*Tertium non datur*," as Lothar Černy remarks laconically, "didacticism or vacant spaces" (2.2: 143). Iser's only third or modifying term is the imagination of the reader, which is why he seems to me incapable of conveying the sense of flexibility for which Harrison wants to argue.

But in the preceding article Andrew Varney describes the same period in wholly different terms. He brings forward an array of examples of early eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse, and of material prefatory to fictional and factual narratives, in order to show that such discourses negotiate freely between apparently opposed categories such as moral and appetitive, didactic and sensational, factual and romantic. Even Robert Hooke, Secretary to the Royal Society, is not above advertising Robert Knox's informative tome *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* (1681) in terms of the transporting "rapture of the reading experience" (136). Readers and writers of fiction collude knowingly in a sophisticated game in which the audience agrees to pretend to be persuaded by protestations of moral beauty which legitimate the more basic, tastier pleasures—savory and unsavory—of the texts. Varney caps his argument by noting how Fielding "sardonically unpicks" this "collaborative tissue" (143) woven by previous readers and writers, by reworking the metaphor of taste in the first chapter of *Tom Jones*, where the reader's appetite for the story and the subject is made to sound almost as voracious as, later, does that gross appetite "commonly called Love" (1: 270).

Harrison's Fielding wants to teach, to present a case. Varney's is a bully, and wants the reader to share his own rather scathing attitudes. One wishes to rework dualisms creatively, the other to satirize others' casual or hypocritical manipulations of such dualisms. And unlike Harrison's good reader of the novel, Varney's is merely "complicit and ductile" (145), like Ian Bell's account of John Preston's "deferential, remarkably passive" reader, who is intelligent only insofar as he or she is alert to the sense that they will be "led by the nose"³ through the novel's shifting codes and systems, towards whatever gap, stumbling-block or ha-ha, or up whatever garden path the author has in mind. "To reject irony is uncool, and to miss it is worse" (145). One wonders what Iser, whose readings of Fielding's higher ironies are often, to quote Brean Hammond, "touchingly naïve" (3.1: 72), would have to say to this.

Two different Fieldings, two different visions of the eighteenth century. The editors of *Connotations* 3.2 were clearly trying to turn the number into an imaginative fiction by creating an Iserian "gap" between the two articles and inviting readers to transform the resulting metatext into an "aesthetic object" by filling in the gap with their own version of the unwritten truth that might lie between. Or perhaps, as Imlac says, "inconsistencies cannot both be right, but . . . may both be true,"⁴ especially where a mind as unusual as Fielding's is concerned.

There are two preliminary questions. How can both these visions of the nature of eighteenth-century thought be true? And how can Fielding subscribe to or embody both of them? As regards the first, one might point out that Harrison's description of Fielding's method is reminiscent of Cassirer's initial description of Enlightenment thought in general, at the start of *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*:

[it] again and again breaks through the rigid barriers of system and tries, especially among its greatest minds, to escape this strict systematic discipline.⁵

This hint might be taken further: suffice it to say that Harrison's account of the wider eighteenth century may be contestable beyond a certain point. Varney's scenario, if pushed further, would yield a two-fold conclusion; firstly, that early eighteenth-century advertisers and readers of fiction were pre-empting some aspects of this intellectual revolution by practising and favouring discourses that negotiated subtly between categories which were, to culturally normative moral thought, dualistically opposed; and secondly, that Fielding had reservations about such free negotiations. All this may be true, although it is possible to scale down the first part of that conclusion, because Varney is dealing with a different kind of discourse. As far as reading of or attitude to *Tom Jones* is concerned, this turns out to be the main point of difference between the two positions.

Both Varney and Harrison assume that Fielding makes readers engage with patterns of thought inherited from some aspect of their cultural heritage. Harrison's assumption is that in *Tom Jones* such "fore-understandings" (163) derive mainly from the discourse of moral philosophy (Lothar Černý questions Fielding's rationalism from a similar

general premise in *Connotations* 2.2, while he makes clear in 3.3 that engagement with philosophical language does not make Fielding a moral philosopher). Varney's answer, though he does not argue the case through, would be that such patterns also derive from the separate but related discourses of aesthetics, taste, and competing attitudes to the nature and function of literature. These and moral philosophy are not mutually exclusive categories of discourse—literary criticism is moral criticism, in this period, and moral philosophy is also often social philosophy—but their emphases and characteristic modes of expression and tones of voice differ, and readers would have identified and listened to them in different ways. It would be useful, in dealing with the still vexed questions concerning Fielding and his readers, to have as full a sense as possible of what those readers would have felt to be the origins and areas of association of his fictional modes of address. There is also the possibility that the two cases above do not exhaust the options: Černý's assertion in 3.3 that Fielding is more like a *poet* than a philosopher is arresting, and will be worth pursuing.

The well at the bottom of which the truth is hiding is, I suspect, on the border between Varney's broader cultural plain and Černý/Harrison's loftier philosophical hills, with the water in it tending, as water should, to the lower level. To test this supposition, I wish briefly to re-examine Book V, chapter i of *Tom Jones*, which treats of the split between serious prefatory chapters and comic history in terms of darkness and its opposite, light, and which raises the question of the relations between philosophical and aesthetic discourses in a particularly striking way. It is also valuable because it deals explicitly with dualisms, day/night, comic/serious and light/darkness, and because it is one of the chapters relating to the question of the "sagacious reader" (XI.ix and elsewhere) which have emerged by consensus as cruxes in this debate. Properly so, as the sagacity or otherwise of the reader reflects on a historiographical level two of the central difficult abstractions of the novel as history, that "true Wisdom" of which Allworthy is said to be a "Pattern" (1: 282) and the dullness, "Darkness" (1: 214) and folly which are, or should be, its opposites. But there is the second preliminary point, to consider: does Fielding characteristically express himself in such a

way as to reflect both of the incompatible attitudes to conceptual categories suggested by Varney and Harrison, and if so how?

He does. A main feature of his mind is that when dealing with the languages of taste, criticism, aesthetics and literature he tends to think differently to the way he thinks when dealing with other matters, public, professional and documentary. This will have implications for the highly mixed discourse of *Tom Jones*, but it seems wise first to illustrate these differences with reference to Fielding more widely.

On the one hand, it is easy to find Fielding passing critical comments that seem to reflect caustically on some of Varney's earlier examples and hence tend to validate his approach to *Tom Jones*. The example of Robert Hooke, for instance, calls to mind Fielding's mordant procedure in Volume Two of the *Miscellanies*, where the "editor" tells us that the stationer who found the manuscript of the fabulous *Journey from This World to the Next* had offered it to, among others, the Royal Society, but that "they shook their heads, saying, there was nothing in it wonderful enough for them."⁶ The most notable example of Fielding's taking issue with what he finds to be a dubious conflation of imaginative excitement and moralism in the reading of fiction is his incorporation, in Parson Tickletext's encomium of *Pamela* at the start of *Shamela*, of parts of the commendatory letters included in the first and second editions of Richardson's novel. Only very brief effusions from the ductile Tickletext are required in order to create the ironizing context:

"The Author hath reconciled the *pleasing* to the *proper*; the Thought is every where exactly clothed by the Expression; and becomes its Dress as *roundly* and as close as *Pamela* her Country Habit; or as *she doth her no Habit*, when modest Beauty seeks to hide itself, by casting off the Pride of Ornament, and displays itself without any Covering" . . . —Oh! I feel an Emotion even while I am relating this: Methinks I see *Pamela* at this Instant, with all the Pride of Ornament cast off.⁷

One would think from this that Fielding would systematically disdain making effects that relied on insouciant marriages of moralism and salacious enticement, but a reading of his pamphlet *The Female Husband; or, The Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, alias Mr. George Hamilton*, written as he was engaged on *Tom Jones*, would dispel such an idea. The

pamphlet records and dramatizes the sensational career, trial and punishment of the golddigging Methodist lesbian Mary Hamilton, who had managed a creative enough subversion of a supposedly fundamental dualism (man/woman) by marrying, bedding and acquiring the assets of more than a dozen "wives" under her alias. As Donald Thomas says, it is a classic of its kind, "praise of 'virtue and religion' mingled [in the introductory material] with promises of 'unnatural lusts' and 'vile amours' as the reader's reward to come . . . sexuality and sensationalism [combined] with moral finger-wagging."⁸

So the prefatory material to *Shamela* establishes ironic relations not merely with a Richardson text and its contemporary readership but also with another Fielding text and its readers. It is as though Fielding did not mind, in some circumstances, being a potential target for his own satire. And in prefatory material to other fiction he is not above engagement with figures of speech that deal in quasi-Tickettextian negotiations between the moral and the visual-nude: the "Dedication" to *Tom Jones* offers the opinion that fiction offers examples that are like pictures "in which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness, which *Plato* asserts there is in her naked Charms" (1:7).⁹ *Plato* as moral teacher presumably trumps Tickettext, but the image as rendered still harks back to Varney's gallery of examples.

As well as these textual examples, which suggest a picture rather different from Varney's, some episodes in Fielding's career would tend to add weight to Harrison's argument about the way that *Tom Jones* revises the relationship between categories. Readers familiar with Fielding's life will recall his final major public achievement of ridding the London streets of violent gangs in four months in late 1753. This created, out of the blue, what is now known as Criminal Intelligence, and involved as radical a revision of the relationship between two more conceptually opposed categories—criminal/judicial—as did anything in his fiction. Having obtained the relatively small sum of £600 from the Privy Council, Fielding used the money to advertise and implement a policy of paying criminals to shop their colleagues, at the same time offering the informants freedom from prosecution as far as possible. That criminals and the judiciary might work together for their mutual benefit,

with the legal rewarding the illegal and so colluding in a morally green area and both taking on as a result the quality of mixed characters rather than the Good and the Bad, had never been considered. "As a method of enforcing law it was revolutionary."¹⁰ Order is restored through the breaking of dualistic decorums: turning the world upside-down intellectually ameliorates it socially, turns it the right way up.

So there are two Fieldings, and if there were "gaps" in his fiction they might have something to do with a gap in him: a psychological or internalized version, perhaps, of the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination with its "internal contradictions and volatility,"¹¹ which is responding differently to different aspects of its conditioning historical ambience. In short, Fielding's attitude to the manipulation or reworking of oppositional categories tends to depend on the context. If the ends to be gained in the real world seem worthwhile, then the benefits of those ends may outweigh the tackiness that may be involved in the expression of the means. In *The Female Husband*, impressionable readers can be warned about the outrageous forms that duplicity can sometimes take; in the almost equally sensational pamphlet called *Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection and Punishment of Murder* (1752), a superstitious horror of being found out may be instilled into an audience that Fielding must have thought of as akin to the credulous Partridge in *Tom Jones*; the London streets may be cleared of systematic criminal terrorism. But where imaginative literature and its supporting discourses are concerned, the response is often more satirical, a more Augustan reaction to the perceived absurdities of a literary-moral world that must be imagined as already "topsy-turvy,"¹² where "whales now perch upon the sturdy oak"¹³ and Pamela can be advertised by breathless clergymen as the naked image of virtue and a clear moral example. Here literary means and moral ends are almost identical, and it takes the sharper clarity of satire to make the point.

The corollary of this split for a reading of *Tom Jones*, which synthesizes many different modes—historic and romance, history and historiography, serious and comic, satiric and comic, aesthetic and actual—would be that there is no philosophical stability in the novel, but instead a restless manoeuvring between kinds of language and systems of value, the "constantly fluctuating activity" and "original intellectual force"¹⁴ that

Cassirer talks of as characteristic of the best minds of the period. Rather than there being a moral case in *Tom Jones* which builds up "like Euclid,"¹⁵ or rather than "Fielding, the poet" simply being "under no obligation to be philosophically consistent" (Černý 3.3: 317), there is a powerful Heraclitean flux of contexts and attitudes, an active process which affects and may actively constitute that case.

This can now be put to the test by looking at the example of Book V, chapter i, where Fielding opens his important "new Vein of Knowledge," which is "Contrast" (1: 212), by waiving his authorial "Privilege" of saying nothing at all (a privilege he very rarely exercises) and explaining to the reader why the comedy of the story is interspersed with such "*Serious*" (1: 213) prefatory essays.

Disdaining the small gesture, he first invokes the universe, "all the Works of the Creation," in which the contrasts and reverses of day and night, winter and summer, may generate "the Idea of all Beauty, as well natural as artificial." Referring to this solemn dualistic hyperbole as "too serious an Air," he then shifts the figure towards that of the brilliance of a jewel being set off by its setting, its "Foil," illustrated in turn by the beautiful woman who chooses a plain companion for public display. Women ("at *Bath* particularly") even contrive to be their own foils, by trying "to appear as ugly as possible in the Morning, in order to set off that Beauty which they intend to show you in the Evening" (1: 212). Everyone their own contrast: seen comically, the binary opposition dissolves, or is made ridiculous, by the kaleidoscope of frames of reference.

The metaphor then shifts again as Fielding accounts for the structural principles of the venerable form of the "English Pantomime" in terms of contrasts, in this case between comic ("*Duller*") and serious ("*Dullest*") elements (1: 214). Only the stygian gloom of the serious—mythical—parts of the entertainment could ever make the insipid English Harlequin, that dullest of brilliants, seem bright and funny. From this now well-shaded tour of light and dark the discussion returns, via Pope and a dig at Steele, the "late facetious Writer, who told the Public, that whenever he was dull, they might be assured there was a Design in it,"¹⁶ to the present case. What is "*Serious*" is now what is dullest, darkest and most soporific. "In this Light then, or rather in this Darkness,

I would have the Reader to consider these initial Essays." Readers may sleep while the author is dull, except for those who have noticed that this author is dull in the same sense that darkness is light. The comedy of visual metaphor is then subtly extended into the next chapter, the subtitle of which promises "*some fine Touches of the Passion of Love, scarce visible to the naked Eye*" (1: 215). The dark-adapted eye of the somnolent reader must, it seems, be instantly exchanged for the trained and focused beam of the microscopic investigator. Poor readers, led not just by the nose but by the optics. No wonder some are dazzled.

Černý focuses on the antithesis of light and dark, and analyzes the chapter's absurd quality in terms of Fielding's supposed desire to burlesque Locke and "the rationalist method of antithesis. . . . What to the minds of rationalist critics appears as the brightness of reason turns out to be absolute nonsense when it has gone through the mill of Fielding's logic" (2.2: 147). Harrison demurs, apparently sensing no dislocation between a philosophical framework of ruptured oppositions and an aesthetic method based on retained contrasts, and opines that Fielding is not being ironic about his "new Vein," but boasting about his invention. And Iser, to whom as usual binary oppositions are powerful stimulants, notices that Fielding uses them in the early paragraphs, and provides an account in which "the text . . . only sets up two sides of a contrast."¹⁷

None of these readings seems wholly to the point, because the philosophical, logical and antithetical elements of the prose are clearly subordinate to others. These constitute a vividly metaphorical, witty medium, part of the function of which is to play with another area of the language of taste to which Varney points, the relation between literary qualities and the world of the senses in the form of light. It is mock-*Spectator chiaroscuro*, reflecting on the stater mode of Addison's well-known papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" (nos. 409 and 411-21), which express literary pleasures in terms of "Light and Colours" as well as Varney's taste and "Relish."¹⁸ In these papers the great principle of imaginative pleasure is not blunt contrast—"what a rough and unsightly Sketch of Nature should we be entertained with, did all her Colouring disappear, and the several Distinctions of Light and Shade vanish?" (3: 546)—but the mind's power of "*comparing*" (3: 567) the works

of Nature with those of Art. In Fielding this modulation between "natural" and "artificial" beauty is carefully destroyed early on, the conceptual opposites coarsely lumped together in an overriding stylistic flourish in order that the rest of the chapter should carry the mock-assumption that all manifestations of "Contrast," on whatever level, are part of the same grand principle.

Some of the energies here are satirical, subtly mocking Addison's universalizing and new-philosophy solemnity—"when we survey the whole Earth at once, and the several Planets that lie within its Neighbourhood, we are filled with a pleasing Astonishment" (3: 575: once again the Royal-Society mentality ["survey"] and the mild aesthetic gasp ["Astonishment"] coalesce, with the genteel "Neighbourhood" making the solar system sound like a sort of cosmic Twickenham). But it is only the manner that comes within range, with the seediness of Fielding's later paragraphs pointing up the inappropriateness of Addison's mandarin tones for the more rumbustious social world of *Tom Jones*. The brutalizing of Addison's elegance implicit in the reduction of his structure of argument to simple contrast smacks of self-mockery, and of mockery of the reader who accepts the early hyperbole at face value. If anything, it all defers implicitly to Addison's superior, more flexible, form of argument. Then, when the chapter blows itself up at the end in the comic conflation of light and dark, the fun seems too tricky and good-natured to be at all satirical. The chapter bears out Harrison's thesis in that the apparent antithesis comic/serious has been remodelled, but it also bears out Varney's sense that Fielding often plays with aesthetic discourse for his own ends. The metaphorical nature of the passage has somehow extended to a figure that can bridge the gap between the two positions and the two Fieldings, critical and reconstitutive.

But sagacious readers have not really learnt anything about moral philosophy, nor about aesthetics or taste. Instead they have been made to pass through a highly specific and energetic process of figuration in which things at first appear philosophically clear and then become comically clouded. In other words the passage is performative at a much higher level than it is argumentative, and readers learn to the extent that they "see" this process by experiencing or sensing it, not by "seeing"

the point. It is not about *chiaroscuro*, it is *chiaroscuro*, and the method is not argumentative prose nor mock-aesthetic satire but poetic wit: Fielding is partly serious when he talks about comic epic-poems. This appears more clearly when we consider Fielding's source, for (naturally enough in performative *chiaroscuro*) the "new Vein" is in fact new in the same sense that darkness is dark. His whirling paragraphs are expanded from hints in the burlesque couplets near the start of Matthew Prior's *Alma, or The Progress of the Mind* (1718), as Dick replies to Mat's digression in praise of Butler's variety of effect with another brilliantly furbelowed reduction of *ut pictura poesis*:

As Masters in the *Clare-obscure*,
 With various Light your Eyes allure . . .
 Or as, again, your Courtly Dames,
 (Whose Cloaths returning Birth-Day claims,)
 By Arts improve the Stuffs they vary;
 And Things are best, as most contrary . . .
 So You, great Authors, have thought fit,
 To make Digression temper Wit.¹⁹

Again there is a comic split between the case argued, the message about contraries, and the medium, the rapidity and variety of the similes. These digressive darts do not *temper* the heat of wit with the coolness of extended illustration (a single word gives yet another "contrary"), they embody and perform it, and so both express and destroy the argument-by-contraries in a "*Clare-obscure*" of their own. Mat appreciates this in his reply—this being a supposed dialogue, we have a trustworthy example of the proper response of the sagacious reader/auditor—

RICHARD, quoth MAT, these Words of Thine,
 Speak something sly, and something fine.²⁰

As with Fielding, the passage manages both to burlesque itself and to express a central value of the work at large; or at least it does if *Tom Jones* is, like *Alma*, a comic-metaphysical hymn to variety and relativity of perception. The good reader of the novel is, perhaps, the good reader of a certain kind of Augustan poetry.

In a less obtrusive form this shunting of the reader through metaphorical processes of shifting contexts, frames of reference, languages and attitudes is fundamental to *Tom Jones*, especially where the language of value, such as wisdom or sagacity, is concerned. In XI.ix, at the end of which readers are exhorted to use their "Sagacity" to uncover the mysterious authorial "Meaning" (2: 614), this apparently abstract value of sagacity has been coloured firstly by the discussion between the landlord of the inn and his wife, the landlord having been introduced as long ago as chapter ii as having the character, "among all his Neighbours, of being a very sagacious Fellow" (2: 576). This elegant conversation ("you are always so bloodily wise") ends with the landlord claiming to have talked Sophia into giving him money, which he has not, and with his wife joining in "the Applause of her Husband's Sagacity" (2: 611). They are a well-suited couple. There is then an effusion from the narrator-as-pseudo-aesthete on landscapes natural and artificial, and on those who ride through the former. This effusion contrasts "the ingenious" and responsive "Traveller" with the "sagacious Justice," who, together with the other "numerous Offspring of Wealth and Dulness" (2: 614), ride without attending to the view. From this the transition to the "Sagacity" of the reader is immediate; as in V.i, the good, ingenious reader is the one who senses and perhaps follows the process through novelistic interlude, supposedly serious digression, and direct address.

But the *tour de force* of these processes comes in VI.ii, iii and iv, which present the "wonderful Sagacity" (1: 274) of a gallery of characters, Squire Western and his sister Di, the wisest of the three countrymen pursuing the Wiltshire thief, and eventually Blifil, in order to shade and throw into relief the blunt definition of Allworthy as a "great . . . Pattern" of "true Wisdom" near the end of chapter iii. This quality is here defined as "Moderation . . . the surest Way to useful Wealth" (1: 282), the golden mean, control and reasonable indulgence of a variety of passions, but only five paragraphs later we hear that Blifil too has very "moderate" appetites. Wisdom or sagacity is very slowly and surreptitiously redefined by contact with different contexts until it approximates to the lesser prudence which is the cunning and perspicacity of Western as "Politician" (1: 272), Di Western as shrewd but inadequate observer of Sophia's one passion of love, the wisest but unreflecting countryman,

and the toadlike hypocrisy of Blifil. Everyone is wise: Allworthy's "Wisdom" is undercut as subversively by the narrator as it ever is by Blifil. The character in the episode who is closest to being a fool, according to Fielding's definition ("the Fool sacrifices all the rest [of the passions] to pall and satiate one") is Sophia, whose great passion is her love for Tom, which she cannot properly disguise; and Sophia's name, in Fielding's emblematic technique of naming, means moral wisdom. When the fools and knaves are "wise," it may be wise to be a fool.

This is the great benefit of considering the novel as a network of metaphorical relations of the kind suggested; it ironizes and energizes its emblematic systems, and invites the reader to consider the novel as a play of forces rather than a moral system *per se*. Put more simply, it forces the wit and the seriousness closer together. To take as a final example, Tom's appeal to the "Image" of Sophia's face in the mirror when Sophia asks him, in XVIII.xii, why she should believe him when he says he is sincere in his rather exorbitant professions of love, sincerity and constancy. Reading this as philosopher will yield Battestin's very beautiful point that the passage, like others, demands

to be read on more than one level: Sophy Western's image in the glass is the literalizing of the Platonic metaphor, the dramatization of Fielding's meaning in the broadly allegorical scheme of the novel. Ultimately, her true identity is ideal, an abstraction.²¹

One can hardly demur. At the same time, it is very lucky for Tom that his tactic can be interpreted with this degree of seriousness. His outrageously flattering rhetorical gesture is, to put it mildly, a brilliant way of blurring the issue and of converting defence into attack. Tom inadvertently manages a "*Clare-obscure*" of his own, and Sophia's reaction is a little like Mat's to Dick in its combination of admiration and suspicion, though she is less sure of her reading. Can he be serious in his conflation of the ideal and the actual, or is he being cunning and opportunistic with aesthetic language? (Has Fielding taught him his own two "personalities," as Nightingale teaches him to write duplicitous letters to temper his constitutional urge to tell the truth?) Sophia blushes, half smiles, forces herself to frown, but is eventually won over to the extent that she promises she will marry him one year later. Like Sophy,

the reader feels the pull of two readings, one philosophical and abstract, the other sceptical, dramatic and suspicious. These mirror or stand opposite to each other, creating a double mirror and a double metaphor: the sceptical reading would carry no force were the other context not also present. There is not necessarily a "gap"; there is, again, a performative process to be gone through which creates, marries and resolves contraries in the reading rather as Tom and Sophia are married in the history. But if there is a single reading, or just "two sides of a contrast," gaps there may well be.

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NOTES

¹Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1972; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 41, 48.

²All references are to the Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Fredson Bowers, introd. and commentary Martin C. Battestin, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

³Ian Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (London: Longman, 1994) 32, 94. Bell is reflecting on John Preston's *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1970).

⁴Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, in the Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, vol. 16, ed. Gwin J. Kolb (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 33.

⁵Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951) 5. Cassirer has been appealed to already in this debate, but the use here mirrors that of Roger Pearson, who applies this quotation to the fictions of Voltaire in his *The Fables of Reason: A Study of Voltaire's Contes Philosophiques* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 33.

⁶Henry Fielding, *A Journey from This World to the Next*, in *Miscellanies*, ed. H. Amory, introd. B. A. Goldgar (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 2: 4.

⁷Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, 2nd ed. 1741, rpt. Augustan Reprint Society no. 57, introd. Ian Watt (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1956) xii.

⁸Donald Thomas, *Henry Fielding* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1990) 254, 255.

⁹This image, which is a slightly sensationalised version of a remark in *Phaedrus* 250D, is usually appealed to quite straightforwardly as an example of Fielding's Platonist-idealist leanings: see for example Martin Battestin, "Fielding's Definition

of Wisdom: Some Functions of Ambiguity and Emblem in *Tom Jones*," *ELH* 35 (1968): 188-217, esp. 204, and Černý (2.2: 155). But Plato was also a poet: one cannot help feeling that there is something other than idealist about the image that carries this supposedly abstract "Idea" into the world of sight. Fielding, of course, is fond of the commonplace of the naked charms of Virtue, and uses it straightforwardly elsewhere. Whether it is felt as such here depends on whether one is wearing Harrison-spectacles, Varney-spectacles, or both. The same can be said of many other verbal details; Fielding's initial introduction and advertisement of Allworthy as "replete with Benevolence" (I.43), for instance, acquires a curious tint if viewed through Varney's lenses. Is the narrator telling us that Allworthy has a relish for moral action and judgment, and that the prospect (this is a prospect-scene) of doing good deeds makes him feel satisfied? He certainly has a taste for haranguing, and a vigorous appetite for moral certainty.

¹⁰Thomas 372.

¹¹Bell 49.

¹²Henry Fielding, *Pasquin, A Dramatick Satire on the Times*, ed. O. M. Brack, Jr., William Kupersmith and Curt A. Zimansky (Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1973) 49.

¹³Alexander Pope, John Gay and John Arbuthnot, *Three Hours After Marriage, Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Simon Trussler (Oxford: OUP, 1969) 101.

¹⁴Cassirer ix, 13.

¹⁵Harrison 3.2: 172, quoting William Empson, "Tom Jones," *Kenyon Review* 20 (1958): 217-49. In Fielding's mind Euclid would not have been a compliment, given that "Conny Keyber" proudly proclaims, in the dedicatory letter to *Shamela*, that "it was Euclid who taught me to write" (*Shamela* xii).

¹⁶Fielding thoughtfully reminds the reader of the point of reference of the chapter by inserting a small joke at the expense of the co-author of the *Spectator*.

¹⁷Iser, *The Implied Reader* 48.

¹⁸*Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 3: 546, 538. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁹*Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959) 1: 485-86. These Augustan burlesques of arguments about "contrast" and light are tamed versions of Swift's notable exercise in demonic rather than simply false analogy in *A Tale of A Tub*, Section VIII: "The mind of Man . . . doth never stop, but naturally sallies out into both extrems of High and Low, of Good and Evil . . . Whether a Tincture of Malice in our Natures, makes us fond of furnishing every bright Idea with its Reverse; Or, whether Reason reflecting upon the Sum of Things, can, like the Sun, serve only to enlighten one half of the Globe, leaving the other Half, by Necessity, under Shade and Darkness; or, whether Fancy, flying up to the imagination of what is Highest and Best . . ." (*A Tale of A Tub* . . ., ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith [Oxford: Clarendon, 1958] 157-58). But Swift is doubtless reworking yet another example or examples.

²⁰*Works of Matthew Prior* 1: 486.

²¹Battestin, "Fielding's Definition of Wisdom" 209.