
UNIT 1 SOME ASPECTS OF FICTION

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

As the word 'fiction' poses problems, the aim of this unit is to examine the relationship between fictional and realistic depictions. The novel can be seen as dealing with questions, issues as well as with the 'facts' of history. The eighteenth century is the century of prose as well as the rise of the novel, with both prose and the novel focusing on the common ways of life. The novel emerged as a new and significant mode of writing – becoming more than a means of providing entertainment, it became a means of radical questioning that would lead to a change in entrenched attitudes. The aim is to discuss these questions in the course of this Unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the first Unit of the first Block in your course on the British Novel. As such, you will find that we discuss some basic issues here which will help you to understand not just *Tom Jones* but also the subsequent novels prescribed, so go through each section carefully and critically. Now that you are doing a Master's degree, you will need to read widely and variously. Try and find some of the books on the novel recommended at the end of the Block from your local library and try to read these alongside this Unit. It is not compulsory for you to read these books but reading them will certainly enhance your understanding of the novel as a literary form.

1.2 THE NOVEL

1.2.1 The Novel as Fiction (?)

As against imaginative or fictional, **the novel is a realistic form**. It presents that segment of life and society, in more or less approximate terms, which has been seen and experienced by actual men and women of a particular period. The concept of mirroring or reflecting an object is more significant in the case of the novel than it would be in the case of poetry or drama. There is indeed the assumption that a social situation with its problems and issues is faithfully recorded in the novel and that the reader does not come across any major flights of imagination on the part of the writer. Also, in the novel, there are no concentrated descriptions that point towards the dark recesses of the mind, the mysteries of the soul, as it were. At the time of writing, the novelist seems to have definitively concluded that his men and women are of the day-to-day kind, working,

chatting, moving around, without the high furnishings of the soul, psyche or mind. They seldom poeticise or see themselves in the heroic mould. While pursuing their ordinary goals of securing bread and butter which entails most of their waking hours, the peasants, craftsmen and traders of a specific social world are part of mundane situations. The job of the novelist is to see how these people conduct themselves, enmeshed as they are in their specific surroundings.

While reading a novel, we may feel that we have been transported to a different world with its own laws, rules and regulations. Towns and villages, markets, streets and pathways hold out as *actual* places with their distinct colouring and feel. **Yes, the emphasis is on actuality.** Not only are the people shown as speaking with their very own mannerisms, but ordinary information about their appearance, condition, opinions and states of mind also is imparted by the author in his or her own voice. This second aspect of the writer's practice implies that the describing person, the novelist, has an opinion and a point of view according to which she/he judges without much scruple the actions of the different characters selected, consciously and with an ostensible purpose, for presentation. The judgement of the writer is biased as all judgements are. The biases obviously indicate that the writer is totally immersed in the overall fate of the characters as well as the effect of their behaviour on the life and nature of the society. In this sense, the writer can be seen as a responsible member of the actual society of that time as well as the society reflected in the novel.

The remarks of the author meant clearly for sharing with the reader, lend authenticity to the description in the novel and make the reader accept it as a truthful account. This leads to a state in which the reader is strongly drawn into the ethos of the world of the novel. In the course of reading a novel, therefore, the reader may feel that he or she is witness to an actual happening in which real people have been involved. The words in the text do not merely signify something outside of or away from them. Instead, the words are there on the page as a picture or pictures which introduce the reader to their world and bind him or her to its specific aspects. There is no wonder that the reader of the novel would get fully absorbed in the goings on of the world chosen for representation in the work. This is what I mean by the novel as a realistic form.

'Imaginative' on the other hand denotes an unreal thing, a 'creation' of the mind of a person gifted with an unusually inventive and powerful imagination. It is also suggested that words in a text under the imaginative category have to be taken as tools and that the artist works with their help to fulfil his/her specific artistic, moral or spiritual purpose. This purpose may be to produce a literary work of exceptional symbolic spiritual significance.

What is fictional then? The word "invented" or "invention" is yet more meaningful in this case. It denotes that the account presented in a work bears no relation with the reality of life as we know it — it is imaginative and more, it is 'fictional.' In this sense, fictional would be more appropriate a term for poetry.

Isn't fiction a "non-fact," a lie? Most of us wish to leave the existing world of hard routine and drudgery so that we move to another in which we can do what we like, where "wishes would be horses." We also notice that the maker of the lie, a liar, is an interesting person as against one who preaches high morality. Have we watched the behaviour of a liar closely? If we have, we would mark that a liar, a compulsive liar, is one who is mentally alert, and all the time notes changes in the faces of the listeners, who keeps track of their moods, and constantly struggles to find out what his or her audience wishes to hear. The liar accordingly modifies the lie as it is in progress. This is because of the fact that the liar is highly inventive and imaginative. But there is a difference. While poetry and drama are also invented and imagined, they cannot be equated with a

lie. On the other hand, they are "high truths." Is it not because of this 'lie' aspect that the novel has been associated with fiction? While poetry and drama talk about the Truth, the universal all-embracing wisdom, the novel as a fictional piece may rest content with presenting an ordinary life-situation. In this way, the irony behind the 'fictional piece' cannot be missed. Or can it?

1.2.2 Fiction as History

Fiction or fictional has come to acquire such strong affinities with the novel that we use the two synonymously. Walter Allen in his book *The English Novel* has drawn our attention in this regard to the issue of artistic representation—the way a writer gives shape to an experience in her/his work. Characters in a novel symbolise specific attitudes in a given society and the writer conveys through them those significant impressions which she or he has gathered from the surroundings. Characters and social impressions merge into each other and the end-product strongly binds us to the represented action. But the writer does not merely 'gather' impressions from life. What happens is that impressions precede characters and are in fact moulded and re-made into characters by the author. In this sense, they are truly fictional — moulding and remaking imply that the author's imagination has been at work in an intense manner. There is also the problem of a plausible, life-like situation that the writer is supposed to invent. This means that characters in the novel cannot be constructed and rendered flesh and blood unless they are placed in identifiable circumstances of our own world. The men and women in a work of fiction become our links with the period in which the writer has lived and stand for those actual trends that existed at the time. Through Allworthy, Western, Jones and Blifil in *Tom Jones*, for instance, we gain close familiarity with the developments in eighteenth century England. The process is complex but the truth is quite simple. In a peculiar way, the actual circumstance, the society of a period becomes a necessary component of fiction. Fiction becomes significant history. That is how the line between the imaginative and the real gets blurred and history intrudes inevitably into fiction. In Walter Allen's words:

"Perhaps character was never anything more than a literary exercise, but its relation to novel is obvious. The first magnificent fruit of its marriage with reality, however, is seen in works of history, especially in the great portrait gallery of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*. This was inevitable. Before the novel, which must to a greater or less degree be an imitation of the actual world, could be born, there had to be works already in existence which were not imitations, that is not fiction, but faithful descriptions of the actual world. So, among the strongest influences on what was becoming the novel were works of history like Clarendon's and soberly careful accounts of real life adventure, distant countries, and strange peoples like Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World*" (p.31).

The question posed here is whether fiction comes to gradually resemble history, or to put in another way, history becomes the all-important subject of fiction. We can take the argument onto another plane and say that around the eighteenth century in England, history becomes a matter of vital interest for the common writer who sets out to do justice to it by focusing upon the behaviour and problems of ordinary men and women.

However, the novel is different from history in one important respect. History as we see it is a long continuous process without a clear tangible beginning as well as an end — it goes on unfolding itself beyond its specific actors of a period, its men and women who are active within it to influence and change it. On the other hand, the novel *begins* at a particular point of life in society as well as ends at another point. Those two points in the novel, recognised and chosen by the author are extremely significant, because between

them lies that segment of social life — captured as it has been through words — which vibrates with meaning at every turn and also contains within itself a totality and a certain truth. It is a significant difference between history, the life of actual people at a given time, and a literary work. In the examination, students are generally asked to comment on the ending of a novel and tell the truth that has been constructed with its help. Why? Because it is assumed, and rightly perhaps, that the end matters in terms of the *lesson* which the novelist set out to convey to the reader. Replace the word “lesson” with the word “moral” and what we have is a fable which has to establish a useful aspect of human wisdom relevant to the period in which the writer lived. The reader gains this wisdom by virtue of arduously following the course of events depicted in the novel and sees that the author consciously took him on a specific journey in imagination. The same thing can be perceived in an account of history but with less emphasis since the historian is much more answerable to the actuality of events, the socio-historical reality of the period under study. In history, moral lessons can be noticed as merely scattered, and the person, the historian, if he chose to clearly underline these morals, can be accused of violating laws of objectivity. He may face the accusation of allowing subjective biases to play the decisive role in the presentation of the historical account. Yes, there are lessons in history, but they are the tentative creations (of course, no useful study of history is possible without them) of the perceiver or the interpreter, not of history as such. For instance, a specific ‘understanding’ of history can be countered by ‘another’ understanding. You can see contrasting lessons conveyed by another interpreter of the same period in history. This is because history is no single person’s or group’s creation — in fact, being a bigger continuum, it is not the creation of any person, group or, even, the whole society of the specific period. Simply taken, it is found there when we are born and it would, hopefully, be there when we die. In contrast, the novel is an author’s creation — it *entirely* belongs to him or her. If the individual so wished, the writing of the novel could be indefinitely deferred or the idea altogether discarded. Such is the grip and bind of the author on the novel, on its writing. Starting from the idea of the fictional piece, the author gives it slant and direction. One can go to the extent of saying that the author has a large number of alternative strategies to choose from. This means that the shaping of the novel involves a great deal of flexibility.

1.3 THE EVOLUTION OF THE NOVEL

1.3.1 Some Problems

It is useful to go into the history or genesis of the novel in England. There are a large number of books on the subject that provide good information about prose works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The idea in these books is that the prose works of the earlier period can be clearly linked up with the novel in the eighteenth century. The common point between the two seems to be prose. Then, there are the stories of discovery, exploration and adventure, which also have laid claims to parenting this modern literary form. It is suggested that the spirit of curiosity necessitated a loose fictional form which provided enough scope to the writer to collect information as well as to question, analyse and assess the new material. These stories centred around ‘the wandering rogue,’ a rootless, un-tied persona whose fascination for new and unknown places could hold immense appeal for the reader. Add to them the imaginary, totally ‘fictional’ pieces written by their authors in different countries of Europe to entertain the reader, taking him or her on an imaginary voyage to the world of mystery, wonder and magic. In these, nothing ‘real’ was intended for projection, their fundamental motive being to give pleasure. Curiosity, suspense and story-telling were supposed to bring these writings closer to the novel. In this context, all one can say is that important as these imaginative efforts are in their respective languages and periods, they scarcely enlighten us about the emergence of the novel. All that has come in the wake of such a venture is

mere guesswork. In fact, the fault in such a genesis-tracing exercise is that it is based on the erroneous concept of literary history. The term 'literary history' denotes that there is a direct linkage within literature between works written in the past with those written later, and that, in a manner of saying, literature produces out of itself. There is also a tendency among scholars of literature these days of going to the philosophical writings of the period in which specific literary works were composed. This is done with a view to explaining how a particular writer's sensibility was moulded by those philosophical writings and trends. The suggestion is that apart from the literary works already existing, it is the philosophical tendencies which produce new literature. Under this scheme, the author is merely seen as moulding the available literary material to suit his/her cultural requirements and of extending the literary horizon a bit further. This assumption should be carefully gone into and examined. Literary history, or even history of literature for that matter, is a concept that requires careful handling by the student of literature. I am not saying that there cannot be a history of the novel theoretically speaking, but that it cannot be seen as independent of that larger history with its specific struggles to break free from existing shackles. It is really disappointing to see that reference to actual events, particularly the economic and political ones, is missing in discussions about the emergence of the novel.

1.3.2 Shift to Prose in the Eighteenth Century

Prose had seldom been a medium of serious creative endeavour before the eighteenth century. Barring a few exceptions, writers of the past chose verse — longer poems, poetic drama, short poems of definite or indefinite length — to share their views, experience or vision with the audience. That is how it had to be, since the audience consisted of the selected few. Till the middle of the seventeenth century, poems could also be found circulating among the narrow circle of friends and fellow writers because they alone were presumed to appreciate imaginative work. The idea of the mass of readers who could be approached through the printed word emerged only in the eighteenth century. Why? Did something peculiar happen in the later period?

The prose-work in the eighteenth century came to locate some new issues in society and handled them with a seriousness hitherto unnoticed. As said above, one of these issues was marriage. It was more than a subject of debate through the presentation of which the writer was able to critique a particular relationship. Earlier, the act of marriage reminded us of the considerations of social propriety, class distinction and religion — it was truly *social*. For instance, the Restoration marriage, the marriage encountered in the comic plays of the Restoration period, was between those men and women who came largely from the upper stratum. The would-be partners in marriage talked with some self-consciousness (they thought of choice, need and purpose) and finally joined each other in a traditionally accepted matrimonial schedule — their background and social upbringing seldom allowing them to rethink or breach the social code of the male-dominated family. This family was a well-established institution essentially reflecting the nature of the older social structure. Writers could not invest much thought in an issue which remained largely impersonal or, if the partners in marriage were bold and courageous, narrowly personal. This second could be seen only around the seventies of the previous century under the impact of recent upheavals or changes. But matrimony could not be considered a significant point of living, confined as women were to the home. The higher plane of social existence associated itself with such vital principles as honour, privilege, acquisition of money, etc. However, things changed radically in the first quarter of the eighteenth century compelling people to consider marriage as a whole set of new considerations — morality, ethics, love, courage, commitment. And what stood in focus was not merely the middle class man, conscious, alert and honest, but the woman, the new woman who was becoming aware of her place in society, who saw that new horizons of fulfilment and

liberty had opened in the wake of the socio-political churning England had gone through a few decades before. The epithet 'middle class' is not to belittle or denigrate the worth of these people on whom it had fallen, to fearlessly as well as intelligently, confront the mighty world of privilege. They were the common people of England who had moved upfront by dint of hard labour and industry and who not only asserted their right to equality but also influenced the policy-making of the nation. They led the lower masses in thought and attitude and effectively resisted the ways of old tradition. Their kind of sharp rational questioning, self-assurance and vigour found a true medium in prose. The common people of England, particularly the middle classes, wanted to know and understand. They enjoyed talking. For them, dialogue was more important than statement since it provided to them an opportunity to question and disagree. They also aspired to theorise and philosophise and evolve through this a new way of responding to the environment. They took pleasure in cracking jokes and playing with language. Far from being complacent about popular norms, they happily shocked their friends and critics alike. All this required larger accounts and representations. Fielding particularly exemplifies this activated mass of people in England and he lets them talk in their natural style which is prose, the medium through which life in the market, the street, on the road, at the inn, conducted itself.

1.3.3 The Novel as a New Literary Form

We have to think about the factors which inspire a writer to choose a particular form from those already existing or, as happened in the eighteenth century, evolve a new one so that it served as an appropriate vehicle for his purpose. The process of the evolution of a form is highly complex because one can see in it a concrete dialectical interaction between a writer's urge to communicate and an environment which on its part is hardly passive, which persists in its threatening posture with the existing modes of expression. I particularly want to stress the presence of women, a whole lot of them, in the eighteenth century society who had the leisure to relax at home with a book or periodical in hand as well as the inclination to know how to dress, walk and converse but also to contemplate upon the questions of right and wrong in life. They were no ordinary women. They were the wives of those men who had become more productive than members of any other social group in the economic field, who organised manufacture from procurement of raw material and employment of artisans to work with it to making available space for collective activity and looking after the deployment of correct methods that the artisans would use to turn out finished goods. More than this, they arranged money for all this activity which saw them through in the final activity of selling the goods in the market so that profits came flowing in. It appears to be a simple activity of the economic kind on the surface but is actually a highly challenging and problematic social activity affecting life-conditions as a whole. This is because in the course of this endeavour, the involved men who were also creating a new value pattern, a novel way of making sense about tendencies that were thrown up in the life in the market. Still more, the market as a new powerful centre of activity spread out to cover all vital areas of existence including ideology and spirituality.

Some significant developments could be seen in the early eighteenth century in England on the literary-cultural plane. One of these was the rise of the periodical — a magazine or pamphlet which sought to engage the average person in useful conversation. This average person was the middle class city-dweller, the gentleman proper or the gentleman in the making who had an interest in the daily occurrences of life, who did not want to merely put two and two together but to also develop a no-nonsense pragmatic understanding to guide him. Such needs were earlier fulfilled in the case of the lower masses by the village parson who interpreted the age-old principles of life and behaviour for the benefit of the common person. However, the difference between the need of the new middle class city-

dweller we have in mind and the common person with whom the parson communicated lay in their social positioning — the former also asking for pleasure while receiving moral guidance. Naturally enough, this new gentleman-in-the-making looked elsewhere for this service in the direction of a non-religious, secular agency. Hence the fulfilment of the need by the periodical — an instrument which did away with the compulsion of going to a specific place at an appointed hour and instead provided the service at one's doorstep. Of course, for availing oneself of the service, one had to meet the precondition of literacy. This the particular individual could well afford in the given social conditions. In its infancy, the novel incorporated some of the functions and traits of the periodical.

1.3.4 The Novel as Comedy

Comedy in the eighteenth century differed immensely from that in the seventeenth century. It became lighter in vein and dealt with those issues which could be easily resolved. Take the case of social manners under whose overall perspective questions such as marriage and love were considered by the writers. The relationship of love became extremely important in social discourse in which great emphasis was laid on individual choice. The man and the woman together took the decision to marry and thus set at nought the pressures of family and society. As a consequence of this emphasis in the eighteenth century on decision-making by the individual, norms and principles of orthodoxy came under severe criticism. One of the reasons why an ordinary person became associated with heroic qualities such as courage and fearlessness was that an important segment of society, the middle class to be precise, stood to gain from protest and rebellion since that weakened the hold of the privileged sections on social behaviour. Under this logic, marriage became a means for the middle class to question the values and norms espoused by entrenched interests. The focus on social manners takes us away from the serious questions of work, shelter and upkeep to be provided by a society to its members. Only those who have solved the problems of bread and butter think of evolving a code of behaviour. The issues of virtue, goodness, morality and kindness which fall under the category of ethics and manners are of great interest to the progressive upcoming sections. Further, the discussion of manners suggests that the members of this group have become individually capable of improving their behaviour, that they have merely to take a close look at their norms and principles in order to adopt a strategy to execute progress and improvement. In this sense, the improvement in manners is primarily a question of active choice. The individual in such circumstances is expected to examine the nature of his/her social environment so that s/he can then take guidance from the rules that govern it. That the environment can be inimical and become an insurmountable obstruction is something that is beyond the imagination of this highly active and conscious entity.

Under the perspective of manners as we understand them, can we adequately define love and marriage? Well, love in such a case would be a relationship between two persons who are relatively free from social constraints. Society can certainly cause problems to them but it would not prove more than a mere inconvenience. On the other hand, love for the man and the woman involved would be a challenge they have to meet in order to fulfil their wish — love offers them scope to draw upon their inner resources and assert, in the process of meeting it, their selfhood.

Needless to say that from such a love, the journey to marriage is a more or less smooth affair. The union between the young people, even when they are socially unequal — one of them from a poor background and the other belonging to the upper social stratum — can cause raising of eyebrows and some clever scheming by a few to thwart it. But the criticism from orthodox quarters may at the same time inspire some other members in

society to stand in support of the lovers. This clash ending in merely the ruffling of a few feathers, therefore, does not lead to dangerous hostility and violence as it did in the past.

Were love and marriage challenges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the individuals who were involved in the relationship? The answer is obviously no. Neither love nor marriage could be separated from the social structure of the time. It was a bond that decisively affected the elite in their pursuit of power, prestige and honour. Both were "social" and "political" events — they made statements about the families, the dynasties and the important streams of traditional behaviour to which the specific persons belonged and which came into play when certain individuals decided to take the "law" in their own hands

1.4 LET US SUM UP

One of the points on which the middle classes of the eighteenth century were exercised was transition. The question these sections confronted was : How to interpret the change that was taking place around them in the world of manners and attitudes consequent upon the economic power they had come to acquire. There is no doubt that change was desirable. But could it be pursued with vigour which is possible only when one is sure about the positive outcome? Obviously, history could not be rolled back as the entrenched interests of the landed gentry wished and whom the village parson in his religious wisdom tended to serve. We come across innumerable arguments against and in support of change in the books written in the eighteenth century in which 'modern' was a much criticised word. At the same time, we notice a definite shrillness in the words of those who opposed change. Perhaps, they were fighting a losing battle. On the other hand, change in itself did not denote anything specific and tangible. Because of this, one could clearly discern a vacuum in the 'spiritual' territory. It so happened that the writer stepped forward to fill this vacuum through the mould of 'conversation in prose.'

UNIT 2 AS WE FIRST READ : *TOM JONES*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 A Reading of *Tom Jones*
 - 2.2.1 A Look at Tom's Story
 - 2.2.2 Problematic Nature of Squire Allworthy
 - 2.2.3 The Philosopher and the Clergyman: Their Comic Nature
 - 2.2.4 What does Tom Symbolise?
- 2.3 Relationships in the Novel
 - 2.3.1 Tom and Sophia in Togetherness and Contrast
 - 2.3.2 Tom As Squire Western's Companion and Friend
 - 2.3.3 The Father-Daughter Angle
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Glossary
- 2.6 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

There is always a difference between the first and second readings of a text. The first brings forth a kind of initiation into the work. The second, on the other hand, brings us closer to a number of hidden features of the work. Before I present here a brief version of *Tom Jones* which I may call just 'a reading,' I wish to make a few preliminary remarks about this novel. To me, it is fundamentally a novel about the social structure that prevailed in England in the middle of the eighteenth century. This preliminary discussion will not only help in recapitulate some of the main features of the relationships/characters/events in *Tom Jones* but will also help establish a base for more detailed discussions in subsequent units.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us use Tom's story as an entry point into this extremely complex novel. **First**, Tom's character by itself would not acquaint us much with the spirit and energy that the novel in its totality embodies. In fact, Tom's character should be used as a point of entry into the novel and no more. In this way, we would be able to win familiarity with what can be termed the truth of this work. An acquaintance with incidents and happenings in Tom's life will reveal to us the conditions of existence at the time the novel was written.

Secondly, we witness in *Tom Jones* a gradual unfolding of complexities. For Fielding, the society of the period operated at a number of levels and these could not easily be identified in their peculiar working. Fielding does not make simple connections between different happenings in life since his purpose as a writer is not to offer explanations and answers. He does the opposite and makes the reader feel that pressures in the eighteenth century society are far too difficult for any individual to cope with, whatever the person's strength or capability. The social establishment is not only rigid and oppressive but also extremely powerful. Its value-system is also firmly entrenched in the psyche of the people. We realise that the novel sharply focuses upon a peculiar energy generated in human behaviour. When angry with the system, people criticise, fight and rebel. Tom's anarchic revolt and Sophia's adamant posture notwithstanding, the final picture emerging out of this process is hardly encouraging or inspiring. With Tom in jail and Sophia locked indoors in Western's house, the last pages of the novel present a grim account.

Of course, we see a movement against hindrances. However, problems multiply with each new development. This results in the regrouping of the forces hostile to the peculiar social energy I talk of. The reader is given to feel that this energy is not properly harnessed. In fact, narrow orthodox formations (the moral-religious system, patriarchy, etc.) create serious obstructions in its way. As the novel progresses, the reader helplessly watches that the agents of the *status quo* (Blifil, Square, Thwackum and Squire Western) consciously thwart any possibility of challenge to the interests of property and privilege. A clear sense of dismay is discernible at the end, with Fielding failing to offer any 'real' answer to the questions posed in the novel. In such a situation, the author could perhaps provide only a 'comic' solution. The question I want to pose is : Is this a success or failure of the author?

2.2 A READING OF *TOM JONES*

2.2.1 A Look at Tom's Story

The novel has been given the title *Tom Jones*. At the obvious level, the book is a story of Tom's life from the time he was born till the time he married Sophia. Let us take a glance at some important points raised through the depiction of Tom's life. The novel opens with the discovery of a young male child on the bed of Squire Allworthy. The child is given the name Tom Jones and is referred to as a bastard, an obvious object of ridicule, rejection and condemnation. The discovery puzzles and confuses the moralistic-traditional society of the time. The disturbed individuals and families of the place fail to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards Tom — Mr. Allworthy being the only exception to the rule. This great benefactor accepts the child as his own and gives good reasons in support of his decision. Allworthy's nephew Master Blifil and Jones share the generosity of the benefactor equally. The treatment that the two get bears testimony to Allworthy's sound principles of Christian behaviour and the reader is reassured that Jones would receive proper upbringing and care. The answer, therefore, to Jones's problem of preservation comes, as we see, from a good and understanding Christianity which unhappily is beyond the scope of most of the inhabitants of the place. What also strikes us is that Mr. Allworthy, because of his privileged position, could alone rescue the helpless foundling from difficult circumstances. It would have been totally different if Mr. Allworthy, the good Christian and an example of moral rectitude, were an ordinary person. We witness that Allworthy's decision to adopt the child starts off a whole series of loud and not-so-loud protests as well as suspicions about his motives. The question emphatically asked many a time in the novel is: Isn't Tom Mr. Allworthy's own son since, to the questioning and ever-suspecting people of the household, nothing else can explain the latter's action?

Allworthy's decision to adopt Jones is undoubtedly an act of transgression in traditional-moral terms. More, it clearly touches upon economic aspects such as the inheritance of land and money. The world of landed property and privilege has so far used Christianity to legitimise its existence and has pushed higher virtues beyond the purview of common people. Allworthy shocks the privileged group by consciously selecting the contrary way of interpreting his religion.

2.2.2 Problematic Nature of Squire Allworthy

However, we become conscious of a certain kind of pompousness in Allworthy. We note that he stands alone in the novel and enjoys a status high enough to be accepted as a moral judge of everything happening in his neighbourhood. Standing alone is not a happy situation — it denies to the person concerned a sense of involvement and participation in the common occurrences of life. Placed at a distance from everyone, Allworthy would

know only that which he perceived in others. This can create problems of comprehension and consequent taking of decisions. There is no denying that he may carefully go into the issues faced by the people at large and offer sane advice to them. But this, as we have seen, places him on a high pedestal by virtue of which he preaches to others (rather than sharing with them) the high principles of morality. Earnestness and sincerity of purpose give him a sense of superiority by which everyone at Somersetshire remains overawed. What I wish to emphasise is that interpreting situations in the light of Christian goodness and benevolence is Allworthy's forte and an active principle in his behaviour. On the other hand, standing apart from common action (disinterestedness and an impersonal attitude, come to mind in this context) and judging on the strength of reason and kind intention was indeed a value in the age of enlightenment. We become a bit puzzled, therefore, to see that Allworthy misjudges things quite frequently in the novel. When he does this, we become acquainted with that great irony of which Fielding is an acknowledged master. Consider for instance this statement of Allworthy :

You know, child, it is in my power, as a magistrate, to punish you very rigorously for what you have done; and you will, perhaps, be the more apt to fear I should execute that power, because you have, in a manner, laid your sins at my door. ... for, as no private resentment should ever influence a magistrate, I will be so far from considering your having deposited the infant in my house, as an aggravation of your offence, that I will suppose, in your favour, this to have proceeded from a natural affection to your child ... I should indeed have been highly offended with you, had you exposed the little wretch in the manner of some inhuman mothers, who seem no less to have abandoned their humanity, than to have parted with their chastity. It is the other part of your offence, therefore, upon which I intend to admonish you, I mean the violation of your chastity. A crime, however lightly it may be treated by debauched persons, very heinous in itself, and very dreadful in its consequences. The heinous nature of this offence must be sufficiently apparent to every Christian, inasmuch as it is committed in defiance of the laws of our religion, and of the express commands of Him who founded that religion (66).

Here, the author has deliberately chosen to withhold from Allworthy the true information about Tom's parentage. Having done this, he has given full freedom to the speaker to dilate upon the ills and evils of immoral behaviour. In addition, phrases such as 'abandoned their humanity,' 'violation of your chastity,' 'Him who founded that religion,' etc. underscore the pomposity of Allworthy unmistakably. We should also keep in mind the fact that the novel as a whole is to take a sharp critical look at chastity, constancy, humaneness and kind sympathy, with Jones seen as learning about them in the raw as he grows up. The author administers a series of shocks through Jones's conduct in difficult life-situations. In fact, under the broad scheme of the author, Allworthy is going to be thoroughly manipulated by Blifil, an aspect designed to show the hollowness of abstract principles which we uncritically adopt.

2.2.3 The Philosopher and the Clergyman – Their Comic (?) Nature

From here, we move on to the situation in which the job of imparting moral-intellectual guidance to Tom is assigned to Square and Thwackum by Allworthy. The author has conceived and drawn these two comically. While Square projects the secular atheistic outlook and lays stress on correct and consistent human behaviour, Thwackum understands everything in strictly religious terms. They are so much given to a mechanical representation of principles and ideals that every remark they make amuses the reader. Fielding uses them to a plan which is to provide through them an entertaining discourse on trivial as well as important matters that Tom and Mr. Allworthy face from time to time. So fond are the philosopher and clergyman of pronouncing judgement or

offering analysis that they never once sit back and ponder. Instead, they rush in to offer their simple predictable views. This is an example of how educators come to obstruct the mental growth of a pupil. On his side, ironically, Mr. Allworthy feels quite satisfied with the arrangement he has made for the moral education of Tom and Blifil.

The writer's plan under which Square and Thwackum work has another aspect to it. As the two teachers go about their business of leading the pupils on to the path of enlightened behaviour, they gradually come to serve a purpose other than comic and begin to seriously influence the action in the novel. This compels the reader to think that the consequences of their 'real' conduct could be sinister. For instance, their attempt at winning the attention of Mrs. Blifil is not merely comic. It is true that in this venture, both Square and Thwackum prove to be foolish while Bridget emerges as a clever manipulator. Still, the episode is too damning for the philosopher as well as the preacher. Can such people fulfil the charge which Mr. Allworthy has given them? In fact, combined with the conspiratorial skills of Blifil, the practice of Square and Thwackum can quite comfortably 'mislead' Mr. Allworthy himself who apparently is the reigning deity of the novel. Till the end of the novel, Allworthy keeps the reader impressed by his "all-worth" and sharp intellect. And yet much remains unachieved. In fact, Blifil almost brings about the destruction of Tom and sets at nought the happy prospects of Sophia. We, therefore, conclude that Square and Blifil become part of the big evil machine of the novel and that their 'comic' nature turns more and more dangerous and, therefore, un-comic as events unfold in *Tom Jones*.

2.2.4 What does Tom symbolise?

Tom's character stands out in the novel as one which is entirely 'unformed.' He appears to be a mere lump of clay. He has that classic inability to adhere to a given code since he would not understand its worth or relevance. It is a different thing that by nature he is kind and generous. Yes, 'nature' is the word. Therefore, good is not good or desirable *per se* in his case. Instead, it is 'natural' for him to be good. As the reader sees, Tom suffers a great deal for being naturally good and selfless. It is entirely understandable, therefore, that conventions, traditions and norms do not mean anything to him but as so many minor hurdles in the way.

We are particularly struck by Tom's attitude towards women. Tom always treats women, irrespective of their social standing, as equal to men. His behaviour in this context is not influenced by that exploitative attitude under which the males are supposed to *manage* the affairs of society and women have to merely act as their appendages. He contains within himself the purity of a 'human' than the distinctive traits of a 'male' which can be taken as a gender construct of a given society. This 'human' in Tom constitutes the essential good qualities both of men and women. In fact, in some respects, one can see more of 'the woman' than 'the man' in him — the softer, purer, more honest and empathy-prone aspects that we have come to historically associate with a woman's temperament. Apart from this, he can scarcely apprehend that people would act under narrow considerations of profit and on that account take advantage of anyone's gullibility and innocence. But, as noted above, innocence is Tom's strong point. It is this which sets him apart from those people, of high as well as low birth, who have become un-innocent in the process of living. Still another trait of Tom's character is that he is greatly courageous and fearless and has the requisite strength to go ahead in the business of fighting. He would more often than not be able to conquer his enemy if engaged in a fight with him.

So many qualities can be rarely visualised in an individual. It is this which suggests that Tom emerges in the novel more as an idea and a spirit than a flesh and blood character. I say 'idea,' not an 'ideal.' The latter has connotations of 'finishedness', something which

is already there for the human beings to look up to, something like that we find in Mr. Allworthy's case. No, Tom is not that kind of an ideal. On the contrary, Tom exemplifies the idea of 'spontaneity' and 'natural behaviour.' As an idea, Tom also critiques that which is detrimental to the naturally good aspect among people. If Tom's character is to be interpreted thematically, he can be viewed as that idea of spontaneity which remains in a state of constant struggle with a pre-existing structure of norms and conventions.

As we First
Read : *Tom
Jones*

2.3 RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVEL

2.3.1 Tom and Sophia in Togetherness and Contrast

In what way do we comprehend Tom's fascination for Sophia? We know that he has been quite intimate with Black Partridge's daughter, Molly Seagrim. Is it merely that Sophia is beautiful, elegant and has a goddess-like quality about her charm? No, Sophia is more than this idealised version of a woman. Her social helplessness against her father's ways is not an ordinary occurrence and leaves a deep impact on her personality. The impending threat of a marriage with Blifil lifts her up from an abstracted existence and reveals to her the horrors of certain doom. Sophia is so entirely convinced of her abhorrence for Blifil as husband that when Mrs. Honour, her maidservant, mentions Blifil "as a charming, sweet, handsome man," Sophia angrily remarks, "Honour, rather than submit to be the wife of that contemptible wretch, I would plunge a dagger into my heart" (320).

This is not the response of that doll-like figure who always moved about in sweet and protected surroundings. After Sophia runs away from home in the company of Mrs. Honour, we see her more and more as a concretised individual struggling to move away from a 'paradise' that was her home. She becomes more and more 'real' in this process. Yet, her escape from that unreal world strangely prevents her from becoming an ordinary person, a weak all-accepting individual who would get reconciled to anything because there is no way out in the particular circumstance. At the same time, she is definitely not like Tom in spontaneity or naturalness. But she has that which Tom doesn't — a sense of discipline where needed and an inner life which is a product of introspection and self-assessment. On the strength of this, she finally becomes a truly thinking individual. Mark her words in the letter that she writes in London to Jones :

A promise is with me a very sacred thing, and to be extended to everything understood from it, as well as to what is expressed by it; and this consideration may perhaps, on reflection afford you some comfort. But why should I mention a comfort to you of this kind? For though there is one thing in which I can never comply with the best of fathers, yet am I firmly resolved never to act in defiance of him, or to take any step of consequence without his consent.

These words of Sophia are required to compose a totality of understanding which as a viewpoint can help the individual to proceed towards virtue and goodness. I consider that Tom's 'naturalness' and easy vigour would soon weaken and lose themselves in anarchic self-destruction if not helped and sustained by a rational self-appraisal. And the trait of appraisal and questioning is to be 'acquired' with effort, it is not 'spontaneous.'

In *Tom Jones*, Fielding, a conscious and an analysing-commenting artist, shares with the reader the two perspectives of Tom and Sophia and indicates a meaningful linkage between the two. He seriously believes that the two perspectives complement each other and are in fact parts of a significant totality.

Though apparently dissimilar, the attitudes of Tom and Sophia have some common points. For instance, kindness and generosity are qualities they share. Again, both have the capacity to rise above their immediate personal interests. There is no denying that Tom is deeply in love with Sophia and would sacrifice anything to win her hand. Still, he decides many a time to sacrifice this wish if that ensured her safety and preservation. Sophia, too, places personal happiness far below her duty towards her father — she would not marry anyone if Squire Western did not approve of it. The only point she sticks to, and it is a high point of her self-assertion — is that Squire Western would not *choose* a husband for her. She makes it abundantly clear that if that happened, she would leave all and run away to the farthest corner of the world to preserve that highly personal and sacred territory of conscious choice. This is a trait of individual self-assertion. But we should not lose sight of the basic morality of this position. This can also be considered an attitude of self-abnegation that an individual adopts with a sense of conscious choice. Tom and Sophia seem to be moving in the direction of this attitude which they finally come to symbolise. It also imparts a unique value to their characters and transforms them into inspiring examples of conscious activist behaviour. Particularly in the case of Tom, self-abnegation comes out to be his strongest redeeming feature, strangely in one who apparently loved easy pleasures and indulgences and scarcely observed the high principle of constancy. But such is life!

2.3.2 Tom as Squire Western's Companion and Friend

In one important respect, Tom is closer to Squire Western than he is to Mr. Allworthy. There is no doubt that Tom has always remained attached to Mr. Allworthy as an obedient child. He has been brought up under the affectionate and indulgent gaze of a virtual parent. The essential spirit of this phase lasts in Tom's behaviour till the end of the novel. But there is no easy sense of give and take between Tom and Allworthy — they do not interact at the level of 'equality.' The one speaks with dignity and the other listens with reverence. On the other hand, Tom is a friend to Squire Western. They hunt, dine and laugh together. When Western learns of Tom's various affairs with women, he is pleased no end with his pal's successes. Western is conscious that Tom is of doubtful parentage, a bastard, mixing up with whom may violate the norms of social intercourse. More fundamentally, Squire Western is full of that raw energy with which Tom himself is abundantly gifted.

However, the difference between the two is equally immense — Squire Western is nature's own to the extent of being a beast. Bereft of true education in the ways of social conduct — he has rarely, if ever enjoyed the benefit of advice from others — Western continues to remain till the end a wild and untamed animal. Mark the way he decided to leave the pursuit of his daughter midway as he caught sight of a hunter with a pack of hounds venturing out into the forest. There is still more crudity in his imposing strict physical restrictions on Sophia. Worse, he cares little for Sophia's right to choice in marriage and doesn't mind employing force to get her acceptance. Tom's attitude towards Sophia, as we know, is opposite to that of Western's. What can Tom make of such a friend as Squire Western? A good person, though thoroughly impulsive and unpredictable.

2.3.3 The Father-Daughter Angle

In fact, one should have a second look at Squire Western's 'goodness,' something by which his dear daughter stands befooled, born, as she thinks, to fulfil daughter-like duties to a 'great' father. She associates fatherhood with sanctity and quite strongly feels that the father should belong to an altogether different category. She has her way at the end of the novel but the terms of her victory vis-à-vis her father are highly 'emotional' and,

therefore, restrictive (for the disadvantaged female) as against rational and realistic. An attitude of this kind in the daughter does not make sense to the reader because of the emotional exploitation involved. In her case, it has been always been a one-way affair. Even though Squire Western is a picture of fondness, yet his love for the daughter is of a peculiar kind. It is unthinking. At the time of the final resolution of Sophia's marriage in Book XVIII, the reader may be swept off by the force of sentiment oozing from the daughter.

Perhaps, she doesn't have in mind Squire Western the man but the mythical father who brought his child into being. It is in this sense that I say Sophia is 'befooled.' The concept of a dutiful daughter fulfilling her filial obligation would hardly cohere with Squire Western's long and oppressive history of subjugating a wife because she was a woman, and, therefore, born to remain servile. Or maybe she sees the gap between the father and the real Squire Western and wishes that the two images join. It is interesting to note that Western is the only character in the novel who openly opposes a woman's right of equality with men and unabashedly preaches women's suppression.

Energy and amiability should look out of place in such a character and I wonder as to why Fielding should harp on his innocence and sweet foolhardiness. He appears 'comic' while struggling helplessly with his sister on account of Sophia's marriage. But we also notice that the context is different and that the brother is mindful of the money and estate the sister owns. Add to this the fact that the sister is a political being with opinions that would ring true as feminist even today. Fielding seems to have consciously visualised Mrs. Western's role vis-a-vis her brother in that Squire Western is raving mad most of the time and the sister is the right counter-force (her education, conduct and politics are at the root of this force) to check him. But Squire Western can also think of mundane matters like money even as he is an amalgam of folly, vigour and uncontrolled energy. This further compounds his role as a woman-hater.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

The novel initially appears to be the story of Tom and Sophia. But Tom has a benefactor, a mother, a couple of teachers and a number of friends. He also has quite a few enemies. In the same manner, Sophia is not merely an individual with that name but also a daughter and a niece. She also has a confidante. The situation of love in which Tom and Sophia are bound brings many other people into play. All these people have their own significance, apart from what they do towards the novel's central pair. I have given some hints of these in this unit. In the next one, I would go further into the ramifications of the action and plot that has been built around Tom and Sophia

2.5 GLOSSARY

Social energy:

The general emotion that affects and activates large groups of people at a particular time. Such an emotion is generated in transitional periods in history.

Patriarchy:

A specific mode of social organisation in which the male-dominated family structure is the rule. It particularly suppresses women economically socially and legally.

Inner life:

The point of solitude in a person's life in which emotions and feelings sustain the individual in situations of distress. This idea works behind expressions such as the thinking being.

Significant totality:

Georg Lukacs's concept. The unified experience that a writer captures in his/her work. The act of capturing implies that the writer considers the experience fully reflective of the nature of his society.

Individual self-assertion:

Quite close to "expression of individuality." This is seen in the case of a character who takes a bold stand, silent or vocal that works contrary to the interests of a group, an institution.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. As a novel, *Tom Jones* is deceptively simple, with a story that makes no significant demands on the reader. Do you agree?
2. Do you see the projection of a moral viewpoint in *Tom Jones* as one through which the author aims at correcting distortions in human behaviour? Discuss.

UNIT 3 **IMPORTANT THEMATIC AREAS IN *TOM JONES***

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Varieties of Female Representation —from Low to High Strata
 - 3.2.1 Bridget as an Intelligent User of Skills
 - 3.2.2 Molly Seagrim and Mrs. Waters
 - 3.2.3 Lady Bellaston's Degradation & Vacuity
- 3.3 Fieldings Narrative Strategies
 - 3.3.1 Role of the Narrator
 - 3.3.2 Places as Segments of Life : the Country, the Road, the City
 - 3.3.3 Breadth of Fielding's Realism
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Glossary
- 3.6 Questions

3.0 **OBJECTIVES**

In this unit, I shall acquaint you with the complex nature of *Tom Jones*. Yes, we should first appreciate the way an author has represented what can be called the action of the novel – the way the author has allowed freedom to various meanings or significances so that they emerge in the novel on their respective strengths. I prefer to call these significances “thematic areas.” There are many important themes in *Tom Jones*, such as religious, ethical and moral. You can further expand the scope of the discussion and bring socio-historical developments within its ambit. I say this because Fielding is more than a novelist or a literary writer – he is a social commentator and historical analyst. This is clear not merely from the prefatory chapters he has added to each book in the novel but also the manner in which he has remarked about the behaviour of characters in specific situations. I plan here to focus more upon the behaviour of characters and the situations in which they find themselves.

3.1 **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous unit, we saw the particular equation of benefactor-beneficiary, teacher-pupil or at best father-son between Mr. Allworthy and Tom. As we noted, Mr. Allworthy came across as a repository of wisdom and Tom as an eager though inconsistent learner of it. We also saw that there always remained a great distance between the two at the level of communication. How about Tom vis-a-vis other characters? I took up this question in the context of Tom's relationship with Squire Western, the former an innocent, fun-loving vivacious youth of dubious birth and the latter a member of the landed gentry, the high and mighty section of society in eighteenth century England. Traditionally, this section had its own view of alliances. We begin this unit with a consideration of women characters in the novel.

3.2 VARIETIES OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION—FROM LOW TO HIGH STRATA

We are struck by a great variety of women characters in the novel. It is indeed surprising how Fielding assigns such clear and distinctive traits to each one of them. He must have had a large fund of social experience to draw upon and a keen eye to set apart one type of female existence from another. I say this because unlike men, who have a share in the power-structure at different levels in the world of the novel, women have to be largely restricted to their sexuality.

3.2.1 Bridget as an Intelligent User of Skills

As noted above, Bridget Allworthy, in spite of her superior social status, is 'wooded' (a mild form of being sexually approached) by a number of people at different points of time. She is not good-looking. Still, marriage with her can be planned by aspirants such as Captain Blifil, and the senior Blifil. Square and Thwackum, too, consistently try to win favour with her. What is clear is that these four have always hoped to attain money or power through sexually exploiting, and more pertinently, subjugating her. Bridget knows it quite well and thinks of using it to further her own ends — a quite 'legitimate' way in the circumstances to use her position as a woman. In Fielding's view, "So discreet was she in her conduct, that her prudence was much on the guard, as if she had had all the snares to apprehend which were laid for her whole sex" (54). She cleverly manipulates the philosopher and the clergyman and reduces the two to the level of abject seekers of sexual favours. We should also not forget that it is Bridget who is the first woman in the novel to violate the code of matrimonial sanctity, by which her great brother swears so much, and gives birth to a bastard who, as we see, raises her role of committing ever-new violations of the sexual-matrimonial code to a different level altogether. And ironically, the dead Bridget has had her way in the end in so many different senses. She is able to do so largely because social privilege protected her from crude encroachment by any of the males. Also, she is less gullible because of superior upbringing and education than other women in the novel. Be that as it may, we are presented through her with an attitude of counter-violation of the all-suppressing patriarchal code by a woman. This planned act of negation by her can be appreciated 'comically' and 'heroically.'

3.2.2 Molly Seagrim and Mrs. Waters

Molly Seagrim attracts the reader's attention more compellingly as a symbol of aggressive female sexuality. Fielding seems to be deriving a great deal of fun from her depiction, but the laughter of 'comedy' is seldom at her cost. Instead, he clearly upholds Molly as a powerful symbol of human vigour and raw sexual power. Molly has none of the prudish, hypocritical sense of chastity of which Fielding accused the heroines of Richardson's novels. In fact, Fielding visualises Molly in excessive animalistic terms. It occurs to us later that this wild, unrestrained, almost overflowing sexuality becomes in the novel a sharp comment on Lady Bellaston's promiscuous behaviour. We see Lady Bellaston planning her affairs cynically with different men on the strength of skills and home-work. In the latter's case, sexuality changes into a sick routinised behaviour. Tom himself loses much of his dynamism and gusto as he interacts with her. Her morally debilitating influence upon Tom is comprehended quite well by Sophia herself. This is reflected in her certain rejection of Tom till things reveal themselves in a radically different light at the end.

Mrs. Waters offers yet another variety of female behaviour. She has a long history of sexual and social harassment. The two harassments can't in fact be separated. But we discern in her a distorted sense of values regarding relationships. Perhaps, her affair with Captain Waters, a military officer with no rootedness in settled existence, has left an indelible mark upon her — a mark of easy utilitarian relationship. Any new male can catch Mrs. Water's fancy and a series of such happenings may eventually land her in a hopelessly shocking situation.

On the surface, we may note a few similarities between Mrs. Waters and Tom in their attitude to sexual morality. But a close look would reveal that insofar as the relationship between the two is concerned, Tom is an object of seduction, to which he undoubtedly succumbs rather easily, while Mrs. Waters is the seducer. More, we have seen Tom behaving innocently in all situations unlike Mrs. Waters who can't be called innocent. Fielding's purpose seems to be to confront the reader with the disastrously unsettling idea of incest at a later stage. In fact, we do not become entirely free from the horror of Tom having possibly gone to bed with his own mother. In this case, chance only helps. But chance or no chance, the situation is such, with Tom's recklessness and lack of serious perspective and Mrs. Waters's worse than amoral ways (we have to distinguish between the two), that the protagonist of the novel might as well have been his mother's partner in sex. Still more than chance, it is the omnipotent narrator who rejects the option and decides to make the novel an epic and, therefore, pull Tom out of the possibility of incest. If the author's decision were to make the work a tragedy, the novel would be a repetition of *Oedipus*. But that is not the genre to which *Tom Jones* belongs in its basic spirit and attitude. However, Mrs. Waters helps us see the enormity of unscrupulous sexuality — it becomes crude and excessive in her case with the passage of time. In this way, the purpose behind the introduction of Mrs. Waters in the novel is not merely to contribute to the complexity of the plot but to offer another variant of female behaviour. With its help, we can judge the inanity of Mrs. Fitzwater, whose sob-story appears episodic and narrow in scope as well as the cynical disregard for ethics and scruples behind Lady Bellaston's well-orchestrated operations.

3.2.3 Lady Bellaston's Degradation and Vacuity (?)

Fielding considers Lady Bellaston in strictly moral terms and finds her deficient in 'nature' as well as 'education.' She is presented as actively participating in masquerades where the men and women of the upper stratum of society entertain themselves. The scene is typically eighteenth century and reflects a growing amount of laxity in morals among people in higher London circles. When Tom, innocent as he is, is exposed to this atmosphere, he does not see the moral degradation and vacuity underlying it. On her part, Lady Bellaston is struck by the looks of Tom and plans to keep him as her lover. A cool player of games in fashionable London, Lady Bellaston employs clever stratagems to keep Tom away from Sophia and uses her social standing as well as money to ensure that he remains firmly in her grip.

However, there is one aspect of her personality in which this projection of Lady Bellaston is questioned in the novel. Here, I refer to Lady Bellaston's inherent fears as an insecure woman in the presence of Sophia's sweet and dignified ways. Lady Bellaston is highly individualistic, self-centred and mean. We hardly see any idealism or moral sense left in her. On the other hand, Sophia is driven by a superior sense of love. We perceive an intense urge in her to self-question. Sophia is torn apart between her lover and filial duty. These things have all along remained alien to Lady Bellaston. In this clash of values, Lady Bellaston is bound to lose. The presence of a superior sensibility has made her still more jealous of a woman totally reassured of winning Tom's love. The sense of jealousy in Lady Bellaston points towards that whole boredom of the stagnant life (the particular social formation) into which the upper stratum of the English society has

fallen and which denies its women the pleasures of being honestly and loyally related to the members of the opposite sex. If we look back from the scenes of London life to the way people went about their business in Somersetshire, we realise that the high and mighty as well as the poor and helpless remained firmly rooted in a life of relative stability and honesty there. On the other hand, the London atmosphere is too cynical and cold to allow simple pleasures of natural give and take. Lady Bellaston becomes acutely aware of the growing loneliness and uncertainty in her existence as a woman. This is specifically caused by her watching Tom as totally absorbed in the thought of joining with his beloved Sophia. The only way Lady Bellaston can assert herself in the situation is to thwart the efforts of the two lovers to join each other.

Where does the novel come to an end — in Book seventeenth or eighteenth? It is again a difficult question to answer. Fielding seems to be keeping the two options open and inviting the reader to make his/her own choice. Looking at the novel from a close realistic angle (words such as convincing, acceptable and logical come to mind in association with 'realistic'), we feel that Tom has become too helpless and weak (he cannot fight the whole structure single-handed) to even wriggle out of the situation in the given circumstances. The 'logic' of events in the novel strongly suggests that Tom is destined to fail, which in his specific case means losing Sophia as well as all connections with Mr. Allworthy. This points towards the likely success of Blifil's sinister plans, who operates in the novel in the manner of Fate, out to systematically destroy Tom's prospects of fulfilment at the end of his journey.

The narrator says as much in the seventeenth book and calls Tom's situation desperate. But this kind of 'realism' does not seem to go well with the *spirit* of the novel. Instead, Fielding sets much store by the 'comic approach' which stresses the vital significance of human intervention moved by the urge to change. It is this urge and attitude which inspires the narrator to continue into the eighteenth book and tell the reader confidently that Tom and Sophia were not born to fail.

3.3 FIELDING'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

3.3.1 Role of the Narrator

I shall discuss at length the question of narration in a separate unit. This is essential since the importance of this fictional device is immense. However, a brief comment is necessary here.

I see a kind of omnipotence in the narrator of *Tom Jones*. He can do whatever he wants to. He can, for instance, give a specific direction to the course of events and influence decisions of characters. More, he can defend his actions with the force of argument. This serves a useful purpose in the novel and compels us to think about the identity of the protagonist. Normally, the author is himself the narrator. However, we come across many authorial comments that are to be accepted by the reader as such and those others where the author talks tongue-in-cheek. The problem is further compounded when we see the narrator at work not in the sense that he narrates a saga but that he creates a saga after his own liking and judgement, and narrates it in the very process of creating it. The author himself combines this kind of role in *Tom Jones*. Still, as the action unfolds, we see a distancing between the narrator and author as well as the creator and author. This has happened because the 'history' called *Tom Jones* has been conceived in the broadest possible comic mould — a serious analyst and commentator wearing a comic mask has taken upon himself to 'create' a 'history' according to the law of probability and convenience. Nay, this serious-comic voice does not accept any discipline for itself and,

in fact, rides rough shod on territories of morality, religion, ethics, love, beauty, carnal pleasures, meannesses, etc.

**Important
Thematic Areas in
*Tom Jones***

Those who see the narrator as the author himself, would face the difficulty of proving that the whole unfolded 'drama' in the novel can be no more than an extension of Fielding's consciousness – that the unifying element in the novel is the author's understanding. This goes against the clash of perspectives in the novel with Fielding not willing, or being able, to provide coherence to a number of discordant voices. Tell me who is right or wrong – Mrs. Waters, Allworthy, Bridget, Tom? What I think is that the totality of the novel constitutes a dramatic interplay between various parts and these parts have an existence independent of the author's consciousness. Yes, in the absolute sense, the serious-comic narrator has been conceived and created by the author but once that has taken place, the narrator has begun influencing and determining the course of happenings unrestrained by the author. If we do not accept the concrete existence of the narrator/narrators in *Tom Jones*, we would be hard put to comprehend those points in the novel's progress where things stop 'moving.' We notice that wherever this happens, the narrator butts into not merely explaining many things, but invents arguments, situations, chance happenings, and even total reversals of fortune. The narrator never fights shy of taking the blame for such interventions and bravely moves on to tell unbelievable things. And the joke is practised invariably under the pretext of 'history.' I feel that the serious analyst and commentator has withdrawn himself many a time from behind the mask or, to put it differently, allowed the mask to be peculiarly shaped by the comic intention. Most of the voices, then, are masks. In either case, Fielding the author seems to watch helplessly the movement of the action.

3.3.2 Places as Segments of Life : the Country, the Road, the City

An important thematic aspect of the novel is the division of life in segments. These particular representations bear the stamp of the place to which they belong. Together, these concrete segments bring to life the whole diversity as well as interrelatedness of eighteenth century English life. As a faithful observer of contemporary situations, Fielding presents the true picture of his surroundings, doing it with the intensity and passion of a creator of history.

There are three distinct places in the novel — Somersetshire, the road (paths, towns and villages spread over the distance between Somersetshire and London), and the city of London. As far as Tom is concerned, these three represent distinct phases in his development. For instance, Somersetshire stands for a dull and stagnated existence. In spite of the two learned men, Square and Thwackum (who interpret situations specifically), the place has been managed and governed since a long time by narrow perception and belief. Magistrate Allworthy uses his intellectual might just to help people out of the errors they commit. Squire Western quarrels or socialises with neighbours on the basis of ordinary principles. The common people — men and women — fight it out in physical terms whenever a disagreement between them takes place. Others steal or snatch. If chance permits, they also cheat. Among the clever ones, Blifil mixes truth and lies to good effect so that he can outwit the best of men. But what we largely see is a pattern under which the movement is circular — you come back to the point from where you started. I draw your attention to Sophia's mother who married the wrong man. The daughter Sophia is also going to marry a wrong man (Blifil) under circumstances that are essentially similar. To think of another detail, Partridge, the supposed father of Tom, is constrained to leave the place and Jones is equally well forced to run away from it. This place also strongly suggests that movement and liberation lies elsewhere though Tom and Sophia who run away with this consciousness do not know where and how exactly they can attain deliverance. What is certain is that Somersetshire holds no hope.

The second place, the road, stresses Tom's need to move and explore. The road also gives Tom scope to reach another place where joining with his beloved may be possible. It holds our hope. On her part, Sophia becomes gradually aware of the value of marriage with a person gifted with natural goodness. This 'road' is rough and difficult, both literally and metaphorically. But it is here that the action is. There is no place better than the road to present the vibrant life of eighteenth century England. Fielding gives us a rare view of the people on the move. The reader sees the soldiers going to fight for causes that may determine the political nature of the country. But these soldiers, in their amorphous military formation behave as individuals with whom the common reader can easily identify, and whom our hero joins for a short period. In fact, Tom thinks for a while to become a soldier — the only difficulty with him is that a career in the military will take him away from his other 'destination,' Sophia. Fielding persists with the depiction of fights, journeys, escapes, etc. in the Man of the Hill episode also. We can imagine, too, the variety of social life that the England of the eighteenth century contained — the innkeepers, travellers in stage-coaches, doctors, priests, barbers, or the gypsies making merry in a secluded part away from the road. The 'road' as a phase of Tom's search and exploration, as mentioned above, is not smooth or straight and can give unexpected jolts to the traveller.

The city of London offers a radically different picture. There is 'life' all right but no movement, apart from that which is noticed on the surface. The world of intrigue and scandal is seen to engulf everyone. We also perceive a conflict between the country squire (Allworthy, Western) and the lord (Fellamar) in London. For Western, it is unthinkable to have Lord Fellamar as son-in-law — the two worlds of status and privilege (of the countryside and the city) being in a state of antagonism. As Lady Bellaston and Lord Fellamar become active to tame and ensnare Sophia, one feels that there is no chance whatsoever of Sophia and Tom uniting. Here, Fielding raises the question of Tom's efficacy as a hero struggling for survival in an atmosphere fraught with threats and dangers. Still more serious is the issue that contending groups converge upon London, a world which itself is quite crisis-ridden, to find a solution of their problems. As we have discussed elsewhere, the city of London makes the possibility of 'comedy' extremely narrow as the fighting faculties of Tom gradually decline.

3.3.3 Breadth of Fielding's Realism

It is easier in the case of *Tom Jones* than most other English novels to move out of the presented situations. The narrator remains insistent that *Tom Jones* is not a fictional work but history. The division of the description into three clear parts takes us into the manner in which the countryside and the city coexisted and reflected upon each other. Coexistence is a weak word since the relationship between the two social segments was anything but kind and peaceful. The metaphor of the city in *Tom Jones* signifies a moribund life-mode and the sooner it is replaced or wiped out by the country (Tom-Sophia intervention), the better. The writer could not adopt a harsher attitude towards the social set up of his time. Understandably, it evoked a violent response.

Fielding's sense of realism stands further enhanced by his view of the countryside which, as he sees it, contained a large amount of the natural and spontaneous. In spite of this, Fielding offers a thorough-going critique of the good as well as the negative characters in the countryside by persistently presenting them as targets of ridicule or irony. He does not seem to be sufficiently sure that the vigour and zeal of the simple people can see the society through. In many cases, Fielding understands the ills and evils of Somerset to be entirely insurmountable.

The road has more of the political aspect to it as against the social. Here, the current of 'life' is stronger. Rebellion by a section of society and the effort of others to quell it is a constant point of reference. What England seems to need is a check on lawlessness but in Fielding's view, this check should contain in large measure the support of the common people – Tom's gusto is quite akin to Molly's. Fielding's prescription is not narrowly literary — an entertainment through fiction that makes the reader aware of the follies, ills and evils of human behaviour through deployment of technique. This is what most English and American criticism is preoccupied with. Instead, the prescription is political because of which *Tom Jones* shocked the eighteenth century reader. If Johnson tended to reject it as immoral and 'vicious,' he did so because he understood it as going against established norms. For Johnson, these forces were of morality and decency in life.

From here, we move on to the higher plane of social history. The novel is not merely Tom's story but history. Tom signifies the emergence of a new group of people in the eighteenth century English society. This group took independent positions and enjoyed critiquing and rejecting whatever obstructed its social progress. The group had an outlook of optimism and constructive intervention. This approach marked the behaviour of characters such as Tom and Sophia who were enlightened and modern in the true sense of the word. However, Fielding finds the scope of their onward journey in the novel rather difficult. We see in the novel a fine interplay of actual, fearsome conditions on one side and individual intervention on the other.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that human initiative may not succeed necessarily. The energy and dynamism of individuals is to be tempered by a great deal of wisdom. One way of successfully countering the challenge of orthodoxy and social stagnation is to evolve an alternative strategy of action. 'Nurture' is to play an important part in this strategy, meaning thereby that people like Molly, Partridge, Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Waters have to be left behind in favour of those who would acquire genuine moral superiority through intellectual daring and economic power. Fielding is strongly convinced of this.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

Fielding in *Tom Jones* plays the important role of a presenter who not only knows all but also controls the action. From time to time, Fielding as narrator steps forward to put across a view. The strength of his representation is that he allows his narrator to comment on questions and issues as also to change the perception of characters at crucial junctures. Men and women in the novel's territory have the freedom to move about freely but only under the critical gaze of the author-narrator. The act of grasping and determining situations in such fiction is broadly done through the author's attitude. In the case of *Tom Jones*, the criticism offered is sharp and the tone adopted is playful. And comic. The range of view and comment being vast and all-embracing, we realise that most vital areas of English life of the century have been significantly dealt with. Arnold Kettle has rightly remarked in his *Introduction to the English Novel* that "Fielding's own social attitudes ... evoke a response remarkably precise and controlled It is with English society at large ... that he is primarily concerned. And between the large panorama, this general interest, and ourselves Fielding himself stands (larger, more insistent than any of his creations) directing our attention, controlling our reactions...." (74-75)

Tom Jones may help us reflect upon the hypocrisy and callousness of societies, nations and regimes in the modern world and inspire the reader to fearlessly critique them through word and action. Most of the criticism coming from western countries seems to willfully overlook this aspect. This practice of academic criticism quite rampant in cultural centres today clouds our understanding of such fictional classics as *Tom Jones*.

Our job as students and teachers is to struggle for a fresh human-centred perspective. More than others, Fielding needs to be rescued from such vastly influential considerations as plot-structure, irony and artistic authenticity.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Significances:	The word is popular with modern critical theorists. The plural in the term is deliberate since this is supposed to critique the validity of one, all-important meaning. "Significances" in a novel relate to the different characters and situations.
Power-structure:	Privileges in a society have a logic and a pattern which evolve from the fact of birth, money etc. Politics, religion and morality manifest the interests of entrenched sections who together constitute such a structure.
Sexuality:	This particularly refers to female sexuality which is sought to be curbed and undermined in terms of morality and tradition. The word denotes a natural physical urge in both males and females.
Animalism:	Animal-like behaviour in human beings. Tom Jones and Molly Seagrim are good examples of it. Even though the term is positive if contrasted with hypocrisy, by itself it locks in "culture" and developed human traits.
Utilitarian:	Not related to ideas or morals. According to it, things are understood in terms of their narrow usefulness. A bourgeois trait.
Narrator :	The idea behind this word is that the author's opinion or voice may be different from that of the teller of the tale.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. In what way do the women characters in *Tom Jones* appeal to you? Have they been set apart from men in the world of the novel? Give reasons in support of your answer.
2. What is the significance of places in *Tom Jones*? Do they stand for different sets of codes prevalent in the eighteenth century English life? Discuss.

UNIT 4 CHARACTERS AS CHARACTERISATIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Problems of Characterisation
 - 4.2.1 Point of View in Fielding
 - 4.2.2 Typical and Individual Characters
 - 4.2.3 Jenny Jones's Character
 - 4.2.4 Social Dimension of Incest
- 4.3 Realistic and Comic Characters
 - 4.3.1 Jenny Jones – a Character in the Realistic Mould
 - 4.3.2 Characters in the Comic Mould
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Glossary
- 4.6 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to give you an insight into Fielding's attitude to society as exemplified in his portrayal of comic and realistic characters.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Characters in fiction refer to actual men and women in society. They are visualised by the author in human and social terms. While reading a novel, you would have come across long descriptions of the appearances and habits of important characters. The author also gives information about their age, station in life and relationship with one another. However, very soon we start hearing them speak in the first person which means that they are freed from the descriptive mould. The dialogue assigned to them puts them into a situation in which they have to carry out their specific plan of action. This 'plan of action' is loosely called the plot of which all characters are a part.

The plot, then, is a plan or sequence of incidents which is important for us largely because it has men and women in it. Good writers pay great attention to the visualisation of these men and women. They work and rework them to make the account appealing and realistic. They also select those aspects of society for depiction which directly relate to the characters. All aspects of the world captured by the author combine so well with one another that the work gains an identity of its own. This is the problem. It is immensely difficult to separate one part of a work for consideration while others are kept out of focus.

Oneness and Indivisibility of a Work

Are there parts or segments in a literary work which can be understood in separation? My answer is that a literary work can be considered a complete and unified whole and may appeal to the reader as such. We can go to the extent of comparing the work with a living organism to stress its oneness and integrity. There is a point in saying that a book cannot be split up in parts unless we want to "murder it." Harsh words these, but we know that

the effect of a literary piece on the reader is of a different kind than that of a philosophical treatise. One way to explain this difference is to say that a novel or a poem is indivisible and has what can be called its inviolability.

But what do we make of the fact, while reading a book, that a specific aspect of it draws our attention more clearly than the others? To put it differently, how does it happen that in our discussion about texts, certain areas get exclusive emphasis while the rest are more or less entirely ignored? Some of these areas can be identified as characters, the opening and ending as well as the process through which the action moves inexorably towards the ending, one or more recurring references (symbols, metaphors, myths) and the specific presence and role of the author. I am talking of the class-room discussion or the seminar format under which the 'serious' readers exchange their individual impressions about a work with one another and assess the validity of one impression against the other.

When I say "in our discussions," I have to be aware of the significant encroachment the serious student of literature makes on the work's territory, its world with diverse segments of life, meaning thereby that "divisions" and "separations" of the kind reflected in "impressions" actually take place not in the text but in the mind of the reader. All discussions about literature, the whole critical enterprise stands upon this exertion and effort of the reader to "make sense" of a book in her or his individual context. A consideration of "aspects and parts" — they are arbitrary divisions — of a book helps us as its critical readers to enter into its nature and spirit. No doubt the divisions contribute mightily to our comprehension of the author's urge to share his or her response to the prevailing environment. It is this urge, this response of the particular author, which constitutes the work's distinctiveness or inviolability — the unifier of the work being its maker. We understand a lot more acutely the author's world, social and cultural, through his work, his particular response to it.

The Common Reader versus the Critic

But there is another format, that of the comprehension of a literary piece by the "common reader," the educated sections in the larger society, as different from the "specialist reader," the student of literature and the critic. The common reader may not be "professionally" interested in seeing those nuances which presumably take our response to a higher plane, he or she may instead seek a direct link of the work with the world surrounding him or her. This happens many a time in the case of the works which reflect specifically on contemporary issues. The common reader may feel that the book in question — the poem, the novel, the play — contains a message and a statement about the actual situation of the time. The question is : How do we as serious "uncommon" readers of literature deal with such an attitude?

In my view, the idea of literature as carrying a message should always be cherished, though we notice that most of the criticism coming from the western academe has discarded it. The academy in the first world, that is how they have to be called by us, tends to divide the human creative-intellectual endeavour in separate compartments — economy, politics, philosophy, print and audio-visual media, ideology, literature, theatre, linguistics, the arts, etc. Under this scheme, the message has been assigned to politics, ideology or the media. Literary criticism, on the other hand, has come to gradually constitute the "internal areas," the linguistic-textual aspects of a book. But can we, the members of a third world society which stands deprived of even the basic means of subsistence, afford the luxury of a class-room or seminar format? In fact, Raymond Williams reminds the reader in the developed world of the west that literature should be firmly placed "in society."

4.2 PROBLEMS OF CHARACTERISATION

To my mind, characters afford important clues to the author's attitude and response. They enlighten us about the way the author's mind works in the process of understanding human personality within a particular system. But before I comment on a character or a set of characters in *Tom Jones* from the angle of human personality, I wish to state that a character in a work of fiction is always a symbol, a concretised pattern of social behaviour. What I imply is that social behaviour can be a good subject of comment – you can call a particular behaviour good, bad or just acceptable. This goes against the notion of that character who cannot be analysed except in psychological terms. An individuality captured in a novel has nothing to do with a flesh and blood human being – it is a represented individuality, not an actual one. Let me explain further. A character's representation or what is called characterisation reflects essentially upon (tells about) its representer or creator — the author — and not upon that 'personality' which a novel appears to contain within itself. Arnold Kettle struggles with this idea throughout his two-volume study *An Introduction to the English Novel*. But Kettle does not resolve the dilemma between what he calls "life" and "pattern" and merely settles down to accept what he considers two separate types of fictional works under the categories of "life" and "pattern." Kettle has argued that there can be a certain type of character which engages the attention of the reader in realistic-experiential terms – the reader feels the way the character does – and that the reader enters the emotional world of the character. For Kettle, this is "life" as captured by a novelist. Kettle's category of "pattern" the opposite of "life," stands for the author's moral or social viewpoint. To my mind, it does not vitally matter whether a character has more or less of "life" in the sense Kettle understands the term. I also add that recognition of "life" in a character in fiction may induce us to unnecessarily explore his or her "psychological depths." How does a critic do it? Of course, we read a number of books which analyse a character's mind, going, for instance, into the reasons why Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* decides to run away with Stephen Guest. However, the question is whether we explore her mind or study the factors (concerning society, family, etc.) that influenced her perception. Such a critical exercise tells us not about Maggie but George Eliot. I reiterate that the character in fiction is finally an extension of the author's consciousness. On the other hand, the reader, in the course of reading a novel, gets acquainted with the author's understanding and point of view.

4.2.1 Point of View in Fielding

In Fielding's case, identifying the attitude is not a problem. Unlike most English novelists, Fielding clearly states his socio-ideological position. When he as an author does not like a particular character or is critical about an issue, he offers sharp comments to tell his disapproval. Of course, while doing so, he adopts the comic mode and we have to admit that his repertoire of comic devices is immense. Nevertheless, none among the readers is ever left in doubt about the author's critical stance. If found unacceptable, things and people are ridiculed and exposed unambiguously in his works. It is also to be asserted that more than the comic devices and dramatic presentations of events and happenings, it is Fielding's remarks which enlighten and alert the reader. To say that Fielding is always ironical and seldom forthright in his remarks is wrong. The fact is that his comments are largely informed by that deep commitment to virtuous conduct which is the result of his strong involvement in social affairs. Consider the 'non-comic' and quite assertive tone of this statement: "I would not willingly give offence to any, especially to men who are warm in the cause of virtue or religion. I hope, therefore, no man will, by the grossest misunderstanding, or perversion, of my meaning, misrepresent me, as endeavouring to cast any ridicule on the greatest perfections of human nature; and which do indeed, alone purify and enoble the heart of man, and raise him above the brute

creation" (130). To miss out on this serious aspect of comment which the author shares with his reader would deprive us of much which in Fielding's view is the wisdom of human life. This forms an important part of his character-presentation.

4.2.2 Typical and Individual Characters

The two concepts of the 'typical' and 'individual' can be gainfully employed to understand Fielding's characterisation. Typicality stands for the broader traits of a person's behaviour. Under this view, a clergyman as a member of the profession and a maidservant would behave as all clergymen and other maidservants of the period. In the use of typicality, the writer's aim is to suggest that a society largely moulds and shapes the behaviour of its members. The men and women living at a time bear the stamp of their society and its ways. While representing characters this way in a work, the writer implies that there isn't much need to explore the deep urges and desires of people. In this sense, the typicality of a character becomes a significant means of gaining insights into the reality of the particular historical epoch to which the author belongs. But the concept of typicality by itself does not appreciate specificity and distinctiveness in a character — it swears too much by the 'general.'

The "individual" in a character could mean two things: firstly, it denotes that sensuousness which draws the reader close to the character, establishes an imaginative link between the two and the reader "becomes one" with it. Authors achieve it through the psychological projection of characters in which not just the decisions taken but the processes through which the particular person reached his or her resolutions are communicated to the reader. There is a whole aesthetic argument based upon a character's "individuality" and "sensuousness" which certifies that character's, or even the whole novel's, authenticity. This stands in opposition to another character who is merely typical and, therefore, stands for an idea. This, as I see it, is a narrow view of the concept of "individuality." If we adopted this view, we would be constrained to believe that Fielding's novels, and the characters in them, lack that verve as well as delicate sense of feeling in a situation which is the hallmark of intensely human writing. More, we might even visualise opposite polarities between the typical and the individual, the former standing for the social and the latter for the human.

The second meaning of the "individual" has greater validity, in that it points towards the particular phenomenon of which a character is a part. In fact, we cannot separate a character from the larger phenomenon under whose specific (because historically created at a juncture) rules it operates. Fiction criticism should go into this relationship between the character and the phenomenon and find out the way in which the two "create" a specificity together. Thus we see that the peculiar pattern of events presented by an author may or may not impart "sensuousness" and "authenticity" in human terms to its actors, it may not show them as "breathing" and "living," and yet engage the reader's attention in its descriptions because of the close identification the presented pattern may establish between the reality of the work and that of the reader. Do we not generally think of our own world, go over our fears and predilections while reading a good novel? In this sense, Fielding's characters may in fact be more "real" and "un-theoretical" than, for instance, those of Richardson's.

4.2.3 Jenny Jones's Character

To illustrate this, let me deal with Jenny Jones's character in *Tom Jones* at some length. Jenny Jones has been shown in three phases — as a young woman when she found herself to be much brighter than others in the neighbourhood; as a middle-aged person when she met Jones for the first time at Mazard-Hill; and finally as one surrounded by

suspicious glances but quite on her own in London. To begin with, let us address the question: what could be the motive of the author in presenting her in Somersetshire as a keen and intelligent student as well as a sensitive individual? The author derives a great deal of pleasure from her virtuosity which in a mere maidservant would be out of place. This makes her highly unpopular in the neighbourhood, particularly among women who feel threatened by her qualities of mind. That she wins close intimacy and friendship with Miss Allworthy is proof of her impressive accomplishments. Does Fielding wish to impart those "comic-heroic" qualities to her as a character which he visualises in a number of struggling individuals from the lower classes — consider Fanny, Joseph and Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*? My answer would be in the affirmative since Fielding chooses Jenny Jones as a character to emphasise a high degree of dynamism and agility. Also, is it not the author's purpose to use her as a fictional device through which the blind prejudices as well as stupidities of the majority of people can also be pinpointed? Add to this the virtue of patience and forbearance discernible in her behaviour when Mr. Allworthy so elaborately castigates her for the sin that she has *not* committed. Her loyalty to Miss Allworthy is not ordinary. The quality of her sincerity to a trapped woman would do even Sophia Western proud. Of course, the reader is to believe till the very end that she is the mother of Tom. Keeping this in view, it is not hard to connect some of the traits and abilities of Tom with those of Jenny as his "mother," strengthening the assumption that the mother of the protagonist has an importance of her own and is by that logic a character of prominence. Her expulsion by Allworthy from the neighbourhood of Paradise Hall is the height of attention she has received in the beginning of the novel. And the problem in the first phase of Jenny's career is that just when she has raised extreme expectations as an important character, she is made to disappear (as Jenny Jones) from the world of the novel forever. Again, the question is : why? As we view her second phase, we find that Jenny has undergone radical change and become an altogether different person.

It cannot be said that Fielding's characters are static, that they tend to retain throughout the novel their initial shape and form. Some of the characters may be of that kind, they may play a simple unchanging role, conceived as they are in the "humorous" mould. It is a functional role, assigned to serve particular demands in their case. This we will consider later in the discussion. What I say at this point is that Jenny Jones as Mrs. Waters cannot be easily recognised in view of so much happening to her in the previous nineteen years. For instance, she has acquired a new name not just formally and technically. Instead, she has over the long period become a typical army officer's woman — unsettled, sexually exploited, stupid, insensitive. Where are those qualities of head which put her substantially above most women in Somersetshire? What has remained of the old person in Mrs. Waters is the habit of striking easy relationships on the sly. The change is from an intelligent young woman to a clever calculating middle-aged woman. Fielding not only recognises this change consciously, and remembers the kind of person Mrs. Waters was when young, he also keeps in view the social process in which the transformation has occurred. Even ordinarily, Fielding is fond of charting the life-course of characters, i.e., sharing information with the reader about significant past happenings in the life of characters. While there may be other fictional purposes such as intensifying the plot-structure behind these numerous discourses Fielding presents, one quite important motive in the present case is that the author puts almost the whole blame for the moral-mental decline in Jenny Jones at the door of society. This is done deftly in terms of characterisation under which we see a whole system and structure critiqued through Mrs. Waters. It may as well be said that the crudities and amoral ways in Mrs. Waters are in fact instances of the brutal rigidities of the society in which she has lived and of which she is a mere victim.

Fielding works to a plan as he shows Mrs. Waters caught in the web of circumstances. Think of the situation in which Tom meets her for the first time — a woman "stripped

half-naked, under the hands of a ruffian, who had put his garter round her neck and was endeavouring to draw her up to a tree" (440-1). She faces an attempt at robbery by a desperate criminal in a forest where chances of getting help are remote. The atmosphere is "wild" in more senses than one. After she has struggled for a while, Mrs. Waters is in a state of total incapacity as she (in torn clothes) is shouting to be saved. This resembles the natural behaviour of an animal to ward off the blow and escape injury. On being rescued, Mrs. Waters turns, almost instantly, into the impulsive mould of sexuality. This seems understandable in those surroundings. The incidents subsequent to this at the Upton inn are hilarious on the surface. Actually, they also take effect under a pattern which is highly oppressive — the threats held by economic subsistence, moral principles, social etiquette, manipulative strategies of the lower people, all forming a sophisticated network at the inn which may be seen as evolved for preventing animals to gain liberty. This I call the general plan elaborately conceived and executed by the author. But the plan is only a plan, a framework. Mrs. Waters as a character may or may not adhere to the code which the framework seeks to impose on the members of society in general. And the strength of Mrs. Waters as a character lies in that she assiduously violates the code while her physical energy is constantly sapped by the intense pressures of struggle. But she is weakened 'physically' by the various assaults from centres of power — a husband in search of an absconding wife, a father closely following (on horse) his daughter so that he can capture her and hand her over to a husband in marriage, a young woman in pursuit of a lover, husband, etc. These not merely threaten Mrs. Waters's privacy with a lover, but also end up in snatching that lover who grows conscious by and by about the value of purity, loyalty and virtue. Looked at from her angle, the Upton inn is a battleground where she loses (physically) most of what she longed to achieve. But she does not give up. If she is a lively and entertaining player at the Upton inn, a highly successful comic character, it is because she has been presented in concrete terms by the author. She breathes. This I call a "concretised" character in whom the typical traits have been highly individualised. I borrow the phrase from Georg Lukacs to call this "concrete typicality" which in my opinion is the strong point of characterisation.

4.2.4 Social Dimension of Incest

In the third and last phase, Mrs. Waters appears just one of the many characters who have converged upon London to be of some use in the resolution of Tom's problems. But, is her presentation of individuality by the author compromised in the process of moving towards the city? I do not think so because in spite of the horror caused by the revelation that she is Jones's mother, she strikes the reader as a person who committed the sin of incest with the least awareness. Secondly, incest has individualistic-moralistic overtones — the individual is condemned to remain in a mental state of sin by a society whose moral code he/she has wilfully or otherwise violated. But it is to be interpreted and judged in a society which has given birth to much graver distortions of morality and ethics. There is a kind of primitivism in incest and the act points towards that distant past when relationships had not yet become fully and properly defined, and that this had given a vague and mythical dimension to a violation of social codes. On the other hand, the eighteenth century London society hides much moral-sexual distortion beneath the veil of secrecy and gradually reduces male-female interaction to a self-seeking manipulative level. To put it more clearly, hypocrisy is a much greater sin for Fielding than incest because in the former case, there is a falsity and dishonesty to which an individual consciously commits himself or herself, and society discreetly overlooks the act. However, in the latter case, the individuals involved as well as those sympathetic towards them feel "horrified" and morally "repelled." Fielding as author is quite clear when he says :

Both religion and virtue have received more real discredit from hypocrites, than the wittiest profligates or infidels could ever cast upon them: nay farther, as these two, in their purity, are rightly called the bands of civil society, and are indeed the greatest of blessings; so when poisoned and corrupted with fraud, pretence and affectation, they have become the worst of civil curses and have enabled men to perpetrate the most cruel mischiefs to their own species (130-1).

Incest is viewed differently. On knowing that Mrs. Waters, with whom Jones has been to bed, is none other than Jones's own 'mother' Jenny, Partridge's face looks "paler than ashes, his eyes fixed in his head, his hair standing on end, and every limb trembling." In fact, the moral-social code regarding incest gets further established through the feeling of horror. Soon enough, the reader gets to know that those considered guilty of the "act" were innocent. Retrieval of Tom and Mrs. Waters from the tight spot – it is a different thing that Mrs. Waters knew all along that she had never mothered a child – makes all have a sigh of relief. Again, incest to Fielding in the last pages of the novel is an act that is committed only once or a few times, but an act nevertheless. Compare this with the goings on in London under cover and which the London society wilfully ignores. We can scarcely term Lady Bellaston's efforts at engaging Tom as a lover an act. Instead, it is an elaborately planned practice.

4.3 REALISTIC AND COMIC CHARACTERS

4.3.1 Jenny Jones—a Character in the Realistic Mould

The question we can pose is: How does Fielding characterise Jenny Jones as Mrs. Waters in the third phase? Firstly, she is not as much in focus in this phase as she was at Upton. Her role towards the end of the novel becomes totally subservient to the interests of Tom. Perhaps, she has now lost the capacity to substantially influence the course of action in the novel. Why? Is it because the novel is supposed primarily to be the story of Tom and Sophia? To say that Fielding is interested in showing how Sophia and Tom finally manage to get married would be to miss the whole point. Of course, apparently the novel places Tom and Sophia at its centre, but at a deeper level, it is about the world with which they are confronted, the world in which they have to live and under whose logic they have to construct a relationship. Jenny Jones also ends up getting a clearance from Mr. Allworthy about her transgressions. The question can still be asked: Where would Jenny Jones go now? Tom's difficulties have been overcome as he turns out to be the nephew of Mr. Allworthy. As a consequence, distinction of birth is bestowed upon him. Having seen that Tom is a respectable person of the gentleman class, Squire Western loses no time agreeing to give his daughter's hand to him. But the whole arrangement, the whole solution appears to be a mere joke in comparison with what Tom and Sophia have gone through previously. This is the crux of the matter. Tom and Sophia unite only comically, with a great deal of wrestling and effort on the part of the author. In a significant sense, they do not marry because the logic of the specific circumstance does not permit it, their final fate being as problematic as that of Jenny Jones.

At the same time, Jenny Jones should be understood in terms of her realism, as one who typifies the fate of all underprivileged women in England. Mark the number of such women in the novel — Molly, her sisters and mother, the landlady and Susan the chambermaid at the Upton inn, Mrs. Miller, Nancy, etc., and our view of the hardships they undergo not merely at the sexual level but also on the economic-social plane is complete. One can scarcely overlook the hurts that life has given to these women. Fielding quite vividly presents these women and exhibits a great deal of fellow-feeling for them. One is struck by Fielding's portrayal of Susan the chambermaid at Upton whose "lips were so large that no swelling could be perceived in them, and moreover

they were so hard that a fist could hardly make any impression on them" (447). In spite of the humour, the crude violence to which ordinary women were subjected is not lost on us.

Let us remind ourselves that Jenny is one of these women, the only difference is that she is mentally better equipped and can on that strength communicate more impressively with her superiors. Because of this, she receives a hostile response from others. Even the best of men in the novel (Mr. Allworthy) thinks it proper to throw her out of the place altogether on account of the moral outrage she is supposed to have committed. Mr. Allworthy has been given the charge to keep the social surroundings morally clean. The punishment of expulsion is also meted out to Partridge but Jenny Jones is to suffer more than him — being a woman, she is fated to be abused sexually in a world ruled by patriarchal notions — chastity, propriety, loyalty, etc. Keep in mind the ideological environment of England at the time : a woman as privileged and protected as Sophia would invite crude verbal assaults. Consider what Ensign Northerton says about Sophia at the Upton inn : "I knew one Sophy Western that lain-with by half the young fellows at Bath" (342). Squire Western's appreciative remarks about Tom's free and reckless "affairs" with women, his victories and conquests, come to mind.

4.3.2 Characters in the Comic Mould

I have so far talked about Jenny Jones who belongs to the category of realistically drawn characters. These characters face threats and challenges from their society which they are born to bear with. They give that impression. Their tragedy is that the novel is not focused upon them. As a category, these characters form the realistic background, this being their true function. However, the category of "comic" characters is different. They influence the action in a major way. "Comic" would include, apart from Squire Western, Miss Western, Thwackum, Square, Mr. Allworthy and Blifil. Fielding's comprehension of these characters is in terms of an idea, that is along abstract-theoretical lines. They could be defined as Mr. Good, Mr. Spontaneous, Mr. Evil, Mr. Hypocrite, Miss Aggressive, etc. Fielding seems to have evolved a whole concept of the "comic" character. This has little to do with the comedy of humours of the previous century and before. Fielding has departed from the comedy of humours by making extensive use of real and concrete situations in which the action is made to take place. The arena of action is not human nature, the essence of human behaviour on earth which is the human beings' temporal home. That is why events and situations in *Tom Jones* are persistently called "history." If *Tom Jones* were not "history," for instance, but a revelation of human nature for the purpose of preserving it from evil, it would have been a different sort of writing. Fielding tests the efficacy of qualities the comic characters represent in actual surroundings. This enables him to evolve a new kind of characterisation, that which embodies initiative and optimism. Also, he stresses the desirability of these qualities in his own society. The reader is compelled to examine the larger tendencies that characters drawn under this mode symbolise. See the contrast between Jenny and Mrs. Fitzpatrick (realistic mode) on one side and Mr. Allworthy and Blifil (comic mode) on the other.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

Fielding wishes to share with the reader the firm belief that it is possible to attain goodness and virtue in life. Making his comic characters a part of this positive struggle, Fielding shows to the reader the fundamental value of virtuous human conduct. Most of the comic characters in *Tom Jones* taste defeat temporarily or permanently in pursuit of their goal. Yet, all seem to gradually realise the true worth of one or the other moral principle. In the process of fighting along in life, they perceive that virtue in theory is not what it may come out in practice. Mr. Allworthy's humility in the presence of Sophia in

the last book of *Tom Jones* is an eye-opener — he could not “see” whatever happened before his eyes: Tom’s parentage, Blifil’s machinations, Thwackum’s complicity, etc. This is how abstract ‘ideas’ fail in a world that is the product of a variety of contending motives and perspectives and whose roots are in actual “history.” Allworthy’s humility is the comic answer to actual threats from social forces which assume not only realistic forms such as Molly, Jenny Jones, Partridge, Mrs. Miller, Lady Bellaston, etc., but also comic forms — Blifil, Thwackum, Squire Western. The two kinds of characters — characterisations — complement each other, they work under a perspective whose basic reference is the attainment of virtue and enlightenment through continuous effort.

4.5 GLOSSARY

- Organism :** Other important derivatives are organic and organicism. It denotes something living and growing. Society as well as literature are conceived under this in terms of evolving naturally, as if from within. This concept underplays analysis and rational reconstruction.
- The common reader :** A distinct category of perception, in the twentieth century. Earlier, there was no distinction between the common reader and the specialist. The division has come to gradually acquire ideological overtones. For instance, if literature appeals to the common reader, it has the capacity to influence society. However, the specialist may view literature as just one among many responses — all being subject to examination and comment in the academic-literary world.
- Concretised behaviour :** Also individuated or individualised behaviour. Human behaviour captured in literature in specific terms. A character presented as no other, as unique. Bringing forth this aspect, the writer takes recourse to a number of factual details.
- Life and Pattern :** Arnold Kettle’s words. He has used the former in the sense of vitality. A character, living and talking, may have a lot of strength and dynamism in him or her. “Pattern” points towards common social traits. Tales with a moral reflect a “pattern,” an “idea” that applies to most of the people in life.
- Point of view :** An important concept in modern criticism theory. According to this, the author’s or a character’s point of view significantly alters the given reality of a period.
- Typical :** Originally Karl Marx’s word. Georg Lukacs developed the idea considerably. Typical symbolises the larger social aspect without which a literary work would lose its appeal. It relates to character as well as overall representation. We identify with a novel because, according to Lukacs, characters and the narration/description in it tells us about our conditions.
- Realistic mode :** The mode that draws us towards the actual conditions of a period. A particular experience or happening is at its centre.

Comic mode : Under this mode, the writer makes broad observations about life and behaviour. The writer's view and purpose have the upper hand in it.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the term "characters as characterisations"? Do characters in a work of fiction not reflect "actual" men and women in life? How would you relate to the characters in *Tom Jones*? Discuss.
3. How do we reach Fielding's point of view in *Tom Jones*? What role does it play in the shaping of characters and situations in the novel?

UNIT 5 ARTISTIC UNITY OR SOCIO-CULTURAL CONCERNS?

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Introductory Chapters : Their Relevance
 - 5.2.1 The Instructional Aspect
- 5.3 The Many Episodes in *Tom Jones*
 - 5.3.1 Why is the Man of the Hill Episode Integral to the Novel?
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Glossary
- 5.6 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Unit we looked at some of the key characters in *Tom Jones* and the problems of characterisation. In this Unit let us look at another aspect of Fielding's technique as a novelist – the question of plot. Some believe that there are several extraneous elements in the novel which can be easily deleted without any adverse effect on the overall plot. Is this true? Or is it that each detail is relevant and integral to the scheme of the whole novel? By reading this Unit carefully, you will be able to formulate reasoned answers to these questions.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern critic lays special emphasis on the unity of a literary work – that element of the book which keeps its different parts together. This element is related to the principle of form, call it the plot, the structure or the arrangement of happenings and events under a conscious artistic plan. In our opinion, such an emphasis would naturally work against the meaning and message of the literary work. While reading a novel, should we enquire whether its descriptions and representations cohere with one another to move towards an artistic unity? One cannot have much quarrel with this principle in the abstract but difficulties occur when it is used by the critic to question the validity of certain loose-looking episodes or references. In the first place, the central concern of a work can comfortably coexist with certain other major or minor concerns. In fact, in a novel, which itself is a “loose” form, many “extraneous” elements can be introduced by the author for the sake of commenting upon the general issues of the period in which he or she lived. But more importantly, the so-called minor or secondary episodes or incidents may engage the attention of one reader more than that of another. This happens because the minor elements may have something inherent in them that sets the mind of a specific reader or set of readers thinking. I have in mind the third world reader today who needs more than artistic unity. So far as *Tom Jones* is concerned, it is full of references, comments, characters and happenings that do not appear to be strictly relevant to the Tom-Sophia relationship, presumably the central concern of the novel.

5.2 INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS : THEIR RELEVANCE

Fielding can certainly be accused of bringing in a great many extraneous elements in *Tom Jones*. I refer to those elements which do not fit in with our notion of 'the novel,' a straight description of events under the overall requirements of a plot-line. Whatever falls outside these requirements becomes under this view not merely unnecessary, but downright objectionable and wrong. Think of those introductory essays given at the beginning of each book in *Tom Jones*. And there are eighteen "books" in the novel. That means eighteen essays. The titles of some of these essays are : "Of the SERIOUS in Writing, and for what Purpose it is introduced"; "Of Love"; "Of those who lawfully may, and of those who may not write such Histories as this"; "Containing Instructions very necessary to be perused by modern Critics" and "A Farewell to the Reader."

It seems that Fielding has chosen these topics at random and that he wants to share his ideas directly with the reader. It also gives us the impression that Fielding does not consider it necessary to relate these ideas in a direct sort of a way to the evolving action of the novel — for him it does not matter whether those ideas have a bearing on the novel or not. Ian Watt has remarked that Fielding assumes the role "of a guide who ... feels that he must explain everything which is to be found there; and such authorial intrusion, of course, tends to diminish the authenticity of his narrative." This is what we see superficially. But is this actually the case? In the first place, what are those ideas about? Among the topics picked up here by me, there are things like "the serious" in writing and the purpose for which it is done, love, the implications of novel as history, the job required of the critic and the act of final leave-taking by the author. Fielding's wording of the topics suggests that he is informal and relaxed in tone, to the extent of being casual. All this can make us demand that the novelistic depiction be edited and these essays be scrapped. Would it make a difference to the novel? Those among us who consider these essays redundant would obviously say that it would not only make no difference to the novel at all, but in fact add to the quality of presentation, making the whole thing look pointed and sharp. I do not agree. Yes, these essays do not affect the unfolding of the story in any way and are in that sense dispensable. But without them, the novel would not be the same. It will lose in its enjoyment-giving capacity and take us away from the narrator-author's friendly presence. Can we afford that? Considering the pros and cons of Fielding's intrusive nature, Ian Watt admits that "Few readers would like to be without the prefatory chapters, or Fielding's diverting asides, but they undoubtedly derogate from the reality of the narrative." For Watt, "the reality of the narrative" consists in an altogether different fictional mode, the one that Samuel Richardson, Fielding's contemporary adopted. Surely, for Fielding the most important aim of a novelist is to provide guidance as well as enlightenment to the reader rather than what is termed "experience."

5.2.1 The Instructional Aspect

Secondly, do we not need to know something about the issues that Fielding has touched upon in these essays? Isn't literature in general and the novel in particular supposed to provide instruction to the reader? The eighteenth century writer — think of Swift, Pope or Johnson — understood the importance of instruction much better than their counterparts in the twentieth century. The question we have to ask is : Where do we look for the broadly acceptable views on important aspects of life? Do we leave that job to the opinion-maker in religion, in politics, in social-ideological-cultural journalism? In Fielding's scheme of things, all these areas from which the opinion-maker operates in the modern world, western as well as the rest, merge into the wider area of the novel. Let us not forget that Fielding performs the twin role of entertainer and educator in his time

and that for him it is as important to acquaint the reader with the right views as to give pleasure.

Thirdly, in the specific context of the plot, Fielding thinks it appropriate to equip the reader intellectually to grasp the truth of the presented description and to judge for her/his benefit the behaviour, manners and morals of the characters in the novel. Fielding does not expect the reader to go into the complex aspects of morality, truth and courage on her/his own and in fact thinks it his duty to add to the common sense of the reader. The introductory essays given at the beginning of the books in *Tom Jones* have this specific perspective-related significance.

5.3 THE MANY EPISODES IN *TOM JONES*

Critics, particularly modern critics, are divided on the validity of the “not infrequent *longueurs*” in *Tom Jones*. The Man of the Hill episode is one of these. Some others are : Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s narrative; Tom’s encounter with the gypsies on his way to London and complications of the Nightingale affair. Do they merely add to the bulk of the novel? In the sense that they reveal a number of features of the characters involved in them, they surely take us deeper into the social reality of the period. In my view, an episode is a crystallisation of certain general tendencies of behaviour at a particular time. In this way, it can lend breadth to the envisioned life in the novel. We can with its help construct explanations of the thorny issues that emerge in the course of the main action of the novel. They constitute the world in which Tom and Sophia fought their specific battles. By offering various choices of action and alternative strategies of behaviour, they also significantly break the finality of the central narrative. What Tom and Sophia did was because they chose to do so and that they could go another way if they so desired.

5.3.1 Why is the Man of the Hill Episode Integral to the Novel?

To illustrate the points made above, let us take a close look at the Man of the Hill episode which has been specifically at the centre of controversy among most twentieth century critics. Its analysis can help us identify Fielding’s larger social as well as moral concerns. The analysis may also shed light on Fielding’s view of the epic nature of the novel. R. S. Crane, an American critic of the New Criticism school, for instance, is not happy with Fielding’s various comments, explanations and episodes in the novel because with their help, he thinks, Fielding merely “states” his position. Particularly, Crane is not sure about the “positive values this (the Man of the Hill’s episode) may have” in the plot structure of the novel. On his side, Fielding has presented the episode as the old man’s “History” and “Story.” Fielding’s purpose ostensibly is to integrate “his History” and “Story” into that of *Tom Jones*. Secondly, the Man of the Hill’s story – the account of his life from early years to old age – is fact-based. Isn’t that what we mean by history? But “Story” also signifies a fictional account – something that individuals in their context perceive and present. The Man of the Hill himself tells his story. May be, he wants to justify his decision to stay alone, totally cut off from the world in which he was born. Hence the story – an imaginative construction – is told by him. Let us then look at some of the important aspects of the “Story” and “History” presented by Fielding in the old man’s words. From the meeting of Tom Jones and Partridge, both travellers, with the Man of the Hill springs in the novel “a very extraordinary adventure,” which is not merely in terms of an incident involving robbery and physical attack. It is also Tom’s and Partridge’s confrontation with a person who went through the highs and lows of life and experienced a great deal of pain. That is how the account of life of the Man of the Hill is “the story of an unhappy man” which Tom and his companion hear with uncommon interest. It is a tale with a beginning when the Man of the Hill was a child and an end when he had after a lapse of a whole active life reached the conclusion that “Man alone,

interest. It is a tale with a beginning when the Man of the Hill was a child and an end when he had after a lapse of a whole active life reached the conclusion that "Man alone, the king of this globe, the last and greatest work of the Supreme Being, below the sun; man alone has basely dishonoured his own nature, and by dishonesty, cruelty, ingratitude, and accursed treachery, has called his Maker's goodness in question, by puzzling us to account how a benevolent Being should form so imperfect and so vile an animal" (431). It is a long sentence and the Man of the Hill seems to be struggling with words to say something profound. While in this characterisation of human nature, man has been referred to as "the king of the globe" and "the last and greatest work of the Supreme Being," there is the realisation, based on observation and experience, that he is actually "imperfect" and a "vile animal."

At the time of expressing this view of mankind, the Man of the Hill is an old man and has lived in seclusion for a long time. He remains firm in this belief in spite of the strong argument that Tom presents to him. As we see, only once (when the old man talks to Tom and Partridge), does the old man budge from his decision to keep away from humans and enter into an open exchange of views with a fellow being. Tom, the avid listener in this episode, speaks but little. Tom's comment occurs only at the end of the account. Here, his aim is to comprehend and interpret, in his own specific context as a learner, the old man's version of a series of happenings.

If we calculate, the old man has talked of events, personal or social, that took place in the late seventeenth century England. The reader of the novel is supposed to feel one with Tom in this curiosity, honest concern as well as absorption of truth about social life. This seems to be the intention of the author. As Fielding sees it, Tom is the discerning, critical, evolving, error-committing and learning character. The account of the Man of the Hill is a part of Tom's education.

An important aspect of the personality of the Man of the Hill is that he has travelled a great deal during his life — from home to Oxford and from there to London and many small towns and villages, as well as the countries of Europe. He shares with Tom Jones this trait of moving around the world in order to seek peace of mind. In fact, there are many more similarities between the character and circumstance of Tom Jones and those of the Man of the Hill. For instance, the Man of the Hill has an unloving mother and an affectionate, well-meaning father. He also has a brother taking to evil ways and becoming a strong adversary to the younger brother, a good and promising lad. The exposure of the Man of the Hill to the environment at Oxford, London and elsewhere reminds us compellingly of the ordeals suffered by Tom during his journey. Both are by temperament good, helpful and generous. If Tom listens intently to the "History" of the Man of the Hill, it is largely on account of these and other similarities. What I mean is that in this sense does the story of the old man become "History," or at least a part of Tom's history. When Tom's attention is disturbed by the queries and silly interventions of Partridge, he (Tom) shows clear annoyance and irritation, not merely because those are acts of discourtesy. There seems to be a great amount of turmoil and churning in the mind of Tom as he listens to the step-by-step progress in the account of the Man of the Hill.

From the way Tom and the Man of the Hill strike a friendly relationship in the beginning of their meeting, we get the impression that Tom Jones is standing face to face with his own future. In the particular context, the Man of the Hill feels obliged that Tom saved his life when it was under threat from the robbers. This is how the two respond to each other at the very moment they begin their conversation which leads to the long account of the life of the Man of the Hill :

"Whoever you are, or whithersoever you are going," answered the old man, "I have obligations to you which I can never return."

"I once more," replied Jones, "affirm, that you have none : for there can be no merit in having hazarded that in your service on which I set no value. And nothing is so contemptible in my eyes as life."

"I am sorry, young gentleman," answered the stranger, "that you have any reason to be so unhappy at your years."

"Indeed I am, sir," answered Jones, "the most unhappy of mankind."

Here, does Tom not feel the way the old Man did in the bitterest phase of his life? As a consequence, the old man suddenly becomes interested in Tom's affairs. He goes on :

—Perhaps you have a friend, or a mistress," replied the other. "How could you," cries Jones, " mention two words sufficient to drive me to distraction?" "Either of them are enough to drive any man to distraction," answered the old man. "I enquire no further, sir. Perhaps my curiosity has led me too far already."

"Indeed, sir," cries Jones, "I cannot censure a passion which I feel at this instant in the highest degree. You will pardon me, when I assure you, that everything which I have seen or heard since I first entered this house, has conspired to raise the greatest curiosity in me. Something very extraordinary must have determined you to this course of life, and I have reason to fear your own history is not without misfortunes" (402).

In fact, we notice that Tom takes the initiative in this conversation and implores the old man to acquaint him with the experiences he has had in life. Why? "Your own history is not without misfortunes" sends such strong indications of the existence of pain in Tom's life that for a moment the reader may well forget the existence of the Man of the Hill and focus entirely on Tom's state of mind.

The point I am trying to make make is that the social environment has a lot to answer for in the case of the Man of the Hill. That is one reason why Fielding refers in such elaborate terms to the atmosphere in Oxford and London. Why did the Man of the Hill feel insecure and vulnerable in the early phase of his life? In this context, Fielding deliberately builds up a contrast between the old man and Tom in spite of the many similarities we notice between the two. Tom has himself been a bastard child, a foundling. There are few, if any, kind gentlemen in Tom's surroundings who would take care to defend and protect the weak. Squire Allworthy is an exception. On the other hand, there are hordes of cheats, thieves and rogues roaming the streets who might offer an alternative path of career to an able-bodied young man aspiring to gain riches and the attendant comforts. During his time, the Man of the Hill joined the group of gamblers and Tom could equally well join such people against whom he happens to defend hapless men and women. Since both have an uncommon amount of morality and fellow-feeling, basic Christian virtues in their cases, they somehow manage to steer clear of vile ways.

However, that does not change the social scene around them. It is this, in my opinion, that Fielding unquestionably emphasises in the Man of the Hill episode, something that we tend to forget in our long and extended discussions about plot structure, Fielding's characterisation, irony, method of narration, and so forth. To my mind, there is an essential linkage between this vision of society and the deployment of various techniques by the author to acquaint us with the world in which he, the author, lived. The significance of the Man of the Hill episode lies in that it is more strictly "realistic," narrowly "historical" than the "History of Tom Jones" which can in a restricted sense be termed a "success story" involving a large number of chances and coincidences to support it. Fielding, the honest perceiver of social trends, carefully includes the meeting

of Tom Jones with the Man of the Hill so that he could go into the dynamics of Tom's progress with a critiquing presence in the novel. William Empson has said that through the old man's account, "Fielding meant to give a survey of all human experience (that is what he meant by calling the book an epic) and the Old Man provides the extremes of degradation and divine ecstasy which Tom has no time for; as part of the structure of ethical thought he is essential to the book, the keystone at the middle of the arch ... the whole setting of the book in the 1745 Rebellion gets its point when it interlocks with the theory and practice of the Old Man. So far from being "episodic," the incident is meant to be such an obvious pulling together of the threads that it warns us to keep an eye on the subsequent moral development of Tom." The typical western reader of today can scarcely see the logic behind the existence in *Tom Jones* of the Man of the Hill beyond the fact that he is a clumsy, and therefore, unnecessary presence. Should we not think about the reasons behind the western reader's lack of sensitivity towards the horrifying social scene in England? We can scarcely overlook the number of incidents through which Fielding's novels alert the reader to murders, rape, molestation, waylaying, etc. on the country roads and in the towns. Is this realism of no value to the modern reader? The 'developed' western world seems to shy away from its "History." It wishes to derecognise its past. Fielding as a presenter of social reality during this time causes embarrassment. The modern western critic is understandably more interested in the irony and the abstract philosophy behind the irony in Fielding's novels. The reader of a third world country would do well to doubt the various abstract appreciations showered upon Fielding. I assert that these appreciations have their roots in modern-day western politics and ideology.

In fact, the difference, if not contrast between the Man of the Hill and Tom Jones helps us appreciate the emergence of the colossus-like figure of Tom Jones, a figure that lets us interpret the eighteenth century society as a playfield for the sporting exploits of a hero. As against the deep and total seclusion of the Man of the Hill stands the struggling and participatory character of Tom Jones who understands his scenario differently. The pursuit of a goal, the endeavour that the existing structure allows a hero equipped with the self-assurance of a competitor, lends immense appeal to Tom's character. Tom is a fine combination of broad virtues, such as honesty and truthfulness, and an amorality that hits strongly at conventional rigidities as well as hypocrisies of the day. The contrast between the attitudes of the Man of the Hill and Tom Jones also shows Fielding's intellectual-perspectival tilt towards the successful completion of Tom's journey through life. It is a choice for "comedy," a successful resolution of problems through the author's intervention. Fielding seems to have seriously decided to pull Tom out of that feeling of nothing being "so contemptible in my eyes as life."

The intellectual churning taking place in Tom's mind as he listens to the story of the Man of the Hill, seems to finally slow down as the Man of the Hill comes to the end of his story. Now, Tom is at the end of the tunnel. He has taken stock of the upheavals in the life of the Man of the Hill and come to the conclusion, tentatively at least, that the old man took an extremely idealistic view of his circumstances. At this juncture, Tom doesn't share the old man's final view (yes, the view has a finality that is oppressive) about life :

I was now once more at liberty, and immediately withdrawing from the highway into the fields, I travelled on, scarce knowing which way I went, and making it my chief care to avoid all public roads, and all towns, nay even the most homely houses; for I imagined every human creature whom I saw, desirous of betraying me.

At last, after rambling several days about the country, during which the field afforded me the same bed, and the same food, which Nature

bestows on our savage brothers of the creation ... [availing myself of] an opportunity of once more visiting my own home; and of enquiring a little into my affairs, which I soon settled as agreeably to my brother ... [whose behaviour] was selfish and ungenerous ... and from that day to this my history is little better than a blank (428-429).

There is a ring of the pristine sincerity and moral rightness in these words of the old man, as denoted by "homely houses" and "Nature bestows on our savage brothers of the creation," the tone of the speech being that of hurt innocence and purity. However, Tom is not impressed by the wisdom. He goes over and comprehends in detail the story which is, as he sees, a version of the narrator in spite of the facts constituting the truth of the story. This is Tom's comment based on his analysis :

In the former part of what you said," replied Tom Jones, "I most heartily and readily concur; but I believe, as well as hope, that the abhorrence which you express for mankind, in the conclusion, is much too general. Indeed you here fall into an error, which, in my little experience, I have observed to be a very common one, by taking the character of mankind from the worst and basest among them; whereas indeed, an excellent writer observes nothing should be esteemed as characteristic of a species, but what is to be found among the best and most perfect individuals of the species. This error, I believe, is generally committed by those who, from want of proper caution in the choice of their friends and acquaintance, have suffered injuries from bad and worthless men; two or three instances of which are very unjustly charged on all human nature

... If there was indeed much more wickedness in the world than there is, it would not prove such general assertions against human nature, since much of this arrives by mere accident, and many a man who commits evil, is not totally bad and corrupt in his heart. In truth, none seem to have any title to assert human nature, since much of this arrives by mere accident, and many a man who commits evil, is not totally bad and corrupt in his heart. In truth, none seem to have any title to assert human nature to be necessarily and universally evil, but those whose own minds afford them one instance of this natural depravity; which is not, I am convinced, your case (431-432).

On the surface, this speech is addressed to the Man of the Hill. We notice breaks in the sentences, changes and modifications in words, and the general unease with the way the argument is given form. Tom's uncertainty and hesitation, particularly in the beginning when he frees himself from the straight, unilinear logic of his companion reflects a mind out in the open to search its specific path. However, there is no given path; Tom has to make his own on the basis of his requirements in a world that has moved away from the ways it pursued earlier, even at the time the Man of the Hill was young. The period in which the old man went through the ups and downs of life and the one in which Tom is journeying, literally and metaphorically, have a gap of at least sixty years, quite significant in the context of English history — the seventies and eighties of the seventeenth century and the twenties and thirties of the eighteenth century.

5.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have seen the importance attached to artistic unity in modern critical thought. Literary texts are readers's texts in the final analysis. The idea of the author "talking" to the reader is important in a particular kind of a novel. Apart from an entertainer, the novelist is a teacher and a moral guide. We have also discussed the significance of the many "stories" and episodes in *Tom Jones*. The Man of the Hill

episode is an integral part of the novel. The episode is a "History" that puts Tom in perspective. The reader is required to think of the two historical periods in comparison with each other – the late seventeenth century and the mid-eighteenth century. The realism of the Man of the Hill episode may be embarrassing for the modern western reader. How does it strike you as a third world reader?

5.5 GLOSSARY

- Artistic unity:** This refers to the concerns of the modern western critic according to whom the inner components of a work should well cohere under an aesthetic pattern. The idea has its source in Aristotle.
- Authorial intention:** Sometimes, events in a work, driven as they are by their internal logic, move out of the control of the author. In such a case, the conscious purpose of the author stands subverted. In the process, the author learns a great deal from his/her own representation.
- History and Story:** The former is taken generally as a representation on the basis of facts. The story, however, is wholly imaginary. The question is: How does the story have a bearing upon history? The relationship between the two is the crux of fiction criticism.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Can the various episodes in *Tom Jones* be dispensed with? What is Fielding's purpose behind their inclusion in the novel? Write a reasoned answer.
2. The novel is supposed primarily to give pleasure (comic or aesthetic) to the reader. Discuss *Tom Jones* in the light of this statement.

UNIT 6 FEMINIST CONCERNS IN FIELDING

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Marriage and Female Sexuality
 - 6.2.1 Tom's Affinity with Women
 - 6.2.2 The Idea of 'poaching' in the Novel
- 6.3 Pregnancy in *Tom Jones*
 - 6.3.1 Pregnancy with Bridget in Focus
 - 6.3.2 Marriage Critiqued Sharply in Bridget-Summer Alliance
 - 6.3.3 Historical Metaphor of Pregnancy
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Glossary
- 6.6 Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to acquaint you with the question of marriage as a social institution in *Tom Jones*. You will see that marriage in the eighteenth century England was used extensively to subjugate women in a framework that took its commands from economic interests. You will also realise that women evolved their own specific strategies to counter the male onslaught through marriage. What is going to particularly impress you is that Fielding views his women characters with great sympathy and understanding.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Fielding is one of the most pro-woman writers in English fiction. Isn't it amazing? This is substantially because he is not merely a keen observer of reality but also one who recognises and accepts people as they are. This means that he doesn't wish to impose his views on them. His moralist bias is expressed in terms of opinion and conviction but not in terms of representation in fiction. As we notice, he allows his characters to tread their own individual paths. For instance, if Fielding finds the women of his day indulging in sexual liberties recklessly, he would go critically into the larger phenomenon than say that the specific women be castigated and punished. More, Fielding sees most libertine tendencies among women as matters of nature's assertion — suggesting that this is how women behave in actual life and that, therefore, they should be appreciated for their spontaneity and uninhibitedness in sex. In fact, Fielding would have been harsh towards them if they went against spontaneous and uninhibited behaviour. This is the essence of Fielding's comic genius and realism.

6.2 MARRIAGE AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

Talking of the women represented in *Tom Jones*, we can usefully focus on the institution of marriage. Marriage, as Fielding sees it, is a socio-economic alliance between males and females. Think how and why the two Blifil brothers scheme their marriage with Miss Bridget Allworthy. Think of Tom. His intimacy with Sophia would not get sanction because the marriage between the two would not qualify on socio-economic grounds. On the other hand, the young Blifil, the likely inheritor of Mr. Allworthy's fortune, would be

considered the most suitable boy for Sophia, irrespective of the fact that he does not love her and she on her side strongly and clearly hates him.

The term "socio-economic alliance" for marriage is a broad one. What actually comes into practice in marriage is the conduct-code. Under this code, particularly, the woman loses all identities as a human being – the specific name, the station, the right to decision-making, an activist participation in given situations, etc. Fielding has observed that the conduct-code of marriage suppresses women's spontaneity more than that of men – the difference can be seen in the example of Squire Western and his wife. The latter died early in life largely because she as a wife could see no scope of true relationship with her husband under what came to be called a marriage.

However, outside marriage women behave freely to the extent of being aggressive. First, they do not merely 'flirt,' but actually seduce men and lead them straight to bed. If Squire Western is shown as a great hunter in the novel, Molly Seagrim has been shown no less as a fighter and marauder. Secondly, the philosopher spotted in Molly's bed by Tom arouses in us a sense of ridicule and disgust – his practice goes against his precept as he sheepishly reveals himself in a state of undress. Not Molly. In her case, it is raw sexuality. Though her own mother and sisters as well as the neighbourhood do not approve of her ways, Fielding is far from critical towards her. Another version of female sexuality – pleasure-giving and natural – is presented through Jenny Jones. Tom has also come of age by the time he meets her and we notice greater reciprocity between the two. What we scarcely notice, however, is that under Fielding's scheme, such reciprocity is not witnessed between partners in marriage. Instead, we see wives running away from husbands and husbands in hot pursuit of them – they have to get back their wives into the marriage-mould. Thus, female-sexuality and marriage stand in contrast to each other. Does it not have its basis in Fielding's attitude towards women?

6.2.1 Tom's Affinity with Women

Tom's own sexuality is equally uninhibited and pronounced. But we have to recognise that he shares this trait more with women than men. Firstly, he learnt about its existence from Molly, a woman conceived outside the family or marriage-mould. His sympathy and kindness towards all women has its source in his sense of gratefulness to both Molly and Jenny Jones. Tom has that softness, sentimentality and considerateness in his nature which women have nurtured in him. No other male in *Tom Jones* is like Tom in this respect.

We should also consider that no male, apart from Tom, has what can truly be called sexuality. In Mr. Allworthy, there is a great deal of intellectual toughness and stamina. He also has deep sentiments as we notice in the last book of the novel. But he is not the man to communicate with a woman on equal terms in a relationship. Squire Western has a passion only for hunting. Square and Thwackum are not capable of realising the true nature of sexuality. For Blifil, a woman is a mere object of sex. See the way he fantasises about Sophia in moments of solitude. Sophia appears to him in his dreams as someone who has a body passively responding to male assault.

Fielding's approach to the question of true female sexuality is exploratory and highly subtle. Sexuality in the case of Sophia is shown as evolving into a kind of bliss through a great deal of fears, uncertainties as well as longings for a companion who would follow a different conduct-code than the one normally encountered. But she is definitely for a code, not a free play of the impulse. What can this different code be? Sophia doesn't have an answer to this question. But she knows, and her knowledge is based on acute observation, that raw nature and total spontaneity by themselves would lead humans nowhere. Tom also has gradually realised this truth. Insofar as positive principles of

sexuality in a given life-frame are concerned, the two have to construct them together. Naturalness would not be negated. Rather, it would be tempered. To be more precise, naturalness is going to be at the centre of all that Sophia and Tom are going to construct in the name of a special code of love-companionship-marriage. Is this possible to attain within the given life-frame? Neither of them is sure. But they would try to evolve it since this effort alone is going to be the basis of their relationship.

6.2.2 The Idea of 'Poaching' in the Novel

While talking about Fielding's feminist concerns, I wish to draw your attention to a few specific areas of human behaviour and sensitivity that emerge in *Tom Jones* as striking. One of these areas is what I prefer to call 'poaching'.

The act of 'poaching' occupies a central place in the novel both in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense. The literal incident of stealth is referred to by Fielding in Book III. In the company of Black George, Tom decides to be active on the land of Squire Western. The shooting of partridges brings to the fore Tom's childish foray into Western's territory. But Tom never killed the birds. The reason why Tom has owned up the crime is that he wants to save Black George from punishment. But this idea of trespassing, intervening and encroaching on someone else's territory is exploited time and again by the author.

Poaching at one level suggests that the private space of an individual is always vulnerable to prying. The novel opens with the whole neighbourhood becoming curious about the identity of Tom's parents, particularly Tom's mother. Begetting Tom was a secret act between two individuals. But the act of which two? Most people in the novel have declared unto themselves that this should not remain a secret. Then, also think of the surveillance under which Sophia is kept till the moment people come to know that she is in love with Tom and wants to marry him. Still further, we see towards the end of the novel that even those among society who belong to the privileged sections move about in parties with faces masked – they are afraid that someone would violate their private space. Operating at various levels of meaning, this active metaphor adds to the richness and complexity of the text.

Fielding's perception of the society as an organic whole enables him to go into the basic aspects of its structure. Is there a clear demarcation between one man's domain and another's? Should a particular man's or woman's space not mean a habitat that has come into being for useful intermingling with others? If that is the case, we should probe the nature of this social intermingling. The author considers it serious that social intermingling in the world of *Tom Jones* soon degenerates into interference and worse.

Let us briefly analyse Fielding's use of the metaphor of 'poaching.' It can be dealt with at three levels – economic, ideological-moral, and in terms of gender.

There are various instances of poaching as social trespass in episodes related to money-matters. I have indicated a few already. The wooing of Bridget Allworthy by various gentlemen like Doctor Blifil, Captain Blifil, Thwackum and Square indicates the lust for money. Similarly, Blifil's attempts throughout the novel to outshine Tom exemplify the desire to absorb Allworthy's estates and property. Fielding's endeavour in the novel is to show how these people illustrate not merely lack of principles. Their being active on someone else's property is an example in miniature of a larger eighteenth century phenomenon where a new set of people, all highly motivated and aggressive, compete for the acquisition of power on the social plane. This economic poaching serves to bring to the fore a society that is acutely conscious of money and class and tries to manipulate things on the basis of this power. Fielding does not specifically pass judgement on

characters. Instead, he investigates loopholes in a certain set of people. This problem is focused on with a view to redefining the conventional relationship within society. What can be a feeling of sharing, compassion and understanding turns into a matter of interception when either 'duty' or right is forgotten. What appears to me most significant in this phenomenon is that it is always the woman who stands at the receiving end of the social onslaught perpetrated to grab property and money-power.

The same idea is explicated in what may be termed as incidents of 'moral/religious poaching' in the text. Thwackum and Square not only try to impel Tom to follow their principles but also prefer Blifil to him in order to have their hold on the power-structure. The same tendency is shown by Squire Western and his sister in their dealings with Sophia. Fielding suggests to the reader that he/she examine these characters carefully. Tom exhibits qualities that the others lack. Tom's generosity, benevolence and tenderness in relationships go radically against the actual life-manoeuvrings in which all males are involved.

This exaltation of a male character over practically all the female characters proves to be an excellent point of entry for questioning Fielding's own ideological stance vis-a-vis the female characters. Is the author biased towards 'man'? Does he, therefore, indulge in 'gender-poaching'? By 'gender-poaching', one means that the novelist considers 'woman' as merely a good device with the help of which he could drive his message home and further his plot. The question certainly remains since Sophia is not seen for a long time in terms of a concrete individual entity with a voice and mind of her own. Her delineation in the novel is along different lines – she asserts herself truly only at the end. One might say that she hardly herself asserts even then. What happens is that she helplessly agrees to make her father happy. Fielding closes the novel on a "comic" note, not a "realistic" one.

Is Fielding trying to present the eighteenth century society as it then existed? Or is he hinting at a universal phenomenon where men always dominated woman? The text doesn't offer answers to these and such other questions. It only presents a number of perspectives – all clashing with one another. For instance, there can be a case of 'gender-poaching' from a strictly feminist point of view. If one pursues the latter then one finds that Fielding is trying to suggest more than one answer to the problem. This modernist characteristic of complexity and multiplicity of voices is indeed an achievement for a novelist who was writing way back. The reader, after seeing Fielding in this light, begins to perceive another kind of 'poaching' that transcends the boundaries of the text and enters the realm of the genre to which *Tom Jones* belongs – "a comic epic poem in prose."

6.3 PREGNANCY IN *TOM JONES*

Pregnancy constitutes an important aspect of the narrative of *Tom Jones*. Pregnancy also affects the lives of women alone – there is no social arrangement that ensures protection and help to pregnant women. It's a different matter that we do not easily notice the hardship caused to women in this respect. If a society were properly organised, the fact of pregnancy would expect both men and women to carry the burden together. Instead, the society in *Tom Jones* subjects women caught in the pregnancy trap to untold miseries and sufferings. In fact, pregnancy becomes an instrument in the hands of the eighteenth century society to subjugate women. When we read *Tom Jones*, we find that Fielding uses pregnancy as a literary device to bring out the social helplessness of women belonging to the different strata.

“Literary device” here includes two levels of working, thematic and structural. The thematic aspect will take us into the moral-critical direction while the structural will enable us to see the presence of pregnancy at the centre of the fictional representation in the novel. We should deal with them separately and then work towards a unified idea of the phenomenon that *Tom Jones* contains within itself. This scheme of interpreting the novel may also throw light on the historical necessities that Fielding lived under as a writer.

Fielding took note of the fact that women remained at the receiving end of the legal and economic stick and that pain, servitude and anguish were the lot of either the poor and dispossessed, or women, or both. Does this immediate context, for Fielding have roots in the longer history of English society? The answer would be a definite yes. Fielding is very fond of going back into history and looking at his social context from there. There are innumerable references to happenings, developments and characters of which Fielding makes a deft use to enlighten the eighteenth century context.

6.3.1 Pregnancy with Bridget in Focus

If *Tom Jones* were to be the story of Bridget Allworthy and her son Tom, it would sharply focus upon the sense of insecurity the women of the day suffered from. We can imagine the mother and son facing criticism from everyone all their lives. Mr. Allworthy may have rendered financial assistance for their upkeep, but he would not approve of the woman's conduct. See the way Mr. Allworthy thinks of sexual transgression as sinful. His whole terminology is that of a good and sincere Christian.

That Fielding uses the pregnancy of Bridget outside wedlock to heap condemnation on her is an example of his moralist concerns. The fear of likely social condemnation compels Bridget to make that pact with Jenny Jones under which the latter owned up the blame for causing disgrace to her sex and, therefore, had to leave the place. Jenny's toughness is remarkable in the sense that she keeps her word to Bridget till the very end. But this toughness also reflects upon the intolerance of her society towards women. In this sense, the social hatred for her is also for Bridget who in fact felt more frightened of the possible exposure. Compare this with Molly's pregnancy. Molly doesn't much care for the disdain that people would heap upon her for being morally lax. However, the fact is that Tom feels compelled to marry Molly, or he would lose whatever credibility he has at Paradise Hall as a good person.

A still more important aspect of pregnancy is that it has been structured into the very fabric of the novel. Fielding did it consciously. He made Bridget's pregnancy a precondition for the existence of the protagonist – the novel is the story of a bastard child left by his mother on the bed of Mr. Allworthy in the beginning itself. Whatever happens to Tom is the consequence of his illegitimacy for which a woman's pregnancy as a natural act is to blame.

For a while, let us free ourselves from the author of *Tom Jones* and look at the novel as a text, as something that embodies a meaning independent of the unity given to it by Fielding. The metaphor of pregnancy can then be applied to the “history” of *Tom Jones* in a new way. How do we take a pregnancy outside wedlock? As already suggested, pregnancy is a natural human act. Summer, the father of Tom, and Bridget spent a great deal of time together at Paradise Hall, fell in love and became physically intimate as a consequence of mutual attraction. The fact of pregnancy, then, isn't linked with “accident” or chance but warmth of human togetherness. Miss Bridget, not the loveliest of women in *Tom Jones*, experienced love of a kind that no other character in the novel would ever experience. A secret pact between lovers, it had a dignity of its own. It is clear from what we have been told that Bridget remained loath to change this relationship

into a marriage with her lover. Why? No answer to this has been provided in the text. Allworthy tells Jenny:

I confess, I recollect some passages relating to that Summer, which formerly gave me a conceit that my sister had some liking to him. I mentioned it to her for I had such a regard to the young man, as well on his account, as his father's, that I should have willingly consented to a match between them; but she expressed the highest disdain of my unkind suspicion, she called it, so that I never more spoke on the subject (837).

One wonders as to why Bridget "expressed the highest disdain" of Allworthy's suspicion regarding her relationship with Summer. Thus says Jenny of Summer: "a finer man, I must say, the sun never shone upon; for besides the handsomest person I ever saw, he was so genteel, and had so much wit and good breeding" (835). Jenny also lets Allworthy know that Bridget would have told him one day that she was Tom's mother and that she was deeply pleased on seeing Tom so well looked after. Against this background, it doesn't stand to reason that she wished not to marry Summer. Jenny's description of Summer also makes us conscious about the traits Tom has inherited from Summer – "so genteel, and had so much wit and good breeding." Here, "wit" can also signify basic intelligence which Tom had aplenty.

6.3.2 Marriage Critiqued Sharply in Bridget-Summer Alliance

My guess about Bridget not marrying Summer is that her decision fits in with the critique of marriage that the text unfolds at its structural centre. In the context of the mystery surrounding Tom's birth, Jenny comments upon the basic idea of marriage. This is what she says of her own state to Allworthy:

...after much reading on the subject (of marriage), I am convinced that particular ceremonies are only requisite to give a legal sanction to marriage, and have only a worldly use in giving a woman the privilege of a wife; but that she who lives constant to one man, after a solemn private affiance, whatever the world may call her, hath little to charge on her own conscience(841).

The passion behind these words indicates that Jenny's critique of marriage has the writer's concurrence. Even if it were not so, the criticism applies considerably to the fate of most women in the novel. The women in *Tom Jones* appear to constitute a category apart from men. Some of them suffer subjugation through marriage, others defy it in their own individual ways (Miss Western and Lady Bellaston). Jenny is quite sharp in perception since the broad context in which she has spoken these words is that of Bridget who would keep the love-segment of her life free from the marriage-mould. It may be that, Bridget wished to impart a sense of sanctity to her love for a man in her own specific manner by making what can be called a statement against a socially sanctioned alliance. As a consequence, she decided to produce an illegitimate child.

6.3.3 Historical Metaphor of Pregnancy

From pregnancy to begetting an illegitimate child is an area that may encompass not merely the contemporary society but the larger historical epoch in which this phenomenon of woman's assertion reveals itself.

The idea of pregnancy, birth and legitimacy/illegitimacy can be stretched far in *Tom Jones*. I wonder whether woman's association with nature is broadly acceptable in the case of Fielding. We have already considered Bridget's behaviour vis-a-vis Summer as

well as Tom's behaviour vis-a-vis various women. Let us contemplate pregnancy and birth in terms of a natural process. The world of *Tom Jones* changes considerably after Tom's birth. It appears that a new element has been introduced in Somersetshire, that a new seed is to grow in the womb of society from the time of Tom's birth and the tentative acceptance of the responsibility of his upbringing by Mr. Allworthy. The question that always haunts the reader is whether Tom would make his grade in the world he has been thrown into. The initial social hostility towards him becomes understandable to us once we begin to look upon the metaphor this way.

The establishment is characterised by two of its pillars in the novel – Mr. Allworthy and Squire Western— whose estates are adjacent to each other. Mr. Allworthy can get an inheritor only if his sister gets married. Squire Western has only a daughter. This fact also reflects upon their world which cannot move forward on its own and, therefore, shows sign of stagnation and decay. One cannot see much hope in the marriage of their kin – Blifil and Sophia – since Blifil the male is deficient even in the capacity to carry forward Allworthy's perspective of benevolence and age-old virtue. On her side, Sophia is to passively wait for someone really dynamic to join her.

This is, however, not to suggest that women stand for nature alone while men invariably symbolise mind or consciousness in the novel. Fielding is quite insistent on showing Miss Western as an aggressive propagandist and Sophia as a tough thinker. As we notice in the last book, Sophia matches Mr. Allworthy well in argument.

In him, Tom also has a generous dose of nature (Tom's impulse denotes only that) which is indifferent to principles of society. An innocent and good-hearted youth, Tom is always brave and forthright. There is total absence of hypocrisy in him which is his most appealing aspect. It is this which endears him to the women in the novel perhaps because women are found hypocritical only under duress – they have to be on the right side of male-dominated vested interests so that they could preserve themselves. Looked at this way, Tom's joining with Sophia in marriage becomes a necessity for society to reinvigorate itself. Their marriage symbolises the possibility of a new trend taking root in the prevailing society – a trend that can effectively challenge the outmoded ways of the aristocracy. It can also put up the nature-society clash in which society would be cleansed of its ideological dross.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

I admit that this argument is abstract and may even look far-fetched. However, my purpose in explaining an area of the novel in such terms is to make you aware of a paradigm that does exist in Fielding. I started by saying Fielding is one of the most pro-woman writers in English. Do such aspects as "poaching" and "female sexuality" not allow us to build up a thesis that goes against male-domination and the edifice of hypocrisy in eighteenth century English society?

6.5 GLOSSARY

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|------------------------|--|
| Feminist : | The person who supports the cause of women in a male-dominated society. The feminist view also underlines the need for evolving an alternative woman-oriented viewpoint. |
| Private Space : | Underscores respect for a person's individuality which is outside the domain of social viewing. The eighteenth century seemed by and large averse to this idea. |

Historical Metaphor : Representation of characters/situations in such a manner that it draws the reader's attention strongly to important changes in history.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. Fielding is not as sympathetic towards women as he is towards men. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.
2. Would it be correct to say that in *Tom Jones*, Fielding considers marriage a mere socio-economic arrangement under which women feel continuously suppressed? Discuss.

UNIT 7 SOME CRITICAL OPINIONS ON *TOM JONES*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 The Problem with Modern Criticism
 - 7.2.1 *Tom Jones* as Plot
 - 7.2.2 *Tom Jones* Preaches a Doctrine
 - 7.2.3 Individualistic Notion Behind Sexual Ethic
 - 7.2.4 Absence of the Concrete Individual
- 7.3 Changing Appreciation Over Centuries
- 7.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.5 Glossary
- 7.6 Questions

7.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, my purpose is to acquaint you with important critical views on *Tom Jones*. There is some indication of these views in other chapters of this block where I have used a remark or two of a critic to clarify my own position. My focus in those chapters has been on *Tom Jones*. Here, I consider a few critical attitudes. I wish to share with you the fact that a remark or comment quite obviously sheds light not only on the text but also the critic's own notions of good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable. In that sense, all critics, and even the "common reader," invariably betray in their remarks their own prejudices and biases. The discussion in this Unit hopefully should inspire you to crystallise your own critical opinions.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit is heavy in terms of ideas and you have to read this at least twice to fully understand it. Through continuous pondering you should learn to distinguish between viewpoints.

Read Fielding's *Tom Jones* and then try not to think about it. I am sure you would not succeed in your effort. I am not saying you would like it. In fact, you may hate the novel. That proves the power of the book. Yes, you can never be indifferent towards *Tom Jones*. As a book, it is full of challenges and may appear 'dangerous.' When I read it the first time as a text for study in my M.A. course, I found it rather simple. Perhaps, at that time, I was interested only in the "story of the novel," in the events and episodes associated with Tom as he gradually moved towards marriage with Sophia. It appeared to be a love story set in the eighteenth century English surroundings. The story, as I saw it, started with Tom's birth and ended with his marriage. It was too familiar a thing and, therefore, lacked suspense. Confusing this story of Tom and Sophia with the novel as a whole, I thought that *Tom Jones* could hardly be called a significant literary work. It also set to nought Fielding's own professed aim as a writer to shun romances. For instance, what is the Tom-Sophia relationship if not a romance? How wrong I was! I didn't realise that this relationship was merely an excuse for the novelist to explore some very important areas of the English society of the period. At the same time, the novel contained immense comic value.

I say that *Tom Jones* is 'dangerous' as a book. It considers nothing unworthy of comment and leaves no vital area of human life untouched. More, it tends to shake a lot of our established notions. In the course of reading it, we may wonder whether anything in human behaviour is sacrosanct. I ask : Does modern criticism try to come to terms with the 'shocking aspect' of the novel?

7.2 THE PROBLEM WITH MODERN CRITICISM

I sometimes feel that Fielding's contribution to the development of fiction as a cultural weapon is underplayed in English criticism. Yes, there are innumerable references to his powerful irony. One also hears of the complex plot of *Tom Jones*. There are quite a few good long analyses of his craft as a novelist. But if you are asked to form a total view of his writing in general and *Tom Jones* in particular on the basis of most available criticism, you would find yourself guessing as to what he conveys to the reader in terms of an attitude or outlook. In the so-called traditional criticism, particularly written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some importance was accorded to humanism, moral values, goodness, honour, and so on. But the twentieth century criticism (we can also broadly call it 'modern' criticism) is wary of dealing with these things and considers only craft, technique and method worth the reader's attention. The question is : Why irony and plot-structure? Why not social criticism and an alternative strategy to evolve a moral-intellectual stance? Modern criticism circumvents these issues and merrily goes on to explore voices, narrative/narratives and structure/structures. There is no doubt that these are important. But are they important in themselves? A considerable chunk of 'modern' criticism gives evidence of this belief. And it is wrong. My answer to such a question would be different. I would say that irony and other fictional devices used by Fielding fulfil an important purpose. This means that we should mainly endeavour to understand that purpose.

To my mind, literary criticism should aim at formulating that which the writer wishes to convey to the reader. That should be in focus. Ask the modern critic this question and the response would be something like this : "Well, focus? O.K. Our focus should, of course, be on that which is to be conveyed to the reader. And what is conveyed is the sense of irony. Attitude? Yes, Fielding's attitude is ironical. Nothing is outside or beyond his irony." This would be a smart answer. But also a superficial one. Because "the sense of irony" and "ironical attitude" signify a rejection of everything in life, or at least placing right and wrong on an equal footing. It can be said that contemporary analyses of literature suffer from a barrenness not witnessed before. And this is because the contemporary critical comment deliberately, as if under a carefully chalked-out plan, avoids what Fielding wants to communicate to the reader.

As a great realist, Fielding looks at his society with deep critical interest and finds that society totally submerged in orthodoxy. To Fielding, this orthodoxy is spread over the entire English life. The writer of *Tom Jones* notes with concern and anger that all those with social authority and power in the eighteenth century society are bereft of sensitivity, fellow-feeling and kindness. They can be seen as callously going about their ways, giving the impression that nothing outside their immediate interest is of any value.

7.2.1 *Tom Jones* as Plot

Let us consider some critical opinions on *Tom Jones* in detail. R. S. Crane in his essay "The Plot of *Tom Jones*" focuses attention exclusively on Tom's character in its process of evolution through various encounters and happenings in the novel. In Crane's opinion, the value of the plot lies in the "capacity of its peculiar synthesis of character, action and thought." Crane examines the sequence of incidents under the overall pattern of action

and calls the plot a mere "substrate" and a "material system of action." According to Crane, the aspect to be emphasised is the artistic quality of a work which consists in evoking a particular emotion in the reader. It is this artistic quality which imparts plot to a novel.

Crane's idea of plot in *Tom Jones* is not complete without reference to the particular vicissitudes, ups and downs, in Tom's life and the way his fate is interpreted by the reader between the "beginning" through the "middle" to the "end" of the novel. In Crane's opinion, it is a comic, and not "tragic" pleasure that the novel affords. For Crane, Blifil "is no Iago" but one who suffers from gross "ineptitude" in spite of his manipulative skills. Crane says that Blifil "merely is a clever opportunist." All other characters with whom Tom interacts are also comic. Insofar as Crane is concerned, "comic" gives merely happiness. Crane does not appreciate the highly negative and threatening nature of Squire Western as well as his sister whom he calls "blundering pair of tyrants" and Dowling's role of an acquiescing, amoral confidante whom Crane defines merely as "the man always in a hurry." This is a way of saying that Tom is not faced with any real dangers since Blifil, Western and Dowling can only create minor obstructions. What about the tendencies they represent? Should the plot not address such questions?

Secondly, the success of the plot of *Tom Jones* lies according to Crane in its capacity to give comic pleasure to the reader. In Crane's opinion, this process suffers wherever Fielding brings in extraneous elements (he calls them faults) such as long episodes, narrator's intrusions and unnecessary introductory essays in each book. Obviously, episodes and long authorial comments, as Crane sees them, come in the way of the reader's enjoyment. The fault seems to lie with the pleasure principle which defines boundaries within which the action is to be viewed. Why say that Fielding is to merely tell a comic tale? For Crane, not instruction but pleasure is of paramount importance.

Thus, Crane's viewpoint reduces the appeal of the novel to the generation of comic pleasure. Crane argues that Tom's character is the comic rallying point of the novel and anything that falls outside the purview of the protagonist dilutes the artistic quality of the work. Because of this, Crane is unable to grasp the realism of the novel, which rests upon the intricate linking between characters — all enjoying their existence not merely vis-a-vis Tom or one another but also the environment within which they act. One can understand the value of the plot of *Tom Jones* a lot better by referring to the society and the forces at work therein. In fact, the plot can be seen not as an integration of action, character and thought in the novel with the quality of pleasure (as Crane puts it) but as a totality of the eighteenth century society captured by *Tom Jones* with its apparently diverse elements. *Tom Jones* as plot would appeal better if the beginning, the middle and the end are broadened to include all those episodes, essays and narratorial comments which reflect vitally on the eighteenth century ethos and take the reader out of the closed world of the novel. The narrator himself attempts it many a time in the novel and there is no reason why the reader should not do it for the purpose of comprehending the unified and linked-up significance of the work. The pleasure-centred neo-Aristotelian concept of plot prevents Crane from grasping the social critique which the plot of *Tom Jones* embodies in its totality.

7.2.2 *Tom Jones* Preaches a Doctrine

William Empson has unambiguously stated that Fielding set out to preach a doctrine in *Tom Jones*. He has reacted quite sharply to Crane's comment on *Tom Jones*. Characterising the view of the modern critic as limited and narrow, Empson has asserted that the modern outlook doesn't take cognisance of the historical reality taking shape in the novel and that it seeks in fact to avoid the concrete idea or doctrine projected through a character or pattern of situations. But the modern critic has a different set of priorities.

Empson says that “modern critics tend to assume both (a) that it isn’t artistic to preach any doctrine and (b) that the only high-minded doctrine to preach is despair and contempt for the world; I think that the combination produces a critical blind spot.” Obviously, as he has rightly argued, this comes in the way of appreciating a novel’s true worth. Empson remarks that “Badgered by neo-classicism and neo-Christianity and what not,” the modern critic remains ignorant about the “humanist, liberal, materialist” nature of Fielding’s writing and considers the views offered through the works as that “worldly advice of a “flippant libertine.”

Empson specifically picks up Fielding’s “habitual double irony” to show that in *Tom Jones* there is a conscious plan on the author’s part to put across a highly tangible principle of human response to established codes. To Empson, the evolution of Tom’s behaviour in the novel puts emphasis on honesty and courage. Tom’s need to learn “prudence,” and to absorb the ways of the world is great and there is a connection between this and the “chastity enjoined by religion.” But the doctrine “about the mutuality of impulse” under which individuals learn and re-learn from interaction can be enlarged to take care of other areas of social experience. This doctrine of behaviour is largely embodied in Tom’s evolution. Empson puts the doctrine to good use and is able to explain with its help the significance of the apparently unconnected episodes as also the introductory essays in the novel.

But Empson remains confined to the working of this doctrine and is seldom able to appreciate that Fielding treats society as a materialist entity. Empson fails to notice the clashes and antagonisms in the novel’s world which is stretched to extreme limits by warring interests. If Fielding had to familiarise the reader with a doctrine, he would have done so directly or through the behaviour of a character. May be, we can see an attitude, a critical, realist attitude evolving in the novel. But that cannot be called a doctrine, particularly of the kind that can be easily deciphered and “preached.” Empson is prevented by his emphasis on the Christian principle to locate the relevance of the last book which for him provides more than the moralistic answer. Empson says that “the decisive question in her (Sophia’s) mind is whether his (Tom’s) impulses have become corrupted; she is quite prepared again to refuse to unite by marriage the two largest estates in Somersetshire.” In my opinion, marriage or joining of estates isn’t the central issue in the novel and Mr. Allworthy or Sophia aren’t the judging or determining agents of the action presented. Instead, Fielding’s main purpose is to attempt a “history” of Tom, through which he wishes to capture the dynamics of the period in which Tom lived. In this “history,” Fielding wants to show that the environment is heavily weighted against any individual enterprise — marriage, love, social freedoms, and so forth. In this sense, Fielding’s introductory essays and the comments scattered all over the text are not “literary prattle,” as Empson calls them, but observations that put a question mark against all available modes of thought including the doctrine of “mutuality of impulse” that Fielding is supposed to project. If there is a deployment of double irony, as Empson asserts, its chief use in the novel is to assert realism, to acquaint the reader with the impossibility of resolving vital issues. “Comic” should be interpreted to mean “unreal,” something that the writer wishes to happen but knows that it cannot happen. Empson as a liberal humanist seems ill-equipped to appreciate Fielding’s realism.

7.2.3 Individualistic Notion Behind Sexual Ethic

Middleton Murry has discussed the ‘sexual ethic of Tom Jones’ and said that there is no specific principle governing the novel in respect of sexual chastity or purity. He perceives that it is broad virtues of human behaviour such as honesty, truthfulness and simplicity which constitute the core of Tom’s actions in the novel. It is pointed out at the same time that Tom is castigated on many an occasion by different characters for his sexual indulgences and indiscretions. However, Murry opines that Tom is not criticised for

them by the author and that Fielding would have us delve deeper into the circumstances of Tom's life to know the sexual ethic of the novel. The point to consider is: Why should Tom succumb to the charms of Molly Seagrim? In fact, they are not "charms" in the usual sense of the word. What happens is that she seduces Tom, and he on his side doesn't mind being taken advantage of. The reason for Tom's innocent responding to Molly's sexual advances is that he is new in this game of love. This is compared by Murry with Tom's relationship with Mrs. Waters. Murry sees Tom as striking an entirely different equation with Mrs. Waters where we witness more mutuality and spontaneity between the two. Still, what should we make of that nagging sense of guilt in Tom's mind which came from the memories of his sweet exchanges with Sophia? In spite of the fact that he saw little possibility of marriage with Sophia, Tom could not altogether forget the need to be loyal to her. Noticing that in both the relationships, Tom remains a passive participant, Murry is constrained to remark that Tom is "rather a backward lover; it is being desired that makes him desire."

However, what is problematic for Murry is to explain Tom's attitude towards Lady Bellaston. In this case, it is not easy to absolve Tom of breaching the code of honour, one of the broad virtues the novel is concerned with, in that he accepts regular money for performing the offices of love to Lady Bellaston. In Murry's view, this has turned a large number of critics against Tom for the depths of degradation that he has touched. Murry doesn't look at money this way and thinks that Tom considered it no more than financial help that a friend extended to him in time of distress. Murry's discussion takes note of this episode as he argues that Tom has maintained consistency vis-a-vis his larger ethic of which the sexual ethic is a part. Murry agrees to "the potential sordidness of the relation" but defends Tom on the plea that even though he lacked "positive physical desire for Lady Bellaston," he felt a sense of "genuine gratitude" to a friend. Or at least, Tom is paying back, as a point of honour, for the help Lady Bellaston has rendered him. To Murry, this is a reenactment of the scene between Lady Booby and Joseph, with the difference that Joseph had the benefit of guidance from Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*, while Tom had no such help.

Murry lays a great deal of emphasis on Tom's goodness which is both strength and weakness. This odd mixture of the two, endears Tom to us and also "leads him into his entanglements." Defining this trait apart from the novel, Murry says that "Good nature is a natural and effortless goodness expressing itself as imaginative sympathy with the joys and sorrows of others." A person of Tom's vigour and honesty may gradually move towards what can be considered right. Love in such a case might prove immensely helpful. In Murry's view, "Consummation of physical passion between a man and a woman of good nature who love one another, Fielding holds, very definitely, to be the supreme felicity attainable on earth. And that is the end of Tom's adventurous pilgrimage."

I have presented Murry's argument in some detail. This has greater significance than most discussions we come across elsewhere. Still, it fails to link the 'ethic' with Tom's specific circumstances. Murry discusses the ethic under the liberalist perspective where individuals evolve their own rules of conduct. The "sexual ethic," thus remains individual-centred and doesn't reflect upon the social constraints under which men and women operate. We are left to ponder whether Fielding propounds such a free libertarian principle. Murry doesn't take sufficient note of the author's attitude which is uncompromisingly critical of the social mores of the time. The 'ethic' of Fielding was a part of the larger moral principle Fielding wished to propound. This principle made Fielding critique even the norm by which Tom and Sophia (as husband and wife) would like to be governed. There is a sense of the approaching threat in the last pages of the novel under which Sophia and Tom would become less sure of attaining fulfilment. Going by the way the society was pulled towards city culture, young lovers bound in

marriage may have become more and more apprehensive about openness, goodness or inner discipline being able to bring mutuality and joy in matrimony. Fielding's strong sense of realism warned him against too much optimism and hope.

7.2.4 Absence of the Concrete Individual

Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* contains an important discussion on *Tom Jones*. Watt compares the novel with Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* and talks about the two kinds of realism these novels exemplify. By now, it would have been clear to you that realism stands for an author's interest in the society of his time and his purpose to find connections between the different forces active in it. Watt notes that the psychological aspect of human personality is almost totally missing in Fielding's novel and that it has a different conceptual mould than *Clarissa*. Watt tells us that *Tom Jones* uses the method of broad social comment and satire while the latter probes the consciousness of a character in relation with her or his behaviour. This can be seen as providing solidity to the particular character's existence. Saying that *Tom Jones*'s "basic direction is toward a return to the norm," Watt criticises the novel for what he calls its "static quality." In his opinion, the deciding ideological factor in Fielding's scheme of things is "his belief in the class premise" and that "The ultimate task of Fielding's plot ... is to unite the lovers without subverting the basis of the social order; and this can only be done by revealing that Mr. Jones, though illegitimate, is genteel." This according to Watt highlights Fielding's basic attitude which is anything but "egalitarian." Watt explains the point further by saying that "in *Tom Jones*, ... society and the larger order which it represents must have priority, and the plot's function, therefore, is to perform a physical rather than a chemical change: it acts as a kind of magnet that pulls every individual particle out of the random order brought about by temporal accident and human imperfection and puts them all back into their proper position." Watt's whole argument has its basis in his preference for the psychological "subjective dimension" that Richardson imparts to his characters, the quite explicitly stated complaint being that "Fielding does not make any attempt to individualise his characters." We may note here that Ian Watt uses the same concepts, such as "static" and "dynamic" or "social" and "individual", as those employed by Arnold Kettle in *The Introduction to the English Novel*. However, Kettle does not show pronounced preference for "the individualised" and remains firmly stuck to the view that a critic's job is to identify specific ideological and artistic tendencies and comment upon them than to "prescribe" one approach in preference to the other. On the other hand, Ian Watt is prescriptive.

7.3 CHANGING APPRECIATION OVER CENTURIES

Why is it that critical opinion on Fielding's *Tom Jones* is so strongly divided? We have the reference of Samuel Johnson who said that he scarcely knew "a more corrupt work." On the other hand, Johnson, says Boswell, "estimated the compositions of Richardson too highly." Boswell has further written that "In comparing those two writers, he (Johnson) used this expression; 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.'" Later, in the nineteenth century, Coleridge remarked: "Upon my word, I think the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones*, the three most perfect plots ever planned. And how charming, how wholesome, Fielding always is! To take him up after Richardson is like emerging from a sick-room heated by stoves into an open lawn on a breezy day in May." It is interesting to see how Johnson expressed fondness for an author who explored psychological depths of a human being and how Coleridge chose to admire a writer who dealt with manners. As we know, Johnson has all along been associated with the social and Coleridge with the psychological dimension in literature.

It seems that the nineteenth century was not so very hostile to Fielding as the eighteenth century. In fact, it was quite appreciative. See Thackeray paying such a huge compliment: *Tom Jones* "is the most astonishing production of human ingenuity. There is not an incident ever so trifling, but advances the story, grows out of former incidents, and is connected with the whole. Such a literary providence, if we may use such a word, is not to be seen in any other work of fiction." Thackeray said this in his lecture in 1840 on "The English Humorists". George Eliot in the course of her great novel *Middlemarch* comments thus on Fielding: "A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his arm-chair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings." We have to particularly mark "his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under." Also, in spite of the broadside contained in the "least imitable parts of the work" (here, George Eliot is appreciative) and "when the days were longer," George Eliot is more than just indulgent and appreciative. Isn't it radically different from the way Fielding's works were received by his contemporaries such as Richardson and Johnson?

The division with regard to Fielding continues well into the twentieth century with Ian Watt unambiguously asserting that individualisation in characters, which Fielding sorely lacks, alone can ensure proper attack on a given social structure. Watt would have us believe that Fielding's comment was geared towards maintaining stability. Arnold Kettle has also said that Fielding had full faith in his world and was "very sure" of it. Kettle has further remarked that Fielding is "fundamentally confident — confident that the problems of human society, that is to say *his* society, can and will be solved by humane feeling and right reason."

7.4 LET US SUM UP

Does it not look odd that a major chunk of English novel criticism in the twentieth century does not give serious thought to Fielding? And it is not entirely due to the fact that Fielding wrote in the eighteenth century, the period in which the novel had not emerged as a full-fledged literary form. F. R. Leavis, for instance, did not consider it appropriate to include Fielding in the 'great tradition' of English fiction since, in his opinion, the novelist lacked depth of insight. In Kettle's *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Fielding has been discussed together with Richardson and Sterne as if by way of contrast.

At the same time, the nineteen-thirties and forties saw a renewed interest in Fielding, the critical attention shifting from abstract questions of manners and morality to the inner segments — plot, characters, irony — of the literary work. The shift has created a new problem of cutting off the work completely from the society in which it was written. *Tom Jones* in particular has been viewed as an eclectic work with no strong central perspective to bind the different strands active within it. One does not know for instance which character or voice to look towards for the right, serious answer. Neither the author-narrator, nor the many characters, particularly the good ones — Mr. Allworthy, Tom, Sophia, Mrs. Miller, Partridge — offer any definitive clue to the attitude or opinion that would be most suitable for the age of reason, social ascendancy and progress.

In my opinion, the problem lies basically in our own position in the twentieth century. If we look at literature as a means to afford pleasure and instruction at the superficial level, or as something that would make us aware of the issues of literary theory and philosophy, we would miss out on most of what Fielding has to offer.

In this way, we see appreciative as well as condemnatory responses to Fielding at different points of time in the last two hundred and fifty years. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these come from writer-critics who were not bound to the classroom or the seminar-hall. These writer-critics published in periodicals that reached the masses the way film and television do today. At the time, the periodicals made a great deal of impact on the tastes and preferences of readers. In fact, Johnson made the idea of the likely influence on readers the basis of his criticism. In their own way, the critics and writers of the earlier centuries openly shared their biases with readers. However, they were not narrowly partisan in the manner in which the modern critic is, tied down as he is to the modern bourgeois notion of literature as art alone. Most modern criticism seems to be strongly opposed to Fielding because he fosters among the readers the sense of ruthless questioning of humbug and double-dealing, and the sense of rejection of the dubious ways of the various power-centres operating in society. Perhaps, Fielding as well as a number of nineteenth century paradigms do not particularly suit modern capitalist interests. The selectiveness as well as circumspect responding of the modern cultural centres should be assessed in this light. We in the third world have to specifically relate to this aspect. And Fielding leaves most of us uncertain, if not actually disturbed. At least, that proves my initial contention that it is impossible to overlook or bypass Fielding.

7.5 GLOSSARY

- Romance :** A category of writing that presented an imaginary world and took the reader away from real-life concerns.
- Fictional devices :** This refers to the practice of a novelist who consciously manipulates characters, situations, etc. Such a writer would use everything in the novel as a device.
- Comic pleasure :** All writing can be broadly viewed as tragic or comic in terms of the pleasure it may afford. This means that there can be tragic pleasure (does it not sound paradoxical?) as well as comic pleasure. The original division was made by Aristotle.
- Totality :** It stands for the work of literature as a unified whole with a nature of its own.
- Neo-classicism :** The eighteenth century doctrine which sought inspiration from the great qualities and virtues of ancient classical literature. The scope of neo-classicism was limited to the narrow ideological requirements of the middle class.
- Liberal humanism:** The twentieth century non-class belief that seeks a separate territory for the freedom-loving and understanding individual who shuns any kind of role but that of an uninvolved observer in society.
- Libertarian principle :** It implies a kind of anarchic behaviour under which the person looks upon society as a restrictive agency.

Subjective dimension : Recognition of inner psychological processes behind the actions of characters.

**Some Critical
Opinion on
*Tom Jones***

Critic's position : The viewpoint – involving social sympathy, ideological support, political preference, etc. — from which the critic observes a work or trend.

7.6 QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that Tom Jones should be primarily viewed as providing comic pleasure? Discuss.
2. Critically examine the statement that Fielding is far from a great novelist since he “does not give individuality to his characters.”

UNIT 8 NARRATION IN FICTION AND THIRD WORLD PREFERENCES

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
 - 8.1.1 Fielding as Narrator
- 8.2 How Do We Understand Narration?
 - 8.2.1 Fielding as Highly Conscious Narrator
 - 8.2.2 Fielding's Partisanship
- 8.3 Relevance of *Tom Jones* to Us
 - 8.3.1 Concept of 'the third world' and its usefulness
 - 8.3.2 Interrelatedness history between societies
 - 8.3.3 *Tom Jones* and its social backdrop
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Glossary
- 8.6 Questions
- 8.7 Suggested Reading

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully, you will be able to further understand the nature of narratorial practice and its role vis-à-vis an audience, particularly an audience like us located in the third world. The discussion in this Unit will help us to rethink our own position as readers in the third world and to relate *Tom Jones*, an eighteenth century British novel, to our own context in the twentieth century.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

8.1.1 Fielding as Narrator

On the surface, the novel has two voices to represent the opinion of Fielding : the narrator's voice and that of Squire Allworthy. The narrator butts in at many a point in the story in the form of 'I', where he talks more or less as the author. We can see this happening where he distinguishes between a dispassionate observer and one whose stance is clearly partisan. "I would not willingly give offence . to men who are warm in the cause of virtue or religion"(130). Here, the narrator as author gives the impression that he is on a mission to establish a positive principle in society and stake his all for the furtherance of that principle, in his case "virtue or religion." The point is : what is that virtue or religion? Virtue and religion are projected, invariably satirically, by Square and Thwackum. Square allows his doctrine of the right to be coloured by narrow considerations of "favours" from Bridget. In the process, his pronouncements become shallow and ridiculous. Thwackum interprets religion to put up a defence for young Blifil and attack Tom's interests. Both Square and Thwackum lack what clearly is virtue or religion. In fact, in the phrase "virtue or religion," the two are seen as one principle — two names for the same thing. In such a case, aren't Square and Thwackum intellectual devices to put forth not acceptable or positive ideas but distortions that occur when virtue is sought to be pursued by men and women in given circumstances? When Square and Thwackum have been shown as straying away from the path of the right conduct, they are made targets of harsh criticism as well as ridicule by Fielding. As far as Fielding's own response to the question is concerned, it is that "both religion and virtue have

received more real discredit from hypocrites, than the wittiest profligates or infidels could ever cast upon them ... when poisoned and corrupted with fraud, pretence, and affectation, they have become the worst of civil curses, and have enabled men to perpetrate the most cruel mischiefs to their own species" (130-131). The narrator as author is quite severe as he considers "wittiest profligates or infidels" worse than hypocrites. In the same manner, words such as "perpetrate" or "most cruel mischiefs" suggest that the narrator-author does not much care for "objectivity" or "dispassionateness" as we understand the terms and instead expresses himself through passion and ardour to undermine hypocrisy. Also mark the use of words such as "worst," "most," "curses," "poisoned," "corrupted," etc. in this quotation. Fielding has preferred not to remain soft or elegant here.

8.2 HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND NARRATION?

Let's understand the practice of narration in fiction. It has been an important topic of discussion in the criticism of the last two decades – eighties and nineties.

To narrate is to tell. This means that while reading a novel in which there is narration, the reader faces the teller of the tale at the level of imagination. For this act of telling on the part of the author, an audience is assumed, be it a gathering in a village, a cluster of listeners at the market-place in a small town or spectators assembled in a big hall to hear and watch a narrator perform. The events and episodes in the tale reach the reader through this narrator. Contrast this with a novel which doesn't contain a narrator, where in place of narration the reader comes across "description." Going through such a novel, the reader soon would lose himself or herself in the presented account of the main character, he or she would become unconscious about the presence of the author, even about the fact that it is a novel that is being read. In this sense, there is greater concentration on the part of the reader in the act of reading. You must have heard about expressions such as "totally absorbed in the novel," "suspense in the account unbearable," etc. A relatively crude example of "description" in this sense is the writing called "thriller." As would be obvious by now, the novel with a narrator, or the novel as a narrative, in contrast believes in constantly breaking the reader's concentration, telling him or her again and again, at regular intervals, that what is being read is a *novel* in which all happenings are unreal, imaginary, fictional and that they are open to a variety of interpretations even within the novel. The author of such a novel believes that in the presented account, there are truths — no single, over-bearing, all-determining Truth. *Tom Jones* is an example of this kind of a novel.

8.2.1 Fielding as Highly Conscious Narrator

There are two prominent as well as distinct aspects of narration. One is that the audience under the arrangement of a gathering facing a narrator has its own set of preferences, expectations and aspirations. One can clearly see an actual process of the narrator moulding and remoulding the audience's response in the novel. The narrator seems to keep a close watch on the way the audience would react to the different comments in the novel — the way in which the reader would consciously or unconsciously construct the meaning of the narration. In one sense, the audience is involved by the narrator, as if under a plan, to act out an imaginary situation in which the role of the narrator is directional or directorial — to lead the activated minds of the audience towards a general, collectivised experience. It is a difficult thing for an author to do. In Fielding's particular case, the emphasis is on activating the audience's mind, along with offering specific clues to the solution. However, the struggle to make sense of the goings-on in the novel has to be carried on entirely by the reader.

The second aspect of the narrative relates, away from the nature of the audience, to the person the narrator is — his mental make-up, imaginative capability as well as purpose. This is to mean that not everybody, even when she or he has the required mental make-up, sensibility and value-system, can be a narrator, that not everybody can state through the spoken or written word that which would relate to the group of people whom the moral teacher is to guide. Particularly, the imaginative capability of the narrator has to be of the dramatic kind under which the teller of the tale extends the scope of feeling as well as thought to a variety of characters, men and women constituting the tale. A person having the skills of an actor using a monologue would be a competent narrator. This capability would substantially affect the sense of purpose of the narrator since the narrator would invariably alert, even disturb the audience — yes, the narrator is out to effectively communicate an experience and such an experience has to be morally acceptable. What I mean is that the moral guide cannot afford to merely critique an existing system of beliefs and that there is to be a valid point of view from which to critique. The situation is so tight that even 'pure entertainment,' if there can be one, would have to follow the rule of propriety — that it may not be correct to laugh at anything and everything. In this context, the author's 'genius' and 'judgement' are key-concepts. In Fielding's own words : By genius I would understand that power, or rather those powers of the mind, which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences. These are no other than invention and judgment; and they are both called by the collective name of genius, as they are of those gifts of nature which we bring with us into the world. Concerning each of which many seem to have fallen into very great errors: for invention, I believe, is generally understood a creative faculty; which would indeed prove most romance-writers to have the highest pretensions to it; whereas by invention is really meant no more, (and so the word signifies) than discovery, or finding out; or to explain it at large, a quick and sagacious penetration into the true essence of all the objects of our contemplation. This, I think, can rarely exist without the concomitancy of judgment : for how we can be said to have discovered the true essence of two things, without discerning their difference, seems to me hard to conceive (437).

From here, we move on to the actual practice of the narrator in the novel. The narrator as a person and a conscious member of society fulfils the specific purpose of enlightening and educating his audience which is his community. He may directly talk to the assembled people to share his personal views with them or indirectly through characters in the tale who present their point of view in their dialogue. For instance, we can straightaway identify the view of the author from that of the character in a given situation. If the situation gives an ironical colouring to an opinion, what in effect happens is that a kind of doubt has been sown in the mind of the reader. Irony, then, is a mode through which an author 'disorients' the reader, to shake up the complacency of the audience about an established notion. All this is deeply narratorial which means that the author introduces the element of dialogue into the mind of the reader. In the process, the narrator enjoys immense freedom, he is not bound to the logic of happenings and can break the tempo of the account abruptly. As already suggested, the novel is popularly seen as casting a spell on the reader, putting him or her to sleep. However, what we do not realise is that that is only one kind of the novel. Another kind of novel believes in waking up the reader, breaking the spell over him or her and freeing them from the effect of the tale. This breaking of the spell is deemed necessary since the reader can grasp the content of the work only when he or she is wakeful, whenever he or she is 'distanced,' alienated from the presented account. In such a case, the story in the novel is pushed behind and the narrator stands face to face with the audience using all his tricks as a stage-performer to communicate with them. In the bargain, he may also take liberties with the story — the chain of events — and give unnatural-looking, 'unrealistic' twists to it. As we have seen, this suits his purpose. Thus, the audience can be truly taken for a ride in the course of events which cease to be important in themselves, which are there in the

tale because the narrator has chosen to include them. Why does the narrator choose so many times to violate the norms of direct, all-consistent and harmonious account? The answer is that the tale is of secondary importance, the primary issue being the establishment of a perfect rapport with an audience that is highly curious, involved and active at the imaginative level.

8.2.2 Fielding's Partisanship

Once these two aspects of the narrative act have been grasped in their correlation, we can assess the full range of Fielding as a narrator, an intelligent communicator as well as a teacher in the true sense of the word. We should not forget that the eighteenth century reader of literature looked up to the author as a guide and philosopher. That is why Fielding can straight away address his reader in the following manner: "I am in reality the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein. And these laws, my readers, whom I consider as my subjects, are bound to believe in and obey, with which they may readily and cheerfully comply. I do hereby assure them, that I shall principally regard their ease and advantage in all such institutions" (88).

Further, Fielding seems to idealise his role as a friend and teacher on the strength of what he calls the governing "principle" of not merely the writer-reader relationship but of the very act of perceiving and living, in honest as well as courageous terms, in a given society. According to Fielding, this principle "presides, governs, directs, judges, acquits, and condemns according to merit and justice; with a knowledge which nothing escapes, a penetration which nothing can deceive, and an integrity which nothing can corrupt."

A significant aspect of Fielding as a narrator is that he is far from "objective, as we understand the term. Instead, Fielding is unashamedly partisan. Not only that Fielding distinguishes quite clearly between good and evil but he also knows the dangers of keeping his views to himself. How does the author communicate to the reader that there can be two or more kinds of 'objectivity' and that the same set of 'facts' can be made to appear different by two narrators or presenters? Fielding responds to this question with a rare sense of clarity. He says:

For let a man be never so honest, the account of his own conduct will, in spite of himself, be so very favourable, that his vices will come purified through his lips, and, like foul liquors well strained, will leave all their foulness behind. For tho' the facts themselves may appear, yet so different will be the motives, circumstances, and consequences, when a man tell his own story, and when his enemy tells it, that we scarce can recognise the facts to be one and the same (379).

To narrate, then, is to widen the range of interpretations and to make the reader feel that the world in which he or she lives is not rigid as destiny or fate but is amenable to change – that a number of differing views are possible about a situation or an issue with the narrator taking a position other than that of most characters in the text and also occasionally the author. What I imply is that the presence of multiple voices introduces a sense of clash among different social attitudes which (the clash) has a definite bearing on the world itself – the arena of such clashes.

We look at the western texts from the reigning viewpoints in the English-speaking western societies. However, we have become aware of this fact only in the last couple of decades. The question is : How much aware are we of this and what exactly is the nature of our awareness. Earlier till the nineteen seventies, we in the English Departments in India had not realised that concepts such as 'human predicament,' 'the suffering anguished individuals,' etc. were closely related to the specific social conditions and the broad politics of the upper stratum of those societies.

Let me say a few things about the country we belong to, a democratic society and polity that has emerged out of the imperialistic stranglehold through struggle. That can hopefully define for us the nature of our socio-cultural life and the viewpoint that we could adopt in reading literature. All of us know that India was a colony of England till 1947. The British exploited us and managed our affairs in their interest. "Affairs" is a vague term; it would perhaps be better to say that apart from subjugating us socially, they also ruled us ideologically and culturally for almost two hundred years. This is what I mean by India having been a colony.

This colonial past still hangs heavy on us. The question is, in what form?

It is no doubted accepted today that our perspective of literature has to be our own, of the society and country to which we belong. We are an underdeveloped economy and society and live in our day from one crisis to another. We cannot consider ourselves equivalent to western capitalist societies in resources and facilities. Nor can we say that we are free from our orthodox and rigid notions of caste, creed and tradition. But more negative than these in our behaviour are the preferences we cherish for things western — languages, literatures, philosophical-ideological viewpoints, political prejudices. It can well be said that the powerful decision-making section of our society mentally belongs not here but to the west and it is this section which is a role-model for the rest of our society.

This phenomenon of crises and distorted preferences is not peculiar to our country and can in fact be noticed in a more or less pronounced form in all those societies which have suffered exploitation and subjugation at the hands of an imperialist power. It is these countries, ex-colonies all, of which India is one, which constitute the third world, as against the first world (the developed western societies put together) which historically played the role of oppressor and victimiser.

8.3.1 Concept of 'The Third World' and its Usefulness

What does the third world signify as a concept and to what extent can we use it to understand the worth and relevance of the English novel? The question is connected with history in the sense that over a period of time, particularly between the eighteenth century and the twentieth, the world has moved towards a division between the economically dominant countries and those whose strength in economy has gradually declined. In fact, economy does not work independent of social and ideological spheres which means that the economic progress of a country or a group of countries owes a great deal to the broader social development that took place there. We all know that the process of colonisation in the western world set in a few centuries ago and resulted in the emergence of a peculiar pattern of happenings. We do not have the space here to explain the causes of these developments but one thing can be certainly identified as an important feature of the modern world — the existence of a large number of ever-weakening societies as a direct consequence of the exploitation by the developed nations of the west. These weak and economically-dependent societies constitute the third world today, most of whom

suffered as colonies of one or other country of the west till the recent past. Needless to say that subservience to the mighty first world is the single most determining feature of this third world which is at the receiving end not merely economically but also politically, ideologically and culturally.

But are these weak nations aware of their dependent position today? My answer is that many of them having gone through nationalist struggles against imperialist powers and tasted more or less partial successes in their respective confrontations have such an awareness and, therefore, do feel hamstrung by a number of constraints.

8.3.2 Inter-relatedness between societies

Literature is an important human product and is greatly influenced by its time and place. What I mean is that literature is produced by men and women who live in a specific social set-up whose pressures and compulsions they constantly bear and to which they always react and respond as the situation allows. In other words, literature is a manifestation of such a reaction and response. Assuming that this general principle applies to all societies, I would say that the literature of our society and time is a form of our responses expressed in language. The question is : Can the responses of another country and society be related to us in our time?

The obvious answer to this would be in the affirmative but there arise a host of problems the moment we consider the kind of relationship that gets established between one society and another at the cultural-literary level. But I wish to face this question squarely and understand the nature of links we may establish between Fielding's *Tom Jones* and us.

To understand for us in India the significance of *Tom Jones* as a text, we have to consider that the work belongs to England in 1747, the year in which it was published. The implications of the mention of the specific year are that *Tom Jones* should be viewed as a comment on the specific situation prevailing in England in 1747 and that the text is an act of immediate cultural intervention at the hands of its author. Both "comment" and "intervention" are important because the purpose of the text was to share a point-of-view and an understanding with its reader and to make her or him aware of the topsy-turvy state in which the society found itself at the time. Fielding does not seem to be comfortable or happy with his social environment and is faced with a host of nagging questions such as morality, honour, true religion, fulfilment, and so forth, and whether it is possible to realise all or any of them in the given situation. For instance, what is the fault of Tom that right from the beginning, he has to be at the mercy of somebody? Insofar as inner qualities and attributes are concerned, Tom has them in ample measure — in fact, he is better endowed in this respect than anyone else in the novel.

For us today, Tom would appear to be a literary device through which the writer confronts us with certain features of the English society of the time when the novel was written — bad roads, bad law-and-order situation, callous upper classes, dishonest teachers, immoral clergymen, self-seeking and insensitive city-dwellers, and so on.

In another sense, *Tom Jones* captures the unfolding historical contradiction of England in the eighteenth century. This means that it is not a text *per se*, but a literary happening that takes us closer to the reality of England at the time. This is how Raymond Williams would look at *Tom Jones*, a text that should be placed in society and history and through which we should see the broader reality of England. For instance, don't we see here a new kind of relationship between what Williams calls the country and the city?

8.3.3 *Tom Jones* and its social backdrop

What picture of the social contradiction — the antagonism between the merchant capital and landed gentry — does Fielding's *Tom Jones* represent? And does this contradiction affect the way Fielding captures the basic traits of his characters? My answer is that Fielding, concerned as he is with the fate of traditional norms, finds the staying power of the landed gentry greatly weakened. He has realised as an author and a responsible citizen of his country that odds are almost totally against Squire Western, otherwise a powerful social figure. Western's moral position has been eroded to the extent that he cannot but appear a ridiculous figure — a bumbling idiot — in the novel. But he is rather a poor example of a whole class losing its hold on the society. The better example is Squire Allworthy. Though right unto himself, Allworthy doesn't effectively control his own immediate environment. Mark the way his servants and ordinary neighbours treat him. Fielding combines in Allworthy's presentation the traditionalism of a squire and the rational, open-minded, exploratory view of a progressive bourgeois. But we have to go by the use his rationalism is put to, which is to uphold the value of tradition in a new context, something changed and modified to suit the present. It appears that Fielding is to a great extent sympathetic towards Allworthy — whenever Allworthy faces discomfiture, Fielding's tone changes to that of friendly concern.

On the other hand, the rising middle class asserts itself quite vigorously. This powerful social section intervenes in its society with an unprecedented gusto which has behind it the serious involvement, ruthlessness as well as the amorality of a merchant-capitalist.

In still another way, *Tom Jones* tells us in our context that tradition and orthodoxy should be subjected to critical examination and seen for what they are in reality. Jones stands in our context to all the entrenched social interests and exposes their stagnation, hypocrisy and irrelevance. Even as a foundling, Jones gains close intimacy with Sophia Western, a true lady in the making who in the conventional sense is supposed to marry the best person in the neighbourhood. This would suggest that a marriage between a bastard and a young beautiful woman from the upper social stratum is unthinkable. But such a marriage has been placed at the centre of the novel. The argument put forward by the author in favour of such a marriage is that if it satisfied the requirements of love, honour, mutuality and spontaneity, it should be regarded acceptable. That is how Sophia understands the question. Fielding seems to be saying that the most important person to take a stand on this issue is Sophia the individual and none else. It is quite clearly stated that Sophia would not have anyone — her father, aunt or the impressive-sounding neighbour — impose upon her a husband. On Jones's side, the consideration once again is individual choice. Marriage based on deep emotionality between a man and a woman and their serious commitment to each other is the only precondition of an acceptable partnership in matrimony.

8.4 LET US SUM UP

Fielding is an enemy of sanctimoniousness. You would have noted that *Tom Jones* as a text goes entirely against myth and myth-making, that the author, in fact, takes pleasure in exploding myths. Consider the myth of mother, daughter, son or father that existed in the English psyche in the eighteenth century. In the context of *Tom Jones*, Sophia and Tom are going to work under the pattern of none of them. There is so much of healthy individuality in them (on the plane of an idea) that they are simply Sophia and Tom. The notion of relationship as understood in their environment is not to affect them one bit. Another question that the novel deals with is that of morality. There may be difference of opinion among critics regarding Fielding's stand on morality — some have felt that he propagated immorality and licentiousness while others thought that he moralised. It is

indeed difficult to explain Fielding's view of good behaviour, gentlemanliness, honour or love. While all such issues are at the centre of *Tom Jones*, Fielding takes great care to avoid a generalised answer. Why? Perhaps because in Fielding's opinion, there can be no generalised answers on significant issues. According to popular notion, the bastard in history represented inhibited social behaviour, revengefulness and sense of insecurity. The bastard also stood for raw sensuality since he had his origin in 'nature' which was free from society-based notion of legitimacy. Thus, the bastard in popular perception was authentic material for villainy. On the other side, the legitimate child, the one born in wedlock, was considered normal, dutiful and socially responsible, someone who carried the burden of social virtues. It was accepted that the legitimate child would grow to play the role of a hero in a given social set-up. Fielding deliberately reverses this thought-pattern and makes it the subject of his comic representation. We in the third world could learn to critique such thought-patterns as racist, casteist or retrogressive, traditional and orthodox.

Although most Fielding criticism has dwelt upon Fielding's "Christian" virtues of love, fellow-feeling, kindness, honesty and moral courage as seen at work in the behaviour of Mr. Allworthy and to a lesser extent in that of Tom, what has been largely overlooked is that Fielding doesn't let go of any opportunity to poke fun at Christianity as believed and practised in England. Or else, how do we reconcile Fielding's representation of the gypsies with the rest of the novel? There is also a minor remark on an Indian practice and we hardly notice in Fielding's tone any prejudice, condescension or ill-will against an 'oriental' society thousands of miles away from England. Also, the episodes relating to the Irish people are as comic, fast-paced and raucous as the ones where distortions of behaviour among the English have been shown. This sense of unsparing critique of a system and structure with an intellectual gusto, rarely witnessed elsewhere in English fiction, is something that we could make a part of our mental make-up.

8.5 GLOSSARY

Voices :	Opinions that emerge in the course of a novel in the form of responses. The conflict between voices in an important part of a work.
Third world :	Those countries which constitute neither the developed capitalist world nor the socialist world. The third world countries are ex-colonies and have remained under-developed. They have a number of common features.
Intervention :	This refers to the attitude of the author. Under the interventionist frame-work, the author boldly critiques his society with a view to changing it. Intervention stands opposed to reflection or depiction in a work.
System and structure :	Human beings live and operate within them. Broadly, they denote society. However, system and structure tell us of an established set of rules and codes which are open to examination and analysis. Some authors understand them as Fate.

8.6 QUESTIONS

1. How far can a reader from a third world country relate to the events and happening in Fielding's *Tom Jones*? Give a reasoned answer.

2. A reading of Fielding's *Tom Jones* can help us understand the problematic nature of our own society and ethos. Do you agree? Give reasons in support of your answer.

8.7 SUGGESTED READING

All page numbers with respect to quotes from *Tom Jones* refer to the Penguin Classics edition, Henry Fielding: *Tom Jones* edited by R.P.C. Mutter, 1985.

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