

# TOM JONES

Written by **HENRY  
FIELDING**

# CURIOSITY

“The History of **Tom Jones**, a Foundling” was published in 1749.

Every aspect of Fielding's own **life is apparent in the novel**,  
from the love and reverence he had for his first wife to his knowledge  
of the Southwestern part of England.

**Tom Jones himself is very similar to Fielding:** they have the  
same good nature and they are used to poverty and the reversals of  
fortune.

As evidenced by Tom Jones, Fielding was also extremely interested in  
English politics, particularly in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745,

# GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE BOOK

FULL TITLE · The History of Tom Jones,  
a Foundling

AUTHOR · Henry Fielding

TYPE OF WORK · Novel

GENRE · Epic comic romance;  
Bildungsroman

LANGUAGE · English

WRITTEN in · 1745

DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION · 1749

NARRATOR · Anonymous

POINT OF VIEW · The narrator predominantly speaks in the first person singular, but occasionally slips into first person plural "we." The last quarter of the novel is partly epistolary, with letters mixed in the prose. The narrator is essentially omniscient

TONE · The narrator's tone is constantly ironic.

SETTING (TIME) · c. 1745

SETTING (PLACE) · England (mainly Somersetshire, Bristol, Upton, London)

# PLOT

“Tom Jones” is made up of three parts :

The first part begins with the discovery of a baby boy in the bed of Mr Allworthy, a rich and benevolent gentleman, who decides to adopt him, giving him the name Tom Jones. Tom is a generous creature, full of vital energy and impulses and he grows up with Blifil, the son of Mr Allworthy' s sister, Mrs Bridget, who dies very young. Blifil is a mean, odious hypocrite, and constantly seeks to harm Tom. When nearly twenty, Tom falls in love with his neighbour' s daughter, the lovely Sophia Western, and she with him, but their relationship is opposed by her father who rejects the idea of marrying his daughter to a foundling. Blifil, who wants to marry Sophia, spreads lies about Tom who is then compelled to leave Mr Allworthy' s house.

The second part deals with the adventures Tom has to face on the road to London as well as Sophia's perilous journey to the capital in search of Tom, after escaping from her house for fear of marrying Blifil.

The third part is set in London, where the major characters meet and where Tom's true identity is discovered. Tom is the illegitimate son of Mrs Bridget and can happily marry Sophia. Blifil, who hid the truth about Tom's birth, is thrown out of the estate.

# CHARACTERS

The characters are **grouped and in contrast**

(Tom is in contrast with Blifil).

Major and minor characters offer a rich **gallery of social types.**

Men of all profession are shown as impostors and ignorant, but the most negative portraits concern women, since money is their only real interest.

# TOM JONES

He is the absolute **protagonist** of the novel.

Tom is proud, raging, generous, indolent, careless, carefree, considerate and complacent with women; he possesses a set of qualities that, for better or worse, make him a

**spontaneous and sincere figure.**

The physical picture is mostly tied to morality, because even the outward traits express inner qualities.

Fielding describe Tom's physically only in two chapters

# SOPHIA

The **female protagonist** is presented to us in all her  
**beauty.**

She is innocent, sweet and tender. She appears to be obedient and submissive but when it is necessary she makes a definitive choice for her existence, she proves to be courageous and enterprising,

Sofia is, in short, a **concentrate of beauty and  
virtue.**

The name "*Sophia*" means knowledge



# BLIFIL

He is the **antagonist** and is characterized as **opposed to Tom**, especially from the point of view moral values .

Apparently good and obedient and submissive he is instead fearful, Sly, and sneaky, he is a flatterer and an opportunist.

# ALLWORTHY

He is intelligent, healthy, rich, generous, dignified in  
grief, clement, liberal, magnanimous hospitable.

He tries to understand, help and forgive everyone.

And yet he is fooled by Blifil.

The name "*Allworthy* "means all virtue, entirely worthy

# SOPHIA'S FATHER

Sofia's father is a **contradictory character**.

Irascible and drunkard, he loves his daughter more than himself, but he wants to decide her life without worrying about her happiness, since for him are more important socio-economic conditions than inner qualities.

# *HEADINGS*

## **FOOD**

The narrator uses the motif of **food** in relation to the process of writing, the process of reading, love, and war. He begins the novel by referring to himself as a host who will provide the reader with a feast.

# TRAVEL

Fielding concludes the novel with a reference to travel, casting himself as the reader's fellow **traveller**. This represents the culmination of a travel motif throughout the novel. As the characters travel from the country to the city, the narrator includes himself as a fellow traveller, remarking that he will not follow the whole journey, but will stop and slow down as he pleases.

The novel is a **bildungsroman**, a novel of formation, where the travel means growth towards maturity.

# THE LAW

The narrator infuses his language—and the speech  
of his characters—with **legal terms**.

Such examples reveal the narrator's technique of  
hyperbole or exaggeration, with a comic effect

# THE STAGE

Fielding constantly alludes to the **theater**, since his novel is in some ways more "dramatic" than it is "literary." The motif of the **stage** reminds us that Fielding thinks of his **characters as "actors."**

# ***THEMES***

## **VIRTUE AS A ACTION RATHER THAN THOUGHT**

Fielding focuses on

**the idea of**

**apparent Virtue and real Virtue .**

Tom, as the active hero who saves damsels-in-distress and plans of fighting for his country, is the embodiment of the very active type of Virtue that

Fielding esteems.



# THE TENSION BETWEEN ART AND ARTIFICE

The narrator upholds the value of natural art in his characters, he uses **artifice** himself in the construction of his novel.

For example, he often closes chapters by hinting to the reader what is to follow in the next chapter, or he warns the reader that he is going to omit a scene. In such a way, he prevents us from suspending our disbelief and giving ourselves up to

**the "art" of the narrative**

# GENRE

## COMIC HEROIC

Is a literary genre

> in which reigns **exaggeration**.

> which has a **serious, heroic**

**and comic connotation**

> leads with a futile **subject using**

**heroic style**, achieving **comic**

**effects**