UNIT 6: HENRY FIELDING: *TOM JONES* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE:

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 The Prefatory Introductions to the Books of the Novel

6.4 Major Themes

6.5 Fielding's Art of Characterisation

6.6 Fielding's Narrative Style

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss briefly the contents of the prefatory chapters to the Books of *Tom Jones*
- identify the important themes of the novel
- explain Fielding's art of characterisation
- elaborate Fielding's narrative style

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit needs to be studied in connection with the previous unit. Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* is often considered one of the masterpieces among the 18th and 19th century English novels. Published in 1749, this novel recounts the metaphoric journey of a foundling named Tom Jones through the trials and travails of life leading him finally to an improved understanding of life and its vicissitudes. In the different sections and subsections of this unit, we shall embark upon an exciting journey into the world of *Tom Jones,* which will further help you to gain considerable insights not only into the characters but also into the amazing chain of events depicted in the novel.

6.3 THE PREFATORY INTRODUCTIONS TO THE BOOKS OF THE NOVEL

Tom Jones is historically contextualised halfway through the 18th century, and is closely enmeshed with the royal history of the Stuarts ruling England at that time. The novel, both a 'Buildungsroman' and a 'picaresque novel', is regarded as the earliest English prose works describable as a novel. This huge work is divided into 18 smaller books, each preceded by a discursive chapter, often on topics unrelated to the book itself.

The introductory chapters preceding the individual books in the novel perhaps constitute the first extended body of work in English in which the author attempts to define and discuss the novel as a literary genre. These chapters thus discuss Fielding's aims and objectives in the novel, how he takes the critics to task, and steps out of his role as author to converse directly with the readers. The following will help you to read the essence of the brilliant prefaces Fielding has written.

Introduction to Book 1

The author begins by comparing a novelist to the keeper of an eating-house and the substance of the novel to a bill or fare. Like an honest host who first provides a menu, an author should inform the readers what they may expect in the novel. The provision of the novel includes the great and universal dish of human nature, which is the most extensive subject in the world. However, the true portrayal of human nature depends on the genius of the author as the true preparation of a dish depends on the genius of the cook. So, Fielding writes in *Tom Jones* *"We shall represent human nature at first to the keen appetite of our reader in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragout it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affection and vice with courts and cities afford. By these means, we doubt not but our reader may be rendered desirous to read on for ever…"*

Introduction to Book II

Here Fielding deals with his treatment of time in the novel. He tells his readers that this work is purposefully termed a 'history' but it is a

history in a special sense. It is not "a life, nor an apology for a life'', but it is a history which records events of significance. Towards the end Fielding provides an important clue to the structure of the novel and also projects himself as an innovator in English fictions: *"My reader then is not to be surprised, if, in the course of this work here shall find some chapters very short, and others together as long…for as 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 my subjects, are bound to believe in and to obey."*

Introduction to Book III

Fielding reiterates that during the course of the novel large spaces of time will be passed over if during such periods "nothing happened worthy of being recorded in a chronicle of this kind." However, in doing so, Fielding observes, that authors should prevent him from reading without either profit or pleasure. Instead, the author should allow the reader, if he so desires, to fill the vacant spaces in the novel with his own conjectures and meaning.

Introduction to Book IV

Fielding asserts that truth is the hallmark of his history in the book and this is what distinguishes this book from a romance. He presents the case of Sophia. If the heroine is to be introduced and if the readers are to be prepared to see the entrance of the lovely lady Sophia, "we have to prepare the mind of the reader for her reception, by filling it with very pleasing image we can draw from the face of nature". In order to explain this, Fielding further refers to the current theatrical practices following which the hero may be introduced by the blowing of drums and trumpets, and the entrance of lovers will be supported by soft and pleasing music.

Introduction to Book V

Here Fielding provides an excellent analysis of the function of a critic and the function of 'contrast' in a work of art. Fielding shows little admiration for critics. Irrespective of the criticism, every work of art is a law unto itself and is centered on its own organic growth. Fielding boldly asks: "Who are the critics and whence did they derive their authority?" Finally, he argues that critics are men of "shallow capacities" who

"mistook mere form for substance" and that "time and ignorance: the two great supporters of imposture" have lent their dubious authority to the critic.

Introduction to Book VI

Here Fielding tells us that many philosophers have arrived at the discovery that there is no such thing as love. They have come to this conclusion by "searching, rummaging, and examining into a nasty place…the nastiest of all places– A BAD MIND". He asks the philosophers to accept that in the heart of every human being there is a benevolent disposition which gratifies itself by contributing to the happiness of others and that in this activity is exquisite delight.

Introduction to Book VII

Fielding in this Book observes that the world has been often compared to the theatre and human life to a great drama and it is easy to account for this when we reflect that it is nothing but representation or imitation of what really exists in life. Sometimes imitation is well done that they are confused with the real thing and a human being may live out his life by impersonating a dramatic character. Fielding says that a single bad act in life no more makes a villain in real life than a single bad part on the stage.

Introduction to Book VIII

Fielding starts with a discussion of the marvellous versus the real in fiction. Every writer should be within the bounds of possibility in his own writing. The general principle, however, is that man is the highest subject but we should be careful enough not to exceed the capacity of the agent we describe. Actions should not be only keeping with "the compass of human nature," but they must be consistent with the character of the performer. The modern comedy writers are to be blamed only for this reason, for their heroes are presented as notorious rogues for four acts and in the fifth, he becomes a worthy and respectable gentleman. If the writer strictly observes the rules of probability and possibility, he is entitled to some faith from his readers.

Introduction to Book IX

Fielding makes a claim that these introductory chapters will help the readers distinguish between the 'true' and the 'false'. By writing these chapters Fielding has secured himself from "the imitation of those who are utterly incapable of any degree of reflection, and whose learning is not equal to my essay" Good writing is an art demanding very rare talents, yet hack writers, despite their talents, have never hesitated to place their inferior works in front of the public. For this reason, Fielding argues *Tom Jones* is not called a 'romance' but a 'history.' He then proceeds to discuss the four basic qualifications necessary for a 'historian'—Genius, Learning, Conversation, and Sensibility.

Introduction to Book X

Fielding opens this book with a few suggestions to the readers

a) Do not be too hasty to judge the structure if the novel
b) Do not confuse certain characters just because they act alike or seem to act alike under similar circumstances
c) Do not condemn a character as a bad one because it is not a perfectly good one. No man has ever been all-good; on the other hand, no man has ever been all-bad.

Introduction to Book XI

Fielding once again explains his condemnation of the critics and their criticism and the reasons for disliking them. Many critics always tend to think that their only purpose is to condemn and in doing so they show their ignorance of the original meaning of the word 'judgment'. Critics are viewed as slanderer and slander is a cruel weapon unlike a sword for its wounds are always incurable. Furthermore, "…(it) seldom promises itself any reward." However, this remark does not apply to all critics as Fielding leaves aside the names of Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Dacier, Bossu and others like them.

Introduction to Book XII

Plagiarism is the most important topic of this chapter. Fielding freely confesses that he has borrowed passages from the ancient authors without acknowledging the source, for those who have a classical education will at once recognise the source immediately, and those who lack this education will have no use for the information on the

source. The practice of 'borrowing' from the ancients, then, is not plagiarism. However, Fielding promises that if ever he is caught, he will give credit where credit is due.

Introduction to Book XIII

Although Fielding is seen invoking his muse in the best classical manner in this chapter, you should note that his concerns are mingled with quiet comedy. His personal note reads like this: "Comfort me my solemn assurance, that when the little parlour in which I sit at this instant shall be reduced to a worse unfinished box, I shall be read with honour by those who never knew or saw me, and whom I shall neither know nor see." However, for the successful completion of the novel, Fielding invokes four elements: Genius, Humanity, Learning and Experience.

Introduction to Book XIV

Fielding makes a bold claim for his being a comic writer and says that knowledge of upper life is of no great use to a writer like himself. This idea is best explained when he says: *"My province is comedy, and high life is certainly not comic—it is about the dullest thing in the world. The lower classes of life afford the greatest diversity, and it is here that the truly comic is to be found, High society treads a dull round of eating, drinking, visiting, and card playing. Not only is the world of high fashion and society soporific but the true characteristic of the present beau monde is rather folly than vice, and not only epithet which it deserves is that of frivolous."*

Introduction to Book XV

This introduction starts with contemplations on the ideas of virtue and vice. For Fielding, virtue is the certain road to happiness in this world and vice the sure avenue to misery.

Introduction to Book XVI

Fielding writes that writing prefatory chapters to the 18 books of *Tom Jones* has cost him more pains than writing the novel itself. Although these 'introductory chapters' are compared to prologues to plays, now they seem to have little connection with the novel and are generally written on three main topics:

(a) An abuse of the taste of the town people

(b) A condemnation of all contemporary authors and critics

(c) A praise of his own 'play' he is trying to present.

Introduction to Book XVII

Fielding now comes back to the situations inside the novel. When a comic writer makes his main character happy, and when a tragic writer brings his character to the height of human misery, Fielding says, both conclude that their work is done. Referring to the characters of the novel, Fielding says that Tom and Sophia now seem to be in a miserable plight. It is indeed doubtful if our author can make them happy. Sophia will probably be provided a good husband, but Tom's situation seems hopeless. What is significant is the fact that there is no supernatural aid for Tom's help. He himself will have to find some logical and natural way of liberating himself from difficulties.

Introduction to Book XVIII

Fielding says: "Now, reader, we have reached the last stage of our long journey. We have been as travellers in a long journey; if any bickerings or animosities have occurred during the trip, let us smile, shake hands, and be friends again; for once we take leave of one another we may never meet again." This is really so interesting on the part of a writer like Fielding. He again tells us: *"Furthermore, we must now lay aside all jesting and raillery; if I have earlier provided any entertainment, I must now lay it aside, for the conversation from now on must be plain and serious. There is no room now except for unadorned narrative."*

From these very brief summaries of the prefatory chapters it must be clear to you that this novel provides an interesting analysis of ''authorship'' as Fielding never allows his readers to forget that he is the 'novelist.' However, what is important is that Fielding's self-conscious authorship is intentional artifice. Fielding makes the readers acknowledge the basic features of fiction—the interplay of reality and illusion. Therefore, parallelly in this huge work of art there runs a concern with the story of a foundling called Tom and a projection of Fielding's narrative strategies and art of writing.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State the significance of the prefatory chapters to the ‘‘Books’’ of the Novel.

Q 2: What are the major issues raised by the author in the different Books of the novel?

Q 3: Do you think that Fielding justifies ‘Plagiarism’?

Q 4: State the three suggestions fielding provides to readers.

6.4 MAJOR THEMES

Thematically, this novel is very important in the context of the period in which it was written. The following discussion on the themes of the novel will help you to seek out the significance of Fielding’s novel *Tom Jones*.

Idea of the Picaro:

The novel falls into an important genre of novel writing, known as the picaresque novel. The term ‘picaresque’ is derived from the Spanish word *picaro* which means ‘a low-life character who lived dishonestly by his wits’, but the meaning of the term was soon expanded to refer to anyone at odds with, or outside, society. The picaresque novel is like an episodic narrative, describing the progress of the *picaro*. Some of the earliest novels based on the picaresque hero are anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and Mateo Aleman’s *Guzman de Alfarache* (1559) translated into English by James Mabbe. In English literature, the tradition of the picaresque novel begins with *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) by Nashe. This tradition was continued in the works of Daniel Defoe (*Moll Flanders*), Henry Fielding (*Tom Jones*) and Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield*). In the hands of these writers, the picaresque narrative mainly becomes an episodic story involving a narrative. *Tom Jones* depicts the journey of the foundling named Tom Jones, in his journey not only through the phases of his life from childhood to maturity, but also literally through various places en route his journey towards London. He learns his lessons through the trials and tribulations of life, by the

mistakes he commits, by being misunderstood and misinterpreted. Finally, he emerges as a somewhat chastened and refined individual, ready to take on life and its ordeals.

Universality of Human Emotions:

The novel *Tom Jones* presents a wide plethora of characters who display variegated range of characteristic prototypes from virtue to vice. There are in fact, further nuances with respect to the exposition of a single emotion. Fielding places the virtuous behaviour espoused by characters like Square and Thwackum as a foil to the virtues actually practiced by Jones and Allworthy. Tom, who saves the women in trouble and aspires to fight for his country, seems to be the embodiment of the very active type of Virtue that Fielding endorses. The female characters like Sophia, Bridget and Honour typify the peculiar nature of characteristic volition accompanied by frequent changes in opinion and attitudes towards the people and the world around. However, Fielding has constructed his characters in round fashion; they do not always behave in a stereotypical manner. The novelist makes them err and waver; they misunderstand and misinterpret. Even a character like Mr. Allworthy, supposedly the grandest and senior most amongst the characters of the novel, nevertheless is led to errors in judgments.

Idea of Virtue:

Fielding insisted that nothing in *Tom Jones* "can offend even the chastest eye on perusal." This might have sprung up from his awareness of the morality based on the goodness of heart rather than technical virtue that he was trying to preach. The protagonist Tom Jones is a lusty, passionate, highly sexed young man but equally generous and easily moved by the sufferings of others. In tracing the fortunes of this kind of a hero, Fielding could come to terms more with the moral complexities of the world as it is than with the simple-minded virtue of Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams in his novel *Joseph Andrews*. You are already told that central to Fielding's philosophy is the idea that a good man can be guilty of bad act, but we should not condemn an individual as bad because he is not perfectly good. Although not a philosopher in the real sense, as early as 1740, in a newspaper names *The Champion* under

the pseudonym Captain Hercules Vinegar, Fielding laid stress on the necessity of the 'good nature' in man, a quality he equated with virtue. He emphasised that good nature was "the benevolent and amiable temper of mind, which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently pushes us on to promote the latter and prevent the former." Tom attains wisdom and better knowledge of mankind and in the process he learns how to lead a happy life. He may be a sinner, but never a villain. Fielding is seriously concerned with his strategy of showing vices and hypocrisies in their repellent ugliness. However, he was equally conscious that virtues and goodness be shown in terms of their innocence and beauty. Thus, the story of *Tom Jones* is derived from life itself. As he wrote in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews "everything is copied from the book of nature, and scarce a character or action produced which I have not taken from my own observations and experience." Fielding insisted that his purpose was "to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices."*

Mock Heroic Convention:

Tom Jones is a comic epic in prose with many mock-heroic conventions like invocations and descriptions scattered throughout the narrative. But the mock elements serve as important artistic purpose and they enable Fielding to make certain important remarks about society, to deflate certain kinds of pretentiousness, to communicate the relish of the colour and variety of human life simultaneously with his ironic perception of the underlying identity of the high class battling and low class brawling. The mock heroic also enables him to bring the hero into a series of situations in which his imprudence gives power to his enemy, which ultimately becomes the cause of his downfall. Whatever Suspense is created becomes comic, seasoned with the comic awareness of the absurdities and futilities of life. However, readers do sympathise with the way Tom gets himself embroiled in troubles. Along with this, the description of the hero as 'Foundling' indicates that Fielding is not exactly following the normal procedure of epic. Instead, he deals with his English society as it is.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: In what ways is *Tom Jones* a picaresque novel?

Q 6: How has Fielding upheld the notion of virtue in this novel?

Q 7: How do you think, the mock epical elements function in the novel *Tom Jones*?

6.5 FIELDING'S ART OF CHARACTERISATION

The basic method of characterisation of Fielding in *Tom Jones* involves action and author's description. In all the characters Fielding shows that a character's own action reveals him more. However, we also find that most of his characters are static– that is they hardly develop during the course of the novel. The only exception is Tom who grows and develops. Another feature of Fielding's characterisation is that he stresses one particular trait of a character. For example, Tom is impulsive, Blifill is greedy and Allworthy is easily gullible. This may mean that Fielding has not created a fully rounded character. However, it is not correct because as far as Tom is concerned, he shows his capacity for growth and maturation. Keeping these general observations in mind let us, in this section, briefly analyse some of the major characters in the novel.

Tom Jones:

Tom Jones is the principal character in the novel. The story delineates his development from infancy to young adulthood. Born out of wedlock, he becomes the adopted child of Squire Allworthy. He grows up along with Blifil, the son of Allworthy's sister, Bridget, and her husband, Captain Blifil. However, they soon become fierce rivals. By nature, Tom is honest, courageous, and generous, but at times, becomes imprudent and downright reckless. His faults prevent him from being a perfect hero but his goodness in heart also makes him an icon of virtue. His handsome look and gallantry make him win the love and affection of many women of the countryside. One thing you should note that women

always take the initiative but Tom never corrupts innocence in the unmarried, or virtue in the married. He is simple minded enough to believe that he has fathered Molly Seagrim's child and is prepared to marry her. When a similar situation emerges in London as Nancy Miller is pregnant after getting seduced by Mr. Nightingale under promises of marriage, Tom gives his ethic of sexual behaviour like the following: "Lokee, Mr Nightingale, I am not canting hypocrite, nor do I pretend to the gift of chastity more than my neighbours. I have been guilty with women, I own it; but am not conscious that I have ever injured any. Nor would I, to procure pleasure to myself, be knowingly the cause of misery to any human being." Thus, although the plot of the novel is concerned with *who* Tom is, Fielding makes it clear that his theme is *what* Tom is.

Squire Allworthy:

He is a wealthy landowner who adopts and nurtures Tom Jones. As his name imply, he is "all worthy", one who is, kind, generous, and morally upright. He is reputed to be benevolent and altruistic. However, much like Tom Jones, he too sometimes takes unwise decisions. His only fault—due to his goodness is that he cannot perceive the evil in others.

Bridget Allworthy:

She is the sister of Squire Allworthy. She is the one who gives birth to Tom when she was not yet married and so, hires another woman to pose as his mother. An unattractive woman, Bridget always betrays beautiful women. She married Captain Blifil just because he flattered his religious views. After her marriage to Captain Blifil, she gives birth to a son who, later, becomes Tom's rival. However, towards the end she becomes devoted to Tom largely because of his good look and gallantry.

Sophia Western:

She is the beautiful daughter of the violent Squire Western. She and Tom fall in love with each other, but circumstances contrive to keep them apart until the end of the novel. Both of them finally get married to each other. Like Tom, she lavishes gifts on the poor and treats people of all classes with respect. Through her commitment and courage she

manages to reconcile her love for Tom, her duties towards her father and her resentment of Blifil.

Blifil:

He is the son of Bridget Allworthy and Captain Blifil. He is always antagonistic to Tom Jones. He pretends to be pious and principled but soon he exposes his real character through hypocrisy. He tries to manipulate events by devious means in order to oust Tom Jones and assure his inheritance of Allworthy's estate. The absence of natural human feelings in him does not distinguish him as a virtuous character, but rather provides a depressing portrayal of what humanity in general would be like if devoid of passion.

Squire Western:

He is a wealthy landowner and neighbour of Allworthy. He is a blustery man who loves a life full of energy and sportiness. However, he is also presented by Fielding as the caricature of conservative country gentleman. Since he is just a caricature, Fielding does not indent us to judge the extreme abuse of his daughter Sophia too harshly. At the same time, his insistence on Sophia marrying Blifil has less to do with greed than his strong adherence to tradition. He often speaks country dialect.

Mrs. Western:

She is the sister of Squire Western. Just like her brother, she too is a caricature of the artificial city woman always acting out expediently. She takes pride on herself being knowledgeable about the contemporary society, culture, and love. However, her ignorance reveals itself on numerous occasions like– she thought that Socrates lectures to students instead of engaging them in conversational debates. She lacks the compassion exhibited by her niece, Sophia. She opposes Sophia's attachment to the lowly Tom Jones.

Partridge:

He is a schoolteacher who was wrongly accused of being the father of infant Tom Jones. After Tom grows up to be a man, he and Partridge become travelling companions. Partridge's relationship with Jones becomes akin to that of a page to a knight. It also bears striking resemblances to the comic relationship between Sancho Panza and Don Quixote in *Don Quixote*, a novel by Cervantes.

Jenny Jones / Mrs. Waters:

Jenny Jones is the maid servant who poses as the mother of Tom Jones when he is just an infant. Although she is not married, she adopts the name *Mrs. Waters* after she begins to live with Captain Waters. She has a sexual encounter with Tom at an inn at Upton. She later plays an important role in extricating Tom from extreme circumstances.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Trace the good qualities of Tom Jones as a character in the novel.

Q 9: How would you like to judge the women characters of the novel?

6.6 FIELDING'S NARRATIVE STYLE

Fielding left a great impact upon the tradition of the English novel in the 18th century and the 19th century by the style of writing he adopted for the novel. In the "preface" of *Tom Jones*, Fielding stated: "the excellence of the entertainment consists less in the subject than in the author's skill in well dressing it up...we shall represent human nature at first to keep appetite of our reader, in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragout it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affectation and vice which courts and cities afford." From Fielding's point of view, art is artifice or deliberately constructed. He believed, as did most 18th century writers and educated readers, that the purpose of art is to create pleasure, which is both civilised and civilising.

You should have noted that the novel *Tom Jones* is largely picaresque and episodic which very well serves Fielding's purpose of castigating vice and upholding virtue in a style filled with irony and wit and borrowed freely from the mock epic tradition. Fielding was alert enough to see that the tradition of the mock-heroic offered him a chance to decide on those modes of the ridiculous that mainly arise from hypocrisies and affectations. However, while defining the novel as an epic genre, Fielding emphasised its function in presenting a broad picture of

a historical period, but like verse epics of the ancient times, it will not always display the weaknesses of humanity. His model might be Don Quixote and his aim was to present a 'prose epic' through which he wanted to create a panorama of society seen through ironic and satiric comedy and farmed in a commentary of his own on the theory of human nature and literary art.

The narrator begins every book with a formal introduction to the reader. He explains every nature of the narrative, both in terms of the plot and the method of writing. Very carefully, he delineates the gradual intensification of the plot with each added character and how they affect the transformation in the order of things. He also explicates as to why he makes use of a specific genre of writing in one instance rather than in another (such as the use of a quasi-epic style). The narrator directly communicates with the readers, addressing them specifically at times as male or female readers. The fact that Fielding had worked in the theatre before becoming a novelist influenced his narrative technique, especially in the use of lively dialogue and the choice of characters. Therefore, another important stylistic device of the novel is the use of colloquial language. Tom and Sophia are round characters but Mr. Western and Mr. Allworthy have some characteristics borrowed from the stock characters of drama. The most obvious influence of drama on *Tom Jones* is in the intricacies of the plot, which are the typical confusion of comedy and pathos.

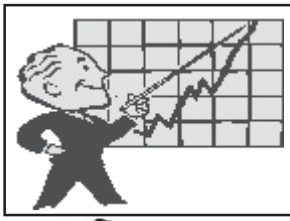


LET US KNOW

"The most outstanding aspect of Fielding's style is the recurrence of finely balanced passages of irony. These passages appear in two different forms. One form is actually a juxtaposition of two passages in which a character first utters grand words about a noble philosophical idea and then Fielding reveals the hypocrisy of the character by showing him acting in direct opposition to his so called philosophy" (James C. Evans). An example of this technique is Fielding's handling of the character of Blifill.

Structure:

There are three types of structure to be found in *Tom Jones*. These are deftly combined by Fielding into one framework. The first structural level is simply associated with the plot content with the sequential narrative movement of one event into another. Fielding followed the ancient epic tradition, especially that of Homer in the *Iliad* with the 'unity of action' being the primary concern. This required the novelist to construct the plot in the way that there are causal relationships among the incidents. In the first section of the novel, upto Book VII, Tom's actions are misinterpreted by Allworthy leading to Tom's expulsion from the latter's home. In the next section, Fielding shifts his focus to Tom's journey to London and, as a critic says, the novelist is following the picaresque tradition, which is related to the medieval romance. Fielding seems to follow the tradition of *Don Quixote*. In the section that describes Tom's journey to London, Tom moves from one incident to another, from the band of soldiers to Mazard Hill, then to Upton Inn and to the Gypsies of London. There is, however, no causal relationship between one incident with another. In the final Section of the novel, Fielding combines these two structural levels– that of classical epic and medieval romance. We can also notice the comic structure at the end, with a comic tone consistently adhered to by Fielding. In the introduction to Book V, Fielding lays out his comic principle: he would alternately present the sober and comic passages not without some subtle relationship between the two. Again, there can often be found an ironic comment on the serious elements of an earlier passage. This enables the novelist to maintain the comic tone pervasively.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Comment on Fielding's style of writing as found in the novel *Tom Jones*.



6.7 LET US SUM UP

We have found that *Tom Jones* appears to be a novel about life and its trials and tribulations, narrated with a somewhat comic approach.

Tom, by the end of the novel, moves towards achieving a settled way of life, with Sophia as his wife. For him, the entire novel resembles a journey, where he errs and stumbles with near escapes and close shaves. He gives in to passions at times, once almost committing the sin of incest. His actions are often misinterpreted. The characters around him have volatile opinions about him, ranging from love to loathing. The novel explores a variety of characters, displaying myriad moods and emotions. Fielding displays an amazing style of narrating the chain of events. He takes the reader into confidence, and often addresses them specifically as male or female readers. This enhances the readability of the novel, and boosts its overall receptivity amongst the reading public. After reading this unit, you must have gained sufficient ideas regarding the major themes as well as the narrative technique adopted by Fielding in recounting the history of *Tom Jones*. You are now well informed of the major characters of the novel, which have left their indelible impact upon the life of the protagonist in the novel. Finally, you have enriched your understanding of the novel by examining the history of reception of the novel by critics belonging to different periods.



6.8 FURTHER READING

Alter, Robert. (1968). *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Amigoni, David. (2000). *The English Novel and Prose Narrative*. Edinburgh University Press.

Coles Editorial Board. (1996). *Fielding Tom Jones Notes.* New Delhi: Rama Brothers.

Compton, Neil. (ed.) (1970). *Henry Fielding Tom Jones: A Casebook*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Drew, Elizabeth. (1995). *A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces*. Radha Publishing House: Calcutta.

Ehrenpreis, Irving. (1964). *Fielding: Tom Jones.* London: Edward Arnold Ltd.

Fielding, Henry. (1994). *Tom Jones.* Norton Critical Editions.

Nandwani, Aditya. (2009). *Henry Fielding Tom Jones.* New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Paulson, Ronald. (1962). *Fielding: A Collection of Critical Essays (20th Century Views)*. Prentice Hall.

Watt, Ian. (1957). *The Rise of the Novel.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Websites Resources:

http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/tomjones/summary.html



6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: They constitute the first extended attempt by an author to define and discuss the novel as a literary genre… …they discuss Fielding's aims and objectives in the novel… …issues of self conscious authorship… …Fielding's telling of the basic features of fiction—the interplay of reality and illusion.

Ans to Q No 2: The provision of the novel being the portrayal of human nature… …treatment of time in the novel… …distinction between history and romance… …the function of a critic and the function of 'contrast' in a work of art... …a discussion of the marvellous versus the real in fiction… …suggestions to the readers… …issues in Plagiarism… …his direct discussion with the readers and so on.

Ans to Q No 3: Yes… …Fielding freely confesses that he has borrowed passages from the ancient authors without acknowledging the source… …his argument is that those having classical education will at once recognise the source and others will have no use for information on the source.

Ans to Q No 4: The three suggestions are:

1) Do not be too hasty to judge the structure in the novel.
2) Do not confuse certain characters just because they act alike or seem to act alike under similar circumstances.
3) Do not condemn a character as a bad one because it is not a perfectly good one.

Ans to Q No 5: The picaresque novel is like an episodic narrative, describing the progress of the *picaro*… …*Tom Jones* depicts the journey of a foundling named Tom Jones through different phases of his life… …following the picaresque tradition he learns his lessons through the trials and tribulations of life.

Ans to Q No 6: Central to Fielding's philosophy is the idea that a good man can be guilty of bad act, but we should not condemn an individual as bad because he is not perfectly good. … …he stressed the 'good nature' in man, a quality he equated with virtue… …although he displayed vices and hypocrisies in their repellent ugliness he was equally conscious that virtues and goodness be shown in terms of their innocence and beauty.

Ans to Q No 7: Like many mock heroic conventions *Tom Jones* adopts invocations and descriptions… …the mock elements enable Fielding to make certain important ironic remarks about society… …it enables him to bring the hero into a series of situations in which his imprudence gives power to his enemy which ultimately becomes the cause of his downfall… … But Fielding is not exactly following the normal procedure of epic. Instead, he deals with his English society as it is.

Ans to Q No 8: Tom is honest, courageous, and generous… …He is handsome and gallant … …he is gentle and helpful… …he is simple minded.

Ans to Q No 9: Except Sophia all the women characters are not free from their flaws… **…**Bridget always betrays beautiful women… …Mrs Western is a city lady who takes pride on herself being knowledgeable about the contemporary society, culture, and love.

Ans to Q No 10: *Tom Jones* is a largely picaresque and episodic novel which very well serves Fielding's purpose of castigating vice and upholding virtue in an ironical and witty style… …Fielding borrowed freely from the mock epic tradition which offered him a chance to decide on the modes of the ridiculous arising from hypocrisies and affectations… …his aim was to present a 'prose epic' through

which he wanted to create a panorama of his contemporary society… …His experiences at the theatre too influenced his narrative technique



6.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: "It is easier to make good man wise than to make bad man good." Justify the meaning of this statement with reference to Tom's character.

Q 2: Critically discuss *Tom Jones* as a commentary on the English life of the 18th century. How does Fielding present the high society life of London?

Q 3: What ideas can you draw about Fielding's narrative strategy from the novel *Tom Jones*? Discuss with reference to the prefatory chapters of the Books of the novel.

Q 4: What influence did Fielding's former experiences as a playwright have upon the structure of *Tom Jones*?

Q 5: Discuss Fielding's method of characterisation in *Tom Jones.* Do you feel that all the major characters are equally life like? What could be the possible reasons for this inequality?

Q 6: Do you think that Henry Fielding could build a relationship between the narrator and the readers of *Tom Jones*? How important is this relationship to the overall impact of the novel? Discuss.

Q 7: How does Fielding portray the relationship between city and country in the novel *Tom Jones*?

* * *