

The Realistic Elements in Tom Jones

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The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling is a bildungsroman and picaresque novel by English author Henry Fielding. It is among one of the earliest English novels. It was published on 28th February, 1749. W. Somerset Maugham mentioned it in Great Novelists and Their Novels as one of the ten best novels in the world. The novel includes a collection of eighteen books. The novel explores human nature. Tom Jones' love for Sophia Western makes him a better person. Tom is moral and has a good heart. The comic novel tells the story of an orphan boy Tom's childhood, his struggle in life and career, and eventually his happy marriage.

The novel explores the nature of good and evil. Unexpected differences between appearance and reality and the perceptions of love in marriage are some of the themes in the novel. The novel is a social satire which makes use of humour and irony to critique the corrupted society of 18th century England. The novel is a universal bestseller and is able to attract readers' interest. The novel ends on a happy note. The novel is filled with the many different adventures of young Tom Jones.

Tom is brought up by a wealthy landowner, Squire Allworthy. Tom spent his childhood in a countryside in England. He falls in love with his neighbour's daughter Sophie Western, but is unfairly forced to leave home. Then Tom wanders from place to place around England and gets into trouble especially because of his affairs with a few women. Tom has a good nature but his reckless nature often gets him into trouble. He fights to succeed in the corrupt society. He gets life lessons from his experience. Tom overcomes the evil deeds of his half- brother finally to attain his birthright.

The inclusion of prostitution and casual sexual scenes in the plot was original for its time. The book's concept was inspired from Fielding's personal life. The character Sophia Western is based on his wife Charlotte Cradock. The protagonist Tom Jones is a realistic hero with strengths, failings and feelings whose transition into virtue took time and struggle. The adventures of Tom is highly entertaining and challenging for the readers. The idea of Tom being a bastard was inherited from the family background as he was an orphan. It remains an issue for bastard characters to find love and marry as is something that some parents of a girl would disapprove of it. Tom was growing mentally amid the treatment of the society and the system between high class and low class of the society.

The following statement of Squire Allworthy expresses his nature- "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, in as much as it is committed in defiance of the laws of our religion, and of the express commands of him who founded that religion."(66)

Sophia writes a letter to his love, Tom: "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."

Tom and the Man of the Hill's conversation: "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 yours." "Indeed I am, sir", answered Jones, "the most unhappy of mankind." –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 their instant in the highest degree. You must 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. Sometimes very extraordinary must have determined you to this course of life, and I have reason to fear your own history isn't without misfortunes." (402)

The old man's view about life: "I was now once more at liberty, and immediately withdrawing from the highway into the fields, I travelled on, since knowing which way I went, and making it my chief care to avoid all public roads, and all towns, may 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 behavior) was selfish and ungenerous...and from that day to this my history is little better than a blank."(428-429)

Tom's comment: "In the former part of what you said, 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 on 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 marry 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 arrived 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)

Tom Jones is a masterpiece fiction which tells the truth of the society at that time. Fielding calls it a history. The author Fielding is a social commentator and historical analyst. There are many themes like religious, ethical and moral in Tom Jones. The novel shares the message that it is possible to attain goodness and virtue in life. Amid the struggle of the characters, the novel shows the basic value of good and virtuous human conduct.

Bibliography:

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