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Topic: Characterization in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*

The plot of Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* is so vast and elaborate that Fielding could not do proper justice to the characterization of the novel. It seems the characters are present in the novel only in order to support the plot. According to Kettle, "The characters themselves are not in the fullest sense, people. They are almost all 'flat' characters in the tradition of comedy of humours, that useful though unstable theory based on the crude physiological psychology of the Middle Ages." In a similar fashion Ian Watt also believes that Fielding neglected characterization in this novel. "*Tom Jones*, then, would seem to exemplify a principle of considerable significance for the novel from general: namely, that the importance of the plot is in inverse proportion to that of character." Fielding only gives description of the actions of the characters, but fails to describe the inner psyche of the characters through their actions in this novel. For example, the character of Allworthy remains the same from the beginning to the end of the novel. Even the hero, Tom Jones grows up physically but not mentally.

Fielding's presentation of the characters in this novel is, however, praiseworthy. He presents his characters mainly through action and partly through description. For example, the character of Sophia is first described in the Book IV, Chapter II and then her character is revealed to us through her dialogues and actions. Fielding also uses the technique of contrast to present the characters in this novel. The best example of this technique is the contrasting characters of Tom and

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Bilfil. Whereas Bilfil is a sneaking, cunning and mean-minded boy, Tom is of generous, open-minded and jovial nature. Similarly, there is a contrast between the characters of Tom and Sophia. There is a balance between instinct and intellect in her character. But, in Tom's character instinct predominates over intellect.

Fielding was writing during the age of neoclassicism when writers intended to follow the rules propounded by the ancients. According to Aristotle, a king should always remain a king by nature. In other words, even if the circumstances change a character should not change its nature. Following the trend of neoclassicism, Fielding also did not try to individualize a character. His intention was, as he himself writes in *Joseph Andrews*, to show "no men, but manners; not an individual, but a species." Another reason for not concentrating on characterization of the novel is that Fielding's broad vision for this novel was comedy. This vision did not allow him to dive deep into the joys and sorrows of each character. If he had done so, his purpose to produce comical effect would have been lost.

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