

## Abstract

*Tom Jones* was one of the seminal texts of fiction to come out of the eighteenth century that helped to build the English novel and to disseminate some of the philosophical tenets most significantly articulated by David Hume in his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This work does not posit that Hume was the chief philosophical inspiration for Fielding; rather, the reason behind focus on Hume is that in his works we find the philosophy of the moral sense elaborated and articulated better than in any other moral philosopher of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Adam Smith. The aim of this thesis is to pursue the questions of ethics and sensibility as played out in Fielding's masterpiece, *Tom Jones*.

The thesis opens with an account of Fielding's background and divine, philosophical and literary influences. The development and mainly characteristics of the novel of sentiment (1740s to 1750s) and sensibility (60s-70s) will be discussed. The notion of moral sense and the merger of ethics with aesthetics will be tracked in the history of philosophy, with a special focus on the Scottish Enlightenment with its main proponents Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith. The next chapter comprises close readings of *Tom Jones*; how Fielding conceived of ethics in his work, how he implemented moral quandaries into the reading experience and how he involved the reader in the moral decision-making, e.g. in relation to his expert employment of satire and irony. Subsequently, there follows an essay on Hume, followed by a comparative section which elaborates on the similarities and discrepancies between Fielding and the mentioned philosophers, e.g. Fielding's "good-nature" vs. Hume's "sympathy" as the respective faculties that enable us to feel the pain of others.

With the thinkers maintaining common sense philosophy, or "a belief system that we have in order to be human," the discussion will also run as a retort to Mandeville's & Hobbes' notion that man is essentially driven by self-interest (found in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*). Yet when discussing Hume, this tenet as well as the foregrounding of reason in *Tom Jones* will get problematized and interpretative syntheses will be drawn. Hume's system borrows from both of the previous philosophical traditions of the

moral sense and of the selfish school of thought and Fielding conceives of reason and sense in quite a new way.

Key words: Fielding, Moral Theory, Hume, Moral philosophy, Early English novel, Comic novel