The Benefits of Failure in Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones

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ABSTRACT

This research argues for the very peculiar ideas Fielding had as far as personal failure is concerned, possibly seen by the author of the famous novel *Tom Jones* not as an alternative to success, but as one of its stages. The long Eighteenth Century, with its scientific discoveries, is a moment in which the component of experience and the knowledge deriving from it starts to matter. Fielding attests, especially as a man of law, that the world has become an imperfect place, responsible for driving the man towards failure. The main purpose of this study is to show that after this acceptance of failure, the man is led towards a process of personal improvement, fulfilled only if the individual is good-natured, tender-hearted and has acquired that precious prudence which comes ultimately from experience; one example of this complex process could be best resembled in the character of Tom Jones.

My approach has an affinity with cultural and legal studies. I have decided to select, among the bibliography, important contributions made by Sharpe, Langbein, Bender, Gladfelder, in order to help me to provide a clear overview of the period of time, marked by a general diffusion of crime and moral vice. I have analysed for my second chapter philosophical texts written by Hobbes, Locke and Hume and Miller’s study of the *Miscellanies*, which helped me to research the aspect of good nature. In the last chapter, dealing with the educating aim of the writer, I have consulted Battestin, Preston, and other moral studies on Fielding, as much as direct examples from the novel itself to strengthen my theory.

Among the most important findings and results, apart from the already-mentioned importance of failure in terms of the personal development of the individual, I would also like
to mention Fielding’s significant lessons on how to correctly and accordingly pass judgement. The narrator, indirectly and behind the mean of artifice, constantly warns the reader to avoid quick and harsh comments (also on other people’s failure and flaws), because reality is often deceiving and far from what it appears to be.

In conclusion, in order to solve this dichotomy of appearance and reality, the narrator urges the reader to be active and attentive when reading the novel, so to understand what lies behind the carefully-planned plot. The narrator does not leave anything to chance, and does not reveal explicit moral lessons; on the contrary, he wishes the reader to understand how to behave and become a better person with the powerful and convincing character of Tom Jones, through his experience, failure, and acquisition of prudence.
INTRODUCTION

Henry Fielding, eighteenth-century novelist and magistrate, was in many ways an avant-garde writer. Not only because he was, along with Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, one of the first developers of the English Novel as a genre, but mostly because of his very modern views. He retained positive feelings about changes, especially those in people, to such an extent that it became one of the most tackled topics in his novels. He was a supporter of the importance of being in constant personal development, in order to reach a possible state of perfection, as a result of a long process called experience. It is for this reason, that making mistakes and failing emerge to be from his writings, not only the biggest step in one’s life, but also a necessary one in terms of personal growth.

This project investigates the role of Henry Fielding in reforming society and his positive concerns about the failure of good-natured men, as a needful step towards the acquisition of prudence and benevolence. It also explores his extensive use of the novel in order to educate masses and spread that sort of exclusive knowledge Fielding had gained as a man of law, who daily sought to fight the evils of society.

Fielding is nevertheless moving in a very peculiar environment. The social reality of the Eighteenth Century had undergone multiple changes that will be analysed in depth in the following chapter. However, it is necessary to state from the very beginning, that one of the most influential developments was the importance the use of reason had acquired in everyday life. The famous Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan (1651), a text written during the previous century, is only one of the many examples of a change in thoughts. It was also still very influential for the future Enlightened philosophy of the empiricist Locke, who saw knowledge
as “not the product of innate ideas or imaginative ingenuity, but of sensation and reflection, both mechanical processes rooted in the real world of everyday experience” (Mahoney:4). The reality-oriented and often labelled “Age of Reason” was in England an important key change between the Renaissance and the Romanticism. It has often been depicted as a calm and peaceful epoch, yet it was not free from troubles proper to a transition. The late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century could represent, in a way, the beginning of modernity, seen as the start of the modern state, of a possible constitution, of the restoration of monarchy and of pure social matters.

Fielding is one of the many voices attempting to depict society with a personal wish for a change for the better. He started his career as a playwright when Walpole’s conservatism was at its peak. Because of his straightforward ideas, he saw himself forced to turn to law, after the Licensing Act of 1737 had prevented him from going on writing satirical plays. Fielding therefore became a lawyer and later on a magistrate, in close contact with the new social reality of London, whose population had increased exponentially. He was indeed deeply concerned with the fast development of the city, the widened discrepancy between rich and poor and the spread of corruption and criminal activities among lower, but also, and most surprisingly, upper classes (Sharpe:95). This unexpected failure of goodness at multiple level of society was also enhanced in Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), which powerfully shed light upon upper-classes corruption. All this led Fielding to examine in depth that long-debated conflict between appearance and reality in his *Tom Jones* (1749), which is quintessentially a novel about judging. *Tom Jones* examines the tendency to judge people based on appearance, and not according to a deeper understanding of character. How is it possible to distinguish good men from bad ones? And what does make a man a real good man? Fielding extensively attempted to answer these question. Probably influenced by the model of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605 first volume, 1615 second volume), in which an
unusual hero is unable to distinguish between what is real and what is not, Fielding turns this matter to the reader: will his audience be able to understand the differences between the malign, but seemingly sensible Blifil and the good-hearted, but apparently too unsettled Tom Jones?

Fielding’s merit in his way of teaching the reader how he himself should acquire prudence in judging, as his characters also should, has been almost unique. He starts from the declaration of his intention to report human nature, although never clearly expressing, nor forcing, what the reader should think. On the contrary, he guides his readers through that complex thread of stories in order to make them realise themselves, after examining what happens to the characters, what good nature really is and what, on the contrary, is not. Not only did he do so. He additionally retained a personal and original view on the importance of failure, one of the major topics of this research. Failure should, in a chain of succession, lead to: repentance, pardon and, finally, a perfect state of existence, as epitomised in Mr Wilson’s in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones the character’s experiences. Evidence has also shown how much the lives of these two fictional characters resembled somehow that of their creator, a fact that could explain Fielding’s tolerance for deviate behaviour and his belief in understanding from one’s own mistakes (Scott Kastan).

The experience of Fielding as a man of law and, as said before, in constant contact with all aspects of social hierarchy, could be seen as strictly connected with the development of his novel. In fact, Hal Gladfelder sees the rise of this particular genre as a resulting need of the representation of “socially disruptive figures familiar from the network of criminal narrative” (7). Social matters turned to be at the centre of literary reasoning of the time. In a society where most people could read, and the readership extended gradually to the lower classes – Ian Watt not by chance connects the increase of the reading public with the rise of the novel – the subject matter of certain stories allegedly changed. What is more, from the
Seventeenth century, literature gradually started dealing with crime for different reasons: first, people were interested in reading a possible reflection of what was happening to their lives in a way that could be as close as possible to the real world. Second, according to Gladfelder, the readership, especially the lower classes, “might share, at least in part, the outlaw’s alienation from the centres of economic and ideological power” (9), and so, find common interests and shared views on the rebellion of the criminal. The connection between crime and literature is quickly established: as the population of the city of London had grown exponentially, especially in the 1710s, this increase allegedly developed an increase of poverty and, as a consequence of that, an increase of crime.

My approach in this research has an affinity with cultural studies and with the study of social crime (Bender, Gladfelder, Sharpe). It is also deeply influenced by the Law and Literature movement started by Richard Weisberg and Richard Posner, in the United States legal environment, and by James Bond White, one of the best-known exponents of the genre with his *The Legal Imagination* (1973). This movement particularly rose after a crisis during the 1960s in the two fields, literature and law. The former, felt its inadequacy and lack of scientific status in a world which, at that time, privileged sciences (Carpi, 2007) and was governed by scientific rules. The latter felt, at the same time, its failure in its impossibility of guaranteeing justice – in accordance to these ideas Weisberg wrote *The Failure of the Word* (1984), in which word stands for law.

Scholars of the *Critical Legal Studies*, born in 1976, saw the combination of law and literature as extremely beneficial for both disciplines. This union, however, has has a long tradition which goes back to Ancient History. Nonetheless, Plato (429-347 BC), in his *Republic*, saw art and law as incompatible, because art (and literature as a form of art) is much closer to appearance rather than truth (Meyer). What is more, law is organised,
unambiguous and governed by rules, whereas art is quintessentially anarchic (Carpi). Aristotle (384-322 BC), as opposed to Plato, conferred literature a status of imitation which is probable and no longer impossible. He used the term *mimesis* to refer to an imitation of nature and reality. In his *Poetics*, he attempted to define, with a scientific approach, the laws which govern poetry and tragedy, thus establishing a further significant connection between law and literature. Many other, such as Kant and modern law, have insisted on the separation like Plato did. But in modern history, especially after the crisis mentioned before, new ways of interpreting the benefits of the union have highlighted how much literature could be useful to the study of law, especially if the Common Law is an unwritten constitution, based on precedents.

Literature, in fact, offers a vast corpus of materials and could be a very useful tool in terms of the understanding of different perspectives of human nature. It also conveys better insights concerning emblematic topics. Literature, in fact, by the aristotelian *mimesis*, reflects reality and the anxiety of the time in which it is produced, and can be an example of how society, people and victims, react to certain events.

Both law and literature deal with social conflict and with the tension between individual conscience and conventional wisdom or legal imposition. [...] In short, both law and literature are preoccupied with the harbingers of justice and the mainsprings of injustice and evil. (Carpi, 2003:23)

The participation of law aspects *in* literature has always had a long history, and it is also one of the main reasons why the subcategory “law in literature” emerged. For instance, it is enough to think about Shakespeare and his *The Merchant of Venice*, a text intertwined with bonds, contracts and a legal substratum as representatives to the transition from the Middle Ages which took place in the Renaissance. Further emblematic texts dealing with legal material have been traced in the works of Melville, Camus, Dickens, Kafka, Dostoevsky. As Carpi (2007) puts it, literature also leads to a better understanding of human nature through
the mean of narration. In addition, “literature offers narrations which become representative of how a culture reacts to social contradictions of the time” (59).

With these premises, the connection with Henry Fielding’s activity could therefore easily be established. According to a law and literature approach, Fielding’s depiction of society in a literary form and his mis-en-scène of “domestic trials” (one among many examples could be Allworthy’s decision to punish Tom), could be no less than a mean to influence the flow of events in the legal history of his time, through the medium of the narration of a story.

Before closing this brief introduction over the law and literature approach, I would like to remind that the line of thought proper to the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) is more often than not in accordance to that of Poststructuralism and the American Deconstruction of Derrida, as opposed to Structuralism. If Structuralism and Saussure believed in the application of fixed and universal rules to analyse any given text, Poststructuralism saw exactly in this a huge risk: that of treating each text with the same structure. Poststructuralism firmly supported the uniqueness of each text, and its never-ending interpretation. Relevant to Poststructuralism is the hermeneutic tradition, seen as

the science of interpretation. It stresses the individuality of each human expression and, against scientific generalizations, claims that we choose between several meanings any utterance might have in the light of the special circumstances under which it is made. (Hamilton:44)

In fact, as Costas Douzinas notices (Carpi, 2007:35), both legal and literary text do not come to us “free of the need to interpret”.

Law and literature is also useful when we consider the Eighteenth Century: studying eighteenth-century law and crime is not easy, because records are not always reliable and

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1 My translation
more often than not they are missing (Sharpe:41). Literature is therefore considered to be a very favourable approach to understand the development of crime and of a legal apparatus.

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This research is divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I will try to attempt an overview of the background with characterised Fielding’s times. I will first analyse briefly the historical background, which also contributed to the development of a new line of thought and new ideas. Evidence of this is the grown importance and predominance of reason and of experience in significant writers and philosophers (Hobbes, Locke, Hume), which lead to the development of English Empiricism. This is also applicable to Fielding, if we consider the importance experience has on a character such as Tom Jones. After this, I will move on to describe the situation of that time especially in a city like London, and all the relevant changes that took place, one of this is the increase of population, also strictly connected to the development of crime. Crime in the eighteenth-century society has always been an interesting field of research, especially in the last years. After an examination of what crime meant during Fielding’s time, I will study the importance of representing reality in the work of Henry Fielding as a magistrate, with a special attention to his legal text *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers and Related Writings*, his bother Sir John Fielding and the artistic representation of the brothers Fielding’s precepts in the production of the artist William Hogarth. The Eighteenth Century saw a great development in the system of law enforcement, resulting in the creation of the Bow Street Runners, one of the first example of police in England.

In the second chapter, focusing on the main topic of my research, I will argue for the necessity and the benefits of failure in Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. The eighteenth-century man is
no longer perceived to be perfect and flawless, but there is a more modern acceptance of human failure and deficiency, emerging from an overall differentiation among individuals, who come from completely different backgrounds. It is properly this imperfect world that leads the man towards failure. After having failed, the man must undertake this process of personal improvement, which is achievable so long as the man retains some aspects of good nature, learning prudence with the aid and importance experience (Hobbes, Locke and Hume). In Fielding, all this is linked to a softened, but still present theological idea of the christian pardon. Evidence of this is the experience of Tom Jones the character, who has to learn and make his way to learn prudence, and the character Mr Wilson in *Joseph Andrews*. Direct example from the two novels, especially from *Tom Jones*, will be provided throughout the chapter. In the third part of the second chapter, I will also take into consideration Fielding’s possible model for failure applied to religion and to legal studies of the time respectively, showing how in the writer’s opinion the legal system failed also because it was not able to include the idea of failure.

In the third and last chapter, I will try to discuss Fielding’s peculiar way to address his moral teaching to the reader, with a closer attention to the aspect of judgement referred also to failure. Judging was very important to the author, because he feared people were too quick when commenting on other people’s flaws. What is more, the active role of the reader is extremely important because the narrator, with his unique technique, is never clearly explicit in terms of what exactly the reader should think. On the contrary, Fielding wishes to help the narrator to understand the subtle difference from appearance and reality, between what is good and what is not, what is forgivable and acceptable in society and what, on the contrary, should undergo a change.
CHAPTER ONE

Historical and Social Background: the Representation of Reality and its Conflicts.

In order to understand the context in which Fielding’s novels developed, it is useful and at the same time necessary to have in mind beforehand the society in which he was living, because the Eighteenth Century is considered to be a peculiar century, for the reasons that will be explored later on in this chapter. Therefore, I will first attempt to give a brief idea of the historical and philosophical changes that took place in eighteenth-century England, with a special attention to the situation in London, the capital and the biggest city; I will move on analysing the influence of crime in the social changes, arguing for the need for its representation, and, as a consequence of that, the active role of Henry Fielding, Sir John Fielding and William Hogarth in creating the images of their time. I perceive crime to be of a great significance when analysing Fielding’s work, because his job as a magistrate influenced much his perception of the world.

The approach I have used for this chapter is that of social studies, mainly based on Sharpe, Langbein, Bender and the Old Bailey Online. What is more, I would like to make clear that when I use terms such as “Age of Reason” and “Enlightenment”, I exclusively refer to those developments that took place in England, at the time which I chose to study.
1.1. Eighteenth-Century England on a National Scale: Historical and Philosophical Changes

1.1.1. Historical Background

When it comes to epochs, there is not always a very clear distinction between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century in terms of the exact year from which we could make the Eighteenth Century start, because it is not easy to define a clear cut that separates the two centuries. It happens more often, in fact, to include in the broad definition of “Eighteenth Century” also a part of the previous century, since this had important historical and philosophical repercussions, namely the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the gradual birth in England of the “Age of Reason”. As a consequence of this, historians often recur to the usage of the expression “The Long Eighteenth Century”.

Historically, the period called “Restoration”, with which we refer to the restoration of the monarchy, starting from 1660, and the Glorious Revolution, both represented a new turn after a very chaotic period marked by the execution of king Charles I (1649), the Civil War (1642-1649), and the accession to the throne of William of Orange (1650), later William III. Those turbulent years stood for the end of the sovereign as uncontested figure, who previously derived his power ultimately from God (supported by the Divine Right of Kings theory) and the newly influential emergence of the Parliament. With the Glorious Revolution, the Parliament had become the supreme source of government, and the monarch was now forced to collaborate with this organ (Goring:7).

After the death of William III in 1701, his daughter Queen Anne was crowned. During her reign, the not uncontested Act of Union was signed (1707), which united the parliament of Scotland to that of England and Wales. This event lead to the famous Jacobite rebellions (1715 and 1745), one of the main focus of Sir Walter Scott’s literary production. The death of Queen Anne in 1714 lead to the accession of the House of Hanover, and the occupation of the
throne by George I, II and III for the rest of the century. It is during their reign that the famous
and not problem-free figure of Robert Walpole (1676-1745) emerged.

George I (reigned 1714-27) and George II (reigned 1727-60) were German at heart;
they spoke broken English and took little interest in England’s affairs. Hence
ministers became more important and more independent of the Crown than they had
never been before. Through royal indifference and the ambition and skill of Walpole,
the first “prime minister,” the modern system of ministerial government began to
develop. (Abrams:2048)

Although Walpole is often remembered as a figure who conveyed a significant stability after
the chaos, he was at the same time often considered by many, among which Fielding, a skilled
manipulator and corruptor of politicians. The beginning of the Hanoverian dynasty coincided
also with a period of growth. The cities expanded, and during the 1710s especially, London
experienced a significant growth in population. It was recorded a gradual development of
trade, economy and technology. Yet, these changes and developments in history, were a result
of further changes that took place in the mind of the people.

1.1.2. The Connection between Philosophy and Literature

Turning now to an examination of the the eighteenth-century philosophy, what
emerges from the historical situation, in which the man escaped from a state of chaos, is the
search for freedom. People were trying to set themselves free from any sort of fanaticism and
religious superstition; A new, reality-oriented approach sought to fight abstract philosophy
and set new roots for a new reasonable and practical way of living (Mahoney).

When talking about the eighteenth-century philosophy in England, it is necessary to
mention the new interest for life experiences with repercussions on real life, influenced by
new concepts such as Empiricism, Scientific Rationalism, and Enlightenment. Among the
most famous and influential figures of the time, we remember Bacon, Descartes, Newton,
Hobbes and Locke. These new developments could not remain unnoticed, and literature as
much as social studies had to adapt to the new English “Age of Reason”. Man, and not God, had started to be the new focus of attention already in the Renaissance. Nevertheless, the Renaissance idea of the strong impact of the Chain of Beings, greatly illustrated in Tillyard’s *The Elizabethan World Picture*, and the ultimate relationship between Microcosm and Macrocosm (respectively with man and God as their representatives), now started to be much weaker, and the fulcrum of interest shifted ultimately to man and the Microcosm. The Ptolemaic tradition, with the earth at the centre of the universe, started to be deeply rejected with the new discoveries. It is for these reasons that the discrepancy between seventeenth-century literature and eighteenth-century literature is so strong: the former, still very attached to a strong Christian tradition, as we could see in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678); the latter, more connected to real events and facts resembled in every-day life.

The Enlightenment and the Empiricism strongly challenged scholasticism and encouraged to believe only in what could be seen and reasonably observed. Reason played no longer a marginal role. In the previous century, Francis Bacon, often regarded as the father of Empiricism and scientific methodology, had set the importance of the observation of nature. His writings were also crucial in their attempt to reconcile faith with reason (Mahoney). Meantime in France, René Descartes was asserting the absolute reliability on reason in part four of *Discourse on Method* (1637), writing that “Whether awake or asleep, we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our Reason”. Along with these lines, Newton’s studies, among which it is important to mention the universal gravitation law, the nature of light, and planetary motion, were completely centred on the study of the Earth, symbolising thus the lost appeal of abstract investigation. Also Pope’s famous *An Essay on Man* (1734) took the form of a scientific study of humanity, enhancing individualism.
In Philosophy, Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) swept away incorporeal, vague concepts and focused solely on accurate reasoning regarding the materialistic nature of the state. Locke, however, is considered to be one of the most influential thinker of the long Eighteenth Century. He wrote his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), considered to be one of the references for English Empiricism and of a new theory of knowledge. Locke set himself against Descartes’ previous beliefs about the existence of innate ideas and innate concept of knowledge, and highly supported the fact that ideas ultimately derive from experience. Among the numerous innovations brought with his way of thinking, he also claimed that sensation and reflection, both rooted in the real everyday world of experience, were the sole driving forces that could lead to knowledge (Mahoney).

These new philosophical ideas of Hobbes and Locke were highly influential for the people of the time, for Fielding too. It is for these newly-developed philosophical roots and for this overall need for writings with strong repercussions on real life, that Paul Hunter establishes as one of the ten criteria defining the novel as a genre, that of credibility: the idea that things in the fictional world must happen according to the laws that govern the real world:

The people who exist and the things that transpire in novels are recognizable as behaving and occurring in believable human ways, and readers are given the sense that things happen in the fictional world according to laws that are essentially like those governing the everyday world they themselves experience. (23)

**1.1.3. London**

London, the biggest city in England, offered a powerful scenario for all the changes that were taking place. London could basically be considered the only big city in England before the Industrial Revolution, which later on contributed to the expansion of other centres such as Manchester and Liverpool. In the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, Norwich and
Birmingham were second to London, with no more than 20,000 and 10,000 people respectively, which highlights how small other towns were in England at that time. “It is estimated that by 1750 one sixth of the English population either was living in London or had lived there for significant portions of its lives” (McLynn:2). I mean to underline this, because when we refer to changes and to the description of social manners, we often refer to the capital city; the rest of Great Britain was mainly countryside, consisting of very small parishes.²

The major change which affected the city in the Eighteenth Century, is the already-mentioned exponential population growth, a product of generally higher living standards, increase of employment (as a result of a slow transition from feudalism to capitalism), and the mass movement from the countryside to the city. The peak was reached during the 1710s, a year in which around 630,000 people were recorded. However, the number should only be taken as an general reference, because the census system was only introduced in 1801. From the 1730s to the 1750s, London assisted to a slow population growth, and as McLynn notices, there were more deaths than births (1-2). This was mainly due to poor hygiene and inadequate conditions of life, high infant mortality rate, and the “gin craze”. This last aspect, was also very negatively described by Fielding in the Enquiry:

A new kind of drunkenness [...] is lately sprung up amongst us, and which, if not put a stop to, will infallibly destroy a great part of the inferiour people. The drunkenness I here intend, is that acquired by the strongest intoxicating liquors, and particularly by that poison called Gin [...] the dreadful effects of which I have the misfortune everyday to see, and to smell too. (88-89)

From the 1750s, another strong population growth was recorded, to such an extent that in 1760 there were around 740,000 people (Old Bailey Online, 2013). This phenomenon, was

² The two web sources of the Old Bailey Online and the London Lives offer a precious description of the city of London during those years, and provide consistent materials used in this part of my research.
also enhanced by the immigration of foreigners to the metropolis, an important consequence of the development of the British Empire outside Great Britain.

Geographically, the city changed considerably during the century. The Great Fire of London of 1666 had destroyed its medieval part, and London was recreated reflecting the social expectations of the new age (Old Bailey Online), with the neoclassical style dominating the new architecture. New squares, churches, markets and open areas were built. The most striking feature is that whereas during the Renaissance and the Seventeenth century, London had been a mere series of neighbouring communities along the river Thames, during the Eighteenth Century, new centres spreading around the city were created. The geography of the city resembled much the rigid social hierarchy, which Goring describes as inegalitarian and fiercely patriarchal (29). The small elite class, the aristocracy, whose wealth was mainly based on land, started occupying a position in the West end, close to the royal court. The mercantile class, represented by artisans, manufacturers, traders and bankers, found its place in the City of London. The City had started to spread and become the centre of business, trade and finance, with the Bank of England founded in 1694. The last part of the social hierarchy, the poor people, the majority of the population, occupied the poorest area of London, which was the East End and Middlesex, two areas also associated to misery and concentration of immigration of people brought by the slave trade. The southern part of the city, Southwark, started housing people, mostly artisans and manufacturers, especially after 1750 when Westminster bridge was built.

This hierarchical society was fixed, and wealth was maldistributed, with little opportunity to change. In fact, fortune was basically inherited, and landowners retained the highest position in society. The architecture of the city also epitomised this disparity, and there was a clash between the grandiose building in the West, and the poor and old

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3 It is better to refer to this class as “the mercantile class” because “The idea of a ‘middle class’ did not gain widespread currency until the end of the Eighteenth Century, with the term itself coming into general usage in the 1780s” (Goring:25).
infrastructures in the East. There was little possibility to move across the social hierarchy, and it is for this reason that Goring writes “Crime was one way in which the poor might try to improve their lot” (27).

Perceptions of London from 1700 to 1800 retained a vast spectrum of different opinion. On the one hand, Samuel Johnson, with his famous quotation, claims that “You find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.” On the other hand, the City had also been very negatively remarked by some of its contemporaries. The parts of the city in which the poor people lived, were overcrowded, noisy, pestilential, muddy. Fielding, in the Enquiry, not only sees London as a dangerous centre of moral corruption, but he goes further on and compares it to a vast Forest, or even to Arabia or Africa:

> Whoever indeed considers the Cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast Addition of their Suburbs; the great Irregularity of their Buildings, the immense Number of Lanes, Alleys, Courts and Bye-Places; must think, think, that, had they been intended for the very Purpose of Concealment [...]. Upon such a View, the whole appears as a vast Wood or Forest, which a Thief may harbour with as a great Security, as wild Beasts do in the Deserts of Africa or Arabia”. (131)

This connection between London and unknown territories resembled in Fielding a fear for the inability to control the dangers of the quick expansion of the city. This set of lanes and alleys was seen as extremely connected to the growth of the criminal network. In Tom Jones, London vices and moral corruptions are also exposed. When Tom travels to London, he comes to terms with a reality of balls and gaming which was so different from the rural life he was used to.
1.2. Crime in the Society of the Eighteenth Century

When dealing with late Early-Modern society, and especially with Fielding, considering also that he was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1748-49, it is not possible not to take into consideration the aspect of crime. Crime, in fact, started to be identified with the period object of my research, which contributed also to the establishment of the first police form. Overall, there are two main types of crime: against property and against the person; so, crime is an opposite force to order that creates disorder, damaging someone or something. Nevertheless, defining exactly what crime is or was, is not free from problems. Sharpe, in fact, observes that the definition of crime depends from, and is strictly connected to the historical period it is referred to, as much as to the existing social conventions. He nevertheless attempts to define it:

Crime is a behaviour which is regarded as illegal and which, if detected, would lead to prosecution in a court of law or summarily before an accredited agent of law enforcement. (4)

Crime in the late Early Modern England could be considered a product of the already-mentioned exponential population growth and the great disparity existing between social classes. England was undergoing the major change from feudalism to capitalism, although economy was at the time still based primarily on agriculture, with the landed gentry as one of the strongest social classes. Nevertheless, as Sharpe clearly explains, “The rhythms of the pre-industrial economy might provide full employment for a month or so at a harvest time, but in the slack periods of the agricultural year there would simply not be sufficient work to do” (99). This is strictly connected to the fact that the increase of population also contributed to an increase of poverty. During winters, hostile weather conditions produced a decrease of work demand, leading to unemployment. The phenomenon of the vagrant is for this reason associated to the typical figure of the rural criminal.
Defining and providing clear data about the history of crime during the Eighteenth Century, is not an easy step. Research made by Sharpe, Thompson and Douglas Hay, has highlighted how much this concept of the “dark figure”, meaning with this a “body of criminal behaviour never prosecuted or never reported” (Sharpe:42), gives a distorted idea of crime, and therefore generalisations of any kind should be avoided. In fact, there is a problematic discrepancy between reported and unreported crime, and so, it could be deceptive to think that what is recorded actually stands for the truth, as the impossibility to exactly count crimes produces a very imperfect idea of it. Evidence has shown that in 1796, only one tenth of the crimes were reported. This happened because before 1750, prosecution was more of a private initiative than a public reality. As McLynn notices, a police force reminded much the English people of a French organism depriving the citizen’s freedom (33). In addition, private prosecution was preferred to going public, because the latter used to take a considerable amount of time and money. As for the time, the assizes, the principal courts for serious crimes, met only twice annually, whereas the quarter sessions, for petty offences, met four times a year. In terms of money, prosecuting was very expensive. As Beattie puts it,

The committee accepted a notion frequently asserted in the past, by Hale among others, and vigorously restated in 1751 by Henry Fielding, that the costs of prosecution were bound to discourage victims of theft from taking the thief to court even when the could identify him and have him apprehended. Fielding thought that the fees were modest but that other costs were crippling and likely to discourage prosecution. (42)

In the eighteenth-century trials, the figure of the lawyer had not officially entered the scene, and we are dealing with prosecution brought by ordinary people. The defendants were called to speak in order to prove the validity of their deposition. As Langbein notices, in a lawyer-free society, private prosecution was reinforced by the Marian procedure of investigation, in which pretrial was conducted by on of the main legal figure, the Justice of
the Peace (40). This fourteenth-century-created figure was not a professional lawyer, but usually a wealthy local governor, considered by many as being worthy to pass judgement. This magistrate was in charge of collecting deposition and conducting the preliminary examination of suspects and witnesses (Sharpe:28). In addition, the Justice of the Peace (JP), would “help the accuser build the prosecution case”, and would be interested in “keeping local order” (Langbein:43-46). Another active figure in the legal environment was the constable, an unpaid ordinary citizen of a precise community, elected for a certain amount of time by rotation; the constable was “responsible for crime detention” (McLynn:19) and for the maintenance of the local order. The result of the pre-examination of the local job of the Justice of the Peace, united with that of the Constable, would help understanding if the case was worth being discussed in an official courtroom. It is for these reasons, that the application of law depended much on the public cooperation of individuals, with the consequence that records are more often than not missing, and the study of crime is also subject to difficulties in terms of exact analysis.

When considering crime in the Eighteenth Century, the century which saw the development of the first police force in England, with the great contribution of the brothers Fielding, it is important to keep in mind the considerable disparity between the nature of crimes in the city and those in the countryside. In the city there was a higher level of reported crime in comparison to the countryside, but that does not necessarily mean that there was less crime in the countryside. Although more people lived in London, the city environment and the strong sense of community could, at the same time, allow more control and possibility to collaborate. When people were fixed into a community, there were also more controllable. What is more, property offences might have been more recurrent in the city, whereas episodes of vagrancy and poaching could have been more often recorded in the countryside.
Nonetheless, the most frequent crime in the eighteenth-century England was property crime, the consequence of a first form of a modernisation of society.

The growth of capitalism highly contributed to the emergence of a strong body of poor labourers, who often sought in property offences the solution to many money problems that were at the core of their every-day lives (in fact, property crime was the most common form of crime). In this sense, the concept of “Social Crime” should be introduced as a form of rebellion from the lower classes of society to the growing disparity between rich and poor. It is this context that the criminal becomes a “good criminal”, a hero among the community, embodying its interests and bring a change. Sharpe uses Hobsbawm’s words when he gives a definition of social crime as:

A conscious, almost political challenge to the prevailing social and political order and its values. It occurs when there exist conflicting sets of official and unofficial interpretations of legal system, when acts of law-breaking contain clear elements of social protest, or when such acts are firmly connected to the development of social and political unrest. (122)

Hay distinguishes two dominant criminal archetypes, which are the outlaw as a romantic figure, and the criminal as a businessman, like Jonathan Wild, as a rebel against the growing capitalism. Douglas Hay defines crime as a form of political protest, and in his study of *The Beggar’s Opera* he has also highlighted the dangers of the crowds sympathising with the lawbreaker condemned to death. Sharpe calls this phenomenon as the danger to “Romanticise” the criminal, especially in his last speech. In this sense, a strong notion of self-awareness of the poor as a class⁴ could emerge among the crowds of those supporting the criminal, because he who tried to escape or turn around their condition of misery. It is for this reason that the hangings, and the whole trip to Tyburn, turned into spectacle, arousing protest instead of fear. Many, among which Henry Fielding, addressed their concern and suggested

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⁴ Not, however, to be confused with notions of identity of classes brought by the French Revolution.
that the hangings stopped being a public event, because they gradually started lacking the component of fear and moral teaching, becoming a mere self-identification with the hanged, a hero against this new form of capitalism, and no longer a moral example of the application of the law. Fielding wrote about this phenomenon of the villain becoming a hero in his *A True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez*:

But when this malefactor is made an object of sedition, when he is transformed into a hero, and the most merciful prince who ever sat on any throne is arraigned of blameable severity, if not of downright cruelty, for suffering justice to take place; and the sufferer, instead of remaining an example to incite terror, is recommended to our honour and admiration. (*Enquiry*:34)

Fielding, less explicitly, examined the pride and the honour that covered the person who needed to face execution in the *Enquiry*. The trip to Tyburn, the place where execution took place, which was situated in Middlesex, west London, was often a moment of imaginary glory:

His (the thief’s) procession to Tyburn, and his last moments there, are all triumphant; attended with the compassion of the meek and tenderer-hearted, and with the applause, admiration, and envy of all the bold and hardened. His behaviour in his present condition, not the crimes, how atrocious soever, which brought him to it, are the subject of contemplation. And if he hath sense enough to temper his boldness with any degree of decency, his death is spoken of by many with honour, by most with pity, and by all with approbation. (167)

Fielding gives many reasons why the aim of the execution, namely providing an example for the community, constantly failed. In fact, too much time would pass between the conviction and the real execution, which made the crowds focus on the punishment rather than on the quickly-forgotten crime itself.

A further additional remark at this point necessary to make, is the apparent decrease in the number of hangings. The Bloody Code, a harsh set of laws and capital offences created after the Glorious Revolution in 1688, described kinds of behaviour that would lead to the
death penalty. The Bloody Code was extremely severe, for example it was applied to property
offences in cases of stealing more than one shilling. In the Eighteenth Century, nonetheless,
the Bloody Code started to become more of a theory than a practice, since society had started
to become more flexible than the rigid Renaissance and Stuart period, and the success of
English Enlightenment and social rationalisation contributed to find less brutal ways of
punishment. Law was still seen as a needful accessory to society for its preservation as much
as a mean to maintain the credibility of the rulers among the ruled (Sharpe:76).

What was happening, however, was a rationalisation of the society itself. Flexibility, not conceived as generosity, but as deference\(^5\), was a distinguished feature of law
enforcement. Sharpe writes: “[Statistics] show a marked change in the level of execution
between 1580 and 1709. [...] a Crown Book recording business from the mid 1750s onwards
demonstrates that low levels of indicted crime and of executions were still current at that
point” (63). In addition, notwithstanding the fact that people tend to think that crime was
increasing, it was actually declining and in eighteenth-century society there was generally less
violence. Douglas Hay has highlighted the paradoxical situation of the coexistence of the
Bloody Code and the decrease in number of deaths and hangings.

A strong clash between the belief in the mere benevolence of people and a little
confidence in human’s ability to restrain evil also dominated the century. In 1793, William
Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*
was published, and one of the main points of this treatise, under the great influence of
Edmund Burke, was the importance of cheerfulness and benevolence, as much as a strong
belief in human perfectibility. In chapter ten, entitled “On Self-Love and Benevolence”,
Godwin states:

The question of self-love and benevolence, is a question relative to the feelings and
ideas by which we ought to be governed, in our intercourse with our fellow men, or,

\(^{5}\) For the concept of deference, see also E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters.*
in other words, in our moral conduct. But it is universally admitted, that there can be no moral conduct, that we can be neither virtuous nor vicious, except in instances where our actions flow from intention, and are directed by foresight, or where they might have been so directed; and this is the definition of voluntary actions. The question therefore of self-love and benevolence, is a question of voluntary action.

According to Godwin, after an improvement of this voluntary action of benevolence, results can be seen also in terms of an improvement in the government. In fact, if this benevolence were applied, war and crimes would decrease, and if every man sought the good of all, the progressive advancement of virtue would and could be the outcome. This strong utopian belief in progress contrasts with the already-anticipated need to enforce the laws because a feeling of human inability to resist temptations and the evils of society was widespread. In the case of Fielding, we will see in the next chapters how he believed in the existence of general human benevolence in man, but nevertheless with the figure of Blifil in Tom Jones, he also condemned brutal malice which existed in a few but irrecuperable human cases.

This belief in human benevolence, united to an overall wish to perceive the law as something less brutal, can explain the system of clemency, in which Henry Fielding played an important role. According to the clemency system, the application of the law sought to find alternative ways to death penalty, among which the exercise of the royal pardon, more widespread across the century, and the transportation to British colonies, such as America. Henry Fielding, in A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning, writes:

And yet, after [...] that a person hath been unjustly condemned, [...] the gates of mercy are still left open, and upon a proper and decent application, either to the judge before whom the trial was had, or to the privy council, the condemned person will be sure of obtaining a pardon, or preserving his life, and of regaining both his liberty and reputation (Enquiry:285).

The courts and the judges were often showing mercy towards the accused, favouring pardon or transportation instead of turning to the rigid Bloody Code. Another important feature that
could contribute to this increase of flexibility, was the proof, by the witnesses, of the good
class character of the accused. Examining the trials reported at the Old Bailey Online, one could
find out that most of the time the accused could be supported by defence witnesses, and when
these attested that the accused had always been a good person, the accused was often
acquitted. This was true, for instance, for pregnant women giving birth to bastards. The new
rational English society, understood that the embryo could not pay for other people’s
transgressions. Thus, pregnant women were declared to be hanged after the delivery of the
child, but in most cases, were later pardoned (Sharpe:68). Overall, in the eighteenth-century
English application of the law, there was more poor law relief, fewer cases of imprisonment
for debt, less brutality, and fewer crimes of violence (McLynn:13).

In conclusion, this greater subchapter dealing with crime has attempted an overview of
the link between the phenomenon of the massive population growth, especially in London,
and that of crime in the Eighteenth Century with its main features. The attitudes towards
crime, which are nonetheless hard to define, but very fascinating, have also been influenced
by the rationalisation of the British society. The crime wave in England also developed a fear
of crime, and consequently, a creation of organisations liable to fight, or at least control it,
which will be the main topic of the next subchapter.
1.3. Representations and Perceptions of Crime

1.3.1. Henry Fielding’s *Enquiry*

The *Enquiry*, written in 1751, after Fielding had been appointed Justice of the Peace of the country of Westminster and Middlesex, gives one of the most important contributions of the author in terms of political and legal activism. Fielding starts from the assumption that the constitution of England, containing the laws, manners, customs and habits of the people, should change and constantly adapt to the current state of things, properly because people change. From the very beginning, the author as a man dealing with every-day problems resulting from the incredible disparity between rich and poor, states clearly that the aim of his research is to define the causes of this condition, trying to give some remedies, consequently asking himself: “Is that Civil Power [...] capable of ruling them (the poor) in their present situation?” (72). The Enquiry is an “essay on the state of the poor” (Zirker:LX), in which Fielding perceives the deeply intertwined connection between this condition of the poor and crime.

In this section, I will try to analyse what I personally perceive to be the most important passages in terms of defining Fielding’s beliefs about the status of his contemporary society, with a closer attention to the *Enquiry*. These beliefs could also help to determine the close connections to his job as a magistrate and the reflections of his novelistic production, exemplified in his most famous work, *Tom Jones*.

The *Enquiry* is an elaborated text, which represents the outcome of Fielding’s work as a magistrate, and differs completely from both his plays and his novels, because the focus is the society itself and its changes. It marks also the transition of Fielding’s career: from being one of the most successful satirical playwrights, a condition which saw an end with the promulgation of the Licensing Act\(^6\) in 1737, to the need to find another source of money, and

\(^6\) The Licensing Act forced any text to be first analysed by the government before being published.
therefore the turn to law and magistracy. In the Winter of 1748-49, Henry Fielding was appointed Justice of the Peace first of Westminster, and then of the county of Middlesex. Those years of magistracy will deeply affect the subject matter of his novel writing. As mentioned before, working first-hand with every-day life problems, witnessing personally various and often miserable life conditions, generated a passionate intensity in Fielding’s writings. The writer was now determined to bring a change to his society, offering his own elaborate solutions to the problems Parliament was currently debating (Zirker:XVIII). The Enquiry, appeared in print in 1751, summarises Fielding’s concerns and his reflections upon eighteenth-century London, which had been observed and recollected during the previous two years of magistracy. Fielding, commenting on the evils of society, on corruption, and on the increase of robberies, states that “I cannot help it high time to put some stop to the further progress of such imprudent and audacious insults [...] on the National Justice, and on the law themselves” (Enquiry:77). Fielding was nonetheless working in the county of Middlesex, the north-eastern area of London, which was the main focus of the growth of population, crime and corruption. In the end of the century, more precisely in 1780, Burke wrote that “The Justices of Middlesex were generally the scum of the earth – carpenters, brickmakers, and shoemakers; some of whom were notoriously men of such infamous characters that they were unworthy of any employ whatever, and others so ignorant that they could scarcely know their own names” (XX). From the style and content of the Enquiry, it is clear that Fielding was devoting himself to the reformation of society, wishing to bring an influential change, fighting against corruption and for the preservation of the social order and justice.

The Enquiry starts with a preface directed to “rouse the civil power from its present lethargic state” (73), and it is, therefore, in its nature a subversive text. Fielding analyses the tripartition of society into nobility, gentry and commonality, and sees this last “social class” as the one which underwent the greatest alteration and change, because of the flourishing of
trade and commerce, which introduced moral evils. One of the most striking passages in the preface, which in my opinion could also represent a hidden manifesto of Fielding’s literary activity, states that:

To prevent this consequence therefore of a flourishing commerce is totally to change the nature of things, and to separate effect from the cause. A matter as impossible in the Political Body as in the Natural. Vices and diseases, with like physical necessity, arise from certain habits in both; and to restrain and palliate the evil consequences, is all that lies within the reach of art. (71)

His aim is “totally to change the nature of things” in the legal system, with the creation of a new state of mind which starts from the assumption of the clear disparity between the rich and the poor, that then continues with the protection of the latter and the warning not to fall into those temptation which characterise the former, such as luxury and the deceits of money. Deceiving appearance might lead the poor people to perceive those luxury to be a necessity, which is actually not; Fielding means to underline the importance of a general benevolence in the person and of the detachment to materialism, something which was also extremely influential to the judgement of a person, both in the legal trial, and also in Tom Jones.

The first section of the Enquiry, ‘Of too frequent and expensive Diversions among the Lower Kind of People’, deals extensively with luxury and one of its main consequences and dangers, namely the expense of money and the loss of time. Fielding explains that luxury has always existed among the upper classes, but it should be confined to these, because its spread among the lower classes during his last years, has contributed to the increase of robberies. On the contrary, the lower classes should focus on working, because the relaxation from labour only leads to the deterioration of society, and especially of lower orders. He explicitly writes that men “must sweat hard to survive”, or society will collapse (80). Surprisingly enough, Fielding connects this excess of luxury to a defect in the laws, and aids that a new law restraining extravagance would be necessary. It is under this social-economic light that
Fielding could also be considered as a forerunner of socialism and of the later-developed ideas of the economists Adam Smith, David Ricardo and the utilitarian Bentham. In fact, Fielding goes on underlining the extreme importance of the circulation of money, because if the rich spent, society (and the poor) would benefit. Smith and Ricardo also insisted much on the importance of the distribution on wealth, whereas Bentham and his utilitarianism denounced leisure, promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, with the use of virtue.

Part two explores the effect of drunkenness, but especially of a “new kind” of drunkenness deriving from Gin, which in Fielding’s opinion is poisonous, with terrible effects on the population, to such an extent that it would “destroy a great part of the inferiour people” (88). Fielding adds that one of the dangers of gin, is also that of transforming people, dragging them in a state of lost consciousness which makes them do things they would not do if sober.

Wretches are often brought before me, charged with theft and robbery, whom I am forced to confine before they are in a condition of being examined; and then they have afterwards become sober, I have plainly perceived, from the state of the case, that the gin alone was the cause of the transgression, and have been sometimes sorry that I was obliged to commit them to prison” (89).

In *Tom Jones*, the dangers and evil consequences of drunkenness are also exposed. When Tom gets drunk after he finds out that Mr Allworthy will survive, his “violent animal spirits” (*Tom Jones*:218) are set free, because drinking “takes away the guard of reason, and consequently forces us to produce those symptoms which many, when sober, have art enough to conceal. [...] It heightens and inflames our passions [...] so that the angry temper, the amorous, the generous, the good-humoured, the avaricious, and all other dispositions of men, are in their cups heightened and exposed” (219).
In the third section, Fielding dedicates a relatively short part to the third last and most
dangerous consequence of luxury, namely gaming. He warns the reader against it, as it is
deceitful in nature because it gives the impression to the inferior people of enlarging their
wealth, which actually does not.

The fourth and long section of the Enquiry, ‘Of the Laws that relate to the Provision
for the Poor’, refers to an improper regulation of the poor, who are in “nasty and scandalous
conditions” (99), as a result of both the abuse and the neglect of laws. The writer goes on
dividing the poor people into three categories: those unable to work, those able and willing to
work, and those able to, but not willing to work. Fielding considers charitable and necessary
to help the first category of people according to the principles of Christianity and humanity.
As for the second group, Fielding claims the law has failed in helping them, whereas the third
and last group should go to prison. Fielding afterwards describes the Houses of Correction, of
which the most important and biggest in London was Bridewell. Although Fielding perceives
that the Houses of Correction initially fulfilled the purpose of reforming and correcting people
through labour, he advises that at present they are merely schools of vice, idleness, nastiness
and disease (121), to such an extent that people can no longer be corrected, and various
magistrates find in reprimand a better solution than the commitment to the House of
Correction. Fielding’s perception of the corruption of this sort of prisons, is also found in Tom
Jones, when Allworthy would rather not send Jenny Jones to Bridewell because she would be
sacrificed to ruin and infamy “by a shameful correction” (Tom Jones:52). Fielding ends this
great digression on the state of the poor by insisting on the importance and the need for new
regulations as much as an enforcement in execution of laws.

I will mention and summarise only briefly the following parts, because I perceive
them as being extremely interesting, but not necessarily influential to my research. They
extensively deal with the encouragements that bring people to rob. In fact, part five explains
how easy it was at Fielding’s times to steal goods, and the ineffectual laws which cannot prevent it; on the contrary, the probability to escape punishment deriving by the failure of the law, encourages robberies. Part six is about the problem deriving from vagabonds, and how easy it is for them to steal in a city such as London rather than in the countryside, because, as seen in the chapter dedicated to London, the city was full of alleys and similar to a jungle, and escaping was often a great chance of success. Fielding suggests that new laws or new implementations should be brought to solve this. Part seven examines the difficulties in apprehending felons and all the situations in which private prosecution is allowed and necessary in order to arrest a man, yet, at the same time, the deficiency and the lack of success for many reasons, such as ignorance or fear of shame.

Sections eight to eleven deal more specifically with prosecution and trials. Section eight, on the difficulties of prosecution, lists a set of reasons why people do not prosecute; for example when they are intimidated, delicate, poor, or tender-hearted. Fielding examines the feature of benevolence in men, which is the “only human passion that is in itself simply and absolutely good” (155). Tenderheartedness can, however, extend itself to barbarity when it fails to fulfil the needs of the community, among which that of denouncing crime for the preservation of both the society and the country, which is “the principal duty every man owes” (156). Section nine is about the difficulty in prosecuting and catching criminals, who have a large chance to escape, as much as the difficulty in procuring evidence to convict criminals. Section ten and eleven show a seemingly harsh Fielding in terms of judging and executing people, an author who seems to contrast the forgiving narrator in *Tom Jones*. Section ten expresses Fielding’s anxieties when dealing with pardons, another encouragement of robberies. Severity as absolutely necessary to society, as it can often be “in the end the greatest mercy” (164), and the terror, which has not to be removed, cannot lack, as it helps to provide an example of justice, “more merciful than the unbounded exercise of pity” (167).
Section eleven takes into consideration, and gives better alternatives to the manner of execution, proving why they lost efficiency. As they are frequent and public, they would aim to add shame to death (168); nevertheless, this has been lost over the time, because the side effect is the already-mentioned spectacle of the criminal’s last speech. Fielding gives three possible solutions: first, the executions should take place immediately after conviction, so that the pity for the offender is substituted by detestation and punishment (169); second, they should be private, much more shocking and dreadful for both the crowds and the criminal; third, they should be more solemn, because as Montaigne has noticed, “the preparation and the ceremony are more terrifying than the thing itself” (170).

Many of the phenomena described in the *Enquiry* by Fielding offer a more-realistic insight in his ideas than the stories of fictional characters covered by the artifice. The *Enquiry* also summarises many of the ideas he developed during his Bow Street experience, which I will examine in the next subchapter.

### 1.3.2. Law Enforcement and the Transition from Private Prosecution to Public Prosecution

In *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750*, Sharpe writes:

1750 is commonly held to be the point from which that compendium of changes which were to be labelled as the Industrial Revolution first began to pick up momentum. [...] A study of crime in early modern England should logically be ended in a period when the rise of new socio-economic forces can be traced, and England was on the edge of making a decisive break with its pre-industrial past. [...] This period saw the emergence of a growing body of criticism of the existing system of law and order, of which perhaps the earliest well known representative was Henry Fielding. (17-18)

Henry Fielding and his brother Sir John Fielding, made an extremely important contribution to the law enforcement movement in the mid-eighteenth century. Their assiduous contribution
represented a shift from a system of exclusively private prosecution and total collaboration of the community to a newer perspective of a government-controlled force represented by the Bow Street Runners, the first shape police ever had in England. As explained before, prosecution in England was exclusively brought by the ordinary people, and based on cooperation; a central police force was a not-yet-developed concept before the brothers Fielding’s contribution. According to McLynn, “The feeling that professional police on the French model would be the death of traditional English liberties was deeply rooted in the political culture” (17). In England, the legal system was much more local and casual, in contrast to a French centralised inquisitor legal system. Using Fielding’s words, England was a “Nation so jealous of her liberties” (Enquiry:76). Henry and Sir John Fielding, nonetheless, were arguing for less freedom, more control and effective detention of crime (Jarrett:19).

Henry Fielding was often labelled as the first uncorrupted magistrate of English history, truly devoted to his cause. Being a Justice of the Peace carried a certain prestige at the time, but the amount of work for a magistrate in London was enormous. Many features distinguish Fielding’s work as a magistrate. First of all, the energy he put into examining witnesses was remarkable: he was very scrupulous, and always tried to discover inconsistencies, clashes and breaking alibis. He did not judge according to prejudices, and avoided passing judgements until he had collected all the necessary evidence against a person. Second, he was famous for always trying to protect the weak, such as farmers and children. He was nonetheless quite severe, especially when he witnessed episodes of revenge. Last but not least, he understood the importance of using his writing skills to raise public consciousness and make people aware of the importance of both law enforcement and of the activism when prosecuting.
Sir John Fielding, Henry’s blind younger half brother, was also, along with Henry, active in the legal system, and when Henry died in 1754, he carried further what he had started with his brother, namely the Bow Street Runners.

In order to understand the mechanism according to which this first form of police force worked, it is necessary to take into consideration the methods of prosecution and the thief-takers. “There was no police force. The so-called constables were just unpaid local citizens, obliged to serve for a year a time in this unpopular capacity” (Rogers:180). Prosecution was mainly private and hard to fulfil. The victims themselves, before the establishment of a national and professional police force in the Nineteenth Century, had to gather evidence and witnesses, prepare the cases, pay the expenses of prosecution (Beattie:35). Therefore, a system of rewards and thief-takers had been pulled alongside to support the victims. These thief-takers “were at least in part in the business of detecting and apprehending offenders whose conviction would pay a reward” (55). It was, nevertheless, an often-corrupted force, and it happened that the thief-takers were thieves themselves, one example lies in the personality of Jonathan Wild. The brothers Fielding saw in Wild’s corrupted activity a potential, knowing that with the system of rewards people were encouraged to convict a robber. Fielding selected six out of eight constables that he could trust, and dragged little by little his country to the conception of a professional police force, which was undermining English dearest love and pride for freedom, strengthening law enforcement and attempting to represent a change to the disorder London was experiencing.

When considering the introduction of the Bow Street Runners, Beattie clarifies:

Of particular importance was the emergence of Bow Street as a center of information about offences and offenders [...]. Equally important for the future was the organization around the Bow Street office of a group of more “professional” constables who, though they depended fundamentally on earning rewards, were retained by a small stipend and were available for the variety of tasks that is more
permanent force attracted – both protection and detection, and outside London as well as within the metropolis (65).

The Fieldings’ aim was merely to find genuine thief-takers that would devote themselves to this job as much as they did with theirs. Controversy is nonetheless not separated from this newly-developed institution, as McLynn writes: “The truth was that the ‘Bow Street Runners’ were no more than glorified bounty-hunters. They were no better than the men they pursued and arrested, performed only when paid” (32-33). When Henry died, Sir John carried on this campaign, which for critics became at times fanatical (32), in the creation of many initiatives, such as a plan for an embryonic national police force in 1772 (33).

The brothers Fielding felt they needed to bring a change and fill a gap in the vacuum left by the failure of law and justice. They were deeply concerned about the increasing immorality of the poor, bewitched by the luxury of the rich people, and the criminal disorder induced by the difficulties of prosecution.

Sir John Fielding wrote about the Bow Street experience in the introduction of his *A Plan for Preventing Robberies Within Twenty Miles of London*, appraising much his brother’s job in gathering the thief-takers, and the constables themselves, defining them brave, genuine and peace-keepers:

The winter after the late Henry Fielding Esq. came to Bow-Street, the town was infected by a daring gang of robbers, who attacked several persons of fashion, and gave a general alarm through the City and liberty of Westminster; and as that magistrate then enjoyed a good share of health, he spirited up the civil power, and sent several bodies of constables [...] into different parts of the town, by whose bravery and activity those disturbers of the peace were quickly apprehended and brought to justice: [...] some of them (the constables), being actuated by a truly public spirit against thieves, and being encouraged by the said magistrate, continued their diligence, and were always ready, on being summoned, to go in pursuit of villains. (*Enquiry*:LVIII)
The title of the text itself denounces this strong activism in offering plans and alternatives to protect citizens from crime; the *Enquiry* and this last pamphlet, a detailed description of the steps people should follow when experiencing a robbery, seem to be a precious union of detection of the increase of robberies and its plan for putting it to an end, or, at least, contribute to decrease its high numbers. It is properly the emergence of this strong activism that made the brothers Fielding so influential during their age.

1.3.3. Artistic Representation of the Decay of Society by William Hogarth

William Hogarth, born in 1697, offered with his artistic contribution a thorough representation of the British society, exposing vices, virtues and hypocrisy, at the time when the brothers Fielding were also working in London. Hogarth “attempted the visual equivalent of the narratives” (Bender:89) with his paintings and engravings. Hogarth made of London his stage, with his incredible mastering of typography, so that places were scenes where the drama of life took place, never abandoning that exact imitation of natural likeness and collecting material from his first-hand life recollections (Burke:10-17). Burke summarises the typical features of Hogarth’s style: constant theatrical features, contemporary realism, and detail of setting. What emerges is the incredible variety of characters. Jarrett (1986), in fact, notices that he is actually portraying the very crowd of London, peculiar for its dense assortment of real people.

Many of the depictions Henry Fielding and his brother Sir John made of society through the medium of narration and literature, can be found artistically in Hogarth and in his representation of London life. A new realistic approach of prose writing, the novel, and a new and realistic portrayal of society started to collaborate with each other. The symbolism, still a strong feature in the Renaissance, was substituted by real, and sometimes harsh social elements, displaying corruption, sexual immorality and vice. Hogarth’s series, especially,
offer an artistic narration of characters, depicted in various stages of life, and aim to show how much these people can be deeply influenced by harsh every-day life experiences, typical of an atmosphere of moral corruption and widespread crime, which often turn them from naïve human beings into emblems of the bad influence of a corrupted society.

The *Harlot’s Progress*, for example, shows into six plates the development of a candid and simple girl, Moll, looking for occupation in London as a seamstress, but lead by a procurress, into the profession of a prostitute. The naivety of Moll, united to the evils of society, represented by the procurress, in a background of absent-minded and inattentive Londoners ignoring the scene, leads the poor girl into her own personal failure. In the satirical plate four, *Scene in Bridewell*, dated around 1732, it is possible to see the decay of the houses of correction, also addressed by Fielding in the *Enquiry* and in *Tom Jones*. Figures of decay are exposed along with Moll in Bridewell. In the background stands a black pregnant woman, who could not be hanged nor transported due to her condition.
Another shorter series, consisting of two plates published in 1751, reflects Hogarth’s preoccupations in terms of the dangerous presence of alcohol and the death brought by drinking, with effects especially on the lower classes and the subsequent weakening and damage of society. The two plates are *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*, by Hogarth described in the *London Evening Post* as “calculated to reform some reigning Vices peculiar to the lower Class of People”. In *Gin Lane*, in a landscape of social disorder and squalor of a population addicted to alcohol, the main figure in the foreground, a woman, is deeply affected and addled by the consumption of gin, and seems to be in a state of madness; this addiction probably lead her into prostitution, because the effect of the syphilis can be seen in the sores on her legs. The main effect of this spread addiction to gin, can be noticed in the distracted act of letting her baby slip off her hands, the most dangerous and problematic result of a population so affected by drunkenness, and the worst outcome for the future generations.
Many other paintings offer a social representation in accordance to that provided by Fielding. For example, famous places in London, such as Covent Garden, were deeply associated to moral corruption; In addition, the rich people’s interest for luxury is depicted with great irony.

*   *   *

In this chapter I have attempted to argue for the major changes of the English long Eighteenth Century that affected the way people perceived society. An overall acceptance of people failure and new ways of pardoning were the result of the impact of the new philosophy, based on a rationalisation of the mind, and a new wish to believe only in what men could prove and see. The flexibility of the law started to prove that other possible horizons for punishment could be found. Moreover, writers and painters started to feel a need to intervene and be
socially active in the representation of society. “Telling stories served the purpose of entertainment, but stories were also a way of coming into terms with aspects of contemporary life, or a tool by which writers attempted to make a difference to the society around them” (Goring:4).
CHAPTER TWO
The Importance and Benefits of Failure.

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to show the major changes that contributed
to the development of Fielding’s philosophical and literary thought concerning human nature
that emerges from his writings. When studying Fielding, we are also studying the specific
society in which he was living. I have also tried to show that, as Bender puts it:

Art, culture and society are not separate or separable. [...] I consider literature and
the visual arts as advanced forms of knowledge, as cognitive instruments that
anticipate and contribute to institutional formation. Novels as I describe them are
primarily historical and ideological documents; the vehicles, not the reflections, of
social change. (1)

If novels are vehicles of social change, and not just its mere reflection, Fielding’s activism
and cultural interventionism is simply thus explained. Not only was he trying to positively
affect his own environment with different methods, among which the writing of novels that
could directly have important claims on the values and feelings of people; He was also
completely aware of the new genre he was developing along with Richardson (Watt:9). His
realistic aim and his thorough study of human nature in the form of the novel meant to serve a
didactic and social purpose. His literal and social activism as much as his perception of the
novel as a social vehicle is clear also in his willing integration of the word “history” in the
title of his most famous work: The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling. As Olds Bissell puts
it, this usage of the term “history” indicates the “lack of fixed boundaries between literary
forms [...] and the implication of verisimilitude” (41). Interestingly enough,
Fielding’s attempt of realism is very strong in his novel *Tom Jones*. I am trying to underline that it was and remained an attempt, because later studies based on Booth have shown how much his literary activity was actually distant from being as realistic as he wished. Notwithstanding the fact that Watt defines realism as the antonym of idealism, Fielding was however always keeping in mind the powerful satirical model of Cervantes, especially in the depiction of characters. As for the attempt of realism, not only does he give precious details of setting (Somerset) and places in London which had, in the reader’s mind, a specific connotation and connection with real life, but also deals with middle-class life, and possible real-life events. One of the feature which might possibly lack a glimpse of realistic resemblance is the depiction of types of characters (that serve his moral purpose) rather than real people, or using Harrison’s words “standard behavioural stereotypes”. In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding in fact states: “I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species”. In Fielding, the model of Cervantes (although claiming a clear and direct imitation should be avoided), is seemingly strong, because by asserting that that of *Tom Jones* is a history, the novel is simply distinguished from those “fantastic romances” (Olds Bissell:41-42). Fielding, aware of this, writes in *Tom Jones* in Book IV, Chapter I:

> As truth distinguishes our writings from those idle romances which are filled with monsters, the productions, not of nature, but of distempered brains; and which have been therefore recommended by an eminent critic to the sole use of the pastry-cook; so, on the other hand, we would avoid any resemblance to that kind of history which a celebrated poet seems to think is no less calculated for the emolument of the brewer, as the reading it should be always attended with a tankard of good ale. (131)

As Olds Bissell (1) states, however, Fielding’s realism owes much to the Spanish tradition, when considering with this a set of developments such as, chronologically, the romances of chivalry (*Amadis de Gaule*), the picaresque novel (*Lazarillo de Tormes*) and the burlesque romance (*Don Quixote*). The component of realism derives, in Fielding, from the picaresque novel. In fact, realism lacks more often than not in the *Don Quixote*. From Cervantes’, nevertheless, Fielding acquired the satirical feature. Despite the separation from Cervantes’ lack of attachment to reality, Fielding’s works are not free from “Quixotic characters” (3), like Parson Adams.
What is more, the intrusive nature of the narrator in the first chapters of each book of *Tom Jones* establishes this strong connection between author and reader, which will be the main topic of the next chapter, and that nevertheless could also represent this mentioned hint of verisimilitude, in the form of a continue and real exchange of intercourses between the two artificial characters: the author and the reader.

Based on these premises, I have tried to show how the reality previously presented has a strong impact on Fielding’s work as a magistrate, and now as a novelist. He attempted to have a clear impact on his contemporaries, not only serving as a moral example, but also providing a concrete example of eighteenth-century mentality and manners with his large fan of types of characters, to such an extent that Olds Bissell claims that Tom Jones is “the most complete and realistic picture of life in mid-eighteenth century England” (75). This research will now focus on the huge variety of experiences and perceptions influenced by the eighteenth-century English reality, with a greater focus on the instance of personal and social failure as a necessary step towards personal growth and improvement.
2.1. Eighteenth-century Society that drives the Man towards Failure

2.1.1. The World as an Imperfect Place

I have previously attempted to describe the complex reality of eighteenth-century England, showing the articulated philosophical social and cultural changes it underwent, with one of the major turning points in cultural terms, which I perceive being the increasing acceptance of a widespread variation of experiences, viewpoints and personalities. Society was, in fact, a mixture of different narratives and a framework of changes and innovations, no longer static nor given for granted. Variety was at the core of every-day life; society was no longer unique, but variety and differentiation started to be widely and thoroughly witnessed and accepted, to such an extent that Henry Fielding chooses to expose this phenomenon to the reading public in the very first chapter of *Tom Jones*, when addressing the reader the main aim of the following pages, namely human nature, by stating that:

Nor can the learned reader be ignorant that in Human Nature, though here collected under one general name, is such prodigious variety that a cook will have sooner gone through all several species of animal and vegetable food in the world than an author will be able to exhaust so extensive a subject. (30)

Eighteenth-century society completely set itself apart from the typical static formula so characteristic of the Middle Ages, a rupture which had started during the Renaissance, yet at that time was still not widely accepted. It is enough to think about Copernicus who, between the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century, attempted to claim that it was the world moving around the sun and not the other way round, therefore transferring the man at the centre of the universe and provoking a threat to traditional religious beliefs; as a consequence of this dangerous and at the same time innovative truth, more and more people started to doubt about the doctrine transmitted by the Church, putting more faith in new ideas of social community.

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8 Nature, human and not, had started to be observed during the long Eighteenth Century. As Abrams (2055-6) notes, people started representing nature. Earlier, for instance, Francis Bacon "had called for an advancement of learning based on direct observation of nature (2049)."

9 My italics
and mutual acceptance. The Eighteenth Century was, in fact, centred on the human condition, on the man and his human nature.

What is more, an increased sense of individualism, derived from this greater perceived variety, started to emerge, with all its further implied problematics, to such an extent that important connections with the rise of the novel itself have been addressed by Ian Watt.

From the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel. (Watt:14)

The singularity of the personal story was no longer marginal, ignored or perceived irrelevant to the community as a whole, and became to be the subject matter of the novel, which attempted to “portray all the varieties of the human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective” (11). The novel, in its subversive nature, did not intend to confirm older traditional plots; on the contrary, it meant to challenge already-existing features and depict the individual experience as something new and untold, and therefore precious for further developments, at a social and personal level. Due to an emergence of different new job opportunities and working conditions, especially as a consequence of a growing industrialisation of society, each human being had started to be the witness of a variety which was already spreading. Differentiation among human beings had also taken shape, and it is enough to think about the immense variety of characters and personalities described by Fielding in all his novels. This diversity started to matter, reshaped relationships among human beings, and enriched society and its groundings. Different opportunities in life were defining people and their backgrounds, and so life was no longer a static process, but was keenly distinguished from one person to the other. An example of this, could be the huge variety there was in the class of the poor people itself, if we take into consideration different realities they had to come to terms with. These different backgrounds, not only economically
speaking, started to play a relevant influence on human beings, and this phenomenon required the acquisition of an important feature in society, which has already been discussed in the previous chapter, namely a sense of flexibility\textsuperscript{10} in respect to this great non-static nature of the new English reality.

The novel, reflecting the newer social mechanisms and, using Bender’s words, being in itself a vehicle of change, attempted also, with the medium of realism and individualism, to portray reality and expose vice and folly as a part of it, often with the medium of irony. Gladfelder uses Lennard Davis’ words in saying that the novel was in some sense criminal in nature (7). The exposition of vice, as in Fielding’s Enquiry, could represent an attempt of social and cultural reformation as much as a subsequent need for education.

When talking about this phenomenon of exposing negative perceptions of a possible deterioration of society, it could be interesting to take into consideration that the feelings of variety and plurality could lead to some form of degeneration. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, degeneration is “The process of degenerating or becoming degenerate; the falling off from ancestral or earlier excellence; declining to a lower or worse stage of being; degradation of nature.” This sense of decline, especially from a perspective of ancestral excellence, was strongly felt also in Pope’s poem An Essay on Man (1734). Pat Rogers underlines that “If nothing is wrong in God’s creation, plenty is wrong in human society” (241). Given also the fact that in Great Britain the exponential city growth contributed to an increase of crime, its further fear and so different unpleasant consequences, human society was by many perceived as corrupted and often far from a model of perfection; this model could be identified for instance with the pastoral world of Eden, from which the man had been sent away. Milton, nonetheless, in Paradise Lost, conveyed the idea that the world in which the man found himself in was better than the Eden, despite the fact that coping with it meant

\textsuperscript{10} Flexibility, again, is a problematic term and should not be taken as a hint of generosity, but mere acceptance, be it active or passive, of diversity.
at the same time a different amount of hardness and sacrifice. An almost harsh Thomas Hobbes saw in *Leviathan* men in constant war with each other, and witnessed that a possible hint of charity or love was completely substituted by war-oriented passions and impulses:

And because the condition of man [...] is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to every thing, even to one another's body. And therefore, as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, how strong or wise soever he be, of living out the time which nature ordinarily alloweth men to live. (Flathman:72)

Samuel Johnson, highlighting some of the negative aspects of the new atmosphere, claimed in *London* that the aspect of the jungle, was a proper one to depict contemporary society.

Going back to the general perception of a dangerous vice, Gladfelder sees Henry Fielding as a magistrate writing “narratives that could both explain and repair the disorder he felt closing in on him” (159), especially considering the fact that his job forced him to come to terms with some of the most terrible aspects and situations of London life. *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild the Great*, published in 1743 is an ironic depiction of this criminal, so thought to suggest the idea that London was experiencing immoralities, vices and barbarisms in the form of organised crime, with the writer’s fear of an unclear perception by the crowds of this phenomenon, as often the criminal was “romanticised”.

Given these premises, it could be asserted that this variety of conditions and experiences also influenced much life perceptions. This considerable amount and diversification of backgrounds contributed to the formation of a thought which now started to take into consideration the world as an imperfect place, against which people had to learn how to defend themselves. Different contexts of class, family and individual background had to be included in the new idea of the man’s mind. The weaknesses of characters now lead to a
general failure at different levels, personal, religious or even legal, in relation to which the system had to learn how to address individual flaws.

2.1.2. The Concept of Failure

Fielding’s interventionism, in his perception of a generation in decay, finds its expression not only in his social contribution as a JP, but also in the literary form of novels, especially *Tom Jones*, destined to shape the mind of his readers with the moral aid of an educator. The concept of failure, I believe, is for Fielding extremely significant, as it seems a needful and necessary step towards personal improvement. The person, for Fielding, is always in motion. Seen the experiences of Tom Jones the character, and Mr Wilson in *Joseph Andrews*, it might seem clear how much the world of the Eighteenth Century seemed a place characterised by a possible accumulation of flaws in human beings, determined especially by vices both in the countryside (for instance Blifil’s egoism) and in the city (with the spread of gin, luxury and other immoral instances denounced in the *Enquiry*).

Taking into consideration the definitions provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb ‘to fail’, is related to: “I. To be or become deficient. 1.a. intr. To be absent or wanting. Now only of something necessary or desirable. 4.a. To prove deficient upon trial. 5.a. Not to render the due or expected service or aid; to be wanting at need. [...] To disappoint, give no help to, to withhold help from. II. To have a deficiency or want; to lack”. The term failure, in addition, refers to “1. A failing to occur, be performed, or be produced; an omitting to perform something due or required; default. 3. The fact of failing to effect one’s purpose; want of success; an instance of this. b. A thing or person that proves unsuccessful”. Interestingly enough, the definition seems to insist much on something which lacks, is absent and deficient of, and not only, as I expected, on a component of mistake. In Fielding’s
narratives, in fact, it seems that most character fail because they lack and need that well-known prudence that might prevent their impulsivity of action.

It is as if Fielding perceived a disappointing inability of the legal system to address human flaws and help the individual to learn from his mistakes, adapting his inconsistencies to a dimension of failure and of subsequent learning through punishment and careful examination. In fact, as Bender notes in *Imagining the Penitentiary*, the new penitentiaries included new narratives, and the old prisons differed from the newer ones, in that the latter seemed to reconstruct fictions of personal identity (2), therefore absorbing the aspect of deterrence in order to forestall the repetition of crime (20), from which derives an attempt to reform also human flaws with the help of education. A possible accumulation of failures at a personal level, also deeply affected a failure in society. It is for this reason that the legal system could be incapable of firstly accept and then provide alternatives of contribution and inclusion of personal failure; these could lead to an positive renovation of society, starting from the assumption that failure should be a positive reason for the person to succeed afterwards. It is also as if, in Fielding, failure were almost a right that should be given to every single person (in a reasonable measure), and that only after that, and if only the individual, demonstrates to have gained a certain experience, he can become a benevolent and reformed member of society. The idea of failure becomes, under this light, almost a need to every person, because the world is no longer a perfect place, far from the ideal Eden. Rather than fought against, failure must be repaired and accepted as a way to reform the individual and make sure he becomes a better person.

Examining now Fielding’s characters, I found particularly interesting to note how much his forgiving attitude as a magistrate and his measured use of clemency find powerful repercussions in two important characters: Tom Jones the character and Mr Wilson in *Joseph Andrews*. Based on the difficulties eighteenth-century society was experiencing, especially in
terms of crime, and of the great variety of human experiences, resulting in weaknesses of characters who need to defend against the world’s immoralities, Fielding creates these two mentioned characters who, after a series of events, learn how to behave in this world, how to cope with their instincts and in fact aspire to personal and moral perfection. In order to do so, these characters, especially Tom Jones, need to have the fundamental quality of being good-natured, and of learning from their mistakes after having gained a superior knowledge deriving from experience. Tom Jones is chosen by the author to be the emblem of the whole humanity: Fielding did not decided for the name of his characters randomly; both Tom and Jones were, at the time, the most famous and used name and surname respectively. This spread usage subsequently rendered the name universal, aspiring to define the man rather than one man.

In The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, Fielding introduces only a dim and relatively short but not unnecessary image of Mr Wilson, who not coincidently or surprisingly is at the end of the story revealed to be the father of Joseph. The young Mr Wilson is depicted by Fielding as a terrible youngster: taking advantage on women and on other people, being very little serious of a person and abandoning himself to vices and immoralities, having also little regard for other people’s feelings. Year after year, however, he starts realising and measuring the consequences of his actions. It is the story of a man who has lived all what life offered him, both negatively and, only afterwards, positively. And right because he lived a corrupt and immoral life, could he only understand the preciousness of his moral failure and appreciate simple but valuable things in life:

In short, I had sufficiently seen, that the pleasures of the world are chiefly folly, and the business of it mostly knavery; and both, nothing better than vanity: the men of pleasure tearing one another to pieces, from the emulation of spending money, and the men of business from envy in getting it. My happiness consisted entirely in my wife, whom I loved with an inexpressible fondness, which was perfectly returned; and my prospects were no other than to provide for our
growing family; [...] we retired soon after her delivery from a world full of bustle, noise, hatred, envy, and ingratitude, to ease, quiet, and love. (*Joseph Andrews*:194-5)

In order for the conversion to a life full of ease and love to take place, Mr Wilson had to go through and live first-hand all the other negative things life offered him. In his experience, failure was, therefore, the turning point.

In *Tom Jones*, the same, although more subtle and carefully plotted, happens with the main character. In order to become a perfect person and win Sophia’s heart, Tom must constantly fail until he gains prudence and an extensive and fruitful learning from his mistakes. Failure is here as well, the key to happiness and perfection. In Fielding’s idea only the characters who fail and experience good and bad things can completely grasp the full sense of life and aspire to become better members of a society and a family. The forgiving Fielding sees in failure the only possible condition to human perfection. As previously depicted, the world is no longer static and problem-free. The knowledge and understanding of moral vices is the only possible condition to their overcome. The modern man must be contaminated by negative aspects of life because only by doing so, can he see further and set himself free from them. The only main character who seems to be immune to this is Sophia Western, who is so pure and, as the name states, already fully grasps a concept of wisdom and perfection. The same Allworthy, despite having been described as a perfect and wise character, makes a huge mistake in being deceived by Blifil and Thwackum and sending Tom away from Somerset, learning afterwards from this mistake and small failure where the truth actually resides.

The idea of failure, mistake and error was not actually new: Tomas Hobbes, in Chapter V of *Leviathan*, ‘Of Reason and Science’ defines the component of error, admitting also that even the most prudent men may fall into this temptation:
When a man reckons without the use of words, which may be done in particular things, [...] if that which he thought likely to follow, followes not; or that which he thought likely to have preceded it, hath not preceded it, this is called error; to which even the most prudent men are subject. (Flathman:27)

According to Hobbes, it seems that failure is the action which does not follow what, on the contrary, should be done. Already a century earlier, people were somehow accepting the fact that men, not necessarily undisciplined, could fall into this sort of temptation.

One very last important thing to mention is the fact that it seems, in Fielding’s opinion, that failure is a needed step towards perfection, but that it could be perfectly overcome and lead to a personal improvement if and if only there is a fundamental component in a man, which seems in Fielding to be innate: first, good nature; second, the acquisition of prudence as a result of the learning from personal experience and mistakes.
2.2. The Process of Personal Improvement

After noticing that the world is an imperfect place, in which human flaws develop, also due to a corruption of society, acceptance is the first step towards improvement, enhancement, renovation. Fielding addresses this to the masses as somebody who brings the knowledge because he was working everyday with real-life moral and social problems leading, in many cases, to different kinds of crime. Failure at a personal and interpersonal (relationship-wise) level, must be corrected and restored for the acceptance of the member to the social life: at a personal level, the individual ought to undergo a complex process of self-reflection and learn from experience, back then a concept no longer to be ignored, so long as the “innate” help of good nature is always present; at an interpersonal level in the community, the individual undertake a reformation through the penitentiary and deterrence. I will examine in this subchapter the importance of personal improvement.

From what has so far been asserted, it derives that personal change is a fundamental step, that leads to a closer state of perfection. It is fundamental, because it is possible: this is the great innovation brought by Empiricism and the new philosophy of Locke and Hume. Identity is yielding, combinable and no longer static, immutable. This change is possible thanks to the external impressions that begin to be perceived as an engine affecting human perception. Descartes, with his cogito ergo sum, had contributed to raise the connection between thinking and identity, and later on Locke, in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), claimed in fact: “Self is that conscious thinking thing”. Past actions and events, not only deeply affect, but also determine our personal reception. Locke continues: “Person, as I take it, is the name for this self. [...] This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes
concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it self past actions, just upon the same
ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present. All which is founded in a concern
for happiness the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness”. Half a century later and a few
years before Fielding started writing *Tom Jones*, David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*,
was published (1739), establishing the innovation of a personal identity and a human mind as
a system of perceptions linked together in a chain of causes and effects (Bender:37).

Personality is liable to change, because these perceptions change.

But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the
rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different
perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a
perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without
varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all
our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single
power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment.
The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their
appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures
and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in
different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity
and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the
successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant
notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of
which it is compos’d. (Selby-Bigge:251-63)

These perceptions work extensively in the mind, to such an extent that Hume also perceives
vice and virtues not to exist in external objects, but to be mind perceptions rather than
qualities:

Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heat and cold,
which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but
perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is
to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho’,
like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or
concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.

This turning point is extremely significant: if vice and virtues exist primarily in the mind in the form of perception, and perceptions are determined by cause and effect, vice and virtues can be changed through the contact between the self and the real world. If the seemingly frivolous Tom Jones is able, as he is, to establish a subconscious relation of cause and effect between the fact that if he abandons himself to carnal pleasures with Molly Seagrim, Mrs Waters and Lady Bellaston, he will lose Sophia Western, he will also, in the future, learn from this and settle a new perception in his mind, more inclined to virtue rather than vice, based on this human perception and correction of failure. In Fielding, these acquired perceptions, as the result of a combination of impressions and ideas, become influential page after page: the man ultimately learns from those and his personality is on a constant flux of change.

What emerges from this, is the idea that it is possible to manipulate identity “by recomposing the fictions on which it is founded” (Bender:38). And as Bender notices, in the case of criminals undergoing reformative punishment, it is the succession of related objects from which the idea of identity is created that should be changed (37-38). At a personal level, amelioration is funded upon change, and through punishment identity can be changed. Tom Jones’ numerous trials put up mainly by Mr Allworthy and Sophia Western, are none other than a subconscious influence on Tom’s perception of life, to such an extent that they contribute to the evolution of his personality towards a state of completion. Bentham claims that the individual self, initially and in its changed version after punishment, is the product of a detailed array altered by new circumstances sensibility (39). So long as there is failure and punishment, human’s sensibility can be modified according to these perceptions of external and internal change.
Locke, Hume and Bentham also belong to that culture in which the lines between fiction and reality became blurred and problematic, specifically because concepts such as personality belonged to a more constructed and fictional realm (Bender:35). Fielding’s moral use of this powerful device introduced by the novel strengthens and confirms his aim to narrate and positively affect reality and the reader’s mind, with the depiction of a fictional trial and the further evolution of the main character. The trial in Fielding is not only restricted to a legal environment, which served the purpose to establish the guilty verdict; on the contrary, it is extended to a personal and interpersonal level. *Tom Jones* is the mis-en-scene in the form of the novel of a trial and resembles the trial of a lifetime itself (Welsh:44), through the evolution of an individual; he fails and learns from his mistakes because he disposes the main quality of being a good-natured person, and establishes himself in the community after being forgiven. The individual, in our case Tom Jones, is forgiven because, unlike Blifil, has a good heart.

**2.2.1. Good Nature, Goodness of Heart and Benevolence**

Among all the moral qualities Fielding finds necessary for the education of a person, good nature and benevolence are in his opinion the most important social virtues in that they are the most inclusive. Having a good heart is also a necessity in order for the acceptance of failure to be completely fulfilled. It is not enough, in Fielding’s opinion, to benefit from one’s own failure, unless this person/character has a probable innate quality of having a good heart, because otherwise he will eventually fall into thinking about self-love rather than self-less love and the interests of the community; as example of that is Blifil, the worst character in Fielding’s novels.

According to Hobbes, virtue is naturally acquired, which does not mean born with men, but learnt through use and experience, not necessarily with means of culture and
method. In chapter VI of *Leviathan*, ‘Of the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Motions, Commonly Called the Passions; and the Speeches by Which They Are Expressed’, he gives a definition of benevolence and good nature, which is the “ Desire of good to another” (33). Tom, in fact, seems to have this innate quality of doing good to other people, sometimes at the expenses of other people (for instance the three robberies to help poor people). Wit, in the form of prudence, is however learnt through experience, its consequence and the carrying of its memory and results.

Hobbes might have agreed, in a certain sense, with Aristotle’s formulation of virtues. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that everything is directed towards love and good deeds, and that the ultimate goal in man’s life is happiness. Happiness, in turn, is acting according to virtue, which for Aristotle is aretè, which means excellence in carrying something out, and not necessarily acting in accordance to moral principles. Happiness is, therefore, more connected for Aristotle to a component of action and unfolding, rather than to ownership. With ‘ethical virtues’, Aristotle defines certain dispositions which produce certain choices. And also for Aristotle, like for Hobbes, these virtues are not innate, but the result of routine, habits and education; Fielding might not have agreed with the component of education, or at least not completely: despite the fact that Tom Jones and Blifil received a very similar education, they turn out to be two completely different individuals, to such an extent that a parallelism in accordance to a binary opposition could be established. Virtues are then, for Aristotle, determined by exercise, and contribute to the ability of acting always accordingly and after having carefully measured. With this aspect of exercise could Fielding agree: in the *Champion*, he wrote “the more therefore we cultivate this sweet disposition in our minds”\(^{11}\), the nearer we draw to divine perfection”.

\(^{11}\) Again, the aspect of the mind and the relation between action and inward impulse is strong.
The topic of good nature was already a dear one to Fielding in his *Miscellanies*. Good nature is for the author an attitude; “sometimes it seems to be a passion, at other times a faculty of moral judgement, or even a moral abstraction, like ‘virtue’” (Miller:55). In the poem about good nature, Fielding claims it to be the lust of doing good which “only grows in soils almost divine”; he goes on: “the heart that finds its happiness to please, / can feel another’s pain, and taste his ease”, and is also “free from contempt or envy”. The component of empathy, so an identification with other people’s sufferings is also one of its features. It is interesting how all these features are proper to Tom Jones the character, the ideal man who needs to learn prudence; It is properly Tom’s empathy with Black George and his poverty that makes him commit those little and almost insignificant crimes that help avoiding the starvation of a family. Tenderness of heart is in fact, also in a religious connotation, associated to pecuniary charity and concern and other people’s misery.

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, also argues for an extremely significant point to Fielding: what is good for the single man, is also good for the general community, because the latter is more important and divine. Fielding in a prose essay in the *Champion* in the early 1740, claims that good nature is the “delight in the happiness of mankind”. It almost resembles Bentham’s utilitarianism and his formula that it is important to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. A thorough distribution of happiness is what Tom Jones subconsciously applies when trying to help other people. Good nature was for Fielding an out-going force (Miller:63) and also a social virtue that could be extended to other people.

In Chapter I of Book I of *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding writes:

A good man therefore is a standing lesson to all his acquaintance, and of far greater use in that narrow circle than a good book. But as it often happens that the best men are but little known, and consequently cannot extend the usefulness of their examples a great way; the writer may be called in aid to spread their history farther ... (15)
If good nature is a moral example to such an extent that the writer himself claims to feel the need to extend it, it can also be oriented to the happiness of mankind, thus contributing to the happiness of each individual. “Indeed the passion of love or benevolence [...] seems to be the only human passion that is in itself simply and absolutely good. [...] the more extensively it was expanded, the more would it contribute to the honour of the individual, and to the happiness of the whole” (Enquiry:155). For this reason, it did not exclude self-interest. It did not, because according to Fielding, if a sensible man with judgement pursues what makes him happy, this corresponds also to the interest of every man. In fact, If happiness included the whole, it also assured a fulfillment of the expectations of each individual, because respecting the whole, it also respects the individual. This almost reminds of Adam Smith’s Invisible Hand in The Wealth of Nations, according to which the market obeys to a self-regulating behavior. Happiness, at the same time, could be also automatically regulated so long as the happiness of the whole community is set as a personal goal. Fielding also bitterly denounces egoism and selfishness for this reason: those whose sense of good-heartedness is completely absent, like Blifil, undermine the well-being of society.

In this respect, good nature is for Fielding the most inclusive of all virtues: it is a social, moral and religious virtue. Social, because it keeps in mind the whole and promotes the happiness of all men; moral, because it influences man’s success, assuring his improvement; religious, because it is identified with charity, which should be the first duty of a Christian (Miller:65). Fielding is similar to the latitudinarians in recognising and emphasising not only a moral but also a social utility in being a good-hearted person. Action and work, rather than mere doctrine had a greater and more fulfilling value. Cicero also sees advantage that could derive from being good-natured: in the De Inventione, he sees good nature as the third ground between honestas and hutilitas, so nothing merely good in itself, but also useful (65).
The problem with good nature is the fact that society fails to recognise true versus sham qualities in human beings. In addition, it fails in distinguishing goodness from greatness, which are not the same thing, and sometimes opposed. Society and common men, without the aid of prudence, are deceived by cases of hypocrisy, the emblem of which, is best represented in Fielding’s novel production by Master Blifil. This dangerous deceive to which every man is subjected, is such a big concern to Fielding, that he decides in *Tom Jones*, *Jonathan Wild*, and also in *Joseph Andrews* with Mrs Booby, to provide examples of true and false semblances of greatness and goodness “that abound in this less-than-perfect world” (Miller:49). The difference between goodness and greatness, is that the latter is deprived from those qualities that contribute to the improvement of a man’s qualities, and is only characterised by impulses of self success, without caring about other people’s emotions and sufferings. The best example of greatness is, of course, Jonathan Wild. I do not totally agree with the general assumption that in assuming that Jonathan Wild was a great man Fielding is only using the weapon of irony. Of course there is evidence for numerous passages in which the employment of the satirical and ironical mean is clear; however, according to Fielding’s definition of greatness, it could be possible to assume that Jonathan Wild was really a great man, in that he completely ignored other people’s feeling. Instances of his greatness are his overriding ambition, a sneaking ingenuity, dishonesty and lack of humility and good nature (49).

In Fielding, true greatness is the combination of greatness and goodness, and this only lives in the noble mind (*Miscellanies*). The road to greatness, characterised by ambition, might also lead to honour, but that of goodness, despite being much more dangerous and difficult because good men easily fall victim to great men, is much more satisfactory in its prospect of a general social well-being. Miller notices that a combination of good and great is fulfilled in Dr Harrison and in Squire Allworthy. I only partly agree, and see much more a
combination of the two in Tom Jones the character after all his life vicissitudes, whereas Squire Allworthy also needs, in minor form, to learn from his great mistake in being not able to completely distinguish real and fake greatness. True greatness is therefore the combination of a tender heart and judgement (goodness and benevolence) and a good head (greatness), which is what every man should aspire to become.

To gather some ideas, good nature is for Fielding a combination of tender-heartedness, benevolence and charity, a combination which is in total accordance to the Christian religion. Goodness alone, nevertheless, is not enough for this world; Fielding highly doubts especially in later production (Amelia) of its sufficiency, because prudence is not only a precious accessory, but also a needful one. If Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones are overall comic pieces of prose that end well, with Fielding’s belief in the existence of some kind of benevolent disposition contributing to the happiness of others, Amelia and his later production after his magistracy, reflects a bitter and more pessimistic attitude, determined by a gradual observation of mankind’s degradation, and the disillusion in noticing that good nature no longer has the power to extirpate other vices (Miller:74-85). Still,

The lesson that most of Fielding’s good-natured characters –Mr. Boncour, Heartfree, Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, Booth– must learn, in one way or another, is that goodness alone, unsupported by social intelligence or prudence or the higher moral imperative of religion, is not enough in the world as it is. (Miller:47)

This confirmation by Miller of the world as it is, seems very interesting in its underlining one more time how much the modern man in the modern world needs to achieve some further skill of prudence as a result of failure, in order to survive and aspire to personal amelioration. In the Enquiry as well Fielding stresses: “ [...] tender-hearted temper very often betrays men into errors not only hurtful to themselves, but highly prejudicial to society. [...] such

12 My Italics.
tenderheartedness is indeed barbarity, and resembles the meek spirit of him who would not assist in blowing up his neighbour’s house, to save a whole city from the flames” (156-7).

Overall, we could quite safely assume that for Fielding good nature is the most reliable force in the difficult pilgrimage of life (Miller:87), and that in general sins can be overcome if he who commits them has the quality of being tender-hearted. Tom Jones could be born to be hanged, but he is not surprisingly acquitted by the author and his readers (Welsh:48). Giving the reason why Tom Jones is acquitted is not hard as a reader of the book. Despite all his mistakes, he still is that good-hearted boy, who like an eighteenth-century Robin Hood steals from the rich and gives to the poor; he is often a victim of both other people’s malicious plotting, and adverse fate and coincidences from which he will escape only through first-hand experience, the Humean relation between cause and effect.

2.2.2. Experience

Experience is something which after Bacon and Newton especially can no longer be ignored in the British Eighteenth Century, and on which the novel counts much for its development. To experience, much of the personal improvement is owed. Back then, Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* claimed: “It is by the practical experience of life and conduct that the truth is really tested, since it is there that the final decision lies. We must therefore examine the conclusion we have advanced by bringing them to the test of the facts of life”.

English Empiricism sees experience as the origin of knowledge and as a criterion for truth, which results reliable only if verified. In comparison to Rationalism, Empiricism limits all human knowledge only to what could be successfully measured and proven. Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) establishes a dependence of reason from experience, which is what provides the former with the material it uses and the unique source
for knowledge. For John Locke, knowledge is not the product of innate ideas, but of sensation and reflection, so rooted in the real world of everyday life experiences (Mahoney). In Chapter I of Book II of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ‘Of Ideas’, Locke writes:

All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

If all knowledge comes from experience, then that strong connection between cause and effect and the impression of outer ideas in the mind that Hume developed, is easily confirmed. Locke also argued that personal identity is based on experience, because “we know who we are today because we remember who we were yesterday” (Abrams:2053).

In Hume, we have already seen how much real-life perceptions affect and create identity and knowledge. He also adds that these cause and effect are the product of experience and are not discoverable only applying reason:

Adam, though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him. No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact.
In addition, the human perception of the world derives from beliefs and feelings which are such because experienced in the world itself (Abrams:2051). The cause-and-effect correlation is possible only through the medium of experience, and there is no such a thing as a priori knowledge, because nobody in front of a completely new object would be able to discover its causes and effect before having them experimented.

Experience and the empiricist belief in only what could be seen and proven, has a legal counterpart: if we think of the English legal system and the Common Law: we know its main feature is the lack of a written code and the importance of the precedent as a vehicle of possible human understanding and witness of the past, in order to determine the future. Fielding also insists much on this extreme need for the adequate materials before judging: as a magistrate, he made broad usage of all kinds of witnesses, and became famous for being a scrupulous investigator, suspending his opinion until he had all the supportive proofs that allowed him to pass judgement; in Tom Jones, he warns and teaches the reader not to judge until he has all the elements: deceiving appearances and the way he presents them should give evidence to the fact that truth might not always seem how it is. The importance of the precedent, and of experience, is also and of course extremely significant to the upbringing of the main character Tom, to such an extent that Welsh notes how Fielding builds his novel based on the circumstantial evidence, on what you see (16).

What is most important to Tom Jones are the lessons he learns throughout the development of the story, determined by the experience acquired learning from his failure. Experience is in Fielding, one of the keys to education that leads to personal improvement and a process in human’s path towards perfectibility. Mrs Miller in Tom Jones, defends the young Tom to Squire Allworthy, claiming that errors are merely related to young age, therefore liable to correction, and they can be smoothed with experience:

I do not pretend to say the young man is without faults; but they are all the faults of wilderness and of youth; faults which he may, nay which I am certain he will
relinquish, and, if he should not, they are vastly overbalanced by one of the most humane tender honest hearts that ever man was blessed with. (775)

In these simple words of Mrs Miller, the whole articulated thought of Fielding is included: despite the fact that human fails because in this precise world he has to fail, he can choose, with the aid of his good nature, to learn from his mistakes and his experience. In the case of Tom Jones, as we know from the end of the story, he does actually learn. And concerning those little, forgivable mistakes he committed, they are, as Mrs Miller claims, partly marginal in comparison to his true and sincere benevolence.

2.2.3. The Ability of Learning from one’s Mistakes, the Acquisition of Prudence

Fielding is arguing for the benefits that failure can bring; in order to do so, the man should be, as previously seen, good-natured, rely much on the mistakes that experience can teach him in order to avoid them in the future, and acquire that extremely needed feature, which is prudence, because benevolence in this particular world is necessary but not sufficient. Prudence seems, along with benevolence, to be what saves Tom Jones from committing the same mistakes over and over again, as much as a mean to be able to distinguish between deceiving appearance and true reality.

Generally speaking, prudence is that faculty which warns us to act with care in terms of future actions. For Hobbes, for instance, prudence itself is a result of experience. Fielding also gives his own definition of prudence in *Tom Jones*:

Prudence and circumspection are necessary even to the best of men. They are indeed, as it were, a guard to virtue, without which she can never be safe. It is not enough that your design, nay, that your actions, are intrinsically good; you must take care they shall appear so. If your inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair outside also. This must be constantly looked to, or malice and envy will take care to blacken it so, that the sagacity and goodness of an Allworthy will not be able to see through it, and to discern the beauties within. (122)
I perceive this quotation as being extremely interesting, because Fielding not only described prudence as a quality necessary even to the best of men; it is also needed for the outside, because people are easily deceived, and as Tom, we might appear to be immoral when we are not. In fact, the author speaks directly to the heart of the readers, because his aim is that of making them realise that even though the actions performed by Tom might seem immoral, there is almost always an explanatory reason why he acts so, which the community fails to grasp. It is as if then, for Fielding, appearance should be in accordance with reality, so to show outside what is inside, through this powerful and not useless learning of prudence. Prudence would help the character to think before he acts, keeping in mind not only the fact that reality could be deceiving and judgement should be passed accordingly, but also that he in turn will be judged, often according to rules of appearance, which most people will always apply.

Harrison notices that right because *Tom Jones* abounds with cases of innocence and misunderstandings, prudence is a necessity for both being a good (and great, I would add) man, and also for the other perspective of dissimulating a villain (37). Master Blifil is, in fact, full of this feature of prudence, in his malicious scheming and plotting; only he lacks completely a hint of benevolence, which is the reason why Fielding so harshly condemns him. Fielding, at least before the years of magistracy, positively believed in the general existence in human beings of (much or little) good nature; the complete absence of these in Blifil and Jonathan Wild, is the reason for their ultimate failure, with however no possibility to repent. Fielding nevertheless gives them a chance to repent throughout the whole story, and only after witnessing they do not change, he condemns them.

Harrison (106-9) even goes further and identifies prudence according to Fielding with the knowledge of the world, and Tom despite being good-hearted, is too much driven by impulses, which he needs to learn how to control. He also adds that morality is for the author
the refinement and the redirection of the original goodness of heart by hard and detailed thought.

Reaching prudence and having a good heart inevitably leads to wisdom. Aristotle separates wisdom (phronesis) from deeper knowledge (sophia). The former is wisdom in respect to what can be made by man, and the ability to choose according to balance and measure; the latter, much refined and superior, is a kind of knowledge which is not necessarily interested in reality and is closer to a theoretic knowledge; this, however, needs the former wisdom to be complete. For Aristotle, both are learned through life experiences, training and education. But mostly, according to Aristotle, spending time with other wise men. Tom Jones, after all his vicissitudes, failures and acquisition of prudence, can aspire to reach wisdom, as much as Mr Wilson does. Sophia Western, on the contrary has always owned, Fielding does not pick a random name, that kind of deeper wisdom and knowledge from whom Tom needs to learn.
2.3. Fielding’s Idea

It is clear at this point that Fielding was not a simple novelist: he was living this double experience of being a novelist and a magistrate, and so, a double perspective and income of knowledge and self-reflection. Although he began to write *Tom Jones* in 1745, when he had not been appointed Justice of the Peace yet, he already had occasion to see that experience is strictly connected to failure, and that living means taking advantage of all the occasions life offers. Nowadays the expression “living in the here and now”, is probably what also Fielding meant: the element of time and space cannot be separated from experience. So for instance, individuals cannot ignore the fact that crime was a real matter, even though according to some a slight one, and that London retained, in the ideology of the Eighteenth Century, connotations of being immoral in its being filled with corrupted place, in which vice and not virtue reigned, all these epitomised in Fielding’s *Enquiry*. Space and time are two identities which cannot be separated from Fielding’s novels and ideas.

It is interesting how this insistence on the here and now and the choice to narrate events determined by that specific reality, leads Fielding to choose a main character, Tom, who is quintessentially human. His readership, after *Joseph Andrews*, needs to forget about strong Quixotic characters such as Parson Adams; of course Partridge could be another example, but he is no longer one of the main characters, because Fielding needs somebody in whom his readers can identify themselves. Olds Bissel notes that Tom is basically a “compromise between the picaro and the hero, intended by his creator to set forth average humanity” (7). Tom is representing humanity on earth as a foundling, so somebody who needs to discover through experience and every-day life his position in the world, and is also, in a sense, the emblem of the man in the world: he who needs to find his place by determining
his personality and reaching the world of benevolence, another important point in the Christian message.

This idea of the man who commits many mistakes and needs to learn prudence and benevolence has always been widespread in literature. The character Pinocchio created by Carlo Collodi (The Adventures of Pinocchio, 1883) reminded me somehow of Tom, as a boy who is driven by impulses and needs to learn how to survive in this world, but also how to establish himself in a set of relationships with other people, keeping in mind other people’s feelings as well. Pinocchio at the same time needs to learn prudence as an ability to recognise true from sham honesty. His metamorphosis, from a piece of wood to a real human boy, is the emblem of rebirth in a moral and personal sense, as the acquisition of these additional features that somebody needs in order to become a better member, inside and outside. Tom does not undergo a physical metamorphosis because the novel strives to verisimilitude, otherwise the standard reader might not be able to grasp the full meaning of Fielding’s words; however, Tom’s metamorphosis is a long process of an array of tiles that constantly are added to each other in the mosaic of experience.

Failure is a necessity in this process as much as pardon and absolution, where good-heartedness is at the basis of the fictional and real character. Failure has its benefits towards religious and social reconciliation and it is the most direct way for redemption. In addition, as Hay observes:

“[…] much of the success of the law depended upon its being merciful as well as an object of terror. The system of pardons and reprieves ensured that a fair number of convicted felons left the courtroom feeling fortunate rather than aggrieved, and thus mercy ensured the acceptance of the rule of law more surely.” (Sharpe:145)

Leaving the individual with an ability to understand from his mistakes through pardon, was therefore not marginal and failure also had a meaning properly because there was the component of pardon. Tom Jones being pardoned by Squire Allworthy stands for his
restoration in a family circle, which is at the same time that of society. Pardon also retained a special connotation in religion, according to which man’s trip in the world is a way to get back to perfection and closer to the image of the Christian creator.

2.3.1. According to Religion

Fielding’s model could be also applied to a Christian religious sphere, in the sense that human’s failure could be brought back to a situation in which the man is sinful and uses his experience in the world in order to redeem himself and get back to a state of benevolence and perfection in accordance with God’s original creation.

Milton in *Paradise Lost* describes the man’s disobedience and the further implied loss of paradise. In Fielding’s time, this loss of paradise could be represented by the fact that the man is forced to live in a world which is full of evils and corruption, therefore losing that state of perfection. Human flaws, however, exist alongside the human being, and are not easily separable from him. After man’s pride, disobedience and fall from Eden, what derives is the fact that man is born as a sinner, and so his initial status of guilt is a consequence of his birth in this proper world. Man must try to redeem himself, and through the acquisition of benevolence and the performance of good actions, he must make his own way to paradise. It is for this condition of sin which is born within the man himself, that Gladfelder might claim “We are all born to be hanged” (6). Fielding does not perceive Tom Jones to be guilty of bad actions from the very first beginning: he is a boy, and as a boy he commits mistakes.

Failure was also, in a sense, allowed by God in the Christian religion as a proof for change: if God sent the man from the world of Eden to the human world, the man should also prove that he had acted against his original sin and redeemed himself, extirpating his flaws proper to his human nature, aspiring to a state of perfection. As Saint Augustine of Hippo

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13 Fielding in the *Enquiry*, also stresses: “But as it hath pleased God to permit human societies to be constituted in a different manner” (155), meaning with this, the fact that God allowed society to be constituted in this particular way where failure is acceptable.
notices that the possibility of going back to God is integrated in the nature of the man himself; this process is a rebirth which transforms the old man into the new man. The evil in the world is a consequence of the original sin, which is the will which renounces to God.

According to Battestin (1959:14), Christianity stresses on the perfectibility of the human soul. Interestingly enough, perfectibility differs from perfection, because the former is the capability of becoming perfect, which is also what Fielding is highlighting. Tom, in a Christian viewpoint, cannot be born perfect, because man is always born as a sinner; he nevertheless is given the opportunity of undergoing this process of becoming perfect, towards a state of completeness and flawlessness, which he actually does through a moral redemption with the precious guide of experience. In Barrow’s opinion, if man is instructed by good discipline, and he is also guided by good examples, he can be considered as inclined to benevolence (16). Failure and experience then guide the man to that original benevolence which derived from God, and man is the human image of God. In this light, Tom must be guided and through his own mistakes redeem himself and acquire a status as close as possible to perfection. The constant exercise of good nature and good heartedness, as much as charity, also draws the man closer to divine perfection. According to Miller, the Christian vision “can be realised only when men have learned to act toward one another with compassion, openness and love” (87), which sums up completely the concept of good nature.

2.3.2. According to a Legal Perspective

Fielding’s model and idea of failure might have also have been the expression of a frustration in seeing the legal system inadequate, in that he did not include the idea of the failure of man as a possibility. Or, better said, individual flaws deriving from a certain variability, were not addressed by the law. Let us examine this short passage from Book III, Chapter II of Tom Jones, when talking about young, undisciplined Tom: “He had been
already convicted for three robberies, viz., of robbing an orchard, of stealing a duck out of a farmer’s yard, and of picking Master Blifil’s pocket of a ball” (103). Fielding is employing a great amount of irony in this very short depiction of Tom’s robberies, because he is making it sound like a terrible crime, when it is actually what a normal boy does at a young age, in opposition to a way too prudent and sneaky Blifil, who was “a lad of remarkable disposition; sober, discreet, and pious beyond his age”. If the law had been applied, however, Tom would have been merely a legal persona who had stolen a specific property, not somebody who, as discovered later, did it in order to feed a poor family. The component of benevolence and charity, ironically proper of a modern Robin Hood, could not be legally taken easily into consideration.

Analysing Tom’s experience, it seems that failure is for Fielding almost a right of a man. Failure needs to be accepted if the man has some base of good nature, and pardon is, as Hay observed, one of the most powerful weapons to guide the individual towards self-analysis. Fielding might have grasped this sense of failure of the law in its inability to take into consideration men’s variability and different instances of background as much as true versus fake honesty. The novel might cover then, for the author, this function of educating where the legal system fails, and so filling a gap in terms of moral teaching, because as Ehrenpreis notices, “Fielding also implies that the change needed is not in the social structure but in the men’s heart” (33). He therefore uses this device of a character who is quintessentially human and has some claim in the reader’s emotion, because it is basically impossible not to sympathise with Tom and fight with him against his hostile fate.

According to Locke, men live in a natural “a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons [...] within the bounds of the law of nature”. Bender claims that “men fail because institutions fail” (118), yet to men failure corresponds a mandatory need for personal redemption, which in the society corresponds to
the conviction to a prison. The man must legally redeem himself in this place. Religiously speaking, it is as if God gave the man a second chance to redeem himself on earth in order to gain a better afterlife; legally speaking, with the prison as a penitentiary, so a place where one should learn from the mistakes, the man becomes a better man for his readmission to society.

Important in this process is the concept of deterrence as an objective of punishment (Bender:20), to prevent the man to commit crime again. Bender makes a critical analysis of the new penitentiaries that appeared in the Eighteenth Century, which differed completely from the old ones, because they “assumed novelistic ideas of character represented in the real world to reconstruct the fictions of personal identity that underlie consciousness” (2). Old prisons were domestically organised, and were intended mainly for keeping the criminal until verdict was sentenced. New penitentiaries, on the contrary, were now thought as places of reformation, in which the individual had to understand what he had done, in order to repent and be reintegrated into the community. It is for this reason that the new penitentiaries enhanced discipline “to enforce solitude and penitence, cleanliness and work” (29). In the novel, a similar process takes place: when Sophia discovers that Tom has spent some time with Mrs Waters, her reaction is to leave; in this imposed form of solitude, as if it were a personal penitentiary, Tom is guided through a self-reflection which allows him to understand the consequence of his behaviour, and offers a possibility for change. Bender also highlights in this sense that the novel and the penitentiary are similar social texts and institutions which work for the regulation and social reformation of the individual. The aim of the penitentiary was to “manipulate identity by recomposing the fictions on which it is founded” (38); this part is very interesting, because it could be brought back to the Lockean and Humean ideas of identity, which is in a constant flux of perception and therefore is completely tractable. Fielding attempts to do the same with the reader, creating a novelistic image of the
penitentiary in *Tom Jones*, working on the manipulation of his identity by the narrator, Sophia and the people with whom the main character comes into contact.

Fielding might have felt this need to supply the legal institutions with some moral consideration (also with the great help of the *Enquiry*) pulling alongside the instrument of the novel. It would be also interesting to take into consideration how the legal system could allow failure. Fielding, with his scrupulous attitude of a magistrate, might have already responded to this: he was thoroughly examining witnesses and was avoiding to pass any sort of judgement until he had collected all the needed evidence. In fact, he was so skeptical concerning appearances that he instructed the reader not to rely too much on the deceiving reality, and examine very carefully the facts before getting to fast conclusions: this will be the main topic of the next chapter.
The last chapter explored an overall existence of failure in the eighteenth-century English world, enhanced and derived from human flaws and, socially speaking, resulting in crime; after having established this existence, the individual (or the reader, in our specific case) must undertake a further step, which is its acceptance. Fielding not only, as already seen, feels failure as something which the man cannot avoid, and therefore a natural part of his growth; he also states its absolute importance as well as the significance of the auto-analysis and the process of learning from these inevitable mistakes. Failure seems to become not the alternative, but the one key to success: “In the study of art no less than in the study of man, the mysteries of success are frequently best revealed through an investigation of failures” (Gombrich:67). The author, however, proceeds further: he aims to consider the aspect of judging, and of judging failure especially. The existence of judgement is intrinsic to the process of reasoning itself, as in reality and through experience, we encounter different situations which are processed by our mind. Judgement comes natural, but is also very deceiving. For this reason, Fielding probably feels the need to clarify the aspect of judgement, which in his opinion should be reduced and dependent upon an overall knowledge of various interpretation rather than a harsh commentary on people’s faults.

In this chapter, I will first analyse this specific importance of judging people and events as much as the role of the writer as a moral philosopher. What is more, I perceive Fielding to develop a very unique technique in terms of establishing these moral connections
and passing his teachings which take the form of a collaboration with the reader, who becomes an important character of the novel. For this reason, a strict relationship between narrator and reader, and the active role of the reader are established in order to fulfil the writer’s expectations.
3.1. Fielding’s Moral Aim

Fielding’s moral aim and the purpose of the novel to fulfil a certain form of education is something not new. The adjective “Moral”, according to the OED, refers to: “1. a. Of or relating to human character or behaviour considered as good or bad; of or relating to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings; ethical. b. Of an action: having the property of being right or wrong, or good or evil; voluntary or deliberate and therefore open to ethical appraisal. Of a person, etc.: capable of moral action; able to choose between right and wrong, or good and evil”. What emerges is mainly the ability to comply with ethical action, which means to do good and act always keeping in mind a general benevolence as much as the happiness of not only the individual, but the whole community.

As explained in the first chapter of this research, in the Enquiry Fielding aims to spread this sort of knowledge he feels he has gained by observing humans during his magistracy. Despite the fact that the Enquiry is almost solely based on social observation, Tom Jones takes the form of a novel, with the aim of educating the reader using the many episodes in which Tom, the main character, constantly fails and needs to learn prudence. Applying what has been analysed in the previous chapter, it is quite obvious nonetheless that Tom already possesses from the very beginning that strong good nature that needs to be present in a human being in order to be linked back to a state of possible perfection, extirpating the sin he is born with.

At this point, it seems established that the failure of man could be a natural process which every individual undergoes, although in different form; at the same time, the individual, in the novel represented by Tom Jones, a character symbolising the whole humanity with his almost anonymous name due to its diffusion, is offered a chance (in
Fielding’s many chances actually), to redeem himself, learn from experience and mistakes, acquire prudence and with the aid of an innate sense of benevolence, aspire thus to be the closest possible to a model of perfection. This innate sense of benevolence is, however, not to be left out: Blifil, one of the only cases in Fielding of total malice, is an instance of the existence of negativity in the world which is irreparable, and for this reason, Fielding harshly condemns him. In the introduction of the Oxford Classics’ edition of Tom Jones, John Bender writes:

“Fielding acknowledges, especially through the personification of Blifil, a presence of irrecoverable bad nature in the world. Just as experience raises in good judgement an awareness of potential error, so the comprehensive good nature, [...] must accept a presence of bad” (1996:XXVII).

The idyllic belief in the existence of a general good nature in men is in Tom Jones supplanted by the unlucky presence of some cases of total wickedness. The climax of Blifil’s malice is to be found in the famous bird episode, when Blifil sets the bird free not out of a possible compassion for the animal, but for pure tease and meanness.

Fielding’s moral aim is not only very strong, but also omnipresent. Irwin states that “the novels have a specifically moral intention” (1). Irwin goes on in his introduction of Henry Fielding: The Tentative Realist talking about “didactic purpose”, “moral preoccupation”, “moral plan” (2), hoping that “each resultant ‘history’ would take on life in the minds of his readers” (5). Educating people seems to be his biggest concern.

He uses the form of the novel because he probably perceives that a tale might be more useful than doctrine in order for people to understand the deepest meaning of good nature and benevolence, seeing and experiencing the results of bad conduct, through the transposition of reality into a fictitious story. If we take for example the fact that Tom argues against Blifil for the importance of action and work over doctrine, assuming almost a latitudinarian credo, it is as if Fielding, with the novel, were abstracting this concept: the fact that clear intertwined...
examples of failure and its overcome might be more useful and have more appeal on the reader than simple preachings. Tom sells his Bible to Blifil, in order to collect some money to give to the poor family of Black George. According to a first and improper glance of Thwackum, it might seem that Tom is extremely ungrateful for the gift. But when talking to Blifil, Tom claims that “there was no merit in faith without works” (141), and the whole project of *Tom Jones* seems to strengthen this idea. It seems as if Tom didn’t need the Bible because he is already living according to the Christian principle of charity. The same thing happens when Tom, in an earlier episode, sells the horse Mr Allworthy gave him; he feels a strong compassion towards the animal, as much as the misfortune of a poor family which needs food to survive. Selling the horse in order to, once more, feed a family, is a good and moral action which, in Tom’s opinion, is more useful for the happiness of the community rather than abstract doctrines. We could safely assume that Tom’s good nature and sense of charity is innate, as opposed to Blifil’s also innate maliciousness.

Fielding’s moral aim is in fact deeply intertwined with aspects of good nature, benevolence and charity, all expressions of virtue. Charity is at the same time one of the most important aspect of Christianity as much as a hint of good-nature and morality: “The dogmatic and mystical sides of religion were very much subordinated to the moral side” (Irwin:10). It is nonetheless extremely significant in *Tom Jones*; if we think about the man Tom helps in the street, showing his utmost generosity in giving him money, we also must refer to the fact that this good action of charity and generosity leads to a precious reward for Tom: the man will give him Sophia’s book. What is more, Tom’s generosity is viewed by Mr Allworthy as one of Tom’s essential qualities, which nevertheless needs to be supplemented:

“I am convinced, my child, that you have much goodness, generosity, and honour, in your temper: if you will add prudence and religion to these, you must be happy; for the three former qualities, I admit, make you worthy of happiness, but they are the latter only which will put you in possession of it.” (211).
It is as if Tom were an emblem of that Aristotelian dichotomy of potentiality and actuality: he can aim to perfection because he has in potentiality all those essential features, namely being good-natured, benevolent and charitable. But in order to reach this perfection in actual means, he needs to learn from moral examples and add the component of prudence. Prudence also guides morality, which is still one of Fielding’s major concern; as a consequence of that, he wishes to instil a moral sensibility in the reader’s inner feelings.

To sum up this aspect of the moral use of the novel, it seems that Fielding wishes to employ his novel *Tom Jones* as a mean to inspire the reader to act and behave according to a possible moral law that respects the individual and the other people. Using Fielding’s words, “In recording some instances of these, we shall, if rightly understood, afford a very useful lesson to those well-disposed youths who shall hereafter be our readers” (122). With the adoption of a character driven by passions and committing one mistake after the other due to his lack of experience in the world, he wishes the reader to learn from the story and from the events Tom must face as well as learn from his mistakes and newly acquired prudence. However, the reader should not only do this: on the contrary, he should also reflect on the fact that Tom, despite his many faults, is also an extremely good character, unlikely often a victim of his own fate and of other people’s wickedness.

After having established Fielding’s ethical and moral intention, the next step to define is that of judgement: a very dear topic to the author. *Tom Jones* is in fact a book about judgement, teaching the reader the complex process of how to pass judgement accordingly and wisely. The moral part is in a sense transferred to the sphere of judgement, as for Fielding, the good and benevolent man, behaving according to ethical rules and respecting other people, is also superior in terms of judging because, as he is very careful, he needs also to collect all the needed evidence beforehand. Tom the character, in a sense, might be not prudent as far as his actions are concerned, yet seems to be quite benevolent in judging other
people, often avoiding harsh and not-reality-based comments; from this attitude, the reader should, in Fielding’s opinion, reflect upon and learn.
3.2. On Judging

Undertaking now an analysis on the importance of judgement in *Tom Jones* and on how the narrator tries to educate the reader in this faculty as well, I would like to take into account the introductory chapter of Book XI of *Tom Jones*. The whole set of the introductory chapters to each book of the novel could be conceived as an overall manifesto of Fielding’s literary activity, in that they give us those precious hints of what the instrument of the novel was for him and in how they can thoroughly stand for his conception of *Tom Jones*. Fielding clarifies the word ‘critic’ referred to men, and establishes that the word, deriving from greek, signifies judgement, and that having given judgement means also having “condemned without mercy” (494). He proceeds mentioning the figure of the slanderer, he who “pries into the characters of others, with no other design but to discover their faults, and to publish them to the world” (495). This is identified by the author with vice itself, as opposed to virtue, represented by good nature and carefulness as far as the way and motives other people’s events are driven are concerned. Fielding goes on stating that this vice, embodied by the slanderer, is nothing but a product of society, and here again, we could quite safely link to his career of a man of law and of the depiction and representation of an imperfect world. Failure is carefully watched by and easily judged by these people who Fielding calls “slanderers”, and could seem to be the most straightforward object of observation by those who enjoy gossiping maliciously. We as readers could also condemn many of the characters of the novel for their faults and lacks. But in this Fielding is giving his precious support and is trying to show the readers that life is too varied to be able to grasp it fully and to comment safely on it.

Judging and reality seem to be deeply intertwined. Preston in *The Created Self* highlights that “*Tom Jones* shows, though, that we cannot choose not to judge. Nor can we avoid being judged, however ‘prudent’ our lives. But we can and should learn to judge with
knowledge, that is with full experience and full sympathy” (132). Consequently, judgement is in itself a part of life and reality that we cannot avoid, that nonetheless comes often too natural and too briefly calibrated. For this reason, namely the easy component of falling into a big mistake of condemning too harshly, this faculty should be refined, which is what Fielding is trying to do in the novel. True judgement must be pursued and wished for. Preston goes on:

“(Fielding) is actually trying to school the reader, to induce him to attend more closely and to judge well. [...] He employs his narrative method with calculated effect, as a means to draw the reader into the action of the book and so clarify its meaning. [...] The reader has this responsibility also: he must try to judge well. To encourage him to do so is itself a part of the subject of the book. That is, the book is about judgement, and the understanding necessary for good judgement” (116-7).

The action of passing judgement is extremely dependent from the dichotomy reality and appearance because judgement is often given according to situations which might appear in a certain way, but in reality, and going deeper with examining witnesses and events, are totally different. This situation leads to a conflict and to a misrepresentation of reality. The novel Tom Jones is extremely rich of examples. Therefore, when considering erroneous judgement, a sphere of misconception of reality must be taken into account too. In the novel already mentioned, it is as if the narrator were, with his episodes, making fun of the reader, trying to make him exercise his ability of passing judgement, offering him examples of deceiving appearance which could lead the inattentive reader to fall into error. Fielding himself claims that reality is at times distorted, and that facts might be dependent from different motives and circumstances (Tom Jones:364).

In these terms, in fact, it should be clarified that there are as many versions of one story as many are the narrators of these stories, and what Fielding seems to insist on, is the unreliability of stories which come from people not involved in them. It is as if narrators of

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14 The variety of the readership itself will be analysed in the next subchapter.
events were unreliable because often forged by instances of malicious gossip, distorting reality according to their perception and own interests. Fielding, as also a scrupulous magistrate examining witnesses and passing verdicts only when all evidence had been collected, is warning the reader to hear the full version of the event directly from the people who experienced it, keeping also in mind that appearance is deceiving, he claims that: “For though the facts themselves may appear, yet so different will be the motives, circumstances, and consequences, when a man tells his own story, and when his enemy tells it, that we scarce can recognize the facts to be one and the same” (Tom Jones:364-5). Facts can be so distorted by people that might appear totally different from the original. It is for these reasons that characters, and Mr Allworthy especially, often misconceive Tom’s departure from Mr Allworthy’s estate. Blifil and Thwackum’s distorted version of the fact, and their claim that Tom had passed negative remarks about Mr Allw orthy’s illness is later to be clarified by Tom’s version of the story, which proves to be the real and most reliable source of information.

What Fielding is mostly concerned about is not only erroneous, but harsh and hasty kinds of judgement. In the introductory chapter of Book X, he admonishes the reader: “First, then, we warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the incidents in our history as impertinent and foreign to our main design, because though dost not immediately conceive in what manner such incident may conduce to that design” (453). It would be interesting to establish a parallel between the “incidents in our history” with the incidents of life, as Tom Jones could represent the story of a life. Meantime the events pass by, the reader might judge characters or express certain emotions and feelings regarding their actions. Before condemning, the individual should wait until he has reached a full and complete idea of how the events took place. Referring to the novel, the reader should also avoid to judge the author for pieces of information which might look unnecessary to the development of the story, but
are nevertheless carefully planned and thought throughout. But also in terms of reality, the person should avoid to judge negatively thus condemning an individual, and should on the contrary use the weapon of patience and tolerance. In Fielding’s powerful words:

“The man of candour and of true understanding is never hasty to condemn. He can censure an imperfection or even a vice, without rage against the guilty party. [...] The worst of men generally have the words rogue and villain most in their mouths, as the lowest of all wretches are the aptest to cry out low in the pit” (Tom Jones:286).

Tom and Sophia could represent the person depicted in the first part of the statement, whereas Blifil could represent that of the second one. Fielding, in these terms, also quotes Horace in the introductory part of Book VII, which deals much, like the other introductory chapters, with judgement. Fielding mentions the nil admirari, translated as “to stare at nothing” (455) As the note explains, “the poet (Horace) is recommending a calm, unexcitable, outlook as the best route to happiness” (891). Fielding goes on noticing that the individual should also be careful when commenting negatively on other people, because he might also be commenting, probably unaware of it, on his own faults and lacks. Establishing the widespread comparison between the world and the stage and between the man and the player, he claims: “Thus the man, as well as the player, may condemn what he himself acts” (286).

This part of judging the individual is very determinant for the same person, in that in judging others we expose also a part of ourselves, defining us as a person. Gossipy Mrs Wilkins, malicious Blifil and severe Thwackum when commenting on other characters’ matters only merely offer the reader their true essence, it is as if those people were determined by the way they talk about others as much as by the way they act. Preston interestingly clarifies this:

“Reactions to events are themselves events. In the same way some of the most important acts in the novel are acts of judgement. We discover and express ourselves in judging others; our moral existence consists in our ability to form moral judgements”. (122)
The way the person owns an awareness of the fact that harsh judgement is morally incorrect and acts accordingly, is also an expression of the person’s good nature. Tom the character is the most obvious example in these terms: despite the fact that he is often and too much driven by passions, resulting in being irresponsible and not careful, he is always very nice with and about other people even when they do not deserve it, as for example Black George; the only character with whom he expresses straightforward negative opinion is Blifil. Sophia Western is also an example of wisdom in terms of passing judgements: she carefully and accurately analyses all the events before stating clearly her opinion, and often actually avoids to do so unless she perceives it as being completely necessary.

Rather than being too much concerned about judging other people, the individual, in the form of the reader, supposed to be learning from the novel *Tom Jones*, should be busy with judging his own faults and mistakes, like Tom does. Tom results therefore as a model, in his being extremely, and possibly too much, compassionate and attentive of other people’s feelings, whereas being too harsh at times with himself. Tom in Book XVIII, chapter II cries “But why do I blame fortune? I am myself the cause of all my misery. All the dreadful mischiefs which have befallen on me are the consequences only of my own folly and vice” (810). This is an extreme high point in the development of the character, despite coinciding with a state of desperation: only through the realisation of his possible little moral failure (in his losing control with women and his lack of prudence), its acceptance and the understanding that his actions and its consequences departed solely from himself, can Tom change his lifestyle and get closer to wisdom. His acknowledgement of being responsible for his actions and for the fact that the present events are a consequence of a certain way of living and attitudes he undertook, are the expression of his perfectibility: not perfection, but the process leading to it. The person, however, should not only be harsh as far as his personal experiences are concerned, but also “charitable and compassionate to others” (Preston:123).
Paradoxically, Mr Allworthy and all the other character, possibly with the exception of Sophia Western, need also to learn from Tom, the “vital connection between hood nature and understanding, simplicity and discernment” (Preston:129). The ability of passing precise judgement, which cannot be avoided, but should be corrected and redefined, seems to be subordinated to good nature. Only if there is good nature and self-reflection there can be good judgement too. If, on the contrary, the person retains some bad feelings, also enhanced by jealousy and envy, as happens for the bad characters of the novel, judgement will always rely much on malicious gossip. Tom’s good nature and perfectibility is what Fielding hopes to instil on the reader as an example of charity, good nature, benevolence and the total eradication, subsequent to its overcome, of failure. Tom also admonishes the Man of the Hill when he resolves to be negative about other people and the past events of his life. Tom asserts that:

Indeed, you here fall in 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 [...] nothing should be esteemed as characteristical of a species but what is to be found among the best and most perfect individuals of that species” (420).

Tom is demonstrating with these simple but pure words a great wisdom despite his young age. He is taking the words of his creator, Fielding in reproaching the Man of the Hill. This remark could be read in a duplicity: Tom is both warning the Man of the Hill not to judge and be this negative, and is also indirectly warning the reader not to do the same with the other characters, Tom himself included.

Going back shortly to the idea that there are as many versions as many the narrators are, it could also be asserted that there are also as many judges as the number of narrations, because the narrators inevitably influence their story with certain behaviour and comments. Taking for instance the case of the finding of Tom in Allworthy’s bed at the beginning of the
story, the characters need to shed light on the fact, finding he who was to be the culprit \(^\text{15}\), putting up a familiar trial. We could compare the hasty and resolute Mrs Deborah with the calm and prudent Mr Allworthy. Despite the fact that there are some hints for the readers that the mother of Tom could be Mrs Bridget Allworthy, the blame is immediately shifted to Jenny Jones. Mrs Deborah as a judge proves to be wrong, and possibly a personification of the failure of the law. The rest of the people from the village also point their finger at the poor Jenny merely out of jealousy, probably for her education. Mr Allworthy, on the contrary, “might have required some stronger evidence to have convicted her (43), thus proving to be a better judge. It seems Fielding is, in a comic way, underlining how many sides and how many difficulties linger on the legal sphere, against which he will pounce on later on when he will be appointed as a Justice of the Peace. Mr Allworthy’s need for better evidence is confirmed with Jenny’s confession.

In the novel there are therefore many judges personified by the characters. As for the reader, he himself is also a character, and can choose whether and how to judge. Considering Tom’s three robberies and the already-mentioned dichotomy appearance and reality, at a first glance it could seem that Tom is guilty. If we only hear what people against Tom have to say, we also would condemn Tom for being undisciplined. Nevertheless, moving on establishing further connections, but especially hearing Tom’s version, we understand that he had done that, as much as the selling of the Bible and of the horse, in order to feed a family and help it against starvation, thus showing his great and caring concerns for unlucky people. The reader, therefore, should aim to judge well and be as more reasonable and tolerant with the character,

\(^{15}\) At that time, concealing a birth outside marriage was a considerable moral sin, as much as the abandonment of the baby. It could often happen that a woman got pregnant without being married, resulting in a moral exclusion from the community, and a probable conviction to Bridewell or other Houses of Correction. The delivery of a bastard could, in some cases, lead to the crime of infanticide, as a way to set oneself free from the moral sin. Delivering a bastard had a huge impact on servants for example, because, if found, they would immediately lose the job, with the risk of a terrible reference for the future, leading inevitably to unemployment and social exclusion. It might be for this reason that Mr Allworthy does not condemn Jenny Jones, the presumed mother of Tom Jones: she tried to offer the child a better life, as he in fact believes.
especially if he demonstrates to be extremely good-natured and critical over his own failure. These three robberies are dominated by an overall irony, both of fate, and of “incidental and minor misapprehension” and “Fielding’s irony serves his didactic views of human nature” (Welsh:50). Our job as readers is also to judge the character, because the narrator not only gives us the possibility to do that, but also encourages us to with his technique. We as readers tend to not fully forgive Mr Allworthy for his big mistake of sending Tom away from his estate, a decision which stands for Mr Allworthy’s biggest failure. Despite having been defined by Fielding as benevolent, charitable and good-natured, which may seem to be all the expressions of virtue that a character on his way towards perfectibility aspires to have, Mr Allworthy, after his mercy towards Jenny Jones and the recurrent pardons towards Tom’s misbehaviour, seems to be incapable of applying justice and look through the surface of people who are misleading him. On the contrary, the reader will always be prone to forgive Tom’s repetitive kinds of failure. Not merely because the reader presents Tom in a way that is easy to feel sympathy for, but because we know that his overall good-heartedness prevails over his inexperience, and that as he has learned through his mistakes and has often proven to be far too wise despite the young age, we can trust that he can only change for the better.

Fielding might be hoping that the reader, after having finished the novel, will have a better insight as far as human nature and the different personality (which at times can be deceiving) are concerned. Our judgement is often shaped by the narrator of the story, by the way he presents events and characters. Fielding’s shadow in fact is omnipresent, to such an extent that his technique, the topic of the next subchapter, is almost unique in its aim to be completely realistic and reality-based, but in his being at the same time something we can never separate and are always dependent from. Fielding is trying to teach the reader that the world in which he is moving is too complicated and the reader should embrace a skeptical, wise and generous point of view, even and especially when judging.
3.3. Fielding’s Technique to Teach the Reader How to Judge

I have already mentioned how much I perceive Fielding’s technique to be overtly unique and fascinating. His aim is to teach the reader how to behave in the world, how to wisely overcome failure, and how to relate to other people always respecting and never harshly judging them. Fielding’s technique is precisely that of presenting the events to the reader, in his opinion free from any sort of personal comment, never clearly saying what and how the reader should think. By the way he presents fact, he is consciously driving us to think in a certain way.

Fielding uses the anecdote of a strong attachment to reality as well as the presentation of real events and facts in order to instil and strengthen the impact and credibility he can have on the reader. In almost all his introductory chapters to each book, he is talking about his piece of work. He clearly distances himself from the romances, which nevertheless still retain a strong influence especially on the production of Joseph Andrews, and on the quixotic character of Partridge, very superstitious in his belief in ghosts. Fielding sets a clear distance between this romance kind of writing, claiming in the preface of the novel that “I do not intend to draw on you the suspicion of being a romance writer” (Tom Jones:3). There are numerous examples of this in the novel; in each first chapter of each book, it is as if the writer were analysing features of his specific kind of writing, stating that it aims to realism, veracity and truthfulness. His pen, as he states, will be guided “throughout the direction of truth” (103). It seems almost as if he were disregarding that Spanish tradition that was so important to him, probably because, as he will highlight later on, it is a pleasure to read, but too far-fetched.

I perceive the introductory chapter of Book VIII as a possible manifesto of Fielding’s literary approach, on the representation of true facts and the imitation of reality. This brings
us back and connects Fielding to Aristotle, who claimed that mimesis was the imitation of reality and that history gives a probable truth, unlike Plato, who perceived literature as a lie, representing appearance rather than truth (Meyer). Fielding also quotes Aristotle in the introductory chapter in which he compares the world and the stage, and mentions the fact that for the Greek philosopher, the theatrical stage is “an imitation of what really exist” (Tom Jones:283). Fielding adopts this approach, the writing as a representation of reality, detached from that dimension of fantasy. In fact, going back to the idea of chapter I of Book VIII as a manifesto, Fielding clarifies that fantasy does not interest him, because since his novel is thought for any sort of reader, metaphors and parallelisms between the real and unreal world would be too hard to be established and understood. What is more, the historian must not “fall into the incredible” (349); on the contrary, if he manages to stay within the rules of credibility\textsuperscript{16}, he can engage the attention of the reader, having a stronger impact on his thoughts. He compares his work to that of an historian, therefore possibility is not sufficient whereas probability is better: “(the historian) is obliged to record matters as he finds them, though they may be of so extraordinary nature as will require no small degree of historical faith to swallow them. [...] The historian is not only justifiable in recording as they (the matters) really happened, but, indeed, would be unpardonable should he omit or alter them” (348). This part is extremely interesting because, having beforehand established that his job is like that of the historian, he is claiming with this last statement that he is representing the truth, not omitting or altering facts. The only thing is that he adds, acknowledging the type of work he has been conducing so far, that unnecessary facts might be “sacrificed to oblivion” (348).

If Fielding’s need for a representation of reality to be useful for the reader, what emerges is also that the man is the object. As the man is imperfect, the imperfect man is thus

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Hunter, for this reason, adds to the ten criteria to define a novel that of credibility. The fantastic starts in the Empiricist England to have a scarce effect, because the need of pragmatism and education of the masses is much stronger.
depicted. A perfect man cannot be employed in the story, because “as we have not, in the course of our conversation, ever happened to meet with any such person, we have not chosen to introduce any such here”; the perfect man would also be of little use, because Fielding states that the reader cannot learn much from perfection. On the contrary:

“Nothing can be of more moral use than the imperfections which are seen in examples of this kind, since such form a kind of surprise, more apt to affect and dwell upon our minds than the faults of very vicious and wicked persons. The foibles and vices of men, in whom there is great mixture of good, become more glaring objects from the virtues which contrast them and show their deformity; and when we find such vices attended with their evil consequence to our favourite characters, we are not only taught to shun them for our own sake, but to hate them for the mischiefs they have already brought on those we love” (Tom Jones:455).

Fielding powerfully combines the depiction of real characters with flaws because they are authentic. And as being authentic, they can affect the reader. The mis-en-scene of imperfect characters (aiming or not to perfectibility) is deeply intertwined with his moral aim. If perfect people do not exist in this world, it would make no sense to describe them, and like the historian, the author must always refer to truth. This could also be seen as Fielding’s declaration of the decision to use Tom as the main character. Tom with flaws is more human than Sophia, for example, and it is the perfect instance of the way a common every-day man must undergo in order to aspire to be a member in perfect accordance with society and its members. What is more, Fielding claims that attesting the “evil consequence” the characters must face should also have some repercussions on our sense.

In order to educate the reader, Fielding employs two complementary techniques: the strict connection between narrator and reader, who both become two characters of the novel, and the subsequent role the reader has in order to fully understand the story by filling those gaps the narrator purposely leaves for him.
3.3.1. The Strict Connection between Reader and Narrator

Fielding establishes in *Tom Jones* a closer connection with the reader in comparison to *Joseph Andrews*, for instance. He does so, not only reminding the reader of his presence in each introductory chapter of each book, but also addressing his speech directly to the reader, mentioning him often. The narrator and the reader thus become two additional artificial characters of the novel. The narrator does so talking about himself, about the fact that he is telling this specific story to the reader. The reader, by being always called to participate to the course of the events.

This presence of the narrator is in *Tom Jones* quite obvious. Taking one step back, Booth highlights in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that the “artifice is unmistakably present” (3). Fielding, for as much as he tries to prove the fact that what he narrates is the closest possible to verisimilitude, can never fully offer a narrator-free version of the story, and the author is always present. In this case, we are dealing with an obtrusive narrator, who aims to guide the reader to think the way he wants, manipulating the course of events and also, in a sense, the reader’s opinion of the story. In fact, “the author’s judgement is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it” (20). Objectivity, Booth claims, is hard to be gained fully, and the illusion of the artifice is hard to set aside.

The narrator aims from the beginning to establish a relationship with the reader of mutual trustworthiness, as he sets himself as a guide for the reader in Book I, directly talking to the reader; he also warns him of his recurring presence as a form of assistance: “Reader, I think proper, before we proceed any farther together, to acquaint thee that I intend to digress, through this whole history, as often as I see occasion; of which I am myself a better judge than a pitiful critic whatever” (*Tom Jones*:33). On this relationship of mutual faith, the narrator clarifies: “If the writer strictly observes the rules above-mentioned, he hath discharged his part; and is then entitled to some faith from his reader, who is indeed guilty of
critical infidelity if he disbelieves him” (352). This remark strongly warns the reader not to quickly call into question or judge the reader. Irwin notices also that, as Fielding was creating a new medium, the reader automatically was at the same time helping him “to assist in the illusion” (5-6). The standard reader normally tends to believe what an author writes, especially when dealing with moral standards that were established over time. The narrator and the reader thus get very close.

Fielding establishes himself as a creator; according to what he writes, the narrator and reader share the same experiences in the novel: they should laugh and cry at the same time; the author declares: “I am convinced I never make my reader laugh heartily but where I have laughed before him” (*Tom Jones*:426). Fielding creates that emotional path through which the reader is guided.

In addition, Fielding always writes with the reader in mind. As Preston observes, Fielding is “interested more in the audience than in the play” (119). He keeps his eye constantly on the reader, manipulating his opinion with the course of the events and with the way he tells what happens. What emerges is that the story might become only a mean to educate the reader, and the author is careful for what concerns the perception of his work.

What is more, the author is not only interested in the audience, but as he always keeps this moral aim of educating, he is looking for intelligent readers (Preston:120). It might be useful at this point to introduce the fact that it seems that in *Tom Jones* there are different kinds of readership. Fielding is often making differences in his audience, realising that there might be this overall diversity in there too. He often refers to “most of the readers” as much as “the attentive reader” and “the sagacious reader”. He knows that diversity in background and culture is often marked, therefore it seems as if the novel could have a different impact also according to the type of reader. In the famous introductory chapter where he compares the world with the stage, he is distributing the spectators into different places, taking into account
the form of the theatre, so to enhance this audience diversification. This variety in the readership is also attested by the creator of the novel: “Reader, it is impossible we should know what sort of person thou wilt be; for, perhaps, thou may’st be as learned in human nature as Shakespeare himself was, and, perhaps, thou may’st be no wiser than some of his editors” (Tom Jones:453). Fielding acknowledges the fact that there may be many readers who would not fulfil his expectations and the other way round. Nevertheless, by deciding to tell the seemingly simple story of Tom, he relies much on the reader’s sense.

3.3.2. The Active Role of the Reader

With Henry Fielding and his particular role of a narrator, it is not really a matter of reliability, or of a representation of what is actually not true, but it deals more with the way he is saying things. He is presenting facts according to a precise order, an expression of his plan. The ironic and significant precision of the plot (that Preston calls “Swiss precision”) stands for this careful and thought-out plan which inevitably needs the reader in order to be complete. The role of the reader is not passive; Fielding not only keeps his constant eye on the audience, but ultimately needs it for Tom Jones to be fulfilled. Or, better said, Fielding needs the reader for his aim with Tom Jones to be fulfilled, namely that of educating and of letting the individual understand that failure is not an alternative to success, but one of its steps and the important thing is to learn from mistakes.

Fielding makes a clear reference of this in Tom Jones, in one of the most important passages regarding the role of the reader:

“In so doing, we do not only consult our own dignity and ease, but the good and advantage of the reader: for besides that by these means we prevent him from throwing away his time, in reading without either pleasure or emolument, we give him, at all such seasons, an opportunity of employing that wonderful sagacity, of

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17 My italics.
which he is master, by filling up these vacant spaces of time with his own conjectures; for which purpose we have taken care to qualify him in the preceding pages” (101).

The reader therefore, actively employed by his creator, must fill up the vacant spaces. Fielding is drawing the attention to the type of reading which should be active, finding consequently a job for the reader. The author needs the reader to participate, to have an important role in judging and take part to the action.

 Mostly, in fact, the reader must have an active role because that would be necessary in terms of passing judgement, of understanding where the truth really lies and of discovering what the real meaning of the fact presented is. For instance, the narrator himself is always playing with ideas of appearance and reality, with this dichotomy between what appears and what really is. Taking for example the famous episode mentioned by Fielding of the three robberies allegedly undertaken by Tom, the narrator almost jokes with the reader, putting to the test his ability to uncover the real meaning of it. Only the sagacious reader and the one who will attentively read the book, grasping every single shade of implicit meaning, will understand the fact that Tom might seem irresponsible, but is actually deeply generous and tender-hearted. In the trial with Mr Allworthy following the robberies, Tom proves to be loyal, sincere and charitable. Loyal, because he honourably protects his friend, Black George sacrificing himself; sincere, because he admits that he is involved in the robbery, although he is hiding the fact that his friend is too; charitable, because in the end it comes out that he carried out this action merely to feed a family. Therefore the standard reader, not interested much in gaining from the story, might just think, although it will be overturned throughout the novel by the author, that Tom is an irresponsible youngster, that needs to be punished; the sagacious reader, will on the contrary understand (not necessarily sharing) Tom’s point of view.
Another matter worth mentioning, when referring to the need for the active role of the reader in order to fully grasp the meaning, is the presence of hints that Fielding gives his audience, especially graspable after several readings of the novel. I am referring to the hints the narrator gives to the fact that Mrs Bridget could be the actual mother of Tom Jones. The omniscient narrator purposely hides this fact to the reader, yet he gives him precious hints, such as the surprisingly lack of complaint when Mr Allworthy decides to keep the baby: “Miss Bridget has always expressed so great a regard for what the ladies are pleased to call virtue, and had herself maintained such a severity of character, that it was expected, [...] that she would have vented much bitterness on this occasion, and would have voted for sending the child [...] immediately out of the house” (Tom Jones:38). This should be as an alarm bell for the active reader, who should read between the lines and understand that the narrator is presenting only part of the events, and that he must fill in these gaps. In another instance, we find Miss Bridget again lovingly playing with baby Tom, and it seems pretty clear that Fielding is not writing this just to fill some pages with some details, but it, as the rest of the events narrated, responds to a careful plan of the plot.

The reader needs to fulfil an active role and be extremely careful with judging also when Fielding presents different perspectives, so to expose that life is full of unreliable narrators. Fielding often takes on some characters as narrators, to show how much careful we should be when believing what other people say (narrator included), in order to form our thought regardless other opinion, which are often influenced by the transposition of other people’s feelings. For instance, when Mr Allworthy is sick, the doctor acquires, in a way, the role of the narrator, claiming that the squire will soon die. The doctor is revealed to be wrong, and Fielding reverses the situation for a purpose: Mr Allworthy the character must be kept alive to change his last will and become familiar with Tom as a legitimate nephew, the son of his sister. The happening of the encounter with Mrs Waters also proves in the end to be
different from what appeared in the beginning: it seemed to be a horrendous rape, but actually it was only a common robbery. What emerges is that facts are often presented distorted on purpose by the narrator. Fielding as an omniscient narrator perfectly knows the real story, revealed only at the very end of the novel. Yet, he is playing with his readers, breaking the order of the story and adjusting it to his purposes, breaking at the same time, as Booth observes, that sense of realism, in that often the reader could feel put on probation by somebody who knows how the real events took place, but is hiding them for some reason.

All this is resembles Fielding’s skepticism: he wants also his readers to be skeptical about the information they receive in the novel and in real life. The reader, as much as the author (especially conceiving his job as a magistrate) should examine the witnesses very carefully, always keeping in mind that people and facts can be deceiving, and that only by paying attention and being careful, and not quickly judgemental, truth can be reached. Facts narrated by other people should never be taken from granted, and can easily be changed by personal perception, thus moving away from reality. This almost reminds of Hayden White, who with his work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) argued for the impossibility to present historical truth because each story is assigned the meaning its narrator decides to give, willingly or not.

In a nutshell, it seems that the moral aim Fielding has when he writes *Tom Jones*, goes hand in hand with the acceptance of the narrator to read the novel critically, participating in grasping the full meaning of the story as much as actively thinking about what really matters in life. For instance, do these three robberies of Tom really matter? Do in the end Tom’s mistake really influence him so negatively? As a matter of fact, the reader forgives Tom for his previous failure because he sees in the character a fundamental good nature as much as a grown-up man who has reflected on his mistakes and has acquired the aid of prudence. It is for these reasons that failure, metaphorically, is forgiven and Tom acquitted by the narrator.
and the readers.
CONCLUSION

In this piece of research, I have attempted to show that Fielding could have thought of himself as an innovator, in his active wish to bring a change to his community, yet needing at the same time an active reader in his novel, in order for a change in the minds to take place at an individual level. To sum up, I have first provided an extensive introduction on the historical, social and philosophical background, so to contextualise my thesis as much as the concept of failure itself. I have found extremely significant to get into the context of the Eighteenth Century, and to notice that it witnessed a great change in the mind, resembled by the new Empiricist philosophy, which swept away incorporeal and abstract reasonings. What is more, failure could have, in this case, derived from this particular society that formed, which proved to be often corrupted and driven, especially with the expansion of London, by the new immoral forces of the city.

What emerged from the second and main chapter of my piece of study, is the fact that failure at an individual level seems necessary for Fielding, as resembled by his almost-perfect character Tom Jones. I perceive it to be necessary because as it is the product of mistakes, it represents also the key change and the turning point of an individual: from failure the man can learn and acquire prudence step by step, aspiring thus to be gradually improved. The reader witnesses the positive influence failure has on the character Tom Jones; the reader, at the same time, realises also with Fielding’s technique, that the character experiences, at the very end of the play, a very successful outcome, properly because he is good-natured, tender-hearted and benevolent. What is more, Tom is extremely kind and charitable to other people, and avoids to pass judgements or to think about his own interests only.
The topic of judgement, has been indeed, one of the most central parts of my third and last part. The reader is offered a possibility to witness how much malicious gossip and quick judgement can affect negatively the individual; the reader is offered also a chance to see how successful can it be to be nice to people. In addition, the active role of the reader played throughout the whole novel a very significant part: it is also for this precious job of a reader that Fielding commits to us, that we feel so deeply intertwined with the events of the novel.

In terms of future research, I believe it could be extremely interesting to analyse Fielding’s turn to pessimism in *Amelia* as far as a general benevolence existing in the world is concerned. I have chosen to analyse *Tom Jones* because I perceive it to be one of the most complete works of Fielding as regards his philosophical and moral thought. In addition, I was deeply fascinated by the complexity of the plot and by the fact that nothing was left out or randomly chosen, but, on the contrary, carefully planned. It is well-known that *Amelia* is the darkest novel Fielding ever wrote, the only novel which fully grasps his negative feelings collected in the two years of his magistracy. It would be, for this reason, very interesting to explore how much Fielding’s belief in the existence of some general benevolence in the world was deeply affected by his legal experience and studies. Last but not least, it would also be interesting to see how the model of failure could be properly applied to the legal sphere.

In a nutshell, I have attempted to draw the main lines of the modern views the writer retained about the man who fails to become a better person, and the importance of judging the other person accordingly. Fielding’s teachings have proven to be extremely significant in my opinion, because they offered, at the same time and in the form of a novel, a very original perspective of the applied and doctrine-free principles of Christianity, among which the most important I perceive to be, after all, being nice to other people.
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