Tom Jones:

The Foundling and the Reader

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English literature has some notable foundlings among its heroes. Scyld Scefing is described, in the seventh line of *Beowulf*, as 'funden': 'since first he lay friendless, a foundling' reads one translation. Foundlings have a tendency to be founders, in that if one is to tell a myth of origins it helps that the hero's own origins be lost in antique mists. King Arthur is raised as an orphan; Romulus and Remus make do with a wolf as parent; Moses is found among the bulrushes.

In narrative terms an orphan may be attractively free of parental interference and restraint. However, a guardian or relative or governess or another standing *in loco parentis* can put a damper on things, as Huck Finn had cause to observe; in such cases a narrative can celebrate the independence of the child without disparaging the sacred bond that supposedly obtains between parents and children. A greater narrative interest inheres in the foundling, for there is always a threat of a significant encounter. A foundling occupies a special, even an anomalous place within society; like an orphan, a foundling has no natural bond with a parent, nor need an emotional obligation to any other person be felt. Unlike an orphan (whose parents must, by definition, be deceased) a foundling lives in the hope or the fear of discovering his or her parents. Oedipus is crucially positioned as an abandoned child, a circumstantial foundling, unaware of the identity of his own mother.

Henry Fielding's Tom Jones experiences the horrors of the Oedipal revelation when he is told in the eighteenth and final book of that novel that Mrs Waters, the woman with whom he had shared a bed in Upton (in the ninth book), is his own mother. Jones is already languishing in prison; even if he were to be reprieved, he could never forgive himself for committing incest. The narrative, already in its last book, is as far from a comic termination as could well be contrived. It turns out, of course, that Mrs Waters, née Jenny Jones, had pretended to be Tom's mother in order to protect the reputation of the sinful woman, Squire Allworthy's own sister Bridget, who soon after /25 giving birth to Tom, was married to Captain Blifil and would become the mother of Mr Blifil. Tom's father, as all eventually learn, was Mr Summer, son of Allworthy's best friend, who died of the smallpox before the birth of his own illegitimate son. Mr Blifil is the villain of the plot not only for conspiring against Tom, but for concealing from Allworthy a letter addressed to him, written by Blifil's mother on her deathbed, confessing that Tom was in fact her son. It is one of the oddities of the narrative that Blifil's actions are never excused, nor their evil mitigated, by pleading a reasonable desire to protect the reputation of his own mother. What is not odd is that a foundling should have educated parents. Children were abandoned as foundlings not only out of economic necessity, but out of shame. For almost the entire novel we are led to suppose that Tom's parents had been poor rather than ashamed; for this purpose Mrs Waters has agreed to allow suspicion to fall on her as Tom's mother, while Partridge is unable to clear himself of putative paternity.

Readers must often have noticed that the foundling theme (even the problem of Tom's identity) is largely irrelevant between the first and the eighteenth books. It is rather surprising to find that the word *foundling*, so prominent on the title-page and in the heading of Book I ('Containing as much of the Birth of the Foundling as is necessary or proper to acquaint the Reader with in the Beginning of this History'), actually occurs less than a dozen times in the course of the next eight hundred pages:

> Book I.ix: … no less than Mr. Allworthy himself; for a Whisper soon went abroad, that he himself was the father of the foundling Child.
>
> Book II.ii: Though the Birth of an Heir by his beloved Sister [Blifil] was a Circumstance of great Joy to Mr Allworthy, yet it did not alienate his Affections from the little Foundling, to whom he had been Godfather, had given his own Name of Thomas, and whom he had hitherto seldom failed of visiting, at least once a Day, in his Nursery.

> Book II.vii: [Dissension between Captain and Mrs Blifil] They never loved or hated, commended or abused, the same Person. And for this Reason, as the Captain looked with an evil Eye on the little Foundling, his Wife began now to caress it almost equally with her own Child.
>
> Book III.vi: … all the Favours which Mr Allworthy showered on the Foundling.
>
> Mrs Blifil … was imagined by all others … to hate the Foundling in her Heart…. [was] in her Heart sufficiently displeased with all the Favours shown by Mr. Allworthy to the Foundling. /26
>
> Book VIII.vii: the tender Behaviour of that excellent Man to the Foundling Child
>
> Book XIV.vi the *Foundling-Hospital.*
>
> Book XV.ii: 'He is a Beggar, a Bastard, a Foundling …'

Nine occurrences in 800 pages of the word that defines our hero in the novel's title seems a little odd, even in an author who disclaims consistency by asserting 'I am not writing a System, but a History' (Book XII.viii).[1]

One might ask whether this thin distribution of the word *foundling*, almost losing it to the reader's sight, might have something to do with the complicated and obscure history of the novel's composition. We know that, shortly after beginning to write a novel to be entitled *The History of a Foundling*, Fielding was diverted from fiction by the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, against which he wrote pamphlets in defence of the Hanoverian settlement. The rebellion of 1745 is then worked into the narrative, through the story of Partridge, and is matched by the account given by the 'Man of the Hill' of his involvement in Monmouth's Rebellion of 1685. His story concludes: 'and from that day to this my History is little better than a Blank' (Book VIII.xiv). Sixty years of world without event, that yet turn out to have been full of travels all across Europe. *Tom Jones* thus acquired a political dimension that has to a large extent supplied its exegetical contexts, at the expense of its titular theme.[2] Yet, as Ronald Paulson has pointed out, to readers in 1749 the word 'Foundling', though immediately suggesting the recently established Foundling Hospital, would also 'have carried a resonance of the dynastic struggle' of the Stuarts.[3] Paulson seems to be the first to have drawn the link between the Foundling Hospital and the '45 Rebellion of Bonnie Prince Charlie, whose legitimacy, albeit of claim more than of birth, was disputed.

It may not be entirely irrelevant to the constitutional question of legitimate succession that the 1740s mark a period of intense interest in the nature and plight of foundlings. Thomas Coram had obtained a Royal Charter for the establishing of a Foundling Hospital in 1739. This led in 1741 to the opening of the first Foundling Hospital in London, in temporary accommodation in Hatton Gardens. Already, however, a permanent site had been acquired: fifty-six acres of pastureland to the west of Gray's Inn Road and to the north of Great Ormond Street, at a date when that and Great Russell Street marked the extent of London to the north of Holborn.[4] The new building, designed by Theodore Jacobsen as a hospital for foundlings, was opened in /27 1745. Included within the Foundling Hospital was an exhibition space open to the general public, the first such public gallery in Britain. The Foundling Hospital's gallery contained works by Hogarth, Reynolds and Gainsborough, all donated, as had been the services of the architect, Jacobsen.

So also were the services of the greatest composer in England, Handel, the proceeds from whose *Messiah* would for many years be donated to the Foundling Hospital. Composed in the late summer of 1741, when the Hospital had just been established, the Messiah received its première in Dublin in

April 1742. Without that charitable commission the world might never have heard Handel's *Messiah*. Charles Jennens's libretto has become so familiar that we seldom acknowledge its profound originality in presenting a sequence derived from the typological reading of Scripture in terms of promise and fulfilment, shadow and reality, type and anti-type. Through this complex structure, Jennens was able to bring out the importance of Moses as the type of Christ, and to establish at the very heart of the universal story of redemption and salvation a *foundling*.

In Dublin the *Messiah* was subjected to criticism, not least by the Dean of St Patrick's, Jonathan Swift, for introducing scriptural texts into the secular space of the concert hall. Seven years later no such objection could be raised, for the oratorio was performed, on 27 May 1749, in the newly consecrated chapel of the Foundling Hospital.[5] Thereafter Handel's *Messiah* was performed at the Founding Hospital every year, coming gradually to be associated with Advent, though the *Messiah* had not been intended for any particular feast or season. It was the annual performance of the *Messiah* in the Chapel of the Foundling Hospital which inaugurated the Advent tradition now maintained all around the world.

Thomas Coram had been exceptionally astute not only in persuading prominent people to make gifts of their wealth and their talents, but also in identifying those with gifts. Even in the absence of Coram, much giving continued: for the first performance of the *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital the tickets were designed by Hogarth. Both Handel and Hogarth were appointed Governors of the Foundling Hospital. The score of the *Messiah* was donated by Handel to the Hospital and remains on display in what is now the Foundling Museum, along with numerous works of art including three of Hogarth's most impressive paintings: 'The March of the Guards to Finchley', depicting the not very rapid response to the threat of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745; a rare Biblical scene by Hogarth, clearly painted for its situation, 'Moses brought before Pharaoh's daughter'; and the portrait of Captain Thomas Coram, widely regarded as one of Hogarth's greatest works.

So successful was the public gallery of the Foundling Hospital that it inspired a new development a short distance to the south-west: another space for public exhibition was opened in 1753, known then and since as 'the British Museum'. The Foundling Hospital itself closed in 1926, and the building was almost immediately demolished. There were protests against redevelopment and /28 in 1934 seven acres were acquired by Viscount Rothermere and, under the name of Coram's Fields, were dedicated by him in October 1935 to the use and welfare of the children of London; adjoining acres have been purchased subsequently, though most of the original fifty-six acre site has been developed as residential areas. Since 1935 only children have been allowed into Coram's Fields, with this exception, blazoned in red paint at the entrance gate: 'NO ADULTS unless accompanied by a child'. The story of the Foundling Hospital and Coram's Fields is of a charitable enterprise which (despite the hiatus of the ten years around 1930, and the change of focus from foundlings to 'the children of London') has maintained a steady purpose for almost three hundred years. Happily no longer in use, though still to be seen in the outer wall on Guilford Street, are the ledges on which abandoned children would be left, or as the phrase casually has it, 'dropped'.

Henry Fielding was an advocate of charitable causes, and was keen to encourage the setting up of the Foundling Hospital. In November 1739 Fielding's paper, *The Champion*, celebrated the granting of a charter to Coram:

> At last the long contested Point of establishing a Hospital for Foundlings is carry'ed; to the immortal honour of Mr. Coram, who has pursued it on such noble, and disinterested Motives, and with such indefatigable Zeal and Industry; A Design so truly humane and charitable, that one cannot help wondering, it has been delayed so long; and yet as it results from the voluntary Subscriptions of Individuals, 'tis as much to be wondered that it ever took place at all.[6]

Strangely, this passage is not included among those items in *The Champion* indubitably ascribed to Fielding that now fill the 600-page volume of *Contributions to* The Champion *and Related Writings* in the Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding.[7] Presumably the editor judges this praise of Coram to be from another pen than Fielding's. Yet in February 1740, in a contribution that is included in the Wesleyan Edition, Fielding expresses very similar sentiments:

> Amongst other Species of Charity for which this age is justly celebrated, there is one which shines forth in a very particular Manner, I mean that of founding Hospitals, a most commendable and useful Branch of this Virtue, and in which we have so well distinguished ourselves of late, that within these three Years, or thereabouts, we have seen the Rise of three Hospitals, one at *Hyde-Park Corner*, another at the *Bath*, and lastly that which does Honour not only to the noble Propagators of it, but to our very Age and Nation, and leaves us only to wonder, how it was possible through stupidity or Barbarity, to have been delayed so long.[8]

/29 The modern editor, W.B. Coley, identifies these hospitals as St George's (still flourishing) and the General Hospital in Bath; and we are told that in the 1741 volume of *The Champion*, the third hospital is parenthetically identified as '(for Foundlings)'.[9] Yet Fielding scholarship has ignored the possible links between Fielding and Coram, even in the face of evidence such as this. The most thorough biography of Fielding, that by Martin C. Battestin, published in 1989, contains not a single mention of Coram or of the Foundling Hospital. Coley however does at least declare and make plain the absence of evidence: 'There is no record of HF's benefaction (if any) to this hospital, but at least one contemporary associated him with it, Christopher Smart, "Epitaph on *Henry Fielding*, Esq;" in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1763), p. 14: "To stand Protector of the Orphan race / And find the female penitent a place."'[10]

It is surely remarkable that the author of 'The History of ... a Foundling' has thus eluded association with the Foundling Hospital. Paulson states the case plainly:

> *Tom Jones* was advertised up to publication as *The History of a Foundling*, which at the time would have registered primarily as a reference to the Foundling Hospital, its ideal of charity, and a certain kind of outcast figure….[11]

Even as late as 1748 one letter-writer reports that 'Mr. Fielding is printing three volumes of Adventures under the title of *The Foundling'*.[12] In the early 1740s Fielding had begun to work on a novel to be entitled *The Foundling*. In 1744 Eliza Haywood had published a novel *The Fortunate Foundlings*. Then the title *The Foundling: A Comedy* was used by Edward Moore for a play first performed in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in February 1748, with the main parts acted by David Garrick, Mrs Cibber and Charles Macklin. Fielding's original title *The Foundling* was relegated to a subordinate position when his novel was published in 1749 as *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*.

Given Fielding's friendship with Hogarth, who is mentioned at least five times in *Tom Jones*, always by the narrator 'in his own person' as it were, once as 'my friend Hogarth' (Book II.iii) and once to be famously invoked: 'O, *Shakespear*, had I thy Pen! O, *Hogarth*, had I thy Pencil!' (Book X.viii), it is strange that Fielding should have played so small a part in the records of the Foundling Hospital. It may be supposed that between his enthusiastic endorsement of the scheme in 1739, followed by his determination c. 1742 to write a novel entitled 'The Foundling', and the eventual publication of *Tom Jones* in 1749, something had gone awry. What is known is that Coram himself argued with the Governors around 1742 and ceased thereafter to have any /30 further direct involvement in the Foundling Hospital. After his death in 1751, however, the Foundling Hospital

was uninhibited in honouring Coram's memory. How this touched Fielding, and affected the nature as well as the title of *Tom Jones*, is a matter on which Fielding's biographers have had little to say. Paulson, however, insists on the close friendship between Fielding and Hogarth and suggests that it might have been Fielding who inspired Hogarth to paint the scene of Moses in the bulrushes for the Foundling Hospital. Hogarth completed that work in 1746.[13]

Though undocumented, the connection between *Tom Jones* and the Foundling Hospital remains somehow embedded in the consciousness of the London historian. Writing in 1951 Douglas Newton in *London: West of the Bars* tells of Coram and the Hospital, in whose grounds is 'still a children's playground. It is a pleasant oasis within the aura of the Euston and Gray's Inn Roads, which are now noisier and busier than when Tom Jones passed through them on his way to London, and scarcely less dingy.'[14] Attentive readers may recall that Tom Jones did indeed enter London on a route not likely to bring him close to Sophia's residence in the area of 'Hanover or Grosvenor Square (for he entered through Grays-Inn Lane)' and then put up at the Bull and Gate in Holborn (Book XIII.ii). One admires the guide-book that can with such insouciance relate Tom's use of the Gray's-Inn Road to the Foundling Hospital, even though no such link is made in the novel. Or was the Foundling Hospital so conspicuous, so prominent in London's topography, that there was no need for Fielding to be explicit?

Christopher Smart was not the only contemporary to link Fielding to the Foundling Hospital. Foundlings were much talked about. In *The Rambler* in 1750 one might have read this reproach: 'What, you never heard of the Foundling House?'[15] There is a hitherto unnoticed detail in the curious novel by Francis Coventry, *The History of Pompey the Little, or the life and adventures of a Lap-dog*. First published in 1751, it was already in its third edition in 1752. That third edition carries a new dedication, to Henry Fielding, which also clarifies a mystery and removes a slander. For it was to Fielding that the originally anonymous text had often been ascribed. And occurring for the first time in the third edition is this brief exchange from Book V, chapter 10:

> 'Unless, perhaps, you are going to send your daughter to the Foundling Hospital?'
> 'Yes, perhaps I am,' cries she, with a toss of her head, 'if one can't maintain one's children at home they must e'en come upon the parish, and there's an end of it.'[16]

It is as though Coventry is keen both to absolve Fielding of responsibility for /31 the engendering of *Pompey the Little* and to pay tribute to Fielding's interest in the Foundling Hospital. But this comes about only after the death of Thomas Coram in 1751, when the Foundling Hospital was able posthumously to acknowledge its gratitude.[17] The publication of *Tom Jones* would have fallen at an awkward time, when Coram and the Foundling Hospital were unreconciled. Further understanding of the discreet silence maintained by Hogarth, Handel, and others over the management of the Hospital in the years between Coram's departure from its Board in 1742 and his death in 1751 might help to clarify the central uncertainty of a great novel announced as the history of a foundling. Coley's affirmation that there is no record of any benefaction by Fielding to the Foundling Hospital is striking, given the exceptional generosity not only of the Duke of Bedford and the other 'noble Progenitors', but of Hogarth, Handel, Jacobsen, Gainsborough and many lesser figures. It was clearly immensely prestigious to be associated with the Foundling Hospital. One may speculate that, just as Handel left to the Foundling Hospital the performance rights in the *Messiah* and its score, so Fielding might have set out to write the history of a foundling with some analogously charitable intention.[18] The continuing split between Coram and the Foundling Hospital might have left Fielding in a perplexing situation: the theme of the foundling is itself abandoned on the ledges of the running headers to *Tom Jones*.

Had the foundling theme remained central to *Tom Jones*, it might have given us a stronger sense of the significance of the 1740s for the history not only of foundlings but of childhood. A recent book,

Holly Brewer's *By Birth or Consent*, draws our attention to the shift in the legal status of children that occurred in the mid-eighteenth century.[19] Protestantism had given authority to the individual conscience; confirmation thus delayed full membership of the church until the child had reached a suitable age. This age is not legally 'the age of consent', but it has much to do with the child's acquisition of independent powers of reason and judgement. Brewer takes as exemplary the fate of William York, a ten-year-old boy convicted in Bury St Edmunds in 1748 of the murder of a five-year-old girl, his fellow-apprentice, supposedly because she fouled the bed that they had to share. This case was subsequently cited by lawyers as setting a precedent, for, though found guilty, William York was not sentenced to execution; in 1757, when he would have been nineteen, he received a royal pardon on condition that he join the Navy.[20] While reports of trials seldom give the age of the defendant, Brewer notes that in the 1780s the age of defendants is regularly cited. These particularly detailed records have been used by historians as evidence from which to make general extrapolations about the age and status of defendants over a century and more; Brewer argues that it was only in the 1780s that the age of the defendant was generally to be taken into consideration before sentencing.[21]

This confirms, or falls comfortably within, the chronology outlined by J.H. Plumb in his influential article of 1975, 'The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England': certain phenomena can be detected in various decades (and one can always argue about earlier instances) but they coalesce as a social reality in the 1780s. Plumb finds the earliest book designed for a child's amusement to be published in 1694, yet 'Similar books were slow to appear, and it is not until the 1740s that the change in style of children's literature becomes very marked.'[22] This shift is attributed to John Newbery's *Pretty Little Pocket Book* of 1742. And by 1780, Plumb writes, 'there was no subject, scientific or literary, that had not its specialized literature designed for children'.[23] In 1782 appeared what is generally acknowledged as the first novel written for children, about children: *Sandford and Merton* by Thomas Day. And yet we still know very little of children's reading habits (outside the curriculum), even in otherwise well-documented schools such as Eton and Westminster.[24] Almost half a century after Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* appeared in 1960 (English translation 1962), and thirty years after Plumb's essay inspired serious research into English archives, we still know very little. The emergence of childhood as a category cannot be separated from the representation of childhood: category, of course, conditions representation. As long as 'children' are thought of as other than children, there will be few records available to those researching into our category of childhood and looking for representations of what we acknowledge as children.

M.O. Grenby has recently advanced an argument about the novel, children's literature and the importance of circulating libraries in the eighteenth century. He poses a series of questions: 'And did circulating libraries play as significant a role in the development of children's literature as in the rise of the novel? After all, these two literary forms developed virtually in parallel, both rising from mid-eighteenth-century foundations to become securely established by 1800.'[25] It is instructive to attend to the simultaneous development of these two literary genres, neither of which has a classical genealogy, and both of which can be understood in terms of democracy and a broadening of literacy and what might be called the reading-classes. Women and children are readers in English, without the ability to read Latin. They have learnt to read not for scholarly or professional reasons, as boys would learn to read in Latin, but in the vernacular and for pleasure; not least, to occupy the leisure that so drastically increased for the middle classes in the second half of the eighteenth century. /33 Fielding was one of the few professional men to write novels; reading them was not an activity much favoured among educated gentleman.

When a new thing comes into the world, and is not proclaimed to be of noble descent, it is inevitable that its origin will be the subject of discussion, Were it noble, it would hardly be a new thing, but a continuation and revitalizing of the old. Yet the inexplicably new, that which disclaims

provenance or parentage, is likely to be reckoned of low birth, or to be suspected of noble concealments. Debate arises to establish its source, its genealogy, its paternity. There is thus a confluence of concerns, over the origins of a foundling, of childhood, of children's literature, of the novel.

Though the theme of the foundling is not foregrounded as one might expect from the title, the narrative drive of *Tom Jones* depends on our eagerness to find out who his parents might be. Part of the cleverness of the plot is that readers now, as then, will expect the mother to be low-born, and are therefore most interested in the question of the father, likely to be one of the landed gentry among whom Tom is brought up. The reversal of expectations is brilliantly executed, for the father, though belonging to the gentry, can be of little interest to readers as we have not previously encountered him or even heard of him by name. By contrast, the revelation that Mrs Blifil is the mother will not have been anticipated, or even suspected. That it may not seem entirely plausible that Miss Bridget Allworthy should have slept with Mr Summer, ought to cause us to reflect on our own enduring prejudices and stereotypes. For those who are foundlings are often high-born: Moses, Oedipus, Scyld Skefing, Perdita. They are abandoned not out of economic necessity but out of a highly cultivated sense of shame. On learning of the identity of Tom Jones's parents, the reader might reflect that, where a foundling's in question, nobody should be beyond suspicion, or above it.

And much the same can be said of an anonymously published text. Within months of the setting up of the Foundling Hospital a series of satirical publications came into being under the name of *The Foundling Hospital for Wit*. Its editor, Hanbury Williams, had been a friend at Eton of both Fielding and George Lyttelton, to whom *Tom Jones* would be dedicated. Like the Hospital itself, the publication proclaimed its arrival with a Charter, dated 25 March 1743:

> The Royal Charter of Apollo and the Muses, for establishing an Hospital for the Reception and Preservation of such Brats of Wit and Humour whose Parents chuse to drop them.[26]

/34 These phrases are then used again in the sub-title of the volume. The first *Foundling Hospital for Wit* expired in 1749. It was followed by the more famous *New Foundling Hospital for Wit* which ran from 1768 to 1774, with which John Wilkes (of the Hell-Fire Club) was closely involved. This publication, however, advertised its contributors by name, thus trading on their notoriety. As such it hardly merited its title, for this was no longer a hospital where authors fearful of recognition and legal liability could 'chuse to drop' their 'brats'. Yet the first *Foundling Hospital for Wit* was created precisely on the analogy between authorship and fatherhood. The rights and obligations that belong to the one who puts (his) name to a literary work were in contemporary debate comprised under the figure of paternity.[27]

There was no question of *Tom Jones* being published anonymously, nor of that book being of uncertain parentage. On the contrary, because Henry Fielding's name was known, and because he was anyway a figure of some public consequence, the paternity of various anonymous texts (such as *Pompey the Little*) was regularly ascribed to him. Fielding was in no position to play a game with readers in which curiosity over the identity of the hero's father would be more than matched by curiosity over the novel's author. But he might be playing a more elaborate game, one that takes us back to the 'origins' or lineage of the novel itself. Not this particular novel, but the novel as a genre, with its own ancestry and lines of descent. What Fielding had defined in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742) as a 'comic epic-poem in prose' is rephrased for *Tom Jones* (Book V.i) as 'prosai-comi-epic Writing'. Though he does not call it a novel, Fielding knows he's on to something new: 'For as I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing, so I am at liberty to make what Laws I please therein.' (Book II.i) Paulson supposes the novel to play with the ambiguity between itself and its hero, under the title of *The Foundling*: 'it is clear that Fielding meant the title to start

the analogy which runs throughout *Tom Jones* between the eponymous hero and the book itself. The title—eventually the subtitle—draws attention to 'the equivocal status of this "new Province of Writing," a bastard of epic, romance and satire.'[28]

Whatever the immediate circumstances and causes of the peculiarly broken and doubly-focussed construction of *Tom Jones*, there is no denying its success, which is to say, its seminal influence on all its successors in English fiction. We may be able to explain this in terms of another phenomenon newly emerging in the course of the eighteenth century: the practice of silent reading.

In the mid-eighteenth century, children acquired a new kind of independence, an identity and a status that would lead to all sorts of improvements in /35 their lives, not least in terms of what adults would be entitled to expect of them. The concept of childhood thus emerges, to be reinforced by the appearance of children's literature in the same period. And the genre of the novel, though it would not give representation to a child and a child's consciousness of the world until much later, was young, and of mysterious progeny. We offer this as a hypothesis: *Tom Jones* forgets that it is about a foundling as it realizes that it is itself a foundling. For as a genre the novel knows no antecedents and is under no obligation to honour its parents. It has no choice, as Fielding knew, but to obey its author, like an abandoned child, confined to an institution, unable to make an appeal to the world beyond or to the generation before.

The mid-eighteenth century is also the age of the emergence of the large city, and of that acute crowded loneliness and sense of alienation among its residents. Our enjoyment of the novel is inseparable from our sympathetic identification with the protagonist. And as, in the mid-eighteenth century, readers began to take novels in silence, so the isolation of the protagonist could be experienced and matched by the reader. There is a loneliness in silent reading: a loneliness quite unprecedented in homes where all activities had been either shared or undertaken in a common space always open for conversation. (One has always been able to interrupt a discourse: when did one first interrupt a silence?) A novel and its reader can both figure themselves as at once abandoned and autonomous: foundlings, of a kind (a highly privileged kind, it need hardly be said). If in recent centuries we have learnt to identify and sympathize with childhood, this may be because in reading silently we recall and cultivate the constitutive bewilderment and isolation, even the lostness of the child; the fear of abandonment can be a readerly apprehension.

As a novel about a foundling, *Tom Jones* is either a failure or a deception. As a novel that teaches its readers about the autonomy of imagination, it is one of the constitutive triumphs of modern literature. In exploiting the separatist anti-social behaviour on which silent reading depends, it makes a foundling of each of us. *Tom Jones* is the grand progenitor of the English novel, the one that has always had the task of teaching readers how to negotiate the isolating spaces and times of fiction. Yet again we witness the transformation of origins that may also be the origin of transformation: the foundling (or *The Foundling*) becomes the founder.

NOTES

[1] The point has been noted by critics but explained on other grounds; thus Donald W. Nichol (see Note 23 below) observes that Tom 'is called "bastard" rather than "foundling" by his detractors' and ascribes this to the fact that the word 'bastard' carries a stronger charge of disapproval.
[2] See John Allan Stevenson, *The Real History of Tom Jones* (Palgrave 2005), for a number of explorations of those contexts, political, military, social and legal, but none concerned with foundlings.
[3] Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 236
[4] See John Summerson, *Georgian London* (London: Pleiades, 1945), pp. 149-56.
[5] See Gillian Wagner, *Thomas Coram, Gent. 1668-1751* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), pp. 181-82. Wagner writes that this performance 'marked the beginning of Handel's long association with the Hospital', yet one might ask whether Coram's removal from the Hospital Board in 1742 had not diverted Handel from his original purpose. In the case of both the *Messiah* and *Tom Jones* we note a gap between c. 1741 as the year of creation or inspiration and 1749 as the year of both the publication of *Tom Jones: A Foundling* and the first performance of the *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital. See also Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1981).
[6] *The Champion*, Vol. 1, November 1739, p. 30; cited in Wagner, p.168.
[7] *Contributions to* The Champion *and Related Writings*, Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding, edited by W.B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
[8] Coley, p. 93.
[9] Coley, p. 193, n. 5.
[10] Coley, p. 193, note 5. Smart's 'Epitaph on *Henry Fielding*' is not cited in Martin C. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989).
[11] Paulson, *Life of Henry Fielding*, p. 235.
[12] Cited by Martin C, Battestin, 'Introduction' to *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* in the Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) Volume 1, p. xxxvi.
[13] Paulson, p. 236. One might ask whether Fielding did not also have a part in Hogarth's choice of the subject of the march of the Guards to Finchley.
[14] Douglas Newton, *London: West of the Bars* (London: Robert Hale: 1951), p. 196.
[15] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 12, p. 6. Cited in OED under 'foundling'.
[16] Francis Coventry, *The History of Pompey the Little….* (London, 1785), p. 27 (Book 5, chapter 10)
[17] See Hildegard Olmberg, *William Hogarth's Portrait of Captain Coram* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1974), p. 84.
[18] As almost two hundred years later, and hardly 200 yards distant, J.M. Barrie in 1929 would donate the copyright in *Peter Pan* to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children. This hospital, still located across the road from Coram's Fields, was founded in 1852 as one of the very first in the world to be dedicated exclusively to the treatment of children. /37
[19] Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005)
[20] Brewer, pp. 210-11, summarizes the facts as outlined in Sir Michael Foster, *A Report of some Proceedings….* (first published in Oxford in 1762), cited from the third edition, London, 1809, pp. 70-73. Foster's *Report* was commended by Sir William Blackstone in his *Commentaries* of 1769, and was frequently reprinted,
[21] Brewer, p. 213
[22] J.H. Plumb, 'The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, no. 67 (May 1975), p. 81.
[23] Plumb, pp. 83-84.
[24] See Plumb, p. 63, note 2.
[25] M.O. Grenby, 'Adults Only? Children and Children's Books in British Circulating Libraries, 1748-1848', *Book History*, Vol. 5 (2002), p. 19.
[2626] Cited in Donald W. Nichol, 'The New Foundling Hospital for Wit: from Hanbury Williams to John Wilkes,' *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. 34:1 (Spring 2001), p. 103.
[27] For the use of the term 'paternity' in the context of literary property and responsibility, see Stephen Parks, *The Literary Property Debate: seven tracts, 1747-1773* (NY: Garland, 1974). By 1814 Walter Scott could write of the paternity of the Waverley Novels having been much disputed: see OED under 'paternity'. Though this is the earliest instance of this sense of the word to be cited in the OED, it is by this date already a familiar figure.
[28] Paulson, pp. 235-36.

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